Residues of Now

The Cultures and Politics of Contemporary U.S. Post-Apocalyptic Novels

by

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Abstract

This study examines the significance of the boom of U.S. post-apocalyptic novels after the American Century. This dissertation argues that U.S. post-apocalyptic novels tend to be reactionary and political conservative, but that they can still be read critically for what I call their residues. I approach these novels as residual in three ways: first, in terms of residual social ontology within the post-apocalyptic novel; second, in their residual generic form; and, third, in the residues of their historical present. *Residues of Now* describes and investigates the field of contestation generated by U.S. post-apocalyptic novels in order to reveal the struggle between their reactionary and progressive logics.

Chapter I compares contemporary post-apocalyptic novels to those from the height of the American Century, developing a tropology of the post-apocalyptic novel. The catalogue, the last man, and the enclave are tropes that feature prominently in exemplary texts by George Stewart, Richard Matheson, and Walter Miller Jr. from the post World War II period and which appear reconfigured in Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) as well as in the post-apocalyptic novels today.

Chapter II assesses the post-apocalyptic novel as a political sub-genre of science fiction by reading Brian Evenson's novel *Immobility* (2012) against Darko Suvin's definitive description of science fiction as the literature of cognitive estrangement and Fredric Jameson's elaboration of cognitive mapping. Evenson's novel describes the fearful immobile body transported through space always seeking a beginning in a way that captures not just the immobility of its protagonist, but the politics of immobility that lie at the heart of the post-apocalyptic novel itself.

Chapter III investigates the spatial dynamics of David Brin's *The Postman* (1985) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984). It introduces the frontier and accumulation by dispossession as central concerns in the mid-1980s through Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985). *The Postman* and *The Wild Shore* each still operate, in crucially different ways, on the frontier

myth. Their difference effectively captures the contest at the heart of the post-apocalyptic conceit between conservative, nationalist reaction and progressive, world building vision.

Chapter IV interrogates the prevalence of the family and the child in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). It frames its discussion of McCarthy's novel with a slipstream novel, *Total Oblivion, More or Less* (2009), by Alan DeNiro and a survivalist fiction, *Patriots* (2009) by James, Wesley Rawles. Each novels features birth prominently, which helps me to develop a narrative theory of reproductive futurism, which is inspired by the work of Rebekah Sheldon. I find that, whether reactionary (Rawles), critical (DeNiro), and ambiguous (McCarthy), reproductive futurism subtends the post-apocalyptic novel.

I conclude *Residues of Now* with an epilogue that explores possible future directions for research, including the role of energy in post-apocalyptic novels that are concerned primarily with environmental degradation.

Preface

> I have felt that the dialectical method can be acquired only by a concrete working through of detail, by a sympathetic internal experience of the gradual construction of a system according to its inner necessity.
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> — Fredric Jameson[1]

I came to this work as many of my generation have—I noticed a cultural fixation with the apocalyptic and I started to ask questions. It seems humorous to me now that I decided against studying stories that centered on the apocalypse itself. I decided that I could not commit myself to research such a sensationalist genre where everyone seems to survive, if only by the skin of their teeth. How was I supposed to know that a similar brand of survival was precisely what I would come to expect from the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel as well? The upshot of my focus became that the novels I read rarely moved as quickly the apocalypse stories I wanted to avoid. Something about the slowness of the decay in post-apocalyptic novels has come to intrigue me. Why does the apocalyptic event itself seem to be less knowable, by the characters as well as by readers of the genre? Of course some novels declared the end loudly, but I became interested in the ones that barely seemed apocalyptic at all, they were much more like life today and were all the more haunting for it.

Asking questions of this particular form of the novel, that is letting it pose questions itself, led me to the convergence that would become an abiding concern in this dissertation. As Frank Kermode points out in *The Sense of an Ending* (1966), history has never ceased to be interested by the apocalypse partially because it "can be disconfirmed without being discredited," which is a "part of its extraordinary resilience."[2] Kermode also wrote that "when we survive, we make little images of

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[1] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), xi.

[2] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 8.

moments which have seemed like ends; we thrive on epochs."[3] My interest, following Kermode's lead, investigates what this current phase of apocalyptic concern could be attributed to, and what in particular this might tell us about the relationship between cultural forms and history today. That is, what do the "little images" tell us about our own epoch?

I demarcate the United States as a geographic boundary for my dissertation for practical reasons, but also for methodological ones. In terms of the former, it became necessary fairly early on to delimit the number of texts I would address in the dissertation: even with a narrowed geographic and historical focus on the post-World War II United States there were still novels that I was unable to incorporate (for an extensive list of U.S. post-apocalyptic novels see the bibliography). As for the latter, the United States, it seems to me and to some others, has been going through a major historical transition in to the 21st century. Namely, the United States has been moving from a phase of historical dominance as an economic and political superpower to a phase of uncertainty in those arenas. Three particular moments or phases of this decline interest me most: first, the moment of U.S. dominance just after the War at the zenith of what has been generally called the American Century; second, the tightening grip of neoliberal dominance in the mid-1980s; and, finally, the moment of free fall between the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the on-going global financial crisis of 2007-2008. The coincidence of U.S. decline and a veritable rash of post-apocalyptic novels strikes me as the ripest relationship to consider in the following pages.

Behind the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel as a going concern lies an emergent thread in my work: petroculture. I am inspired lately by the work of Timothy Mitchell, especially in *Carbon Democracy* (2011), which seeks to retell the story of the development of modern government along the axis of energy, an element strangely missing from the pages of political philosophy. Thus, the

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[3] Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* 7.

historical frame of my dissertation, the American Century, can be seen to roughly correspond to the rise of the automobile and petroleum use and the decline of coal use. If we imagine the height of the American Century in those heady days after World War II, then we can begin to see that it starts its decline during the OPEC crisis of the 1970s, which was followed by the 1980s oil glut. The tension generated in an increasingly oil dependant state, which was simultaneously outsourcing manufacturing, created a turbulent political climate at home, which in turn reached outward through the tendrils of multinational corporations, war, and debt. The point to make here, in the Preface to my dissertation, is that correspondence of U.S. global dominance and the post-apocalyptic novel, shadowed by petroculture, tell a fascinating story. Indeed, it is my suspicion that on its own the post-apocalyptic begins as a containment strategy for the anxieties of the success of modernity, and then as internal and external crises mount, it becomes a tool for the familiarization of the radical changes to come during the hegemon's slow death. Retrospectively, we might say that the symptoms of decline were already there all along, but it is only now amidst the global uncertainty generated by a superpower in decline that these relationships appear clearly before our eyes. As much as the historical backdrop includes a compelling set of crises for post-apocalyptic novels to work through and symptomatize, my hope is that they also offer a glimpse of what might lie beyond their restoration-fixated outlook. Placing the corpus of texts I am calling post-apocalyptic fiction as a sub-genre of science fiction is both a practical and strategic step. Despite the post-apocalyptic novel's reactionary politics and in the face of its attempts to turn residual social ontology back into dominant social ontology, is there a chance that at times it offers a way out of its own impasse?

Dedication

For Alex and for those who survive…

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I presented an early version of Chapter II at the Marxist Literary Group's Institute on Culture and Society at Ohio State in 2013, an early version of Chapter III at a joint session of ACCUTE and CAAS at Waterloo in 2011, and gave various other presentations at ACLA, CAAS, CACS, and MLG-ICS, all of which informed the development of the project. For me as for many before me, the MLG-ICS became a kind of alternate graduate school: Each year I would leave the institute energized by the conversations, each year I would return ready for the previous year's debate and find a new vital conversation underway, and each year I learned the challenges and rewards of trying to think those conversations together. Thank you to everyone who has participated over the years and to those who continue to make it engaging and instructive.

I wish to thank the reference librarians at the Merrill Collection of Science Fiction and Fantasy in Toronto, Ontario for guiding me through their wonderful archive. I was lucky to have received travel grants from the Graduate Students Association, a Marie Louise Imrie award from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and two Sarah Nettie Christie awards for travel from English and Films Studies. The Department of English and Film Studies also supported me by awarding me several Queen Elizabeth II awards and the Kule Institute for Advanced Study awarded me a Dissertation Completion Award. Thank you to Sarah Blacker, Gerry Canavan, Adam Carlson, Alexandra Carruthers, Marija Cetinic, Maria Elisa Cevasco, Amy De'Ath Jeff Diamanti, Michael Epp, Andrea Hasenbank, Daniel Harvey, Lisa Haynes, David Houseman, David Janzen, Kate Lawless, Katie Lewandowski, Matt MacLellan Norman Mack, Danijela Majstorovic, Derritt Mason, Sean O'Brien, Shama Rangwala, Joseph Ren, Valérie Savard, Katelynn Schoop, Conrad Scott, Anthony Squires, Camille van der Marel, Sylvie Vigneux, Zoran Vuckovac, and Liam Young. I have to thank and highly recommend my editor, Justin Sully. His thorough and indispensable comments stimulated my thinking and got me excited about my project again. Thank you to Jaimie Baron, Elena Del Rio, Cecily Devereux, Corrinne Harol, Nat Hurley, Eddy Kent, Sourayan Mookerjea, Terri Tomsky, Teresa Zackodnik, and others in the department of English and Film Studies who have supported me and believed in my work. Thank you to Kim Brown, Mary Marshall Durrell, and the rest of the EFS staff. Thank you to the Edmonton Free School, the Marxist Feminist reading group, the hardworking feminists at GUTS, and my cohort. Thank you to my mother, who taught me the incredible wonder of writing about culture, to my father, who modeled integrity, focus, and humour, my step mother, who showed me how my understanding of the world was deeply shaped by my own experience of it, and to Leigh Ann, Josten, William, Rebecca my sisters and brothers who I love deeply. Finally, my loving partner has been with me through the entire process, and in many ways this dissertation is hers too. Thank you, Alex.

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Capital…allows its actual movement to be determined as much and as little by the sight of the coming degradation and final depopulation of the human race, as by the probable fall of the earth into the sun. In every stock-jobbing swindle everyone knows that some time or other the crash must come, but everyone hopes that it may fall on the head of his neighbour, after he himself has caught the shower of gold and placed it in secure hands. *Apres moi le déluge!* is the watchword of every capitalist and every capitalist nation.

—Karl Marx

Prologue

> Survival is the horizon of contemporary politics, this horizon is symptomatic not of politics in general, but rather of cultural reaction formations stimulated by the eclipse of U.S. imperial hegemony. Catastrophism in its dominant forms must therefore be linked not simply to the undeniable realities of the organic crisis of our times but to an imperialist obsession with the triage of global humanity.
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> — Ashley Dawson[1]

Residues of Now investigates the cultural scripts of impending decline in contemporary U.S. post-apocalyptic novels. The term "post-apocalypse" bears a certain kind of awkwardness: on one hand, *apocalypse* denotes the destruction of current forms and a revelation, even a transcending, of limits; on the other, the *post-* insists that something remains after the term it modifies. Put another way, these novels tell stories of survival and generate their crises in the conceit that the apocalypse is not a total one. The characters' struggle to remake the world in post-apocalyptic novels generates new ways of being and doing at the same time that it draws out old antagonisms and returns to already settled disputes; they seem to want to settle a score, restore lost objects of desire, return to nostalgic origins, and press the reset button on our problems, especially those which seem hopelessly beyond repair. In a recent issue of *American Book Review* the special focus editor, Ashley Dawson, introduced post-apocalyptic literature by situating it as a form of catastrophism. Dawson's report outlines the major co-ordinates for an engagement with the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel. He frames survival in terms of U.S. hegemony, linking a catastrophic version of the future with the impetus behind what he calls "imperialist obsession," an obsession that I would locate in the objectives of a group like the

[1] Ashley Dawson, "Apocalypse Now," in *American Book Review* 34.2 (January/February 2013): 3.

Project for a New American Century.[2] Taking up Dawson's reading of the markers of the current crisis, this study attempts to historicize the contemporary U.S.post-apocalyptic novel, gleaning what the symptoms of U.S. geo-political and economic decline have to tell us before and after the new millennium.

Following the work of Philip Fisher, I ask: what are the "hard facts" of the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel during and after the American Century?[3] Fisher argues that popular forms such as historical, sentimental, and naturalist novels "outrun analysis" and "quickly become settled in the language and in the perceptual frame of their civilization."[4] He posits that the dominant discursive

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[2] From the PNAC's "Statement of Principles": "As the 20th century draws to a close, the United States stands as the world's pre-eminent power. Having led the West to victory in the Cold War, America faces an opportunity and a challenge: Does the United States have the vision to build upon the achievements of past decades? Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?" Project for a New American Century, "Statement of Principles," in *The United States and Iraq Since 1990: Brief History with Documents* Edited by Robert K. Brigham (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 91.

[3] "The very choice within a culture to attend to increasingly refined differences or to more and more inclusive categories is a political act for which inner practice and memorization takes place informally and continuously…The simple argument [of *Hard Facts*] is that within the 19th-century American novel, cultural work of this fundamental kind was often done by exactly those popular forms that from a later perspective, that of 20th-century modernism, have seemed the weakest features of 19th-century cultural life." Philip Fisher, *Hard Fact: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1985), 5.

[4] Fisher, *Hard Facts* 20.

realm of activity, for popular novels, is one of familiarization, and that forms which often appear, in retrospect, to be reactionary, perhaps, did the crucial cultural work of incorporating "nearly ungraspable or widely various states of moral or representational or perceptual experience."[5] I am tempted to simply re-write his account of the nineteenth-century U.S. historical novel as an account of the post-apocalyptic novel:

> In a sense the historical novel is a device for practicing how to meet a certain but postponed future. It is a psychological rehearsal that creates an ordered resignation that lets a group "face," as we put it, a future that they have already chosen and set in motion, but have not yet morally or psychologically passed through. The historical novel trains resignation and gives an elevated moral tone to stoic regret. It pictures forces as beyond control, already underway, and creates central figures who embody processes they do not control.[6]

In this way, he examines the "hard facts" of the eradication of Native Americans in the historical novels of James Fenimore Cooper, the emancipatory representational practice of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and the emergence of the individual and the economic in the city of Thomas Dreiser's naturalism. In this study, I undertake an examination of the speculative, and often contradictory, attempts by contemporary U.S. authors to imagine narrative meaning after the apocalypse in the context of the "Hard Fact" of the United States' declining global hegemonic role.

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[5] Fisher, *Hard Facts* 3. And further, "this "making familiar" should be seen as the counter-term to the so much discussed "defamiliarization" or "estrangement" that the Russian formalist Shklovsky proposed as the central act of culture. Making familiar or making ordinary is the radical "work" done by popular forms." Fisher, *Hard Facts* 19.

[6] Fisher, *Hard Facts* 18.

Giovanni Arrighi, David Harvey, and Immanuel Wallerstein, among others, offer an extensive treatment of the causes and outcomes of the United States' imperial bid, under George W. Bush, for continuing hegemony and a New American Century.[7] The first American Century reached its height after World War II with U.S. economic activity and political prowess at an all time high. After Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal was displaced by the "reformist realism" of his successors, the primary instruments of U.S. hegemony became "control over world money and global military power,"[8] instruments which could not work in Iraq in early 2000s as they had in Korea in the 1950s.[9] Indeed Korea was a high water marker for a U.S. foreign policy using, in the words of Andrew Hoberek, "third-world modernization" as a "practical terrain for the renewal of the US middle class."[10] The string of failures in Iraq since the 2003 invasion marks the culmination of a long

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[7] See also, Peter Hitchcock, "Oil in the American Imaginary," in *New Formations* 69 (2010), 81; and, Imre Szeman, "System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster," in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 106.4 (Fall 2007): 805.

[8] Giovanni Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling—II," in *New Left Review* 33 (May/June 2005): 107.

[9] Giovanni Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling—I," in *New Left Review* 32 (March 2005): 25.

[10] Andrew Hoberek, "Postmodernism and Modernization," in *Twentieth-Century Literature* 57.3 and 57.4 (Fall/Winter 2011): 348. Hoberek elaborates the relation between the U.S. middle class and U.S. foreign activity further, "In the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, another group of American thinkers elaborated what would turn out to be a highly influential solution to the problem of middle-class decline. According to these thinkers, US efforts to modernize other parts of the globe would...enable middle-class Americans to recover their lost agency. It would do so both directly, by providing a field for the renewal of American enterprise and the application of American

decline, charted by Wallerstein over four symbolic events: "the war in Vietnam, the revolutions of 1968, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the terrorist attacks of September 2001."[11] U.S. action in Vietnam may have signaled the start of U.S. decline, but the invasion and occupation of Iraq for the second time certified it.[12]

From the start to the end of the first decade of the 21st century, U.S. action at home and on the world stage reflects the destructive struggle to keep hold of its dominance by whatever means necessary. To understand the position of the United States in a global capitalist economy, Harvey and Arrighi look to the early twenty-first century debt-driven crisis of the U.S. and, particularly, the U.S. failure to transform the Iraq war into a new source of political-economic hegemony. For

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expertise, and indirectly, through the transformation of citizens of the so-called third world into proxy Americans." Hoberek, "Postmodernism and Modernization," 345.

[11] "The United States' success as a hegemonic power in the postwar period created the conditions of the nation's hegemonic demise. This process is captured in four symbols: the war in Vietnam, the revolutions of 1968, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and the terrorist attacks of September 2001. Each symbol built upon the prior one, culminating in the situation in which the United States currently finds itself—a lone superpower that lacks true power, a world leader nobody follows and few respect, and a nation drifting dangerously amidst a global chaos it cannot control." Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Eagle has Crash Landed," in *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2002), 64.

[12] "But the chances are that, while its difficulties in Vietnam precipitated the 'signal crisis' of us hegemony, in retrospect U.S. difficulties in Iraq will be seen as having precipitated its 'terminal crisis,'" and "Far from laying the foundations of a second American Century, the occupation of Iraq has jeopardized the credibility of us military might, further undermined the centrality of the U.S. and its currency within the global political economy." Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling—I," 57 and 80.

Arrighi, the failure of the U.S. military action in Iraq signals the terminal crisis not merely of a narrowly geo-political hegemony, but of a specifically American regime of accumulation founded on an economic symbiosis of war and debt. In effect, the turbulent political economy of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can be described as a combat between what Harvey indentifies as the interests of the limitless accumulation of wealth and the interests of a hegemonic power wishing to remain in charge.[13] "The true novelty," writes Arrighi, "…is the attempt of the declining hegemonic power to resist that decline by turning itself into a world state."[14] Like Britain, Holland, and Genoa did before it, the United States has reached the limits of its capacity to be the centre of capital accumulation—flagged not only by its aggressive foreign policy and military action, but also the increased role of finance in the U.S. economy. Since the 1970s the U.S. has entered a stage of financial expansion, just as the previous centres of accumulation did: historian Fernand Braudel calls moments of intensified financialization "*a sign of autumn*."[15] If expanded financialization

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[13] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003): 26-30.

[14] Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling—II," 108.

[15] "The withdrawal of the Dutch from commerce around 1740 to become 'the bankers of Europe' was typical of a recurrent world-systemic tendency. The same process was in evidence in Italy in the fifteenth century, and again around 1560, when the leading groups of the Genoese business diaspora gradually relinquished commerce to exercise for about seventy years a rule over European finances comparable to that exercised in the twentieth century by the Bank for International Settlements at Basle—'a rule that was so discreet and sophisticated that historians for a long time failed to notice it.' After the Dutch, the British replicated the same tendency during and after the Great Depression of 1873–96, when 'the fantastic venture of the industrial revolution' created an overabundance of money capital. After the equally 'fantastic venture' of so-called

is a sign of the changing seasons then the 2007-2008 financial crisis could be characterized as the first snows of winter. The subsequent Emergency Economic Stabilization Act speaks to the lengths that the hegemon will go to in order to secure its position. In "Autumn of the System" Joshua Clover suggests the financial crisis leaves commentators not with economic questions but with fundamentally narrative ones. Clover argues that guessing at the "nature of the transition to some next cycle or the nature of the next cycle itself," remains "preposterously presumptuous" and that uncertainty about the future becomes "the fundamental narrative problem of our historical moment."[16]

The trope of autumn can further be read alongside what critical theorists, sociologists, artists, and others have described as petroculture—a current subtending the entire postwar period and leading to the crises of the 1970s, the oil glut of the 1980s, and, arguably, U.S. military investment in the Middle East. For geographer Matthew T. Huber, "understanding the geographies of petrocapitalism requires understanding not only the politics of extraction or refinery pollution...but also the sociological relations of gasoline stations, single family homes, automobility, and the dominance of petrochemicals and plastics in everyday life."[17] For cultural theorists like Imre

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Fordism-Keynesianism, we may add, us capital since the 1970s has followed a similar trajectory. '[Every] capitalist development of this order seems, by reaching the stage of financial expansion, to have in some sense announced its maturity: it [is] *a sign of autumn*'." Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling—II," 86.

[16] Joshua Clover, "Autumn of the System: Poetry and Finance Capital," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 41.1 (Spring 2011): 34.

[17] Matthew T. Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital* (Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2013), xviii.

Szeman, meanwhile, efforts to understand contemporary capitalism that do not take energy into account leave it "largely unscathed: different in content, perhaps, and no doubt occupying a different space on the globe, but essentially the same in form—a system organized around limitless accumulation, at whatever social cost."[18] Similarly, Peter Hitchcock argues that "in general, oil dependency is not just an economic attachment but appears as a kind of cognitive compulsion that mightily prohibits alternatives to its utility as a commodity and as an array of cultural signifiers."[19] Szeman and Hitchcock identify a historical limit in the political itinerary of the hegemon and capital's structuring fantasy of never ending accumulation, and they interrogate petroleum's dark promise to overcome it. These interventions reframe Clover's question while maintaining its central import: the stakes of the uncertainty of the future are ratcheted up when we recognize the underlying ecological imperatives to thinking a world beyond U.S. hegemony, capital, and petroculture. The post-apocalyptic novel takes up this narrative problem against the backdrop of growing U.S. petro-hostilities, expanding financialization, and declining hegemony. As such, these novels seem to offer a narrative response ripe with the desire for a new time and an escape from the suspicion that the time of U.S. power has run out.

Post-apocalyptic novels embody these desires and suspicions in a seemingly anti-historical drive. Why is it that, in attempting to imagine solutions to contemporary political and economic problems from the concrete, like food shortages or foreclosed homes left empty (while millions remain homeless), to the abstract, like financial markets and the alienation of subjects, the post-apocalyptic novel frequently suggests that the answer is returning to a simpler way of life? Rather than address the problems of the present within a diegetic realm of possibility, post-apocalyptic

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[18] Szeman, "System Failure: Oil, Futurity, and the Anticipation of Disaster," 805-806

[19] Hitchcock, "Oil in the American Imaginary," 82.

novels depict the pre-apocalyptic past as a restorable entity, suggesting that the same may hold true in the real world and that the residues of now, and of previous nows, lie ready for just such a reactivation. In so doing, they take part in a larger ideological struggle over the relationship between period, form, and politics. Post-apocalyptic novels follow other popular forms, like the historical novel, dime novel or science fiction,[20] by imaginatively working through contradiction, yet they stage this process within a significantly different framework. They use the conceit of the post-apocalypse as a way of inventing grand narratives after the so-called end of grand narratives, offering beginnings after the so-called end of history, and shoring up U.S. hegemony in the age of its decline.

The Post-Apocalyptic Novel

The post-apocalyptic novel is almost as old as science fiction itself. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) was published less than a decade before her sole survivor story *The Last Man* (1826). Another early science fiction novel, H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), threatens the Time Traveller's Victorian present with a post-apocalyptic future, although the time machine itself, and not the apocalyptic moment, is the conceit of the narrative. Wells's novel, like Shelley's, has a historically correspondent post-apocalyptic novel, Ignatius Donnelly's populist *Caesar's Column* (1890), which also dates to the *fin de siècle*. In his novel Donnelly juxtaposes the brutalities of urban industrial capitalism against the rural background of the protagonist, Gabriel Weltstein. The climax of the novel arrives as a working class revolt overthrows the oligarchic dictatorship of the United

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[20] Fisher, *Hard Facts*; Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso, 1998); and, Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: Poetics of a Genre* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979).

States: the infamous, titular column is erected, built out of human bodies surfaced over with concrete. One critic describes the power of this symbol as associative:

> A reader contemporary with Donnelly would have thought of Atlanta and Richmond; perhaps of Haymarket Square; certainly of the Paris Commune. An American reader today might think of Coventry or Dresden, of the German death camps; and then thanks to the curious and ghastly coincidence of visual imagery, he would come to the column of white cloud that towered over Hiroshima. But clearly the symbol has a life of its own; it demands the associations.[21]

Readers of the novel today, too, might think of the billows of smoke from Kuwaiti oil fields lit on fire by retreating Iraqi troops, and certainly of images of the collapse of the World Trade Centre Buildings in 2001. *Caesar's Column* shows that the post-apocalyptic novel has a long history in the United States that can be cross referenced with science fictional writing and events in the present, even if it predates the present by well over a century. Certainly, too, Donnelley's novel makes a space for the post-apocalyptic novel to engage political, social, and economic crises and their aftermath though the novel also emphasizes problems with reading post-apocalyptic novels as allegories for any crisis in particular. If the column of Donnelly's novel reveals anything about the genre it is the critical tendency to treat its tropes, images, and settings as exchangeable for any given crisis, fashionable and horrific, of the present.

In the decades following Donnelly's novel, U.S. authors produced a number of similar works. Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) is set in a post-apocalyptic present and narrated by an old man, James Smith. Smith recounts the devastation wrecked by the scarlet plague as a lesson that

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[21] Alexander Saxton, "'Caesar's Column': The Dialogue of Utopia and Catastrophe," *American Quarterly* 19.2 (Summer 1967): 224.

no matter how stable the present seems, the future may bring massive change. Published in the same year, Garrett P Serviss's *The Second Deluge* (1912) takes on biblical catastrophe, featuring a modern day Noah named Cosmo Versal. Versal laments the loss of culture and the lost potential of what could have been, though his portentous vision sees humanity through to survival. George Allan England's trilogy *Darkness and Dawn*, comprised of *The Vacant World* (1912), *Beyond the Great Oblivion* (1913), and *Afterglow* (1914), is about two sleepers who wake up to find that the earth was destroyed one thousand years earlier. In the face of this revelation, the couple works to rebuild civilization. Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie's *When Worlds Collide* (1933) tells the story of how people react to a rogue planet, Bronson Alpha, that is on a collision course with Earth. U.S. scientists rush to devise spacecraft capable of saving some of humanity. The sequel, *After Worlds Collide* (1934), follows the survivors as they try to establish life on the new planet Bronson Beta. The lines of apocalyptic worry captured in these early U.S. texts do not stray all that far from apocalyptic concerns from John of Patmos onward. Here too, extra-terrestrial planetary bodies threaten to smash into earth, rushing floods and raging fires threaten its denizens, and disease spreads through populations without signs of abating.

Since the threat of the atomic bomb, post-apocalyptic novels have appeared with greater frequency and with ever more advanced (and credible) threats. In addition to introducing a new set of apocalyptic scenarios, the early cold war proliferation of post-apocalyptic novels also brings about an intensified emphasis on survival. Post-1945 titles begin to contest various explanations of the post-apocalyptic winter and how people might be imagined to survive it. Walter Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959), Pat Frank's *Alas Babylon* (1959), Mordecai Roshwald's *Level 7* (1959), Robert A. Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* (1964), and Roger Zelazney's *Damnation Alley* (1969) stand out as tales of post-nuclear survival in the early cold war period when the atomic concern would have been most troubling to U.S. citizens. But, after the 1960s, just like new viral outbreaks and

planetary collisions, the nuclear threat began to fade from a dominant concern to a residual one. The type of apocalyptic destruction began to matter less than how the story was told.

These discursive contests over different varieties of apocalyptic catastrophe, each with its own unique criteria for determining who survives and what persists, create a conceptual problem for framing post-apocalyptic novels as a coherent genre: this is a corpus composed of exceptions. As soon as one begins to identify one tendency across the post-apocalyptic corpus, others appear to be ruled out. For example, the dominance of post-nuclear apocalyptic survival stories emerges punctually for suburban white Americans just after the Bomb, but has a possible different resonance for black Americans left in the inner cities after white flight.[22] Other dominant tropes in post-apocalyptic novels, such as the appearance of many Western themed titles in the nineteen eighties, are more difficult to periodize. Post-apocalyptic novels are caught between what Andrew Hoberek describes as "a difference between the transitional but still self-consciously 'literary' appropriation of popular genres," by writers, "and a newer tendency to confer literary status on popular genres themselves," by critics.[23] The post-apocalyptic novels' conflicting generic, literary, and character tendencies, and the way these are received, overlap, sometimes one set represses another, and in

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[22] For an account of the apocalyptic in the African-American literary tradition see Houston Baker, "Freedom and Apocalypse: A Thematic Approach to Black Expression," *Long Black Song: Essays in Black American Literature and* Culture (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1972), 42-57 and Maxine Lavon Montgomery, *The Apocalypse in African-American Fiction* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1996).

[23] For the former he cites authors like Barth and Pynchon and suggest the comment still applies to younger writers like Colson Whitehead and Michael Cunningham. Andrew Hoberek, "Introduction: After Postmodernism," in *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53.3 (Fall 2007): 238

other cases they seem to operate in generic harmony. Yet, one of the claims of this dissertation is that this undulation, repression, and re-emergence serve to distract from the central coherence of the genre. One aim of this study, in other words, is to develop a synthesis of discrepancies within the genre, moving to a higher level of generic abstraction in order to consider specific examples that express a shared narrative tendency over any other taxonomic conflicts.

From Apocalypse to Post-Apocalypse

Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1966) establishes a critical register for understanding the cultural role of the apocalypse. In the first of his lectures, Kermode emphasizes what he calls "the middest" as an element crucial to understanding both the apocalyptic and fiction.[24] Kermode decodes the middest from the Latin *in media res*, meaning in the midst of things, which stands for a narrative present that has established origins and an expected *telos*. As in the Bible, where the book of Genesis starts the story of humanity and the book of Revelations closes it, Kermode enumerates various apocalyptic fictions based on growing concern over the end that unfold during the middest. Kermode's most memorable insight, perhaps, is that apocalyptic concerns allow individuals and societies to locate themselves in space and time—we know where we are because we can see that we are headed for the ending. Post-apocalyptic novels invert the positions of the end and the beginning—the story begins with the apocalyptic ending and concludes with a new origin. The post-apocalyptic novel attempts to look beyond the *telos* of the apocalypse by distancing the confines of the present through an estranging, apocalyptic event. This event serves to remodel the real world. Floods or global warming cause the ocean level to rise; great fires or nuclear bombs blast the

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[24] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, [1966] 2000), 7.

landscape, leaving scarred heaps of rubble; viruses leave corpses, or at least the absence of other humans. This process is comparable to what Fredric Jameson calls *world reduction*: a particular attempt to imagine "an experimental landscape in which our being-in-the-world is simplified to the extreme," which is based on "a principle of systematic exclusion, a kind of surgical excision of empirical reality, something like a process of ontological attenuation in which the sheer teeming multiplicity of what exists, of what we call reality, is deliberately thinned and weeded out through an operation of radical abstraction and simplification."[25] Here, Jameson writes about Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974), but the device of world reduction can be located, albeit with different political outcomes, in post-apocalyptic novels as well as in other science fictions. In the post-apocalyptic scenario the process of estrangement is also a process of subtraction that allows one to perceive reality with fresh eyes by removing elements from the world as we know it.

The process of subtraction in post-apocalyptic novels reshapes what David Ketterer optimistically observed about the term *apocalyptic*—that it "allows for a dialectic, conflict, or a tension of opposites."[26] For Ketterer apocalyptic literature enjoys a privileged connection with reality:

> Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the creation of other worlds which exist, on the literal level, in a credible relationship (whether on the basis of rational extrapolation and

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[25] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), 269, 271.

[26] David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic Imagination, Science Fiction, and American Literature* (New York: Anchor Books, 1974), 7-8.

> analogy or of religious belief) with the "real" world, thereby causing a metaphorical destruction of that "real" world in the reader's head.[27]

Ketterer offers a useful heuristic to distinguish between the world of the work and the "real" world—what Darko Suvin would call the author's "empirical environment."[28] The novelistic reshaping of the empirical environment creates a strong connection between the problems of the real world and the apocalyptic destruction of its image in the story world. Further, with the addition of the *post-*, the term *apocalyptic* changes its import from a complex and indirect tension between a beginning, middle, and an as yet unknown, even unknowable, ending to a more immediate relationship. The post-apocalyptic novel takes place after the end, collapsing it into a new beginning that can still be related to the reader's present. Within the post-apocalyptic story pre-apocalyptic time and the present time in reality are taken to be the same. Put another way, in the post-apocalyptic novel the origin of historical time within the story is identical with the end of the historical time of the reader. Thus, the apocalyptic event of the story creates a new fictional plot line that branches off from reality in an alternative future with a political dimension: "this is where we could end up if we continue to behave as we do today." Ketterer's sense of the relation of the real world to an imagined apocalypse holds true for post-apocalyptic novels as well—with one exception.

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[27] Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old*, 13.

[28] Darko Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," in *College English* 34.3 (1972): 372. Cf. Fredric Jameson's similar formulation in an essay on Ursula K. Le Guin originally published in 1975: "One of the most significant potentialities of SF as a form is precisely this capacity to provide something like an experimental variation on our own empirical universe." Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), 270.

In post-apocalyptic novels, readers do not confront the destruction of the real world; instead, they must engage its reduction until the only concern remaining is survival.

Cultural criticism's concern with the post-apocalyptic, broadly speaking, has developed steadily over the last decade but still lags behind the boom of recent U.S. post-apocalyptic novels.[29] James Berger's *After the End* (1999), Teresa Heffernan's *Post-Apocalyptic Culture* (2008), Peter Y. Paik's *From Utopia to Apocalypse* (2010), Evan Calder Williams's *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* (2011), and Mary Manjikian's *Apocalypse and Post-Politics* (2012) demarcate an apocalyptic form that, by the late twentieth century, is no longer capable of the revelation of possibilities for the future. Instead, they claim, apocalyptic forms now only offer the unveiling of the exhaustion of possibility. In a recent article, Heffernan put it in this way: "From zombies and viruses, to environmental and financial collapse," post-apocalyptic novels "seem stalled in an endless loop where disaster never gives way to a new dawn. They seem to be arrested at the crisis stage of the apocalypse."[30] Although this may not be true of all post-apocalyptic novels, Heffernan names a tendency of these novels to revel in the excitement or the horror of disaster. The following accounts of apocalyptic form explore the arrested quality of apocalyptic thought today and demonstrate the force of Heffernan's assessment.

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[29] One of the most striking things about looking at a bibliography of U.S. post-apocalyptic novels seems to be also the most banal. What catches my eye is that, to my count, the number of contemporary titles (2002 to 2013) released is greater than those released from 1946-2001 (see Appendix A).

[30] Teresa Heffernan, "On Apocalypse, Monsters and Mourning," in *Frame* 26.1 (May 2013): 94.

Berger's seminal work on post-apocalyptic narrative forms articulates a double movement internal to the genre. For him, post-apocalypse representations echo historical reality. Berger writes that "apocalyptic writing itself is a reminder, a symptom," suggesting that, instead of conjuring an image of a catastrophic future that breaks with the uneventful continuity of the present , apocalyptic writing is itself a document of the aftermath of a massive "disorienting catastrophe"[31] that has already occurred in historical reality. Berger's use of the adjective "disorienting," with its spatial overtones and negation of a determinable location, emphasizes the bait and switch of the post-apocalyptic narrative. Berger contends that even "the most dystopic visions of science fiction" only end up replicating "actual historical catastrophes" of the twentieth century.[32] He emphasizes a form of repetition that encases historical reality within narrative, suggesting that cultural forms, such as dystopic science fiction, have lost the capacity to think beyond the devastating events of the twentieth century. For him, "in the late twentieth century the unimaginable, the unspeakable, has already happened and continues to happen," which makes all cultural forms, in some sense, post-apocalyptic.[33] Berger's interpretive pursuit seeks to address the horrific power of historical events in an effort to overcome the seeming failures of narrative modes. Post-apocalyptic novels simplify this problematic because they contain Berger's articulation of the unimaginable within their new narrative time: thus, they attempt to mediate historical events, so that it is within the novel rather than in reality that the event has already happened.

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[31] James Berger, *After the End: Representations of the Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1999), 5, 7.

[32] Berger, *After the End*, xiii.

[33] Berger, *After the End*, 42.

Building on and diverging from Berger, Heffernan connects these imaginative (in)capacities to the fallout of modernity itself. She argues that the structuring power an apocalyptic *telos* had for the Enlightenment loses the full force of its revelatory power in what she terms "post-apocalyptic culture." Heffernan attends to a decisive shift, from apocalyptic to post-apocalyptic culture, where the end game of an earlier moment disappears and "the present world is portrayed as exhausted," with "no better world that replaces it."[34] Heffernan differs from Berger in that she suggests that "loss cannot always be translated into language," and examines the "repercussions of living in a world that does not or cannot rely on revelation as an organizing principal."[35] Meanwhile, Paik argues that the politics of utopia and apocalypse alike have been misused by the left and the right, while Williams historicizes Paik's brand of unease, reading apocalyptic futurity as the cultural symptom of massive consumer and state debt in the United States. Williams suggests that in post-apocalyptic culture "the permanence of the *here and now* comes unstuck, leaving the uncertain shell of the ensured future and the nervous repetition of the defaulted present to plow forward into nothing."[36] In each of these recent accounts of apocalyptic culture the apocalypse as a structuring *telos* is replaced by the future as a revelation of more of the same.

My study of the post-apocalyptic novel takes up these arguments about the changing scope and efficacy of apocalyptic revelation. In the conclusion to *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, Heffernan claims that at the turn of the twenty-first century the "Apocalypse—with its strange pleasure in the catastrophic cleansing of the world, its reassuring division of the righteous and the damned, and its

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[34] Teresa Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2008), 5.

[35] Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, 7.

[36] Evan Calder Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse* (Washington: Zero Books, 2011), 3.

disturbing comfort in knowing absolute finality and order—dramatically reasserts itself."[37] I aim to pick up where she leaves off and specifically investigate novels that stage the inverted apocalyptic story. I find, along with Williams, that the return of the apocalyptic generates a "yawning duration, an accretion so slow and naturalized that we can no longer recognize it… [with] none of the blush and flash of novelty."[38] In *Apocalypse and Post-Politics*, Mary Manjikian draws parallels between the sorts of speculative fiction created in *fin-de-siècle* Britain and those created in the present day United States in order to ask why "strong nations seem to have a monopoly on the creation of this type of [post-apocalyptic] literature."[39] She posits that one simplistic explanation, in the U.S., would involve "pointing to September 11 and suggesting as Americans became aware of the precariousness of their state's leading position in the world, they have been drawn to the creation of this type of end times culture," which, she continues, provides a useful path for "moving beyond the situatedness of one's own experience and coming to a broader understanding of the hegemon's significance (or lack thereof) in the international system."[40] Manjikian does not elaborate a co-ordinate event in *fin de siècle* Britain, but I understand the events of September 11 less as a punctual moment that made clear U.S. decline and more as a tipping point that enabled the U.S. to seek to regain some of its hegemonic standing. As I hope my study bears out, the post-apocalyptic novel reveals itself as a cultural form that is bent on obscuring and naturalizing the hard facts, to use Fisher's term once more, of historical change—a directive that continues to find new ideological purchase after the signal crises

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[37] Heffernan, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*, 150.

[38] Williams, *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, 13.

[39] Mary Manjikian, *Apocalypse and Post-Politics: The Romance of the End* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 7.

[40] Manjikian, *Apocalypse and Post-Politics* 6, 7.

of U.S. decline. Indeed, what that these commentators detect as a change in apocalyptic culture can be read through the shockwaves of the United States' declining hegemony as the source of the post-apocalyptic novel's own internal limit.

How to Begin a Story after the End

The post-apocalyptic plot tends to begin *in media res* sometime after the apocalypse, but before any kind of stable life has returned. The way the post-apocalyptic plot generates its crises and resolutions is based on the way it reverses the apocalyptic plot. The post-apocalyptic plot takes the apocalypse as an origin; it begins after a diegetic, social conception of the end, and proceeds towards a new origin, the beginning of a new story [see Plot Comparison - Figure 1 pg. 29]. A narrative's beginning, middle, or end are relative terms only meaningful within their particular context. In other words, the relationship of narration to plot determines the beginning, the middle, and the end in each case. The apocalypse as a plot event could be any of these things, depending on how the story is told (emplotted). In terms of the post-apocalyptic story, however, the apocalypse acts as origin and not as middle or ending. Here the distinction between the end of the plot (i.e. closure) and the apocalyptic end (i.e. the origin) becomes crucial. What I mean by a narrative that "begins after the end" is that the origin of the post-apocalyptic story is the apocalypse. Thus, the plot of the post-apocalyptic novel often begins *in media res*; the characters always look back to apocalyptic end as a moment of beginning, the moment "when things changed."

The recognition of what counts as an end and what counts as a new beginning is almost entirely based on the representation of the characters in these stories. Though in the next section I will argue that this social ontology of post-apocalyptic novels is a starting point for understanding the implications of this or that apocalypse, for our purposes here the apocalyptic end is a diegetic origin. As such, the characters experience the reversal of the standard plot as if a crisis were

unfolding. Crucially, they mediate the plot from within their own middest point, *in media res*. This centrality of the main character places considerable emphasis on individual response to the apocalypse. Reading a selection of opening lines from novels published between 1954 and 1985, we discover that proper nouns, Robert Neville, Brother Francis Gerard, Nick, and Gordon, feature prominently.[41] Each of these individuals is properly placed as well: two in the middle of the street, one in the desert, and one in the middle of a fight. These individuals know who and where they are, and in the cases of Nick and Gordon what they have already had to endure. A sense of purpose remains intact in these novels. The shift outlined by the theorists of 21st century apocalyptic culture has begun, but is not yet fully dominant. Despite a profound sense of loss, these characters seem to be self-possessed, self-sure, and determined. All of this certainty comes from their ability to recognize where they are, not only spatially, but temporally in relation to the apocalyptic event itself. These characters exist after an apocalypse and they work through crises towards the narrative end of their respective plots. The distinction between the apocalyptic end and narrative end here is crucial:

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[41] "On those cloudy days, Robert Neville was never sure when sunset came, and sometimes they were in the streets before he could get back." Richard Matheson, *I am Legend* (Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, 1954), 13; "Brother Francis Gerard of Utah might never have discovered the blessed documents, had it not been for the pilgrim with girded loins who appeared during that young novice's fast in the desert." Walter Miller Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (New York: Bantam Books, [1959] 1997), 3; "There was a dead man lying in the middle of Main Street in May, Oklahoma…Nick wasn't surprised." Stephen King *The Stand* (New York: Signet, [1978] 1991), 386; and, "In dust and blood—with the sharp tang of terror stark in his nostrils—a man's mind will sometimes pull forth odd relevancies." David Brin, *The Postman* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), 1.

the former has a revelatory function that inaugurates the post-apocalyptic plot, while the latter often brings with it a return of order, and offers reorientation, and, crucially, closure.

A great number of contemporary post-apocalyptic novels begin similarly and seem to employ uncertainty in their narrative style. In novels such as *World War Z* (2006) by Max Brooks, *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, *Things We Didn't See Coming* (2010) by Steven Amsterdam, and *Zone One* (2011) by Colson Whitehead the past remains at a nostalgic remove.[42] "It goes by many names." Brook's opening line describes a discursive struggle over how to recognize the apocalypse. McCarthy's opening line, "When he woke...he'd reach out," moves from past tense to the simple conditional, which introduces an uncertainty: will the child be there when he does reach out?[43] Amsterdam names an "emergency," while Whitehead reflects on a continuing desire: "He always wanted to live in New York." Each hints at a present that is wider than the moment the narrator describes. From a discursive struggle, to the uncertainty of a father, to the widening present, in this, admittedly selective, evidence is the preliminary suggestion of an important shift in the post-

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[42] "It goes by many names: 'The Crisis,' 'The Dark Years,' 'The Walking Plague,' as well as newer and more 'hip' titles such as 'World War Z' or 'Z War One.'" Max Brooks, *World War Z* (New York: Crown, 2006), 1; "When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he'd reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him." Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage, 2006), 3; "For the first time, Dad is letting me help pack the car, but only because it's getting to be kind of an emergency." Steven Amsterdam, *Things We Didn't See Coming* (New York: Pantheon, 2010), 3; and, "He always wanted to live in New York." Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 3.

[43] This is an unusual first sentence because McCarthy does not use apostrophes or quotation marks throughout the entire novel. Why does he do so here?

apocalyptic genre as it has developed over the past decade. Here, Berger's description of a disorienting catastrophe helps to situate the subtlety of the change I detect: a disorienting catastrophe acts as an estrangement or defamiliarization of historical events that clears the way for a symbolic reorienting based on the remembered structure of life before the catastrophic end. For Berger, the traumas of the mid-twentieth century—for instance, Nazi concentration camps and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—are simultaneously estranged and processed in representations of the post-apocalypse. For me, the post-apocalyptic novel of the early twenty-first century disorients a sense of a historically impending end of U.S. hegemony and symbolically resets the countdown on destruction, all the while familiarizing the sense of uncertainty shared by these characters and narrators.

Residues of Now

> The literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at once and the same time, a reaction.
>
> —Fredric Jameson[44]

These issues in the development of the post-apocalyptic novel may be broadly considered in terms of the condensation of what I want to call symbolic residues. As is perhaps true of any genre over time, the history of the internal transformation of the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel is in many ways the story of how old tendencies operate in new frameworks. In each novel, the attempt to situate narrative in the aftermath of some other story's end point often includes *residues*. This concern with what is left behind, with what has been forever changed, and with what may return in time will inform my exploration of contemporary social time and, in particular, the way its historically specific attachment to an eschatological logic is given symbolic shape in the contemporary US post-

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[44] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), 82

apocalyptic novel. It is precisely for this reason that a study of the residues of now in post-apocalyptic novels suits an investigation of the present. For this project, the term *residue* operates in three distinct registers:

1. The social ontology of post-apocalyptic novels: In the post-apocalyptic novel, characters act to reclaim their lives from before the apocalyptic novum. But the event has displaced their desires from their pre-apocalyptic past to their post-apocalyptic present, leaving them uncertain how to proceed. Often, their actions can be described as residual because they behave based on old tendencies rather than reacting to their current situation.

2. The generic form: Like pastiche or a mixture of genres, post-apocalyptic novels collect residues of other genres.[45] They do so in a manner that inverts the practice of science fiction, which tends to borrow the plot from another genre.[46] Instead, in post-apocalyptic novels, the setting, characters, and *mise-en-scene* are borrowed, while the post-apocalyptic plot remains relatively constant. In this way, it matters less to the narrative whether the characters appear to be in a western or a cyber-punk future, than how the plot moves forward.

3. The historical present: In another sense, residual describes the character of the post-apocalyptic novel's attachment to our own present, our own now. A diegetic end also marks the end of other things—economic, social, and political—and can be read as a way of grappling with declining U.S. hegemony and the ways it limits the cultural imaginary of the future. The post-

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[45] Jameson has also referred to the collection of generic residues as "generic discontinuities." See Fredric Jameson, "Generic Continuities in SF: Brian Aldiss' *Starship*" in *Archaeologies of the Future* 254-266 (London: Verso, 2005).

[46] "So often in science fiction…the plot is borrowed from another genre" Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 299.

apocalyptic novel itself is a residue from our own time and is shaped by its moment in history, by its interaction in the field of contestation that limits and delimits the genre.

In light of these three registers, the *Residues of Now* becomes a through line that connects the inner logic, generic tendencies, and historical conditions on which the bulk of this investigation focuses. Thus, in this study, I aim to read contemporary U.S. post-apocalyptic novels dialectically as objects with their own narrative logic and as participating in the U.S. cultural and political imaginary. I aim to read post-apocalyptic novels with and against themselves in order to assess the relationship between narrative form and history today, at least from the vantage of a ubiquitous genre that appears to be deeply invested in reaching the limits of the U.S. political imaginary without overcoming them. Post-apocalyptic novels engage in questions of declining U.S. hegemony through each residual layer, in what can be seen as an effort to trace the experience of a character or narrator from a specific moment outwards, toward a larger understanding of the whole. This effort to come to terms with what has transpired and how one might go about rebuilding familiarizes the problems of the present, including white flight, suburban petroculture, nuclear anxiety, the dismantling of the welfare state, and intensifying cycle of crises.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is structured along the lines of my own investigation from the specific details presented in these novels, to their generic connections with one another, and, finally, to the way they symptomatize the very limits and possibilities of narrative representation in the present. Over the course of the dissertation, my analysis also moves forward in time. The way I break down my investigation is meant to sit within my characterization of declining U.S. hegemony. I begin in the post-World War II period at the height of the American Century, and move towards the post-apocalyptic novel in the 21st century. Even as I read the contemporary moment, it must be noted

that I began by looking back to take stock of the current bloom of post-apocalyptic novels. These moments seemed to have the most to say to one another, to share a common set of concerns over other moments of post-apocalyptic cultural production. I start by establishing common tropes of the genre in Chapter I and compare the post-apocalyptic novel to science fiction in Chapter II. In Chapters III and IV, I move the focus to specific readings of post-apocalyptic novels first in the wild west interregnum of the 1980s and then in first decade of the twenty-first century.

Chapter I offers a periodization of the post-apocalyptic novel that identifies a number of generic tendencies that appear in texts from George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949), Richard Matheson's *I am Legend* (1954), and Walter Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) to Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978). Of these tendencies, I discuss the catalogue, the last man, and the enclave as triangulated elements of the genre; further, each text accounts for the world post-event through the experience of a sole survivor or a small insulated group. Despite the similarity of their narrative mechanisms, these earlier texts tend to offer sharper social commentary than contemporary versions. My analysis will focus on how they respond to the rise of the nuclear threat, as an external force, and their construction of fears of racial otherness and hopes for rebuilding society anew outside of the city against the backdrop of white flight and increasing associations of the urban with blackness. Anticipating my examination of more recent tendencies in the post-apocalyptic novel, I identify a transitionary moment in the genre through my reading of King's *The Stand*, which moves towards the reactionary mode of recent post-apocalyptic novels. This chapter offers the background against which the desire to reset the clock is identified and critiqued in light of massive suburbanization and the growth of a largely white middle class.

Chapter II compares post-apocalyptic novels to science fiction, and argues that the former is a politically reactionary sub-genre of the latter. Where science fiction operates through what Darko Suvin calls cognitive estrangement, I suggest that post-apocalyptic novel tend more towards

cognitive reduction. They address impasses in historical time precisely by reducing the complexities of their narrative worlds. This process of subtraction moves these novels into a difficult relationship with what Fredric Jameson has called "cognitive mapping." They do offer a perspective map in the world that offers their characters a chance to act, but it is difficult to find the way this translates from the story world to the real world. In order to the demonstrate the limits of the post-apocalyptic novel for making sense of the world, I conclude chapter two with a reading of Brian Evenson's *Immobility* (2012) as paradigmatic of the post-apocalyptic novel's turn away from the extrapolative operations of science fiction towards a Nietzschean eternal return to the present.

Chapter III engages the tendency of post-apocalyptic novels to re-boot fantasies of the frontier—fantasies that have been a part of the U.S. cultural imaginary from Fredrick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis to the boom of the Western genre in Hollywood. I open the chapter with Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (1985) as a text that critically frames my exploration of post-apocalyptic frontiers. In the rest of the chapter I focus on two mid-1980s post-apocalyptic novels, David Brin's *The Postman* (1985) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984). This chapter attends to the correspondence between the spatial imagination of past frontiers and future frontiers as symptomatic of the domestic and global actions of the U.S.A. in the 1980s.

Chapter IV focuses on survival as a crucial plot device in the post-apocalyptic novel. It draws from early 21st century survivalist, popular, and literary post-apocalyptic novels that imagine disaster scenarios not in an effort to map out the various ways humanity might meet its end, but how it might *survive it*. As a key narrative concept, survival operates with a slight difference across post-apocalyptic variants, encoding, as it does, unique relations to reproduction and futurity (here taken up from the work of Rebekah Sheldon). Indeed, the standpoint of reproduction renders the apocalyptic event as a sign of future extinction: the new daily life of survival may be sustainable due to the odd hoarder's cache of preserves, but life beyond the present becomes impossible in male

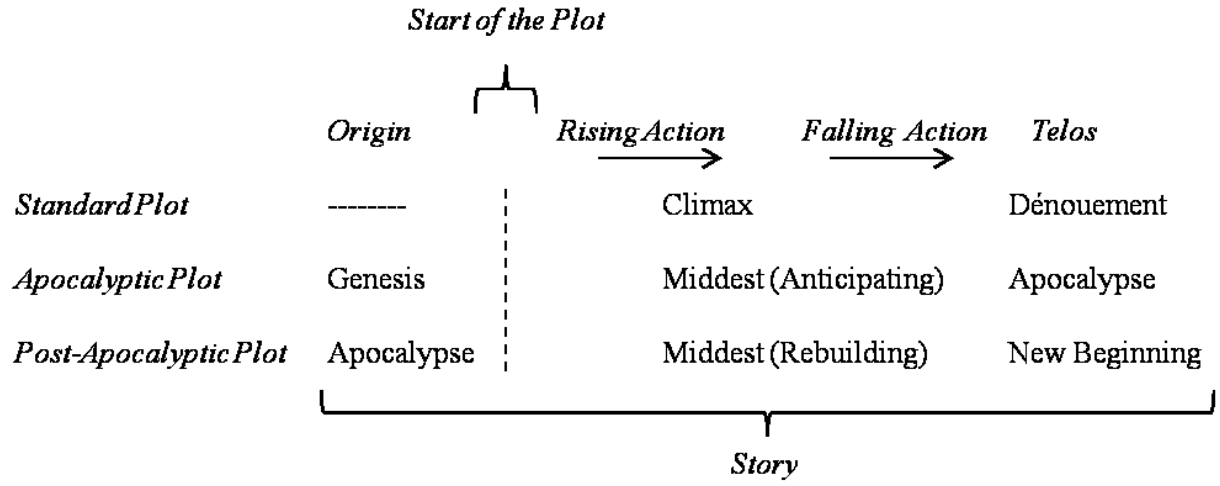
driven, masculine-centric novels without women. In this chapter, I read the resurgence of survivalism in James Wesley, Rawles's work, and the return of the family in Alan DeNiro's post-apocalyptic novel, as two sides of a reproductive futurity grounded in the continuance of individual and national interest. Finally, I read the complex of survival and reproduction in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) as a nightmare image of patriarchal crisis.

I conclude by looking to the future of the genre itself by taking up the new global spatial imaginary in Max Brooks's *World War Z* (2006), a cyclic form of crisis in Steven Amsterdam's *Things We Didn't See Coming* (2010), and the destabilizing of the individual in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011). Written after the American Century, these texts struggle to break free of the limits to imagining the future that the previous chapters have elaborated. These novels dramatize fairly standard stories in terms of the zombie novel or the sole-survivor fiction through the formal innovations of reportage, fragmented vignettes, and the innovation of PASD (post-apocalyptic stress disorder). The stakes of this shift in the operations of the genre present a deepening of the self-reflexive tendency in the dominant operations of post-apocalyptic novels, opening on to the question—can the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel accurately represent its own crisis? And, if so, what does this genre reveal about the crises of American hegemony, capitalism, and petroculture?

Residues of Now tells the story of the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel as a sub-genre of science fiction and as national allegory. My study of these novels is deeply concerned with the relation of then to now, and now to what will come. I ask, broadly, what role cultural forms have in anticipating, diagnosing, and shaping the present and the future. This study raises the historical backdrop of U.S. hegemony and capitalist accumulation to shape its stakes and to take seriously the narrative logic and critical concerns of post-apocalyptic novels themselves. From Stewart's *Earth Abides* to Whitehead's *Zone One* the space and time of late capitalism in America are imagined and re-imagined. Whether or not this exercise has a political design in these novels, I believe that the very

act of positing a future, especially in the face of uncertainty and crisis, is a radical act worthy of our consideration. This belief informs the whole of my study and I hope that my commitment to it has kept me reading and re-reading not only for these novel's shortfalls, narrowness, or symptoms, but also for their insights, innovations, and challenges.

Plot Comparison – Figure 1



Chapter I: A Pre-History of the U.S. Post-Apocalyptic Novel

Three moments mark the development of the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel in its movement towards its current, 21st century form. The first, and arguably most socially conscious, will be the focus of this chapter, wherein U.S. novelists use the conceit of post-apocalypse to offer social commentary on their post-World War II historical moment at the height of the American century. The second, a transit point between the first and the third moments, will also be discussed in this chapter as a moment when the tendencies of the early novels are put to work with an active awareness of the post-apocalyptic as a novelistic genre. The third moment of development is of the most importance to this dissertation: I characterize the period from 2003 to the present with a post-apocalyptic flourish in dubbing it "after the American century," and I will also refer to this moment as the contemporary. To determine the generic bearings of the contemporary U.S. post-apocalyptic novel, in this chapter I examine a handful of representative novels from the period following World War II. Reading these novels together as the wedge and hammer that pried open new spaces for the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel begins the historical work of charting its coherence as a genre and of specifying the distinctive features of its contemporary form. Keeping this larger purpose in view, I aim to historicize the emergence of a new iteration of the post-apocalyptic novel at the tail end of literary modernism in the "long 1950s."[1]

While the emergence of new characteristics of the U.S post-apocalyptic novel in the late 1950s and early 1960s is an uneven process that is deeply rooted in particular political and existential anxieties, I argue, on the basis of my analysis in this chapter, that it is in this moment that the

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[1] M. Keith Booker. *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War: American Science Fiction and the Roots of Postmodernism, 1946-1964* (Westport: Greenwood P, 2001).

contemporary characteristics of the genre first begin to appear. The anxieties expressed in these post-War, post-apocalyptic novels, such as responses to the nuclear threat and white flight to a newly burgeoning suburbia, certainly open themselves to interpretation based in the destabilizing of modernist understandings of artistic autonomy. Faith in grand narratives and the centrality of the human in the world are shaken by the atomic bomb.[2] More specifically, white America was in the process of finding its place outside of the urban centres in the new growth of a sprawling suburbia.[3] Yet, at the same time and largely in answer to the complex cultural understanding of the nuclear event and growing mobility of petroculture, U.S. self-assurance in its global hegemony was at an all time high. Like conflicting storm fronts, these concerns and sureties collide in the space of the post-apocalyptic novelistic imaginary. These global and bounded anxieties establish the epistemic framework and narrative movement that distinguish the post-apocalyptic novels of this moment: on one hand, massive destruction and internal differentiation is formed by the low pressure of anxiety and, on the other, overcome by highs of confident know-how and growing regimes of mobility.

Exhibiting a logic that is paradigmatic of a number of texts from the post-War period,[4] books like George Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949), Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954), and Walter

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[2] David Seed, *Under the Shadow: The Atomic Bomb and Cold War Narratives* (Kent: Kent State UP, 2012).

[3] Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2004) and Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005).

[4] Other U.S. titles from the post-War period include *The Long Loud Silence* (1952) by Wilson Tucker, *The Long Tomorrow* (1955) by Leigh Brackett, *Dr. Bloodmoney, or How We Got Along After the*

Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) begin to create the cultural space that post-apocalyptic novels occupy today. These texts adopt what are now recognized as the central tropes of the post-apocalyptic novel: sole-survivors navigate a less complex world, society rebuilds but with a difference, or small groups struggle to maintain ways of being in the world.[5] *Earth Abides*, for instance, imagines a scenario in which the survivor of a disease travels across the United States documenting the subtle changes in a world nearly without people.[6] *I Am Legend* takes the sole survivor motif to a different logical conclusion, imagining the response of an individual to the threat

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Bomb (1965) by Philip K Dick, *Make Room! Make Room!* (1966) by Harry Harrison, and, a later title, *The Iron Dream* (1972) by Norman Spinrad.

[5] I base these components on Gary K. Wolfe's assessment of post-apocalyptic novels in "The Remaking of Zero." He breaks the post-apocalyptic plot into a five act structure:

Experience or discovery of the cataclysm, Journey through the wasteland, Settlement and establishment of a community, the re-emergence of wilderness; and, The decisive battle of the Elect. Read along Wolfe's lines, the apocalypse becomes a new beginning, which leads to reformation of residual social bonds. I posit that his acts can be condensed into these three major elements: the struggle to survive, the reforming of community, and the return of old habits, tendencies, and institutions. Gary K. Wolf, "The Remaking of Zero," in *The End of the World* edited by Eric S. Rabkin, Martin H. Greenberg, and Joseph D. Olander 1-15 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983).

[6] This type of extrapolation is similar to that found in Alan Weisman's best-seller *The World Without Us* (2007), which imagines how the Earth would survive in the absence of people. Stewart's interest in the environment strikingly predates Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), which is often credited with inaugurating an ecological consciousness.

of a virus that disfigures humans into vampire-like creatures. Finally, using narrative shifts in time, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* plays out the rebuilding of society after the near total destruction of humanity and with it all knowledge of technology, engineering, and science. Through related narrative strategies, these early novels contribute to the formation of an original site of contestation, a site that is worked and re-worked over the course of recent literary history.

Fundamental to the cultural work of creating this new contested space is what is best grasped as a historiographical problem. These texts crystallize the stakes of post-apocalyptic novels around a core preoccupation with the imagination of historical change through breaks or ruptures. Exploring one theory of how change takes place, Stewart, Matheson, and Miller expose a latent fantasy that, in the face of radical change, things want to stay as they are. Beginning with Stewart's novel, the privileged subject of the post-apocalypse—as protagonist and sometimes narrator—is distinguished as the one who can understand the changes that have taken place in the world. Crucially, the privilege of understanding how the world used to work also bars the protagonist from significantly affecting the development of the post-apocalyptic world to come. Similarly, Matheson's text symptomatically expresses anxieties about a number of endings and beginnings: it was written after Auschwitz and after the bomb, but before decolonization, before free speech movements, before anti-war demonstrations. The protagonist of *I Am Legend* works systematically to purge the world of all agents of change. Matheson's use of the genre deconstructs the self-importance of the male protagonist as the centre of progress and the road to a better future. Finally, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* distributes the experience of apocalyptic change across three focalizing agents, each separated by hundreds of years. Still, the grounded locality of the plot allows for an understanding of the tension between the historical changes that are taking place and the ability to act in the face of those changes. Following Hegel, all three novellas seem to echo the thesis that truth only arrives after the final hour. Despite the inverted character of the post-apocalyptic plot—wherein the final

hour has, as it were, already come and gone—these characters' intimate knowledge of the first apocalyptic end (the final novella cycles back around to pose a second apocalypse) does not help them to form a truly "new" beginning. These texts, taken together, offer a grasp of the character of the post-apocalyptic novel in the decades following World War II. In order to position them as a moment within a developing genre, the chapter closes with a reading Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978). While the chapter begins entrenched in the long 1950s, it concludes by turning to the late 1970s for an example of the post-apocalyptic novel, which certainly comes from the lineage of post-War fiction exemplified in the novels of Stewart, Matheson, and Miller, but can be read as text that exhibits a crucial new component of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel: an awareness of its own generic operations.

Cold War Examples of the U.S. Post-Apocalyptic Novel

> The more he thought about it, the more fundamental he considered her idea of keeping track of time. After all, time was history, and history was tradition, and tradition was civilization. If you lost the continuity of time, you lost something that might never be recovered.
>
> —George R. Stewart[7]

> Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend.
>
> —Richard Matheson[8]

> Some may forget. Some may be lost for a time from the Faith. Teach them, and receive into the Order those among them who are called. Pass on to them the continuity. Be for Man the memory of Earth and Origin. Remember this Earth. Never forget her, but—*never come back*.
>
> —Walter Miller Jr.[9]

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[7] George R. Stewart, *Earth Abides* (New York: Random House, 1949), 113.

[8] Richard Matheson, *I am Legend* (Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, 1954), 170.

[9] Walter Miller Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (New York: EOS, 2006), 289.

Stewart, Matheson, and Miller's texts occupy a lull in the waves of science fiction between the end of the so-called science fiction Golden Age, which lasted from the late 1930s to late 1940s, and the science fiction New Wave of the 1960s. As the production of science fiction novels slowed during this period, post-apocalyptic novels seem to have gained readership, addressing different concerns than Golden Age science fiction did.[10] M. Keith Booker argues that science fiction produced between 1946 and 1964, during what he has termed the long 1950s, should be read as the vanishing mediator between Golden Age science fiction and New Wave science fiction.[11] As such, Booker points out that the science fiction produced during the long 1950s is not often recognized as significant. He describes the science fiction of the long 1950s as strikingly cognizant of the massive economic, political, and cultural changes occurring during the period despite its marginal position to

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[10] Dividing SF production into Ages corresponds loosely with Isaac Asimov's Stages theory of American SF, as described here by Jameson: "I have myself always been attracted to Asimov's stages theory (of American SF): Stage One (1926-1938), adventure dominant; Stage Two, (1938-1950), technology dominant; Stage Three (1950-?), sociology dominant. Twenty years later we can probably date the end of Stage Three from the mid-'60s, and add a fourth stage ('aesthetics dominant') whose 'new wave' preoccupation with myth and language goes into some kind of crisis in the mid-'70s and leaves the field divided into feminist SF on the one hand and a regressive resurgence of 'fantasy' on the other." Fredric Jameson, "Towards a New Awareness of Genre," in *Science Fiction Studies* 9 (1982): 323.

[11] David Seed's study, as well, considerers the texts from this period, but he refers to them as "cold war narratives." Seed, *Under the Shadow*.

other cultural forms.[12] While these texts are crucial in understanding the development of science fiction and postmodernism, they did not stand out in the field of cultural production in the same way Golden Age science fiction did before or New Wave science fiction did after.[13] Booker also traces the political uprisings of the late 1960s to changes in attitudes towards sex and race that began during the long 1950s, positioning these radical elements against the quietly more dominant, conservative cultural movement of the same period, which saw, among other things, the canonization of modernism. Booker's argument connects the science fiction of the long 1950s to the postmodern novel, which bookends the arrival of the post-apocalyptic novel.

Booker's period, the long 1950s, thus contains the emergence of several post-apocalyptic texts of note, even as it does not address them specifically, speaking rather to "science fiction" in general. These post-War post-apocalyptic texts set the stage for the contemporary form of the post-apocalyptic novel through a set of narrative devices which come to be crucial for the genre: *Earth Abides* explores an impulse to catalogue post-apocalyptic life, *I am Legend* develops the trope of the last man, and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* witnesses the emergence of the post-apocalyptic enclave. These features appear with repetition in post-apocalyptic novels since the inaugural texts of the genre, such as Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) and Ignatius Donnelly's *Caesar's Column* (1890) discussed in the prologue, and respectively name the impulse to record the changes in world, to centre one's post-apocalyptic position as just in the face of encroaching threats, and, in a synthesis of the first two, to pull together into a new community to preserve the catalogue in a group of last people.

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[12] Booker argues that figures like Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlen, and Fredrick Pohl wrote much of their best work, while authors like Phillip K. Dick and Kurt Vonnegut Jr. got started in the 50s. Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War* 2.

[13] Booker, *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War* 5.

Published in 1949 and thus, of my examples here, historically closest to the horrors of WWII and the bomb, *Earth Abides* has surprisingly little to say directly about either fascism or the nuclear threat; instead, it delights in cataloguing apocalyptic changes to the world in the near total absence of humans. The novel follows a young doctoral student as he explores the United States after a disease has killed most of the population. Isherwood Williams survives because of a luckily timed snake bite. After mourning the loss of his family, he delights in a new sense of open space:

> Even though the curtain had been rung down on man, here was the opening of the greatest of all dramas for a student such as he. During thousands of years man had impressed himself upon the world. Now man was gone, certainly for a while, perhaps forever. Even if some survivors were left, they would be a long time in again obtaining supremacy. What would happen to the world and its creatures? *That* he was left to see![14]

As Williams travels through the abandoned, now pastoral landscape of the United States, he finds no evidence of disease or devastation except for that caused by nature. For example, he has to clear several fallen trees from the road in one of his many cross country drives, but never has to remove bodies from the streets: humans, in the book, are only apparent in their more or less conspicuous absence; there are no bodies and there is no one left to maintain the roads.[15] Captured as well in the novel's several cross country journeys is the fascination with a distinctly petrocultural regime of mobility. Rather than emphasize the harsh realities of the post-apocalyptic setting, *Earth Abides* treats survival as an exciting social-scientific opportunity to explore the U.S. in the absence of humans.

The cataloguing impulse formally overshadows the protagonist, offering more seemingly objective commentary through distanced narrative sections. These sections anticipate contemporary

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[14] Stewart, *Earth Abides* 24-25.

[15] *Earth Abides* was written before Eisenhower and *Federal Aid Highway Act* of 1956.

post-apocalyptic novels as they draw on the formal devices of then-recent U.S. novels. The narrative apparatus interjects first person narration with objective interstitial chapters that elaborate unpopulated scenes of the deterioration of U.S. infrastructure. The interstitial sections in *Earth Abides* are reminiscent of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), in which the migration of the Okie population is narrated from a distance in between the chapters specifically detailing the Joad family's journey. In *Earth Abides*, however, the interstitial sections are distinctly *not* about people, and, indeed, could not occur in the presence of humans: "As with dogs and cats, so also with the grasses and flowers which man had long nourished. The clover and the blue-grass withered on the lawns, and the dandelions grew tall."[16] Stewart's descriptions continue, lamenting the loss of the asters, the camellias, wisteria vines, and the rose bushes, and replete with imperial imagery: "as once, when the armies of the empire were shattered and the strong barbarians poured in upon the soft provincials, so now the fierce weeds pressed in to destroy the pampered nurslings of man."[17] These sections, printed in italics, anticipate contemporary ecological writing such as Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* (2007). They also effectively separate the protagonist from the background of the novel, which he so readily observes, making the catalogue into a stitching point between material reality and its observer. But, the novel does centre on Williams as crucial to its narrative project. At one point, the narrator remarks, "The more [Williams] thought about it, the more fundamental he considered [Emma's] idea of keeping track of time. After all, time was history, and history was tradition, and tradition was civilization. If you lost the continuity of time, you lost something that might never be recovered."[18] The passage deepens the importance of the catalogue for the

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[16] Stewart, *Earth Abides* 40.

[17] Stewart, *Earth Abides* 40.

[18] Stewart, *Earth Abides* 113.

protagonist's cultural endeavours. Though Williams is separate from the backdrop of the post-apocalyptic setting, his impulse to catalogue maintains his link to the time before the end and his own intellectual investment in the post-apocalyptic world.

The cataloguing plot structure of *Earth Abides* distinguishes it from contemporary post-apocalyptic novels by taking larger descriptive steps forward through chronological time: in "Part I: World Without End," a full year is narrated in detail followed by the course of 21 years in a section aptly dubbed "Quick Years"; "Part II: The Year 22" drops back to a closer narration and is followed by another series of "Quick Years," which cover the course of Williams's lifetime through fragments; and the book ends with the final "Part III: The Last American," which slows the pace of the narrative as Williams lives out his final year. He is the last American, not because he is the last one left alive, but because he is the last one who remembers modern—which is to say pre-apocalyptic—life. The book's approach to narrating the end contrasts with contemporary novels that envision bleak landscapes through sparse prose, following their protagonists in more or less real time over the course of several days or months—Brian Evenson's 2012 novel *Immobility*, for instance, follows McCarthy's 2006 example in *The Road*, which, in turn, is similar in geographic scope to Kim Stanley Robinson's 1984 novel *The Wild Shore* or David Brin's 1985 novel *The Postman*.[19] *Earth Abides* likewise differs from earlier U.S. post-apocalyptic novels, such as Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague*, because the story is not told from within a narrative frame; instead, Williams lives through the apocalypse and experiences time only moving forward. Stewart writes a steady, studied, and detailed account of how human culture and society would re-form, what it would retain, and what it might lose.

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[19] For a full description of setting in *Immobility* see Chapter II, in *The Road* see Chapter IV, and in *The Wild Shore* and *The Postman* see Chapter III.

Retrospectively, *Earth Abides* stands out due to its narrative difference from the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel. Though he was clearly influenced by *Earth Abides* when writing *The Stand*, King complains, "The first half of Stewart's long book is riveting; the second half is more of an uphill push—too much ecology, not enough story."[20] Yet, King's assessment cannot diminish the critical importance of Stewart's novel. Early criticism such as Rabkin, Greenberg, and Olander's *The End of the World* (1983)—a collection in which each essay seems to mention Stewart's novel—and recent work such as Eric C. Otto's monograph *Green Speculations* (2012) make reference to Stewart's novel. Across this long record of critical engagement, Stewart's novel is singled out due to his ecological focus as well as his approach to narrating the cleared spaces of a depopulated United States. The narrative device of the catalogue may not appear in the same way after *Earth Abides*, but it continues to be an important background element for establishing the post-apocalyptic setting in contemporary novels in the genre.

Where Stewart's novel avoids direct engagement with early cold war anxieties, Matheson's last man novel is marked through by the atmosphere of the second "red scare" as much as with endemic racial and gender issues of the long 1950s. *I am Legend* works through this cluster of anxieties by introducing the conceit of a world in which a strange disease has turned the population into vampire-like beings that nightly taunt the only uninfected man, Robert Neville. The situation created by the disease transforms Neville into a righteous vigilante who stalks and kills the vampire-like creatures by the day and barricades himself in his house by night. The plot turns when Neville encounters a woman, Ruth, who has also survived, and welcomes her into his home. Ruth turns out to be an agent sent by a newly treated contingent of vampires. All of this plot is impressively summarized in the note Ruth leaves for Neville once she has left him:

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[20] Stephen King, *Danse Macbre* (New York: Everest House, 1981), 370.

> Robert: Now you know. Know that I was spying on you, know that almost everything I told you was a lie.
>
> I'm writing this note, though, because I want to save you if I can.
>
> When I was first given the job of spying on you, I had no feelings about your life. Because I *did* have a husband, Robert. You killed him.
>
> But now it's different. I know more now that you were just as much forced into your situation as we were forced into ours. We *are* infected. But you already knew that. What you don't understand yet is that we're going to stay alive. We've found a way to do that and we're going to set up society again slowly but surely. We're going to do away with all those wretched creatures whom death has cheated. And, even though I pray otherwise, we may decide to kill you…[21]

Though the treatment has erased any violent behavior caused by the disease, this new group still resembles the others that threaten Neville in their features and in that they still need to sleep during the day. Thus the revelation at the end of the plot, in terms of Neville's self assured heroic identity, is that the presumed monsters, the treated vampires, are the ones being terrorized and that the *true* monster is Neville, who "is a legend as vampires once were."[22]

In *Living in the End Times*, philosopher Slavoj Žižek reads Neville's status as part of the realization that "one's own tradition is no better than what appears to us as the 'eccentric' traditions of others."[23] Matheson puts Neville's epiphany in these words:

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[21] Matheson, *I am Legend*, 154.

[22] Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (New York: Verso, 2010), 62.

[23] Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, 63.

> Robert Neville looked out over the people of the earth. He knew he did not belong to them; he knew that, like the vampires, he was anathema and black terror to be destroyed. And, abruptly, the concept came, amusing to him even in his pain…Full circle. A new terror born in death, a new superstition entering the unassailable fortress of forever. I am legend.[24]

This shift in expectations arrives as a negotiation between content and form, specifically through the narrative apparatus of the protagonist, who, until the plot twist, is represented as the hero. The end of the novel reveals that Neville has actually been acting as a conservative agent, constraining history from moving forward and barring the progress of humanity's transcendence from its old species form: he is a force left over from a previous historical moment who is, precisely in trying to ensure his own survival, transformed into the antagonist of the emergent, social collective.

In *I am Legend*, the single, white male holed up in his house with whiskey, Schönberg, and rage signifies as completely incidental to history, manifesting the melodramatic alienation of his particular standpoint. This figure can be read allegorically: as the autonomous modernist newly assailed by popular cultural forms since the breaking open of his hideaway. Further, Matheson's book prefigures a common trope of post-apocalyptic novels, in which the last human stands out against a number of dead or very alive, very threatening others. The contrast it reveals, however, is located in its critical, didactic lesson about the relation of the dominant (here the white male) to historical change. Anticipating an argument I will return to later, the clever reversal of political polarity in *I am Legend* reappears only in failed forms in contemporary post-apocalyptic novels, unable to affect a similarly meaningful deconstruction of inequality; here, the clever plot twist becomes symptomatic of nothing so much as the history of a form too long accustomed to a reactionary conservatism. Thus, while Matheson's novel smartly engages with the changing

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[24] Matheson, *I am Legend* 170.

American racial and cultural milieu, it does so by introducing an ideologically volatile narrative solution: by revealing its last man protagonist as the (unwitting) champion of conservative white male values, *I am Legend* (just as unwittingly) establishes a trope that has since been consistently remobilized in order to affirm the same reactionary fears it originally sought to undermine. Put otherwise, Matheson's novel may operate as critique in its historical context, but considered in terms of the trajectory of contemporary U.S. post-apocalyptic novels, it becomes subsumed by the latter's reactionary politics.

Synthesizing the distinctive features of Stewart and Matheson's novels—namely the device of the catalog and the trope of the last man—Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, comprised of three novellas, follows separate characters and plots that unfold centuries apart after a nuclear holocaust. Each plot works through the diverse conflicts of survival, knowledge, and the re-birth of society that are unified by their shared setting: the monastery of the order of St. Leibowitz. The novel follows this order of Brothers who guard over the scraps of a destroyed civilization as they work to rediscover technology. The plot begins when one Brother discovers a series of pre-catastrophe writings that the reader recognizes as engineering blueprints and computer hardware design instructions. In the world of the novel, the cultural significance of these artifacts is shifted into the realm of the sacred; some are even rendered in stained glass by the order that preserves them. The order itself, with its imperative to preserve in the bounded space of the monastery, contains the cataloguing device of *Earth Abides* and the last man trope of *I am Legend*, though here they find a new collective form in the enclave of Saint Leibowitz. By remaining sequestered from the anti-intellectualism of the post-apocalyptic world, the order is able to hermetically seal technical knowledge—Leibowitz, after all, was an engineer—protecting it until it may once more be of use to them. As such, the order can be described as an enclave.

I base my understanding of the enclave on Fredric Jameson's elaboration of the term in *Archaeologies of the Future*, where he develops his sense of the enclave from the Utopian writing of Thomas More and William Morris. For Jameson, the enclave is an "aberrant by-product," a "pocket of stasis" within the dominant cultural milieu that "radiates baleful power"; according to him, this power "can be eclipsed without a trace precisely because it is confined to a limited space."[25] The enclave operates like the utopian writer's workshop with a number of tools from past eras ready to hand and to mind. The concept operates much the same in Miller, but for the critical inversion of origins and ends found in the post-apocalyptic plot. Thus, the Order of Lebowitz is a kind of historiographical thought experiment, enabled by the conceit of the post-apocalypse, which can be described as the de-linking of historical chronology from progress. Put differently, the future can now entail technological regress while the past holds technological progress. Miller's novellas take on an explicitly political, though ambiguous, character in their theory of how historical change takes place. They remain ambiguous because the wonderful device of sequestering past knowledge has catastrophic, rather than Utopian effects, which should not discredit the wonders of the enclave as a political maneuver.

The order of Leibowitz creates an eddy amidst a rushing river of ignorance, swirling around past knowledges obscuring them from the outside world where a harsh mistrust of learning has developed; indeed, the intellectual class is blamed for the catastrophe. Although this novel appears to be about societal retrogression it does not depict a uniform movement backwards, but rather what (to bastardize a phrase from Louis Althusser) we might call an uneven regression—modern ideologies of class survive, even in a setting supposedly resembling pre-class dark ages. The first novella, set in the Age of Simplification (sometime in the 2500s), begins with Brother Francis of

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[25] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), 15-17.

Utah discovering a fallout survival shelter. After discovering the shelter, a remnant from before the Flame Deluge, Brother Francis thinks about the Lord Abbot's decree: "…not shall any other excavation be initiated which does not have as its primary purpose the augmentation of the Memorabilia."[26] The collection of this memorabilia is the prime directive of the Order of Leibowitz, to which Brother Francis belongs. To his great surprise, this fallout shelter does contain precisely what he is looking for: his "eye traveled down the list until it encountered: 'CIRCUIT DESIGN BY: *Leibowitz, I.E.*'" and he realized that "he had uncovered relics of the Saint."[27] While the design itself remains unintelligible to the Order, their sacred duty remains to sequester this knowledge until such a time that it might be useful once more. The section ends when Brother Francis of the Order is ambushed on his way to New Rome, located in Denver. His mission was to deliver the sacred relics.

Set in the year 3174, the plot of the second novella hinges on conflict rather than on discovery. Largely focused on the abbot Dom Pualo, the novel also introduces a secular scientist, Thon Taddeo, who yearns to discover the technological secrets in the archive of the Order. Miller describes this knowledge in terms of its sequestration:

> The vaulted basement had been dug during the centuries of nomadic infiltration from the north, when the Bayring Horde had overrun most of the Plains and desert, looting and vandalizing all villages that lay in their path. The Memorabilia, the abbey's small patrimony of knowledge out of the past, had been walled up in underground vaults to protect the priceless writings from both nomads and *soidsant* crusaders of the schismatic Orders, founded to fight the hordes, but turned to random pillaging and sectarian strife. Neither the nomads nor the Military Order of San Pancatz would have valued the abbey's books, but the

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[26] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* 23.

[27] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* 27-28.

> nomads would have destroyed them for the joy of destruction and the military knights-friars would have burned many of them as "heretical" according to the theology of Vissarion, their Antipope.[28]

This passage established the enclave's archival practices in preserving knowledge for future generations and the fact that the world has evolved in complexity from the first novella. Indeed, one Brother Kornhoer develops an electrical current generator using a treadmill that illuminates an arc lamp. Meanwhile, behind the plot surrounding the Order's enclave of technological secrets, a political plot unfolds that is complex and difficult to trace: states form, alliances are taken up and shed, new players emerge to vie for dominance. Hannegan, the Mayor of Texarkana, forms alliances, smashes the nomadic warriors that have been plaguing the countryside, and declares war against New Rome.

The third novella, set in 3781, ends after a resurgence of technology has brought on another nuclear war, signaling Miller's heavy handed critique of the connection between technological innovation and assured destruction. A small group of monks escape on a spaceship, preserving their teachings for posterity. The pronouncements of Abbot Dom Jethras Zerchi—which encapsulate the monastic enclave's drive to preserve the religious order—simultaneously describe the narrative logic of the post-apocalyptic novel:

> You will be years in space. The ship will be your monastery. After the patriarchal see is established at the Centaurus Colony, you will establish there a mother house of the Visitationist Friars of the Order of Saint Leibowitz of Tycho. But the ship will remain in your hands, and the Memorabilia. If civilization, or a vestige of it, can maintain itself on Centaurus, you will send missions to the other colony worlds, and to the colonies of their

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[28] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* 143.

> colonies. Wherever Man goes, you and your successors will go. And with you, the records and remembrances of four thousand years and more. Some of you, or those to come after you, will be mendicants and wanderers, teaching the chronicles of Earth and the canticles of the Crucified to the peoples and the cultures that may grow out of the colony groups. For some may forget. Some may be lost for a time from the Faith. Teach them, and receive into the Order those among them who are called. Pass on to them the continuity. Be for Man the memory of Earth and Origin. Remember this Earth. Never forget her, but—*never come back*.[29]

Abbot Zerchi offers the imperatives to preserve and to disseminate the tenets of a human culture as a founding principle in order to never forget catastrophe. The first novella begins after the end and works towards a new beginning, following the inversion of Kermode's apocalyptic plot markers as described in *The Sense of an Ending* (1966) and elaborated in the prologue. Zerchi addresses his fellows at the cusp of the middest, just before their new origin story is about to begin, but, unlike the Edenic origins of apocalyptic culture, the post-apocalyptic plot itself acts as origin and reminder. This impetus towards continuity remains a signal motif of contemporary post-apocalyptic novels. However, unlike the tendency of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel to work for a total restoration of what came before, the passage from Miller's book recognizes that, in the face of carrying forward knowledge, the apocalyptic event marks a boundary which cannot be crossed again: "but—*never come back*."

The catalogue, the last man, and the enclave inform the tropology of contemporary post-apocalyptic novels. Stewart's novel introduces an exploratory mode similar to contemporary ecological writing that seeks to examine what impact the disappearance of modern accoutrements might have on human culture and society. Matheson's plays into the more horrific elements of

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[29] Miller, *A Canticle for Leibowitz* 289.

surviving a catastrophic disease or nuclear winter, while at the same time imagining the white loneliness, and redundancy, of a sole suburban survivor. Finally, Miller's book, operating in a cautionary mode, combines the first two devices to explore how humanity could passably rebuild, while making the same mistakes over again from within a small sect. Reading across the catalogue, the last man and the enclave, reveals a form of wish-fulfillment, an answer to the if-only dreams of a generation threatened from outside the nation by nuclear warfare and from inside by perceived racial imbalance. In these post-War novels, fantasy realizes itself through the ability to explore the world devoid of humans, to kill one's neighbours old and new alike, or to retreat from the anti-intellectual world in order to sequester a deep knowledge. Each fantasy, read through the historical reality of white flight, provides a particular way of seeing the city and its people just as much as they situate the emergence of the suburb as a land of promise and regress. It is in this way that *Earth Abides*, *I Am Legend*, and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* manage a political-ideological relation to their present. Yet, even as they attempt to reflect critically on the reactionary movement from a radical break to a future of more of the same, these post-War texts become retroactively absorbed into the contemporary politics of the genre of the post-apocalyptic novel.

Symptoms of the Present in Stephen King's *The Stand*

> This isn't the aftermath of a nuclear war, with everything laid to waste. All the machinery is there, waiting for someone to come along…and start it up again.
>
> —Stephen King[30]

Though epic in proportion, King's 1978 novel, *The Stand*, runs on a fairly straight forward plot. A top-secret military grade disease is released from storage and kills upwards of ninety percent of the population of the United States. The survivors begin having dreams either of an old black woman in

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[30] King, *The Stand* 323.

a corn field or of a sinister agent of evil. These individuals begin to travel towards the perceived source of their dreams, either Boulder, Colorado or Las Vegas, Nevada. The narrative apparatus jumps from character to character, not limiting itself to versions of the last man found in Stewart and Matheson or the main characters found in each of Miller's novellas. When these characters arrive at their destinations, they begin to make decisions about reforming political and social life, in each case with different results: in Boulder, the reformation follows the image of polis and, in Las Vegas, that of the feudal gang. These forces are then set against one another as each group imagines that it cannot continue knowing that the other is out in the world, which leads to a final showdown. In the final pages of this chapter, I would like to focus on the ways that *The Stand* demonstrates the post-apocalyptic plot even as it moves beyond the tropology of the catalogue, the last man, and the enclave. King's novel synthesizes the three elements of this tropology, in its form of storytelling and in its self-reflexive adjustments.

As with most post-apocalyptic novels, the plot in *The Stand* moves from destruction to survival. The fortunate accident in *Earth Abides*, wherein Williams is saved by a well-timed snake bite, is restaged in *The Stand* across a complex set of characters, all of whom survive due to some form of destiny that simultaneously acts to divide them based on morality. King's novel provides a sort of reasoning for the survival of members of either camp that comes down to the forces of two extra-historical characters, Abigail Freemantle and Randal Flagg, who inhabit different temporalities from the other characters and seem to exist in a larger diegetic world. Whether siding with Flagg in Las Vegas or being drawn to Freemantle's cabin in the cornfields in their dreams, characters in *The Stand* develop along epic lines of world-historical significance, but their story proceeds first through destruction; catastrophe then enables the staging of the battle for survival between the forces of good and those of evil. *The Stand* is a typical post-apocalyptic novel precisely because it borrows the

setting of an epic confrontation between good and evil and then animates that setting with the post-apocalyptic plot, and not the other way around.

In King's *The Stand*, the apocalypse happens twice: first, caused by a hyper-contagious disease nicknamed "Captain Trips," after the unfortunate officer who allowed it to spread throughout the United States, and then in section three, "The Stand," in the form of the final showdown, in Las Vegas. James Berger offers a rubric of three senses of the apocalypse that can help to understand the doubled apocalypse of King's novel. First, *the* apocalypse that has been imagined to destroy the world from the revelation of John of Patmos to post-War nightmares of total nuclear annihilation; second, *an* apocalypse that marks a historical transition, functioning "as ruptures, pivots, fulcrums separating what came before and what came after"; and third, *apocalyptic* has an "interpretive, explanatory function, which is, of course…as revelation, unveiling, uncovering."[31] In *The Stand*, "Captain Trips" signifies as "an apocalypse," because it marks a historical transition from the new origin of the apocalyptic end into the middest. The agent of that transition is the disease: the narrative frame jumps from the point of infection, spreading outwards with the disease, and the image of characters coughing is repeated as King weeds out the inconsequential. "Captain Trips" has a revelatory function; peeling away most of the population of the United States leaves only handfuls of survivors in a form of *world reduction* discussed in the prologue. The characters that remain are as complex as the descriptions of the gory massacre that illustrates the first third of the book. The final section, "The Stand," on the other hand, operates as the closure of the middest and offers the revelation of a new beginning at the end of the plot. In this way, and decidedly unlike Stewart's or Matheson's novels, *The Stand* structurally restores order by balancing its apocalyptic disorientation with a second apocalyptic revelation.

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[31] Berger, *After the End* 5.

The Stand acts as a representative example of the post apocalyptic plot. It represents the nightmare image of the day and offers a stalwart response of survival to those terrifying images—or at the least it leaves this question of survival open.[32] As characters gather, either in Boulder or Las Vegas, they come together in the shape of residual collectivities, either the political demos or the militia gang. The two camps ready themselves in contrasting ways for the second apocalyptic event, or (to use an even clumsier moniker) the *post-apocalyptic apocalypse*, as the movement from nightmare to survival undergirds the narrative unfolding of the post-apocalyptic novel. Each part of this movement has its own affective payoff—what one could describe as two types of satisfaction. First, on the side of cultural anxiety, there is the satisfaction of witnessing the destruction of capital's infrastructure. In *The Stand*, it can be fulfilling to observe "Trashcan Man" starting massive fires all across the United States, while characters like Redman and Bateman end up satisfying a taste for rebuilding the American nation. Further, on the side of survival, the characters on the liberal-democratic side of conflict end up pulling through to the winning side of the post-catastrophe struggle, providing the narrative closure of victory, even if it is still marked by the uncertainty of the future. *The Stand* ends with Fran Goldsmith and Redman looking at their baby boy:

> "Do you think…do you think people ever learn anything?" She opened her mouth to speak, hesitated, fell silent. The kerosene lamp flickered. Her eyes seemed very blue. "I don't

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[32] A counter example to stories of survival would be one reading of narratives of total extinction, such as Lars von Trier's film *Melancholia* (2011). Where the final moment of the film marks a real end—Derrida's total destruction of the archive, mentioned above. However, another reading of this film could take this ending as a final comment on the inability for narrative film, or any other narrative form for that matter, to represent the unrepresentable catastrophic destruction of all existence.

> know," she said at last. She seemed unpleased with her answer; she struggled to say something more; to illuminate her first response; and could only say again: "*I don't* know."[33]

Whether or not people stand to learn something from the events of the story seems beside the point in a genre that is premised on the restoration of the same, the return to the status quo, and the refusal of radical difference.

Characters in *The Stand* can now think about disaster scenarios from other apocalyptic extrapolations because these stories have entered the culture of the world of fiction, and, crucially, they can act on them as well. King gives his characters opinions that are not reducible to flat ideologies; as it divides the characters into two major, opposing groups, it still fleshes them out. At one point, the character Glen Bateman, while speaking with Stu Redman, even theorizes how they might expect society to be reformed:

> "There are two possibilities," Bateman said. "At least two that I see now. The first is that the babies may not be immune…[the second] that we may finish the job of destroying our species ourselves…Not right away, because we're all too scattered. But man is a gregarious, social animal, and eventually we'll get back together, if only so we can tell each other stories about how we survived the great plague of 1990. Most of the societies that form are essentially primitive dictatorships run by little Caesars unless we're very lucky. A few may be enlightened, democratic communities, and I'll tell you exactly what the necessary requirement for that kind of society in the 1990s and early 2000s is going to be: a community with enough technical people in it to get the lights back on…This isn't the aftermath of a

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[33] Stephen King, *The Stand* (New York: Signet, 1991), 1135.

> nuclear war, with everything laid to waste. All the machinery is there, waiting for someone to come along…and start it up again."[34]

Of immediate note is how the second possibility quickly splits, becoming a second *and a* third possibility. Bateman's theoretical musings set aside the first possibility that everyone will die out, encapsulating what will animate the rest of the novel—two communities in the post-disease United States will struggle for dominance. Also worth highlighting is the way in which, contrary to earlier post-apocalyptic novels, King's characters can hypothesize about the version of the end of the world that they inhabit. Bateman points out that they are not in a post-nuclear United States, and so much of the nation's infrastructure must still be intact, ready for the use of the survivors. Here also is a moment when King can wash his hands of what his characters do or say: they are figured as people of the world each impacted and inspired by its cultures and ideologies. In a sense, then, the lesson of Matheson's novel has been made—that one's world view is no better than someone else's no matter how "strange" it may seem. *The Stand's* striking divergence from the post-War texts discussed above arrives with King's character's ability to take on a heightened level of self-reflexivity—people in this genre behave based on a post-apocalyptic form that is already apparent to them. *The Stand* is remarkable as a representative of the post-apocalyptic novel's reactionary turn as it synthesizes the tendencies of the earlier texts.

The fictional event of "Captain Trips" in *The Stand* occurs in the wake of the actual radical movements of the 1960s and the economic crises of the 1970. The reckoning of *The Stand* comes at a historical moment different from the post-War period when actually existing communism was still a force in the world, before the so-called end of ideology of the 1990s. King describes the period in the United States while he was writing *The Stand*:

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[34] King, *The Stand* 323.

> Its writing came during a particularly troubled period for the world in general and America in particular; we were suffering from our first gas pains in history, we just witnessed the sorry end of the Nixon administration and the first presidential resignation in history, we had been resoundingly defeated in Southeast Asia, and we were grappling with a host of domestic problems, from the troubling of question of abortion-on-demand to an inflation rate that was beginning to spiral upward in a positively scary way.[35]

While extra-textual, these comments help to isolate the desire to maintain a certain logic to the present that is at the core of novels like *The Stand*. As such, a number of traces from its social and historical context mark the particular desires of the novel: it comes to terms with the 1960s in a different way than its contemporaries, say, the feminist utopias of Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, and Joanna Russ; it narrates the continuation of the cold war competition of two dominant ideologies; and, it strongly bears King's adoption of the epic form.[36] *The Stand* is one site that opens

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[35] King, *Danse Macbre* 372.

[36] Regarding *The Stand*'s epic proportions, King writes: "For a long time—ten years, at least—I had wanted to write a fantasy epic like *The Lord of the Rings*, only with an American setting. I just couldn't figure out how to do it. Then, slowly after my wife and kids and I moved to Boulder, Colorado, I saw a *60 Minutes* segment on CBW (chemical-biological warfare). I never forgot the gruesome footage of the test mice shuddering, convulsing, and dying, all in twenty seconds or less. That got me remembering a chemical spill in Utah that killed a bunch of sheep (these were canisters on their way to some burial ground; they fell off the truck and ruptured). I remembered a news reporter saying, 'If the winds had been blowing the other way, there was Salt Lake City.' This incident later served as the basis of a movie called *Rage*, starring George C. Scott, but before it was released, I was deep into *The Stand*, finally writing my American fantasy epic, set in a plague-

up a ground of generic contestation for contemporary post-apocalyptic novels to separate from other cultural forms, like film, while situating it as a sub-genre of science fiction.[37] This ground of

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decimated USA. Only instead of a hobbit, my hero was a Texan named Stu Redman, and instead of a Dark Lord, my villain was a ruthless drifter and supernatural madman named Randall Flagg. The land of Mordor ('where the shadows lie,' according to Tolkien) was played by Las Vegas." Stephen King, "The Stand: The Complete & Uncut Edition," s*tephenking.com*, no date. www.stephenking.com/.../stand:_the_complete__uncut_edition_the_inspiration.html (accessed 27 Nov 2012).

[37] The disaster film, like post-apocalyptic fiction, has a capacity to crystallize nightmare and fantasy in one image. Susan Sontag's analysis of disaster films in "The Imagination of Disaster" (1966) highlights the prevalence of anxieties about disaster in a condensed filmic narrative mode. As she elaborates, the disaster film works something like a commercial: a problem arrives, brings about mass destruction, and is witnessed by the hero; others confirm its existence; experts are called in to deal with the crisis, while masses of people are affected by the problem; more destruction and panic ensues; at last, a vulnerability is revealed and exploited; and finally, hints are made that there may be a further threat to come (i.e. a sequel). This formula makes for an exciting film and also seems to insist on the capabilities of science (here nothing more than an instrumental solution to the narrative) to resolve threats to humanity—it also accounts for the *repeatability* of the film. In the proliferation of both disaster films and post-apocalyptic fiction, audiences and readers are able to witness over and over again the survival of the protagonists, in one way or another. Sontag astutely observes, "Science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster…in science fiction films disaster is rarely viewed intensively…it is a question of scale"; she highlights these films' attachments to imagining mega-disaster (in the form of insects or alien blobs) and survival, rather

contestation offers one explanation for the continuing and increasing attraction to the post-apocalyptic novel in two senses. First, the practical sense of wanting to get the details of survival right ensures that with various apocalypses a sort of contest over the surest techniques could emerge. Second, as observed with the three texts earlier in this chapter, the post-apocalyptic novel can, and often does have a critical function, though, due to the necessities of the plot, these novels tend to put to work towards reactionary ends. Thus, the post-apocalyptic ground of contestation becomes an area to fight ideological battles over how to start the world over again.

The Stand reveals that the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel is fundamentally about both what appears in the text and what remains conspicuously absent. In the novel, the two opposed factions congregate with purpose along either side of the bifurcated divide, meeting up as they are drawn either to Flagg or to Freemantle. The novel's narrative apparatus relies on these two factions moving from dispersion, across the post-"Trips" United States, towards collectivity and mutual

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than imagining the future as an extrapolation in the cognitive mode of science fiction. While her reading of disaster film is sound, her methodological reasons for separating the operations of film from fiction are wanting. For instance, she explains that, in contrast to novels, in film the representation of disaster is immediate rather than making what might be a more forceful argument that the cinematic apparatus is a different form of mediation than the novel. In short, Sontag's argument, without directly saying so, posits the disaster film genre as containment strategy, a place to see cultural and national anxieties about communists and the bomb in the form of, for instance, *Them* (1954), *Tarantula* (1955), or *The Blob* (1958), as they threaten (but never annihilate) Western culture before they are conquered by a hero with his or her team of scientists (Directed, respectively, by Gordon Douglas, Jack Arnold, and Irvin S. Seathworth). Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," in *Against Interpretation* (New York: The Noonday P, 1966), 209-213.

aid—either in the effort to restore order or seek out weapons stockpiles and cause havoc. The narrative process in the novel is also one of subtraction and concentration: those susceptible to "Captain Trips" are killed off, and then the remainders are factored down to the lowest common denominator, two. The only exception to this rule is that the spurned Harold Lauder and haunted Nadine Cross betray Freemantle's coalition in Boulder, Colorado as they are in the midst of trying to restore democracy to the United States. This betrayal marks the outline of the absence within the novel itself, namely any neutral ground for the two groups to resolve the opposition of their aims. For a moment in the novel, when Lauder and Cross plant a bomb in order to kill some of Boulder's leaders, they appear as a force from beyond the residual process of democracy. Instead, they should be read as constitutive of the United States' re-formation. What the novel reveals is that the two factions are deeply related and even rely on the existence of the other to function despite appearing to the contrary, reminding us that though it was reissued in 1990, *The Stand* is a cold war allegory through and through. Written in the mid-1970s, King's novel is legible as a formal resolution of cold war anxieties, where two forces at loggerheads can finally duke it out (with just one nuclear bomb). Yet the novel simultaneously clings to a series of ideologemes from the post-War period. While this makes it a good indicator of its history, its form also indexes the ossifying of the post-apocalyptic novel's generic core. Reading King's novel as a sign of the ground opening for the post-apocalyptic novel sets some of the terms for that ground's contestation, the primary of these being self-reflexivity and that characters begin to think about what other characters in other stories might have done, how they might behave, in order to bolster their own survival.

The pre-history of contemporary U.S. post-apocalyptic novels engages in questions of the end, crisis, and massive loss. These novels tell stories about the end of the world and also about how that end relates to anxieties about survival understood in the most general way as the survival of particular ideas about class and race. The motif of measuring the world as a sole, or nearly sole,

survivor, and then finding an enclave of like minded individuals to batten down the hatches with, plays out against the backdrop of the movement of suburbanization fueled by white flight, on one hand, and a burgeoning petroculture, on the other. The post-War fiction discussed above effectively clears a space for the operations of the post-apocalyptic novel today, but one marked by its reaction to a perceived need to find new spaces and create new beginnings. In light of this nexus of race and settlement, King's *The Stand* marks the opening of a wide path for future novels to follow and the closure, in some ways, of the racial tension in the earlier novels. Different texts manage the impasse between an apocalyptic break and the restoration of the status quo in unique ways. The contemporary U.S. post-apocalyptic novel, then, from its historical beginnings, formalizes an impasse that can itself only result in a crisis: it registers a restricted ability to figure the end and imagine the future at the same time that it attempts to undertake both of these tasks. The capacity of a novel to achieve this complicated epistemological and narratological maneuver hinges on the post-apocalyptic text's struggle to narrate the future as difference, which is of particular trouble and import today. The post-apocalyptic novel does not have some master code; rather, it gives form to the messiness of a number of anxieties within the cultural imaginary that, a decade into the new millennium, can allow us to unearth not only the near and real threats played out in the numerous disaster scenarios in recent fiction, but also the cultural and political implications of the desire to repeatedly witness humanity survive the end of the world. All of these observations leave us, not with solid answers as to the operations of the genre's literary history, but with a question now properly framed within this short account of its origins: can post-apocalyptic novels accurately represent their own crisis?

Chapter II: The Post-Apocalyptic Novel and Science Fiction

The post-apocalyptic novel has many antecedents that position its development largely within the genre of science fiction. Both genres tend to be extrapolative as they imagine the impact of social or technological changes on the near or distant future. Science fiction tends to borrow plots from the espionage thriller, the romance, and the revenge story, relocating them to science fictional settings such as the cyber network, the densely overpopulated colony, or the vast reaches of deep space. The post-apocalyptic is a setting or situation that, like science fiction, opens itself up to cross-fertilization with other genres and plots—the *apocalyptic* western, the *atomic* crash survival, the *empty North America* road trip, the *last man* Robinsonade, the *post-pandemic* pastoral, the *zombie* future history, and so on. What gives the post-apocalyptic novel some coherence across this range of examples is the way that it elaborates setting through sheer quantitative reduction—the space-clearing of population, of nation, of government and politics. Post-apocalyptic novels get to the heart of the problems they seek to address precisely by reducing the complexities of their narrative worlds: large populations are wiped from the Earth and cities collapse along with the infrastructure linking them. When Darko Suvin describes the operations of pastoral, he might as well be describing a post-apocalyptic novel: "Its imaginary framework of a world without money economy, state apparatus, and depersonalizing urbanization allows it to isolate, as in the laboratory, two human motivations—erotics and power-hunger."[1] Instead of isolating the individual through erotics and power-hunger as the pastoral tends

[1] Darko Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," in *College English* 34.3 (1972): 376. Examples of this type of cognitive reduction include George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* ([1949] 1999), Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* ([1959] 2005), David Brin's *The Postman* (1985), Sherri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988), and Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars* (2012).

to do, contemporary U.S. post-apocalyptic novels offer a political lesson about collective human motivation. They set the stakes at the level of the species: the survival of humanity and the reproduction of the present.[2] Though they operate in a manner similar to most science fiction, post-apocalyptic novels seem to simplify the way of the world rather than elaborate the various ways that the future, and thus the present, could be different.

Much as the historical novel fascinated the attention of Georg Lukács, science fiction has attracted critics for its attentiveness to historical movement.[3] Indeed, as Suvin has suggested, the generic link between historical fiction and science fiction illuminates their shared engagement with the author's "empirical environment."[4] Fredric Jameson elaborates the connection between the historical novel and science fiction by suggesting that where the historical novel corresponds to a

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[2] By the reproduction of the present I mean the contemporary situation perceived at the time of they were written.

[3] Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," and *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: Poetics of a Genre* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979); Raymond Williams, "Utopia and Science Fiction," in *Science Fiction Studies* 5.3 (1978): 203-214; Fredric Jameson, "Generic Discontinuities in Science Fiction: Brian Aldiss' Starship," in *Science Fiction Studies* 2 (1973): 57-68, (1982; 2005), "Progress versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?" in *Science Fiction Studies* 9.2 (1982): 147-158, and *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopian and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005); Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2000); Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (Boulder: Westview P, 2000), and Mark Bould, "Introduction: Rough Guide to a Lonely Planet," in *Red Planets*, edited by Mark Bould and China Miéville, 1-26 (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2009).

[4] Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," 372.

sense of historicity: "science fiction equally corresponds to the waning or blockage of that historicity...to its crisis and paralysis, its enfeeblement and repression."[5] Science fiction, in this sense, is thus a symptom, but still, importantly, a way to keep the future open in its concern with locating or being unable to locate the subject in history.[6] The historical novel and science fiction engage in the project that Jameson calls the "aesthetics of cognitive mapping,"[7] expressing a deep concern with the way global capital operates, the effects it produces, and, crucially, the place of the subject within said operations and effects. How then to identify the generic specificity of post-apocalyptic fiction, this rapidly expanding set of texts written by genre writers and literary authors alike, writing

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[5] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991, 284.

[6] Feminist science fiction critics argue that there is a reciprocal correspondence between critical theory and science fiction. In "(Re)reading Queerly" (1999), Veronica Hollinger suggests that science fiction gives voice to theoretical problems of gender and sexuality. This translatability allows for a decoding and recoding that serves to reconfigure the impasse faced by both science fiction and critical theory. Hollinger cautions care in making these translations from one register to the other, for "In our struggle against a monolithic patriarchy…we risk *reinscribing*, however inadvertently, the terms of compulsory heterosexuality within our own constructions." Veronica Hollinger, "(Re)Reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender," in *Science Fiction Studies* 26 (1999): 25 my emphasis. See also, Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: The Women's Press, 1988); and Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995).

[7] Jameson, *Postmodernism*; and, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1988).

in both the mode of science fiction or that of the historical novel with which Lukács was enamoured? Though some work has been done on individual titles, and on other post-apocalyptic cultural forms, there remains little critical discussion in literary terms of the post-apocalyptic novel as such.[8]

In this chapter, I want to take up the established ways that scholars have come to read, discuss, and write about science fiction in order to assess the political workings of the post-apocalyptic novel. It is my suspicion that the works I have identified so far in this dissertation as post-apocalyptic are *not* in fact full or characteristic science fictions, insofar as these works tend to have a politics that is quite opposed to the way theorists of science fiction have come to imagine its own politics. Instead, taking a cue from Suvin, I read post-apocalyptic novels as a political sub-genre of science fiction.[9] The post-apocalyptic novel's attachments are less attuned to progressive political work and more in line with a reactionary assessment of historical change. I will test a post-apocalyptic novel against two cognitive or aesthetic operations that often ground claims about the

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[8] That is, aside from the numerous doctoral dissertations underway on any number of variations of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction. To name only a few, Emily Arvay at the University of Victoria, Canada; Laura Hudson at University of California Davis, U.S.A.; Eui Kang at the University of Illinois at Chicago; and, Conrad Scott at the University of Alberta, Canada. Cf. studies of the post-apocalyptic novel in relation to political philosophy Claire P. Curtis. *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: "We'll Not Go Home Again"* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010) and international relations Mary Manjikian, *Apocalypse and Post-Politics: The Romance of the End* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).

[9] Suvin has importantly suggested that utopias are a political sub-genre of science fiction that both exceed and underpin its tendency to figure historicity and historical movement.

politics of science fiction: cognitive estrangement and cognitive mapping. The former term, cognitive estrangement, is Suvin's, naming his most lasting contribution to the poetics of science fiction. The latter is Jameson's term and, it should be noted, is not necessarily about science fiction at all. I will argue, however, that Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping is deeply informed by the way science fiction works. Following my discussion of these two cognitive operations, I will build my claim for the post-apocalyptic novel as a reactionary sub-genre of science fiction: it is not cognitive estrangement or mapping, but cognitive *reduction* that defines the post-apocalyptic as a genre. I have selected Brian Evenson's *Immobility* (2012) as my test case, because it seems to share characteristics typical of post-apocalyptic novels—a single focalizing character represented as male and uncertain of his surroundings—and, crucially, has much in common with Suvin's description of science fiction.

Cognition and Estrangement, Suvin's Poetics of Science Fiction

> As Samuel R. Delany once suggested, inexperienced readers do not see that what appears to be the taken-for-granted background (the setting) is accurately in sf the foreground or driving force behind the total creation; for before a story can be followed or a character understood, the fictive world itself must be indulged in, grasped, learned, and detailed in the reader's own minds so that the matters of plot or character can literally make sense.
>
> —Tom Moylan[10]

Science fiction is and remains deeply dependent on the social contexts and historical moment of its own present, which it estranges in its extrapolations of the future. The way science fiction generates its extrapolations remains inseparable from its narrative operations. In 1972, Darko Suvin proposed a definition of science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement," which "permits us to lay the basis of a coherent poetics of SF."[11] In Suvin's account, cognitive estrangement describes the

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[10] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 6.

[11] Suvin, "Poetics," 372, 373.

displacement of contemporary ideological and material presuppositions onto a fictional world which appears different from our own, thereby allowing a reader to perceive those elements through fresh eyes. Locating this operation as the definitive representational act of science fiction gives form to a genre and a criticism "determined by the *dialectic* between estrangement and cognition."[12]

While cognition and estrangement depend on each other, they are each separate features of the science fiction text. Maintaining this separation has had implications for the way science fiction has been read as a genre. On one hand, the emphasis Suvin places on "cognition" crucially distances his poetics of science fiction from older narrative forms. According to Phillip Wegner, this emphasis achieves "the connection of utopian and science fictions to nineteenth century literary realism," which serves to build a critical distance between the poetics of science fiction and "other traditional and modern estranging forms such as myth, folk (fairy) tales, and fantasy."[13] For Jameson, the focus on cognition does more than create generic distance, acting as a "refusal to allow the (obvious) aesthetic and artistic status of the SF or utopian work to neutralize its realistic and referential implications."[14] In other words, apprehending science fiction as, at base, a cognitive operation or estranging cognitive displacement of our recognizable, "empirical environment" puts the scientific and, crucially for Jameson, the "real" political reference of these extrapolative fictions into relief. As readers of science fiction "we do want to think about 'real' science when we read these pages… and by the same token we want to be able to think about 'real' politics here and not merely about its

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[12] Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, 16.

[13] Phillip E. Wegner, "Preface: Emerging from the Flood in Which We Are Sinking: Or, Reading with Darko Suvin (Again)," *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction, and Political Epistemology* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), xix.

[14] Jameson, *Archaeologies for the Future* 410.

convincing or unconvincing 'representation.'"[15]

On the other hand, Suvin borrows the notion of "*ostranenie*" from its formalist articulation by Viktor Shklovsky and its more clearly political inflection in the dramaturgical theory of Bertolt Brecht. According to Phillip Wegner, the power of science fiction "lies in its ability to 'estrange' or momentarily distance its audience from the norms and values of their particular social worlds," which allows this audience "to experience reality in its most fundamental aspects as a contingent, artificial, and most, importantly, a deeply malleable human construct." [16] For Wegner, "Teaching its audiences how to think of the spaces they already inhabit in a new critical fashion"[17] remains science fiction's narrative strength. Thus, bringing the two together achieves a distinctly narrative effect: the elements subtend one another, overlapping to create a defamiliarizing story world that remains logical and coherent. Cognitive estrangement allows the engaged reader to imaginatively encounter the limits and the possibilities of their own, real world. Science fiction that properly balances cognition and estrangement, on Suvin's account, is always already about the present.

Cognitive estrangement enables science fiction to warn, diagnose, proscribe, and act as "a mapping of possible alternatives."[18] To take a classic example, *The Time Machine* offered a meditation on the results of human life activity on the species. It suggested that should humanity proceed down a certain path its development would split in two, forming two races, one industrious but hideous and the other beautiful but useless. Of course, this look into the future also allowed for a powerful critique of the present. This was not simply a glimpse into how things could be, but into how they

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[15] Jameson, *Archaeologies for the Future* 410.

[16] Phillip Wegner, "*Imaginary Communities*" (Berkeley: U of California Press, 2002), 17.

[17] Wegner, "*Imaginary Communities*," 17.

[18] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* 12.

were in a fully industrialized, capitalist England. In *The Time Machine*, the extrapolative is the extension of the internal logic of a situation to its logical end or limit made possible through the invention of the titular machine.[19] Jameson defines extrapolation as a concept that designates details of setting and plot "in which heterogeneous or contradictory elements of the empirical real world are juxtaposed and recombined into piquant montages."[20] Put differently, the answer to the question "what would happen if Wells had a time machine?" is as much about what *could* happen as it is about what *is* happening. As a narrative device, the extrapolative inaugurates the estranging situation in the first place. Whether the fictive conceit is based on one small change, or on a whole new totality, the relation between cognitive estrangement and cognitive mapping hinges on the capacity for narrative to describe the real world.

The capacity of science fiction to take account of a situation and formulate creative, generative alternatives comes into focus when considering one trajectory of the novel, elaborated by both Suvin and Freedman, which develops from tales of adventure. Suvin writes,

> At the beginnings of a literature, the concern with a domestication of the amazing is very strong. Early tale-tellers tell about amazing voyages into the next valley where they found dog-headed people, also good rock salt which could be stolen or at the worst bartered for. Their stories are a syncretic travelog and *voyage imaginaire*, daydream and intelligence report. This implies a curiosity about the unknown beyond the next mountain range (sea, ocean, solar system...), where the thrill of knowledge joined the thrill of adventure.[21]

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[19] Suvin, "Poetics," 378-380.

[20] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* 276.

[21] Suvin extends this very-spatial mode of exploration from geographic features, mountains, seas, and then oceans, to the solar system. "An island in the far-off ocean is the paradigm of the

This combination of the thrill of knowledge and the thrill of adventure still animates much of science fiction today. Most important in Suvin's brief history is the relationship between knowledge and geographic position, adventure and the map. Science fiction comes into its own when the geographical basis of the adventure story is complemented by the historical: when it is not what happens when we go into the next valley, but what happens to humanity when we "move" into the next century that intrigues us. Freedman corroborates these observations. He suggests that these adventure and proto-science fiction novels of Sir Walter Scott, Mary Shelley, Edgar Allen Poe and others tend to elaborate the relationship between an individual subject, their lived environment, and that subject's and that environment's place within a national or global totality. Freedman's examples include: Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Poe's "A Descent in to the Maelstrom" (1841) and "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaal" (1835), the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and Verne's *Extraordinary Voyages: Known and Unknown Worlds*—a title, as Freedman notes, that Verne gave to his novels as a whole.[22]

Suvin's poetics focus on the relation of the subject, protagonist, or reader to a larger whole. He argues that a common method for accustoming a reader to a new situation was, borrowing from

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aesthetically most satisfying goal of the SF voyage...especially if we subsume under this the planetary island in the aether ocean usually the Moon." "Poetics," 373. Suvin's examples include, "Iambulus and Euhemerus through the classical utopia to Verne's island of Captain Nemo and Wells' island of Dr. Moreau… the Moon-from Lucian through Cyrano and Swift's mini-Moon of Laputa to the 19th century." Suvin, "Poetics," 373; italics in original.

[22] Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* 49-53. See also Carl Abbott's account of travel narratives as pre-cursors to science fiction proper in Carl Abbott, *Frontiers Past and Future* (Kansas: UP of Kansas, 2006), 8-9.

the *bildungsroman*, to "have the hero or heroine define it for the reader by growing into it."[23] The mediation of the protagonist, then, allows the reader to slowly come to terms with the estranging situation in a narrative mode based on the exploration and elaboration of new and existing spaces. In this sense, the science fictional effect of cognitive estrangement expands and deepens the reader's sense of place within history. As Carl Freedman writes, "The science-fictional world is not only one different in time or place from our own, but one whose chief interest is precisely the difference that such difference makes."[24] Protagonists come to know the post-apocalyptic landscape in a similar way. Think of the protagonists discussed in Chapter I: Williams, in *Earth Abides*, and Neville, in *I am Legend*, come to terms with a world that has new rules and where their actions count in ways that are different from before. It is in this way that science fiction eases its readers into the estranging situation through the protagonist's experience of the new, while, at one and the same time, opening up the possibility for the reader to reflect on his or her own present afresh. In "The End of the Beginning," Conrad Scott suggests that characters adapt to the post-apocalyptic setting through a "rethinking of the notion of environment."[25] Yet in *Earth Abides* and *I am Legend*, the protagonist's role turns out to be antagonistic to the development of a new way of life; Williams and Neville behave as though their stake in the future were privileged over those around them. Indeed, each book concludes with a similar frustration of its main character's designs as these characters don't fully grow into the world, which complicates Suvin's point without refuting it. The type of relation

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[23] Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* 79.

[24] Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* 43.

[25] Conrad Scott, "The End of the Beginning: Environmental Apocalypse on the Cusp in Scott Fotheringham's *The Rest is Silence* and Nicolas Dickner's *Apocalypse for Beginners*," in *UnderCurrents* 18 (2014), 28.

characters have with the world becomes an instructive element for identifying the post-apocalyptic novel in relation to science fiction.

Cognitive Mapping and its Vanishing Mediator

> The move from 'individual' SF to great SF epic histories of a new type is less a matter of the extrapolation of forms of individual destiny onto collective history...than it is of the mediation of space itself; and the collective adventure accordingly becomes less that of character (individual or collective) than that of a planet, a climate, a weather and system of landscapes—in short, a map. We need to explore the proposition that the distinctiveness of SF as a genre has less do with time (history, past, future) than with space.
>
> —Fredric Jameson[26]

Like science fiction, Fredric Jameson's theory of cognitive mapping emerges out of a spatial analysis of culture, locating a subject that is at once individual and collective within a changed global situation. Cognitive mapping offers a key political measure of what science fiction novels depict. Cognitive mapping, as much as it signals a struggle to come to terms with the estranging scale and pace of the postmodern, late capitalist present, maintains the role of cognition championed by Suvin.[27] As in the epigraph to this section, one could describe the connection between Jameson's and Suvin's cognition in terms of the spatial inflection that their thinking shares; with "cognitive mapping" and "cognitive estrangement," what is being worked or acted upon as "cognition" is an explicitly spatial relationship to the world. In this sense, I want to explore the way in which Suvin's

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[26] Jameson, *Archaeologies for the Future* 313.

[27] In a talk on cognitive mapping, Jameson thanks Suvin directly: "it is the great historical merit of the work of Darko Suvin to repeatedly insist on a more contemporary formulation of this aesthetic value [to teach], in the suggestive slogan of the *cognitive,* which I have made my own today." Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," 347; italics in original.

poetics of science fiction, if not science fiction itself, acts as a kind of vanishing mediator in Jameson's description of the aesthetics of cognitive mapping.

In the 1984 article, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Jameson observes that the incapacity to "locate" ourselves is a lived, existential fact of the postmodern and that "literary" form (by which he means culture, architecture, etc.) tends to represent this fact as a "symbol and analogue" of our failure to cognitively map our collective situation. Turning to Jameson's description of a new aesthetic, we should note the absent presence of science fiction:

> So I come finally to my principal point here, that this latest mutation in space—postmodern hyperspace—has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. And I have already suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment…can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects.[28]

Locating oneself, organizing one's surroundings, and mapping one's position in relation to an external world powerfully resonate with the tendencies of science fiction to offer the strategies and techniques required to map speculative narrative spaces. Cognitive estrangement seems to stand in the same relation to the fictional worlds of science fiction as cognitive mapping stands to the postmodern moment of Jameson's analysis. The questions underlying this analogy are, how and to what extent does SF stand in relation to postmodernity and, specifically, is it an exceptional case of

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[28] Jameson, "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *NLR* I/146 (1984): 83-84.

postmodern literary form? Put differently, does science fiction's cognitive estrangement avail it of "fresh eyes" to see the postmodern world?

Though Jameson does not explicitly turn to the novel or to science fiction to reach his political conclusions in "Postmodernism," by the time this essay was published he had been writing articles for *Science Fiction Studies* for ten years (while Suvin was its editor). In the "Postmodernism" essay, Jameson looks to urbanism rather than science fiction to explain the shifting relationship of the subject to modern and postmodern cities. Still, his description of the urban bears the traces of the properly science fictional experience of alien landscapes or the new hyper city and communications "matrix" of the newly emergent subgenre of science fiction, cyberpunk:

> Kevin Lynch taught us that the alienated city is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves: grids such as those of Jersey City, in which none of the traditional markers (monuments, nodes, natural boundaries, built perspectives) obtain, are the most obvious examples. Disalienation in the traditional city, then, involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place, and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories. Lynch's own work…becomes extraordinarily suggestive when projected outwards onto some of the larger national and global spaces.[29]

The alienated city and the prospect of disalienation begin to sound a little like those descriptions of cyberspace and Chiba City, Japan in the opening pages of Gibson's *Neuromancer*.[30] Case, Gibson's

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[29] Jameson, "Postmodernism," 89.

[30] Gibson's *Neuromancer* should not be considered a post-apocalyptic novel, even though it takes place after a nuclear war that conflict is not the structuring event of the narrative. Indeed, the

protagonist, runs through Chiba City, which corresponds to the modernist city, dreaming of the postmodern city in the form of cyberspace and "the matrix" with none of "the traditional markers."[31] Banished from cyberspace, Case begins the novel psychically caught between the two cityscapes of Gibson's novel, a state of exile that aligns in illuminating ways with Jameson's diagnosis of postmodern alienation in the modernist city:

> A year later and he still dreamed of cyber space, hope fading nightly. All the speed he took, all the turns he'd taken and the corners he'd cut in Night City, and still he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void. . . The Sprawl was a long strange way home over the Pacific now, and he was no console man, no cyberspace cowboy. Just another hustler, trying to make it through. But the dreams came on in the

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operation that Case undergoes before the novel begins could equally be considered apocalyptic, through perhaps only in Berger's sense of *an* apocalypse that changes the course or direction of events. The larger point is that the fiction I delineate as post-apocalyptic is so both in terms of content—everything in the narrative takes place after a catastrophe—and form—the limits to the diegetic world precisely trace some of the most pervasive epistemic limits we have to imagining the future as difference (not to mention the different generic path that cyberpunk cuts through the field of science fiction cultural production).

[31] Jameson laments not being able to include neuromancer more prominently in that book, "This is the place to regret the absence from this book of a chapter on cyberpunk, henceforth, for many of us, the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself;" however, it is not to Jameson's detriment that the article does not discuss *Neuromancer*—the novel was released at the same time as the article after all—rather, the logical, historical correspondence of the two is to his benefit. Jameson, *Postmodernism* fn. 419.

> Japanese night like liverwire voodoo, and he'd cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn't there.[32]

On one hand, this passage explores Chiba City through a drug addled stupor that stumbles down the twists and turns of the layered forms of so many film noir depictions of the city, framed by the now classic opening line description, "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel."[33] On the other, the promise of cyberspace—a mappable system of logic where the promise of finding purchase on the present is now lost to the protagonist, Case, who is banished from the matrix.[34] Case's eventual return to cyberspace and the challenges he faces there act out a sort of wish fulfillment—with the right techniques and technologies, an individual agent could not only determine where they are, but how to act in the face of that knowledge. Gibson's novel addresses the same historical problematic as Jameson's essay: the complexity of history and the unmappable present in late capitalism for the still modern subject. Gibson's cyberpunk science fiction, encounters the same problematic as Jameson's theory, even if it does so with the bleary, red eyes of a strung out jockey's ambitions.

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[32] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984), 5.

[33] Gibson, *Neuromancer* 3.

[34] "[Postmodern sublime narratives], which first tried to find expression through the generic structure of the spy novel, have only recently crystallized in a new type of science fiction, called *cyberpunk*, which is fully as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of good paranoia itself: William Gibson's representational innovations, indeed mark his work as an exceptional literary realization within a predominantly visual or aural postmodern production." Jameson, *Postmodernism* 38.

But, in "Postmodernism," Jameson does not begin his description of cognitive mapping with the map. His elucidation instead connects to the generic history of science fiction through an elaboration of the itinerary, which has its own formal relation to the development of the map. Jameson explains that itineraries are

> diagrams organized around the still subject-centered or existential journey of the traveler, along which various significant key features are marked—oases, mountain ranges, rivers, monuments and the like. The most highly developed form of such diagrams is the nautical itinerary, the sea chart or *portulans*, where coastal features are noted for the use of Mediterranean navigators who rarely venture out into the open sea.[35]

Thus, the itinerary functions like a list or a set of directions on how to travel from point A to point B. Jameson's commentary on the history of navigation connects to the generic history of science fiction via the shared geography of the travel narrative—the novels of Verne standing as the most obvious examples of this generic link.[36] The type of cartography Jameson describes moves even closer towards the poetics of science fiction: "Cognitive mapping in the broader sense comes to require the coordination of existential data (the empirical position of the subject) with unlived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality."[37] It is at this point in Jameson's essay, and through the resolution of this spatial tension, that science fiction stands revealed as the vanishing mediator of the aesthetics of cognitive mapping. Jameson writes,

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[35] Jameson, "Postmodernism," 90.

[36] Mark Bould, "Introduction: Rough Guide to a Lonely Planet," in *Red Planets*, edited by Mark Bould and China Miéville (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 2009), 2-12; and, Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, 49-53.

[37] Jameson, "Postmodernism," 90.

> The new political art—if it is indeed possible at all—will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is, to say, to its fundamental object—the world space of multinational capital—at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. *The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale.*[38]

Reading this passage alongside the poetics of science fiction reveals a glimpse of the double helix structure undergirding Jameson's dialectic. Science fiction vanishes into either side of cognitive mapping—experience of the subject and knowledge of the totality—making it possible to imagine this "new political art" en route to inventing and projecting a "global cognitive mapping." Even here, in Jameson's struggle to narrate a path out of the delirium of the postmodern moment, a moment that by his own account appears impossible to imagine in its entirety, the utopian light of a radically different future shines through from within a properly science fictional description of possible worlds. The explanatory force of Jameson's writing comes from its conception and enactment of narrative, and specifically the Jamesonian dialectic is modeled, in part, on the utopian elements that are particular to science fiction. Is the spatial and temporal opening of the possibility of thinking two opposing terms at once enabled by the cognitive estrangement that allows characters and readers to understand science fictional worlds, and, if so, could it also allow for the emergence of new collective subjects with enough understanding of the late capitalist present to act? While it could simply describe the dialectic since Hegel, cognitive mapping seems like something from the

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[38] Ibid. 92; italics mine.

future—it seems that the ghostly traces of science fiction and cognitive estrangement animate the dialectic.

Mapping the Present in Brian Evenson's *Immobility*

> What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once again and innumerable times again; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unspeakably small or great in your life must return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!" Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained power over you, as you are it would transform and possibly crush you; the question in each and every thing, "Do you want this again and innumerable times again?" would lie on your actions as the heaviest weight! Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to long for nothing more fervently* than for this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?
>
> — Friedrich Nietzsche[39]

Focalized through a central character whose waking from a deep freeze begins *Immobility*, the world of Evenson's novel is full of complexities that are never fully revealed. The opening lines characterize a sense of confusion that compounds throughout the novel: "A sensation of coming back alive again, only not quite that, half life maybe."[40] The starting point of the novel's meditation on immobility is that of the paraplegic protagonist:

> Still utter darkness, though perhaps a faint hint of light on the horizon. Scraps and bits of sound caught somewhere between brain and ears and slowly unthawing to become words, trickling slowly in, but in such a way that it is hard to be sure if they are words from now or

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[39] Friedrich Nietzsche, "§341: The Heaviest Weight," in *The Gay Science* trans. Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 194-195.

[40] Brian Evenson, *Immobility* (New York: Tor Books, 2012), 11.

> things actually heard. The word food, or perhaps brood. Dying out or crying out, something of the sort, hard to say which exactly, if either.[41]

The protagonist-narrator cannot use his legs. The ones that wake him also tell him that he needs to receive a drug-cocktail shot to his spine every twenty-four hours in order to slow its deterioration and stave off his encroaching death. They also tell him he needs to retrieve something that was stolen from them. The novel follows this disabled amnesiac across a hostile post-nuclear landscape as he is carried by two special clones, a.k.a. "mules," designed to transport a burden for several days before deteriorating beyond use. While the novel is named for the character's own paralysis, it also flags the way characters and communities in the novel seem to be trapped between survival and extinction. In the interstices of these positions, the novel figures several ways out of eternal return that form an itinerary of the novel's narrative movement and a set of future possibilities.

Immobility can be described as the movement through a set of estranging episodes, each linked by the focalizing character. I name these episodes: (1) immediate survival, (2) long term survival, (3) extinction, (4) the unknown, and (5) reproduction. The appearance of each possible future is coordinated through the contradiction of survival and extinction as it is overdetermined by identity and difference (see *Immobility* – Figure 2 pg 85). Reading these episodes in order, I want to suggest the way in which they promise different alternatives for the protagonist. Through each of these spaces, the novel presents a world where one can never be sure of survival or, indeed, of death—a bit of advice repeated throughout the novel is "*Always remove the head.*"[42] Each move from episode to episode in the novel provides instructions for how to read it, *à la* Suvin, through its estranging prose. The plot of the novel renders its title, *Immobility*, in several iterations: first, it

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[41] Evenson, *Immobility* 11.

[42] Evenson, *Immobility* 232.

characterizes the paralyzed main character; second, it becomes thoroughly ironic when Horkai is seen to be the most mobile character in the novel; and, third, it names a deeper kind of return, repetition, or reconstitution of the same. Horkai's dis(ability) enacts a dialectical reversal of the title: Horkai is not immobile; he is precisely the most mobile character in the novel and as such is able to offer the fullest account of what is happening in the world. So then, much like Nietzsche's eternal return, Horkai moves back to his constraining situation precisely by moving away from it. Evenson's novel describes the fearful immobile body transported through space always seeking a beginning in a way that captures not just the mobility of its protagonist, but the politics of immobility that lie at the heart of the post-apocalyptic novel itself.

The novel opens with the main character waking to confusion—he eventually remembers his name is Joseph Horkai. We know that he has been in deep freeze storage, has been tasked with a mission by the community's leader Rasmus, and that he is unlike any of the people within this community. One benefit of this difference is his ability to withstand the hostile, post-apocalyptic environment outside. Horkai remains uncertain about his identity, whereabouts, history, and whether he can trust anyone. He writes a note to himself to make sense of his situation. "What I Know: 1. I was stored for thirty years. 2. I have been woken up to perform a task. 3. Something is wrong with my memory," but he rather quickly revises his list: "with his thumb he brushed over the words 'with my memory' until they blurred and became a glowing splotch. Something is wrong."[43] It should be noted that his first reaction to the others around him is hostile, but he is pacified. Before he can learn any more about his past or his identity, he is tasked with retrieving a stolen item, "seeds," from a place called Granite Mountain. In order to persuade Horkai to assist him, Rasmus describes him as a "fixer...called upon when nobody else could solve a problem...willing to use any means necessary

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[43] Evenson, *Immobility* 49.

to make things right."[44] Since he cannot walk, he will be carried by the aforementioned mules. The novel thus adds a new space to its map, Granite Mountain, which stands at the end of a long path of twisted and wrecked highway. The reader may follow the mules there step by step, but the connection between the origin and the destination can only be figured by the line of the plot and not by a fully realized, or cognitive, map.

The next scene imagines long-term solutions that hinge on a shift from difference to identity around the coordinate of survival (I refer you again to *Immobility* – Figure 2 pg 85). Horkai discovers that the others who are holding the stolen item are just like him; this revelation has the effect of intensifying the level of estrangement just at the moment when Horkai and the reader begin to understand more of the world around him. The reason he was selected for the mission becomes slightly less opaque—these others can withstand the outside, look like him, and greet him as a companion—meaning that Horkai is less of a "fixer" and more of an ideal infiltrator. Under Granite Mountain, a number of beings sit frozen in storage. Mahonri, the one who greets him, explains that he acts as a sentinel while the remaining beings sleep, which allows them to extend their stewardship of seeds that are also kept in storage. In other words, the freezing extends their lives and their stewardship hopefully long enough to witness a return of flora and, with it, humanity. For a moment, here, the future seems uncertain: Horkai could attempt to retrieve the stolen item from the deep freeze or stay along with Mahonri and help them in their bid to wait out the fallout and restart the experiment of life on Earth. Ultimately, Horkai maintains fidelity to his "community," brutally assassinating Mahonri in his sleep and escaping with the stolen seeds. But he doesn't take the grisly advice to "remove the head," and Mahonri revives and gives chase. One narrative possibility for the future, staying with those like him, gives way to another: flight through

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[44] Evenson, *Immobility* 40.

the wracked countryside, as Horkai moves on to another space, another possible future.

The novel accounts for each situation from within a new set of uncertainties, which act as a rewiring of its pervading estrangement, sending jolts back to its start. Horkai escapes, the mules expire, and he tries to drag himself the rest of the way home. Much of this interstitial section is narrated in fragments filtered through Horkai's delirium. During this scenario, he is visited by at least one group and one individual: the first take some of his precious treasure and the second rescues him and nurses him back to health. Between encounters we learn about the stakes of Horkai's mission—the stolen container holds a precious type of seed: fertilized human eggs. Horkai has in his hands the potentiality of an ambivalent future; here the novel deepens its debt to a science fictional setting and operations, clearly revealing its investment in questions of futurity and reproduction. Horkai, a distinctly different entity, holds the possibility of the reproduction of Rasmus's community in his hands. The significance of his power over the future connects to the previous situation, where Mahonri planned to use the fertilized eggs in another, more distant future. The novel has been working through different spaces and different futures simultaneously. The initial community needs the eggs now, while Mahonri needs them should the planet become hospitable once more. Both possibilities signal the novel's concern with limits to the future and how integral reproduction—sexual, social, and, as we shall see, ideological—is to maintaining the shape of the present.

The plot regains coherence once Horkai is safe. As the valence shifts from identity and survival to identity and extinction, Horkai learns from his saviour, Rykte, that he is not paralyzed after all. The injections he received from the community were responsible for his immobility in the first place. The revelation of the knowledge that he has been paralyzed by Rasmus and used as instrument to accomplish ends other than his own opens up the possibility of betraying his promise to them. The tension in this section escalates when members of Horkai's community arrive to beg

him to return. He now faces a choice between fidelity to his community and betrayal of them in favour of a life lived with Rykte. Just as before, with Mahroni, he decides to return to the community, but not without wondering: "Is Rykte right...is it better for humanity to die out?"[45] Horkai's decision seems to insist that, though many alternative futures confront the protagonist, he cannot veer from his path. Here Horkai's drive toward reproducing his situation accelerates as he leaves Rykte bound for Rasmus and the community.

Best characterized as an encounter with the unknown, the fourth scene is the closest that Evenson's novel comes to breaking its protagonist free from the eternal return to the same. On his way back to the community, Horkai is sidetracked by a strange building he remembers from a moment of delirium. Outside of the other spaces and possible futures, what he discovers is difficult to map into the novel's story—it is a moment the novel itself cannot seem to resolve—and the closest he comes to deviating from his path and breaking from his eternal return to the same:

> He moved carefully forward, rifle ready. The body was relatively recent, not the desiccated corpses he'd seen while travelling with the mules. It was naked. A stake had been hammered into its chest. It was extremely pale and hairless, just like him. He could not tell if it was a man or a woman; the facial features were ambiguous and the hips could have belonged to a boyish girl or an effeminate man. It had what looked like the beginnings of breasts, but the body itself was chubby and the nipples looked more like those of a man than a woman. Between the legs was no sex, neither male nor female, but instead a strange gelatinous casing that seemed to have been extruded from the flesh itself. He bent to have a closer look, but

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[45] Evenson, *Immobility* 227.

> couldn't figure their purpose. He was just reaching out to touch them when the creature opened one eye.[46]

Despite the attempt by its molesters to pin it down, the body on the table is unrecognizable. Despite Horkai's attempt to place the gender through an accumulation of bodily signs—pale and hairless, hips, breasts, nipples, sexual organs—he "couldn't figure their purpose." In an estrangement that also resonates as deeply queer, Horkai stands face to face with an entity that cannot even be fit into his expanded understanding of the post-apocalyptic world. This figure of radical difference forms a neutralization of Horkai's position. The body is *immobile* and, from Horkai's description, soon to depart the world. Horkai's immobility is an abstracted version of this staked body such that here stands the strongest example of how he tends to shrink away from the unknown, to yearn for more of the same, and to reject an as yet unknowable future. Horkai follows his encounter with the unrecognizable being with a resolute decision to return to the community and mutters, "*Back to the original purpose . . . focus Horkai,*" before departing.[47]

In an essay that pits the ideology of progress against the possibility of utopia, Jameson writes "a narrative must have an ending, even if it is ingeniously organized around the structural repression of ending as such."[48] While the overt lesson of the novel's closure seems to be one about political attachment, its true lesson, about aesthetic-epistemological limits to imagining the future, arrives at the moment of recurrence. The novel ends with haunting similarity to how it began. Given Horkai's decision to turn away from the most radically unknowable future in the novel, the twist at

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[46] Evenson, *Immobility* 231.

[47] Evenson, *Immobility* 232.

[48] Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia," in *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005), 283. "Progress versus Utopia" was first published in *Science Fiction Studies* 9.2 (July 1982).

the end is almost unsurprising: Horkai completes his mission and is forcibly sequestered back into the deep freeze by Rasmus. A short fifth section, and reproduction may not be quite the right name for it, concludes the novel, ending with the line: "*Ah*, he thought, just before the sudden inrush of extreme cold. *I've been in storage. They must just be waking me up.*"[49] Horkai's return to the community measures the depth of collective belonging as the ending of *Immobility* insists on Horkai's confinement, which is here revealed to be a re-confinement.

Horkai's story repeats a turning away from, or refusal of, divergent futures. The three encounters, with Mahonri, with Rhytke, and with the impossible body, suggest Horkai's *recognition* of the multiple futures embodied before him. In Horkai's recognition, the story's desire for immobility reaches its purest expression, where even full recognition and knowledge of a genuinely other future does nothing to bring it about. This impasse is the central problem of the text—how is it that we can encounter the limit of our own thought and capacities and miss the chance to act? When Horkai encounters the alien body that exceeds his capacity to cognitively frame it, his only response is an attempt to place the figure within the physical embodied realm of sexual reproduction. Further, in the other scenes *Immobility* appears to be staunchly anti-collective. The one community that doesn't involve individual autonomy is the one that deceives and constrains Horkai. Mahroni stands in for a meditative existence, a hermetic sealing in the possibility that the future may one day be better. Resigned to human extinction and the uncertainty of the continuation of their life into the future, Rhykte forecasts a sort of radical opposition to any form of futurity whatsoever. The body offers a different promise, and perhaps this uncertainty increases its seductiveness. It cannot be easily ascribed this or that possibility, this or that known configuration. In its very unassimilability it reconfigures the previous encounters, revealing a queerness to the other various futures that Horkai

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[49] Evenson, *Immobility* 253.

viciously resists: the community of human men, the watchful cult of mutant protectors, or the quiet life shared with a partner that anticipates no future whatsoever. The novel's protagonist, then, figures as a mix of conservative and reactionary, while demonizing any form of collective life. In the end, Horkai's actions reveal a desire for eternal return that mimics the post-apocalyptic novel's formal impasse. *Immobility*, in short, replaces science fiction's tendency for cognitive estrangement with a cognitive reduction of social and sexual reproduction that forms the ultimate description and limit of its problematic. This reduction leaves us only with a map of possible futures: immediate gratification, delayed action, resignation, or the unknown. Just as Jameson has described science fiction as a genre that is both a symptom of, and a corrective to, the postmodern problem of historicity,[50] *Immobility* treats History as a complex moment of negotiation between the present and the future, where only nostalgia for the future remains. This weak hope for a present outside of the eternal return, for the present *as History* is consistent with the reversal of the apocalyptic plot: from the break issues not a new situation, but a return of what came before. The post-apocalyptic novel stages a possible future, but the impetus of the genre is retrogressive; rather than opening up a sense of historicity, it stages the future in order to stimulate the sense that nothing would be better than to return to the present. Post-apocalyptic novels can thus be thought of as a reactionary sub-genre of science fiction intent on reconstituting the diegetic, pre-apocalyptic present. They take the radical, extrapolative gesture of science fiction, but then set out only to reverse the extrapolation. To rephrase Freedman's words, not the difference that difference makes, but the difference that makes little to no difference at all.

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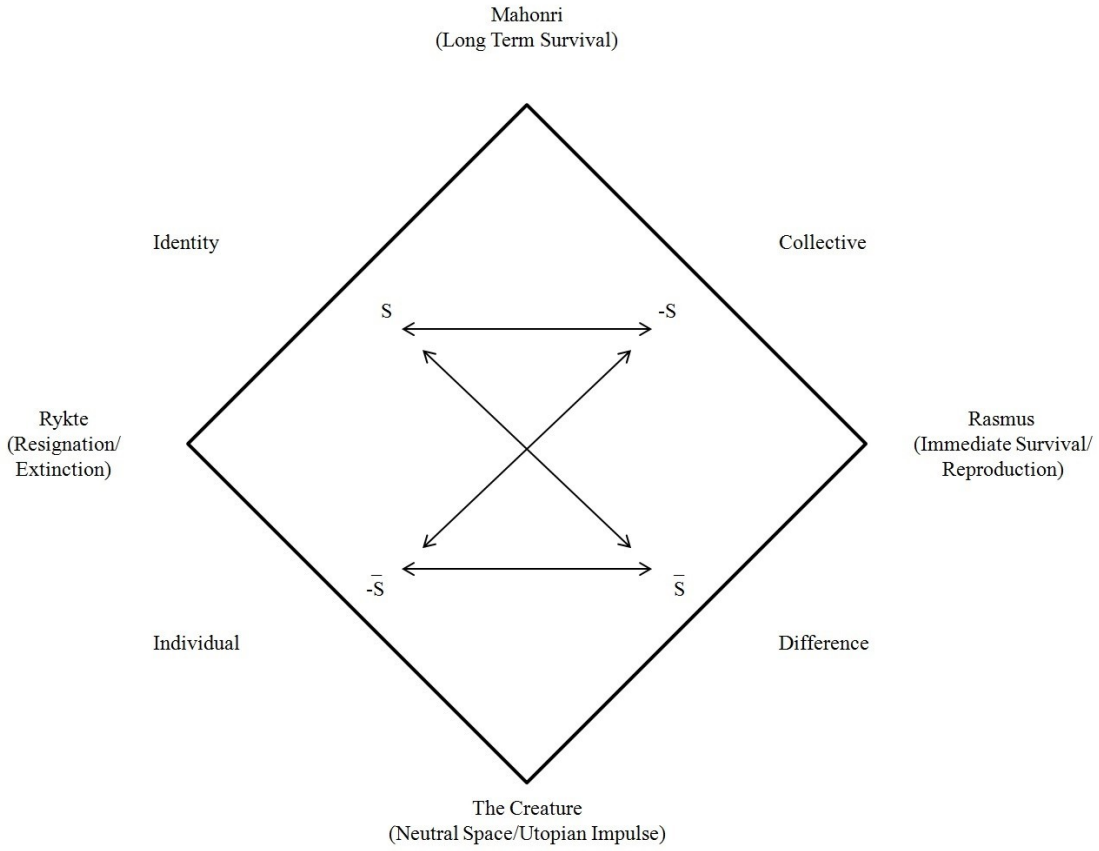
[50] "Science fiction equally corresponds to the waning or blockage of that historicity...to its crisis and paralysis, its enfeeblement and repression." Jameson, *Postmodernism* 284.

Immobility – *Figure 2*



Chapter III: Old and New Americas

> The rise in importance of accumulation by dispossession…symbolized by the rise of an internationalist politics of neoliberalism and privatization, correlates with the visitation of periodic bouts of predatory devaluation of assets in one part of the world or another. And this seems to be the heart of what contemporary imperialist practice is about. The American bourgeoisie has, in short, rediscovered what the British bourgeoisie discovered in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, that, as Arendt has it, "the original sin of simple robbery" which made possible the original accumulation of capital "had eventually to be repeated lest the motor of accumulation suddenly die down." If this is so, then the "new imperialism" appears as nothing more than the revisiting of the old, though in a different place and time.
>
> —David Harvey[1]

Cormac McCarthy's 1985 novel *Blood Meridian, or, The Evening Redness in the West* returns to the frontier of the mid-nineteenth-century American southwest. The novel takes place in the wake of the U.S.-Mexico War of the late 1840s, which saw the largest single expansion of U.S. territory in history. With the 1848 treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo the United States received the Rio Grande boundary for Texas, ownership of California, and land that today makes up New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado. Set in and across these lands, the novel follows the narrator, referred to as "the Kid," as he joins up first with U.S. Army Irregulars, and later with a gang of scalphunters led by John Joel Glanton. McCarthy's novel charts old spaces that had recently been altered by events as it develops the old problematic of the frontier, which opens up a view to a deeper correspondence at work in the new spatial imaginary of the 1980s. Commentators on McCarthy's novel suggest that it reworks a history of the west, exposing the deep injustices and incredible violence of the U.S. Mexico War. They suggest that it struggles to overcome the deeply racialized ideological oppositions that most frequently characterize frontier imaginaries. Billy Stratton argues that McCarthy's treatment of the frontier "deconstructs the conventional narrative

[1] David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 180-181.

of the Western adventure novel that *Blood Meridian* initially seems modeled after."[2] Historian Neil Campbell reads *Blood Meridian* as an accurate representation of frontier history and Fredrick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis.[3] Writing about the western more generally, Carl Abbott extends this observation , explaining that the subtext to the American western, as a genre, is "the advance of civilization through contests with nature, native peoples, and nasty outlaws," and, he continues, the trope of expanding across the continent encompasses "the dominant national myth of the United States, and it serves as the American equivalent of European imperialism and imperial adventuring."[4] Furthermore, Emil Sepich claims that in *Blood Meridian* McCarthy responds to critics who "found his earlier books an excess of the grotesque" by writing "a well-researched and solidly present—yet no less grotesque—*historical* novel."[5] While certainly not post-apocalyptic, *Blood Meridian* actively engages in a return to what I will argue is the same frontier problematic that, in mid-1980s post-apocalyptic novels, becomes symptomatic of what David Harvey calls new imperialism. My own reading will attend in particular to *Blood Meridian*'s epilogue in light of the dominions of old Americas and the enclosures of new ones, in order to specify a dynamic of old and new Americas that get played out in David Brin's *The Postman* (1985) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984).

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[2] Billy Stranton, "'el brujo es un coyote': Taxonomies of Trauma in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*," *Arizona Quarterly* 67.3 (Autumn 2011): 152.

[3] Neil Campbell, "'Beyond Reckoning': Cormac McCarthy's Version of the West in *Blood Meridian, or, The Evening Redness in the West*," in *Critique* 39.1 (Fall 1997).

[4] Carl Abbot, *Frontiers Past and Future: Science Fiction and the American West* (Lawrence, UP of Kansas, 2006), 14.

[5] Emil Sepich, "The Dance of History in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*," in *Southern Literary Journal* 24 (Fall 1991): 30.

Blood Meridian bears witness to the spread of civilization south and westward with Holden's gang as its brutal emissaries. The plot begins at a public revival when the Kid witnesses Judge Holden, a character he will meet many times over the course of the novel, spinning lies to entice an angry mob into lynching a preacher. Following this event, the Kid joins a group of ill-outfitted U.S. Army irregulars led by a Captain White. After crossing the border into Mexico, the Captain's cohort is attacked by a band of Comanche warriors. The Kid escapes, is arrested in Chihuahua, and is subsequently set free when Toadvine, his cell partner, convinces the authorities to let them join John Joel Glaton in the state's scalphunting operation. The gang's original contract is to terminate Apaches, but they begin to murder anyone they encounter, from agrarian Indians to Mexican villagers. After months of terrorizing the Mexican country side, Glanton's gang returns to U.S. territory, establishing a "toll" at a ferry on the Colorado River near Yuma, Arizona to dispossess American settlers of their wealth. After another group sets up another ferry downstream, the two vie for control of the river and most of Glanton's gang, including Glanton himself, are killed in the process. The Kid and a few others survive, escaping into the desert. The Kid ends up in jail in San Diego after Holden testifies that the Kid himself destroyed Glanton and his gang. The Kid is again set free in return for revealing the location of the gang's hidden treasure to the authorities. For years afterwards, the Kid travels the American West. The plot resumes, if only to end again, in 1878 in Fort Griffin, Texas, where the Kid encounters Holden one last time, which ambiguously closes the novel—it is unclear if Holden rapes the Kid, murders him, or leaves him be. These events are followed by a one paragraph epilogue to which I will turn shortly.

Though the gang's movements appear to be erratic, they emblematize a logic of accumulation, and Judge Holden is its epitome. In his reading of the end of the novel, Patrick W. Shaw convincingly argues that the judge "survives to haunt the future" and that he does not murder

the Kid, as so many critics claim.[6] Although Shaw posits a complex explanation for the novel's unrepresentable ending, relying on McCarthy's claim that there is "No such thing as life without bloodshed,"[7] he excludes the historical mechanisms that make up the zero-level background for the violent actions of Judge Holden and Glanton's gang, which is not to say he is wrong, but rather that there is further evidence for his conclusions about the novel's ending. The judge selectively collects things over the course of the novel. For instance, after a battle,

> The judge knelt with his knife and cut the strap of the tigerskin warbag the man carried and emptied it in the sand. It held an eyeshield made from a raven's wing, a rosary of fruitseeds, a few gunflints, a handful of lead balls. It also held a calculus or madstone from the inward parts of some beast and this the judge examined and pocketed. The other effects he spread with the palm of his hand as if there were something to be read there.[8]

This list of objects characterizes a recently deceased man's life possessions. The discerning eye of Judge Holden seems to be guided by the narrator, who describes the handful of objects in terms of their appearance with only a guess at their possible utility—the full sense of their cultural significance is lost. This divide between the use or meaning of the objects and the Judge's insatiable desire to collect them retraces the larger pattern of theft and violence taking place in the south-west in the wake of the U.S.-Mexico War. Joshua J. Masters describes the judge as "a nightmarish

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[6] Cf. Vereen M. Bell, *The Achievement of Cormac McCarthy* (Baron Rouge: Lousiana State UP, 1988); Tom Pilkington, "Fate and Free Will on the American Frontier: Cormac McCarthy's Western Fiction," in *Western American Literature* 24.1 (Fall 1991): 16-31; and, Sepich, "The Dance of History."

[7] Qtd. in Patrick W. Shaw, "The Kid's Fate," in *Southern Literary Journal* 30.1 (Fall 1997): 103.

[8] Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian, or, The Evening Redness in the West* (New York: Vintage, 1985), 110.

embodiment of the myths of colonial expansion, myths that [McCarthy] extends, rewrites, and reconstructs to apocalyptic ends."[9] In the figure of Holden, the novel captures the tension between the destructive and generative forces of the frontier. The epilogue, and not the scene of anti-closure between the Kid and the judge, offers an interpretive key to my reading of *Blood Meridian's* gruesome exegesis. The representation of colonial violence in McCarthy's historical novel serves a framing purpose for my argument: to critically return to the frontier story in order to understand the return of the frontier in the mid-1980s post-apocalyptic novel.

The epilogue of the novel recalls the entire movement of the novel's plot: it contains the movement of Glanton's gang, the bizarre archival activities of Judge Holden, and the ambiguous end faced by the Kid. The speaker in the Epilogue remains unclear, though it may be observed that the elegance of the long central sentence places the observer outside or in command of a great expanse of time:

> In the dawn there is a man progressing over the plain by means of holes which he is making in the ground. He uses an implement with two handles and he chucks it into the hole and he enkindles the stone in the hole with his steel hole by hole striking the fire out of the rock which God has put there. On the plain behind him are the wanderers in search of bones and those who do not search and they move haltingly in the light like mechanisms whose movements are monitored with escapement and pallet so that they appear restrained by prudence or reflectiveness which has no inner reality and they cross in their progress one by one that track of holes that runs to the rim of the visible ground and which seems less the

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[9] Joshua J. Masters, "'Witness to the Uttermost Edge of the World': Judge Holden's Textual Enterprise in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*," in *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 40.1 (Fall 1998): 25.

> pursuit of some continuance than the verification of a principle, a validation of sequence and causality as if each round and perfect hole owed its existence to the one before it there on that prairie upon which are the bones and the gatherers of bones and those who do not gather. He strikes fire in the hole and draws out his steel. Then they all move on again.[10]

The Epilogue plays out the novel in allegorical miniature: Glanton's gang are those who search; as Straton points out, the phrase "and they rode on" is the most repeated one in the novel—it occurs more than thirty times. Even the last, short sentence of the epilogue explicitly states: "*Then they all move on again*." The Epilogue also considers the repetition of the "they rode on" phrase in the novel through "striking the fire out of the rock," in which each new hole signifies the extension of a series and together construct a limit—the enclosure of property in the wake of the U.S.-Mexican War. This spatial-temporal relation is entrenched at the level of the sentence, where the process is described first in a long figurative Faulkner-esque sentence, and then encapsulated and serialized in the repetition of the phrase "*He strikes fire in the hole and draws out his steel*." Then, of course, they all move on.

But this moving on is also a violent making room for what historically follows. The bones have been found, now they are and are being gathered by some but not by all. This relation suggests a process of accumulation characterized by the gathering of resources, here figured as bones, in the hands of a single set of individuals to the point where the sheer amount gathered, the number of bones, generates new types of gatherer. Put another way, the quantity gathered generates a new quality of gatherer: one who has enough wealth to begin to put it to new ends, which also implies those who don't have the means to put to new ends. In Chapter XI, Glanton's gang encounters a group of *ciboleros*, "their packhorses laden with dried meat…bound for the markets at Mesilla," and a

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[10] McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 337.

point of differentiation is captured in their encounter: "The Americans might have traded for some of the meat but they carried no tantamount goods and the disposition to exchange was foreign to them."[11] This disposition to exchange is just as much a functional part of the process of accumulation detailed by the novel, as the existence of the goods themselves. Without a shared disposition to trade, the *ciboleros* and the Americans are at an impasse. Indeed, the violent dispossession of lands, goods, and resources depicted in *Blood Meridian* is an integral part of the process whereby the "the disposition of trade" is fostered on the frontier.

As is evident in McCarthy's novel, Turner's frontier thesis remains deeply embedded and continues to resonate with meaning in the U.S. cultural imaginary of the 1980s. As early as 1893 Turner was arguing that American democracy was a historical result of the American Frontier. In *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (1920), he argued that "the existence of a free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward" explained U.S. development, and, more succinctly, Turner described the frontier as "the line of the most rapid and effective Americanization."[12] Though Turner elides the displacement of Indigenous peoples and the violence wrought on them as their lands were bartered or stolen away from them, the deeply spatial process that he theorizes around the turn of the twentieth century emerges once more in the work of David Harvey, Silvia Federici, Giovanni Arrighi and others, who study the way capital accumulates around the turn of the twenty-first century. Indeed, a major concern—in the work of Harvey, Federici, and Arrighi and the post-apocalyptic novels of the 1980s—is that space, for capital, is at a premium, which becomes an acute problem in a political economy premised on

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[11] McCarthy, *Blood Meridian* 121.

[12] Fredrick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (Ann Arbor : University Microfilms, 1966), 11, 13-14.

limitless expansion. To anticipate an argument made later in this chapter, 1980s post-apocalyptic novels participate in a return to abundant or cleared space as central fact or precondition for the restoration of the *polis*.

Put succinctly, in these novels the frontier mediates history, where what was once a push into the space of the west now operates allegorically as the logic of neoliberalism. The importance of neoliberalism to my argument here hinges on its centrality to U.S. domestic and foreign policy leading up to and during the mid-1980s, and cannot be simply reduced to a guiding ethos in economic policy. That is, I am interested in neoliberalism as the relation of dominant ideology to economic reality. Often characterized as economic liberalism, the most notable tenets of neoliberal policy require an absolute faith in the market to manage production, circulation, and consumption, which results in a rationalization and economization of every aspect of life. Despite its long incubation period from the Ordoliberals of Weimar Germany to the Chicago School of economics employed by the Carter administration, neoliberalism had certainly reached dominance by the mid-1980s. Jeffery T. Nealon describes this peak in relation to the 1960s: "If in the U.S. 'the '60s' functions politically as a kind of shorthand for resistance and revolution of all kinds, 'the '80s' most immediately signifies the increasing power and ubiquity of markets and privatized corporatization of everyday life." According to Perry Anderson, meanwhile,

> The keynotes of the Carter Administration were tight money and deregulation, to weaken labour and strengthen business. In Congress, the Democrats lowered the capital-gains tax and raised the payroll levy, while—in one vote after another—rejecting reform of health care, indexation of the minimum wage, consumer protection and improvement of electoral

> registration. At the Fed, Volcker was entrusted with a hard deflation. Neo-liberalism was now in the saddle.[13]

Anderson flags the moment when neoliberalism achieves dominances with a telling cowboy metaphor. Indeed, Keynsianism comes to an end by the 1980s when the frontier of the Americas is once again opened to capital accumulation, in a way that echoes the Wild West. This return is seen especially in the reinvestment in the gunslinger historical figure, which has mutated to coincide with the figure of *homo economicus*. That is, with the dissolution of the Keynesian public good and of the corresponding social networks of support that accompanied that moment, the individual subject is once again at the mercy of the elements, so to speak. Put differently, the market has become a naturalized phenomena, so the cowboys of the 1980s post-apocalyptic frontier have to rough it on their own and through their grit carve out a life for themselves from the new plains of the Americas, liberated as it were, 'set free' to pursue happiness through the harnessing of human capital in an embrace of the entrepreneurial spirit. This setting loose of the subject finds its historical precedent in earlier moments of primitive accumulation, when through the process of enclosure capitalist accumulation got underway.

To return to the epigraph, in *The New Imperialism* (2004), Harvey uses the term "accumulation by dispossession" for what he credits Hannah Arendt with calling "the original sin of simple robbery," which enabled the accumulation of capital in the first place and "had eventually to be repeated lest the motor of accumulation suddenly die down."[14] This characterization of "accumulation by dispossession" can be read into Turner's frontier thesis as a particular un- or

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[13] Jeffrey T. Nealon *Post-Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Production* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012), 10; and, Perry Anderson, "Homeland," in *NLR* 81 (May/June 2013): 10.

[14] Harvey, *The New Imperialism* 180-181.

underdeveloped zone[15] that was consumed in the process of its "Americanization," to use his term, for its "free" resources and land.[16] According to Turner, for production to be an on-going,

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[15] By un- or underdeveloped I mean to say, still common, not yet subsumed by capital, or rather not yet delivered to capital by the enclosing operations of primitive accumulation underwriting the advance of the frontier, or rather constituting the formation of the frontier as such. For Marx, this process is precisely what's at work in the so-called conquest of the Americas: "The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, [of America], the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black skins, are…the chief moments of primitive accumulation" Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 823. Silvia Federici's corrective to this formulation does not only note that Marx, in his focus on the waged worker of liberal political economy, misses the production of a matrix of gender differences that results from the process of primitive accumulation, but she also names primitive accumulation as a process that is ongoing: it subtends capital accumulation all along rather than existing only as its precondition, in a way that has intensified in response to the economic crises of the 1970s. See Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia: 2004).

[16] Turner's thesis posited that American development could not be entirely explained by production in the east, but had to take into account "the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession and the advance of American settlement westward." Qtd. in, Margaret Walsh, *The American Frontier Revisited* (London: MacMillan, 1981), 11.

expanding process, a terrain is needed that is open, fertile, and resource rich.[17] The centre, then, draws from this peripherally expanding border to continue its development. According to Turner, the disappearance of the frontier "closed the first period of American history,"[18] and the spatial frontier would be replaceable only by an intellectual, scientific one. Turner's thesis, while provocative, elides the communities of Native Americans in favour of positing a free and clear zone that remained open for expansion and accumulation, something that McCarthy's novel puts into focus. In her 1981 study *The American Frontier Revisited*, Margaret Walsh puts pressure on the implications of Turner's argument, asking whether freeness simply means empty, or if it means, instead, available at little or no cost. She finds neither satisfactory as these lands were not empty and seizure of them certainly implies a deeply unequal exchange or outright seizure. By locating the frontier in relation to the limits of capitalist progress, Turner identifies a spatial problematic that does not vanish with the end of the historical and geographic entity he named, but instead persists in the expanded exploitation of the global south by U.S. interests. V.I. Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg describe this form of exploitation in terms of an uneven development: the spatialized accumulation of wealth by the capitalist class through the exploitation of the working class *geographically* so that particular zones of capital accumulation appear to be more developed than other zones precisely because of their deeper exploitation of the latter. Harvey explains that geographical unevenness causes a differentiated return on investment, meaning that as different places compete with one

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[17] One example of this is the use of buffalo hides from the North American plains for factory belts in the industrializing northern states.

[18] Qtd. in Walsh, *The American Frontier Revisited* 12.

another to attract investment this unevenness deepens, staging local, regional, or national classes against one another.[19]

Harvey describes this process as accumulation by dispossession to explicitly guard against the tendency to imagine the process of "primitive accumulation," elaborated by Marx at the end of *Capital Vol. 1*, firmly in the past. Federici similarly posits that

> A return of the most violent aspects of primitive accumulation has accompanied every phase of capitalist globalization, including the present one, demonstrating that the continuous expulsion of farmers from land, war and plunder on a world scale, and the degradation of women are necessary conditions for the existence of capitalism at all times.[20]

Further, my focus on the frontier above shows that the U.S. was already well accustomed to this strategy here attributed to the British bourgeoisie. That is, already in Turner's thesis we can see Harvey's idea of accumulation by dispossession playing itself out, and in the epilogue of *Blood Meridian*, the linked processes of "accumulation by dispossession" and Americanization recur within the condition, process, and location known as the frontier. The return to the concerns of the frontier in 1980s is thus a layered one: an allegory of the spatial domination of the U.S. abroad, a desire to overwrite the investments of the last twenty to thirty years of public investment, and an attempt to rewrite U.S. history itself.

McCarthy's novel is *historical* in the crucial doubled sense that it elaborates, in gruesome detail, a historical moment and, at the same time, provides commentary on the contemporary dispossession and accumulation of resources, this time from the global south and from the

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[19] David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), 295.

[20] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch* 13.

commons within the US as publicly owned assets were privatized. This movement is thus characterized by an international drawing inward, from the periphery to the centre, and a national drawing upward, in seizures of public wealth by corporate interests. Each movement transfers wealth to the capitalist class in a redistribution from the margins and the marginalized to those in control of the means of production and the state itself. Like the activities of Glanton's gang, these processes are also hyper violent dispossessions that tend to criminalize the homeless (often Native Americans), echoing the conquest of the Americas. *Blood Meridian* epitomizes the relation between old and new Americas because it is at once about the brutal history of the systematic genocide of the Apache Indians, the murder of Mexicans and settlers, and the seemingly pointless opportunism of whichever gang laid claim to whichever territory. In light of the actions of Glanton's gang, U.S. foreign activity during the 1980s seems to still operate under the bloody frontier relationship on which its national character rests: covertly funding government coups in South America and the Middle East and aiding the grasp of capital to reach previously unsubsumed corners of the globe. McCarthy's account of one gang's bloody rampage through the mid-nineteenth century continental southwest is thus also the story of the off-shoring of manufacturing and the neoliberal deregulation of corporate power.

This violent economic policy continues to operate through what Harvey calls the spatial fix. In the face of economic crisis, potentially brought about because capital cannot, for one reason or another, meet up with labour in the production process, capital tends to seek to move from one zone to another. That is, it seeks out areas that are underdeveloped or labour pools that are less costly. As Arrighi points out, Harvey's elaboration of the fix has a double meaning: literal and metaphoric. On one hand, it means a fixing in place that is an embedding in the land of facilities: "railways, roads, airports, cable networks, fibreoptic systems, pipelines, electricity grids, water and sewage systems, as well as factories, offices, housing, hospitals and schools" as opposed to "ships,

trucks, aircraft, or machinery" that are mobile. Put differently, "it is only by fixing certain physical infrastructures *in* space that capital, in all of its physically mobile forms, can actually move *over* space in search of maximum profit."[21] On the other hand, "spatial fix" metaphorically refers to the tendency of capital to overcome spatial barriers—what Arrighi reminds us Marx called "the annihilation of space through time," or the undoing of monopolistic privilege of particular locations through the deepening of competition across an expanding geographic space. Here's is Arrighi's lucid explanation of this process:

> As a result of this tendency, capital recurrently accumulates over and above what can be profitably reinvested in the production and exchange of commodities within existing territorial systems. This surplus of capital materializes in inventories of unsold commodities that can only be disposed of at a loss, in idle productive capacity and liquidity that lacks outlets for profitable investment. The incorporation of new space into the system of accumulation 'fixes' the ensuing crisis of overaccumulation by absorbing these surpluses, first through 'temporal deferral' and then through a spatial enlargement of the accumulation system. Absorption through temporal deferral refers specifically to the production of space, that is, to the utilization of surplus capital in opening up and endowing the new space with the necessary infrastructure, both physical and social. Absorption through scale enlargement, for its part, refers to the utilization of surplus capital in the new productive combinations that are made profitable by the geographical expansion of the system of accumulation after the new space has been adequately produced.[22]

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[21] Giovanni Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling—1," *NLR* 32 (March-April 2005): 35.

[22] Arrighi, "Hegemony Unravelling—1," 36.

It is in light of McCarthy's return to the frontier and the economic policies it allegorizes that something like post-apocalyptic setting, in the ruins of the past civilization, appears in a new light as capital investments which could not be made to dance (as Marx's dancing table had). They are residual components of a previous mode of accumulation (capitalism) now ripe for the use of a new one (scavenging, barter, retro-feudalism). One way to think about the post-apocalyptic novel then, is as a sort of hand wringing over the economic contingencies of overaccumulation, especially in the wake of Keynesian investment in public works, infrastructures, and building projects.

Thus, McCarthy's preoccupation with the past of the frontier is spatially reconfigured and temporally inverted in David Brin's post-apocalyptic novel *The Postman* (1985) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984). As we will see, the frontier logic that remains in the foreground of McCarthy's novel fades into the background in *The Postman*, leaving Brin's examination of a restored American nation housed in the state of Oregon in focus. Though Brin's post-apocalyptic novel entertains a dynamic of old and new familiar in *Blood Meridian*, its preoccupies itself with the re-constitution of the liberal subject and the rebirth of the U.S. nation. Rather than looking back to explain the present, it displaces this temporal situation forward. In other words, it posits an imaginary future from which to look back and grapple with the present. While, for McCarthy, the frontier marks in letters of blood and fire the origin story of American industries and imaginaries, for Brin the massive fallout of the destruction of those industries becomes an origin story, a place to reform civilization.

The first novel of Robinson's *Three Californias* trilogy, *The Wild Shore*, provides my argument a case that seems to mirror the spatial imaginaries of Brin's novel. In Robinson's novel, the United Nations, under Russian control, has aggressively cut the United States off from modernity. Like Brin's novel, Robinson's expands the known territory of the protagonist first through exploration, but then diverges from it by critically reflecting on this mediation by further expanding the

protagonist's awareness of the global through a novel-within-a-novel, a travelogue that explains and exposes the reasons that the U.S. was banished from modernity. In this way, the spatial dialectic of *The Wild Shore* accounts for both the bloody history imagined in *Blood Meridian* and the question of U.S. reformation in *The Postman*. In *The Wild Shore*, the stakes of each possible future are weighed carefully one against the other, and by the novel's close none has achieved complete dominance over the others.

The historical backdrop that *Blood Meridian* provides brings to the fore the way the frontier mediates plot and setting in mid-1980s post-apocalyptic novels, suggesting that mid-nineteenth century spatial contradictions and desires remain active in the U.S. cultural imaginary. Put another way, McCarthy's historical novel elucidates the spatial imaginary in the pastiche of the western frontier story and the post-apocalyptic novel. The argument of this chapter is not simply that the new depiction of the old frontier aims to relive those heady days of settlement, but rather that the frontier post-apocalyptic novel of the 1980s draws attention to the way the U.S. is re-enacting frontier history on a stratified and growing domestic class system as well as on an expanding scale abroad. And indeed, insofar as these novels develop any genuine critique of imperialism and neoliberalism, it is found in the Restored United States of Brin's *The Postman*, in the way Robinson's *The Wild Shore* stages multiple paths to the future, and, in both, in what will emerge as an interest in problems central to the spatial imaginary of the novel as a particular form. The spatial imaginary that interests me in these novels is one that is premised on a subtraction of the complexities of the global situation from a diegetic world. They locate a limit within the post-apocalyptic narrative form, especially its (in)capacity to depict the reality of the post-Vietnam, post-OPEC crisis, yet still Cold War period. I want to focus on the strange insularity to the state-bound spatial imaginary found in these novels. I ask, in other words, what the considerations of space in these novels might tell us

about, not only the way they engage in depicting historical reality, but the possibilities and limits of the post-apocalyptic novel to depict old Americas and project new ones.

The Postman, the Liberal Subject, and the Restored United States

> Here then is what science fiction looks like without (or after) the future: the twentieth century is envisioned not as the launching pad for a glorious technofuture but as an anomalous moment of prosperity and historical possibility which quickly burns itself out, leaving in its place the worst combination of Manifest-Destiny America, feudal Europe, and decadent Rome.
>
> —Gerry Canavan[23]

The acknowledgement that begins Brin's novel sets the stage for the fantasy about space and identity that follows it: "It hardly mattered anymore what had done it—a giant meteorite, a huge volcano, or a nuclear war. Temperatures and pressures swung out of balance, and great winds blew...The Earth turned. Men still struggled, here and there."[24] From the start, the cause of the apocalyptic event seems to be irrelevant despite the vastly different effects produced by the extraterrestrial, geothermal, and atomic catastrophes envisioned in the brief "Prelude" that opens the novel. The meteor strike and the volcanic eruption certainly do not take place in the novel, while the nuclear war is less certain. On the novel's own account, the cause of the depopulation of North America and the reasons "Men still struggled," are hardly worth wondering about; however, the effects include a newly cleared space, a frontier-esque sandbox for narrative conflict. Gerry Canavan's assessment seems to situate *The Postman* as a precursor of a number of western style post-apocalyptic novels, including Robert Charles Wilson's *Julian Comstock* (2009), which similarly figures the

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[23] Gerry Canavan, "Science Fiction without the Future," in *American Book Review* 33.3 (Mar/Apr 2012): 11-12.

[24] David Brin, "Prelude," *The Postman* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1985), n.p. Italics in original.

miraculous return of civilization as "the worst combination of Manifest-Destiny America, feudal Europe, and decadent Rome."[25] While the novel's "Prelude" renders the cause of the apocalyptic event in *The Postman* irrelevant, according to M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas, the novel poses the responses to the apocalyptic event as a central concern: though "a series of catastrophes occurs…the real collapse of civilization is brought about not by the catastrophes themselves, but by the response of right-wing survivalist groups to these catastrophes."[26] This assessment of the post-apocalyptic story world frames the central conflict of the novel not around surviving a host of apocalyptic threats to the present, but around having fight to reboot modernity along democratic, if also nationalistic, lines.

Commentators on the novel agree it imagines civilization reboot as a horizon of possibility. Abbott turns to the frontier myth: "the fertile land that pioneers saw as an Eden at the end of the Oregon Trial in the 1840s is still a semi-Eden at the end of a bleak desert journey, a place where Gordon can help survivors rebuild society." He rephrases this aphoristically as well: "when sociality collapses, head *west* to reconstruct it."[27] In contradistinction to this position, Mary Manjikian suggests that "regardless of the 'flavor' of the apocalyptic created, it is nonetheless true that the apocalyptic novel is, in essence, a product of privilege, arrogance, and hubris...to contemplate

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[25] Gerry Canavan may be writing about Robert Charles Wilson's *Julian Comstock*, but he is also accurately describing the social remnants found in *The Postman*. Canavan, "Science Fiction without the Future," 11-12.

[26] Booker, M. Keith and Anne-Marie Thomas, "Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Fiction, in *The Science Fiction Handbook* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 61.

[27] Abbott, *Frontiers Past and Future* 217 n.11, 78.

throwing away civilization, one must have civilization in the first place."[28] More specifically, this expanding scale is critically tied to the (re)development of a liberal political subject from a state of nature, through the birth of the liberal subject, to the generation of a social contract, and the struggle with threatening forces from outside of that contract. Finally, Claire P. Curtis reads post-apocalyptic fiction, like Brin's, as a "spatial and bodily context" for the social contract theorists' considerations of the state of nature.[29] She finds that typically the Lockean and Rousseauan scripts are germane to novels like Brin's because they tend to emphasize property and community over fear.[30] Curtis concludes this based on Locke's emphasis on the "free and rational desire to work," the desire for security, and the desire "to not simply stop transgressors, but to provide a community where such transgressors would never attack."[31] The novel meditates on the question of the settlement of seemingly empty spaces, seeming to suggest that what causes social bounds to form and what brings people together is their shared labour under some form of social contract.

In the service of working towards the re-building of society, each section expands the spatial scale of the story and replaces an old set of problems with a new set of problems, leaving some conflicts unresolved while others are simply forgotten. The story of the titular Gordon Krantz is related by an unnamed narrator and, contrary to the nearly global frame established in the prelude, unfolds within the bounded space of what was once Oregon. The novel is divided into four sections,

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[28] Mary Manjikian, *Apocalypse and Post-Politics: The Romance of the End* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 67.

[29] Claire P. Curtis, *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract: "We'll Not Go Home Again"* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 4.

[30] Curtis, *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract* 9.

[31] Curtis, *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract* 68-72.

"The Cascades," "Cyclops," "Cincinattus," and "Neither Chaos." In "The Cascades," the main character faces the challenge of overcoming the harsh post-catastrophic landscape travelling between small towns in search of food and shelter. Then, in "Cyclops," these smaller social groups are brought together by Krantz, the postman, to face off against smaller threats like raiders. In "Cincinattus," these smaller groups band together under the banner of the "Restored Unites States" to face the mounting threat of a survivalist army. Finally in "Neither Chaos," Krantz imagines that he will head west in search of other communities to bring into the fold of the Restored United States. This description of the plot shadows Turner's sequence of frontier exploration and development: compare "miners, engineers, farmers, community builders, city dwellers" with individuals, villagers, mail carriers, city dwellers, nation builders.[32]

In the opening pages of the novel, *The Postman* reveals that it operates on two registers at once. The first is that of Krantz facing the trials of the post-apocalyptic setting and its denizens, while the second is that of the narrator's long reflections on the post-apocalyptic world, how life used to be, and the possible return of civilization. For instance, as the novel opens Krantz is robbed by some bandits and left to die, but rather than focus on his predicament the narrator ruminates on a U.S. tradition of survival:

> Post-Chaos America had no tradition but survival. In his travels, Gordon had found that some isolated communities welcomed him in the same way minstrels had been kindly received far and wide in medieval days. In others, wild varieties of paranoia reigned. Even in those rare cases where he had found friendliness, where decent people seemed willing to

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[32] Abbott, *Frontiers Past and Future* 32.

> welcome a stranger, Gordon had always, before long, moved on. Always, he found himself beginning to dream again of wheels turning and things flying in the sky.[33]

In unpacking the narrator's musings, I note how the temporality of old and new Americas are co-existent as each appears in the same rhetorical gesture—America is new, post-Chaos, and old, no tradition but survival. The narrator's descriptions are utterly clichéd, depicting the rambling minstrel—easily substitutable with the railroading bluesman, cowboy, or the sailor—who travels "far and wide," always on the road again, leaving his troubles behind him. Krantz's movement seems to indicate listlessness, or at least, an unsettled tendency to keep in motion, described in the above passage as a desire for mobility. The way Krantz begins to "dream again" of "wheels turning and things flying" indicates the tension at the heart of old and new within the post-apocalyptic novel. The "again," after all, marks his return to a personal dream, to return to "pre-Chaos America" (perhaps just plain "Chaos America") now twenty years in the past. *The Postman* is riddled with examples, like this one, of the narrator's nostalgia for civilization, typically portrayed as a longing for the nation. After the narrator's musings, we return to the first register of the plot: Krantz, left with no other options for survival in the post-Chaos *bellum omnium contra omnes*, decides to retrieve his stolen gear, but this resolution presents a problem in that it means he will have to face the possibility of killing for his own survival. Rather than have Krantz resolve his moral dilemma, he happens on a solution to his predicament. That is, he avoids an encounter with the bandits that made off with his tent and his food and, then, finds an "abandoned, rusted jeep with ancient U.S. government markings, and the skeleton of a poor, dead, civil servant within, skull pressed against the passenger-side window."[34] The shelter that the jeep provides offers the narrator a chance to further reflect on

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[33] Brin, *The Postman* 33.

[34] Brin, *The Postman* 22.

the outcome of Krantz's situation. The patch on the mailman's jacket triggers a nostalgic reflection and makes Krantz feel "a sad poignancy—something like homesickness. The jeep, the symbolic, faithful letter carrier, the flag patch . . . they recalled comfort, innocence, cooperation, an easy life that allowed millions of men and women to relax, to smile, or argue as they chose, to be tolerant with one another—and to hope to be better people with the passage of time."[35] Once again, the narrator overdetermines Krantz's experience, describing him as a character caught between longings for modernity and coping with the harsh realities of the present, which are all too real.[36]

At first the shelter offered by the jeep saves Krantz's life, but when he takes the dead postman's belongings a transition occurs. In acting the part of the postman, he inherits the outfit's symbolic power, which transforms the economic problematic of the novel from bare survival to trade. Following his new admittance to Oakridge, Krantz no longer has to worry about food or shelter, and assumes some authority over the problems of the town's people, as evidenced in an exemplary salvo launched at the mayor: "Mr. Mayor...Don't force me to exercise my authority in ways both of us would find unpleasant. You're on the verge of losing your privilege of

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[35] Brin, *The Postman* 24.

[36] The narrator's emphasis on civilization, here and throughout, reflects Brin's own formation during the Cold War. In a web clip, Brin reminisces about his own experience during the Cold War with safety drills. He says that *The Postman* was a chance to put a character through an apocalyptic scenario, "A man whose job as a citizen was more important that his own life." Brin places civilization front and centre emphasizing the question: "What can I do to help bring [civilization] back?" And, at the close he says, upliftingly "Let's try to preserve civilization." "David Brin Discusses the Film and the Book" (*Worlds of David Brin*, 30 October 2012). http://www.davidbrin.com/postman.html (30 August 2013).

communication with the rest of the nation."[37] As Krantz assumes the power vested in the uniform and becomes a civil servant to an "ancient" state he secures an entry point into a social contract, where he can lend his strength and cunning to that of others in order to form a social whole that remains stronger together than any member would be on their own. Krantz's claims about the privilege of communication signals the return of simultaneity, folks in Oakridge can now begin to imagine how others live their lives (not only those in the next town, but even more distant others) within a national consciousness, albeit one still limited by the extreme locality of the novel's geographic scope. However, as his talk of the "Restored United States" spreads, towns start to assign their own postmasters and letter carriers. While Krantz seeks to accomplish his own survival, he inadvertently generates the bonds of community. His lies cease being lies at this critical point and become reality, contributing to restoration of the United States; as Krantz circulates the mail, his tales about a "Restored United States" start to enfranchise the people of Oregon. For Krantz, this storytelling serves the individual end of seeing that he has food and shelter as he travels, but, for the narrator, the moment he begins carrying letters a collectivity is forged. As others quickly take on the recently revitalized occupation of postman they are investing themselves in a collective life, reforming old structures of communication and participating in a technology outmoded even by the telegraph yet now made pertinent once more.

As the towns begin to "Americanize" and work together to establish mail routes, they start to shed what Krantz notes are signs of feudalism,[38] turning towards more sophisticated social relations that include democratic elections, declarative, juridical acts, and new patterns of exchange. Section two, "Cyclops," begins with the inclusion of the "National Recovery Act," signifying the

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[37] Brin, *The Postman* 76.

[38] Brin, *The Postman* 72.

strides towards a reformed nation that Krantz made in the first section of the novel. The act states that the "people and fundamental institutions of the nation survive"[39] and contains four main principles, with one amendment: first, men and women are granted freedoms under the Bill of Rights and the right to a trial for all serious crimes conducted by an impartial jury; second, slavery is forbidden; third, there will be regular secret ballot elections; fourth, citizens shall keep safe the resources of the United States including books and pre-Chaos machinery; and, finally, citizens are required to cooperate with mail carriers and any interference with a carrier is a capital crime.[40] The Act is signed "By order of the Provisional Congress Restored United States of America May 2009." This document signifies the effects produced by Krantz's articulation of a national imaginary.

The tensions of the climactic penultimate section, "Cincinnatus," mount under the pressure of additional communities, social relations, spaces, and ideologies, pulled together to face the Holnist threat. They realize that their combined forces are not enough to triumph, and so Krantz travels south in search of other allies who are rumored to have repelled the Holnists's forces. The plot accelerates as Krantz attempts once more to draw on the power of the national imaginary to pull the people of Sugarloaf Mountain, with their ex-military leader George Powhatan, into the fold of the Restored United States, but this community is not so easily swayed. Dramatically, Krantz and his small band are captured by Holnists *en route* back to Corvallis. By this point in the novel, the resolution of the capture, as well as the Holnist threat itself, appears to be a foregone conclusion: Powhatan and his followers need to join with the Restored Untied States to face off against the regressive, survivalist threat. As Curtis argues, "The typical post-apocalyptic novel uses the threat to the safety of the small collective of survivors to cement their ties and to push those survivors into a

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[39] Brin, *The Postman* 87.

[40] Brin, *The Postman* 87-88.

more self consciously organized system. A community is formed, one that can actually fight back."[41] The only way forward, in the novel, is through democratic assembly and the armed protection of the rights and freedoms of those participating in that assembly.

The Holnists present a threat because of their violent behavior, but also because theirs is a different form of social organization. Against expectations, Nathan Holn's great work, *Lost Empire*, the basis for the survivalist cult that bears his name, rejects political binaries, instead advocating a return to feudalism. A fragment of the text is included in the novel, so we are able to read what Krantz reads:

> Feudalism has always been our way, as a species, ever since we foraged in wild bands and screamed defiance at each other from opposing hilltops…Think back to how things were when the Nineteenth Century was just dawning in America. Back then the opportunity stood stark and clear to reverse the sick trends of the so-called "Enlightenment." The victorious Revolutionary War soldiers had expelled English decadence from most of the continent. The frontier lay open, and a rough spirit of individualism reigned supreme throughout the newborn nation.[42]

Holn's lament for a lost empire and his understanding of U.S. history, which describes Benjamin Franklin as an evil genius, is not startling, and neither is Krantz's reaction to the text as he slams it down, unable to read any more. But, the logic at the heart of Holn's text is the same as that underlying Krantz's Restored United States; what is needed to address the problems of the post-Chaos present is the return to old techniques of power, to reach out and take what is needed for survival. Holn's account discusses feudalism, connecting itself with a more expansive, political-

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[41] Curtis. *Postapocalyptic Fiction and the Social Contract* 8.

[42] Brin, *The Postman* 252-253.

economic understanding of historical development even though he wants to arrest history, epitomized in his attack on the enlightenment. What makes Krantz angry is not that Holn's ideas are so foreign to him; it is that they too are focused on the rugged individual as the centre piece of frontier philosophy. In effect, Holn's aspirations are regressive shadow image of Krantz's—the conterposition of accumulation via dispossession to accumulation via communication.

While Krantz, the agent of the civilization's return, is captured, he experiences a revelation of the *future* that anticipates the outcome of the novel. The Holnists string Krantz upside down in a rundown shack. In this passage, his internalized commitment to civilization keeps him from giving in:

> Only there, in the blackness, he encountered the one ghost that remained. The one he had used the most shamelessly, and which had used him.
>
> It was a nation. A world.
>
> Faces, fading in and out with the entropic speckles behind his eyelids...millions of faces, betrayed and ruined but surviving still...
>
> —for a Restored United States,
>
> —for a *Restored World*.
>
> —for a fantasy...but one which refused obstinately to die—that *could not* die—not while he lived...
>
> In the darkness within himself the dream glowed—even if it existed nowhere else in the Universe—flickering like a diatom, like a bright mote hovering in a murky sea.

> Amidst the otherwise total blackness, it was as if he stood in front of it. He seemed to take it in his hand, astonished by the light. The jewel grew. And in its facets he saw more than people, more than generations.
>
> A *future* took shape around him, enveloping him, penetrating his heart.[43]

The "otherwise total blackness" of Krantz's immediate surroundings and the "bright mote hovering in a murky sea" that represents a regained relationship to history and collectivity heighten the stakes for the liberal subject through a temporal negotiation of old and new. The future that takes shape around Krantz, "more than people, more than generations," heralds itself as the remaking of the old, that "one ghost that remained," through the continuation of a liberal narrative of subjectivity projected onto a fictive future space. The final conflict does away with the Holnist threat by canceling out old-military technologies in a twist that reveals that the interminable Powhatan, like the Holnists' leader, is an enhanced cyborg warrior. Powhatan arrives just in time to battle off the leader of the Holnists, saving Krantz from a battle he could not hope to win.

Although centered on Krantz throughout, the novel's narrative movement, from individual, to town, to state, expands at the closing of the book, opening onto the frontier described by Holn: Krantz dreams of California and what survivors it may hold. But, this narrative turn reveals yet another symptomatic absence: the global itself. *The Postman*'s fantasy, unlike *Blood Meridian*, and as we shall see, unlike *The Wild Shore*, appears to be premised on the eclipse of the global, on the effacement of a global problematic. However, Krantz's desire at the end of the novel stages a relation to the globe through his desire for yet another frontier, another set of relations to subsume under the aegis of the Restored United States. *The Postman* stages a broad series of events in the development of the liberal state, working through the frontier-esque state of nature, the idea of the

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[43] Brin, *The Postman* 290.

social contract, the formation of alliances against common enemies, and the expansion of the space of the state in the sense of territorial and ideological expansion. *The Postman* seems to depend on an unstated theory of history in which reason and progress follow-from the development of the increasingly rational, liberal subject—who appears, always-already, as an incipient member of the state of nature—but, lacking Hegelian sophistication, the novel repeats a Crusoean narrative, building something out of nothing. In other words, the novel imports British colonial mythology and German philosophical-historicism to the post-apocalyptic USA, but forgets to bring British and German social relations with them. Instead, it fashions something of a retelling of the American myths about the social contract, which reinforce Krantz's claims that the Restored United States exists in the East. A mode of production develops subtly at the same time: here the development of liberal political-philosophy is shadowed stage by stage as the political economy of the collective moves from subsistence survival to the reproduction of daily life, and then on to the possibility of full-scale production within the context of the novel itself. The problem with *The Postman* is that it takes the categories of the rational individual and the democratic state as the determining factors of social life, rather than something like a post-apocalyptic political economy. The impasse of the post-apocalyptic novel re-asserts itself: *The Postman* fantasizes about starting anew and yet replays the stages of historical development that led to our own present, crystallizing old and new Americas within Krantz's final vision of hope for the future. Despite its ideological character, Krantz's dream of the nation still imagines that this future could be a better one, which seems to be precisely the opposite drive of *Blood Meridian*, where the frontier past was re-imagined in its sheer brutality.

Blood Meridian rewrites frontier history and *The Postman* stages the development of liberal subjectivity alongside a more equitable relationship with already existing settlements in the area. The novel presents an opportunity for a political reading that imagines a Restored United States as a way to right the wrongs of a U.S. that, in the 1980s, has become increasingly neoliberal and globally

aggressive. In *Blood Meridian*, however, the strategy is one of disclosure, a de-romanticization of the frontier myth through a fictional situation which plays out the violent dispossession and murder of all parties opposing or merely in the way of Glanton's gang. In *The Postman*, by contrast, the desire for a collectivity takes shape as a desire for a Restored World: "Amidst the otherwise total blackness, it was as if he stood in front of it. He seemed to take it in his hand, astonished by the light. The jewel grew. And in its facets he saw more than people, more than generations." [44] The novel simultaneously rewrites a history of the frontier, details a process of accumulation in the west, and generates the desire for a new collective life.

McCarthy's novel operates as a sort of history leading up to the present and an expose of the violence that undergirds frontier myth. Brin's novel imagines a future history. This similarity with a difference is why the epilogue of *Blood Meridian*, which is also the fencing off of the frontier, remains so crucial *for both novels*. The answer to the question these novels generate—that is, how do they write back to the 19th century American frontier—sounds rather straight-forward in retrospect: the frontier remains so persistent in the mid-1980s because the ideological oppositions between terrain and property remained unsolved, because the driving force of capitalist expansion is recasting itself anew in the neoliberalization of the state and the market. The frontier persists as a key category for American imaginaries because it still captures the motor of capitalist expansion, whose movement always seeks new zones to make productive for capital. Both novels, as much as they engage in the history of the frontier, can be read as attempts to think the present historically. Both attempt to think beyond the end of the story either by formally intervening on the last page of the novel, as *Blood Meridian* attempts to do, or by representing a form of future history, as I have argued in my reading of *The Postman*. Past modes of production overshadow the desire for collectivity in Brin's

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[44] Brin, *The Postman* 290.

novel, which remains haunted by the feudalism of its survivalist gang and the accumulation by dispossession of the American frontier. What if old and new America were projected differently, in some third way, not a history leading to the present or an allegorical future history, but as a radical neutralization of the U.S. domination?

Three Californias and the Multiple Present

> Robinson is a novelist who takes history seriously. The fall into history is the transition from the carefully controlled circumstances of a single contingent of first comers to the intractability of multiple groups, people, values, and agendas. It is the collapse of the open-ended possibilities of a new place into the constrained situations of historicity – the concatenation of habits, hopes, and vested interests that characterize any society.
>
> —Carl Abbott[45]

The novels of Kim Stanley Robinson's *Three Californias* trilogy—*The Wild Shore*, *The Gold Coast* (1988), and *Pacific Edge* (1990)—are each set in Orange County sometime later in the 21st century, and respectively stage post-apocalyptic, dystopian, and utopian futures. *The Wild Shore* depicts a post-apocalyptic United States through the subsistence of one small community, which already marks its distinction from other tales of after the end, where the stakes are so often set at the level of a sole survivor. *The Gold Coast* pictures a hyper-capitalist future for Orange County, where designer drugs rule the people and the endless highways are navigated by fully automated cars, echoing the cyberpunk corporate mega-cities envisaged by William Gibson and Neal Stephenson.[46] Finally, *Pacific Edge* imagines an ecologically sound future along utopian lines where the local is privileged over the global and the corporations that held such remarkable sway in *The Gold Coast* have been removed from their seat of power. This future is still one based on economic relations and production, but it

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[45] Abbott, "Falling into History" 67.

[46] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New Work: Ace Books, 1984); and Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008).

is one that is motivated by fantasies other than those of limitless expansion and growth that lie at the heart of the previous two novels: one haunts the present with capitalism's absence and the other finds it fully realized. Tom Moylan describes Robinson's search for utopia, in *The Gold Coast*, as one that operates "by way of a dystopian pessimism that turns the wisdom of history and the commitment of daily struggle against the anti-utopian fear and loathing of radical political interrogation and transformation."[47] Each novel in the series appears to be written as a journal by a leading character. *The Wild Shore* and *Pacific Edge* are written by younger characters, Henry Fletcher and Jim, respectively; while each novel contains the character of Tom Barnard—who acts as a guide for the younger characters—it is not until *The Gold Coast* that we read his version of events in Orange County.

Critics tend to read Robinson's *Three Californias* together as a whole, placing the mounting tensions that exist between the three narrative futures at the centre of their interpretive enterprise. Helen J. Burgess treats the trilogy as the movement of a dialectic centred on California's superhighways: *The Gold Coast* and *The Wild Shore* become thesis and antithesis—one is set before the apocalypse while the other is set after—and *Pacific Edge* stands as the synthesis of the issues explored in the first two novels.[48] Abbot places the trilogy in critical dialogue with Robinson's later Mars trilogy in terms of their "imagined Wests,"[49] plotting the two trilogies' relation to the frontier myth.

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[47] Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* 221.

[48] Helen J. Burgess, "'Roads of Giants': Nostalgia and the Ruins of the Superhighway in Kim Stanley Robinson's Three Californias Trilogy," in *Science Fiction Studies* 33 (2006): 277.

[49] Carl Abbott, "Falling into History: Imagined Wests in the 'Three Californias' and Mars Trilogy," in *Kim Stanley Robinson Maps the Unimaginable*, edited by William J. Burling, 67-82 (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009).

Moylan adopts a more formal view, arguing that the novels of Robinson's first trilogy while overshadowed by the U.S. social reality of the 1980s engage and explore the generic possibilities of science fiction. Each of these critics places the three aspects of the *Three Californias* within the larger frameworks of genre in which they are respectively situated—the first as post-apocalyptic novel, the second as capitalist realism mixed with dystopia, and the third as ecotopian novel.

By describing multiple futures in the same space that includes multiple scales and possibilities within each future variant, the *Three Californias* trilogy immanently critiques the shortcomings of the sources of its generic inspiration. In "Roads of Giants," Burgess describes *The Wild Shore* as a sort of "postapocalyptic road trip," citing Walter Miller Jr.'s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) and Roger Zelzaney's *Damnation Alley* (1969) as forerunners of the genre.[50] Abbott, as mentioned, elaborates all three novels in relation to the contradictory roles that California tends to play as "as arcadia, utopia, and featured player in the collapse of civilization,"[51]drawing on the work of Mike Davis to illustrate the apocalyptic side of California's future—one need only think of Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975) for the utopian portion of those west coast hopes. Moylan also reads these texts in terms of their generic forbearers, this time situating the references deep within science fiction: "In these self-reflexive studies of a metonymic American space, Robinson moves from a post-holocaust, apocalyptic narrative (in the vein of an Orson Scott Card or David Brin), to a near-future dystopian account (closer to the style of Philip K Dick), and on to the utopian *Pacific Edge* (which Edward Tames has called the most interesting utopia since Delany's *Triton*)."[52]

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[50] Burgess, "Road of Giants" 278.

[51] Abbot, "Falling into History" 68.

[52] Tom Moylan, *Scraps of an Untainted Sky* (Boulder: Westview P, 2000), 204.

The specific critique of interest here is, of course, the one that the post-apocalyptic iteration, *The Wild Shore*, offers. The imaginary of old and new Americas maintains a role in structuring meaning across the whole trilogy, but takes on a rich explanatory force when considered within an individual text. *The Wild Shore* imagines a pastoral Orange County after the U.S. has lost a nuclear war. Developing on the same motif of redevelopment that Brin draws on for *The Postman*, Robinson paints the picture of a small community, San Onofre, struggling to survive while caught between the scavengers who occupy the ruins to the north of town and the forces of re-modernization in San Diego to the south. The novel is set 60 years after an atomic strike on the U.S. by the United Nations, led by Russia, in the year 2047. The apocalypse is nameable and its form is important. The 50 to 60 residents of Onofre divide the labour of subsistence farming and fishing among them. They share in town-wide rituals, like bathing in the bathhouse, celebrating bounty, and mourning loss. After sequestering the United States, the outside world still progresses. Later in the novel, we learn that Japanese ships patrol the coast, intent, along with the rest of the world, on preventing the U.S. from reforming and rebuilding technology. *The Wild Shore* parallels real world history, but critically diverges from it by neutralizing what Giovanni Arrighi has described as the United States' global "protection racket": "After a decade of deepening crisis, the Reagan Administration initiated the transformation of legitimate protection into a protection racket," changing the character of the U.S. global role and discarding "the United Nations as a source of legitimacy for U.S. hegemony."[53] The

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[53] Arrighi further explains this racketeering: "By this standard, Tilly goes on to argue, the provision of protection by governments often qualifies as racketeering: 'To the extent that the threats against which a given government protects its citizens are imaginary or are consequences of its own activities, the government has organized a protection racket. Since governments themselves commonly simulate, stimulate or even fabricate threats of external war and since the repressive and

novel imagines what Orange County, as a microcosm of the United States, would be like in the absence of global concerns. It ponders how the U.S.A. would change if its interests became circumscribed, echoing an older protectionist desire in U.S. political culture.

The novel is divided into four sections that successively widen its geographic scope. With this expansion, conflicts that began as internal to the community telescope outwards, revealing the sources of antagonism within and outside San Onofre. Each section is narrated by Henry Fletcher, a teenager who explores the nearby ruins and is the beloved student of Tom Barnard, one of the few survivors from before the attack on the U.S. We only learn at the end of the novel itself that we have been reading Fletcher's own account of events, recorded in an empty codex, supplied by Barnard. Moylan and other critics highlight that as soon as Fletcher completes his book, he begins to write another one (just like Robinson himself). The expansion of each section mirrors the frontier-esque promise of bounty explored in *Blood Meridian* and the political conflicts in *The Postman*, but here, critically, the widening of the narrative frame does not introduce new, open fantasy spaces, but, instead, develops the narrative conflict, moving from the local, to the national, to the global. The crucial difference between these two post-apocalyptic novels is that the shift from the small settlement, to the scavenger meet, to the city, to global relations in *The Wild Shore* does not entail leaving behind any of the problems or tensions of those places. In fact, the plot is driven by the

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extractive activities of governments often constitute the largest current threats to the livelihoods of their own citizens, many governments operate in essentially the same way as racketeers. There is, of course, a difference: racketeers, by the conventional definition, operate without the sanctity of governments.' Tilly claims that the legitimacy of power-holders depends far less on the assent of those on whom power is exercised than on the assent of other power-holders." Arrighi, "U.S. Hegemony Unravelling—II," 109, 111.

encounter between the varied spaces and relations; the more we grow into the world with Fletcher the better we understand its complexities.

In section one, we learn about life in San Onofre: the tutelage of Fletcher and Steve by Old Barnard, familial relations and conflicts, their reliance on the sea, their relation to scavengers, and the regular swap meets. Here, tension is contained within the community, or at least near to it; for example, Fletcher, Steve, and a group of their friends make an excursion into the ruins of San Clemente to dig up graves in search of treasure—an outing which Fletcher describes as "the start of it" and what "gave us a taste for…more than fishing, and hoeing weeds, and checking snares."[54] This excursion brings them into conflict with the scavengers, another group of survivors who would prefer to live off of the remains of the urban, rather than farm and fish in a community like San Onofre. The scavengers do not present a great threat and tend to stick to their territory. Also, they frequently join with scavengers and other small subsistence groups for swap meets. Fletcher recounts San Onofre's popularity at such meets: "We were the only seaside town at this meet, so we were popular. 'Onofre's here,' I heard someone calling. 'Look at this abalone,' someone else said, 'I'm going to eat mine right now!' Rafael sang out his call: 'Pes*ca*dos. Pes*ca*dos.' Even the scavengers from Laguna came over to trade with us; they couldn't do their own fishing even with the ocean slapping them in the face."[55] Fletcher beams with pride for his community's ingenuity and knowledge of the sea, marking the novel's difference from *The Postman* and other post-apocalyptic novels. Here, even on the small scale of the town, the world is a functioning one with plausible communities and economies. Further, unlike in *The Postman*, the discovery of a larger world beyond

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[54] Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Wild Shore* (New York: Orb, [1984] 1995), 6.

[55] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 34.

San Onofre does not replace or disrupt the relations that have already been established, though it does shift the centre of conflict and drive the plot.

Section two, "San Diego," introduces a similar imaginary to Brin's variant of nationalism, patriotism, and longing for a "Restored United States" through the figure of the Mayor of San Diego. After meeting with a group of San Diegans at the Swap Meet, Fletcher and Barnard learn of the project under the guidance of the Mayor of San Diego to lay new railway lines and conceal them from UN satellites. One of the San Diegans muses, "no question they've got cameras that can image a man…the question is, how much will they notice?"[56] So Fletcher and Barnard travel by train to the south to, in the words of a representative of the Mayor, "talk about trade agreements and such."[57] Once they arrive, they discover that San Diego and especially its Mayor are icons of a technological fixation in that technology as a means to reclaim U.S. world dominance motivates the Mayor's politics. In Barnard's words, "He lives in style, Henry, because he's got a gang of men doing nothing but help him run things, that's all. That's what gives him the power to send men off east to contact other towns." [58] And, that is what gives him the power to reconstruct the railways as well. The construction of united national railways goes all the way back to the mid-nineteenth century: "the iron pouring in millions of tones all over the world, snaking in ribbons of railway across the continents,"[59] a moment Eric Hobsbawm identifies as a turning point between *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (1962) and *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (1975)—the start of what he calls "The quiet but

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[56] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 89.

[57] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 60.

[58] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 185.

[59] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (London: Abacus, [1975] 1995), 16.

expansionist 1850s."[60] The historical fantasies of the frontier myth were undergirded by the expansion of the rail system across the U.S., and these fantasies are certainly at play in the novel as well, especially in the Mayor of San Diego's designs "to rebuild America" for its re-emergence on the world stage.[61] Harvey's explanation of the spatial fix subtends the historical development of the railway and the Mayor's fixation with its return in Robinson's novel: the frontier provides a seemingly open space to enclose and capture as a resource for development, but once the rail has been laid capital will need to look elsewhere for new spaces in which to expand. Indeed, rail is not the only technology being rediscovered. The Mayor has a minor print operation, which allows Robinson to comment on cultural production and the cognitive work of literature. The principle text in production, *An American Around the World: Being an Account of a Circumnavigation of the Globe in the Years 2030 to 2039* by Glen Baum, recounts in travelogue fashion the adventures of an American boy who slips past the sentries on the island of Catalina and journeys the world. Once back in San Onofre, Fletcher and his friends take great pleasure in reading the book aloud, even as it acts on their imagination, expanding their sense of the world beyond their little valley, over the next hill, and over the ocean. This experience fuels their desire to engage in actions that may have significance outside of San Onofre.

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[60] Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital* 10. Clarifying the periodization for *The Age of Revolution*, Hobsbawm writes, "The historic period which begins with the construction of the first factory system of the modern world in Lancashire and the French Revolution of 1789 ends with the construction of its first railway network and the publication of the Communist Manifesto." Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1779-1848* (New York: Vintage Books, [1962] 1996), 4.

[61] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 103.

Again, unlike *The Postman*, *The Wild Shore* does not dislocate the global in the interests of simplifying relations in the U.S. and avoiding the messy world of global politics; instead, the larger conflict comes from the united world intent on maintaining a watchful eye on the United States. On the way back to their village by boat, they encounter a Japanese patrol ship and Fletcher is captured, substantiating San Diegan claims about Japanese surveillance of the coast. Fletcher, in a dramatic sequence, escapes his captors and plunges overboard into the Pacific. He manages to make it back to shore where Barnard and others rescue him. Barnard and Fletcher are now in a position to return to San Onofre with news from outside the small community and from beyond the swap meets. This expansion, from the local to the global, is reflected in the title of the third section: "The World." It does not take long for the pressures from outside the community to rear up within it, as the community divides itself between those who wish to mind their own business, living as they have been, and those who wish to join the San Diegans in their nationalistic revitalization project. Even though Fletcher and Steve dream of being a part of the "American resistance,"[62] others oppose them.

The residents of San Onofre gather in the bathhouse to hear about Barnard and Fletcher's journey, which provides a sense that Robinson has been offering the other side of *The Postman* narrative all along.[63] Unlike Krantz's role as self-determining, decisive individual, here, the collective is given agency. In this way, *The Wild Shore* highlights deliberation in collective decision making, emphasizing the use of language as a tool for assessing the will of the individuals that make up the community. In this way, the novel works through what Jürgen Habermas would call *communicative*

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[62] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 165.

[63] Robinson's novel actually predates Brin's, but its fully developed conceit recommends it to follow *The Postman* in this chapter.

action, a deliberative process where at least two, and possibly more, people work together based upon their shared assessment of a situation or event. Robert C. Holub explains,

> Instead of proceeding from the isolated subject confronting the objective world, Habermas opts for a model that considers human beings in dialogue with each other to be the foundation for emancipatory social thought. By differentiating between instrumental reason, which has unfortunately achieved hegemony in the modern world, and communicative reason, which has the potential to transform societies into genuine democracies, Habermas can retain a critical edge to reflections on modernity while explicating a positive program for change.[64]

For Habermas, social interactions occur under conditions of double contingency: the actors decide of one another that each has the capacity to decide (*vis-a-vis* influence and reaching understanding). If an agreement cannot be made they "experience uncertainty as a problem."[65] We also saw this type of decision making earlier in *The Postman*, when Krantz attempts to enlist Powhatan. During a bathhouse meeting Fletcher interrupts Barnard's accounts of their journey by interjecting his own opinions: "The way Tom told it, the San Diegans kept looking to be fools or wastrels, no better than scavengers. So I had to interrupt him from time to time and add my opinion of it—tell them all about the electric batteries and generators, and the broken radio, and the bookmaker, and Mayor Danforth."[66] Here is Barnard's explanation of the new situation: "[the Mayor] claims that his men

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[64] Robert C. Holub, "Habermas, Jürgen," in *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism* (1994) litguide.presss.jhu.edu/cgi-bin/view.cgi?eid=280 (7 May 2014).

[65] Jürgen Habermas, "Towards a Communication-Concept of Rational Collective Will Formation. A Thought-Experiment," in *Ratio Juris* 2.2 (July 1989): 145.

[66] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 185.

have been as far as Utah, and that all the inland towns are banded together in a thing called the American resistance. The resistance, they say, wants to unify America again…He wants us to do our part in this great plan by helping the San Diegans fight Japanese on Catalina."[67] However different the conflicts of the novels seem, the American resistance sounds reminiscent of the Restored United States, Brin's novel does not imagine geography in the same way that Robinson's does. In *The Postman*, the world outside of the U.S., even outside of Oregon, may as well not exist; in *The Wild Shore*, the tensions of a globe are figured as a totality of complex and indirect relationships, which are managed in the tensions between old and new Americas. The question of joining the American resistance is presented as a real question; unlike the way events seemed to unfold of their own accord in *The Postman*, *The Wild Shore* has consequences that are tangible from the start, such as the survival and safety of San Onofre.

In section four, "Orange County," the San Diegan plot comes to a head and the remaining threads of the story are tied back together once more. Against the wishes of the community, the kids, lead by a bloodthirsty Steve and a reluctant Fletcher, decide to help the San Diegans attack a group of Japanese tourists who are there to see post-apocalyptic California, resulting in the death of their companion Mando. After the conflict, word comes from San Diego that the Mayor has been ousted by a more reliable leader. Finally, Fletcher sits down to write the book that we have just been reading. He thinks, "The old man told me that when I was done writing I would understand what happened, but he was wrong again, the old liar. Here I've taken the trouble to write it all down, and now I'm done and I don't have a dog's idea what it meant."[68] Fletcher, in his own way, resists an

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[67] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 185.

[68] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 377.

understanding that the events he recounts were leading up to this final moment and, thus, could have meaning made of them.

But, Robinson makes one final Hegelian reference: "my hand is getting cold—it's getting so stiff I can't make the letters, these words are all big and scrawling, taking up the last of the space, thank God. Oh be done with it. There's an owl, flitting over the river. I'll stay right here and fill another book."[69] One could read this as a pun on Robinson's part and guess that the book Fletcher refers to here is actually Robinson's to write (i.e. *The Gold Coast*—the second novel in *The Three Californias* trilogy). To be sure, it does represent a much different series of events staged in the same space, underpinned by a similar imaginary of U.S. progress. However, within *The Wild Shore* itself exist a number of variant futures: the subsistence farming of San Onofre, the scavenger lifestyle based on ruins, the autocracy of the Mayor of San Diego, the border town on the island of Catalina, and the geopolitical, globalized life of the UN (though this latter way of life is beyond the comprehension of the regressed post-Americans).

As evidenced in this chapter, the new Americas of the post-apocalyptic novel recapitulate the old Americas of the frontier. Robinson's post-apocalyptic novel, rather than siding with a myopic nationalistic future, turns towards a broader narrative solution. It allows contradiction to work itself out through the plot itself. Its version of the old and new Americas post-apocalyptic narrative stands a step closer to characteristic science fiction that holds onto the impulse of multiple mock futures full of challenge and complexity. Though similar groups emerge as a response to the complexities of the present (see *The Postman* – Figure 3 pg 119 and *The Wild Shore* – Figure 4 pg 120), the obstacle to these configurations is quite different for the two authors. Brin directs *The Postman* at neutralizing the globe as problem, asking, "what if we imagined a new start to our democratic

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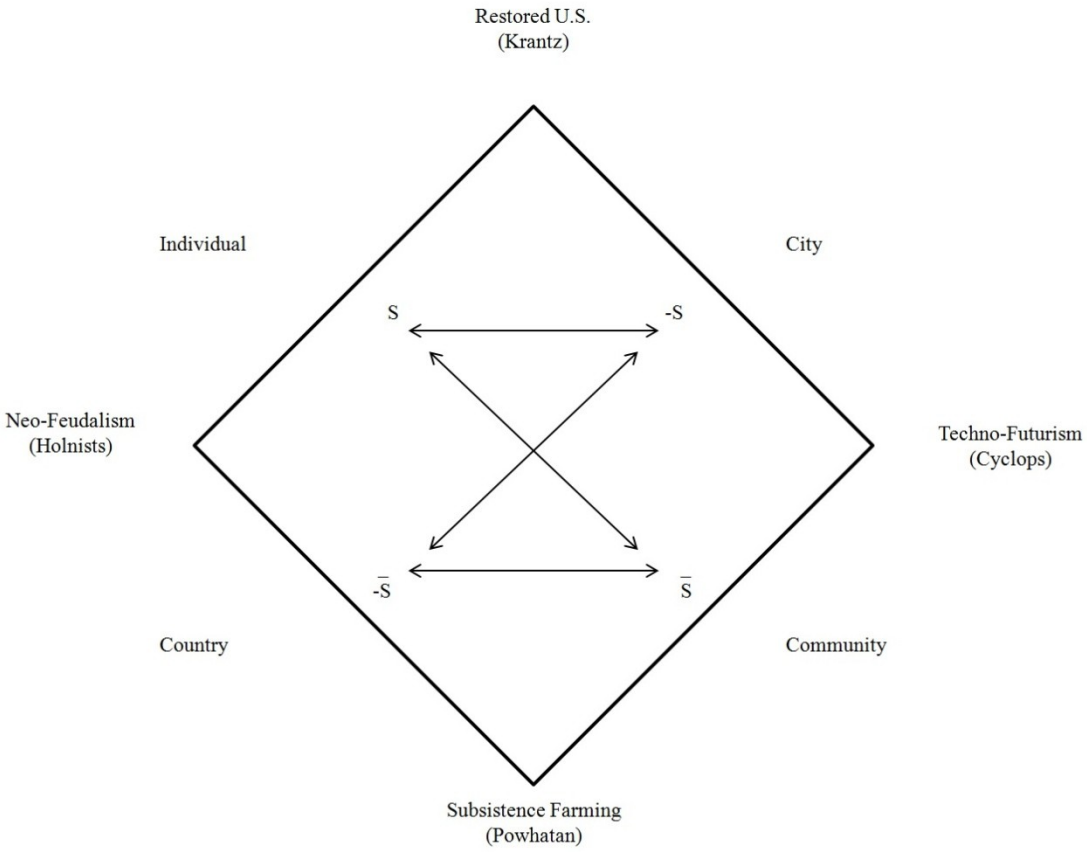
[69] Robinson, *The Wild Shore* 378.

republic?" Robinson, on the other hand, takes aim at the current configuration of U.S. power and dominance itself, asking "how would things be different if the U.S. was stripped of its influence on the globe?" As *The Wild Shore* suggests, the image of a truly united world offers a resolution and an impossible task in the interregnum of the 1980s: the actual resolution of the twin problems of accumulation and energy shortage on global scale is not the only interesting move in that novel; Robinson, in an exact inversion of Brin's conception, neutralizes the United States itself. In *The Wild Shore* the fictive conceit of a world government banishing the United States to technological backwardness and political obscurity becomes important to the discursive contest of the post-apocalyptic as a genre, as the novel meditates on what life might look like in the wake of a targeted apocalypse.

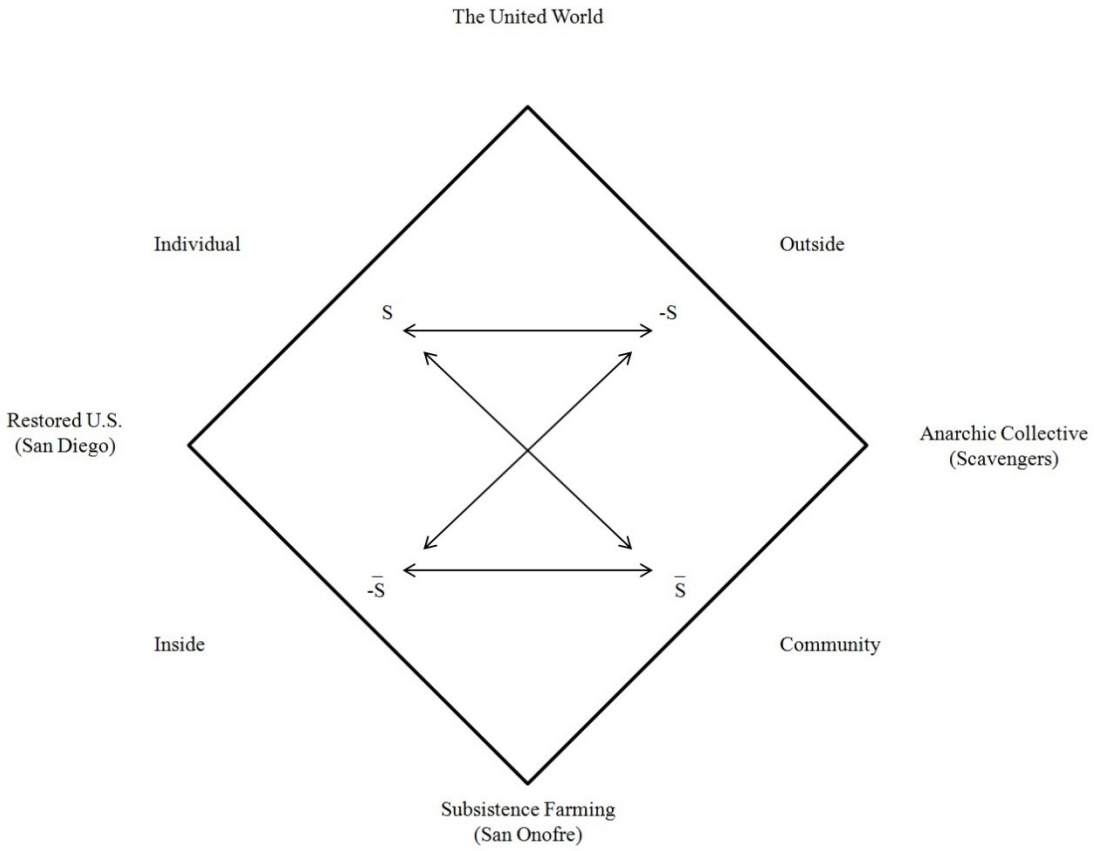
In light of the desire for reconstitution uncovered in Brin's novel, old and new Americas seem to collapse their temporal dimension into an imagined space that stands open and ready for rebuilding, repopulation, and remodernizing. In other words, the fantasy of a restored United States is the fantasy of starting over again, with a clear enemy and a clear *telos* to strive towards. The trope of old and new Americas operates in much same way as the inversion of origin and *telos* in the post-apocalyptic novel. *Blood Meridian* reanimated the 1848 U.S. Mexico-War and subsequent "accumulation by dispossession" of the frontier's wealth, gesturing to the ongoing nature of these processes. Krantz, and his narrator Brin, take the old Americas for new ones, turning the residual U.S. nation into an emergent U.S. nation. *The Wild Shore* imagines a future after the vanishing of U.S. hegemony as Robinson sets down a path to overlay the possible futures of Orange County in the hope that mapping the space of the future could reconstitute, at least to some small degree, our collective path to its brightest potentiality. The mid-1980s post-apocalyptic novel is thus riddled with inherited contradictions. It depicts ongoing accumulation by dispossession even as it temporally displaces it onto the future, suggesting that it could happen here again as it happened once before.

Old and new Americas can thus be conceived of as a space caught between the time of the frontier and the time of the dispossessed future: a desperate imagination in the present that seems to insist "this cannot be happening now," even as the residues of the Keynesian welfare state were deregulated and privatized in new enclosures at home and as wars were being funded and armies supplied abroad. The frontier never vanished; it just failed to name the process that outlives any national boundary named by Turner's "Americanization."

The Postman – *Figure 2*



The Wild Shore – Figure 3



Chapter IV: The Politics of Survival

> The future, more particularly the continuation of the human into the future, is one of these loci of social pressure so intensive that it determines the limits of action, grounds discourse, and draws all fantasies into its orbit's gravity.
>
> —Rebekah Sheldon[1]

Perhaps unwittingly, post-apocalyptic novels posit a future where women's choices become limited incredibly by the imperative to survive, which, I argue in this chapter, tends to contain an implied imperative to reproduce as well. Writing about contemporary science fiction, Rebekah Sheldon characterizes the real world state of women's reproductive rights by pointing out that today "it feels a lot like 1984—not the iconic 1984 of Orwell's dystopia, but the 1984 in which Margaret Atwood composed *The Handmaid's Tale*."[2] Atwood's feminist-dystopian novel captured the ways that, even after the concessions of the 1960s and 1970s, patriarchal roles still held incredible sway in structuring women's lives. She offered a glimpse into a near-future state that was dominated by the masculine fear of infertility that brought reproductive work to the fore, incredibly captured in the novel through the various roles assigned to women: the Aunties, the Wives, the Handmaids, the Marthas, and so on.[3] On account of its dystopian conceit, *The Handmaid's Tale* appears to respond to

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[1] Rebekah Sheldon, "Reproductive Futurism and Feminist Rhetoric: Joanna Russ's *We Who Are About To...*" *Femspec* 10.1 (2009): 31

[2] Rebekah Sheldon, "Somatic Capitalism: Reproduction, Futurity, and Feminist Science Fiction," in *ADA: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology* 3 (2013) http://adanewmedia.org/2013/11/issue3-sheldon/ (27 Feb. 2014).

[3] Recall Atwood's colour-coded social ontology: the Aunties dress in white and train the Handmaids, who dress in red, in the work of procreation and childbirth, the Wives are social companions, and the green-clad Marthas cook and clean.

a historical moment more concerned with top down regulation of reproductive rights than with what women face today in the real world. The concern in contemporary post-apocalyptic novels is different in that the oversight of the state has vanished within those novels; instead, characters are left to their own, supposedly natural, devices. That women in post-apocalyptic novels, if they are included at all, have to rely on their own knowledge, habits, customs is an extrapolated warning of what is to come and a subconscious reflection of the way women's reproductive rights are under threat.[4] This chapter takes aim at the imperative implied in survival to reproduce, to restore the pre-

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[4] Across the U.S. over the past several years women have had to face invasive regulations concerning abortion (the infamous mandatory ultrasound laws) and even the closure of many health clinics. See Andrea Flynn, "Texas Abortion Restrictions are Harming Women's Health," *Salon.com* (30 Nov. 2013) http://www.salon.com/2013/11/30/texas_abortion_restrictions_are_harming_womens_rights_partner/ (7 Mar. 2014) ; Andrea Grimes, "Two Texas Reproductive Health Clinics Close, a Harbinger of a Coming Access Crisis," *rhrealitycheck.org* (5 Mar. 2014) http://rhrealitycheck.org/article/2014/03/05/breaking-two-texas-reproductive-health-clinics-close-harbinger-coming-access-crisis/ (7 Mar. 2014); Terry O'Neill, "Mandatory Ultrasound Laws Violate Women's Rights and Bodies," *Huffingtonpost.com* (27 Feb. 2012) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/terry-oneill/mandatory-ultrasound-laws_b_1300219.html (7 Mar. 2012); and, Katy Waldman, "Does Looking at the Ultrasound Before an Abortion Change Women's Minds?" *Slate.com* (9 Jan. 2014) http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2014/01/09/ultrasound_viewing_before_an_abortion_a_new_study_finds_that_for_a_small.html (7 Mar. 2014).

apocalyptic stature of humanity through procreation. What are the politics of survival and how do these politics operate in the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel?

The focus of this chapter, Cormac McCarthy's 2006 Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road*, can be added to a long list of post-apocalyptic novels about and narrated by men that openly display the genre's obsession with survival, especially in the form of the child and the family: Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* depicts an old man telling his grandchildren a story of the great plague, featuring the sexual conquests of men formerly from the lower class; Stewart's *Earth Abides* follows a protagonist who is shocked at the way knowledge in his progeny has degraded only one generation after his own; King's *The Stand* ends with Goldsmith and Redman holding their newborn, unsure of the world he has been born into; Evenson's *Immobility* relies on the technology of already-fertilized human eggs for reproduction; and Peter Heller's *The Dog Stars* (2012) follows the airplane pilot Hig on a search for the source of a mysterious radio signal and introduces a buxom nurse as resolution to his post-apocalyptic, personal crises.[5] Survival in these examples forces the family and children, as the guarantors of the persistence of the species, into prominence as an implied outcome of the post-apocalyptic scenario. Post-apocalyptic novels often take for granted that the social organization of the family will persist for generations after the apocalyptic event. A male cast and fixation with survival similarly dominate *The Road* despite the overwhelming sense in the novel that nothing left alive by the apocalypse will be able to survive its blasted environment for long. Further, in the face of such bleak chances for survival, McCarthy's novel still brazenly insists on reproduction as the gateway to the future.

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[5] For a survey of the roles of women in the reconstructed societies of U.S. post-apocalyptic novels see David Kuhne, "Gender Roles after the Collapse: Women in American Post-Apocalyptic Fiction," in *CCTE Studies* 77 (2012): 22-28.

As a term, reproduction contains several critical valences that telescope outwards, but which all centre on the action of reconstructing or recreating. From operating as a synonym for procreation to meaning the act of replicating a work of art, reproduction implies "the action or process of forming, creating, or bringing into existence again."[6] So it is that as the children of a nuclear family are reproduced by their parents they also reproduce an extended family, which in turn makes anew a part of the next generation of citizens of a particular nation or state and productive bodies to labour or work together under the auspices of modernity. This thinking conflates reproduction with procreation, on an individual level, with childrearing, on a familial level, and with productive citizenry, on a social level. In this sense, reproduction maintains a relationship to temporality—a thing from the past is being reformed, recreated, or brought into existence in the present, which implies that this thing or some version of it will also persist in the future. In this way, reproduction describes a process that appears to be naturally ongoing. As some feminists and critical theorists argue, however, reproduction is not simply a given relation, but operates based on gender, class, race, and sexuality.

In "Reproductive Futurism and Feminist Rhetoric," Sheldon reads 1970s feminist science fiction using Lee Edelman's work to demonstrate a useful way to think through what he calls "reproductive futurism" in the post-apocalyptic novel. Building on Edelman's work, Sheldon describes reproductive futurism as an "odd temporality" that turns reproduction into a site of the "permanent deferral of fulfillment,"[7] where fulfillment refers to the heterosexual investment in the

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[6] "1. a. Reproduction, n." in *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2014) http://www.oed.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/Entry/163102?redirectedFrom=reproduction#eid (18 May 2014).

[7] Sheldon, "Reproductive Futurism and Feminist Rhetoric," 19.

life activity and potential of offspring, which is subsequently deferred with each new generation. In her words, reproductive futurity "names the logic by which the social *good* appears co-terminus with human *futurity*, a futurity emblematized by the figure of the child and vouchsafed through reproduction."[8] Reproduction, for Sheldon, becomes the watchword for a deeply ideological process whereby subjects are interpolated into having children as a natural stage of the human life cycle. In a reading of Alfonso Cuarón's dystopian film *Children of Men* (2006), Heather Latimer usefully glosses reproductive futurity as well, positing that the concept "relies on the fantasy that we may somehow return to our own innocence or childhood, to a time-that-never-quite-was, through constant attempts to protect our future world and our future children."[9] In this sense, reproduction carries the symptom of the way futurity has become so intertwined with the idea of having children that we cannot seem to think of what is to come without thinking of future generations. "If we are always focusing on protecting our future generations rather than facing our own mortality," Latimer suggests, "we are given the illusion that our lives have purpose, order, and form so long as we can ensure that those future generations will exist."[10] It is precisely this illusion that operates in the post-apocalyptic novel through the imperative to survive. Since the institutions of daily life in modernity are largely destroyed in these novels, the full scale of reproduction sketched above, from individual to nation to globe, is no longer available. Instead, characters derive their purpose from surviving from day to day, in the hopes of restarting the engines of futurity. Sheldon's and Latimer's formulations of reproductive futurism redeploy Edelman's theoretical framing in a distinctly

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[8] Sheldon, "Somatic Capitalism."

[9] Heather Latimer, "Bio-Reproductive Futurism: Bare Life and the Pregnant Refugee in Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men*," in *Social Text 108* 29.3 (Fall 2011): 65.

[10] Latimer, "Bio-Reproductive Futurism," 65.

narrative milieu, where the constant deferral into the future of reproduction is homologous with the narrative explanation of the post-apocalyptic situation progressing forwards in time: the survival plot is structured around waiting for the next event much in the way parents look to the next generation to continue their stories.

Before turning to a reading of *The Road*, I want to consider the treatment of three births in two quite radically opposed versions of the post-apocalyptic novel. Part survival manual and part military thriller, *Patriots* (2009), by James, Wesley Rawles, extrapolates a plausible socioeconomic collapse from reckless banking practices, hyperinflation, wild fluctuations in the stock market, and governmental negligence while, *Total Oblivion, More or Less* (2009), a Slipstream coming of age story by Alan DeNiro, imagines fantastic changes in U.S. geography, strange new plagues, and the incredible invasion of Genghis Kahn-esque horse warriors, breaking with any extrapolative relationship to the present.[11] The very difference in the plausibility of each apocalypse recommends them as a good sample of the way that the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel tends to take up birth, specifically, and reproduction, generally.

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[11] In her review Carolyn Kellogg defines slipstream: "Coined by Bruce Sterling in 1989, it has gained momentum, with writers Aimee Bender, Kelly Link and George Saunders dipping in and out of its waters. Vaguely defined as making the reader feel strange, slipstream often mixes elements of fantasy and science fiction with literary fiction in ways that are uncomfortable, seeding impossible contradictions or leaving central questions unexplained. DeNiro, a Minnesota poet with one short-story collection behind him, enters the slipstream with 'what ifs' that are as informed by Herodotus as they are by Huck Finn and Hardees." Carolyn Kellogg, "*Total Oblivion, More or Less*," in *The Los Angeles Times* (1 January 2010) http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/01/entertainment/la-et-book1-2010jan01 (18 May 2014).

The stylistic gambit of Rawles' *Patriots* and its sequels seems to be that those who expect a future of disaster will be rewarded when it comes.[12] The novel follows a group of survivalists in the wake of economic meltdown known as "the Crunch." Most of the novel takes place on their ranch in Northern Idaho where each member acts as a designated specialist of some kind: food prep, communication, automotive repair, medical, and so on.[13] Men and women work together; they all have expert survival knowledge, training, and self-determination. In a sense Rawles depicts what Fredric Jameson has described as the "wartime togetherness" of war films, but in a more gender progressive sense.[14] The events of the novel may be fictional, but the techniques, militia code words,

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[12] Rawles has written four books that imagine a near future in the wake of financial and social meltdown in the United States: *Patriots* (2009), *Survivors* (2011), *Founders* (2012), and *Expatriates* (2013). He has also written *How to Survive the End of the World as We Know It: Tactics, Techniques, and Technologies for Uncertain Times* (2009).

[13] James Wesley, Rawles, *Patriots: A Novel of Survival in the Coming Collapse* (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 1990-2009), 46.

[14] "No doubt we could go on and show that alongside this fantasy about [the diversion and motivation behind cataclysm], there is present yet another kind which deals with collective life and which uses the cosmic emergencies of science fiction as a way of reliving a kind of wartime togetherness and morale: the drawing together of the survivors of planetary catastrophe is thus itself merely a distorted dream of a more humane collectivity and social organization. In this sense the surface violence of the work is doubly motivated, for it can now be seen as a breaking through the routine boredom of middle-class life; while in either event, the violence in the disguise may be understood as the expression of rage at the nonrealization of the unconscious fantasies thus

and munitions are all real—as the expansive glossary at the back of the book reveals. *Patriots* labels the apocalypse as an object of desire, a moment for the role of the survivalist to move from being incidental to history towards being its prime mover.

Patriots posits survival as a baseline against which desires and politics are measured. Despite the violent action the group has to undertake in the name of its own survival, the following scene reproduces a familiar, nostalgic, and heteronormative desire:

> One morning in early August, as they were dressing, Mary told Todd, "Honey, I've got something to tell you. I missed my last period, and I've been feeling really nauseated the last few days."
>
> "You mean...you mean..." Todd stammered.
>
> "Yes, you big oversexed stud, you got me pregnant."
>
> …Todd put on a crooked grin and joked, "Personally, I think that you covertly put some pinholes in our supply of rubbers."
>
> Mary slugged Todd in the shoulder and shouted, "Todd Gray! How could you say a thing like that? I swear, you have the biggest ego on the planet. I'll bet that you think I just couldn't wait to become the mother of your first child, 'oh great tribal chieftain.'"[15]

Here the positions appear scripted, as these characters play out a standard popular culture pregnancy announcement. Their declarations are subtended by a specifically post-apocalyptic reproductive futurity, which takes pregnancy as a natural occurrence despite the drastically changed circumstances

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aroused." Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 406.

[15] Rawles, *Patriots* 145-146.

of the post-apocalyptic setting. Mary's names for Todd, "big oversexed study" and "great tribal chieftain," play into a heteronormative dynamic that undercuts Mary's equal role in the group's military structure and tactics. Further, the "good" of pregnancy appears as particularly suspect in the post-apocalyptic situation where resources are limited and threats outside the shelter of the ranch abound—a problematic that gains intensity in *The Road*. Later, the novel describes the birth scene in encyclopedic detail. For instance because she prepared for it, Mary thinks to herself that her nausea during contractions is normal and even exclaims "The fluid is clear! There's no sign of merconium in the fluid. That would have darkened it. That means that the baby probably isn't in fetal distress."[16] Rawles does not miss the opportunity to impart some technical knowledge to his readers, in anticipation of contingency. What remains striking to me in the wake of the perfectly accomplished home birth is that Mary and Todd's son is hardly mentioned for the rest of the novel. Without further narration or description, the fact of the child itself stands in as the promise of America's futurity and the reproduction of the most efficient, competent, and patriotic survivors of the apocalypse.

Total Oblivion, More or Less stages a strikingly different apocalypse to the Crunch. Where *Patriots* focuses on manual-like description, DeNiro casts his characters, a suburban family from the American mid-West, in the tumult of an event of cataclysmic proportion. In the wake of bizarre and unexplained events, an empire, Nuevo Roma, emerges. The protagonist's older sister becomes a midwife and her brother becomes a spy. A plague sweeps across the land, altering the bodies it touches in strange ways. The Mississippi River deepens to well-nigh Marianas Trench fathoms.[17] The

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[16] Rawles, *Patriots* 177.

[17] "*Everything* was changing. There was so much change, in fact, that I wasn't sure whether it was just my ignorance about the landscape of America, or whether the world itself was being

emerging powers are matched by the altered landscape: really happening but deeply incalculable. Although the plot of *Total Oblivion* also incorporates a birth, unlike *Patriots* it stages birth as a phenomenon that subtends the stories of their characters, whether fully natural and explicable or bizarre and unrecognized. The protagonist's mother, pregnant and sick, turns translucent from a strange disease:

> I look at my mother's belly for the first time since waking up. It was hidden under some ratty blankets, huge, ready to burst. I could see the baby's head in there. A boy's head. Larger than my head. Another boy in the family, then. The fetus probably had the plague, too, but it seemed to suit him. Maybe he was the reason Mother was still alive; that he was processing toxins through his own tiny body.[18]

DeNiro's protagonist gazes into the womb that birthed her, and confesses, "I couldn't trust the biology of the situation—what was real, what were the rules," which neatly sums up the continued encounter with strangeness in the novel.[19] Here in spite of the bizarre circumstances the child is figured as saviour even before he is born for keeping his mother alive. In this way, he seems well suited for the post-apocalyptic future he faces. This image of the baby boy carries a weighty reminder that things may appear to have been altered, but some economic structures, some social relations, like the family, continue to be reproduced whether or not they have been consciously maintained.

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remodeled day by day. Were the cliffs crumbling? I wondered. Was the river getting deeper or shallower? (Deeper, I later found out for certain, but I wouldn't know that for a while.)" Alan DeNiro, *Total Oblivion. More or Less* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 49.

[18] DeNiro, *Total Oblivion* 123.

[19] DeNiro, *Total Oblivion* 123.

In "The Future *in* and *of* the Novel" (2011), Nancy Armstrong identifies the family as a marker of a particularly novelistic problem: can the novel, today, imagine a collective scale beyond the family? The family in DeNiro's novel acts as a stable structure around which all of the odd challenges to reality take place, so that even though everything appears to have changed, *Total Oblivion, More or Less* does not provide, in Armstrong's words, "imaginative access to what comes after the family."[20] A note included just before the Epilogue discloses a second instance of the novel's reproductive futurism. The note reads:

> A Birth during Wartime: At 8:02 p.m., on the seventh day of the egret's month, 120 yards below sea level, two miles northeast of Nueva Roma, Macy [last name redacted] was born to Em [last name redacted] and Wye [last name redacted]. Her weight at birth: 5 pounds, 4 ounces. She is of no nationality, no country. She is of the sea, and her parents. The Birth proceeded without incident. Macy is a name from Old French, which means "weapon." *(log of Sophia Palmer, midwife)*[21]

The list form of this log states the details of the birth in matter-of-fact prose, after the fact, which singles out this child from the one in *Patriots* and the protagonist's baby brother. This post-apocalyptic baby does not signify a crisis in the present, but stands for the future as such. This loss of nationality and country combined with the continuation of familial tiles, arguably, makes up the "More or Less" of the title. At the end of DeNiro's post-apocalyptic novel the future remains bound up in reproduction with the child as the promise of fulfillment. Birth, in post-apocalyptic novels, involves a negotiation between the pre-apocalyptic past and the unknown future. Reproduction

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[20] Nancy Armstrong, "The Future *in* and *of* the Novel," in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 44.1 (Spring 2011): 9.

[21] DeNiro, *Total Oblivion* 297.

offers a way out of the stalled present of the post-apocalyptic novel by subverting the revelatory power of the changes that have taken place. Put differently, the child and the family are stable entities against which to construct a pre-apocalyptic identity and social ontology. DeNiro's protagonist clings to her family as a way of coping with the massive geological changes that take place, Rawles's group of survivalists hone their particular skill set in anticipation of contingency, and McCarthy's father and son seem trapped in the perpetual present, unable to fall back on a larger sense of community or the promise of reproduction.

The Man, the Boy, the Absent Wife and Mother

McCarthy's *The Road* describes a journey from one place to another, a passage through an inhospitable landscape in elegant sparseness, with stripped down dialogue and luminous descriptions of the devastated countryside. Unlike the surety of survivalist capability in Rawles's corpus or the uncertainty of the geological and political changes in DeNiro's novel, *The Road* situates its characters in a landscape where survival appears unlikely and reproduction, in any expanded sense, seems impossible. Laura Gruber Godfrey describes the landscape of the novel as "an environment well past the point of ecological crisis."[22] On the surface *The Road* is a story about a man and a boy who travel down the presumably post-nuclear U.S. East coast in search of warmer climes, but, as Chris Danta suggests, "*The Road* is a bifurcated text," because it operates in two registers: at once "globally and impersonally…rendering the end of the world," and "lyrically and locally" addressing the

[22] Laura Gruber Godfrey, "'The World He'd Lost': Geography and 'Green' Memory in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," in *Critique* 52.2 (2011): 166.

survival of a father and a son.[23] Indeed critics tend to engage *The Road* either for its diagnosis of global crisis or for its insights into the local: George Monbiot famously says that it is "the most important environmental book ever written,"[24] and Nell Sullivan takes up the novel's poetics as an elaboration of homosocial bonds.[25] On both registers, the characters' incapacity to grasp the world around them reiterates a familiar divide for the post-apocalyptic novel between a total, diegetic world and the individuals who inhabit it. This world threatens to engulf them at each turn.

Reproduction is not an immediate concern in *The Road*; instead, the characters appear to be stranded in a perpetual and inhospitable present. This space in the novel is charted through survival, rather than its characters' prior knowledge or their longing for a return to normalcy. In fact, such a return, as we shall soon see, is figured as entirely impossible in the novel. Instead, the novel explains what little capacity for survival they have via the senses, temporality, and memory. The characters' senses overlap with the present and diminish any hope of reaching the future, or even recognizing it upon arrival. Time appears to be frozen, though the characters are mobile and certainly are not caught in some form of physical stasis. Memory drives the man forward and ultimately delivers an interpretive tool to decode the novel's intricate relation to survival and reproduction, which will lead

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[23] Chris Danta, "'The cold illucid world': The Poetics of Gray in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," in *Styles of Extinction: Cormac McCarthy's* The Road, edited by Julian Murphet and Mark Steven (New York: Continuum, 2012), 18-19.

[24] George Monbiot, "Civilization ends with a shutdown of human concern. Are we there already?" in *The Guardian* 30 Oct. 2007. http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/oct/30/comment.books. 18 Sept. 2013.

[25] Nell Sullivan, "The Good Guys: McCarthy's The Road as Post – 9/11 Male Sentimental Novel," in *Genre* 46.1 (2013).

our investigation back once more through the novel, this second time from a broader scale that takes on reproduction as its core hermeneutic measure.

Establishing a crucial thematic, the opening page of the novel figures the senses, in this particular case vision, as rapidly dwindling faculties: "Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world."[26] In ""The cold illucid world,"" Danta argues that the poetics of grey in *The Road* are an effect of the removal, or distancing, of the sun as a reservoir of symbolic meaning. He suggests that without the metaphoric, comparative well of power that is the sun, figures and objects in the world become grey in a "dimming away" of the world, to use McCarthy's words. While for Danta the loss of the sun as a referent causes the characters to rely on their "human breath and human body,"[27] this dimming away does not seem to indicate a strengthening of inner vision through either a rising up of the other senses to compensate or the arrival of some mystical ability to look inwards for answers. Eventually, this lack of vision encroaches on the other senses as well: "The blackness he woke to on those nights was sightless and impenetrable. A blackness to hurt your ears with listening."[28] This blackness represents a fundamental blockage that *The Road* works through, without immediate results. The blackness leaves its characters nearly blind and almost deaf, wondering what has happened and what to do next.

The different temporalities at play within *The Road* shape its characters' relation to survival as deeply spatial in nature. The novel describes the apocalypse as a punctual event: "The clocks

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[26] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) 3.

[27] Danta, ""The cold illucid world,"" 19.

[28] McCarthy, *The Road* 15.

stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions."[29] First is the time of apocalyptic-novum, the time of the event that becomes forever marked as "1:17," demarcating the pre- and post-apocalyptic. The man's memories flow from the former, and the boy knows only the latter. The time of the event consistently threatens to make space the dominant characteristic of the narrative and the characters' reliance on the road itself signals this spatialization. Always marked in terms of where the man and the boy are on the road, the present of the narrative deepens the spatial sense of time. That chipped and charred black-top serves as their guide and ultimately signals the danger and idiocy of their struggle. Indeed, the new man at the end of the novel remarks that he cannot believe they survived for so long travelling on the road. In a strong sense, then, the road itself is the narrative present and moving along it becomes a brand of survival, a continuance, inertia, and a slow shuffle towards one's destination. The problem with the road as a figure for freedom, direction, or even aimlessness is that it tends to come to dead ends, never presenting a *telos* of its own accord. The three other ruined modes of transportation that the man and the boy encounter—a stalled train, a wrecked tractor-trailer, and a reefed boat—similarly signify the way time has been derailed, left stranded in a fully spatial present. This temporality of the now seems to be the strongest one in *The Road*, leaving the novel's third temporality, the future, nearly as inaccessible as its second, the past.

The Road fluctuates between exploring the man's desire for the past and elaborating the real threats the man and boy face on their journey in the present. At one point the man remembers one "perfect day of his childhood," with his uncle in a row boat on the lake, as "the day to shape the days upon."[30] But, "like the dying world the newly blind inhabit," these visions slowly fade from the

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[29] McCarthy, *The Road* 52.

[30] McCarthy, *The Road* 13.

man's mind.[31] McCarthy emphasizes that there can be no turning back as the man's dreams of the old world, so vivid and "rich in color[,]...turn to ash instantly."[32] Even the landscape the man and the boy traverse is referred to as "cauterized terrain" as the tracks of those who went before them become "fossil tracks in the dried sludge," seen but frozen in the present.[33] The real threat comes from the cold ("to crack the stones. To take your life") or from the damp ("there'd be no fires to dry by. If they got wet they would probably die").[34] McCarthy's dichotomy between the inaccessible past and the inhospitable present indicates a subtle difference from post-apocalyptic novels such as Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, where the characters exert their effort to preserve some small connection to the past, or Brin's *The Postman*, where the pre-apocalyptic weight of civilization pulls and tugs the shape of the post-apocalyptic present to match it. For McCarthy, artefacts, representations, and even, memories of the past remain out of reach and beyond the comprehension of the male protagonists, and thus seemingly beyond the reach of reproductive futurity. Without access to the past or the future, the limited present of threat and danger is the only thing the man and the boy are able to live through. It is the only thing capable of repetition.

Intensifying this problem of the inaccessible past, the breakdown of social relations is only ever represented in the man's memory. The man's recollections and musing serve as a guide to what the child has no memory of, even though they are necessarily limited because of his grief, intellect, and subject position.

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[31] McCarthy, *The Road* 18.

[32] McCarthy, *The Road* 21.

[33] McCarthy, *The Road* 14, 12.

[34] McCarthy, *The Road* 14-15.

> Sometimes the child would ask him questions about the world that for him was not even a memory. He thought hard how to answer. There is no past. What would you like? But he stopped making things up because those things were not true either and the telling made him feel bad.[35]

Once again, the sharp delimiting of any connection to the past seems to prevent the father from imagining the future. Here, McCarthy outlines the shape of old and new Americas only in a negative sense: the nation or the village are not accessible forms for organizing social life in the novel. Instead, the burnt-out after-image of what came before appears like a mirage, visible long enough to know that something indeed did come before but vanishings before it can provide any information on how to rebuild the world, leaving nothing for the present but survival.

As with the senses, temporality, and memory, *The Road* carefully negotiates its own terms for survival. The man's role in the obliteration of the past and his heightened sense of the present unfolds as he recalls episodes of negotiation with the boy's mother:

> We're survivors he told her across the flame of the lamp.
>
> Survivors? she said.
>
> Yes.
>
> What in God's name are you talking about? We're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film.[36]

The man's and the woman's understandings of the present are disconnected; though the woman expresses a different sense of the post-apocalyptic landscape, the man's perceptions are privileged in

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[35] McCarthy, *The Road* 54.

[36] McCarthy, *The Road* 55.

the novel. Their disagreement about survival acts as one axis for delimiting narrative possibility in the novel: one is either for or against survival. The man describes the woman's insistence on ending her life as "talking crazy," as it remains an entirely untenable position for him. It certainly follows from the novel's description that Jay Ellis describes the father as "*Homo techne*," arguing that he must *do* to ensure his son survives.[37] The woman says the opposite:

> I should have done it a long time ago...I didnt bring myself to this. I was brought. And now I'm done. I thought about not even telling you. That would probably have been best. You say you would die for us but what good is that? I'd take him with me if it werent for you. You know I would. It's the right thing to do.[38]

As she outlines the reasons for her decision she paints a picture of the cannibals catching them, raping them, and eating them. In the face of this, one truth of the man's instance on survival, and particularly *on her survival*, emerges when he says, "Please don't do this...I cant do it alone."[39] In the man's desperation I sense the deep connection between reproduction and futurity. Here, the absence of the mother is the absence of the future itself.[40]

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[37] Jay Ellis, "Another Sense of Ending: The Keynote Address to the Knoxville Conference," in *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 6 (2008): 30.

[38] McCarthy, *The Road* 56.

[39] McCarthy, *The Road* 57.

[40] *The Road* is inconsistent in its apostrophe use. For instance, the first passage quoted in this paragraph uses the contraction "we're" including an apostrophe. In the latter passages quoted in this paragraph contractions are not indicated with an apostrophe. For instance, "I didnt," "If it werent," and "I cant do it alone," each forgo the use of an apostrophe. The use of the apostrophe in the first passage stands out from the style of the novel as an anomaly. I have decided to reproduce it here in

In his memory when the mother decides her fate, the relation of pre-apocalyptic past to post-apocalyptic present comes together with the third temporality, the future. The woman's final impassioned response raises the stakes for the man and the boy:

> Then don't [do it alone]. I cant help you. They say that women dream of danger to those in their care and men of danger to themselves. But I dont dream at all. You say you cant? Then dont do it. That's all. Because I am done with my own whorish heart and I have been for a long time. You talk about taking a stand but there is no stand to take. My heart was ripped out of me the night he was born so dont ask for sorrow now. There is none. Maybe you'll be good at this. I doubt it, but who knows. The one thing I can tell you is that you wont survive for yourself. I know because I would never have come this far. A person who had no one would be well advised to cobble together some passable ghost. Breathe it into being and coax it along with words of love. Offer it each phantom crumb and shield it from harm with your body. As for me my only hope is for eternal nothingness and I hope it with all my heart.[41]

The mother has lost her ability to dream. Her argument flows from this inability to reconfigure the images of her days, her past, or her fantasies into nightime stories. She emphasizes what will turn out to be the lesson of the novel, and nicely echoes King's novel, when she says, "You talk about taking a stand but there is no stand to take": there is no sense in the world of the novel that the actions of the woman or the man will be able to effect a change in the shape of the present. The crisis the woman identifies is one of historicity. She identifies the only remaining consolation. To "cobble together" a "passable ghost," as an apparition of History, a marker of the absent cause, and

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order to be faithful to the text of the novel.

[41] McCarthy, *The Road* 57.

placeholder for her will towards self-annihilation. In what will nearly be her final words, the woman outlines the correspondence at the heart of *The Road* between survival and reproduction as one of narrative possibility in the negative: will one endure the present in the hope of a future or give in to its seeming impossibility?

Here survival begins to open up to the kind of reproductive futurity in Rawles's corpus and *Total Oblivion, More or Less*. The boy's mother gave up her life rather than face the world; she remains a ghostly figure of maternal care and futurity despite her own desire not to be. McCarthy's characters work through a problem: survival in the name of an impossible reproductive futurity or death. Moving beyond Rawles's and DeNiro's version of reproduction as a conservative hope, the horrifying portrayal of reproduction as procreation in *The Road* subtracts maternal care from the plot of the novel and leaves it in the inaccessible past, only able to return at the novel's close once the future, as *the time of the family*, is restored as a possibility. In its emplotment, the novel defines survival, reproduction, and futurity against one another; one could not be understood without the others.

But with this revelation the novel presents us with an impasse. The totality within the narrative provides empirical examples of only a few logical ways to live: surviving in a cannibalistic gang (a mode the novel cautions that should be strictly avoided), surviving in small units like the man and the boy do, or living in the seemingly benevolent family group that emerges at the end of the novel (see The Road - Figure 5 pg 159). In the wake of the apocalyptic event, survival in *The Road* is split between the security of the known, as self-reliant individuals, and the risk of the collective, as a group full of uncertain motivations. The novel posits the form of the family as a solution that divides the boy and the new family from their shadowy others: suicide or the

"bloodcults."[42] As such, *The Road* raises social form as a fundamental question: how is survival to be extended into the future when not one of the above scenarios factors in the limited capability for the reproduction of daily life or sexual reproduction?

The apparent lack of futurity built into *The Road* extends from the bottom-up frame of survival in the novel to its more top-down dimension of reproduction. The novel comes closest to exposing the inner logic of its impasse, the absence of any real alternative in a form similar to that found in Evenson's *Immobility*, when the boy describes a toy he had in a dream: "this penguin that you wound up and it would waddle and flap its flippers. And we were in that house that we used to live in and it came around the corner but nobody had wound it up and it was really scary" (36). After his father reassures him, the boy concedes one final detail—the key on the penguin was not turning. No one was responsible for winding the penguin, yet it moved of its own accord. Here, the boy expects windup toys to operate in accordance with a particular logic—the key should move along with the toy and require someone, a boy for instance, to wind it before the mechanism could release this stored up kinetic energy. One way to read the penguin is as a figure for the boy, in a material sense, and, for the man, in an imaginary one—they move on, surviving when they no longer have the energy or the resources to do so. Like workers refusing to go to work because the wages they are paid are too low to buy the food needed to make up the calories for their trip to work, staying at home with no income means slowing hunger while working means starvation. The same logic operates, or could be operative, for the man and the boy, but they struggle on sustained by next to nothing. What the boy finds "really scary" about his dream is as much the ostensibly magical dance of the penguin as the logical breakdown of his own relation to the external world, a world that the novel registers as entirely unplottable. The dream not only records the demise of the expected order,

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[42] McCarthy, *The Road* 16.

but also registers an unintentional truth: these unpredictable objects mark the novel's inability to posit a future where the boy's impulses to creativity or collective belonging could be in control at all.

The dream is frightening for the boy not because it is reminiscent of the story's apocalyptic, structuring origin, but because the toy *continues* to move without his input: the penguin's mobility is a signature of the invisible dynamic guiding the frighteningly autonomous-seeming object, the motivating force behind the apparently free figure, and outlines the invisible core of the novel.[43] The novel imagines this absence in terms of social responsibility or collective support. As Teresa Heffernan puts it, it is "the desire for survival and preservation at any cost that causes the father to act violently towards others," so the fear of death rather than the preference of solitude or something like racial or social prejudice keeps the two nameless protagonists from interacting with others in an intense struggle between the desire to choose life over death and the limits to doing so in this post-apocalyptic world.[44] The novel posits the problematic of individual versus collective, as overdetermined by life and death, on a political register as the loss of the social contract (see The Road - Figure 5 pg 149). The boy's fear of the inexplicably moving penguin, however, underscores the breakdown of a far larger set of relations, namely capitalist social relations as such. His horror gestures to a contradiction behind the sign of the magically dancing object, under the veil of the

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[43] This is what Louis Althusser called the absent cause, which has been understood both as the logic of History, along the lines of Althusser and Jameson, or as that of capital itself, following Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman. Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 2009), 208-9; Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981); and, Szeman and Cazdyn, *After Globalization* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

[44] Teresa Heffernan, "On Apocalypse, Monsters and Mourning," in *Frame* 26.1 (May 2013): 102

political, namely an economic contradiction of production and scarcity. Like *The Postman*, *The Road* attempts to resolve an economic problem on the level of political social organization, positing the basis for the relation of strangers in a national context and the relation of individuals in a familial one.[45]

The novel's final paragraph reinforces this tension while it posits the impossibility of civilization's return: "Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back."[46] Where the man's dreams inevitably faded into ash grey mornings, these visions remain blazoned in the arresting image of trout in a stream, fish that have long since vanished from the world. Here, the narrator not only offers descriptions of sights and smells, but also figures of totality, so many "maps and mazes." The sentence following does not banish these visions; instead, it acknowledges the impossibility of their return. The punctuation (".") between the final two sentences indicates a threshold that cannot be crossed—the lack is known, but its remedy is, indeed, impossible to administer. The fading faculties of the man, the "dimming away" of the world, the sense "of a thing which could not be put back," all of these ruptures operate on the hinge point of post-apocalyptic survival, on the divide between ending and beginning. McCarthy's novel plays with this generic marker, repeatedly emphasising the post-apocalyptic novel's narrative limit,

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[45] For relation of strangers within a national contexts see Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

[46] McCarthy, *The Road* 286-287.

which in this case is the disappearance of any possibility of the return to production, reproduction, and a global division of labour.

The two bunker scenarios signal the impossibility of returning to production and indicate the real circumstances of a future spent scavenging from the remains of a quickly fading world. The second cellar is filled with what seems like a limitless bounty to the two malnourished travellers—"Crate upon crate of canned goods. Tomatoes, peaches, beans, apricots. Canned hams. Corned beef. Hundreds of gallons of water in ten gallon plastic jerry jugs. Paper towels, toilet paper, paper plates."[47] It is not made clear whether this bunker is a holdover from the early days of the cold war, recently restocked, or a new construction. In any case the logic of the bunker fits the protagonists' familial habit to scavenge. Here, the hidden truth of the nuclear threat of the 1950s is given new life in the vital energy and protection the bunker offers the man and the boy: designed to protect a small family from the blast and fallout of nuclear war, the bunker can only protect those on the inside while those on the outside perish—a dark take on much American 1950s nostalgia.[48]

The second grisly truth of this bunker's plenty reveals itself when compared to an earlier scene, which offers a corollary to the bunker in the form of a cellar filled not with preserves but with human cattle: "Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide shielding their faces with their hands…Help us, they whispered. Please help us."[49] The man and the boy flee from the old farm house, pursued by four men and two women—the keepers of the bounty

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[47] McCarthy, *The Road* 138.

[48] David Seed notes that debates over nuclear refuge and civil defense projects were often undertaken by science fiction writers, such as Judith Merril and Philip Wylie. David Seed, "The Debate over Nuclear Refuge," in *Under the Shadow* (Kent: The Kent State UP, 2013), 42-61.

[49] McCarthy, *The Road* 110.

of human flesh. Monbiot comments on the cannibalism of the novel: "all pre-existing social codes soon collapse and are replaced with organised butchery, then chaotic, blundering horror. What else are the survivors to do? *The only remaining resource is human.*"[50] Monbiot's assessment rolls into Inger-Anne Søfting's assessment of the novel: "there is no future as humanity is not self-sustainable."[51] This combination results in a vision of humanity with no future because it is literally only sustained by itself. The two cellars, full of a cultivated bounty, present the stark options of survival in a strikingly similar form—in the novel, scavenging from what has been left behind seems to be the only way to survive. Nothing can be grown and nothing can be made, so one must either feed off the reserves of a dead world or the dying flesh of the living.

Even though production has vanished from the novel, reproduction remains the path to the future. As Søfting suggests, "In order to intimate the possibility for future procreation the presence of female characters is important; the sole presence of a father and his son as the characters to carry the world on is surely in a very literal sense a dead end."[52] Indeed, it is most striking that at the very moment the boy is alone, he is discovered by a friendly group and any chance he has of developing a new mode of survival in the world is severed.[53] On one hand, Søfting reads this as "doubly sad" because the boy's survival "is nothing but a postponement of his death and an extension of his suffering."[54] On the other, Heffernan argues that "the boy is the responsible one" in that he comes

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[50] Monbiot, "Civilization ends…"; my emphasis.

[51] Inger-Anne Søfting, "Between Dystopia and Utopia: The Post-Apocalyptic Discourse of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," in *English Studies* 94.6 (2013): 713.

[52] Søfting, "Between Dystopia and Utopia" 712.

[53] The boy is discovered by a nuclear family in John Hillcoat's film *The Road* (2009).

[54] Søfting, "Between Dystopia and Utopia" 713.

to "encourage a rearrangement of desire" from the old position of a "joyless humanity preoccupied with surviving" to one that "doesn't care about dying."[55] She continues, "the boy interrogates the idea of an 'essential,' 'universal,' 'eternal' humanity that should be preserved at any cost."[56] However, both assessments stop short of what happens at the end of the novel. Despite McCarthy's endeavour to sever the past from the post-apocalyptic present and thus avoid the problems of old and new Americas elaborated in the previous chapter, it is precisely the way the novel re-introduces futurity that makes it paradigmatic of post-apocalyptic novels and the ideologies connecting reproduction to futurity identified by Sheldon via Edelman. The time of the family in *The Road*, though relegated to the nostalgic pre-apocalyptic past in the memories of the man, seems also to be the time of utopian possibility for the novel.

Thus, while the end of the novel could be read as a sign of hope, it is also a deeply symptomatic moment, more so than even a deliciously shared can of coca-cola. Here, at the end of the novel, a family unit—a man, a woman, some children—discovers the boy just as he leaves his dead father behind.[57] The boy is faced with a choice: should he go with the strangers or go off on his own? But it is not the choice itself that stands out as bizarre against the backdrop of the rest of the novel; instead, the appearance of the woman makes this a deeply problematic moment in the text. It is not for nothing that the boy is approached after his father, the defender of the last bastion of self-reliance and mistrust, has passed away. The choice the boy faces presents a flash of possibility that this novel could end in a different way than it does, but instead, like the militia-survivalist and Slipstream post-apocalyptic variants, it returns to the fold of the family and to reproduction.

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[55] Heffernan, "On Apocalypse, Monster and Mourning," 103.

[56] Heffernan, "On Apocalypse, Monster and Mourning," 103.

[57] The boy is discovered by a nuclear family in John Hillcoat's film *The Road* (2009).

The group at the end of *The Road* is a demos, a collective which talks through decisions. What other group could you have that would be acceptable to end the story and shelter the boy? The woman in the group shares her own ghostly theory about reproduction, which is not that unlike the absent mother's theory:

> The woman when she saw him put her arms around him and held him. Oh, she said, I am so glad to see you. She would talk to him sometimes about God. He tried to talk to God but the best thing was to talk to his father and he did talk to him and he didnt forget. The woman said that was all right. She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time.[58]

This passing on, "from man to man," is the final turn in the screw of the absent presence of the mother and of reproductive futurity. However wonderful this passing on seems to be, it is not what takes place in the novel. The fire does not pass from the man to the boy when the man dies; instead, at the moment the narrative perspective is about to shift to the true post-apocalyptic subject, the boy, the new man enters the scene, taking over the now dead man's position. Along these lines, Nell Sullivan emphasizes the homosocial aspects of the novel, but this homosociality always implies the absent presence of the female. In this post-apocalyptic epistemology of the closet, the absence is not only a sexual one, it is a procreative one.

Unlike the survivalist version of the future, replete with many a gun-toting apocalypse-know-it-all and premised on a trained capability to carry on, McCarthy's novel pushes at the limits of human survival, exposing, as it does, the problematic of reproductive futurity. If the post-apocalyptic novel, as a genre, imagine the destruction of present institutions, relations, and tendencies, only to prop them back up patched together with the remains of a blasted world, then

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[58] McCarthy, *The Road* 286.

reproductive futurism appears to be a guiding logic that shores up the impulse to re-create the world as it was before the apocalypse. Situated at the meeting point of survivalist thought and the imaginaries shoring up daily life, post-apocalyptic novels like McCarthy's symptomatically capture the limits of this form to imagine the future. I raise the question of a feminist politics for the post-apocalyptic to address the contradictions implied in post-apocalyptic narrative form. The politics of survival remains problematic in forms that imagine the future. It strands its characters in the present, catching them in a state of exasperation about what to do next.

In conclusion, I detect what Adorno would call the negation of the negation. *The Road*, because it is a post-apocalyptic novel, operates through cognitive reduction. It reduces the overdeterminations of life in petromodernity. It does away with the complexities of social ontology, leaving life simpler than before the apocalypse. But, it takes this process a step further as well. *The Road* does away with the problems of capitalism as well as the problems with the way post-apocalyptic novels have tended to neutralize the complexities of the present. Thus, in *The Road*, we do not find the pastoral landscapes and new collectivities of other post-apocalyptic futures; instead, we find nothing but the ragged remains of the pre-apocalyptic world. In this way, *The Road* gets to the heart of the fantasy of beginning anew. McCarthy's novel reveals that, in all the wonder and hopefulness, the typical post-apocalyptic resolution remains impossible without the mechanism of reproductive futurity. Survival itself depends on recreating the situation that allowed one to pass the previous day and stay alive. *The Road* shows that at some point we will have used up everything. The rations will be too low. The fields will lie wasted. The water will be tainted. The air will not be breathable. Yet in the face of this, it seems, we will still believe that rearing the next generation will restore our world. That the entangled fate of humanity and futurity must come through reproduction is a descriptive fact. *The Road* asks us to consider how we imagine what it is that we are reproducing and if any other path to the future lies open.

At least one moment in the novel has yet to be reckoned with. Alongside the vanishing of all resources but the human, in *The Road* the world has also been emptied of forces of creativity, save for the uncertainty that the boy represents. In one scene, the man makes a flute for the boy and describes his playing as "…a formless music for the age to come. Or perhaps the last music on earth called up from out of the ashes of its ruin."[59] The boy's playing makes something new in the world, fashioning something to account for his experience of the blasted wasteland. The man describes the music as "formless" for the age to come; but, as is typical of the novel, he revises his own interpretation part way through his thought so that it more closely matches the inaccessibility of the past or the future, changing it from an emergent cultural form, "music for an age to come," to a doomed and apocalyptic one, "the last music on earth." Something about the boy's playing remains undecideable, just outside the man's ability to cognize and to describe what is happening. In this uncertainty, the man's own productive energy is left aside and forgotten—he made the flute for the boy in the first place. These traces of creative potential outline a new form of production that emphasizes the boy's origin as a post-apocalyptic subject who never knew the pre-apocalyptic world, which hints at the outlines of an alternative narrative possibility of the present within the novel, but one which remains untold.

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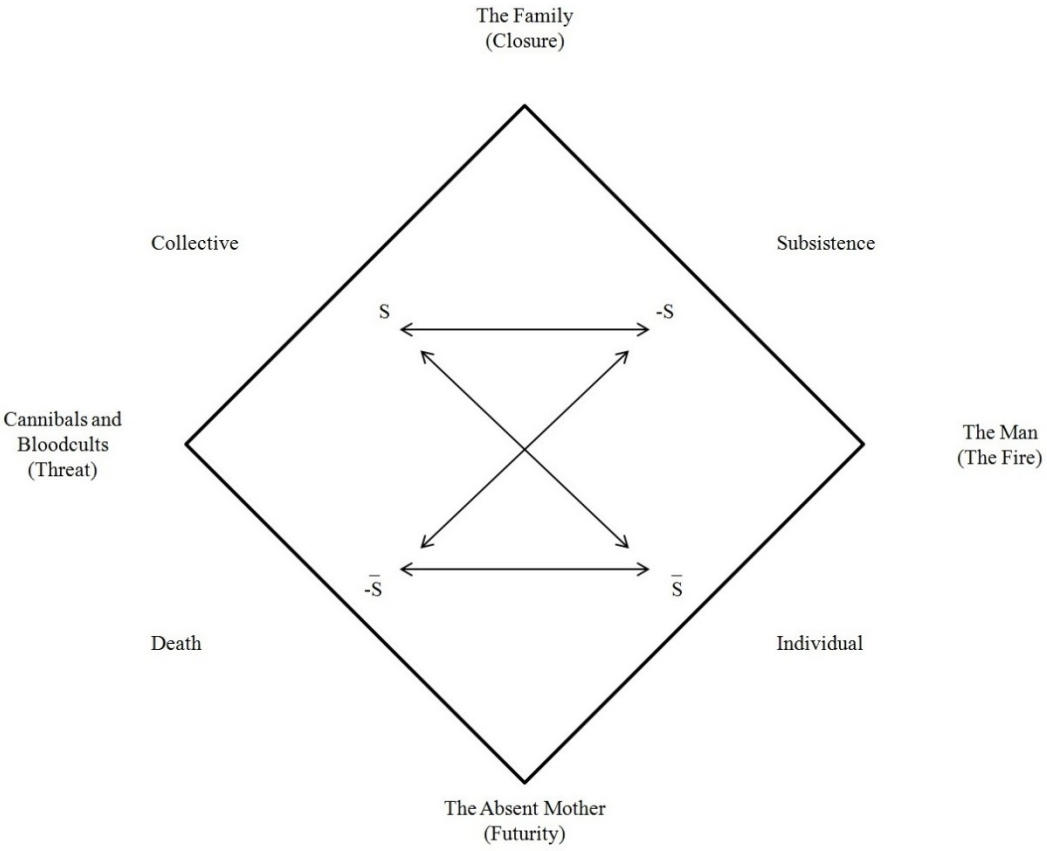
[59] McCarthy, *The Road* 77.

The Road – *Figure 5*



Epilogue

> If science could ever complete the task of explaining the world, the low allegories of genre fiction would no longer be necessary. The convergent narratives of personal experience and external design would finally collapse into one. While this is a mostly depressing or tragicomic prospect, a utopian dimension remains in the wondrous realization that, come a "phase shift" in the ecological and social systems we inhabit, the nature of our world will drastically change. As when, in Max Brooks, the starkly depopulated post-WWZ world turns to Cuba as the engine of the renewal of global commerce—it having come through the apocalypse surprisingly well.
>
> —Mark McGurl[1]

The aim of this dissertation has been to furnish a theory of the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel from after the American century. Central to this task are two competing critical ambitions: one on hand, to expose the reactionary politics, whether of the frontier or of reproductive futurism, of the post-apocalyptic novel and, on the other, to articulate the ways it has struggled to generate, and in some cases succeeded in generating, historical insights about the decline of U.S. hegemony. The post-apocalyptic novel, in its very form, articulates multiple possible futures which compete for dominance within the text. As a sub-genre of science fiction, the post-apocalyptic novel tends to posit a handful of paths for its protagonists. Though these paths tend to operate through a kind of cognitive reduction, they still "serve," in the words of Fredric Jameson, the "function of transforming our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come."[2] In *Immobility*, Horkai is faced time and again with other possible futures, which, upon reflection, would only take the breaking of a promise to pursue. That he turns away from those alternate possibilities does not

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[1] Mark McGurl, "The Zombie Renaissance," in *N+1* 9 (Spring 2010) https://nplusonemag.com/issue-9/reviews/the-zombie-renaissance/ (30 April 2014).

[2] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), 288.

mean that they were not available to him. Transporting this insight from the story world to the real world, we might come to realize that, recognized or not, alternate possibilities may be available to us for our own collective future. Likewise, in *The Postman* and *The Wild Shore* lie possible configurations of the social behind the movement of the plot that take on a spatial relationship made visible by the movements of the protagonist on the mail route or on the way to discover the return of technology in the city. Meanwhile, the politics of survival in *The Road* unfold temporally, rather than spatially, implicating the insufficiency of the masculine and heteronormative strain of the post-apocalyptic novel. The multiplicity of narrative futures common across these examples suggest that the apocalyptic end may not be the final end, and there may yet be something left to accomplish after what appeared to be our last moments.

In each of its figurations of space and time, the post-apocalyptic novel models a form in which possible futures are grounded in already existing communities. Further, as I have demonstrated in Chapter I this sense of the opening of possibility is premised on the break of the apocalyptic event itself. Following this line of reasoning, we could think of the world depicted by the post-apocalyptic novel in Jamesonian terms as a desire for *the future as disruption*. For Jameson, the answer to the "universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible" is "the Utopian form itself," not because it posits some image of the new harmonious world, but because the Utopian form asserts that a different world is possible "by forcing us to think the break itself."[3] This does seem to inform how this dissertation understands the post-apocalyptic novel as a sort of success by failure, in the sense of offering a glimpse that the future could be different, precisely by tracing the limits of the post-apocalyptic novel's imaginative capacities. The U.S. post-apocalyptic novel hunts the present for residual forms of the "good life" in response to concrete problems, like resource

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[3] Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* 232.

shortages or foreclosed homes left empty (while many remain without shelter), or abstract ones, like Braudel's *signs of autumn* or the anomie of subjects. Instead of a curiosity about how to make do with ready-to-hand solutions based on the limits of the present, this obsession with previous solutions to the problems of the present dominates the post-apocalyptic novel's concerns. I have characterized the genre's central limit throughout the dissertation as an inversion of origin and *telos* at the heart of the post-apocalyptic narrative form that has serious consequences for imagining the future. In the final pages of this dissertation I would like to discuss several recent iterations of the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel that do begin to grapple with this central limit.

Mark Spitz final decision in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) to dive into a mass of zombies, rendered in the novel as a "sea of the dead," dramatizes a new *finale* for the narrative movement of the post-apocalyptic novel:

> In the stream of the street the dead bobbled in their invisible current. These were not the Lieutenant's stragglers, transfixed by their perfect moments, clawing through to some long-gone version of themselves that existed only as its ghost. These were the angry dead, the ruthless chaos of existence made flesh. These were the ones who would resettle the broken city. No one else…Fuck it, he thought. You have to learn how to swim sometime. He opened the door and walked into the sea of the dead.[4]

Like the mother from *The Road*, in the face of an eternal return to the same, Mark Spitz decides to give up; further, not only the protagonist gives up, as *Zone One* also features a special type of zombie that has given up.[5] So even though "the world was muck," the narrator still suggests that "systems

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[4] Colson Whitehead, *Zone One* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 259.

[5] Skels resemble a typical zombie—hungry for human flesh, in a state of decomposition, more dangerous in groups, and vicious—the stragglers, less so. The latter are Whitehead's

die hard—they outlive their creators and unlike plagues do not require individual hosts—and thus it was a well-organized muck with a hierarchy, accountability and, increasingly, paperwork."[6] Rather than read Mark Spitz's decisions to embrace the mass as a discreet act within a novel, what seems striking about his decision is that it flies in the face of the genre as whole. His gruesome decision to "learn how to swim" shakes the foundation of both the repetition compulsion and the focus on the individual demonstrably found in the post-apocalyptic novel. But, eliminating the focal character does not eliminate the post-apocalyptic scenario; it merely undoes the narrator's and reader's access to it. Readers attentive to a moment early in the novel will know that this end of access to the world of *Zone One* is by no means the end of its story world.

In this incredible passage early in Whitehead's novel, the city itself becomes a subjective figure, deindividuating any of its particular denizens and reframing the apocalyptic event of the novel as simply another in a long line of reformations that have changed the composition of Manhattan. When Mark Spitz recalls visiting his uncle, he remembers standing and looking out the window at the city below:

> He remembered how things used to be, the customs of the skyline. Up and down the island the buildings collided, they humiliated runts through verticality and ambition, sulked in one another's shadows. Inevitability was mayor, term after term, yesterday's old masters, stately named and midwifed by once-famous architects, were insulted by the soot of combustion engines and by technological advances in construction. Time chiseled at elegant stonework,

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contribution to the zombie plot: stragglers just stand or sit or lie and stare. They are skels that have thoroughly checked out; they often return to a fixed place, perhaps still meaningful to some recess of muscle or blood memory, and just wait.

[6] Whitehead, *Zone One* 162.

> which swirled or plummeted to the sidewalk in dust and chips and chunks. Behind the façades their insides were butchered, reconfigured, rewired according to the next era's new theories of utility. Classic six into honeycomb, sweatshop killing floor into cordoned cubical mill. In every neighbourhood the imperfect in their fashion awaited the wrecking ball and their bones were melted down to help their replacements surpass them, steel into steel. The new buildings in wave upon wave drew themselves out of the rubble, shaking off the past like immigrants. The addresses remained the same and so did the flawed philosophies. It wasn't anyplace else. It was New York City.[7]

Everything is here: the consecration of each age of urban planners and architects by the previous generation of social planners, the marks left by the smog of automobile use, the shift from labour heavy industry to the cognitive lightness of creative industries, and the crash of wave after wave of new immigrants eager to become "American." But, for Whitehead, each of these figures becomes a mere synecdoche, something contained in the still vastness of the New York skyline as it is surveyed by the mediocre boy in his uncle's apartment. This narrated rise and fall of a city echoes what Samuel Zipp has described as "Manhattan Projects," those efforts in the 1960s to remake the city which allow Zipp to articulate "the rise of a world city and the decline into urban crisis"[8] as a dual process, which, in turn, shapes the moment of Whitehead's own formation in the wake of the 1960s and his response to this formation in *Zone One*.[9] The turnover of New York City from the mid-

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[7] Whitehead, *Zone One* 5-6.

[8] Samuel Zipp, *Manhattan Projects: The Rise and Fall of Urban Renewal in New York* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 29.

[9] Andrew Hoberek's review is instructive for me here: Whitehead "presents New York as an imagistic assemblage of scenes glimpsed through windows: the curator is none other than the author

century to the post-industrial "city of tomorrow" in the 1960s and 1970s is a change that simultaneously figures the contemporary turnover of U.S hegemony—the places remain the same, and in many cases so do the names, but everything seems different now. This attempt to come to terms with a new economic order makes up the backdrop of Mark Spitz's movements through the Zone.

This long architectural passage gains new significance in light of the close of the novel. Whitehead may be narrating the changing urban plan of the city, the social relations that undergird it and shore it up, but in providing a theory of the urban metabolism he also gestures to a deeper connection between the form and content of the post-apocalyptic novel itself. If anything, the allegorical slippage of Whitehead's narration makes up an informal history of formal change that is not strictly limited to the city at all, but can be read as a metahistory of emergent, dominant, and residual forms: "Up and down the island the buildings collided, they humiliated runts through verticality and ambition, sulked in one another's shadows." The effects wrought by the writers taking on their visions of *after the end* are replaced as "Time chiseled at elegant stonework, which swirled or plummeted to the sidewalk in dust and chips and chunks." The post-apocalyptic novel obsesses over

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himself. Here we see a profound difference between Whitehead's approach to his genre materials and that of, say, Junot Diaz in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* Both Whitehead (b. 1969) and Diaz (b. 1968) belong to a generational cohort of mostly male American authors—Michael Chabon (b. 1963) and Jonathan Lethem (b. 1964) are others—who embrace the genre forms of their youths. But whereas Diaz, in *Wao,* turns to the clunky, semi-Victorian diction of comic books, science fiction, and fantasy as a way beyond the minimalist, Carveresque prose of his first book. *Drown* (1996), Whitehead tells his zombie story in highly polished, formally perfect prose." Andrew Hoberek, "Living with PASD," *Contemporary Literature* 53.2 (2012): 409.

two presents simultaneously: the diegetic middest and the real-world, contemporary present. It worries about how social ontology is changing. These novels ask: who is moving where and what will be left for the implied "us," the overdetermined public, of the text? Increasingly, recent novels like *Zone One* have also been asking questions about expression and transmission, taking on the limits they perceive not only in the real present, but in their diegetic, narrative present as well.

Max Brooks's 2006 zombie novel, *World War Z*, similarly blows open the constraints post-apocalyptic novels typically adhere to. It uses a new model of post-apocalyptic storytelling based on transcribed interviews, which effectively describe the appearance and the movement of those infected with the zombie virus and the response of individuals, governments, militaries, militias, and so on.[10] The interviews early in the book render the geographic spaces where zombies first emerge as heavily populated zones often with a thriving black market for smuggling bodies or body parts. Further, this collapse plays out on a global register: as a pandemic narrative, *World War Z* represents the contact points where one infected body, or body part, encounters another. The novel itself attempts to represent the social totality in the form of circulation not in the global market, but in a shadow economy that currently employs, according to a recent *Forbes* article, over 1.8 billion pre-

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[10] The novel begin at the end of the story it will tell as Max Brooks, the name of the author and the fictive reporter, conducts a series of interviews in the wake of what is known as the zombie war. These interviews are leftover artefacts from an unrepresented object also written by Brooks (the character): the United Nation's Postwar Commission Report. In antagonism to the factual report, the interview style of the novel seems to assume that its reportage can sketch out a totality of events through the shear accumulation of points of view, patching together a global perspective of "The Zombie War" over the course of ten years.

apocalyptic labourers.[11] The formal conceit of Brooks's novel allows it to work through the limits of the U.S. post-apocalyptic novel in the very terms of the former's ideological backdrop: the global circulation of goods, official and otherwise. *World War Z* clarifies the connection between the backdrop of U.S. hegemony and the production of post-apocalyptic novels, in a way that clarifies how cultural forms are both products of and respond to moments of crisis. In its assertion of continuing dominance through aggressive military action and a deep investment in its economic institutions, the United States, Brooks seems to suggest, manufactures uneven spaces and illicit movements that remain, nevertheless, deeply integral to this global system's functioning. Rather than display the centre and the periphery through the overlap of a post-apocalyptic setting on U.S. territory, *World War Z* juxtaposes multiple spaces with varying degrees and kinds of unevenness through the mediation of the circulation of goods and bodies accounted for in its interviews.

This is not to say that *World War Z* frames its conceit in direct correspondence with the limits of the post-apocalyptic novel, but as Mark McGurl suggests in the epigraph above, we ought to read it as allegory, which implies multiple levels of meaning operating at any given moment. From the shipyards in India where ships were once broken down for parts and now refugees flock to in order to take to sea, to the island of Cuba that emerges as the dominant world power in the wake of the war, to the communities architecturally designed to be zombie proof—buildings on stilts, retractable ladders, walls and watchtowers—*World War Z* struggles to rebuild new modes of social organization amidst a social totality understood not through the mode of production, but through

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[11] Marco Rabinowitz, "The Rise of the Shadow Economy: Second Largest Economy in the World," in *Forbes* (07 November 2011) http://www.forbes.com/sites/benzingainsights/2011/11/07/rise-of-the-shadow-economy-second-largest-economy-in-the-world/ (4 June 2013).

circulation and exchange figured as contagion. Indeed, what gets produced and reproduced in the novel is not capital but zombies, each one a spitting image of a former labourer in pre-apocalyptic times. Perhaps, were we to give the novel its due beyond the tired tropes of the sole survivor or the enclave found in other U.S post-apocalyptic novels, we could read the intersection of the disparate interviews as a form of fragmentation itching to be brought back together to form a larger view of the social totality. Yet what is so compelling about Brooks's novel is that it effectively figures the depiction of the world *as globe* as a problem in a way the post-apocalyptic novel had previously not done. *World War Z* pursues a meaningful engagement with interviewees from all around the globe, in every industry, and despite the interference of a variety of adversities. Brooks's negation of the formal limits of the post-apocalyptic novel situates the declining hegemon within the global flows of a system of accumulation that causes immiseration to such a degree that the superfluous living appear, simultaneously, to be dead and hungry for human flesh.

U.S. post-apocalyptic novels from the long-1950s to the first decade of the twenty-first century suffered from a sort of nationalistic myopia, and the new spatial imaginary evident in *World War Z* still lags behind the emergence of globalization as a critical concern. Part of my argument in Chapter III is that the inward gaze of mid-1980s post-apocalyptic novels, like *The Postman*, operated as a form of cognitive dissonance—the return of the frontier as setting constituted both a looking at and a looking away from the domestic and global expansion of capital with the United States at the helm. The swelling crises of petromodernity—pollution and global warming—demand a jump in the scale of thought beyond the local or the national. As the development of the post-apocalyptic novel stands out against U.S. military action, state power, and economic dominance it seems to grapple with a new dimension of a problem articulated by Walter Benjamin, where he suggests "not even the past will be safe" from the conquerors. Indeed, Jameson adds "the future is not safe either":

> It is compared to that leveling of the land speculators and builder-investors, whose bulldozers destroy all the site-specific properties of a terrain in order to clear it and make it fungible for any kind of future investment, so that one can build on it whatever the market demands. This is the future prepared by the elimination of historicity, its neutralization by way of progress and technological evolution.[12]

As post-apocalyptic novels frantically try to contain or foreclose other futures, they also struggle to maintain a narrative opening not only to the future of the white, privileged, male and U.S. global dominance, but also *to the future of capital itself*. Thus, the cognitive reduction that we see at work in the post-apocalyptic novel clears literary setting in ways that correspond to the clearing of vast swaths of countryside for the expanding suburb and the petrocarbon extraction required to continue to support such expansions of a culture and a life style. The space required for the suburban life described in Chapter I—highlighted by the figures of the sole survivor and the enclave—begs a return to an emergent concern subtending this dissertation: how to factor energy in to the concerns of the post-apocalyptic novel and the fallout of the American century? In light of this new concern, I would ask one more question, what to make of nearing U.S. energy independence, which seems both to resolve the problem of forward momentum and U.S. hegemony and to re-present the apocalyptic not on a national but on a global scale. In 1973, President Nixon promised energy

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[12] Jameson, *Archaeologies* 228. Jameson paraphrases Benjamin here, which I have preserved. The full quotation from "Theses on the Philosophy of History" is as follows: "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious." Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations* (New York: Shocken Books, 2007), 255.

independence for the U.S.A. within a decade in response to the OPEC embargo; while, today, "U.S. crude oil production is up 50 percent since 2008. Thanks to that increase, as well as more efficient automobiles, petroleum imports have fallen from their high of 60 percent in 2005 to 35 percent today—exactly what they were in 1973." According to Daniel Yergin, the U.S. may be facing energy independence.[13] The increase demanded by the lifestyle of the suburban enclave can be granted, by and large, by the expansion of oil production in off-shore drilling and the extraction of natural gas through hydraulic fracturing (fracking). Both the Deepwater Horizon spill of April 2010 and the landscapes that fracking generates and poisons rest in a horrific congruence with the post-apocalyptic setting. In light of my argument in Chapter III, we can identify the boom in natural gas extraction in states like North Dakota as a new round of Harvey's "accumulation by dispossession."[14] The charting and settling of the frontier, which altered the land and removed it from the domain of the indigenous peoples, can be seen as an early circuit of accumulation by dispossession. Now the operations of fracking or strip-mining make up another round of the seizure

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[13] Daniel Yergin, "Congratulations, America. You're (Almost) Energy Independent. Now what?" in *PoliticoMagazine* (November 2013) http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2013/11/congratulations-america-youre-almost-energy-independent-now-what-98985.html#ixzz30IxJinK7 (29 April 2014).

[14] According to *USA Today* story about the April 2014 jobless rates in the U.S.: "North Dakota, whose economy has benefited from a boom in oil and natural gas production, continued to have the nation's lowest unemployment rate at 2.6%, the same as in March." Doug Caroll, "April Jobless Rates Drop in 43 States," in *USA Today* (16 May 2014) http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2014/05/16/april-state-unemployment-rates/9168843/ (20 May 2014).

of the commons by capital. In this way, the future is being spoken for as well, and not only in ideological terms.

But I do not think that a lived experience of such landscapes would register in either the punctual rush of the oil spill or the slow violence (to borrow Rob Nixon's precise turn of phrase) of poisoned ground water. Rather, the future of fracking is most compellingly imagined following Steven Amsterdam's *Thing We Didn't See Coming* (2011).[15] The novel follows an unnamed protagonist through nine vignettes, each with its own setting, plot, tone, and signs of the apocalypse (or many apocalypses) and is never explicit about what disaster takes place, though as the plot progresses it becomes clear that some form of environmental devastation has occurred. From an expedition on a horse bred to withstand an exceptionally harsh rainy season in "Dry Land" to a struggle for survival with his sometimes partner Margo in the badlands during a drought in "Cake Walk," the circumstances of the narrator and those around him exist in a state of flux. Organized in this way, the novel registers a temporal tension between the narrator and his disparate, changing surroundings. His experience of the world is one where the effects of certain massive changes are felt though never seen. The novel does not offer a sustaining system of meaning—no figured city with its dense architectural codes, no global connections knitting the world together, no set of social relations with any consistency. The protagonist's father discloses a bundle of symptoms to his son in the first vignette:

> In your time there'll be breakdowns that can't be fixed. There will be more diseases that can't be fixed. Water will be as valuable as oil. And you'll be stuck taking care of a fat generation of useless parents…The future is a hospital, packed with sick people, packed with

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[15] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011).

> hurt people, people on stretchers in the halls, and suddenly the lights go out, the water shuts off, and you know in your heart that they're never coming back on. That's the future, my friend.[16]

But, this is the closest the novel comes to explaining or revealing the cause(s) of any of its many crises. Writing in a different context, Franco Moretti also offers a way to read this cycle of crises: "Variations in a conflict that remains constant…can only be glimpsed *at the level of the cycle*: individual episodes tend, if anything, to conceal it, and only the abstract pattern reveals the true nature of the historical process."[17] *Things We Didn't See Coming* ties the crises of each vignette together on the level of form, without making their connection clear on the level of content—these are not so many unrelated symptoms, so many fragmentary effects, but are instead part of a near-unrepresentable system. With this realization the separate vignettes rearrange themselves before our eyes, falling under the rubric of permanent crisis, a dialectical move from separate fragments to formal totality, all mediated by a Lukácsian "middle hero."

Lukács, in his summary of Sir Walter Scott's historical novels, supplies the model for the reading I advance:

> [Scott] presents history as a series of great crises. His presentation of historical development...is of an uninterrupted series of such revolutionary crises. Thus if Scott's main tendency in all of his novels...is to represent and defend progress, then this progress is for him always a process full of contradictions, the driving force and material basis of which is the living contradictions between conflicting forces, the antagonisms of classes and nations.[18]

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[16] Amsterdam, *Things* 23.

[17] Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (New York: Verso, 2007), 29.

[18] Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London: Pelican Books, 1981), 57.

If, as Lukács argued, the historical novel created a narrative place for bourgeois subjectivity after the French Revolution, then I read each of these three novels as attempts to reconcile a loss of any such place for the privileged subject at the end of the American Century and as a *familiarization* of the changes that are taking place. In Amsterdam's novel, crisis appears symptomatically as political—"a hospital, packed with sick people, packed with hurt people, people on stretchers in the halls"—and economic— "the lights go out, the water shuts off, and you know in your heart that they're never coming back on." By imagining a future without enough material wealth to be shared among the survivors, despite massive reduction in population, *Things We Didn't See Coming* describes a situation uncannily like the one capital would have us believe we live in today. It seems to suggest that the solution to inhabiting such a world is not to delude ourselves, to recognize that we must compete for food, water, and shelter. We may have anticipated these changes, yet if we adhere to a system of expanding accumulation and dispossession it seems there is little we can do to change our fate. In Whitehead's novel, the ultimate lesson is not to continue to fight in the face of insurmountable odds, but to bow to the tide of history. Brooke's novel, perhaps the most optimistic of the novels in my Epilogue, suggests that the answers to our current problems are not to turn to the past for answers, but to make use of our technical skills and fashion a new world out of the dying hull of the old. Indeed, Brooke's houses on stilts may be designed to keep zombies away, but they could be the inspiration for whole settlements elevated from rising ocean levels. Finally, Amsterdam's novel, on the formal level of the vignette, pushes up against its own representational limit: it only depicts crises as a temporal series or a cycle, which remains the novel's central, one might even say structuring, crisis. For *Things We Didn't See Coming*, the future appears to be guaranteed. It struggles to work through this problematic, but in the very momentum of its vignettes it encounters its own crisis: the figure that this novel cannot represent beyond the mere shadow of its possibility is the apocalyptic event itself, a terminal crisis. Thus, what comes after the end, after the apocalypse, the logic of the

novel seems to suggest, can only be more of the same. The problem remains: rather than a Utopian break it is apocalypses all the way down.

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