

Editorial Animation Studies

By Thomas Lamarre

Animation has always had its champions. Animators and fans have often proved eager to sing the praises of animation and especially to laud it over and above cinema. To give examples: French animation director René Laloux (2006) famously declared animation to be the true cinema, and in a humorous yet profound essay exploring the 'evolution' of Mickey Mouse from adult to juvenile, renowned biologist Stephen Jay Gould (1992) parenthetically remarked that he still preferred *Pinocchio* to *Citizen Kane*. Yet, for all that its enthusiasts remind us that animation is at least as old as cinema (some would give animation historical priority over cinema); still, animation has only recently begun to produce a groundswell of activity within the university. This is not to say that animation has not previously garnered any serious attention. There have been books, and very good ones, largely centred on major studios or famous animators. In the course of the 1990s, however, animation began to feel important enough that today animation studies is frequently presented as a field of analysis distinct from other fields, even from film studies. New journals dedicated to the study of animation have emerged, and in coming years we can expect a host of new books dealing with various aspects of animation.

It is impossible to foresee what will characterize or constitute animation studies. Much as René Laloux declared animation to be the true cinema, animation studies may pronounce itself the true film studies. Or, in the manner of Stephen Jay Gould's preference for animated films, animation studies may be predicated on an open-ended preference that fortuitously opens new kinds of questions about the moving image. But why now? What has changed that animation

is calling for new or renewed attention?

By the late 1990s, the ascendancy of animation became associated with the rise of digital. New media theorist Lev Manovich, for instance, wrote, "the opposition between the styles of animation and cinema defined the culture of moving images in the twentieth century" (1999:298). Famously, Manovich spun a tale of the relation between cinema and animation in which animation, once subsumed by cinema, had now succeeded in subsuming cinema. Japanese animation director Oshii Mamoru (2004) expressed a similar sentiment, announcing that all cinema is becoming animation. Oshii, of course, is renowned for his use digital technologies to experiment with the boundary between cinema and animation.

Such explanations of the new centrality and popularity of animation are surely correct to call attention to the importance of digital technologies and new media in transforming (although maybe not subsuming) cinema and spurring animation. Yet, because their emphasis falls on a sort of digital avant-gardism, questions about the broader field of animation or animation studies tend to drop out of the picture.

In this context, a recently published volume of essays on animation, *The Illusion of Life II: More Essays on Animation*, is especially interesting because, although it only recently appeared in print, in 2007 (all quotes from which are noted by page number only in the body of this editorial), its essays derive from a conference held in 1995 in Sydney, Australia. What is more, the conference and the essays build on a prior conference held in 1988 and published in 1991 under the title *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation* also edited by Alan Cholodenko. The essays in *The Illusion of Life II* thus precede the contemporary

boom of scholarly interest in animation, building on and responding to the astonishing popularity of animated forms in mass-targeted and globally disseminated entertainments of the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as video games, television series, music videos, and special effects films. *The Illusion of Life II* speaks to a moment when animation had begun its meteoric rise within global media, while animation studies remained low on the theoretical horizon.

As with any set of responses, the essays are exceedingly heterogeneous in their approaches and concerns, and yet they merit consideration both as a whole and separately, precisely because they anticipate basic questions about animation that will haunt animation theory for some time. Two emphases distinguish the volume as a whole from prior discussions of animation.

On the one hand, an aura of urgency surrounds animation criticism. We get the feeling that animation opens pressing questions about contemporary media conditions that could not otherwise be posed. There is also a sense that cinema and film studies are no longer suited to, or sufficient for, understanding contemporary media. Simulation becomes a key word, in response to the sense of a collapse in the distinction between cinema and animation, or more precisely, between capturing reality and generating reality. In this respect, *Illusion of Life* anticipates of some of the points that became central in new media and digital theory.

On the other hand, *The Illusion of Life II* is unusual in its endorsement of the importance of Japanese animation (anime), at a time when anime had barely begun to garner scholarly attention. Explicitly, and implicitly in the choice of materials, the collection entertains the idea that American and Japanese animations are the crucial site for analyzing current media conditions.

Taken as a whole, *The Illusion of Life II* seems to announce a fundamental shift from a 'cinema formation' to an 'animation formation'. At the same time, its emphasis on Japanese animation introduces questions about the transnational, about relations between place of production and reception, which in turn raises questions about where and how 'animation cultures' are formed. The essays are not necessarily in agreement about how this shift to animation or the emergence of animation culture should be articulated: some articulate it historically, others ontologically, and others heuristically. But to situate the volume and the emergence of animation studies I will begin somewhat historically, with stories about the formation of cinema and its subsequent expansion to the point of dissolution.

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The Cinema Formation

Cinema has changed dramatically over the past twenty-five years. Whether we look at production, distribution or reception, it is clear that cinema today is not what it was. The advent of the VCR and DVD players created the possibility of film rental and home theatre. Distribution laws changed, repertory or art film theatres closed, and the cineplex made its appearance, even as new sorts of image-based entertainment (video games, comics, animation, manga, anime) vied for attention, and new technologies of editing and imaging transformed the moving image itself. The emergence of digital technologies and the Internet permitted a film to be distributed and received in various formats at various times and places. What had formerly appeared as a stand-alone film became another information file in a media network. Films were and are still being made, and film continued to be an important medium and form of mass entertainment, but its coherence and salience had been radically altered.

Film studies, too, underwent important changes. After years of petitioning for serious intellectual and academic attention, film suddenly became almost ubiquitous in the North American university: videocassettes and disks made copies of various kinds of films from documentaries to television programs readily available, and professors in a range of disciplines introduced film into the classroom. From needing to prove its intellectual worthiness, film became source material. Just as historians and sociologists often include novels in their courses without fussing over literary analysis, so it is with films: anyone can use film in the classroom without addressing film theory and analysis. Film simultaneously won credibility and lost a sense of specificity.

Not surprisingly, around the same time, a debate over theory ran through film studies. A number of scholars expressed strong objections to film theory, especially its psychoanalytic conceits, which had in their heyday contributed greatly to the scholarly importance of cinema. Film scholars who proposed to jettison theory often insisted that theory tended to totalize the film, to introduce overarching paradigms that ignored the material complexity and diversity of cinema. To counter such allegedly totalizing tendencies, the anti-theory scholars proposed a turn to cognitive sciences and statistical analysis, leaning on modes of classical empiricism that, although frequently taken for scientific in the humanities, have never held sway in the sciences. Reductively speaking, the result was a standoff between psychoanalytic theory and cognitive empiricism.

Significantly, the debate over film theory made manifest a new degree of uncertainty about the ground for the study of film. Was there any reason to insist on the specificity of film as distinct from other media or modes of expression?

Somewhat paradoxically, even as the anti-theorists posited the ground for the study of film outside film itself (for example, in statistics and cognitive science), they did not question the coherence of film as an object of study. At the same time, film theory developed a new awareness of its tendency

to presume an historical impulse toward unity and totality within the film industry, in the guise of 'classical cinema' or 'classical Hollywood style'. It was in this context that the new film history, with renewed attention to 'early cinema', appeared to resolve or at least to bypass the impasse that had appeared in the debate over theory.

Theoretically, the new film history found in early cinema a useful point of departure for talking about the emergence of modernity and modern modes of perception, especially in the urban metropolis, by turning to a time before cinema was cinema. Prior to the formation and institutionalization of certain cinematic conventions that made cinema into a distinctive and autonomous form of expression (the classical style), moving pictures meshed readily with other forms of popular entertainment such as magic acts, side shows, vaudeville theatre, popular opera, magic lantern displays, fairs, festivals and exhibitions. In fact there was no cinema as such; moving pictures, as one medium among others, contributed to the production of modern forms of perception and the modern urban experience. While resolutely historical, such research strove to get out of teleological, linear or deterministic histories of the birth of cinema, by situating itself at a moment when cinema as such did not exist. André Gaudreault (2007) writes directly about this historical problem.

Needless to say, bracketing questions about the material specificity of cinema and looking at moving pictures within a broader framework of modern perception presents a new set of questions. A certain paradox arises vis-à-vis the specificity of cinema in early film studies. Historically, arguments about the specificity of cinema in contrast to other media were crucial not only to the industrial establishment of the so-called 'classical style' but also to the development of film theory and film studies. Noel Carroll (2004) calls this the 'specificity thesis', only to argue against it. He feels that the specificity thesis constrains each art or medium to pursue only what it can do best — as the critic defines it. In effect, Carroll calls attention to the prescriptive and teleological implications of the specificity thesis.

Rather than dispense with the specificity thesis altogether, however, early film studies tends to bracket the specificity of cinema. In other words, early film studies accepts the history of the emergence of a set of specific formal conventions and industrial measures that made 'cinema' what it is, but turns to a time before cinema in order to step outside the prescriptive and teleological implications of the specificity thesis. In effect, however, it holds the specificity of cinema under erasure. Specificity is presumed to come later. Bracketing the specificity of cinema allows early film scholars to look at moving pictures as one medium among others within a broader field of modern perception. As a result, as Ben Singer (2001) notes, such studies tend toward a 'modernity thesis'. It is as if the specificity thesis of cinema had been displaced onto a specificity thesis of Western modernity. This is where this manner of thinking film history presents some new challenges and impasses.

Either ignorant of or uninterested in the historical and theoretical debates about formations of modernity and the status of the West, this manner of thinking film history

runs the risk of replacing the teleological history of cinema with a massive Western modernity thesis, in which modernity emerges in the West and diffuses to the Rest. Emphasis thus falls on the emergence and diffusion of Western forms (usually Hollywood cinema, which gradually came to dominate global markets in 1920s) to the Rest. In other words, such film histories presume a centre and a periphery without considering how some areas come to be constructed as peripheries, and how the West (or even Hollywood style) might emerge as a relation between centre and periphery to begin with. There is, simply put, a tendency to replicate modernization theory, however unwittingly. Yet part of the challenge of cinema, even in its early days, lies in effects of synchronicity among urban centres, which poses a challenge to diffusion theories and centre-periphery models, encouraging us to address the temporality that unfurls diverse formations of modernity. Miriam Hansen's (1999) notion of vernacular modernism is a gesture in this direction. She sees Hollywood cinema as fractured with modernist ambiguities, with anxieties about modernity that can be reiterated or recombined with other ambivalent modernisms in non-Western locales. Still, the gesture remains predicated on diffusion theory and leans toward a massive Western modernity thesis.

If I linger over (and somewhat reductively extract) this oscillation between the specificity thesis and the modernity thesis in film history and theory, it is because this is precisely where animation studies emerges, posing a very similar set of questions. Animation studies gathers steam, for instance, at the same time that film history begins to bracket the specificity of cinema, opening cinema into media studies and into general theories of the moving image, with film as one medium among others. Animation studies arrives in conjunction with the modernity thesis of cinema, as if ideally suited to contribute to general histories of the moving image and discussions of modern media conditions and perceptual formations. Nevertheless questions about the distinctiveness or specificity of animation inevitably arise.

The Limited Field

In his introduction to *The Illusion of Life II*, Alan Cholodenko initially situates the volume as a needed response to the historical boom in animation, contrasting the ubiquity and centrality of animated forms with the dearth of intellectual inquiry. Subsequently, however, Cholodenko makes clear that the study of animation cannot rest content with responding to new historical conditions, describing new objects, rectifying scholarly neglect, or with filling gaps in our knowledge. Instead he unabashedly proposes to privilege poststructuralist and postmodernist theory, seeing in animation a way to reanimate Grand Theory. First, he argues, we need to theorize "film 'as such' as a form of animation", and second, we must begin to theorize "animation as a form of 'philosophy'" (45). The study of animation, then, entails a two-fold movement. On the one hand, Cholodenko calls for an inversion of current priorities: the neglected term (animation) is given precedence over the

privileged term (film), not only historically but also ontologically. In a often vertiginous style that favours chiasmus and temporal inversions, Cholodenko stages the relation between cinema and animation as a form of 'mise-en-abime' in which cinema is not never animation, and film studies are always already animation studies. Animation almost seems to become a privileged term. On the other hand, in the manner of deconstruction, this inversion of priorities is not intended to privilege and thus ground animation but rather to open ontological inquiry. The study of animation thus promises to renew the grand theoretical questions that film studies, in Cholodenko's opinion, formerly raised but subsequently failed to pursue in earnest.

Such an approach resonates with Derrida's deconstruction, and as such, raises questions about what exactly is at stake in deconstructing the cinema/animation construct. After all, Derrida's critique of metaphysics meticulously unraveled the tautological constructions that grounded power formations associated with Western modernity. But what kind of metaphysics is associated with cinema/animation? Because Cholodenko's work insistently refers to simulation and to life, it would seem that life and reality themselves demand philosophical reconsideration, even though it is not entirely clear in his account if a specific formation of power is at stake. I will return to this. Suffice it to say at this juncture, Cholodenko's view of animation reprises the oscillation between a specificity thesis and a modernity thesis. On the one hand, his account tends not simply to bracket the specificity of animation or cinema but to situate animation as *the* site of non-specificity or indeterminacy vis-à-vis cinema. Animation comes before film, subsumes and underlies it, and opens and extends it. On the other hand, not surprisingly in light of Cholodenko's vision of animation as a site of ontological indeterminacy at the heart of cinema, he associates animation primarily with the postmodern. Much as Lyotard came to see postmodernity as a site or moment of perpetual indeterminacy nascent within modernity, Cholodenko inclines toward a rather massive postmodernity thesis in which animation at once anticipates and comes after the modernity of cinema.

As an introduction to an exceedingly diverse collection of essays, this is a cannily ambitious and capacious vision of animation. Cholodenko's is a Janus-faced vision that allows animation at once to ground and to 'unground' any particular study of animation. Animation is at once a new object of study and the anti-disciplinary object par excellence. Thus we are invited to read any essay on animation, however localized and specific, from the angle of an inoperative specificity that foils and complicates any attempt at a disciplinary formation such as animation studies.

As if echoing the two-pronged gesture of their editor, the essays in *The Illusion of Life II* fall neatly under two general headings, heading in two directions. The first nine essays, grouped under such national rubrics as 'Japan,' 'the United States' and 'Japan and the United States', not only rely on received national identities but also deal largely with 'traditional' cel animation, that is, animation composed primarily by applying ink and colour to celluloid 'cels' that are

then photographed. The latter seven essays in *The Illusion of Life II*, under the general aegis of the 'expanded' field of animation, focus more on CGI, computer games, and flight simulation, as well as animation in a broader field of operations (such as character licensing). Simply put, it is as if there existed two fields of animation — an expanded field and a contracted or limited field. The expanded field conjures up a postmodernity thesis (or a series of postmodernity theses) in which animation is a sort of omnivorous mediator ideally suited to technologies that capture and recombine different media digitally. Animation is a central contributor to the formation of a general mediatic or techno-economic condition. In contrast, the limited field presumes defined places and identities that become manifest in specific instances of animation. In effect, the limited field gravitates toward a specificity thesis for animation; but rather than demonstrate or argue for the specificity of animation, the essays tend to attribute its specificity to underlying formations of national culture. This tendency is most evident when Japanese animation or anime is in question.

Significantly, Japanese animation does not make an appearance within the expanded field of animation, even though, as Cholodenko observes, Japan is the world's largest producer of animation. Anime is constrained to the contracted and limited field of animation, as if inherently. What is more, the essays on Japanese animation consistently place it in dialogue with American animation and generally shore up a sense of its unity and identity rather than its diversity or multiplicity. Kosei Ono's contribution, for instance, offers a brief anecdotal history of animation in Japan in which American animation is a constant point of reference. He calls attention to citations of American cartoon characters in prewar Japanese animation and, even though he wishes to acknowledge the diversity of animation and individuality of Japanese animators, he nonetheless defines Japanese society (as homogeneity) in contrast to American society. In other words, in place of a specificity thesis or modernity thesis of animation, Ono provides a nation thesis, a Japan thesis, in which Japanese animation tells us more about Japan than about animation.

Pauline Moore also uses Japanese animation to talk about Japan, but her discussion greatly complicates our image of Japan. She proposes that forms like manga and anime "live out, that is, reanimate the trauma of The Bomb, as do the cute characters found therein" (23). For Moore, the cute characters of manga and anime are undecidable in terms of location or place, neither Japan nor America, neither East nor West. Yet her evocation of 'The Bomb' also implies a historically specific origin to this non-locatable cute, even if that origin is traumatic and thus difficult to represent. Moore makes clear that cute comes from America, as did the atomic bombs. In other words, the trauma inherent in Japanese cute implies a real origin and direction; it is trauma vis-à-vis American power. Interestingly enough, Moore's interpretation recalls arguments made popular by conservative and rightwing commentators in Japan in the 1990s. They argue that the trauma of postwar defeat, symbolised in the

atomic bombs, has so thoroughly distorted postwar Japan that younger generations have no sense of nation, history, or responsibility. Some commentators see in Japanese cute a refusal to grow up that derives from nuclear trauma and Japan's defeat. Artist Murakami Takashi enshrined this logic in his 2005 'Little Boy' exhibition. Simply put, evocations of Japan's nuclear trauma frequently imply an ideology of national victomology.

Moore, however, steers clear of victomology, striving to move beyond her initial investment in the logic of origins whereby Japan borrows or adapts American forms. Ultimately, in anime, she detects Japan coming into its own, no longer a passive borrower or adapter but now an active exchanger and trader. While she presents this transformation in a relatively positive light, I think that there are bleaker implications. For instance, Moore articulates this Japanese trading and exchanging vis-à-vis America, as if it were only possible for Japan to act on the world via a US-Japan circuit. What is more, to transform the US-Japan relation from dominator-dominated to equal partners, Moore must somehow lessen or domesticate the trauma of the atomic bombs. This is precisely what she notes in Japanese manga and anime: a transformation of nuclear trauma into a general critique of technology. The full implication of her observations is that Japan emerges as a full trading partner with the US by transforming its traumatic experience of the atomic bombs into a generalized vision of a technologized world suitable for export. It seems that mutations in cute make nuclear trauma exportable and exchangeable within the US-Japan global partnership.

If Moore appears more cheerful than I about such developments, it is because at some level her discussion picks up on a self/other dialectics of recognition (and a cultural hermeneutics) that almost invariably comes into play in discussions of Japan. Japan's values must be posited as different from those of the U.S. and at the same time must be recognized by the US. American fans often express a desire for fuller recognition of the artistry and other virtues of Japanese animations, and the new visibility of anime within the American mainstream commonly became cause for celebration in the 1990s. A politics of identity and recognition frequently arises around anime. For instance, in a painstakingly researched essay that addresses allegations that Disney's *Lion King* borrowed directly from Tezuka Osamu's *Jungle Emperor* (aka *Kimba the White Lion*), without acknowledging its debt to the Japanese master, Fred Patten ultimately concludes that the real scandal is not that Disney borrowed from Tezuka but that Disney refused to admit that its animators knew of Tezuka. He writes, "it was Disney management's insistence that, despite its worldwide animation expertise, it had never heard of Tezuka or of *Kimba* — that they were not worthy of knowing about — which caused the entire controversy" (311).

Such a politics of recognition feels decidedly at odds with the deconstructive play of animation envisioned by Cholodenko, and in which "a spectre haunts the animatic relation between the two nations, one... called 'Japanimerica'" (55). The concern for recognition and identity that commonly arises around Japanese animations does not countenance a third spectral term as the

condition of (im)possibility for differentiating Japan and America. It gives identities priority, and its logic is, in deconstructive terms, supplemental. As such, discussions that explore specific features of anime can easily turn into proclamations of Japanese difference or even Oriental difference. The specificity thesis can quickly morph into the nation thesis or the exoticism of the Oriental supplement.

In a lively and inspired exploration of how anime visualises the invisible yet palpable energies of sound, for instance, Philip Brophy turns to differences between Western and Eastern thinking about matter and energy in an attempt to bring specificity to anime. He suggests that the visualization of sounds and forces in anime derive from an Oriental tradition that gives force priority over matter, the invisible over the visible, and by extension, the spiritual over the material, and the metaphysical over the physical. Here it is not so much Japanese identity as Eastern spirituality that is at stake, and across a series of very different anime, Brophy finds that their depictions of the sonic are consonant with Oriental thought. Oddly, however, many of the features of Oriental thought in Brophy's essay — the vibrational whole, the reverberation of the past in the present, the emphasis on forces acting on forces — are central concerns of *modern* philosophy in Japan and the West. William Routt's essay, for instance, is also concerned with how the manga and anime versions of *Gunmu* present something invisible yet somehow perceptible — the soul and life. Like Brophy, he poses a phenomenological question — how do we experience something invisible or imperceptible in anime? Thus, alongside Brophy's account, Routt's essay serves as a reminder that the crucial question is not whether anime is, in essence, traditional or modern, or Eastern or Western. Rather, the question is one of why resolutely modern questions, when posed in the context of manga or anime, so often imply a movement beyond Western modernity — either toward the postmodern or toward the ancient East or both at once. Here, too, Cholodenko's deconstructive sensibility invites us to detect a movement of supplementation vis-à-vis anime, calculated to delimit and manage its surplus.

In an essay that delves into the dynamics of dualism in animation (in the form of innocence versus experience), Jane Goodall uses an anime film, the soft porn rape monster fantasy *Urotsukidoji*, to exemplify a worldly and experienced mode of address. Calling attention to quasi-mythic structures of dualism in animation, Goodall largely brackets questions about culture until the end of the essay where she cites, for 'cultural context', Karel van Wolferen on how the "alleged absence of any fundamental dualism in traditional Japanese thought is extolled even today" (169). The implication is that the anime film can thus stage or perform dualism to mock it, and Goodall challenges us to think about this humorous manner of enacting dualism as fundamentally different from poststructuralism. Yet, because Goodall turns to traditional Japanese thought to make her point, her observations about 'mock dualism' raise questions about how she stages identities and oppositions, about their performative status. What would it mean to see Japan animation as staging and

constructing 'Japan' rather than embodying or reflecting a received identity (traditional Japanese thought)?

This is the other face of deconstruction, the flipside of Cholodenko's *Japanimerica*. The deconstructive sensibility encourages us not merely to expose the tautological nature of received identities but to account for how something becomes present to begin with. In this respect it is noteworthy that the three essays grouped under the rubric 'The United States' do not fuss about American identity or cultural context. Rather these essays address basic conflicts in value that emerge across varieties of animation. Interesting enough, it is Disney animation (or something like it) that provides the point of reference for articulating a critical modernism within American animation. With great subtlety, Edward Colless shows how "the story of the little mermaid is an impure thing that excuses the image of a carnal embrace" (239-40), deftly revealing the sly machinations of desire that make Disney's *Little Mermaid* something very different from a sentimental child's tale. Richard Thompson explores transformations in the postwar American cartoon, grounding the shift from prewar to postwar through a contrast between Disney and Warner Bros. While *Duck Amuck* makes evident the breakdown in prewar unities of character and narrative, it is ultimately in Robert Clampett's *The Great Piggy Bank Robbery* that Thompson sees the deepest realization of the empty quest film, built on a series of deferrals and the futility of desire — in other words, a true cinematic modernism comparable to *Citizen Kane*. Freida Riggs defends Ralph Bakshi's use of rotoscoping of live action footage in *The Lord of the Rings*, which critics almost universally maligned. She sees in this alleged failure of animation a raid on Ideals that recalls Husserl's vain search for a foundation for philosophy, wherein she detects the outlines of a practical and conceptual emphasis on process, and endless quest.

Alongside the individual merits of these essays, what interests me is the overall tendency to discover, or rather to re-discover, modernism through highly localized discussions of examples of animation. Film studies historically developed an emphasis on film's specificity, which spurred the production of a 'classical film style' or an 'institutionalized mode of representation' (to use Noel Burch's term), as well as a critique of classical institutionalized conventions. In contrast, the above essays on animation at once presume and bypass the articulation of a specificity thesis for animation. Yet it seems that Disney animation comes to stand in for a 'classical animation style' or an 'institutionalized mode of animation.' It is vis-à-vis Disney that modernism emerges, as if by default. This default specificity thesis has consequences for situating anime within animation studies. Japanese animations tend to be defined as modernist in advance rather than as 'classical' or 'institutionalized', which means that their modernism is also an identity, a cultural context, a limited field, and is thus constrained to yearn for recognition within the expanded field (transnational postmodernity), even while its triumph there is presumed.

Film theory and postcolonial theory have registered a similar impasse. In film theory, the insistence on the classical Hollywood

style encouraged the notion that everything that did not strictly accord with Hollywood form constituted a modernist response or even resistance. Entire national cinemas as well as American films that disturbed the classical style might equally well be construed as modernist. Somewhat analogously, postcolonial scholars have recently begun to express concern that deconstruction, as used in postcolonial theory, has tended to generate ever more sophisticated studies of the West while unwittingly discovering pretty much the same kind of otherness in every discussion of the non-West. Needless to say, the fault may not lay with deconstruction per se but with a general deconstructive manner of thinking, where difference is posited as difference vis-à-vis American or Western norms and conventions — explicitly or by default. In the essays on animation grouped under national rubrics in *Illusion of Life II*, something similar happens, partly because the specificity of animation is assumed and yet remains largely unspecified. As a consequence, to speak deconstructively, animation *surplus* is staged as *supplement*. While this tendency becomes most evident in discussions of Japanese animation, it is indicative of a general tendency to imagine animation not in terms of a specific ground, material conditions or orientations, technologies, discourses, power formations, or even modernity. Instead animation appears ideally suited to a renewal of modernism and its modalities (vernacular nationalism, Orientalism, supra-humanism). The material limits of animation studies appear almost synonymous with those of modernism. The limited field thus forces us to ask: what is the future of modernism? Why modernism today?

The Expanded Field

While the essays grouped under the expanded field are equally diverse, as a whole they present a shift toward questions of power. Rex Butler's essay makes for a good transition, for, in a manner reminiscent of Žižek and psychoanalytic theory, Butler sees in animation a point of departure for a careful reading of the work of negativity within popular American films. An animation-like moment in *Schindler's List* — a girl hand-coloured in red within the black-and-white film — disturbs and exposes the mechanisms of fantasy for it bears "some analogy to what the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan spoke of as the 'stain', that place in the image from which the image looks at you" (320). Butler finds analogous negativity in the figure of the extraterrestrial in *E.T.* and in the king-father in *The Lion King*. In the latter instance, he concludes, "the king is the place holder of void. It is only through the king that we come to understand there is no actual locus of power" (329). In other words, the king is like the phallus in Lacan, and animation the stain that forces a reckoning with castration. Thus Butler feels that "the 'idealism' of Spielberg and Disney offers a far more radical deconstruction of capitalist ideology...". They are "great critics of the postmodern" (330).

Butler does not elaborate on capitalist ideology or the postmodern, but because his emphasis is on subject formation via the structuration of the visual field in

general (rather than animation specifically), one surmises that ideology here refers to any structuration of visual field (subject formation) that hides or does not acknowledge its fundamental impossibility, its illusory and tautological nature, its point of internal otherness. In contrast, by staging an illusion of illusion, Spielberg and Disney expose “this world itself as an illusion” (330). Butler thus brings new theoretical rigor to the modernism implicit in prior essays, finding modernist texts and auteurs engaged in a struggle against the illusion of plenitude (the imaginary) that masks the lack at the heart of subject formation.

Likewise, in an essay discussing at length Derrida’s deconstruction of the metaphysics that gives ontological priority to speech over writing, Annemarie Jonson finds in Porky Pig’s stutter a deconstruction of plenitude, life without death, and life without difference that “hyberbolises *non*plenitude, disclosing the thantic interval” (447). Much as Butler explores the articulation of an internal material limit to the illusion of visual plenitude, Jonson discovers in the pig’s stutter an internal material limit on spoken plenitude within animation — to wit, the stain as the condition of (im)possibility for seeing, writing as the condition of (im)possibility for speech, and death as the condition of (im)possibility for life. For me, the interest of these kinds of deconstructive thought lies in their insistence on looking at the internal limit of a material formation or modality. What strikes me as odd, however, is their lack of interest in animation specifically — one might say the essence or ontology of animation. Instead what comes to the fore is a deconstruction of the essence or ontology of the human.

Thus, in a beautifully turned deconstruction of mechanism versus animism in the history of Western thought, Cholodenko shows how the mechanism has operated as the unacknowledged condition of (im)possibility for animistic schools of thought, and conversely the living or animated for mechanistic thought, which tautology extends into film and animation theory. He then proposes a third term, the automaton, as a sort of impossible ground for both schools of thought. Here, too, deconstruction of ontology moves toward the human, and the human automaton takes priority. He writes, “man is always already hybrid, ‘man-machine’ — ‘animate inanimate’..., what operates in both domains of artificing the human — the animistic and the mechanistic — is simulation, the human is always already a simulation...” (494). While Cholodenko’s account opens into broader questions about the fascination with life and movement as well as the ground for mimesis, it nonetheless dwells on the human face to face with humanoid automatons, dolls, demons, cyborgs, and other folds of the human.

At stake in these variations on the deconstructive turn, then, is the status of the human and humanism. While one might well ask if such approaches to animation are not narrowly axed on the human (anthropocentrism) to the exclusion of other material essences and ontologies (cinema, animation, media), there also seems to be something about animation that returns us to a confrontation with the human, which might productively be taken up in greater

detail. The other essays within the expanded field which address power formations also consistently return to questions about the human. Patrick Crogan, for instance, provides an overview and finely honed analysis of the military development of flight simulation and its impact on virtual reality. Insofar as he focuses on technologies, his point of departure promises to part with anthropocentrism. At the same time, perhaps because Virilio’s discussion of the logistics of perception consistently provides a point of reference for him, Crogan’s critique of technology implies a sense of the complete loss of a human-scaled and human-centred life world, albeit less explicitly than Virilio. But it is still the human that is at stake, almost nostalgically. Crogan’s emphasis makes us think about what is at stake in the deconstructive turn of other essays. How does the deconstruction of the human respond to the technological derealization of the human world announced in Crogan and Virilio?

The human also stages its return in a brilliant essay that considers in detail the ontology of animation (the essence of its technology, as it were). William Schaffer considers the consequences of the immobility of the camera in animation. With Gilles Deleuze’s ontology of cinema and its emphasis on camera movement as a point of reference, Schaffer stresses “the performance of an invisible hand” (466) in animation, different from yet analogous to the mobile camera of cinema. For Schaffer, animation thus entails a tension between the animator’s control over the character and the animator’s invisibility, resulting in a control image in which the “position of the controller, invulnerable and all powerful, is the one all characters strive to capture for themselves as their chaotic encounters unfold...” (471). Thus the ontology of the human reappears, in the form of allegories of ‘divine creative freedom’ versus ‘impotence’. While Schaffer nicely avoids psychologising this relation, the promise of looking at the ontology of animation gradually gives way to an account of how animated characters find themselves in an *animatic abyss* (which contrasts sharply with Deleuze’s divergent series). It is as if the indeterminacy proper to animation becomes displaced onto the characters’ experience of a crisis in authority or ‘natural’ sovereignty. But that crisis is as much an effect of anthropomorphism in analysis as it is of animation.

An equally challenging essay by Ben Crawford on character licensing and animation is especially provocative in light of Schaffer’s emphasis on animator and character. Crawford stresses “a collaborative, corporate model of authorship, one conceived of as operating within strategic responses to competitive marketplaces around the globe” (421). On the hand, he sees the enforcement of intellectual property and copyright laws as the basic operating reality of the animation industry. On the other hand, he considers the seven main criticisms of licensed merchandise, finding that such criticism typically entailed an elitism blind to its own practices and values, while projecting them onto children. Countering such criticisms, Schaffer concludes, “at the heart of merchandising and children’s entertainment lies not the rejection of humanism in a festival of aimless

effect but rather the recruitment of the power of affect liberated from its humanistic bonds” (421). In contrast to Schaffer’s emphasis on the image, Crawford, for strategic reasons, wishes to dispense with image analysis to underscore the impact of character properties. Yet surely the dynamics of the image are as real as those of the market and corporate law. If we take up the challenges issued by both Schaffer and Crawford, both the ‘production machine’ and the ‘image machine’ demand further attention, as does the relation (and non-relation) between them. Crawford indicates as much when he puts forth the question of “the power of the persona rendered as image”.

In assessing the video game *Street Fighter*, accused of inciting racial violence in the wake of the Rodney King riots, David Ellison first considers how the impulse toward privatisation and securitisation has been extended to information, such screens and data flows have become as much a part of protective siege-resistant architectures as metal or other materials. Critical attention, he notes, gravitated toward video games, particularly those featuring combat, as a convenient scapegoat — whence the notion of the Gulf War as a Nintendo War. Ellison, however, finds that *Street Fighter* “utterly subverts” the “kind of racist typology” in which “their body speaks the truth of their character”, a mode that he sees prevalent in other visions of interactive or immersive technologies (360-61). Once again, as if ineluctably, questions about animation in relation to power formations direct attention toward the human, here articulated in character ‘types’. While I am not sure that I agree with Ellison that *Street Fighter* subverts racist typology by assuming that “all races and species are capable of violence” (360), his comments are especially interesting in light of the emphasis in other discussions of animation on character properties, humanoid automatons, the invisible control of characters, and even stuttering humanoid animals.

The study of animation in the expanded field of power relations consistently gestures toward the conditions of (im)possibility for human existence — but not simply as universal ontology but as biopolitics. Maybe it is here that studies addressing animation in its specificity might shed new light on contemporary power formations by focusing an inquiry on the material limits of animation. One of the strengths of *The Illusion of Life II* as a collection anticipating the current boom of interest in transnational flows of animation comes of its demonstration that it is not simply the illusion of life that is at stake but the politics of life. Thus the reappearance of modernist and humanist conceits around the study of animation promises something more than a simple repetition of modernism and humanism, potentially inviting us to confront the physiology of power inherent in the intersection of the animate typologies with new information technologies and transnational capital.

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Exchanges: Queue or Swarm?

By Gerard J. van den Broek
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"Millions of people, swarming like flies round Waterloo underground."
(Ray Davies, *Waterloo Sunset*, 1967)

I hail from a country that has been queue-less for centuries. Isn't Holland renowned for its unorganized masses of people at railway stations, tramway and bus stops and attractions park box offices? The Dutch just don't queue up, much to the grief of foreigners visiting our country, who complain about our rudeness. Though not commenting on the rudeness of my fellow citizens — a pestering experience for the natives, too — this was, at least, one of the elements that triggered my attention to The Queue Project of Gillian Fuller (SRB 16.3 2007). However, after reading it and relating its notions to both my experience as a Dutchman, an anthropologist brought up in the Leiden School and a wildlife photographer with a track record of many thousands of hours in the field, I decided to combine these three, which culminate in this comment.

"The Queue Project attempts to locate the political in the regulatory micro-processes of movement and non-movement of bodies by exploring the cultural techniques (or rather *techniques*) of distribution architecture, logistic organization and what one might call organised directionality of groups."

With this rather broad and practical definition, I have enough space to allude to various domains; and I will. The queue is, as Fuller also implies, a particular form of group, an entity that incorporates a fair number of bodies, positioned in a unidirectional way: a line. A line might be either straight or bent, but a line is a line (though not in the arithmetical sense, there a line is the shortest connection between two identified points). Here, however, the line remains characteristic in the sense that it is a formation of one body after another, and only one body "thick", at least that is the ideal queue, I presume.

Queues can be found in many domains, as Fuller shows us. These range from people queuing up for the dole, as pictures of food distribution actions in the Third World show us, to data in computer networks waiting to be processed, and telephone calls waiting to be put through; with the arrival of the call centres, we all know that this contributes to a rise of heart failure and strokes in Western society, because of the long periods one has to wait, the terrible music that is playing into your ear while waiting, and, last but not least, the inadequate way your problem is solved. In an age of communication, here the medium definitely is the message, and it leads to complete disaster and not to answering your question.

Outside the realm of humans, we also find the queue, the same type of alignment of living bodies. Ants, for instance, queue up frequently, when going on the prowl, when looking for a place to build a new nesting hill, etc. Some species of migratory birds venturing to their breeding grounds or winter quarters take off and queue up for their journey. Seemingly, well-organised birds flock together many weeks before they leave. They feed, sleep, and migrate together from field to field (I have lapwings and geese in mind here). The huge difference between geese and lapwings is that lapwings in contrast to geese do not form a formation; the flock on the ground is the same as in the air: a loosely built up group of individuals that more or less stays together while moving in a certain direction, whereas the geese line-up in two rows as it were in which both front parts come together so that the shape of a V is the result.

It is interesting that after forming the V-shaped formation, the animals are mostly grouped together in a loosely knit construction. Our group of geese feed together on one particular field — consuming large quantities of grass, much to the farmer's regret.

Not all the geese are busy feeding; instead, they are on the lookout for danger; these are the sentinels. Therefore, despite their group behaviour, not all geese act the

same, some clearly have a task, which they fulfil conscientiously, which makes geese the best guards ever, even in your own backyard. There must be some sort of organizing principle here as all geese groups show the same kind of behaviour: it is structured, predictable and repeats itself time and again.

Sparrows seem to have similar behaviour. These constantly tweeting little birds flock together during the fall and roam fields and meadows in search of food, too. However, there do not seem to be any guards; repeatedly, small quantities of birds more or less jump off haphazardly, fly just a few meters and come down again continuing their search for food. Looking at a field full of numerous noisy sparrows inevitably brings a sense of chaos and not an organizing principle in mind. Yet they all know what they are doing, so it seems, when they take off and fly to the south.

However, before they fly, they not only start feeding, but also sleeping together. Here we witness a most startling natural phenomenon; they gather near large trees in the field, or a railway station in the city. Their gatherings form a spectacular show for everyone to see: the sparrows start to swarm! Before they finally settle down for the night, thousands, sometimes tens of thousands of sparrows, flock together in the sky rather close to the place where they will spend the night and they start zigzagging through the sky, forming patterns like clouds which change shape with the speed of light; a continuous flowing movement is both seen and heard, as the wind ruffles through their feathers. It is impossible to predict changes in swarm shape. And it goes on and on. Suddenly, as by command, they all approach the tree or the railway station, roost and leave us standing in awe. We have seen a miracle of nature.

The remarkable thing is that sparrows, when they have landed (at the railway station) roost mostly on the electric wires or on latches stretching often for hundreds of yards, and form, quite accidentally, a queue! The difference between the geese and the sparrows is obvious. Holgerson's friends

are much more organized than the noisy sparrows. Albeit that both species are cosmopolitans and travel widely. While sparrows travel in flocks, geese seem much better organized and form a V-shaped formation. Both, however, exhibit the principle of sharing energy.

Travelling geese, we have seen, fly in V-formation, and when we are able to watch this for a little while, we see that the foremost place in the formation is on a shift basis. The front flyer is dismissed after a period of time and another goose takes his place somewhere from the two “legs” of the rest of the formation. This may be an individual somewhere from the middle or the back though never the second or third in line. It is obvious that the geese are collectively saving energy. Any cyclist can tell you that riding behind a vehicle makes successful use of drag. Geese know this natural phenomenon and apply it for both short and long hauls. The mutual distance between individual geese, once up in the air, is always more or less the same, but somewhat smaller according to my own personal observations than when they are feeding. Not so for the sparrows; they flock closely together when swarming, and it seems a miracle how they manage to stay so close together *and* follow one another so consistently. The “ratio” behind this is on the one hand much simpler than expected, but as a phenomenon much more complex.

How is it that thousands of birds do not collide, yet stay closely together, and follow a — unpredictable — flight and still seem to have a “direction”? When in a swarm birds do not orient on the entire group; instead, they only focus on their immediate neighbour, and when they all do this together, and at the same time, not one will leave the swarm and, thus, the swarm stays together. However, this is only possible when they also adapt their speed to their immediate neighbour, using optical principles, as far as researchers know, though their feathers make a ruffling sound each time the swarm changes direction, but this is not the result of intentional signalization.

Swarms seem to have attracted much more attention than queues, probably because of the seemingly inexplicable principles that seem to govern them. The swarm is suspected of having a certain form of intelligence based on collective behaviour in decentralized, self-organized systems. Gerardo Beni and Jing Wang introduced swarm intelligence as a term in 1989 within the context of cellular robotic systems. As I am not an expert in artificial intelligence — I am not even an expert in the natural variant — I would like to at least try to tackle both phenomena from a perspective that is more familiar and trusted to me: structural analysis. When I look at both queues and swarms, a number of opposing characteristics are forced upon me. Queues seem to be goal oriented, whereas swarms seem to be a goal in their own right. We even attribute a sense of beauty to the swarm — *l'art pour l'art*? The swarm seems also to evoke a feeling of pleasure, whereas a queue is a drag. Nobody likes queuing up, even when the reward is an expensive ticket for a rock concert (NB over 23 million fans were in a queue for Led Zeppelin's latest concert, whereas only 23,000 could be the lucky ones.) Queues imply hope — take the food distribution in developing

countries, where nobody is sure of their share, like in WW II Europe, and people still (try to) queue up and nowhere as clearly as here: queue jumpers have a nasty problem; they are driven back while sometimes being severely beaten! Here we must make a distinction between the queue, the swarm and the crowd. Especially the last seems to have similar characteristics as the swarm, and is prone to confusion.

Well, we have seen in Fuller's article what a queue is, so I restrict myself to the distinction between the crowd and the swarm. A crowd, too, consists of a fairly large number (of people, animals, of living, moving creatures at least). A crowd is determined by time and space in the sense that it consists of a large number of, let's say, people, who are gathered in a confined space — the mutual distance between all individuals is smaller than people normally observe — and these people have gathered within a certain period of time. A crowd does not necessarily MOVE. When absolutely motionless, it is still a crowd. Dynamics are not a prerequisite, though often present, especially when individuals are moving toward the place of gathering as well as leaving it.

A swarm, however, only exists because of its dynamic character; it is a crowd, one might say, having internal dynamics in the way just mentioned. A swarm might have intentional and unintentional movement. A swarm of bees following an intruder clearly has group intentional movement, aimed at chasing and possibly killing its enemy. The swarm of sparrows, however, has no such objective. The sparrows do their act before they are going to roost; their swarming may be seen as a ritual; a set of actions with a predictable result, which still holds its value. The swarm is egalitarian in nature, whereas the queue is not. The queue implies ranking, first in row will get the tickets, for example. In the swarm there is no first, there also is no last. The two-dimensional character of the queue and the crowd is obvious, whereas the swarm is three-dimensional. People, therefore, cannot gather in swarms and as a result, they miss a special characteristic of the swarm, even if they form a self-organized group. Birds, clearly, are ahead of us.

Whereas the queue forms a linear constellation, the swarm is a chaotic, cloud-like and rank-less one. It is easily penetrable, whereas in the queue severe repercussions may result from queue jumping or breaking the code in another way. There is a code and Fuller has clearly demonstrated many aspects of it. What would be the code of the swarm? Staying together, keeping a more or less fixed distance from one's neighbour, and flying at the same speed; the rest is all chaos with its internal dynamics, unpredictability of form and inherent beauty. A swarm is much more exciting than a queue, and demands admiration and awe, whereas a queue asks for pity or relief if, as a passer-by, one does not have join it. The queue is mostly seen as a waste of time. A queue is an indication of time. That is why some amusement parks try to conceal their queues by zigzagging the routes in a way that people are packed together and form a quasi-crowd, which is much less clearly an indication of “time” and “waiting”. Nobody is waiting in a swarm. A swarm is joined mostly for pleasure, much less for a particular functional purpose. Proof of this is the fact that I have frequently seen

sparrows joining the swarm over the Utrecht railway station just as they please (when I look out the window of my office in the city of Utrecht, I have a great a vantage point). It's true that very small migratory birds seem to swarm, but I would prefer to call this a flock, and restrict the swarm to the beautiful, ritualistic flying around of the members of our avifauna. The migratory swarms do not show the same dynamics and characteristics of the ritualistic swarming of the same species. Moreover, the small migratory birds do not swarm at all in the sense I have described. Swarming by sparrows and jackdaws has more to do with dancing than with walking or going from A to B. A swarm, like a dance, is omni-directional, whereas a queue is unidirectional. A swarm may be joined from every direction; a queue from just one, otherwise you are in trouble.

Further, a queue has the intention of being dissolved, which is a characteristic the swarm lacks. A swarm starts as a swarm, not even a crowd starts as a crowd, nor does a queue start as a queue. In fact, both a swarm and a queue have quantitative and qualitative traits. Nevertheless, swarms are much more complex than queues. A queue is not that intelligent a solution for grouping people together; it is paternalistic, as it were, coercive, one-dimensional and not very creative. Compared to the swarm its dynamics are hopeless. And still, people queue-up everyday, everywhere (not in Holland, though), biding their time, bowing their heads to bureaucracy and power, and this is endorsed by the people themselves, and so, it is in a way also a self-organizing group, but based on ranking, not creativity and play.

When we look at the world of birds, and especially to the queue-like formation of a travelling group of geese, can we speak of a self-organizing entity? The V-shaped formation of geese has a type of dynamics different from the queue in a number of respects: it looks like a double queue; it goes forward in its entirety; places are changed from the back to the rear and vice versa (a sort of double queue-jumping, but with merely positive effects). In short, a formation of geese gets somewhere as a group not as individual animals that end up being the first in line and then end their participation in the queue. Queues are resolved; they get individuals somewhere; whereas formations of geese bring the group to a particular spot. The dynamics of a queue are less complex than a V-formation, which involves a collective goal and energy-saving behaviour among its members. At the same time, the V-shaped formation has also some characteristics of the swarm: the inter-individual distance is strictly observed — probably also for optimal flight efficiency — but also in terms of the internal movement of individual members within the formation.

Anarratology: Dennis Cooper's Transgressions

By Danny Kennedy

Dennis Cooper's texts are vivid with sluts and weaklings. His sluts reach their apotheosis in *The Sluts*, devoted to their anal carnival. The preposterousness of godhood is itself contested in *God Jr.*, the former text's more restrained twin. A vigil for the weaklings, these must include its faux-disabled narrator, the dead, and deadened.

This year Cooper, newly signed to Harper Perennial, continues to collaborate on a series of critically acclaimed theatre pieces with director Giselle Viéne; has a volume of poetry *The Weaklings* released; and sees the publication of an original collection of essays on his work forthcoming.

It is eight years since Cooper completed his signature novel series the George Miles Cycle, where sluts and weaklings co-mingle. Since then Cooper's themes and preoccupations seem to have fragmented, shards lodging in each of his subsequent books. *God Jr.* is suffused with the tender atmospherics, and ear for grief, often overlooked by Cooper's critics. *The Sluts*, in stark contrast, evacuates any recognizable ethical register in a riotous exchange of violent sexual imaginings. In these texts Cooper's interests seem apparently at their most polarized and isolated. But both sluts and weaklings walk through each text in turn, and both are required for Cooper's transgressive art to perform its disappearances.

Weaklings: The [a]narratologist's Imaginary ("The Remedial Logician")

The George Miles Cycle constitutes the core expression of Cooper's aesthetics; a sequence of five novels – *Closer*, *Frisk*, *Try*, *Guide* and *Period* — exploring the dynamics of sexualized violence and pursuing knowledge of the eponymous teenager's personality and dispersed subjectivity. Miles is the disturbed object of fascination driving the cycle's investigations. Both his eroticised body, and the vacant mannerisms that gesture from it, serve as a crucial standard of comprehension in the texts, allowing characters their inter-personal transactions and activities.

George was a real figure in the writer's life. The cycle began as an attempt to communicate with this absent friend and the sense of loss that had accreted to his memory. Cooper later discovered prior to commencing work on the final volume of the cycle that Miles had shot himself before the first book had even been completed. Many years afterwards in the poem "November 17, 1997" he writes:

So I forgot who you were,/and you wanted me to know. You're the/one who fired a gun at his head, so high/on whatever, and so depressed by my lack of whatever that you were afraid you might have otherwise not hit the target,/wherever I was at the time (2008: 40).

In these lines the trajectory of Miles' bullet is

ultimately, secretly directed at Cooper himself for his perceived neglect of the troubled youth. Miles and Cooper had been close friends in preparatory school, with the latter's narcotic experience enabling him to coach the former in coping with the more difficult outcomes of psychotropic adventure. The two developed a bond, re-uniting in their twenties as lovers for a brief period, only to be again separated; and followed by the confirmation of Miles' death in the mid to late 90s. Earl Jackson Jr. points out that "George Miles' names not the boy Cooper wanted to reach but the failure of these texts to communicate to him, to bring him back into Cooper's life" (2006: 89). The bullet's projection, in Cooper's framing of this terminal event in Miles' life, becomes an image of the space between them as individuals, a signifier of both directional distance and the vicissitudes of temporality. Miles' own tormented life, as well as Cooper's ambivalence, becomes the target of violence once death intrudes into the frame of experience. Since Miles is the primary integer of Cooper's multiplicitous desire, as enacted throughout the cycle's paeans to variations on his gaunt, pale, scraggly physicality, this poem's terrible site of meditation is in many ways the retroactive originary moment of Cooper's art. Like the death Miles is precluded from experiencing, this lonely self-execution cannot be recuperated by the writer; it is instead an impossible instant, his work arising from its deferred acknowledgement. The cycle's anguished insistence on representing both subtle and obscene substitutes for Miles somehow begins its repetitions here, in a moment the author is literally ignorant of, almost until the conclusion of the said cycle.

If the cycle is a monument to George Miles, then this unbearable death is concealed and finally unveiled by its construction. Cooper admits, "when you were here,/I never thought about you, but fell in love/with anyone who resembled you, I was/so haunted" (2008: 40). A ghostly series of resemblances piles up in the cycle, numerous secondary characters acting as a "parallel self" for George who is perpetually withdrawn and inaccessible (1989: 36). Miles is figured as "a badly tuned hologram", "a prop", his face redolent of "a Halloween mask" (4, 5, 15). In these details he emerges as the vacant and indeterminate passive boy, the cycle's chief icon. He is imprinted with the spectral incoherence of the physically degraded, emotionally exhausted teen, spooked by his own inarticulateness; he and his avatar's "dusty and spent as ghosts" (9).

Deprived of intentionality through a combination of drugs, dreaminess and the shibboleth of his own uncanny personality, George is forever acted upon and is rarely capable of any action himself, barely able to rouse himself sufficiently to escape the assault that almost kills him at the climax to *Closer*. He is lusted after, abused, distorted, maimed and *represented* relentlessly by the text and its protagonists. Marvin Taylor argues that *Closer* is a novel that is foremost about the

crisis of representation, a demonstration "that the extremes of representation to which Cooper brings us question the very possibility of creating literature in a world where representations are irreconcilable with their referents" (2006: 176). He highlights the dismembering fragmentation that de-structures the cycle's first novel. Although *Closer* is undoubtedly a novel fixated on the limits of representation, from John's dysfunctional efforts at Miles' portraiture, to Cliff and Alex's incorporation of him into a pornographic tableau, and Philippe's appropriation of George to enact his perversions, the text's representational argument is still only one aspect of Cooper's characteristic interest in the process of narrative and its specific imaginary.

So a particular space is opened up by the measure of Miles' missile: it is the space of relation and representation. In the cycle this relation is charted by arranging a narrative field in order to narrate firstly the imagined and recollected experience of Miles—so as to gain knowledge and understanding of his enigma; and secondly to experiment with and test this data through Cooper's concomitant obsession with dramatic violence. Basically, the cycle erects itself as a narrative architecture built to "represent the world" in "a form they can understand" (1989: 31). Cooper appears to align his work to an overtly conservative narrative mandate in order to achieve the perspicacity demanded by the burden of Miles' unrecoverable loss: a sympathetic representational definition capable of conveying a sense of their relationship in the text. He would seem to appeal to representation and to idealize form; artistic moves supposedly anathema to postmodern temperaments. Yet his approach to representation is neither a reactionary restoration of realism's tenets, nor a restaging of mimetic strategies in a weakened mode, as simply the "simulation of imitative form" (Gibson 1996: 71). Instead Cooper inaugurates a transgressive representational model that violates the imaginary space of narratology.

Cooper constructs his 'fictional' worlds according to a strict logic of representation and its limitations. He invigorates his transgressive texts by binding them tighter and tighter with representational prohibitions. In this way the work attains a fascination equivalent to that of George Miles in the text by aggravating its narrative structure, intent on measuring, studying, acquiring knowledge and information of the body's mysterious signification, with an anti-interpretive and morally appalling fantastical semiosis located in the sickening eruptions of anal violence which punctuate the cycle. It is this operation at the limits of a robust representation that recalls Elizabeth Young's intimation of an escape from compositional deadlocks in a writing aware of the "increasing sense that all the theories of postmodernity have been played out... and that fiction will be able to move on from here", remarks included at the tail-end of her seminal essay on Cooper's early novels (2006:

65). Discussing the structure of the cycle in pseudo-narratological terms Cooper himself says (Sunday, March 05, 2006):

When I was developing the cycle, I realized that what I wanted to do wouldn't work if I wrote in a straightforward narrative style. I realized I would have to figure out and design a particular kind of container suitable for the content and subjects I wanted to explore – a container that would organize, display, house comfortably, and allow a productive interaction between subjects that would otherwise either deflect or destroy one another.

Elsewhere Cooper argues that “contrariness and confusion” in his work stems from a perhaps typically ‘postmodern’ scepticism toward systematic thought, including the narrative form. “I just don’t believe in the idea that there is a system already in place that is capable of locating truth”, he confides to Robert Glück during their interview (2006: 252). Yet narrative as a perpetually risked container of heterogeneous objects and experiences is retained in Cooper’s texts. Glück, as the impresario of the so-called New Narrative literary inclination, shares a similar methodology to Cooper in claiming narrative as an epistemological and imaginative device, while at the same time transgressing its structure and delineations. This indicates a textual affect which inherits the prejudices against narrative heightened by postmodern aesthetics, but shifts this position so that it yields a new narrative structuring capable of expenditure, side-stepping the rote assumptions of ‘experimental’, atrophied writing.

Criticism has tended to place Cooper’s work alongside practitioners of so called Blank Fiction, often conflated with the Downtown New York writing scene, its origins in punk action, reading it as a thesis on the apathetic life-style bred by late capitalism and the numb aggression permeating our shared hyper-reality, an exhibition of consumerist environments, or a disputation with the transcendence of identity politics in queer writing. Sustaining an examination of Cooper’s inquiry into the (im)possibilities of narrative it is more instructive to read his texts in conjunction with certain practices closer in style to Glück’s version of so called New Narrative. In his “Long Note on New Narrative” Glück contends that New Narrative is a literature of the present, that its practitioners “did not want to break the back of representation or to ‘punish’ it for lying, but to elaborate narration on as many different planes as we could, which seemed consistent with the lives we led” (2004: 28). This vision of a state of representation consistent with lived experience coincides in part with a kind of autobiography: “by autobiography we meant daydreams, night-dreams, the act of writing, the relationship to the reader, the meeting of flesh and culture, the self as collaboration, the self as disintegration, the gaps, inconsistencies and distortions” (29). Cooper too is embarked on the representation of night-dreamt autobiography. New Narrative volunteers, just as Cooper does, a narrative form, a representational system that it determines in order to transgress it. “We

realize the mistake in the system, which is that the system is a system”, writes Glück (1987: 42). However, instead of adhering to a stultifying postmodern anxiety at narrative systems, New Narrative co-opts the system and its law so that they can transgress its boundary and divisions. As Georges Bataille famously puts it, “the transgression does not deny the taboo but transcends it and completes it” (1986 [1957]: 63). The system of narrative is transgressed by the content it attempts to contain and efficiently constrain by its logic; a logic that allows representation and approach. The transgression is an uncertain moment of rupture, like the imagining of Miles at the point of death. Such acts invite a representation that disrupt narrative and eventually must fail. Consequently, according to New Narrative, transgression in narrative form entails a complex negotiation of narratological prohibitions regarding the causality and sense-making of story, the relation between sequential events and the space of representation, comprising “the double necessity and impossibility of narration” (1987: 41).

For Glück, “Cooper is so close he’s abstract” (1984: 117). Representation in Cooper crushes its gaze into the human form with such intensity the eye collapses in vertigo. At the same time Cooper’s cycle is a narrative form that is architected, yet at the same time punished by the extremity of the material it assembles and organizes (‘DC on the cycle’):

I’d developed a game plan or overall structure for the cycle. It would take the form of a novel being gradually dismembered to nothing. The first novel would be the cycle’s body, and the succeeding novels could only consist of its material. Each succeeding novel’s form would reflect the damage caused by the violence, drug use, and emotional turmoil of the previous novel...I hoped that this strict structure combined with the more instinctive, chaotic dismemberment structure, would give the cycle the dual qualities of excessive form and improvisational looseness.

Representation is not revealed as an empty simulacrum of the real or glibly denuded in its constructedness, but instead performs its function as an analogue to the distant spaces traversed by the text’s subjects.

New Narrative writers, as well as being story-tellers, are simultaneously theorists of narrative, narratologists creating new narratologies as well as narrating new experiences. Andrew Gibson contends that the supposed science of narrative, like all purported objective applications of thought, corresponds to a particular imaginative element ineluctable from its elaboration. In this case the “narratological imaginary” is above all the identification with geometrics and the formal grid. According to Gibson’s analysis, narratology has primarily involved itself in two types of space, “the space of representation – [t]his is understood as the space of the real, the homogeneous space of the world” as well as “the space of the model or describable form” (1996: 3). In Gibson’s estimation “the narratological imaginary has been haunted by something like the reverse of poetic intuition, by dreams

of the geometric” and this has led to the idea that “for narratology, geometry is a kind of universal law” (5). Gibson sees this calcification of the narratological imaginary as an inhibitor for prospective readings of narrative, and advocates a distinctly postmodern narratology based on de-centred notions of force and energetics, in preference to the strict architecture of systematic narratology with its rigid concepts of form and representation.

The geometric laws of narratology rely on Necessity to uphold their fixed and logical system. Lev Shestov, Bataille’s philosophical tutor, views Necessity as the extraordinary limit that both orders the chaos of experience and disciplines the imagination within a rigorous series of categorization whose sum is confinement. Necessity converts all philosophy and art into the regularity of science through its subjugating claims. While Necessity allows knowledge to accumulate, it restricts the possible and diagrams the provocations of man into a relatable finitude, guaranteeing representation despite its inherent creative poverty. Shestov insists that “knowledge is so intimately bound to necessity” and that individuals endure “pain and bitterness at ineluctable Necessity” (1966: 49, 37). Necessity ensures the reproduction of structures of systematic thought that Bataille will associate with the designs of architecture, since “there is consequently no way to describe a system without resorting to the vocabulary of architecture” (1992 [1974], 33). If one does not submit to Necessity there is only the confusion of the heterogeneous that exceeds subjecthood and the space of representation: “Without architecture the world would remain illegible...the cosmos itself is architected” (35).

This heterogeneous reality enclosed by the space of representation and architected inside the delimitations of narrative in fact enables the transgressive mechanism of Cooper’s text. Glück notes (2004: 31):

transgressive writing is not necessarily about sex or the body – or about anything one can predict. There’s no manual; transgressive writing shocks by articulating the present, the one thing impossible to put into words, because a language does not yet exist to describe the present.

In this formulation the present indicates the object of representation; that which is brought into the restricted economy of the narrative field at the cost of its heterogeneity. The ‘new narrative’ is in fact a narrative transgressed by the excess of “the present”, the violence of the referent. Miles in his bedroom before his own death must be made to submit to the narrative grid and conform to representation so that some relation can be made between the eroticism of his existence and the position of Cooper’s text. But the horror and formless intensity of Miles debases and unsettles narrative, undoing the certainty and consolation of its representations. The sought after knowledge and information of the body is not discretely forthcoming but becomes ever more spiralling, even as it is obscured. If the traditional structure of narrative thrives on representation and the model of form then Cooper’s text is brought to a transgressive and precise failure at each of these points, a collapse that is an

opening to the impossibility of the referent it wishes to understand and contain. But it achieves this fall into the heterogeneous through a paradoxical project of narration. Representation and form are harangued and worked through so as to attain the limit of that irresolvable scene of violence and loss that is the cycle's core. Cooper's work founds itself in the narratological imaginary critiqued by Gibson, because of the very pathos of its obsession with space, limits, finitude, and restriction. It gives a calculated clarity to his "pain and bitterness". The narratological grid is appropriated as prohibition, and limit, to invigorate his textual transgression. This is attempted not as a sterile, retrospective, or ironic intellectual game, but as a practice offered to represent, with all its intractable compromises intact, the anguish and distances of experience. Narrative form (in the cycle's "gradual dismemberment") and human form, especially as evinced in the duplicated forms of Miles' models (in the abjection and violation of bodies in the text), are repeatedly transgressed and wounded at all stages of the cycle's unfolding.

As both narrator and narratologist, Cooper performs the function of what a part-title of *God Jr.* calls "the remedial logician". The geometrics of narrative, rather than being overcome in a writerly ethos of postmodern writing, are instead self-consciously accentuated, acquiring a counter-valent suggestiveness and austere poeticism, as they reinforce the uniformity and self-abnegating futility of narrative to house and represent the excessive present of the lived experience they aim to scaffold. The intended referent rejects its taxonomy and undoes the mathematics of the narrative's inquiry. Yet this is arrived at via the operations and work of the narrative, though it is narrated to a point of dissolution, confusion and breakdown. In this way Cooper's remedial logic, using narrative as a curative for the agonies of experience develops into a narratology without narratology, or the conceptual disturbance of an anarratology.

Sluts: The Excremental Fantasist ("The Childish Scrawl")

One of the more original ways Cooper attends to this in his text is the emergence of fantasy to upset and bring low the narratological imaginary in which his concerns are framed and distributed. Denis Hollier notes that "Bataille opposes to the levelling phraseology of philosophico-scientific discourse...something that he calls the virulence of "fantasies" (1992: 93). Referring to another part-title lifted from *God Jr.*, I would like to situate the play of fantasy in Cooper with what he calls "the childish scrawl". This fantastical "scrawl" appears in the text as a figuration for the transgression of narratology's remedial logic. While this opposition would seem to evoke Todorov's dialectic between the fantastic and the naturalistic, or properly representational, this binary is something different again. For one it is transgressive. Second of all, it not only turns on representation, but on the remote signification of a particular narrative logic, freighted with the anguish of its limitations. This virulent fantasy can only arise within this imaginary, and it gains power from its offensive challenge to this logic, a logic that enables it and finally transcends it.

In part the fantasy is the violent expression of the failure of the narrative to measure, block out, classify or arrange experience. It shatters the homogeneous world of representation, only for the narrative to have its boundaries restored once again, continuing upon its inherently failed project, a failure that reaches completion through the continuance of the narrative. As a momentary transgression of the arcane scientific discourse imprinted in Cooper's text (the desire to *know*, measure, interrogate, situate, disclose, understand, control the other...), the fantasy throws the poignancy of this structure into terrible relief. The fantasy works against its realization in the structure of the narrative. As Maurice Blanchot says of Henri Michaux, Cooper's is "an imagination that works endlessly against itself" (2001 [1943]: 225). It resists the "presiding idea" of narratological invention that "can give it a structure and impose a form on it" (225).

God Jr. is narrated by Jim, the distraught bereaved father of Tommy – his teenage son – killed in a car accident in which Jim happened to survive. The novel jettisons the familiar attention to wrenching sexual violence so prevalent in Cooper. What remains is the fantastic, frequently expressed in the excremental visions of the earlier cycle. Here, the fantasy of Jim entering the imaginary environment of Tommy's favourite video-game dominates the later half of the text. Jim melds with the platformer's bear hoping to somehow mimic and encounter a trace of his deceased son's experience. While his son remained aloof and mysterious to him in life, and absolutely unreachable in the silence of death, the computer game's structure affords Jim the impression of accessing the phenomenological texture and sensibility that perhaps animated his late son. This "remedial logic", this potentially curative course of action, results in the game narrative substituting for the narratological imaginary mapped by the cycle. Miles is here replaced by Tommy, another of Cooper's youths who is transfixed by his own sublime vacuity. Just as Cooper had written the cycle in remembrance to Miles, while also testing his visceral epistemology, in *God Jr.* Jim builds a folly in his yard *in memoriam* to Tommy; a monument designed to match a drawing his stoned son had made of a defunct piece of level design inside the same Nintendo game. The harsh, and by Shestov, and perhaps Gibson's account, inhuman geometric imaginary of the narratological system is made painfully transparent in *God Jr.*'s videogame scenes, mapping out and structuring Jim's emotional state. It illustrates in its rawest iteration the sensitivity and necessity of utilizing this grid, showing how Cooper embeds a formation within his text analogous to the distance and discontinuities felt by his characters, while also highlighting how this grid would seem to offer the possibility of interrogating and encountering, even abstractly, the beloved object of loss.

If *Period*, the final entry in the cycle, reduces the narrative form to a ruined skeleton and a grave for Miles, then in *God Jr.* even the flagrant bodily traumas of that work are absent. As much as the imagery of physical brutality in the cycle acts as the most extreme manifestation of fantasy in Cooper, its terror often encourages a reading that misses its significance as an outbreak which undoes the grid from within its own space,

defining and regulating its limit. In *God Jr.* the fantasy of blurring, through pot and grief, with the ludicrous "little costume" (2005: 81) of the bear game-sprite discloses a less obscene, but no less bizarre fantasy. It is a complex movement of virtual embodiment that both enables Jim's negotiation of the fabricated video-game world's actual geometric graphic narrative imaginary, and facilitates the ludicrous technicalities of this world to interact with him. Instead of a simulated exchange with his son, Jim/bear perambulates inside a delimited spatial model occupied by infantile, tokenistic fantasies – "gargantuan tropical plant[s]", "cacti", "cute...scorpions", "kindly sunflower[s]", and the "snowman" (2005: 91, 111, 110, 114, 148). His quest for what previous Cooper protagonists might conceptualize as "forms of information about what or who I am physically" generally passed on through sex, murder and the varieties of extreme experience, is a way to know the other in a profound and complete intimacy, a form of relation at the pinnacle (1991: 50). But as Bataille reminds us, at the pinnacle is collapse and "the fall 'is occasioned by a short circuit of knowledge and sexual bliss'" (1992: 103). This is the rupturing activated by fantasy.

God Jr. is a text littered with references to drawing: a motif originating in the very first chapter of *Closer* devoted to teen artist John's efforts at drawing Miles. A recurrent emblem of the act of representation in Cooper's writing, it surfaces in the novel as "blueprint", "JPEG", "fucked-up pixels", "doodling" (2005: 58, 67, 62, 58); a shifting array of visual signifiers holding out the possibility of optical, verifiable knowledge. These elements of the text are therefore linked to the remedial logic of narratological pursuit. But this is transgressed in *God Jr.* by a formless inveiglement upon this visual frame – what Cooper gestures toward in the expression "the childish scrawl". Ultimately the doodling of reality will devolve into opacity, as "the doodle's nothing more than a growing black dot...digging a hole" (58). "A messy little drawing" (representation) can collapse into an anal singularity, a grave of meaning (however appropriate or evocative), or deform into a scrawl, a nascent and troubling fantasy (71). Jim, "a real estate agent" (14) and consequently employed to "pencil in...render...delete" (87), is a subject trained to intervene in visual arenas arrayed with structures, constructs, architectures. Yet the monument he builds for his son is a translated fantasy, its blueprint a childish scrawl, a nonsense; rather than an orthographic plan it matches "some stupid puzzle" or "a stupid maze" (34). Tommy "has almost been erased. Soon his death will lack illustrations or even much of a story" (15). In its place will stand this eccentric empty backyard mausoleum. "But you want to talk about a puzzle? Try making up a world where having killed someone you love isn't important" laments Jim (160). This made-up world, this unconvincing structure, built to house bafflement and sorrow at death, and to rescue a sense of usurped intimacy between father and son, shatters before the intrusions of the fantastic. In this transgression the sad prison-house/refuge/echo-chamber of the narratological imaginary is damaged by the excess of these experiences. Jim's intoxicated 'bear-hood' is hailed as a god by the game's inhabitants when a convoluted theology

warps his progression. In this phantasm, God is the disabled, fraught and disenfranchised patriarch to a company of exaggerated, cartoonish creatures. As 'Dennis' remarks in *Frisk*: "Now I'm part of the fantasy that always fucks me over" (1991: 53).

It would seem that both Cooper and Bataille associate "fantasy with base matter, and indeed with scatology" (Biles 2005: 61). Jeremy Biles argues that fantasy is another function of the *informe*, the formless that ruins organization and structure. The idea in Cooper is narrative – "It imposes on the chaos of the world an order. The order of mere things: substantial reality" (60). For Biles, Bataille's view of fantasy contributes "to undo the structures and 'formality of systems' which are the product of the dominant tendency of thought – the tendency toward systemisation and ideality" (62). Fantasies also function by projecting the self, forging an ecstatic relationship with the other marked by "visions of laceration, woundedness" (64). Cooper's fantasies of "spectacular violence" (1991: 54), proffer yet another "ulterior life" (108), where he and Miles co-mingle in an impossible, excessive marriage, a life where death can obscenely manifest in an "incommunicable, obviously" (1991: 78) "dramatisation of fantasy" (Biles 2005: 63). Biles summarizes: "Fantasy, the base matter of thought, turns the *shape* of the body into the *base material* of flesh that no idea can comprehend" (66). This is the fantastical relationship between Cooper and his 'models'. Dennis Hollier relates fantasy to the "smudges and spots" of inkblot on the child's answer-book (1992: 121): the tiers of feint ruled knowledge smeared in "graffiti" (Hollier 1991: 121) (Cooper 2005: 87). Cooper fills his implacable studies and narratives with the haunted eros of distance and disconnection, this cramped space of representation where understanding might be possible: a space at times no bigger than the meanest anus. This project ensures its logic's sacrifice, curtailed and transfigured by the blinding scribble of an immature scrawl.

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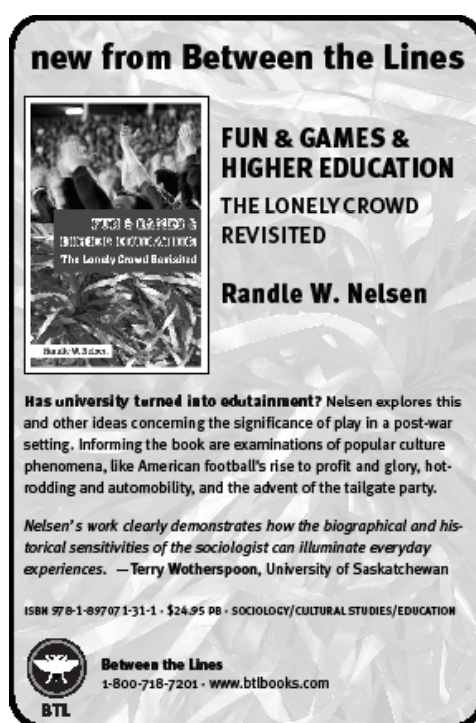
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Desiderata

By Gary Genosko

Fischer, Hervé, *Digital Shock: Confronting the New Reality*. R. Mullins, trans. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006.

The translation of this book from the French five years after its original publication begs the question: is the so-called new reality of the cyberworld at the millennium's turn still in some sense shocking? Surely it is not new. And is Fischer's humanist skepticism about the "brutality" and "barbarian magic" of the digital revolution – its "technological apartheid", "regression of the imagination", and erasure of "critical spirit" in its seductive "digital simulacrum" – exchangeable intellectual currency, today? Readers will need to grapple with what happened in the meantime (including updates inserted in order to break up the 90s frame of reference) of this book, between two language cultures, in the shadow of the rise of post-humanism,

and, indeed, whether Fischer's position itself has been accommodated and neutralized by the dreaded hegemon: the digital simulacrum whose promoters (a vague "new middle class") play at God by enlisting a runaway technoscience to transcend the interpretation of the world for its transformation at the altar of the pseudo-egalitarian binary code.

Fischer undertakes two substantive tasks in *Digital Shock*. First, he resists as he defines the digital simulacrum by formally presenting its thirty paradoxical laws. We do not know why there are thirty; at best they are a "suggestive sampling". Moreover, Fischer proceeds by the statement of paradox, presented in boxes as numbered laws. I suggest that readers begin this book at its end in chapter 23 with the explanation of paradox – "a paradox is either the registration of crisis, the dialectical engine of change, or the expressions of the societal desires and utopias that we project into the future of the human adventure" (255) – and the list of laws. Fischer could have been a bit clearer about why these are laws and not rules by linking law more explicitly to the formal structure of the digital and universality to a new reality, for example.

Sometimes there are further formal paradoxes supporting the paradoxical law, as in law twenty-five: "Cyber-pedagogy, which promises to be cheaper and more effective, actually costs more and destroys the foundations of traditional pedagogy" (188). The paradoxes of cyberpedagogy are: i) it is very expensive; ii) its rapidity overshoots the slowness of traditional learning; iii) it teaches old lessons with new tools that are in some ways antithetical to them; iv) superficial edutainment trumps the equation of knowledge with authority. All good points, but they are marshaled in defense of a rather flimsy and unanalyzed principle "save the [retooled] classroom teacher". What about the misery of underemployment in the contemporary university sector, which is not at all broached, and the fact that the ongoing imposition of cyberpedagogy violates faculty contracts and erodes intellectual property rights, not to mention extends surveillance and new analyses of performance that are made possible in and by the wired classroom. Fischer's brand of humanism is a paradise of compromises between the old and the new, subject to the techno-myth of improved pedagogical relations, and a perfectly liberal balancing act between knowledge as equally a thing of the mind and market. Here we see the negative effects of paradoxes: they produce bewildering results. Reflection and commodification are strange bedfellows.

Other paradoxes are not very paradoxical or, better, not paradoxical enough. Compare the eleventh with the twelfth; the former claims that the cyberworld's tendency to unify at one level permits and even promotes diversification (linguistic and cultural) at another. This straightforward, much-discussed, paradox is, in the latter case, the twelfth, actually dynamic. In the twelfth there is a simple series of statements: "Digital technologies are a powerful agent of cultural and spiritual development. They recover, disseminate, and record all previous cultures. They generate new cultural products and ensure their propagation. Computer language leads to a new aesthetic. The cyberworld comprises and institutionalizes a new cultural space-time that is exceptionally

dynamic and communicative” (101). This is a flat summary of mythic themes and its paradoxicality is found in its irony, not in the friction generated by the statement. Consider, for instance, the digital myth about communication (transparent, omnipresent, connectivity), which Fischer exposes as a de-metabolized communication emptied of social fullness, chez Baudrillard. It is ironic to revisit the myth (“...exceptionally dynamic and communicative”). The conclusion that may be drawn is that the character of the paradoxes are not uniform, and many diverge from the standard formula – something diminishes or increases at the same time as a correlate diminishes or increases, with both assigned a positive and/or negative value: “First Paradoxical Law: The regression of the human psyche is proportionate to the advance of technological power” (255). It is this kind of tensile and dynamically interesting paradox that best captures Fischer’s project.

As is expected in the cyber-literature, all of the critical topics that have come to identify it – its avatars, if you will – are rehearsed: speed kills, time flattens, history wanes, memory ephemeralizes, communication negates itself, books hybridize, talking heads virtualize... . Fischer puts his faith, however, in multimedia electronic arts that for him have the ability to “reconcile art with society”, that is, to steer a course between failed avant-gardes and a reductionist art market. Yet there is a danger here as technoscience has busily colonized the imaginary of creation; so, too, has government, as research-creation is now part of guided funded. Fischer invites the arrival of “artist- researchers” with the capacity to create iconic imagery by decoding the digital simulacrum. This very McLuhanesque, very nostalgic vision, quite usefully reminds us of international examples of innovation, but also thrives on promising examples drawn from Québec which may not be that well-known – like Hexagram, Softimage, Cirque du Soleil, and even more mundane but nonetheless inventive business people like J. Armand Bombardier, and institutions offering support to the cultural industries like the Caisse de depot et placement du Québec. Unfortunately, Fischer does not dig down into the institutional organigrammes and the social and political assemblages that made these ventures exemplary; instead, he opts for a roster of geniuses. His orientation is corporate. He would also seem to be allergic to the low-level pirates that Québec has produced of late – like the teen hacker Mafiaboy, lightly sentenced to eight months in open youth custody in 2001 for unauthorized use of computers after bringing down during the previous year the web sites of blue chip e-businesses (Yahoo, Amazon, CNN, Dell, Ebay) with a furious wave of Denial of Service attacks), or the ring of 17 botnet herders busted in February of this year for running huge networks of zombies for various criminal (identity theft, installation of malware like Trojan horses) and quasi-criminal activities (phishing and spamming).

When it comes to political reflection he stays with the macro level opposing poles of libertarian and neo-liberal ideologies that push/pull the cyberworld (simultaneously a space of adventure and intense scrutiny). However, he does take a page out of McLuhan and bend the analysis of the global village in a time of glocalization toward the

political question par excellence of Canadian culture: the question of Québec’s position within the federal model. It could be 1973, instead of 2006, for Fischer rehearses McLuhan’s sympathies (in *Forces*, no less, the journal sponsored by Hydro-Québec) to a tee: glocalization naturalizes Québec’s demands for independence. This is not “todaymorrow”, Fischer’s temporal inflection of glocality, but just “yesterday.” And his jibe at Toronto is completely in character.

Fischer’s penchant for paradox is often just an expression of ambivalence. His discussion of media convergence – it actually counter-reveals the irreducible differences of media – has one exception: the BlackBerry. But Fischer won’t give it the name “convergence”, and later complains about the myth of inventing all-powerful “gadgets that we can hold in the palm of the hand, that we imagine can do everything” (127). One wonders if Fischer himself is a CrackBerry user.

Digital Shock is very lightly notated – it is not a deeply researched book – and enlists only a few of the leading thinkers of Canadian technoculture like Pierre Lévy, Derrick de Kerckhove, and Arthur Kroker, with provisos included. Fischer contributes little to helping define the era of post-McLuhan debate for the emerging generation of scholars born in/of the simulacrum. These are the 0/1s, for Fischer, whose statistical significance he doubts.

One of the reminders of the *Digital Shock*’s mustiness is the recurring figure of the cathode ray tube – a technology eclipsed by a new generation of LCD flat screens and plasma projection devices. Surely, it is with nostalgia that one looks back, along with McLuhan, on television’s “ceaselessly forming contour of things limned by the scanning-finger” (*Understanding Media*, 72), that is, the continuous process of scanning by means of electrons fired by the cathode ray gun, sweeping across the lines of dots in the phosphor-coated mesh of the picture tube. Flickering, power-hungry, electromagnetic radiation spewing CRTs are “yestertoday’s” technology of choice.

Note on A-signifying Semiotics

In a recent article (“A-signifying semiotics,” *The Public Journal of Semiotics* II.1 (2008): 11-21) I attempted to explain that a-signifying part-signs do not appear, like signaletic stimuli, to require higher level semiotic functions engaging cultural contents or the kind of effects that typically emerge in and from the movement between signifiers; that is, they lack signifieds. To use a slightly different semiotic language, such signs establish new relations between form and matter in as much as they skirt substance in some manner; there is a tendency in the information age for a-signifying semiotics to maximize its machinic force - to rapidly evolve, speed up, acquire greater mobility, automate, miniaturize, and proliferate. In a-signifying semiotics part-signs work ‘flush’ (*travaillent à même*) with the real, more precisely, with the fluxes of technomaterial networks.

In short, a-signifying signs are akin to signals, yet they are perfectly adapted to the information age. These machinic trigger signs also have, as Félix Guattari taught us, much to do with the contemporary production of mutant forms of subjectivity (the raw

material of immaterial labour) that results from a generalized distancing from traditional territories and coordinates (ie., those of scriptural semiotics, for instance, in the era of hypertext and interactivity). Subjectivity is a raw material worked by informatic capital within the expanding fields of its systems of valorization, colonizing life by 1s and 0s and PINs, and access codes, subjugating not by knots but by nets; in the process modeling subjectivity through 24hr online banking, the protective ‘pet’ of automated tellers, instant credit, and points of access to accounts and financial services, the fix of quick cash and all the consumerist microvectors of pseudo-singularity as a risk profile, produced by an adaptable, flexible, creative, and subjugated cognitariat. Today, subjectivity works flush with finance capital and loses its savings.

I want to underline the point that meaning may not be essential, but politics is. All molecular phenomena display, for Guattari, a politics in lieu of a signified. I illustrated this with the example of the magnetic stripe on a bank card. On the magnetic stripe, which is located in a certain position on the plastic card, there are several tracks. These are not neutral tracks upon which the particles are lined up. Rather, of the three tracks available, the first was developed for use by the airline industry and the second is used by financial institutions. Each track’s format was developed by and for specific interests. The cards meet a variety of international standards, and function by means of specific algorithms. A-signifying machines may be used to ‘automate’ the messages of the signifying semiologies that, in a capitalist system, begin stirring at a young age, especially around basic training in capitalist behaviors, namely, credit.

On the fringes of infocapitalism there are no bank machines that will take your card; networks are finite. The networked radiation of the a-signifying part-signs that automatically trigger anonymous at a distance verification processes find their machinic potentiality temporarily exhausted as the banking systems like Cirrus, Interac, Plus and the rest terminate until further notice. A-signifying semiotics are perfectly adapted to the networked banking systems we use on a regular basis. They may be mobilized for the next extensions not yet actualized of the cash networks and placements of automated tellers and new magstripe tracks colonized by the next corporate players, and by the coordinated triggers that may just ensure that you and your money can be parted just about everywhere and at any time, at an impressive profit.

Information precedes signification, the potentialities of which are in machinic systems, the site for the study of a-signifying semiotics. Repetitive machinic signaletic stimuli are the stuff of the infocapitalist technoverse. But these are not the signals of an older semiotics. Rather, Guattari’s originality as a semiotic theoretician lies precisely in his innovative investigation of the characteristics of a-signifying part-signs and how they belong to the very texture of the informatic strand of the machinic phylum. Guattari regained signals towards the end of establishing the semiotics of the leading strand of machinic phylum – informatics – more and more held hostage by corporations in what is known as the surveillance postindustrial complex.