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Race Writing in the Internet Age

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by

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DEDICATION

For

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Race Writing in the Internet Age

By

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"Race Writing in the Internet Age" argues that the intensified forms of global economic integration made possible by Internet technologies have defined contemporary "postrace" narratives—narratives that, in turn, both formally embody and thematically challenge the racial ideologies that subtend this integration. The Japanese coders, South Asian hackers, "cyber coolies," African-American app designers, Korean- and Taiwanese-American social media addicts, and Nigerian "yahoo boys" who populate the contemporary American novel elaborate key contradictions between the "postracial" world of social technology and the global wage differentials that attend and make possible the Internet itself. In novels by Teju Cole, Bharati Mukherjee, Ruth Ozeki, Ed Park, Ishmael Reed, Gary Shteyngart, Colson Whitehead, and others, race disappears into a colorblind Web run through apparently abstract software algorithms, only to reappear in the wage gap between developed and undeveloped nations. However, these novels do not simply construct race in accordance with capitalist imperatives: they also sublimate technology into form, in ways that must change inherited understandings of the contemporary novel's relation to the information and communication technologies alongside which it came of age. Reading the "postrace" novel in light of new interdisciplinary research on

the cultural implications of software systems and computer code, fresh interest in formalist analysis, and ongoing work on global political economy, "Race Writing in the Internet Age" discovers a range of contemporary writers turning to algorithmic forms—computational techniques for market forecasting, models of viral transmission and social networking, the underlying principles of Web browsing and search—as a way of illustrating race's reconfiguration within the tech-integrated global market.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about how digital post-Fordism's rise has changed the way novelists of ethnicity represent race and the processes through which it is ascribed. Specifically, it is about how the Internet's thoroughgoing restructuring and integration of the global labor economy—its intensification of labor translocalization, mobility, flexibility, and precarity—gets registered by novelists concerned with how these structural changes in the world of work have destabilized race's traditional fields of reference and subtly transformed the ontological experience of racial selfhood and community. Keyed to the purportedly race-leveling affordances of digital post-Fordism's technologically-mediated labor markets, novelists of racial experience—including Teju Cole, Bharati Mukherjee, Ruth Ozeki, Gary Shteyngart, and Colson Whitehead—represent and theorize these changes by internalizing technical processes in their expositions of racial characters. In so doing, they engage a new mechanics of racial construction and ascription at a moment of intensified economic integration, when formerly naturalized sites of affiliation (nation, race, class) are said to have given way to a "postnational" and "postrace" world order. Testifying to the flexible and non-nationally delimited forms of social personhood generated by algorithmic models of networked global enterprise, these novels equally attest to race's categorical persistence through an entrenched system of global wage differentials underpinned by the superfluisation of third-world labor.

The central argument of *Race Writing in the Internet Age*, then, is that novelists writing about racial identity in today's tech-integrated global economy no longer confront race as a category solely derived from biological or cultural difference, or as one that is strictly enforceable at the level of physical, material constraint. Instead, they now additionally confront race in the ever-abstract and increasingly algorithmic terms of a networked, post-Fordist regime

of transnational labor and production. Within this networked, transnational labor regime—which has been persistently lauded for its "postracial" provisions owing to the Internet's putative ability to de-race labor and level racial difference—race nevertheless gets rearticulated through a system of global wage differentials that effectively renews divergences in wealth between the nations of the global North and South. In what follows, I explore how contemporary novels about racial identity represent this crucial contradiction—between the so-called "postracial" networked global economy, and the global wage differentials that continue to determine race as a category of economic distinction—through narratives of racial unmarking and re-ascription, narratives in which protagonists racial identities will seem to disappear into a colorblind Web only to reappear in the wage gap between developed and undeveloped nations. Frequently centered on nonwhite tech laborers—from Japanese coders, South Asian hackers and cyber-coolies, to African-American app designers, Taiwanese social media addicts and Nigerian yahoo boys—these texts, I suggest, also mime the algorithmic processes that encode Internet-based technologies, imitating vernacular tech-based forms like models of viral transmission and social networking, computational techniques for market prediction, and the underlying principles of Web browsing and search. They thus use literary form to represent how race, run through the abstract software algorithms that coordinate a globally dispersed labor force, now moves between an evident and an inevident category of economic difference.

One of the advantages to this framework for reading contemporary ethnic fiction is that it brings into closer alignment extant formal analyses of the "postrace" aesthetic put forth by literary scholars, and economic and political critiques of "postracial" ideology proposed by critical race theorists, sociologists, and legal scholars. At present, the former analyses of a "postracial" literary form have sought to enumerate the unique textual features that have

attended race's repositioning in a cultural milieu that continues to celebrate liberal multiculturalism while paying less regard to racism's systemic persistence in contemporary social life. Ramon Saldivar, for instance, who offers the fullest formal elaboration of the "postrace" aesthetic, nominates "historical fantasy" and "speculative realism" as those literary forms which most aptly narrate "the emergence of transnational, cosmopolitan, economic, and cultural orders [still riven by] inequity" (594). Amalgams of realism, magical realism, and metafiction that also borrow textual strategies from the genres of graphic narrative, fantasy, and science fiction, the forms of "historical fantasy" and "speculative realism," Saldivar proposes, capture the complex oscillation between a racist, historically-rooted reality, and utopian desires for a "postracial" future. In a similar vein, Stephen Sohn suggests that contemporary ethnic novelists have responded to the shallowness and contradiction of "postracial" discourse by experimenting with a cross-racial mode of storytelling he terms "racial asymmetry," in which an "author's ethnoracial status is not easily or directly mirrored within the fictional world" (2). Like Saldivar, Sohn is interested in how contemporary writers of color have begun to move "beyond the limits of cultural nationalist models" and the supposedly "authentic" protagonists they would describe (4). By frustrating an economy of racial representation rooted in mythologies of racial biology—an economy that depends upon the perceived essentialness of a racial-biological correspondence between a text's author and protagonist—these writers engage in a potentially radical project of comparative racialization, one that begins to describe a newly-multiple, transnationalized subject no longer containable within genres of autobiography, auto-ethnography, historical documentation, or even the traditional parameters of novelistic realism. Lastly, critics Yoonmee Chang, Min Hyoung Song, and Stephanie Li all define "postrace" aesthetics in terms of a tendency toward race-neutrality and/or the exclusion of racial characters and content. Li, for

instance, posits the emergence of a "race-specific, race-free language" in recent ethnic fiction and political discourse (82). In such discourse, she suggests, while racial identities are never made explicit, subtle indicators of race compel readers to concede to racial stereotypes. For each of these critics, then, "postrace" aesthetics give new form to the anti-racist, anti-imperialist identity politics long articulated by ethnic fiction. Saldivar describes "historical fantasy," for instance, as "seek[ing] the radical transformation of existing social structures," while Sohn envisions "racial asymmetry" as an attempt to forge new interracial coalitions (595). Similarly, Chang and Song see "postraciality" is an aspirational horizon—a conceptual means of imagining difference in deracinated, metaphysical terms.

Meanwhile, scholars working in critical race theory, sociology, and legal studies have largely formulated "postraciality" in terms of the systemic reproduction of race and class relations by purportedly race-blind legal and economic institutions. While this scholarship also acknowledges race's cultural dimensions, and admits the forms of stigmatization that have inspired a "politics of identity" of the sort articulated by ethnic fiction, its practitioners also tend to define race in starker legal and economic terms, as a system of domination anchored by wealth stratification, occupational and spatial segregation, and racialized wage differentials. My suggestion that a technology-techne framework might reconcile these twin discourses of postraciality aims not to undermine the social concerns put forth by critics like Saldivar, Sohn, Chang, and others, nor does it discount the ways in which contemporary novels of ethnicity continue to chronicle the historical disenfranchisement of racialized groups and to maintain utopian commitments to thinking beyond racism. Rather, my aim is to explore how the same formal features these literary critics use to define the "postrace" aesthetic—"historical fantasy," "racial asymmetry," and so forth—also resonate with the affordances of our current tech-

integrated global infrastructure. For instance, Saldivar's genres of "historical fantasy" and "speculative realism" fix on a dispersed, unstable literary subject forced to embody the space between racism as a historical reality, and its fantasized transcendence; but this same figure of dispersal and instability also describes the spectrality of race and class formations in an age of weakening nation-states and shifting global hegemonies, showing how the novel of ethnicity can only, in a certain sense, double for the long arm of capital in the management and consolidation of increasingly spectral racial forms. Similarly, while Sohn's concept of "racial asymmetry" alludes to the powerful, ongoing history of Asian-American assimilation, it also neatly captures the dynamics of racial ventriloquism in the Asian IT outsourcing market, a massive regime of subaltern tech labor for which asymmetries between actual raced bodies and their seemingly de-raced "voices" are altogether compulsory. In paying attention to these points of formal contact and coherence between the so-called "identity politics" register of racial critique put forth by literary studies, and the technologically-mediated, market-dictated forms of race articulated by political economy, *Race Writing* aims to nuance and invigorate the terms of "identity politics" in both discourses.

Attuned to the conjunctures of networking technology and literary teche, then, *Race Writing* also aims to reveal potential continuities between traditional methods of formal analysis and close reading, and emerging computational techniques for literary analysis now garnering interest in the digital humanities. Reading "algorithmically" in the manner I will outline (and which I will pursue most fully in the final chapter of the dissertation, which explores the fine-grained lexical patterns that emerge within a total narrative form) not only stands to nuance the terms and practices of "identity politics" critique, but might also illuminate the broader aims and

assumptions of those quantitative, digital-humanistic approaches to which my methods bear some very slight resemblance.

Ultimately, *Race Writing* argues that the powerful resonances between contemporary technology and literary techne developed by novelists of ethnicity such as Cole, Mukherjee, Ozeki, Shteyngart, and Whitehead bespeak equally powerful affinities between the material forces of political economy that are now "making" race in the networked global market, and the textual and social materials they themselves deploy in their task to "make" racial identities within the space of literary culture. Recognizing that the formal practice they've inherited as novelists is inextricably bound up with how race is made and unmade in the service of capital accumulation, these writers also speak usefully to the evolving form and function of the novel itself. Their textual innovations suggest that the novel form can no longer describe an "imagined community" keyed to the consolidation of a national and implicitly racial character. Rather, through the depiction of the now-dispersed, attenuated, and globalized protagonists of their discipline, these writers suggest that the novel is now beginning to reflect the dynamics of a new, tech-integrated global economic infrastructure in which traditional categories of race and nation are actively being unsettled and reshaped.

The opening chapter returns to the era of Silicon Valley's inception to argue that Thomas Pynchon's classic postmodern novella, *The Crying of Lot 49*, seizes on the "network sociality" of the corporate brand as a heuristic through which to imagine the virtues and vices of a still-nebulous social technology: the U.S. Department of Defense's fledgling ARPANET system, precursor to today's Internet (Arvidsson 88). Cannily prefiguring and subtly undermining a complex mode of interconnectivity envisioned to be both totalizing and revolutionary, public and private, anonymous and also personal, Pynchon's depiction of the

racially marginalized, hierarchical, and self-segregating Trystero mail service rejects the notion of an ecumenical communication infrastructure and emphasizes, instead, the deep material divisions that persist as intensified forms of social and economic integration come into being. Outlining an ambivalent network imaginary imbued with a decisive racial-hegemonic character, *The Crying of Lot 49* critically anticipates the world-market rhetorics of decentralization, dehierarchization, openness, and "postraciality" that will attend the Internet's commercial rise. Ultimately, the novel's simultaneously subversive and hegemonic Trystero reflects Pynchon's own ambivalence about the equalizing political ambitions of sixties counterculture, as well as the role played by political novelists like himself within increasingly wide-ranging yet imminently co-optable webs of cultural production.

Chapter two brings Pynchon's considerations of networks's racial character to bear on a formal analysis of Teju Cole's award-winning novel *Open City*. Cole is widely recognized for being an innovative social media activist; and yet, *Open City* has almost uniformly been labeled an "antiquarian" text, the highly lettered account of a Nigerian-German flâneur (Julius) who wanders New York in search of his racial identity. Yet an emphasis exclusively on Cole's "antiquarian" style risks missing the novel's formal engagement with the technological present. I argue that *Open City* develops a narrative structure that is isomorphic with Google's "read the user" search algorithm, from its use of autocomplete suggestions to its deployment of predictive information retrieval. The twenty-one short chapters that serialize Julius's aimless wandering also chart his gradual slotting into an "implicitly preferred" racial identity category, as Julius is repeatedly hailed by African and African-American strangers eager to solicit his identification with an objectified blackness organized around a set of racial keywords and stereotypical images. Yoking Julius's flânerie to the principles of Google's search technology, Cole renders the "Open

City" a metonym for the "open" Web in order to lay bare the ideology of "openness" itself. Staging Julius's interpellation by precarious African-American laborers and immigrant detainees from undeveloped nations, the novel exposes how liberal fictions of raceless individuality associated with "going online" actively conceal the vast third-world populations whose labor supports the Internet as a global mode of production.

In the final chapters I turn to two novels by Colson Whitehead (*Apex Hides the Hurt* and *Zone One*) that have been read as exemplary instances of the "postrace" aesthetic. I argue to the contrary that Whitehead's novels allegorize the appearance of new modes of racialized capture, containment, and labor coordination associated with the rise of the US technology sector, while also previsioning a political revolution wrought by technology's data-subjects. *Apex Hides the Hurt* centers on the rebranding of an ex-slave town originally known for its barbed wire production but eager to attract the business of a global cybersecurity firm. I argue that the novel materializes the changing technologies by which borders are controlled: here, barbed wire gives way to a secure Internet, underscoring the Internet's functional capacity to install seemingly race-neutral technologies for the continued policing of raced bodies. Whitehead's zombie thriller *Zone One*, in turn, demonstrates how race's forms and functions adapt to new technological parameters. A powerful response to assertions of our "postrace" political moment, *Zone One*'s final move to re-race its protagonist not only figures the flexibility of Internet-era racial categories, but also carries the full force of revolution. Miming the technical affordances of malware, *Zone One* imagines a future in which race, transformed into a viral data object, "returns" as the untapped collective intelligence of a giant reserve army of nonwhite labor, generating catastrophic—but also revolutionary—political effects.

A coda offers brief readings of several recent novels concerned with Asia's techno-economic rise: Bharati Mukherjee's *Miss New India*, Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*, Ed Park's *Personal Days*, and Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*. In particular, it queries the relationship between literary form and the computational technique of "sentiment analysis": the quantification of online expression for purposes of advertising, economic prediction, and political forecasting. Mukherjee, Ozeki, Park, and Shteyngart's novels imitate the textual formats culled by sentiment analysis algorithms, including social media microblogs, online recommendations, ratings, and reviews. Their narratives also illustrate characters struggling to become sentiment analysts in their own right, as protagonists attempt to decode their own feelings and those of Asian counterparts, charting new forms of interethnic relation immanently tagged to the movements of a tech-finance-dominated economy. Developing "sentiment analysis" as a shared metaphor for market prediction and literary procedure, all of these writers underscore technology's shaping effects on aesthetic practice. Moreover, their texts update our account of the novel as an integrative social "technology" in itself, one that no longer figures an "imagined community" structured around the time of the nation, but rather evokes an online public synchronized to the time of global capital.

CHAPTER 1

Branding Counterculture in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

Preface: Pre-Digital Networks of Outrage and Hope

Near the beginning of *The Crying of Lot 49*, protagonist Oedipa Maas drives from the fictional Northern California suburb of Kinneret-Among-The-Pines to the fictional Southern California city of San Narciso in order to execute the will of her recently deceased ex-lover, real-estate mogul Pierce Inverarity. There, she uncovers what she believes are clues to the existence of an underground mail service known as the Trystero. Oedipa's first impression of San Narciso is that it "was less an identifiable city than a grouping of concepts—census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway" (14). Looking down at the city sprawl, she is reminded of

> the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out)…. (14)

In *Postmodern Sublime*, Joseph Tabbi theorizes some of the contradictions inherent to Oedipa's sense that printed circuit offers access to meanings both "astonishingly clear" and "hieroglyphically"—later "hierophanically"—"concealed" (20). Tabbi suggests that with the emergence of unfathomably powerful and complex information technologies, the concept of sublimity began to move away from theological orders of representation and to assume a

scientific character. Oedipa's sense of awe at the circuit's explanatory power registers this shift, signaling a classic dilemma faced by postmodernists of Pynchon's ilk: how do artists represent seemingly unrepresentable "technological structures and global corporate systems [that exist] beyond the comprehension of any one mind or imagination," systems whose totalizing reach threatens to co-opt their own critical positions and undertakings? (ix). Published in 1966, the complex and totalizing systems *Lot* 49 might be understood to index existed on the very cusp of present-day information infrastructures. At the time of the novel's composition and publication, the U.S. Department of Defense's fledgling ARPANET system (colloquially known as the "Intergalactic Computer Network") was well into development, and DoD scientists were less than five years away from successfully transmitting the first email message from one computer to another. Tabbi suggests that *The Crying of Lot 49*, which ends by comparing Oedipa's deranging journey through San Narciso to "walking among [the] matrices of a great digital computer, the zeroes and ones twinned above, hanging like balanced mobiles right and left, ahead, thick, maybe endless" (*Lot 49* 150), evinces a "first generation technological aesthetic that originated when computer and multimedia technologies were still new" (210). Read against the technological innovations of Pynchon's moment, Oedipa's sublime vision of a city interconnected in the manner of a media device depicts an emerging technoculture "in which human agency finds itself enmeshed in viral, bureaucratic forms of transhuman networks," and also, arguably, prefigures the dynamic and totalizing ARPA networking architecture (Johnston 3). In this view, Oedipa's quest to decode the Trystero allegorizes new and potentially disorienting computational techniques for information processing: struggling to parse the Trystero's ever-proliferating semiotic codes and diagrams, Oedipa experiences, as Alan Liu puts it, a kind of

"transcendental data pour whose revelation is never immediately available to consciousness lived on the interface" ("Transcendental Data" 76).

In light of readings such as these, which proceed from Pynchon's avowed interest in a variety of new media discourses (cybernetics, information theory, computers, and so forth), one might venture to interpret Trystero as the shadowy figure for a yet-unfamiliar ARPANET system: a powerful communication network and a "transcendent" social interface seemingly imbued with counter-hegemonic and oppositional—but also eerily "transhuman" and "bureaucratic"—capacities. Rather than pursue analogies between Trystero and ARPANET, however, this chapter highlights the Trystero's conceptual likeness to another propagator of "network sociality" with which Pynchon was considerably more familiar: the corporate brand (Arvidsson 88). Seizing on the brand as a heuristic through which to imagine the virtues and vices of a still-nebulous social technology, *The Crying of Lot 49* cannily prefigures and subtly undermines a complex mode of interconnectivity envisioned to be both totalizing and revolutionary, public and private, anonymous and also personal. At the same time, Pynchon's depiction of the marginalized, hierarchical, and self-segregating Trystero mail service emphasizes the deep material divisions that persist as new and intensified forms of social and economic integration come into being. Rather than celebrating the emergence of an ecumenical communication infrastructure, then, *The Crying of Lot 49* outlines a more ambivalent network imaginary imbued with a decisive racial-hegemonic character. Critically anticipating the world-market rhetorics of decentralization, dehierarchization, openness and "postraciality" that will attend the Internet's commercial rise, *Lot 49*'s simultaneously subversive and hegemonic Trystero communication system ultimately reflects Pynchon's own ambivalence about the equalizing political ambitions of sixties counterculture, as well as the role played by political

novelists like himself within increasingly wide-ranging yet immanently co-optable webs of cultural production and consumption.

Insiders Outside, Outsiders Inside

Explicating Pynchon's politics remains, for literary criticism, a difficult task. This is perhaps because Pynchon's political views, like the subjects of his novels, are often tremendously synthetic, conveying what Edward Mendelson describes as grand "imaginative designs" rather than forthright political agendas (97). And yet despite critical consensus that Pynchon's social commitments lie, in deliberately oblique fashion, somewhere beyond partisan commentary or polemic, scholarship continues to glean overtly topical political lessons from Pynchon's work.[1] This chapter begins by asking not whether Pynchon's subjunctive Americas are analogous to sixties-era resistance movements (the sites of cultural revolution and failure Pynchon's California novels are frequently understood to idealize and indict), but rather how and why Pynchon begins to register his novels' demotic function in a self-critical evaluation of his own role in giving voice to these movements.[2] Thus, while *The Crying of Lot 49*'s underground mail carrier, the Trystero, has almost uniformly been decoded as a figure for counterculture, I will argue here that Pynchon also deploys the Trystero as a figure for the countercultural novelist, at once a medium for and commodifier of counterculture's political aspirations. Specifically, by merging the Trystero's political motifs with the representational practices of brand management (indexed by the Trystero's extensive cultivation of symbolic assets such as a logo, slogan, mascot, and chant), I will argue that Pynchon develops the Trystero as an image for political authorship within commercial culture, an image that simultaneously endorses and resists

[1] For a comprehensive recent study in the topical vein, see Joanna Freer.
[2] Critical work on Pynchon's politics is thorough and wide-ranging; see in particular Frederick Ashe, Jeff Baker, David Cowart, Stefan Mattessich, and Samuel Thomas.

branding as both a compensatory vehicle for counterculture's political organization, and as a new model for postmodern and contemporary authorial self-construction.

Reading *The Crying of Lot 49* in this way may seem at first to rehearse the terms of Thomas Frank's and, more recently, Alan Liu's accounts of counterculture's relation to commercial culture. Revising the myth of an authentic counterculture's cooptation by the "monolithic bad guys" (7) of postwar American capitalism, Frank proposes that counterculture and commercial culture were "symbolic allies" (9), working in tandem to generate the hip symbolism from which the "hip consumerism" of the mid-sixties emerged (28). Building on Frank's trajectory of hip, Liu triangulates the mainstream-counterculture-subculture relation in an effort to posit counterculture not simply as commercial culture's ethotic double and inspiration, but as a disaffiliated mediator between the respective positions of mainstream insiders and subcultural outsiders. Acting as "insiders outside" and "outsiders inside," Liu contends, counterculture oriented itself to subculture and the mainstream by "interioriz[ing] in its identity the complex relation between [the two]" (*Laws of Cool* 136), simultaneously borrowing "the pose of subculture to protest angrily in the streets" (238) while miming techno- and military-industrial styles associated with mainstream culture's "adult workaday world" (132). Designating subculture as "that part of culture excluded by definition from normal work" (100), Liu thus sees counterculture as a pivot between mainstream cultures of work and subcultures of leisure, a contradictory milieu he most succinctly names an "alternative lifestyle" (131).

Rather than take Trystero's evocation of a brand as evidence of Frank's symbolic alliance or, perhaps less generously still, as Pynchon's disaffected illustration of counterculture's assent to the traditional charge of selling out, my suggestion that *The Crying of Lot 49* represents branding as vehicle for the articulation of counterculture's politics as well as for the self-

fashioning of the countercultural novelist pursues what I perceive to be Pynchon and Liu's shared sense of counterculture as a position capable of registering profound ambivalence toward commercial culture and subculture alike. Depicting the Trystero as a community forged by investments in a logo, slogan, mascot, and chant—a community that, in Liu's sense, mimics the techniques of mainstream commercial culture while repurposing them for Trystero's alternative yet not overtly anti-commercial modes of relation—Pynchon seems to propose that brand communities, like counterculture, limn a position of "insiders outside" in potentially critical and repurposable ways. At the same time, Pynchon expresses ambivalence about how, like brand managers, authors might sympathize with counterculture's political aspirations while transmuting these aspirations into political commodities for mainstream culture's consumption. As we will see, *The Crying of Lot 49* conveys these ambivalences by balancing Pynchon's sense of the brand as a tool of ideology, able to construct political identity but also to repress it, with his attraction to the brand community as an unusual yet compelling example of what Wini Breines terms the "counter-institutional" modes of political sociality sought by the New Left (421). Likewise, while Pynchon's selection of character names like Stanley Koteks and Clayton "Bloody" Chiclitz registers branding's commodification and suppression of the individual, his depiction of the Trystero also fantasizes about modes of cultural authorship and demotic communitarianism that draw on the brand's "in-group" assets (its logo, slogan, mascot, chant, etc.) in order to figure forth spaces for collective identification—spaces that, as sociologist Adam Arvidsson puts it, answer to the political "homelessness" of postmodern subjects (92).[3]

[3] Naming Pynchon the discoverer of "in-group style," Fredric Jameson, in *Archaeologies of the Future*, goes on to cite "Fetish:Footage:Forum," the online chat group of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003), as a compelling recent example of such a group, one whose members are bound by shared linguistic and representational practices, common affects, and knowledge.

In this sense, while Pynchon invests in the brand as a potential vehicle for counterculture's political solidarity and collective expression, *The Crying of Lot 49*'s narrative of disenfranchised and immiserated outcasts convened by Trystero's in-group assets also admits to the brand's profoundly compensatory political function and, by extension, to Pynchon's own deployment of the brand as a figure for those compensatory forms of relation that authors writing in the wake of counterculture's political failure will increasingly understand their work to mediate and express. Thus, despite its abiding reputation as a novel of the countercultural moment, I will finally suggest that Pynchon's depiction of branded counterculture eschews a typical mid-sixties utopianism and, instead, anticipates those utopias which, like the political communities of network-era neoliberalism, come to operate within rather than against consumer culture. I close the chapter by briefly examining Pynchon's decision to publish early chapters of *Lot 49* in the popular, major-market magazines *Esquire* and *Cavalier*—a decision, I suggest, key to Pynchon's political project and thus the development of his mainstream literary brand, but also to the market-conscious self-conceptions of his literary descendants, who often seize on brands in an effort to negotiate the novelist's changing status as an "insider outside" the culture industry.

The Politics of Tupperware

The Crying of Lot 49 opens with the following lengthy sentence:

> One summer afternoon Mrs Oedipa Maas came home from a Tupperware party whose hostess had put perhaps too much kirsch in the fondue to find that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity, a California real estate mogul who had once lost two million dollars in his spare time but still had assets numerous and tangled enough to make the job of sorting it all out more than honorary. (1)

While critics routinely identify Tupperware as a figure for the "banal mindlessness" of Oedipa's domestic life in the fictional Northern California suburb of Kinneret-Among-the-Pines, few have pursued Pynchon's immediate juxtaposition of the small-scale professional efforts of the Tupperware hostess and the convoluted corporate reach of the mogul, Inverarity (Blaine 57). Maurice Couturier, however, gestures toward this relation when he invokes the direct-selling business model known as the Tupperware Party Plan. Following Frank Kermode's observation that Tupperware products would have been sold "outside [of] normal commercial systems" (20-21), Couturier suggests that, for Oedipa, "it is not [Tupperware's] airtight containers which are really for sale, but a little share of conviviality" (13). More than a figure for Oedipa's domestic preoccupations, then, Tupperware also describes Oedipa as a young housewife in desperate need of some "conviviality"—as a woman whose boredom and loneliness are evidently, if somewhat sadly, sated by the scripted, commerce-driven sociality of the Tupperware brand. Seizing on Oedipa's yearning for the atmosphere of the Tupperware party, rather than her need for actual Tupperware products, Couturier invites us to consider Oedipa as a producer and consumer of Tupperware's brand community, a convivial culture comprised of hostess-agents and party-going patrons, and driven by word-of-mouth marketing rather than by a national advertising campaign. Understood in this way, Pynchon's initial conjunction of Tupperware (a brand culture organized by the soft conspiracies of word-of-mouth marketing) and Inverarity (the mogul whose numerous assets are everywhere entangled with the Trystero's harder mail fraud conspiracy) conveys a relationship of intensity between two communities of affect imagined to exist "somewhere outside of normal commercial systems." To put this in slightly different terms, as a weak version of the conspiratorial culture Oedipa believes she discovers on her deranging

quest to disentangle Inverarity's assets, Oedipa's affiliation with Tupperware prefigures her involvement with the Trystero.

Keyed to Tupperware's affective and communal dimensions, Couturier's observation emphasizes Pynchon's deployment of Tupperware in the construction of Oedipa's social world. Advancing Hannah Arendt's notion of a social world generated via the surplus labors of action and speech, Adam Arvidsson argues that the appropriation of these surplus labors (figured here as little shares of conviviality) are a central feature of brand management.

> Brand management is a matter of putting to work the capacity of consumers (and increasingly other kinds of actors) to produce a common social world through autonomous processes of communication and interaction. This capacity to produce a common social world is empowered and programmed to unfold in ways that create the measurable kinds of attention and affect that underpin the commercial value of brands. (vii)

For Arvidsson, brands come to prominence in the 1980s as "institutional embodiments of the logic of a new form of informational capital" (1). In this view, it becomes clear that the little shares of conviviality to which Couturier refers establish Tupperware as an apt model for how brands put consumers like Oedipa to work producing those measurable forms of attention and affect that underpin the brand's commercial value. Adapting Kermode's observation, Tupperware's specific capacity to put its consumers to work "outside of normal commercial systems" goes one step further by marking the brand's involvement in what T. Morris-Suzuki describes as a shift from "the direct exploitation of labour . . . [to] the private exploitation of social knowledge" (64). It is not the hostess' direct labor (domestic or other) that Tupperware seeks to exploit. Rather, it is her domestic knowledge and enthusiasm. Channeling this

knowledge into appropriable social forms like little shares of conviviality, Tupperware thus works to define its brand identity—and consequently to fund its value—by defining the specific forms of subjectivity and sociality its products and environments make possible for consumers like Oedipa.

At the time of *Lot 49*'s publication, the forms of subjectivity prescribed by Tupperware were anything but apolitical. Indeed, Pynchon's citation of the brand would have evoked the ongoing conflict between a class of working women encouraged by the agendas of political feminism, and a set of dominant conventions that continued to limit non-domestic forms of women's labor. Immediately following World War II, Tupperware had attempted to consolidate these rival positions by offering women a professional outlet with an explicitly domestic focus, one that sanctioned yet also absorbed postwar female subjects' desires for social and professional independence.[4] As Joanna Freer suggests, Pynchon's opening lines allude to the subversion of feminist political aspiration by imitating the "dumbed-down [tone of] short stories and female-targeted advertisements that filled women's magazines" in the era preceding the publication of Betty Friedan's feminist masterwork, *The Feminine Mystique* (129). A nod to Tupperware's role in the consolation of Second-Wave Feminism, Oedipa's briefly described involvement with the brand is significant because it marks a relationship between her social habits (Tupperware party-going) and her declared political identity as a "Young Republican" (59). Figuring Tupperware in the construction of Oedipa's Young Republicanism, Pynchon thus divulges his sense of the politics immanent to consumer culture, a politics for which social gatherings like Tupperware parties might serve as sites for the aesthetic construction of Young Republicanism and the subversion of political feminism alike.

[4] See Lauren Berlant.

In 1966, for Pynchon to make the point that brands might aid in the construction of political identities is not especially shocking. More than a decade earlier David Riesman proposed that postwar subjects had come "to regard political information and attitudes as consumer goods," similar to other "products, games, entertainments, [and] recreations," as well as to view consumption itself as an acceptable mode of political expression (189). As Michael Szalay observes, the postwar subject's indoctrination into "consuming" politics coincided with the Democratic and Republican Parties' decisions to enlist Madison Avenue's help in "selling presidential candidates": Eisenhower commissioned Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborne (BBDO) for his 1952 presidential campaign; Stevenson's strategists hailed from Norman, Craig, and Kummel (NCK); Kennedy's and later Johnson's from Doyle, Dane, and Bernbach (DDB) (113). As relationships deepened between political parties and ad agencies, so too did agencies' aesthetic strategies define party image. For Szalay, Kennedy's decision to hire DDB was significant, in part, because it effected the transfer of DDB's signature élan (creative, ironic, antinomian) into the Democratic Party's political style. In light of these developments in the branding of political parties, Pynchon's Tupperware-party-going, Young Republican Oedipa reflects the collusion of political parties and Madison avenue advertisers, and also a somewhat subtler, evolving relationship between political dispositions and mass-market brands. Implicating Tupperware in Oedipa's consumption of Republican Party ideology, Pynchon expands Riesman's thesis about consuming politics. He suggests that by consuming certain brands, postwar subjects might also be shoring up specific party allegiances.

By the mid-sixties, lifestyle advertising was just beginning to theorize how these types of affinities between products and politics might be strengthened and further exploited—how, that is, consumers might actively come to regard brands as tools in the construction of their

identities and communities. Enabled by transformations in the media environment (chiefly the rise and ubiquity of television) but also by technical developments in market research (which now expanded their rubrics to account for consumer motivation in the unfolding field of psychographics), brand advertisers began to consider how they might script consumer desire rather than simply minister to existing consumer demand. Rejecting earlier forms of advertising largely based on product description, the sixties saw the rise of creative agencies that cultivated brand identity by stimulating consumers' emotional responses, by giving brands personalities with which consumers could identify, and by situating brands within the virtual realities of an ever-expanding media culture. Pynchon's text refers to these developments in brand advertising not simply by including the names of culturally significant brands such as Tupperware and Volkswagen (whose 1963 campaign by DDB effectively launched advertising's "creative revolution"), but also by reflecting, at the levels of narrative and form, media culture's dense intertextual public sphere: Oedipa encounters all variety of media, from radio to playscript, as well as remediated content such as the film, *Cashiered*, which she watches on television, and *The Courier's Tragedy*, a Jacobean revenge drama which the novel itself remediates.[5] Most importantly, Pynchon's novel does more than just identify specific brands and the media environments in which they circulate. It also parodies advertising psychology of the mid-sixties, which reasoned that "a consumer's personality [could] be seen as the peculiar total of the products he consumes" (Levy qtd. in Arvidsson 59). Oedipa's husband Mucho, for instance, a former used car salesman, shudders to recall the "endless, convoluted incest" he observes in used cars ("motorized, metal extensions of [people]" (4); "futureless, automotive projection of [their

[5] On advertising's "creative revolution, see Frank.

lives]"(5)). But the novel, ever alert to its cultural moment, also reflects the fetishization of car brands by fifties musical groups such as The Eldorados, The Edsels, and The Cadillacs. Mucho enjoys listening to a group called "Sick Dick and the Volkswagens" (13). Oedipa drives a Chevy Impala and becomes involved with a mercenary named Tony Jaguar. She later encounters characters whose very names evoke popular brands: Stanley Koteks and Clayton "Bloody" Chiclitz. In this way, *The Crying of Lot 49* features brands in ways that begin to explore how lifestyle advertising forms and deforms postwar subjects. Anticipating Baudrillard's critique of the sign system, the novel examines how these subjects, shaped and defined by a "convoluted incest" with the signs and objects of brand culture, come to discover that in relying upon commercial objects in order to construct and perform social selves, something of those selves gets caught up and even lost in culture's signifying complexes.

Branding the Subject: Koteks, Chiclitz, and "being ground into anonymity"

In the process of inventorying Inverarity's estate, Oedipa discovers what she believes are clues to the existence of an underground mail service known as the Trystero. Unusual stamps, watermarked with a muted post horn, turn up in Inverarity's collection. More post horns, accompanied by the acronyms, W.A.S.T.E. ("We Await Silent Trystero's Empire") and D.E.A.T.H. ("Don't Ever Antagonize The Horn"), begin to appear throughout the southern California city of San Narciso: graffitied on inner-city buses and chalked onto sidewalks, in store windows and bathroom stalls, stitched into delinquents' gang jackets and tattooed on the unsteady hand of a drifter.[6] At the height of her confusion, Oedipa wanders San Narciso in search of explanation. She tours the city with "an exhausted busful of Negroes" (98), among them a psychotic "Negro woman . . . who [keeps] going through rituals of miscarriage" (100).

[6] Two of these processes (graffitiing and tattooing) represent primitive forms of branding; see Celia Lury.

She observes a boy who plans "to slip at night into aquariums and open negotiations with the dolphins" (99) and witnesses a night watchman "nibbling at a bar of Ivory Soap" (100). She questions possible Trystero sympathizers at a bar, discusses revolutionary philosophy with the Mexican anarchist Jesus Arrabal, and dances with a party of deaf-mutes. She comforts an aging sailor, for whom she delivers a letter via Trystero's W.A.S.T.E mail system, and tracks the courier who collects it. She overhears a group of children chanting Trystero's name while playing jump rope at midnight in Golden Gate Park. Appearing before Oedipa like "gemlike 'clues,'" "decorating each alienation, each species of withdrawal, as cufflink, decal, aimless doodling, there [is] somehow always the post horn" (95;100).

Eventually what Oedipa learns is that the Trystero originated with one Joaquin de Tristero y Calavera, a sixteenth-century Spanish aristocrat who in retaliation for the loss of his claim to Spain's then-monopoly carrier Thurn & Taxis established the Trystero as private couriers for anarchist correspondence. After centuries of conflict with Thurn & Taxis, Calavera was forced to relocate the Trystero to Civil War-era America where, after serving briefly as couriers for the Union, they simply decided to stay on "in the context of conspiracy," using forged stamps and repurposed federal waste bins to provide an uncensored channel of communication for any and all anarchistic populations (143). In her most lucid reflections on the Trystero's activities, Oedipa reasons that theirs

> was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery. Whatever else was being denied them out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance, this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private. Since they could not

> have withdrawn into a vacuum (could they?), there had to exist the separate, silent, unsuspected world. (101)

At this moment, arguably the moment of her political awakening, Oedipa admits that W.A.S.T.E. bears witness to the American political system's hatred and indifference toward its marginal populations. But she also imagines the Trystero as an alternative to this indifferent system, as the promise and possibility of the community Oedipa desperately seeks throughout *The Crying of Lot 49*, one driven by "more total and more personal networks of relationships than the formal, abstract, instrumental relationships characterizing state and society" (Breines 421). This definition, taken from Wini Breines account of the New Left, casts Trystero as a model for what Breines terms a "counter-institutional" political community (420). But it also recalls Arvidsson's sense of the "web of stories, solidarities, and identities" that underpin the brand's construction of its "network sociality," a sociality convened and organized by representational practices nearly identical to Trystero's (88).[7] By depicting the Trystero as a community convened and organized by a set of shared texts, logos, decals, and chants, Pynchon begins to describe political subjectivity less as the individual's active involvement in democratic process and more as her dependency upon a set of mass-cultural and affective resources, resources that may not promote an "act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance," but instead serve as vehicles for the production of alternative or "unsuspected" modes of political solidarity.[8] At the same time, Pynchon also considers the political novelist's role in furnishing counterculture with these

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[7] On the concept of "network sociality," see Andreas Wittel.

[8] It is important to note that in-group identifiers of the sort deployed by the Trystero predate brand culture. For example, Jameson's study of postmodernism outlines the development of "secret Masonic signals" that convene an imagined underground "Party of Utopia." My interest here is not to claim Trystero's "signals" for the capitalist marketplace, but rather to explore resonances between the novel's two modes of "signaling" (those lying ostensibly beyond the capitalist marketplace and those operating within it). See *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

affective and symbolic resources, figured forth by the novelist in those "separate, silent, unsuspected" and imaginary worlds of the text.

Before glimpsing Trystero's alternative world, however, Oedipa once more confronts the instrumental one when she visits the headquarters of Yoyodyne, Inc., an aerospace industry giant and major San Narciso employer whose stock, she learns, Inverarity had acquired liberally. There, she meets Yoyodyne president Clayton "Bloody" Chiclitz and scientist Stanley Koteks. Critic J. Kerry Grant reads "Bloody" Chiclitz as a reference to Chiclets brand chewing gum, citing the then-popular threat, "Do you want a mouthful of bloody Chiclets?" (48). For Elizabeth Hinds, Pynchon's choice of names like Koteks and Chiclitz reflects a deliberate emptying of character, and demonstrates the extent to which Pynchon imagines that his "Puritan Preterite [is] lost, inhuman, without grace" (24). Hinds's impulse to read the brand as an evacuator of character is valuable. As I have been arguing, however, Pynchon associates his characters with brands less with an eye to conveying their emptiness or fundamental inhumanity than in an attempt to illustrate the postwar subject's gradual subsumption under brand culture. To put this another way, Koteks and Chiclitz might be said to exaggerate Pynchon's sense of Oedipa's relationship to Tupperware. Rather than proffering the brand as political prosthesis (as Tupperware is for Oedipa), here Pynchon compels Koteks and Chiclitz to embody and perform brands to which their political identities and value complexes do not logically correspond. Unlike Tupperware, which serves as a metaphor for the plasticity and containment of Oedipa's political identity within consumer culture, the branded Koteks and Chiclets figure something akin to the identitarian incoherence of Fredric Jameson's "decentered" postmodern subjects, "schizophrenics" whose subjectivities eventually collapse into a "rubble of distinct and unrelated signifiers" (*Postmodernism* 117; 26).

Pynchon's text invites such a reading by emphasizing Koteks's hostility toward his employer, Yoyodyne, a corporation he criticizes harshly for its subversion of his creative identity. Here is the conversation that takes place between Koteks and Oedipa:

> Koteks explained how every engineer, in signing the Yoyodyne contract, also signed away the patent rights to any inventions he might come up with.
>
> "This stifles your really creative engineer," Koteks said, adding bitterly, "wherever he may be."
>
> "I didn't think people invented any more," said Oedipa, sensing this would goad him. "I mean, who's there been, really, since Thomas Edison? Isn't it all teamwork now?"
>
> Bloody Chiclitz, in his welcoming speech this morning, had stressed teamwork.
>
> "Teamwork," Koteks snarled, "is one word for it, yeah. What it really is is a way to avoid responsibility. It's a symptom of the gutlessness of the whole society."
>
> "Goodness," said Oedipa, "are you allowed to talk like that?" (67-68)

On one level, Koteks invokes the social controls theorized by Herbert Marcuse in *One Dimensional Man*. "Domination," Marcuse writes, just one year prior to the publication of *Lot 49*, "is transfigured into administration," and "the tangible source of exploitation disappears behind the façade of objective rationality" (32). Speaking out against Yoyodyne's stifling claims on engineer creativity, Koteks's complaint describes how dense signifiers such as "teamwork" get deployed by military-industrial giants like Yoyodyne in order to link the appropriation of the engineer's intellectual property to the exigencies of ongoing war. Aligning its corporate values with those of the American nation (construed as the most winning team of all), Yoyodyne emerges as an exemplary figure for postwar management ideology, an ideology whose rhetoric of teamwork and dehierarchization served to unite bureaucratic objectives with those of

corporate culture. The team, Koteks tells us, may appear as a leveler of hierarchical workplace relations and a promoter of wide-ranging creative collaboration, but it is, ultimately, a tool of management and bureaucracy alike, the canny rhetorical descendent of William Whyte's organization man.

As Alan Liu observes, the concept of the team emerges in 1960s workplace culture as "the unit of ephemeral identity that most flexibly fuses technologies and techniques into skill sets (called 'innovation,' 'creativity,' or 'resourcefulness') adapted to the changefulness of the global economy" (*Laws of Cool* 47). For Liu, teamwork's ramifications are numerous; individual identity is "swallowed alive by the cult of the team," while diversity is transposed into a "purely 'talent'-oriented notion" (172). From this point, Liu concludes, "culture" is readily subsumed by "corporate culture," which figures forth a "networked world of corporate subjects become pure, distributable objects—teamworkers who have no legitimate identity and emotion" (172). Understood in Liu's terms, Koteks complains that because he has effectively been swallowed by the corporate cult of Yoyodyne he is no longer able to assert his identity or emotions, much less achieve the iconic status of an inventor like Edison or Bell. Instead, he must lend his personality to the corporation, coming to understand himself as a "pure, distributable object" constituted by and within a corporate culture. In this sense, Koteks emphasizes management ideology's role in the postmodern subject's reduction to pure, distributable objecthood (a predicament, one might add, that mirrors Pynchon's own experience as a military-industrial laborer for Boeing in the early 1960s, a time during which he was compelled to channel his own creative energies into writing technical reports for Boeing rather than into revising the manuscript for *V*).[9] In part a figure for the author, then, Pynchon renders Koteks a victim of bureaucracy. But Pynchon's

[9] See Brian McHale.

additional conflation of Koteks with Kotex brand sanitary products also describes a stranger mechanism by which mass culture victimizes its subjects, gesturing toward a mode of decentering that Oedipa, too, will later experience with regard to Trystero and Inverarity both, and which she will describe in the language of "crowding" and "gloom," "saturation" and "residue," encryption and hysterical pregnancy (64;71;146;147). Like the malignant digestive ritual of the night-watchman Oedipa observes on her San Narciso tour, "nibbling at a bar of Ivory Soap, who [has] trained his virtuoso stomach to accept also lotions, air-fresheners, fabrics, tobaccoes and waxes in a hopeless attempt to assimilate it all, all the promise, productivity, betrayal, ulcers, before it was too late" (100), Koteks figures his own assimilation by brand culture. Not only must Koteks submit to the "cult of the team" dictated by Yoyodyne, he must even embody the Kotex brand.

If the "branded" Koteks thus appears as an unwilling agent for the propagation of late-capitalist ideology, then Oedipa's final encounter with her husband, radio disk jockey Wendell "Mucho" Maas, reveals how the "generic" subject might potentially resist such interpellation. Returning for the last time to Kinneret-Among-the-Pines, Oedipa learns that Mucho has recently formed a habit for LSD. Ignorant of his addiction, a concerned colleague describes Mucho's transformation to Oedipa: "He's losing his identity, [Oedipa], how else can I put it? Day by day, Wendell is less himself and more *generic*. He enters a staff meeting and the room is suddenly full of people, you know? He's a walking assembly of man" (115; emphasis mine). Mucho's becoming-generic would seem to represent the figural inversion of Stanley Koteks's predicament as an employee "branded" by Kotex and Yoyodyne.[10] Where Koteks resists the

[10] Pynchon's play on words might also be taken as a comment on *The Crying of Lot 49*'s much-noted resistance to the generic conventions of the novel form.

brand's prescriptive organizational identity, Mucho, addled by LSD, embraces with quasi-mystical conviction the generic or collectivizing possibilities afforded by an object of mass culture. Here is Oedipa's final exchange with her LSD-tripping husband:

> "Say 'rich, chocolaty goodness.'"
>
> "Rich, chocolaty, goodness," said Oedipa.
>
> "Yes," said Mucho, and fell silent.
>
> "Well, *what*?" Oedipa asked after a couple minutes, with an edge to her voice.
>
> "I noticed it the other night hearing Rabbit [a fellow jockey] do a commercial. No matter who's talking, the different power spectra are the same, give or take a small percentage. So you and Rabbit have something in common now. More than that. Everybody who says the same words is the same person if the spectra are the same only they happen differently in time, you dig? . . . [together] you'd have this big, God, maybe a couple hundred million chorus saying 'rich, chocolaty goodness' . . . and it would all be the same voice" (116-17)

On the one hand, Mucho's description of "rich, chocolaty goodness" nominates the slogan and, by implication, the commodity to which it refers as an instrument of mass hegemony, an ordinary object that embodies the dangers of commodity fetishism and instantiates a mode of consensus engineered by consumer culture. But at the same time his ecstatic vision of public culture negotiating a mass media artifact in order to perform and renew their commonalities seems, significantly, to evoke the emotional and expressive dimensions of the Trystero, unified as they are by common investments in slogans such as "W.A.S.T.E." and "D.E.A.T.H.". In this sense, Mucho's "vision of consensus" appears strongly allied with Trystero's, reminiscent not only of the revolutionary strategy described to Oedipa by Jesus Arrabal in which "consensus

allows the masses to work together without effort, automatic as the body itself" (97), but also of the dance party of deaf-mutes Oedipa encounters in San Narciso's underworld, brought to a halt by "mysterious consensus" (107). Even if we are tempted to read Mucho as the narcotic subject of mass culture—a man, like Koteks, assembled out of bizarre intimacies with products and corporations—Mucho's "chorus" also figures what Bishnupriya Ghosh terms a "'nontraditional' effervescent popular culture," one "structured [by] improvisations that reposition mass-media commodities . . . in symbolic ensembles" where they can "be deployed to represent both hegemonic and popular aspirations"(314; 20). Remobilizing "rich, chocolaty goodness" as a mediator for collective feeling, Mucho articulates how shared symbols, even and perhaps especially those originating in mass culture, might be capable of forging new modes of consensus. Just as the Trystero's W.A.S.T.E. hijacks and resignifies waste, so too might popular forms like brands and slogans, Pynchon seems to tell us, figure forth alternative economies of signification, economies that both establish and restrict possibilities for political unification.[11]

Branding Counterculture

Nearly fifty years after the publication of *Lot 49*, two Hollywood films proposed that revolutions would be branded: Jamie Bradshaw and Alexandre Doulerain's science fiction flop, *Branded* (2012), and Gary Ross's megafranchise adaptation of Suzanne Collins's hit trilogy, *The Hunger Games* (2012). In *Branded*, adman Misha Galkin opines that Lenin was the world's premier brand manager and Communism the world's "first true global brand," before going on to rid Moscow of parasitic brand avatars that feed on human desire and are controlled by corporate goons (Bradshaw and Doulerain). In *The Hunger Games*, heroine Katniss Everdeen incites the proletariat

[11] This affirmative reading of social belonging in brand culture is of a piece with John Fiske's notion of the consumer as producer. See *Reading the Popular*.

to rebel against the oppressive Capitol regime by seizing on the mockingjay as a symbol for their collective dissent. In both films, branding's representational practices help build and organize a revolution; leaders like Lenin gradually assume the iconic status of brand personalities or party mascots, while shared symbols like the mockingjay acquire the unifying and communicative functions of the logo. To this point, I have argued that *The Crying of Lot 49* elaborates similar claims about branding counterculture by dramatizing how the Trystero's heterogeneous band of social outcasts (described throughout the novel as variously raced, disabled, psychotic, and underclass) achieve consolidation by way of their shared affective investments in a common set of in-group assets (Trystero's logo, slogan, mascot, chant, etc.). At the same time, I have indicated Pynchon's wariness about branding's consolidating capacities by emphasizing his alertness to the brand's reduction of political complexity (its Tupperwaring of political affect) if not its suppression of political identity altogether (the branding of subjects like Koteks or Chiclitz).

One of the most significant ways in which Pynchon expresses ambivalence about branding counterculture is by constructing the "revolutionary" Tristero de Calavera as a mirror image or counterpart to the "hegemonic" mogul, Inverarity.[12] Pynchon collocates Inverarity's commercial outfits with the Trystero's conspiratorial ones (situated everywhere from Fangoso Lagoons to Tank Player's Theatre, Zapf's Books, The Greek Way and, perhaps most memorably, Tremaine's Swastika Shoppe), while also fashioning Inverarity as an opposing "brand personality" in Celia Lury's sense, "not [as] an individual, fictional or real, alive or dead but [as] an abstract amalgam of qualities, a signification of the indeterminate composite of values that are

[12] Hanjo Berressem also reads Trystero as a mirror image to the dominant paradigm, if not precisely to Inverarity himself. See *Pynchon's Poetics*.

commonly associated with individuals in the abstract" (75). In Oedipa's recollection of the last phone call she received from him, for instance, Inverarity appears as a web of dominant cultural values and references:

> [She remembered] that last year at three or so one morning there had come this long-distance call, from where she would never know (unless now he'd left a diary) by a voice beginning in heavy Slavic tones as second secretary at the Transylvanian Consulate, looking for an escaped bat; modulated to comic-Negro, then on into hostile Pachuco dialect, full of chingas and maricones; then a Gestapo officer asking her in shrieks did she have relatives in Germany and finally his Lamont Cranston voice, the one he'd talked in all the way down to Mazatlán. (2-3)

Frank Osterhaus reads Inverarity's voices as a practice of "multiple impersonation," indicating the origins of an identity that will eventually "involve all of multicultural America" (76). In a similar vein, Hanjo Berressem suggests that Inverarity's phone call casts him "as a mere compound and reflection of various cultural icons and a switchboard of various discursive frameworks . . . [through a] constant shifting of voices hides a more basic void and exposes [Inverarity's] personality as being always already an impersonation" (112-13). Inverarity, Berressem concludes, is "not an original person but a cultural simulacrum" (89). While Inverarity's voices certainly "involve all of multicultural America" and work to consolidate and reflect "various cultural icons" and "discursive frameworks," it seems important that Inverarity performs these consolidations and produces these frameworks by articulating racial and cultural difference in the advertising rhetoric of popular images, cartoons, and racial tropes. Recycling and reinscribing familiar pop icons like *The Shadow* and raced personalities like the "comic Negro" or the "hostile Pachuco," Inverarity's phone call produces him as a "personality"

encoded by mass culture, but also as a media manager, able to capture the essentializing features of history's racial and cultural others. In this way, Inverarity simultaneously evokes his own constitution as this history's strange and artificial center (as the "basic void" of white patriarchy lying at the heart of multicultural America), but also as the point or node at which multicultural America, imprisoned and reframed as cartoon, trademark, or racial hieroglyph, convenes under the sign or brand of "Inverarity."[13] At the same time, Inverarity's varied performance of mass-media icons evokes the formal dynamism of ARPANET's interface, which its creator, J.C.R. Licklider, likened to a cinematic montage. In ARPANET, Licklider writes, "we see the rocket's trail of fire, the mushroom cloud, the streak of lightning that portrays electronics' might" (2). Limning the brand's commodification of racial difference with the network subject's integration into a putatively disembodied "post-" or "trans-human" media space, Inverarity's bizarre montage bespeaks networks' hidden racial-hegemonic character: sites for the "postracial" imaginary, media networks, Pynchon would have us see, simply recode older forms of racial typification.

As Oedipa discovers, Inverarity not only reflects the sublimation of racial fantasies and types, he also brands material history by commodifying the bodies of forgotten American GIs. In a television commercial for Fangoso Lagoons, a premier housing project and one of Inverarity's largest San Narciso investments, Oedipa learns that the lagoons are to be accented with "real human skeletons from Italy" (20). On a later visit to Fangoso, Oedipa finds out that these real human skeletons are the remains of a small company of World War II GIs, isolated and killed in a German attack, and later disposed of in Italy's Lago di Pieta. While Inverarity purchased some of the skeletons for use in Fangoso's exhibit, most of the bones were acquired

[13] On advertising's production and mobilization of racial essentialisms, see Berlant.

in partnership with Beaconsfield Cigarettes for use in their signature bone charcoal cigarette filters. As Patrick O'Donnell suggests, Beaconsfield's sourcing and manufacturing process figures "amalgamatory capitalism as a metaphor for the cultural order depicted in [*Lot 49*] that everywhere works to assimilate dispersed cultural productions and remains into interlinked systems of transformation and desire," systems arguably prefigured by Inverarity's multicultural phone call (86). The commodification of the material bodies of GIs, however, makes another more specific claim about how brands work as mechanisms for the commodification or "waste management" of historical excess: one of the ways in which history and its surplus "wastes" get managed, the novel tells us, is to be commodified and suppressed by brands like Beaconsfield.

As I have suggested, the historical Tristero de Calavera also performs a version of "W.A.S.T.E. management" by branding a radical surplus history, only he does so without overtly transmuting historical material into the assets of mass culture. Nevertheless, like Inverarity, Tristero, translates a discrete historical aspiration (his financial and political designs) into a generic countercultural drive, bringing his heterogeneous subjects into a community of affect that levels their differences under the signifying objects and images of the Trystero brand. Like Inverarity, Tristero constructs a network sociality which realizes a distinct sense of belonging, contrives shared meanings, and establishes frames of action for the secret knowledge and activity of the Trystero's members.[14] Like Inverarity, Tristero's iconicity reinforces a powerful cultural myth—a fiction, as Douglas Holt contends, through which the brand addresses "cultural anxieties from afar, from imaginary worlds rather than from the worlds that consumers regularly encounter in their everyday lives" (8). For Inverarity, this fiction is multicultural America, an

[14] Drawing on sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of the frame, Lury and Arvidsson argue that brands establish boundaries within which specific social and aesthetic interactions can occur. See Goffman.

invented consolation for the realities of racial inequality and historical injustice. For the Trystero, it is the imaginary world of the counterculture and its ambivalent insider-outsideness, addressed to the ongoing dilemmas of social alienation and political exclusion.

And yet, importantly unlike Inverarity's subjects, who serve "amalgamatory capitalism" precisely because they exist as disembodied abstractions ("the comic-Negro," "the hostile Pachuco," "the real human"), Trystero's subjects are everywhere hyperembodied in ways that seem specifically to resist transformation into cultural commodities. Thus it is not surprising that the Trysteran bodies Oedipa notices on her San Narciso tour correspond with and correct Inverarity's catalog of clichés: in place of Inverarity's comic Negro, Oedipa discovers, among the exhausted busful of Negroes, a psychotic "Negro woman with an intricately-marbled scar along the baby-fat of one cheek who [keeps] going through rituals of miscarriage" (100). In place of the hostile and hypersexual "Pachuco dialect," Oedipa discusses Mikhail Bakunin with the "unsexual" Mexican anarchist, Jesus Arrabal (97). In place of the Gestapo officer who asks her if she has any relatives in Germany, Oedipa confronts her own psychiatrist, a former Nazi sympathizer. In place of Lamont Cranston, the vigilante-playboy of thirties radio who most closely resembles Inverarity himself, Oedipa gains insight into Trystero's capacities to facilitate the secret lives of those "God [knows] how many citizens," withdrawn into Trystero's "separate, silent, unsuspected world" (101).

Opposed to the trademark abstraction of figures like "the comic-Negro" and the "hostile Pachuco," then, Trystero's hyperembodied subjects nevertheless occupy the public and commercial space of San Narciso in silent and unsuspected ways. Referring not to commodities but rather to a secret, communal mode of being, Trystero's logos and slogans proliferate in store windows and public transit systems not as advertisements for things that can be bought or sold

but as solicitations for that "separate, silent, unsuspected world" where alternative political identities and histories can be embodied, recorded, and performed. In this sense, Trystero's achievement is not precisely, as Oedipa would have it, a "calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic," but rather a curious and secretive embeddedness within it—not the production of a concealed and private political sphere in the prophylactic sense, but the diligent inscription of Trystero's private, affective intensities within the social commons (101). Existing somewhere "outside of normal commercial systems," the Trystero also exist within them, as a community of affect organized by shared representational practices of graffitiing, tattooing, dancing, chanting, lovemaking, caretaking, and simply being-together.

In this way, the Trystero functions like a brand community, convened, as Mark Batey writes, by a "shared consciousness; rituals and traditions; and a sense of moral responsibility," but it also resembles an "iconic" brand, one that has "transcend[ed] products and [market] categories and become a free-standing meaning" (198). Exemplary of this brand status, Batey suggests, is Harley-Davidson. "Few brands have managed to generate the kind of deep visceral connection and unswerving loyalty that Harley has," Batey writes. "While the HOG refers to ownership of a Harley machine, the name is also an appropriate metaphor for the group of people who own not just the product but the brand itself" (203). Marking the difference between owning a brand's products versus participating in a brand's "aspirational and inspirational context" by using its "vocabulary [and] code of conduct [to construct] . . . a way of life," Batey maintains that brands like Harley-Davidson, which delve deeply into the affective dimensions of user experience, manage to "break out of their [product] category and into culture" (203). Like Harley-Davidson, Trystero solicits its members to collaborate in the lived production of the brand; unlike Harley, what Trystero finally sponsors isn't a political

commodity, but an embodied politics itself.

As sociologist Wini Breines argues, in working to produce new "organizational forms and instrumental mechanisms . . . consistent with [its] so-called anti-political motifs," the New Left sought especially to "sustain within the live practice of the movement relationships . . . that 'prefigured' and embodied the desired society" (420-21). No relational form captures these desires more fully than "community," both in its "sense of wholeness and communication in social relationships, but [also in its attempt] to create noncapitalist and communitarian institutions that embodied such relationships" (421). Along with Carl Boggs, Breines terms these communitarian institutions "prefigurative-" or "counter-institution[al]" (421). More than the expressive, anti-organizational program it is often labeled by critics, the New Left was finally, for Breines, an attempt to realize the participatory democracy theorized by the SDS—to "circumvent the passivity and hierarchy of electoral politics" by drawing on community's "personal and antihierarchical" political values.

Pynchon hints at his affinity for the New Left's political values in the 1984 introduction to *Slow Learner*, where he claims that the New Left "was to be limited by the failure of college kids and blue-collar workers to get together" (*Slow Learner* 7). Joanna Freer locates Pynchon's interest in the movement earlier still, in the 1966 *New York Times* editorial, "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts," where, as Freer writes, Pynchon champions precisely the "egalitarian, non-paternalistic, cross-community approach New Left groups exercised" in the early sixties (10). In dialogue with Breines, Pynchon's emphasis on the Trystero's embodied, cross-community, and communication-driven practices appears to cast Trystero as an essentially New Left society, opposed to normative capitalist relations and traditional political praxis. But Pynchon's equal emphasis on the Trystero's use of representational techniques interchangeable with those of

branding also nominates the brand itself as a potential counter-institution, capable of forging those personal and antihierarchical political societies desired by the New Left. Indeed, just as Oedipa finds evidence of the Trystero's communal activities throughout her San Narciso journey—during her encounter with the drunken Trysteran sailor being cared for by concerned neighbors; in the company of Inamorati Anonymous, a group of failed suicides who support one another via anonymous letters; upon discovering the sleepless band of children chanting Trystero's name in Golden Gate park; and amongst the sublime party of deaf-mutes—, so too does she discover that Trystero relies upon its "gemlike clues" in order to convene and manage these communities (95). In this way, while Pynchon constructs the Trystero as a figure for the New Left's "personal and antihierarchical" political values, he also makes clear that Trystero's collective expression of these values requires something like the representational conceit made by Harley's consumers, an emotional wager that the brand's otherwise hegemonic, organizational symbols might also serve as vehicles for the articulation of personal and antihierarchial political aspirations.

Given what I have argued is Pynchon's sense of the brand as both a facilitator and subverter of political identity and collective aspiration, what Trystero finally models best is perhaps the tension between signifiers that might effectively mobilize political aspirations and those *en route* to becoming commercial hieroglyphs; between sites of political action and the operations of the political fetish; between political culture and the cult of the brand. And it is in this sense that Pynchon's Trystero should also be understood to respond to counterculture's utopian project by offering a utopian vision of its own, a vision neither of egalitarian society won by violent revolution, nor, as Oedipa suspects, of absolute "withdrawal" from the machinery of the Republic, but rather of unsuspected, quasi-anarchist modes of being-within the

capitalist system.[15] This is not, of course, to suggest that Trystero reflects Pynchon's sense that participating in a brand culture might meaningfully replace social action. Rather, it is to observe that Pynchon's depiction of the branded Trystero imagines the brand community as a specific site for political expression and empowerment in a manner that critically prefigures the utopian promises of neoliberal consumer culture, a culture for which ambivalences of this sort are nearly ubiquitous.[16]

In this sense, the "silent, unsuspected" utopian project undertaken by the Trystero begins to mirror and clarify that of the political novelist working within yet against the capitalist status quo, a project both parties engage via the production and dissemination of texts, playscripts, and counter-histories whose very circulation is itself a silent, unsuspected means of political empowerment. Indeed, I wish now to suggest that Pynchon's emphasis on the textual nature of Trystero's artifacts foregrounds and self-reflexively describes his own pragmatic construction of a "subversive" literary brand within the context of several major-market magazines in the early 1960s. Specifically, by exploring similarities between the Trystero's "unsuspected" place within the capitalist marketplace and Pynchon's careful, measured participation in circuits of commercial advertising for popular journals like *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Esquire*, *Cavalier*, and *The New York Times Magazine*, I hope to evoke the young Pynchon's sense that his literary brand might, like the Trystero's, appear as a "gemlike clue" in which the people glimpse their force (95).[17]

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[15] Trystero's quasi-visibility within a capitalist marketplace would also seem to map onto its uncertain position along the spectrum of counterculture's modes of protest, which, like Trystero's activities throughout *Lot 49*, range from peaceful activism to violent revolution.

[16] For more on the promises of neoliberal consumer culture, see Sarah Banet-Weiser.

[17] As Ghosh writes, mass media icons such as brand logos often provide "glimpses into eruptions of collective aspiration."

The Pyndustry and the Brand of PYNCHON

Pynchon's work first appeared in a popular venue in December of 1964, when *The Saturday Evening Post* printed his short story, "The Secret Integration." A year later, two excerpts from the forthcoming *Lot 49* were published: "The World (This One), the Flesh (Mrs. Oedipa Maas), and the Testament of Pierce Inverarity" in the December 1965 issue of *Esquire*; and "The Shrink Flips" in the March 1966 issue of *Cavalier*. Just months following *Lot 49*'s release by J.P. Lippincott, the *New York Times Magazine* printed Pynchon's editorial, "A journey into the mind of Watts," a vigorous condemnation of the LAPD which has since been read as a critical coda to *Lot 49*.[18] John K. Young approaches Pynchon's work for popular magazines with an eye to recovering its context-specific meaning. Reading "The World" alongside the articles and advertisements with which it originally appeared in *Esquire*'s Christmas issue, Young maintains that Pynchon's story was strategically edited and positioned so as to serve as "an indirect advertisement for [Grommes & Ullrich] bourbon," a product *Esquire* marketed to its predominantly white, male readership (400). However, rather than suggest that Pynchon descried his story's "commodification within *Esquire*'s bibliographical environment," Young argues that Pynchon was eager to participate in this process (391). Noting that Pynchon carefully excerpted "The World" so as to relate only Oedipa's boozy affair with Inverarity's handsome lawyer (thus foregoing any reference to the Trystero or to *Lot 49*'s weightier themes), Young reads "The World" as Pynchon's attempt to "refashion himself as a mainstream author [by] forsaking the artistic pose attendant on small magazines for the commercial viability conferred by major-market publications" (391). Eager to boost sales for the forthcoming *Lot 49*, but also alert to his complicity with an "increasingly commercialized literary market," "The World,"

[18] See Freer.

Young concludes, testifies to the young Pynchon's willingness to "become a particular kind of public author" by "selling himself on the market for 'sophisticated' fiction that *Esquire* represents" (391).

Building on Young's work, Tore Andersen reads "The Shrink Flips" with similar attention to the story's initial publication venue. Andersen notes that "The Shrink Flips" originally appeared in *Cavalier* alongside a curious ad for Interwoven socks. "[Interwoven's] ad copy," Andersen writes, "was headed by the legend, 'The Man from Interwoven,' and begins: 'She worked for H.E.E.L., the world-wide anti-sock conspiracy'" (124). For Andersen, the acronymic pun, H.E.E.L., points up the derivativeness of Pynchon's W.A.S.T.E. Not the "unprecedented vanguard of zany paranoia" he is often credited with being, H.E.E.L. reveals the extent to which Pynchon reflects rather than anticipates "a cultural phenomenon [that had] trickled down to something as mundane as socks" (124). Although Andersen does not mention it, the acronym motif had been trickling down to wider public audiences since at least the 1964 premier of the award-winning spy series, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, which ran for four seasons on NBC. Along with its spin-off series, *The Girl from U.N.C.L.E.*, which had a briefer run from 1966-1967, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* featured acronyms heavily. Its creators, Sam Rolfe, Norman Felton, and Ian Fleming were even advised to clarify the series' full title lest it unwittingly offend the United Nations.

While much more could certainly be said about *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*'s apparent thematic relation to *The Crying of Lot 49* (the series' pilot episode, for instance, features a suburban housewife embroiled in an international spy plot), topical parallels of this sort are not my primary interest here. Rather, and in Young's sense, I am interested in how we might read Pynchon's acronyms, W.A.S.T.E. and D.E.A.T.H., alongside cultural phenomena like

Interwoven's H.E.E.L. and NBC's *U.N.C.L.E.*. In this vein, I propose that Pynchon's deployment of the acronym motif in "The Shrink Flips" and, subsequently, *The Crying of Lot 49* speaks to his desire to integrate himself with consumer culture rather than to distance himself from it—to channel the affects and exploit the communicative flows of *Cavalier*'s readership and *U.N.C.L.E.*'s viewership in ways that allow audiences to locate Pynchon and his work within these broader cultural matrices. If, as Young suggests, Pynchon "becomes a particular kind of public author" by agreeing to the commodification of his work by a popular magazine like *Esquire*, then I would like to suggest that through his citation of a mass-cultural motif, Pynchon also works to register his own commercial status as something akin to a literary brand: see H.E.E.L., think Interwoven; see W.A.S.T.E., think Pynchon.

In this, I wish to conclude, Pynchon's narrative of branding counterculture in *The Crying of Lot 49* and his related bid to brand a literary identity by participating in mainstream culture both inaugurate trends in postmodern and contemporary literary production, whose major texts foreground relationships between authors and publishers in an ever-expanding culture industry, and also tend to seize on brands in an effort to negotiate the novelist's cultural and commercial status. Anticipating those concerns, Pynchon's sense of the author's relation both to a political scene and also to a wider capitalist marketplace remains decisive: a figure for the author, DeLillo's Nick Shay, of *Underworld*, contrives an elaborate story about his father's disappearance based on the brand logo for Lucky Strike cigarettes. Bret Easton Ellis's sad sociopath, Patrick Bateman, loses his mind in a brand culture that suffocates his most basic identitarian yearnings. *Pattern Recognition*'s Cayce Pollard is allergic to some brands, even as she manipulates this sensitivity to market others. The fiction of David Foster Wallace delivers dystopic worlds in which space, time, and bodies themselves are interpellated by brand advertising. Recent novels

by Percival Everett, Dana Spiotta, and Colson Whitehead thematize author-figures as brand managers, each with an eye to Pynchonian questions of the author's market value, and each, to varying degrees, hopeful that authors might yet retain a measure of cultural worth irreducible to it.[19] For each of these novelists, Pynchon's account of branding as a trope for cultural authorship remains implicit, on the one hand encouraging novelists to consider those "unsuspected" yet politically empowering ways in which they might become "particular kinds of public authors" by branding themselves for the mainstream, but, on the other hand, signaling novelists' complicities with a market for culture that is, at best, indifferent to the power of their claims.

[19] For an insightful account of *Stone Arabia*'s gestures of industrial self-reflexivity, see Michael Szalay, "The Incorporation Artist."

CHAPTER 2

Random Walks: Teju Cole and the Algorithmic Logic of Racial Ascription

In July of 2014, shortly after issuing his thirteen-thousandth tweet, Nigerian-American writer Teju Cole decided it was time to take a break from Twitter. Cole had joined the social networking platform in October of 2009, prompted in part by what he saw as an opportunity to promote his then-forthcoming and subsequently much-acclaimed second novel, *Open City* (2011). By the middle of 2014, Cole's Twitter account had amassed a following of 188,000 users. His decision to put the account on hold was not borne of frustration with the medium. Much to the contrary, Cole's esteem for Twitter is well documented by *The Guardian*, *NPR, The New Yorker*, *The Washington Post*, *Wired*, *Slate* and several other sources, all of which have published admiring articles on Cole's provocative Twitter projects.[20] Many of these articles offer praise for the 2014 short story "Hafiz," which originated as a single tweet from Cole but later developed into a collaboratively-authored piece written in real-time by Cole's friends and followers. Others mention Cole's "Small Fates" project, a series of tweets Cole issued between 2011 and 2013 based on events that occurred exactly one century prior, such as the 1912 shooting of an unarmed African American man in New York City. Others still laud his 2013 "Drone Short Stories": tweets that disfigure familiar narratives from literary modernism by introducing images of drone violence. Then, there is Cole's latest work: the 4,000-word essay on the US/Mexico border crisis, tweeted in March of 2014 alongside images of "The Fence," and "The Time of the Game," a photo-essay assembled from crowdsourced images of a single moment in the 2014 World Cup Final.

[20] Other popular news sources that have commented on Cole's work include *Buzzfeed, Vice,* and *Mother Jones.*

In light of projects like these it is hard not to view Cole's conception of social media as deeply empowering, a testament to the persistence of an early nineties Internet discourse celebrating the arrival of a "free" and "open" Web available to the political concerns of all racial groups.[21] Indeed, Cole's descriptions of his Twitter projects tend to echo politically affirmative accounts of the network society.[22] He cites "Hafiz," for instance, which tells of an Arab American man who falls ill on the subway, as a "small attempt to put a number of people into a collaborative situation," to form a narrative that would "feel emergent, from a source that no one could have suspected" ("Teju Cole Writes"). In a similar vein, Cole narrates his decision to release "Hafiz" for free over Twitter as the result of his desire to "create a 'we' out of a story that [he] might simply have published in the conventional way." "A lot of people I want to be read by," Cole continues, "and a lot of people I want to speak to, don't have subscriptions to *The New Yorker* or *The New York Times*, so it's important for me to speak to them in this way also." Cole thus links Twitter's technical capacity to foster "emergent" and "unsuspected" modes of distributed storytelling to his own prerogative, as a writer, to challenge the conventions of mainstream publishing. It is only because Twitter offers its social networking platform in the spirit of "generosity" that Cole is able to deliver "little bits of magic" like "Hafiz" free of charge to the reading public.

While Cole is neither the first writer to undertake a digital storytelling project nor the first to cultivate a social media presence, his Twitter agenda is unusual, in part, for the degree to which it resonates with his work as a novelist.[23] If, for many contemporary writers, social media

[21] On the early rhetoric of Internet equality, see Peter Chow-White and Lisa Nakamura.
[22] Here, I refer especially to the work of Manuel Castells.
[23] In 2008, Rick Moody launched the multi-media literary journal *Electric Literature* by delivering a short story composed of 153 Tweets. That same year, Neil Gaiman worked with BBC Audiobooks to produce an interactive novel, which he subsequently tweeted. In 2012, both Margaret Atwood and Jennifer Egan

afford opportunities to gain visibility and retain relevance at a time when the novel form has begun to feel obsolete, for Cole a platform like Twitter appears to offer much more, furnishing a means to engage the changing nature of writing and publishing, but also providing a new style of writing seemingly keyed to "emergent" and collaborative structures of social experience. Perhaps this is why Cole originally published his debut novel, *Every Day is for the Thief* (2007), on his Lagosian blog, "Every Day," and why he describes *Open City* as an attempt to emulate Twitter's "pure, uncut, directly from the grain" (qtd. in Rosenberg) mode of address. Perhaps it is also why *Open City*, with its multiracial cast and wandering storyline, assumes a punchy, dispersed narrative form that seems in many ways the high-literary version of a Twitter feed.

This chapter will suggest that in addition to Cole's avowed emulation of Twitter's "pure, uncut" style, *Open City* also, and in far subtler ways, registers Cole's interest in the relation between literary form and the algorithmic forms of racial ascription, sociality, and domination newly configured by Internet technologies. Cole sets *Open City* in the mid-2000s, well into the dot-com recovery period when market valuations for global tech corporations were soaring. And yet, his novel does not overtly address any aspect of contemporary technoculture. Instead, *Open City* presents a series of literary and philosophical reflections issued in the antiquarian prose of its brooding protagonist Julius, a half-Nigerian, half-German psychiatrist whom nearly all of the novel's critics have identified as a modern-day flâneur.[24] Over its twenty-one short chapters, *Open City* tracks Julius as he "aimlessly wanders" (Cole 3) about New York, meeting with a

published serialized work online. Atwood's novel, "The Happy Zombie Sunrise Home," appeared on Wattpad, while Egan's much-promoted "Black Box" was tweeted by *The New Yorker* over nine evenings in late May and early June, a single tweet issued every minute between 8-9PM ET. Salman Rushdie, Haruki Murakami, Margaret Atwood, Neil Gaiman, and David Mitchell all interact with readers via their Twitter accounts. Ursula Leguin writes a blog and Veronica Roth curates a Tumblr, while Paul Coehlo and Gary Shteyngart prefer Facebook and Instagram.

[24] See James Wood, Giles Foden, Claire Messud, Pieter Vermeulen, Katherine Hallemeier, and Stephen Miller.

diverse catalogue of friends, and encountering a number of African and African American strangers who hail him as a fellow African, inviting Julius to identify with an objectified blackness organized around a set of racial keywords and stereotypical images. The novel also recounts Julius's brief trip to Brussels, where he goes in search of his German grandmother, as well as a handful of Julius's seemingly random memories from his childhood in Nigeria. Proceeding more or less without a plot, *Open City*'s major events thus unfold obliquely, as if by accident. My claim is that this serial narrative obliqueness—a counterpart to Cole's decision to take up the belated figure of the flâneur—represents more than a stylistic homage to Twitter. Rather, I argue that the flâneur, who is frequently cited as a figural precursor to the Internet user, provides Cole with a particularly vivid way of dramatizing the operations of a "technological unconscious" recently theorized by critics including Nigel Thrift, David Beer, Alexander Galloway, and Katherine Hayles.[25] Drawing on earlier notions of technology's conditioning of sense perception put forth by Walter Benjamin (whose writings are widely referenced in *Open City*), the "technological unconscious" refers to now-ubiquitous systems for user tracking and content personalization notably deployed by Web search engines like Google, which monitor users' online activities, expressions, and preferences the better to match them with suitable products and information. Read against the narrative form and content of *Open City*, I am suggesting that Julius's multiple acts of searching—the actual search Julius undertakes to find his grandmother, but also the recurring city wanderings in which the young psychiatrist is understood to be "walking in search of his identity" (Miller 198)—are isomorphic with the algorithmic processes that underpin Google's user-tracking search technology, from its use of autocomplete suggestions to its deployment of location analytics and personalized information

[25] On the flâneur as precursor to the Web user, see Anne Friedberg and Lev Manovich.

retrieval. Limning the narrative of Julius's aimless wandering with the operations of Google Search, Cole's novel subsequently describes a technological unconscious that subtends literary and, moreover, racial form.[26]

Because *Open City* frames Julius's wandering in distinctly racial terms—as so many attempts to discover the historical meaning and cultural content of his biracial, postcolonial, immigrant subjectivity—Julius's flânerie does not simply trace out the rules of Google's search algorithm, but also illustrates how popular Internet technologies like Google underwrite the digital economy's "new classificatory architecture" (Fourcade and Healy 10). Deploying broadly actuarial methods to construct users' "data doubles" (Haggerty and Ericson 606) this "classificatory architecture," Cole suggests, serves as a subtle means of racial interpellation, reinforcing feedback loops between individual and collective racial characteristics, and truncating the less predictable and more diverse types of social and cultural encounters that Julius, in his "aimless wandering," seeks relentlessly to cultivate. In this sense, Cole's decision to fashion Julius as a flâneur also works to undermine the fantasy of a transcendental subject commonly invoked in accounts of the "postracial," "post-identity-politics" Internet. Rendering the "Open City" a metonym for the "open" Web, and casting Julius's flânerie as the figure for his desire to be unrestricted and, most importantly, racially unmarked within this space, *Open City* proceeds to stage Julius's encounters with numerous African and African American interlocutors who venture in vain to form bonds of racial solidarity with him. At the same time, the novel documents Julius's resistance to these interpellations, emphasizing instead his determination to view the "Open City" as an anonymous space of total freedom and unscripted serendipity, one

[26] Here I refer to Colleen Lye's concept of "racial form," which she defines as a literary form that registers interethnic social and economic relations rather than one that expresses essential racial identities.

where he might choose a racial identity for himself (here, a German one) or even forego race entirely as a category of differentiation. Understood in this way, Julius's flânerie illustrates contradictions between an aspirational postraciality entailed in the Internet's seemingly open form, and the technical processes for user and group classification (autocomplete, predictive and personalized search, etc.) that attempt to hail users into preexisting identity categories, seizing on aspects of their online *habitus* (traces of their consumer habits and micro-practices, drawn from a database of actions) the better to anticipate their demands. These processes reveal the Internet to be less an anonymous or empowering space of total freedom, and more a privatized domain of near-total surveillance, one where algorithms quantify interactional processes and sift through user data in order to coalesce individuals with homophilic peers: other users, often referred to as "neighbors," determined to share their fundamental attributes. Continually slotted into a racial identity category, and offered recommendations for persons and products that ostensibly accord with this identity, Julius's "aimless wandering" manifests a subtly curated and bounded journey through New York City based on his perceived "user habits" and "consumer preferences." This experience illustrates Wendy Chun's notion that subjects today inhabit new media systems in which they are cast as "character[s] in a universe of drama putatively called Big Data," a universe that seeks to identify them as members of an economic class likely to be receptive to certain products, services, and ideas (*Updating to Remain the Same* 2). For the wandering Julius, this universe not only reflects the new infrastructure of data collection and search engine-optimization that measures and increasingly defines the lives of its subjects (what Chun calls the Internet's transformation into a "series of poorly gated, trackable communities") but also race's systemic drag within a current phase of accelerated capitalism whose purportedly neutral proxies reiterate global class formations along racial lines (94).

In this way, Cole's subversion of Julius's fantasy of an open, postracial Web ultimately levels an expansive critique of networked capitalist enterprise, enterprise that continues to maintain the Internet's race-neutrality as a consolidator of the global economy while enforcing global wage differentials that subordinate and thus effectively re-racialize the labor of third-world subjects similar to those Julius encounters throughout *Open City*.[27] I therefore argue that through Julius's flânerie Cole at once allegorizes the codification of racial identity by consumer giants like Google, and gestures toward the Internet's role in reconfiguring race to accord with technical changes in the global division of labor.

Tracking, Tracing, Sorting, Morphing

In "Remembering the Technological Unconscious by Foregrounding Knowledges of Position," geographer Nigel Thrift observes that digital computing has given rise to an array of sociotechnical systems "whose content is the bending of bodies-with-environments to a specific set of addresses without the benefit of any cognitive inputs, [and whose aim is to create] a prepersonal substrate of guaranteed correlations, assured encounters, and therefore unconsidered anticipations" (177). In today's data-rich society, Thrift continues, bodies are continually being bent to the wills of marketers and the businesses they represent. As such, the "technological unconscious" names the role computing has come to play in "track[ing]-and-trac[ing]" (182) consumers so as to "hypercoordinate and microcoordinate" (177) them with the products and information to which they are ostensibly best suited. Extending Thrift's concept beyond the realm of commerce, sociologists David Beer, Roger Burrows, and Scott Lash suggest that the technological unconscious might also denote much larger ontological shifts toward technology's constitutive, rather than simply mediatory, role in "how we do things, the way we

[27] See Chris Chen.

are treated, the things we encounter, [and] our [general] way of life" (Beer 987). Lash, for instance, sees information technologies as administering broad sets of "generative rules"—"virtual [rules] that generate a whole variety of actual [rules]" (70-71)—which obliquely regulate behavior, both online and off. Operating in "compressed and hidden [ways]" (70), these now-pervasive technologies realize a "post-hegemonic" regime of "power through the algorithm" (71).

Recent critical writing by Alexander Galloway—part of a group of contemporary theorists investigating the relation between new media and the control society, including Jodi Dean, Tarleton Gillespie, Geert Lovink, Mackenzie Wark, and Tiziana Terranova—sharpens Lash's sense of power through the algorithm by turning to the concept of protocol. Taken as a "controlling logic" (*Protocol* 149) that moves outward from computer technology to affect all registers of social life, protocol, in Galloway's view, has emerged as the premier style of contemporary social management, one that both accommodates and reflects the twenty-first-century transformation of production, consumption, and sociality into a "vital mass of immaterial flows and instantaneous transactions" (20). In its organization of "real human people," Galloway suggests, protocols work to supplant individual identity with "certain hegemonic patterns" borne of "algorithmic collaboration" (114). In place of "living bodies [with] … essences, or souls," computer protocols now define individuals in terms of "quantifiable, recordable, enumerable and encodable characteristics" amenable to digital technologies' more fluid and immanent forms of regulation (113).

As we will see, *Open City* describes a number of "generative rules" and protocological controls that everywhere seem to entrain Julius's behaviors and pattern his individual characteristics, working to "hypercoordinate" Julius with an array of persons and products

indicated by his own superficial qualities. But even before the novel describes these rules, or begins to register their effects on Julius, it signals Julius's suspicion that some "controlling" technical logic might be lurking in his everyday world, structuring it in ways he can neither understand nor resist. Early on, Julius is disturbed by his compulsion to sort and classify the neighborhoods he has visited on his most recent walk, a wearisome task that swiftly undoes the "much-needed release" (3) the walk was meant to provide.

> That night I took the subway home, and instead of falling asleep immediately, I lay in bed, too tired to release myself from wakefulness, and I rehearsed in the dark the numerous incidents and sights I had encountered while roaming, sorting each encounter like a child playing with wooden blocks, trying to figure out which belonged where, which responded to which. Each neighborhood of the city appeared to be made of a different substance, each seemed to have a different air pressure, a different psychic weight … My futile task of sorting went on until the forms began to morph into each other and assume abstract shapes unrelated to the real city; and only then did my hectic mind finally show some pity and still itself, only then did dreamless sleep arrive. (6-7)

Julius's strange episode of sorting neighborhoods into abstract shapes not only illustrates but intensifies the problems of agency and protocological regulation to which Thrift, Lash, and Galloway refer. Attempting to "release [himself] from the tightly regulated mental environment of [his] work [as a psychiatrist]" (7), a profession in which Julius is required to sort and classify patients according to the DSM-IV, Julius finds that he has yet to grapple with unconscious forces that would conform his imagination to familiar organizational demands, forces seeking to generate abstract modes of relation between outwardly distinct "psychic" substances. Read in this way, Julius's futile task of morphing neighborhoods into each other resembles one of the

most basic practices of data management: commensuration, or the "transformation of different qualities into a common metric" (van der Vlist 1). A computational technique for processing data assemblages such as search queries and content recommendations, commensuration's fundamental goal is to produce measurable data objects whose attributes can be effectively sorted and categorized. In line with Lash's sense of how the generative rules of information technology have begun to "'sink' into … aspects of our everyday lives" (qtd. in Beer 985), Julius's urge to de- and re-cipher the persons and things he has encountered on his nightly walk manifests a quasi-unconscious, technical control logic that compels him, even in moments of desired mental respite, to repeat the operations of a sorting algorithm.

Driven to collect and sort the "data" derived from his experience of New York's neighborhoods, Julius's "futile task" merges the city's "real" architectural features with the "abstract shapes" and imperatives of the digital economy's new "classificatory architecture," an architecture whose primary objective, Marion Fourcade and Kieran Healy suggest, is to assist market institutions in "apprehend[ing] their clients, customers, or employees through new instruments of knowledge, efficiency, and value extraction" (10). Today's markets, they continue, "have learned to 'see' in a new way, and are teaching us to see ourselves in that way, too" (10). Having begun to "see" the city and its neighborhoods like a market algorithm, it will not be long before Julius recognizes the market's ability to "see" him similarly, as an "algorithmic self" accumulated from the history of his "recorded actions, built up from traces left on everything from social media to credit bureaus, shopping Web sites and fidelity programs, courthouses, pharmacies, and the content of emails and chats"—a "self" vulnerable to the manipulations of new technologies of connection eager to construct him as a "certain kind of person" likely to find satisfaction in some neighborhoods more than others (18).

It is significant, then, that Julius's exercise in commensuration seizes on the "neighborhood" as its modulating object. In his classic study of "matrix multiplication"—statistical techniques used to identify, classify, and evaluate individuals on the "basis of the populations or groups to which they have been assigned through analysis" (128)—Oscar Gandy, Jr., has shown how information systems naturalize the production of "geodemographic market clusters" that reinforce systemic patterns of discrimination and "cumulative disadvantage" (134; 139). During the 2008 financial meltdown, for instance, predatory lenders used data mining systems to target low-income minorities (134). In this way, "neighborhood" parameters proxied by seemingly innocuous data systems came to define modes of consumer segmentation that served to reinforce offline patterns of inequality. Outlining these processes of neighborhood segregation in more figural—one might say "psychic"—terms, Wendy Chun observes that recommendation algorithms such as those deployed by *Netflix.com* deploy so-called "neighborhood predictors" that draw on a notion of the Internet as a "series of gated communities" (119). "The segregation of films and users into neighborhoods based on strong likes and dislikes," she writes,

> assumes that neighborhoods are forms of voluntary segregation—that YOU reside with people "like YOU," whose actions preempt and shape YOUR own. … These algorithms make no attempt at desegregation, at expanding one's point of view by exposing one to things that are radically different. Rather, YOU reveal YOUs, where these YOUs are closely lumped together, and YOUs are defined—whether or not users speak—through YOUR affiliations. (120)

Algorithms like *Netflix*'s thus identify individuals by way of their relation to groups of like-minded peers, predicting and promoting future behaviors that "conform to, confirm and

optimize, [their] statistical network analyses" (120). Chun concludes that data-analytic systems keyed to the consumption of cultural artifacts

> resolve multiculturalism though neighborhood predictors that bypass yet reinforce categories such as race, gender, and sexuality … moving away from subjects and narratives toward actors and captured actions that they knit into a monstrously connected chimera. They imagine connections that transform the basis of the collective imaginary from "we" to YOU: from community to an ever-still-resolvable grouping that erodes and sustains the distance between self and other. (40)

Cole signals Julius's growing awareness of these aggregating systems throughout *Open City*, namely by narrating Julius's persistent disdain for the vast number of African persons who assume he is just like them, attempting to draw on supposedly shared experiences of "the Motherland," and offering Julius recommendations for various "African" products they imagine he might enjoy (186). Frustrated by offers of friendship or advice that strike him as hollow and automatic, Julius instead pursues aesthetic experiences widely adrift from his explicit racial indicators: he visits the American Folk Art Museum and attends various classical concerts at Carnegie Hall, seeks the intellectual companionship of an academic elite composed almost entirely of fellow doctors and professors (whose own ethnicities range widely), and reads vast quantities of Western philosophy. At the same time, Julius's behavioral indicators do not entirely disavow his racial Africanness. His immediate consumption habits, such as his frequent purchase of goat curry, plantains, and rice and peas from a Jamaican eatery near his home, and occasional cultural predilections for African poetry, music, and travel evince the spirit of his "aimless wandering" through the city: the unspoken desire to desegregate himself from a target demographic "neighborhood," and to avoid becoming recognizable to some algorithmic system

whose "palpable but opaque undercurrents … mov[ing] quietly beneath [his] knowledge," and silently curating his experiences he subtly senses (Gillespie 192). As we will see, what Julius's eclectic and obfuscatory patterns of consumption steadily reveal is the gap between racial typification (the racially-reified "user caricature" contrived from Julius's basic demographic details (Gillespie 174)) and Julius's more complex racial identification; between the coarseness with which market-segmentation algorithms assign individuals to demographic communities based on their direct market legibility, and the more fine-grained workings of identification maintained by individuals like Julius.

Eager though he is to lose himself in those moments of "freedom" and "improvisation" (7) his aimless walks afford, then, Julius's nightmarish episode of "sorting … [his neighborhood] encounters like a child playing with wooden blocks" indicates his awareness that he, too, might be a mere wooden block in some other more omnipotent child's sorting-game. Soon after exiting the subway at Wall Street, Julius enters a vast atrium whose columns, he observes, "could have been wrought from recycled plastic chairs, and … [whose] ceiling seemed to have been carefully constructed out of white Lego blocks" (46).[28]

> The feeling of being in a large-scale model was only increased by the lonely palm trees in their pots … [on one side of the hall t]here were five pairs of [backgammon] players … all of them black. On the other side of the hall, under the other long nave aisle, there was another pair of men, both white … I walked among the backgammon players, most of whom seemed to be middle-aged, and their languid, focused faces and the slowness of their movements did nothing to correct my impression of being among life-size mannequins. (46-47)

[28] On LEGO's "pre-racial" color scheme, see Derek Johnson.

While Julius frequently describes the subway an as anonymizing organizational environment where commuters, dressed "all in black and gray," march along, "shoulders up, heads low … hemmed in on both sides … penned in" (58), here, the subway's regulatory processes involve the segregation of black "mannequins" from white. In a later scene, Julius wonders whether the subway might be able to sort individuals according to their precise racial composition: might he, a half-African émigré, find the subway "line that connected [him] to [his] own part in … [America's] stories [of immigration]"? (59). At other times, Julius describes the subway's organizing effects in psychoanalytic terms that seem to normalize racial difference, merging all individuals into an abstract "human" race: "[t]he sight of large masses of people hurrying down into underground chambers was perpetually strange to me, and I felt that all of the human race were rushing, pushed by a counterinstinctive death drive, into movable catacombs" (7). Resonant with the Internet's subterranean fiber optic networks, New York's subway appears as a system wherein persons, like data, dart from one line to another, their final destinations open yet their paths determined by a series of oblique controls. Like neighborhoods morphed into abstract shapes, the "large-scale model" Julius imagines stands in for any number of statistical models that work to determine an individual's position within the social marketplace, establishing relationships between the individual and, in this instance, the color-coded population to which she belongs. In this model, then, the illegible crowd is decomposed into grayscale colors, and the otherwise unique impulses of so many individuals get reduced to a shared "counterinstinctive" drive. A figure for the technological unconscious, the subway thus spatializes the workings of data transfer and also outlines the algorithmic logic of sorting, filtering, and classification to which Julius is at least partly alert. Here, bodies dissolve into colors, and colors are grouped along separate aisles, organized by a "classificatory architecture"

that segregates them into groups of homophilic peers. Here, thousands of strangers, all "reenacting unacknowledged traumas, the[ir] solitude intensified" (7), are likened to the flow of information.

For Katherine Hayles, the "unacknowledged trauma" Julius ascribes to solitary subway travelers presents a particularly useful site for elaborating the workings of the technological unconscious. Because trauma, like computer code, exists beneath the surface of consciousness, Hayles reasons that moments of psychic rupture are especially suited to reveal the entraining of human behavior by technology. Just as trauma manifests itself through "significant puns, slips, and metonymic splices," so too does code make itself known to the user "at those moments when the program makes decisions we have not consciously initiated" (137). While *Open City* abounds in histories of actual trauma (Julius's conversations with various friends and strangers effectively chronicle the long twentieth-century of human rights abuses, from the Japanese internment and the Nazi occupation of Europe to the Ugandan and Rwandan genocides), the novel's most acute moment of traumatic rupture occurs not when Julius himself is accused of having raped a former classmate named Moji, but rather when Julius repeatedly fails to remember his ATM personal identification code. Following Hayles, I am suggesting that in moments like these *Open City* relates traumatic memory to the technological unconscious as two species of withheld information, each working beneath the surface of consciousness. More specifically, I am proposing that the novel produces this analogy not only by drawing a series of parallels between human beings and bits of information, or between urban architecture and data-network infrastructure, but by embodying in the narrative of Julius's aimless wandering the essential principles of Web search technology.

Virtual Flâneurs and Random Walkers

Open City's twenty-one short chapters are framed and roughly chronologized by the dozen or so aimless walks Julius takes in New York and Brussels toward the end of 2006 and into 2007. Often detailed in conjunction with Julius's accounts of his preoccupation with the migration patterns of New York's local birds, the walks also serve to focus Julius's wide-ranging thoughts on art, music, literature, philosophy, politics, and history, as well as to relate conversations between Julius and the many racially diverse individuals he meets both in New York and abroad. These interlocutors include Julius's mentor, a medievalist and former Japanese-American internee; a Barbudan museum guard; a Liberian immigrant awaiting deportation in Queens; a Haitian bootblack; a Belgian cardiac surgeon; a Czech travel agent with whom Julius has a brief affair; an African American postal worker; and a Moroccan philosophy student who runs an internet café in Brussels. Chapters in which Julius converses with these and other characters assume the form of biographical vignettes, often revolving around the discussion of a work of literature or philosophy (these range suggestively from *Beowulf* and *Piers Plowman* to Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History," Kwame's Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism*, and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*). Interspersed with these conversation-driven chapters are a handful in which Julius relates his seemingly random memories of Nigeria, including his flogging by a Nigerian Military School instructor, the death and burial of Julius's father, and a scene of sexual awakening centered around Julius's secret enjoyment of a Coca Cola. Throughout the novel, Julius reflects upon his racial identity as a Nigerian-German émigré and attempts to work through his relation to his immediate American surroundings, his distant African homeland, and his more distant German lineage. Repeatedly, *Open City* describes Julius's refusal to identify with numerous African and African American strangers—and this despite his persistent feelings of isolation. The novel ends by recounting a particularly traumatic incident

suffered by Julius, and by revealing another perpetrated by him: Julius is mugged and beaten by a group of African American teenagers, and soon afterward, a Nigerian schoolmate, also living in New York, alleges that Julius raped her at a party several years ago. Although the allegation goes unconfirmed (Julius simply refuses to acknowledge the assault in any way), the incident lends the novel diegetic closure by furnishing a psychological explanation for Julius's melancholy and his walking habit.

Quipping that *Open City* deserves the epigraph "[w]alk and walk" (198), Stephen Miller joins the majority of Cole's critics in interpreting Julius as a modern-day flâneur. Issuing the "ruminations of a deracinated New Yorker," Miller writes, Julius walks from Manhattan to Wall Street and on to Washington Heights, offering insights into each place and its history but mainly "think[ing] about identity" (198). Noting that Julius recalls "at least three city walkers out of literary history: the 'strolling spectator' type which has informed the novel from its earliest days; the Baudelairean flâneur which transferred into fictional prose with tales such as Andre Breton's Nadja (Julius's ex is called Nadège); and the "roving 'I' of European romantic modernism, which has found its most eloquent exponent in the work of WG Sebald," Giles Foden underscores *Open City*'s "propensity toward form, fictionality, and reflexive self-examination." Echoing Foden, James Wood suggests that Cole's novel is "as close to a diary as a novel can get."

> While *Open City* has nominally separate chapters, it has the form and atmosphere of a text written in a single, unbroken paragraph: though people speak and occasionally converse, this speech is not marked by quotation marks, dashes, or paragraph breaks and is formally indistinguishable from the narrator's own language. As in Sebald, what moves the prose forward is not event or contrivance but a steady, accidental inquiry, a firm pressurelessness….

Observing that *Open City*'s most significant plot details are "only very gradually sifted into the narrative," such that we discover Julius is Nigerian "by indirection," Wood links *Open City*'s narrative obliqueness to the aimlessness of Julius's thoughts—his cosmopolitan ability to hold forth on subjects ranging from Velazquez, Mahler, and Barthes, to the New York slave trade and the anatomy of the bedbug.

Expanding upon Wood's sense of *Open City*'s narrative indirection, Claire Messud suggests that the novel's "unsettling realism" derives not only from its stylistic antiquarianism and investment in Julius as worldly cosmopolite and flâneur, but also from Cole's willingness to broach the "greater subjects" to which these nineteenth-century forms and figures ostensibly give him access. "In our age of rapid technology and the jolly, undiscriminating ephemeralizing of culture and knowledge," Messud writes, "an insistence upon the high stakes—a desire to ask the big questions—can seem quaint, or passé, or simply a little embarrassing." As Messud has it, *Open City* makes a point of asking "the big questions" despite it being unfashionable to do so. Much like its narrator Julius, who rarely touches a computer or uses a cellphone, the novel eschews the lower stuff of the hypermediated life in favor of "higher" and greater subjects. For Messud, then, one of the things that makes *Open City* so unsettlingly realistic is its refusal to engage the conditions of the here-and-now—the novel's quaint yet powerful capacity to excavate the present while excluding many of its most prominent cultural forms.

Messud is certainly right to point out *Open City*'s low- or even anti-tech sensibility. On the rare occasion that Julius does mention using a computer, it is to listen to the "disembodied voices" (5) of radio announcers broadcasting from Germany, France, and the Netherlands. The young doctor doesn't blog or take part in social media, and he only occasionally checks his email. Preferring to make calls on a landline, Julius finds use for his cellphone as an alarm clock.

His letters are written by hand and his meetings are conducted face to face. While Cole's decision to omit the signs and objects of Internet culture, and his related choice to cultivate a "sly, faux antiquarianism" (Wood) associated with the flâneur narrative and type thus appear in line with the unsettling of novelistic realism Messud names, I have begun to suggest that Cole's concern in doing so lies with something other than recovering "the big questions" by paying homage to serious, pre-digital-era prose. Rather, the faux antiquarianism of Cole's figures and style belies *Open City*'s structural engagement with the more "ephemeral" conditions for racial identity construction and affiliation articulated by networking media. Like Madhu Krishnan and Pieter Vermeulen, then, who interpret Julius's flânerie as the vehicle for Cole's broader critiques of postcoloniality and cosmopolitanism, I am interested in how Julius's flânerie interrogates the rhetoric of postraciality commonly entailed in "taking a walk" across the hyperlinked Web.

In this vein, I suggest that in addition to the strolling spectator types enumerated by Foden, Julius evokes the "virtual flâneur" (274) theorized by Lev Manovich in his pioneering 2001 study, *The Language of New Media*. There, Manovich proposes that the concept of "navigable space" (64) which has been foundational to Web interface design and remains evident in browser names like "Internet Explorer" and "Netscape Navigator," can be traced to the spatial sensibilities of the Parisian flâneur famously poeticized by Charles Baudelaire. In his 1863 essay, "The Painter of Everyday Life," Manovich notes, Baudelaire describes the flâneur as

> the perfect spectator, the impassioned observer, [for whom] it is an immense joy to make his domicile amongst numbers, amidst fluctuation and movement, amidst the fugitive and infinite … [whose joy is t]o be away from home, and yet to feel at home; to behold the world, to be in the midst of the world and yet to remain hidden from the world. (269)

Moving through space as a privileged insider, the flâneur prefigures the Internet user as a "prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito" (274). "Instead of Parisian streets, shopping windows, and the faces of the passersby," Manovich continues, "the virtual flâneur travels through virtual streets," clicking and linking from one data object to the next (274).

Literary critic Hamish Dalley writes that in *Open City* Julius inhabits a "mode of existence in which spatio-temporal locations can be constellated to create an ungrounded, non-teleological historical awareness" (31). Dalley terms this mode "global-local," and I would suggest that such a constellated perspective evokes the architecture of the Web, an information infrastructure Julius navigates easily and without restraint (19). Never assuming that any city space is off limits to him, Julius wanders with ease from the poorest neighborhoods of Central Harlem to curiosity shops in Chinatown and luxury boutiques on the Upper West Side, his virtual gaze peering down into the African Burial Grounds submerged beneath lower Manhattan, and rising up to the aerial viewpoint of migrating geese. Like the "data dandy" theorized by Geert Lovink, a complementary figure to Manovich's flâneur for whom the "Net" has replaced the "metropolitan street," Julius "wrap[s himself] in the finest facts," which he imparts in a string of affectless Wikipedia-like monologues, hyperlinking from Paracelsus' Theory of Signs to the ophthalmic science of blindness (qtd. in Manovich 270). Similar to Julius's sleepless imitation of data commensuration (in which he "sorts" neighborhoods into "abstract shapes"), his exhaustive cataloging and copious, location-specific exposition of New York's histories and artifacts mirrors information practices common to the digital era he inhabits: the immediate and "perfect recall" typical of today's search engines, and the relentless indexing and archiving of those persons and things he encounters on his aimless walks across the city (Gillespie 173).

Conceiving of himself as a subject liberated from categories of identity made manifest at the level of physical appearance (race, gender, class, etc.), Julius fashions an identity by means of what Mark Poster calls "performative self-constitution," casting himself a lover of Mahler, Bach, and Fela Kuti, a student of Freud, Appiah, and Benjamin (75). After all, Julius declares, "Mahler's music is not white, or black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibrations, is open to question" (252). Bound by the parameters of culture rather than those symbolic and institutional registers of the material world, Julius communes with these universal vibrations while listening to the "disembodied voices" (5) of German, French, and Dutch radio personalities. In concert with these voices, he reads aloud passages from Barthes, Peter Altenberg, and Tahar Ben Jelloun, suspending his actual body in the manner of the online user, and coming to occupy what Mark Hansen describes as a "constituted textual body" (147). As such a body, Julius assumes the status of Mahler's music, imagining himself neither black nor white, but rather some other odd entity much like the audio data into which Mahler's music has been converted, a thing capable of "mingl[ing]" with the fiber-optically-delivered "murmur of … radio announcers, or with the thin texture of violins" (5). This scene of disembodied communion notably echoes another, in which Julius and a Moroccan friend marvel at the silent "together[ness]" (112) of a diverse group of patrons at an Internet café. Both scenes figure "post-national" communities of networked subjects whose integration the Internet makes possible, individuals who collectively dissolve into and reemerge from out of a bodiless and equalized global public space. In this space, the Internet gets realized in the utopian rhetoric of John Perry Barlow and a host of mid-1990s apostles of "cyberspace": as a "world that all may enter without privilege of prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth"—a space liberated from bodily

constraints, where anonymity guaranteed that "the authentic self could finally be revealed and an authentic public sphere could emerge because discrimination—which naturally stemmed from the presence of raced bodies rather than racist institutions—could be eliminated" (Chun 105).

And yet, despite the cosmopolitan breadth of Julius's aesthetic inclinations and his peculiar tendency toward "performative self-constitution," Julius consistently experiences the breakdown of those fantasies of raceless anonymity and untrammeled cultural access such critics as Manovich, Lovink, and Barry associate with virtual flânerie.[29] Not the "prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito," Julius instead finds himself being continually hailed by African and African American interlocutors who insist that his racial identity is fixed, a determining quality of Julius's subjectivity that implicates him in cultural and economic regimes of pan-Africanism and subalternity more so than the traditions of his German forebears. Formalizing the types of racial-interpellative paradigms for consumer profiling outlined by Thrift, Gandy, and Chun, which work to measure and encode subjects the better to match them with commercial content, *Open City* begins to describe a data-intensive process of identification operating in the deep background of Julius's life, a process the novel suggest is now essential, if only unconsciously apprehended and felt, to how racial identities are constructed and ascribed. The novel, that is, begins to signal an invisible system working subtly to manage Julius's varied tastes and ostensibly aimless wanderings, a system whose rules, I argue, resemble those of Google Search.

The 1998 report, "PageRank Citation Ranking: Bringing Order to the Web," authored by

[29] Wendy Chun and Lisa Nakamura usefully point out that the virtual flâneur is necessarily tagged to the Western subject, whose offline racial mastery translates into online fantasies of self-erasure. Rather than figuring forth a virtual environment where race truly disappears, or where racial identities can be taken up and performed without regard for offline racial hierarchies, the Internet, Chun argues, simply grants nonwhite users the prerogative to "pass" as invisible, white males.

Google co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin, is famous today for outlining Google's revolutionary search algorithm, PageRank, an ordering system that exploits the web's link structure to produce a "global 'importance' ranking of every webpage" (1). "Using PageRank," Page and Brin explain, "we are able to order search results so that the more important and central web pages are given preference" (15). The demand PageRank addressed was clear: to assist users in quickly navigating an increasingly vast Web whose heterogeneity tended to obscure the quality results users sought. Moving beyond previous ranking strategies based on citation counting (rankings based solely on the number of incoming links a page received), Page and Brin redefined results ranking to account for both the number of incoming links and also the relative authority of those links. PageRank was organized around three principles. First, that a link from one page to another counted as a unit of recommendation. Second, that links could be weighted according to the authority of the linking page. And third, that authority was a metrically assignable, collaborative property derived from the web's naturally-occurring peer review system. Within PageRank's operation, a secondary process was key: the "random walk." In order to compute the relevance of a given webpage, PageRank needed to test scenarios in which queries were unspecified and unmotivated. In short, the algorithm needed to model whether and how a "random walk" across the hyperlinked web would indeed lead a user to arrive at the web's most important pages. Mathematicians Amy Langville and Carl Meyer summarize the process as follows:

> [Imagine that when a walker] arrives at a page with several outlinks, he chooses one at random, hyperlinks to the new page, and continues this random decision process indefinitely. In the long run, the proportion of time [he] spends on a given page is a measure of the relative importance of that page. If he spends a large proportion of his

> time on a particular page, then he must have, in randomly following the hyperlink structure of the web, repeatedly found himself returning to that page. Pages that he revisits often must be important, because they must be pointed to by other important pages. (36)

While Brin and Page's report served primarily to convey PageRank's strength in establishing reliable general rankings for searches, the report also mentioned then-ongoing research to develop a personalized PageRank algorithm honed by an individual user's unique search patterns. Curiously, Brin and Page offer the personalized algorithm as a solution to concerns over search distortion due to advertising content. "[P]ersonalized PageRanks," they write, would be "virtually immune to manipulation by commercial interests. For a page to get a high PageRank, it must convince an important page, or a lot of non-important pages to link to it. At worst, you can have manipulation in the form of buying advertisements (links) on important sites. But this seems well under control since it costs money" (12).

By now, Google's personalized PageRank algorithm is the known default for most online searches. Additionally, the company's recently patented "read the user" technology—an algorithm that enhances Google's ability to "decipher which page regions and topics the viewer is interested in, based on the viewer's behavior *after* they have arrived at a page"—allows Google to gather ever-more precise data about users' online behavior (Lovink 152). As John Battelle writes, "Google and most other consumer-facing search engines are obsessively focused on understanding user intent," which they attempt to derive from user behavior—search queries; websites visited; duration of time spent; and so forth (273). Gandy adds that Google's "idealized 'perfect search' is most likely to emerge as the result of increasingly comprehensive 'histories' of our behavior in cyberspace," so that each user essentially encounters the equivalent of her own

"personal Web" (138).

Robert Gehl observes that Google's personalized search technology has radically transformed the metrics for identity profiling. "Whereas state-based interpellation of identities might arise from the metrics of security (date of birth, race, country of origin)," Gehl writes, interpellation today arises from the "metrics of capital and consumption: user profiles, categorized social connections ('friends,' 'co-workers,' 'family'), credit scores, searches, purchase histories, media consumption, desires, fantasies, demographics, and movements through space" (1241). A means of user classification, Google Search, and the random walks that underwrite it, have emerged as powerful tools in the production of "rationalized identities": individual consumer profiles assembled from a user's "most salient digital fragments" (1241). Far from simply "organizing the world's information" as Google famously purports to do, the company's search technology is thus vital to the selection and shaping of that information, as well as to the "rationalization" of the users who seek it ("About Google"). Designed to assist users with their searches, features like autocomplete and predictive tracking analyze users' online behavior in an attempt to curate relevant content. Jennie Olofsson writes that while these features do facilitate more efficient searches, they also tend to "funnel searches toward the most common continuation, meaning [that users] … are slotted into prefabricated categories of representation," reinforcing existing power relations by "implicitly inscribing the preferred continuation" (249). Similarly, when Google "automatically extends a sentence you have started to type," argues Fredric Kaplan, "it does more than save you some time, it transforms your expression into one that is statistically more regular based on the linguistic data it daily gathers" (59-60). Madeleine Akrich adds that Page and Brin's decision to black-box PageRank's source code has also served to naturalize Google's search results.

Open City is a question-heavy text. In 259 pages, 210 questions are posed, most of them by Julius. Many of these questions appear to be trivial: "How are you?"; "How is work?"; "Would you care for some persimmons?" (12). But many others unfold lengthy scenes in which Julius relates histories of some importance to his racial "search": "Are you a gangster, mister?" (31); "What can we understand about the roots of persecution, particularly when the target of this persecution is a tribe, or race, or cultural group?" (43); "Do you support M-Qaeda?" (12); "You know Art Blakey?" (141). These questions prompt Julius's associative musings and accompany his aimless walks, walks that Julius insists allow for "every decision—where to turn left, how long to remain lost in thought in front of an abandoned building, whether to watch the sun set over New Jersey, or to lope in the shadows on the East Side looking across to Queens—[to be] inconsequential, and … for that reason a reminder of freedom" (7). Despite this insistence, Julius's ostensibly directionless walks repeatedly lead him to encounter African persons and content. On the first and last of his aimless wanderings, Julius takes arbitrary detours and winds up in Harlem, where he observes a diverse community of Africans and African Americans. In between, Julius's walks yields chance encounters with an African-born taxi driver, a Haitian bootblack, and an African American postal worker. On another occasion, after he involuntarily fails to exit the subway at his neighborhood stop, Julius embarks on a spontaneous tour of Rector street and winds up in a restaurant just across from the World Trade Center disaster site. There, he speaks briefly with a Barbudan museum guard. Other outings lead to chance encounters with a Liberian detainee, a Congolese bartender, and an African American World War II veteran. Julius's final walk through Harlem ends in a confrontation with three African American teenagers, who beat Julius and steal his wallet and cellphone.

With the exception of Julius's assault by the Harlem teens—a scene in which the terms of

racial affiliation-making are arguably reiterated, albeit in an aggressive key—each of these encounters unfolds similarly: a gesture of racial kinship is extended by the interlocutor, and subsequently rebuffed by Julius. The African cabdriver, for instance, feels slighted when Julius fails to greet him upon entering his car. "Not good, not good at all, you know," the driver chides Julius, "the way you came into my car without saying hello, that was bad. Hey, I'm African just like you, why you do this?" (40). Although Julius apologizes for his behavior, he is irritated by the driver's presumption. "I said, I'm so sorry about it, my mind was elsewhere, don't be offended, ehn, my brother, how are you doing? … [But] I wasn't sorry at all. I was in no mood for people who tried to lay claims on me" (40). In *Open City*, claims of this sort are continually laid upon Julius, and continually refused. Kenneth, the Barbudan museum guard, attempts to discern Julius's racial background before delivering a monologue on his love of African culture. He subsequently recommends that Julius visit a nearby restaurant: "[Kenneth] asked where I was from, what I did. He spoke fast, chattily. One of my housemates, once, in Colorado, he said, was a Nigerian. He was called Yemi. Yoruba, I think he was, and I'm really interested in African culture anyway. Are you Yoruba? (53). Soon afterwards, Julius notices "that [Kenneth's] eyes were asking a question: a sexual question. I explained to him that I had to meet a friend. I apologized for not having a business card with me, and said something about visiting the museum again soon" (54). Later, an African American World War II veteran is moved to tell Julius how proud he is to come to Julius's psychiatry office and "see a young black man … in that white coat, because things haven't ever been easy for us, and no one has ever given us nothing without a struggle" (210). In the most dramatic of "claims," a postal worker named Terrence McKinney gushingly labels Julius a "visionary."

> Say, brother, where are you from? Cause, see, I could tell you were from the Motherland.

> And you brothers have something that is vital, you understand me. You have something that is vital for the health of those of us raised on this side of the ocean. Let me tell you something: I am raising my daughters as Africans. (186)

Irritated, Julius resolves to avoid the post office at which Terrence works.

Captured in each exchange is a process of racialization that works to interpellate Julius into a vast yet tenuous web of black transnationalism, where each interlocutor appears as a point or node upon that web, and each racial signifier—black, brother, Motherland, Africa—a keyword for its activation. Like the "random walkers" described by Langville and Meyer who, in "following the hyperlink structure of the web, repeatedly [find themselves] returning to [certain] page[s]," Julius, despite his varied cultural preferences, repeatedly confronts an array of African and African American persons, objects, and histories eager to command his attention: a conversation on the German occupation of Brussels ends with the suggestion that Julius listen to the late works of Art Blakey and Cannonball Adderley. A citation of *Elizabeth Costello* inexplicably leads Julius to consider the history of the New York slave trade. Later, Julius's memory of a recently-ended relationship shifts into his contemplation of the Haitian revolution. Other encounters feel similarly engineered, as though generated by a recommendation system: after viewing *The Last King of Scotland,* two children make strange hand gestures at Julius and ask if he's "a gangster" (31). Finally, after visiting a Jamaican restaurant, Julius bumps into a metro passenger reading Octavia Butler's *Kindred*. Read against the user-interpellative techniques of Google's search technology, Julius's aimless wanderings begin to resemble Google's "random walks." Correspondingly, the larger narrative within which Julius's walks take place begins to model those "read the user" features that aim to slot users like Julius into "prefabricated categories of representation" by continuing their thoughts to "implicitly preferred" conclusions.

Similar to Google's process of "keywording"—which, as Kaplan explains, operates by reconceiving of words as objects of value within a global, real-time linguistic market—the "claims" made upon Julius update Althusser's account of interpellation, in which subjects are hailed into social being by ideological institutions. Here, Julius is not only hailed by a group of ostensibly like-minded individuals determined to share his attributes, but also by a set of words imagined to resonate with his identitarian predilections. Through processes of user-to-user registration (liking, friending, following, recommending) that adapt the dynamics of ideological inscription, Julius comes into being, to recall Chun, as a "character in the drama putatively called Big Data," his statistically significant elements distilled out of the admixture between individual and collective types (119).[30]

Julius, however, is plainly loathe to think of himself as a "character in a drama called Big Data" somehow "knitted into a monstrously connected chimera" (Chun 40) of like-minded peers, his thoughts evident enough to be carried out to their implicit conclusion. Rejecting the notion that he might be, in Fourcade and Healy's words, a knowable social subject around whom "boundaries must be drawn, [and] multiple identities … typified, so that [his] behavior can be steered and nudged in ways both personally gratifying and economically profitable," Julius instead yearns for pre-Internet styles of serendipitous discovery in which he is neither catered to nor known (20). Twice, Julius bemoans the closure of his local Tower Records and Blockbuster, both brick-and-mortar locations where he and other patrons spent hours "going through the CD bins [of classical music and classic cinema] with something of the patience of grazing animals" (16). Upon learning of the closures, Julius observes: "I didn't feel sorry for these faceless national corporations; far from it. They had made their profits and their names by

[30] On online gestures of interpellation, see Richard Dienst.

destroying smaller, earlier local businesses. But I was touched not only at the passage of these fixtures in my mental landscape, but also at the swiftness and dispassion with which the market swallowed even the most resilient enterprises" (19). Julius's unusual sympathy for the passage of certain cultural "fixtures" into an ostensibly "fixtureless" new digital economy reconfigures the dilemmas he faces throughout the novel: between desired affiliations rooted predominantly in the "fixtures" of elite Western cultural material and focused upon the members of an intellectual class of high-skill laborers, and a more nebulous, "fixtureless" universe of "Big Data" in which Julius's race persistently cues his social and cultural encounters—a universe in which, to cite a particularly infamous example of "psychometric targeting" deployed by Facebook, users who "liked" Jay-Z were encouraged to "like" Obama. Much is at stake in this transition from one style of "fixtures" to the next; and while Julius often deems the recommendations he receives absurd, their perpetual recurrence to a single yet particularly durable demographic indicator—his race—underscores key contradictions in the putatively "postracial" world of social technology. Attuned to the search algorithm's struggle to make sense of Julius's elusive consumer identity, and to properly take the measure of his wide-ranging cultural interests so as to render him knowable as a market character or type, *Open City* dwells on these contradictions, showing how new technologies of integration have begun to destabilize and transform the ontological experiences of racial selfhood, community, labor, and place. Julius's voluntary affiliations with intellectual elites and his involuntary "steering and nudging" toward a stereotypically-defined racial group thus testify to race's persistent and systemic pull within the digital economies' seemingly "fixtureless" systems of material stratification.

Understood in this way, Julius's repeated encounters with "African" persons and products illustrate the proliferation of his so-called "shadow body" within the information

systems he passes through, a "sufficient approximation" or "caricature" generated through the emphasis of some of the Julius's user aspects and the ignoring of others (Gillespie 174). As Tarleton Gillespie explains, such bodies arise out of

> bits of information that are most legible to the algorithm … [which] thus tend to stand in for those users. What Facebook knows about its users is a great deal; but still, it knows only what it is able to know. The most knowable information (geolocation, computing platform, profile information, friends, status updates, links followed on the site, time on the site, activity on other sites that host "like" buttons or cookies) is a rendering of that user … imperfect but sufficient (173).

Illustrating the slippage between Julius's anticipated identifications and his actual ones, Julius's encounters dramatize race's reification into what Chun calls a "database category": a set of racial signifiers and stereotypes whose proliferation on the Internet, Chun writes, also "constructs race or ethnicity as a category to be consumed" (154). Encouraging Julius to identify with the "authentic" racial content of his Africanness, Julius's interlocutors outline the "African's" most basic, enumerable character traits. In so doing, they also seek to render their economic exchanges with Julius as affective ones, soliciting Julius's racial identity in ways that signal a new post-Fordist mode of production where, as Alexander Galloway writes, "desire and identity … [have been] woven into the value chain more than ever before" (*Interface Effect* 130). Under this mode of production, formal racial equality has become tantamount to commercial equality. "For each affective predilection of the postfordist economic subject," Galloway writes, "there is a corresponding marketplace that will satisfy it … [such that] each woman [emerges as] a woman consumer, each black a black consumer, each gay a gay consumer, each chicano a chicano consumer" (140). Keyed to systems of enterprise for which identity names a "fully unique,

customized, qualitatively [defined economic subject]," Julius's racial-interpellative encounters illustrate how race appears as an identitarian category codified by consumer giants like Google precisely because it also operates as an economic category within the broader trajectory of global capitalism (140). Julius's shock at being hailed as African, then, indicates his resistance to being implicated in the regimes of subaltern labor to which the "African" more broadly refers—indicating, too, his desire to free himself from what Lawrence Lessig calls the "invisible hand of cyberspace" (6) pushing race into the realm of value creation on a global scale.

Interface Effects: Racialization in a Postrace World

On one of his very first aimless wanderings, Julius finds himself at the Time Warner Center located on New York's Upper West Side. "The area," Julius notes,

> had changed recently. It had become a more commercial and tourist destination thanks to the pair of buildings erected for the Time Warner corporation on the site. The buildings, constructed at great speed, had just opened, and were filled with shops selling tailored shirts, designer suits, jewelry, appliances for the gourmet cook, handmade leather accessories, and imported decorative items. On the upper floors were some of the costliest restaurants in the city, advertising truffles, caviar, Kobe beef, and pricey "tasting menus." Above the restaurants were apartments that included the most expensive residence in the city. (8)

Completed in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th attacks, the Time Warner Center was originally known as the AOL Time Warner Center, following the February 2000 merger of Internet provider AOL and media conglomerate Time Warner. The merger, though short-lived, was widely deemed historic. AOL co-founder and then-CEO Steve Case reasoned that it was only a matter of time before AOL Time Warner would surpass Microsoft and General Electric

to become the largest and most valuable company in the world. As COO Robert Pittman put it, AOL's ability to deliver Time Warner's content to millions of customers stood to generate enormous wealth: "All you need to do is put a catalyst to [Time Warner] and in a short period you can alter the growth rate. The growth rate will be like an Internet company" (qtd. in Munk 184). Like most Internet companies forged in the mid to late 1990s, however, AOL's market valuation fell dramatically toward the middle of 2000, just months after the merger with Time Warner was finalized. By 2003, as the Center was nearing completion, top executives from both companies, including Pittman, had resigned, and "AOL" was struck from the Center's 10 Columbus Circle nameplate.

Overlooking Central Park, Time Warner's Columbus Circle address had long drawn the interest of real estate developers including the New York Land Company, Boston Properties, and Donald Trump, all of whom proposed the construction of lavish, multi-use buildings. The eventual bid went to Boston Properties with a design for two towers, each nearly 700 feet high, which were to serve as headquarters for the financial firm Salomon Brothers, as well as provide space for premium retailers, a hotel, and the high-end residences Julius mentions. While much of the initial commentary on the Center focused on its uncanny resemblance to the fallen World Trade Center towers, more recent coverage has turned its attention to the residences. These articles bring to light the remarkable number of foreign businessmen and state officials using shell companies to purchase Center condominiums. Hailing from Russia, India, Colombia, China, Kazakhstan, and Mexico, Time Warner's foreign investors stand accused of transforming the Center into a "safe deposit box" and laundering site for their fraudulently-acquired global wealth (Story and Saul). Although many of these individuals are currently under investigation for labor abuses, environmental violations, and financial deception, they have been able to move

their wealth abroad and keep it anonymous, thanks to Time Warner's famously relaxed real estate policies.

Julius does not linger at the twin-tower complex. Put off by its "generally snobbish atmosphere," he quickly leaves to see a former professor (8). And yet, despite the brevity of his visit, the Time Warner Center announces what will be Julius's abiding fantasy throughout the remainder of *Open City*: that an individual might, in the manner of Time Warner's foreign investors, cast off her marked, sensorial body and enjoy the freedom that capital itself enjoys to circulate, unmarked, within the global economy. Figured forth by Time Warner's anonymous buyers, and enacted within the Center's opaque system of global money, Cole further associates this fantasy with the general anonymity and functional disembodiment promised by Internet companies like AOL. In so doing, Cole exposes an economic truth lying heart of Internet companies' enduring appeals to leave the flesh behind. The Internet, Cole tells us, doesn't simply invite its users to become disembodied like data. Rather, it promises that they might become disembodied—de-raced, denationalized, de-gendered—like money, free to cross all national borders. Alert to the conceptual relation between the disembodied flow of data, and the flow of money and labor in the global economy, then, Cole's reference to Time Warner sets up the difference between the types of laboring bodies that will seem to enjoy capital's unrestricted freedom of movement (elite, de-raced bodies such as those of Time Warner's investors and the Center's luxury retailers) and those other bodies that will remain confined by racial categories and national borders both (the highly raced, proletarian, and precarious laborers on the opposite end of an ever-widening gap between rich and poor), between the fantasies of "capitalist individualization, accumulation, and legitimization" (Fuchs 84) located at the rhetorical center of

Internet utopianism, and race's systemic drag within a purportedly "postracial" phase of accelerated capitalism.

Julius confronts representatives for this lower-end, raced labor throughout his aimless walks: immigrants from Haiti, Barbuda, and a broadly defined "Africa" working as cabdrivers, bootblacks, and security guards; Congolese and Rwandan refugees; an undocumented laborer from Liberia; African American youth participating in Harlem's informal economy of illicit drugs. As with Cole's reference to AOL Time Warner, where a new-media veneer just barely conceals the systematic reproduction of race and class relations, these figures bespeak an economic logic primed to keep racialized populations in place. They signal, as Chris Chen writes, an invisible architecture now organizing race as a "relation of domination inside and outside the wage relation—reproduced through superficially non-racial institutions and policies."

Nowhere is this invisible architecture more suggestively elaborated than in a lengthy scene during which Julius visits a detention center in Queens. There, in a "long, gray metal box" located amid a "vicious landscape of wire fencing and broken concrete," Julius meets a Liberian man named Saidu (62; 63). "The meeting room," Julius notes,

> was as expected, perfunctory: a narrow rank of bays, split down the middle by Plexiglas, with chairs on both sides, and small perforations at face level. The man who sat in front of me had a broad white smile. He was young, and dressed in an orange jumpsuit, as were all the other inmates. I introduced myself, and he smiled immediately and asked if I was African. (64)

As Julius speaks with Saidu, he learns that the young man escaped the National Patriotic Front of Liberia and worked briefly on a rubber farm before managing to hitchhike from Monrovia to Guinea, Bamako, Tangiers, and on to Spain. A few years later, having earned enough money to

purchase an illegal passport, Saidu boarded a plane to New York, where he was immediately arrested at customs.

Absorbed in Saidu's story, Julius cannot help but wonder whether Saidu is telling him the truth. "Wasn't it more likely that he had been a soldier [?]," Julius muses. "He had, after all, had months to embellish the details, to perfect his claim of being an innocent refugee" (67). Nevertheless, Julius is sympathetic to the man sitting on the other side of the partition, charmed by his "generous smile" and the "certain gentleness in his every sentence" (64). Saidu's is a tale of seemingly endless physical captivity: from the armored trucks "packed with Senegalese, Nigerians, and Malians" to the small ferry boat bound for Spain, to the two years spent there "[sleeping] in a crowded living room with ten other Africans," to the "purgatorial waiting rooms" in the US customs office, and finally to his years-long "confine[ment] in this large metal box in Queens" (67; 63; 64). Leaving Liberia, Saidu packs up his life in a small suitcase. Later, he jettisons most of the items and transfers what remains to an even smaller backpack. At the detention center, his entire life's possessions—"clothes mostly, and his mother's birth certificate"—fill only a tiny plastic bag (69).

Here, Cole establishes a spatial configuration—two men, one physically captive behind a Plexiglas screen, the other ostensibly free to wander cities and traverse national borders—that pits the comparatively "dominant" Julius against the "subaltern" Saidu, juxtaposing Julius's skilled first-world labor as a psychiatrist with Saidu's proletarian, third-world labor as a rubber farmer. At the same time, Cole's configuration of the two men evokes the structure of a Web interface, with Julius occupying the Internet's "client-side" and Saidu its "server-side." In the client-server model for computer network architecture, the client-side refers to those web interfaces that a user can see and with which she can interact. By contrast, the server-side

consists of the web servers and applications where data is processed; these are utilitarian interfaces that remain altogether invisible to the user. When, for instance, a user visits Google's homepage and enters a term into the search bar, a list of results will subsequently appear before her. What will not appear before her are the myriad operations occurring on the server-side (the term's storage and processing by PageRank, and its reformatting for her client-side viewing). Given the two sides' varying objectives, the focus of client-side development is generally understood to be "aesthetic"; client-side developers are concerned with designing intuitive, easy to use websites for content entry and retrieval. Server-side development, by contrast, is geared toward data optimization and "functionality." These developers seek the fastest and most efficient way of running data through various algorithms and worry less, if at all, about how an interface looks (Ortiz 678).

Offering a glimpse of what lies behind the Internet's client-side, Julius's encounter with Saidu unfolds multiple layers of allegorical meaning. Associating Julius with the side of the Internet that has been deliberately coded for its "aesthetic" qualities, Saidu, in contrast, assumes the "functional" position of the unseen code and machinery that structures Web content for clients like Julius. Moreover, Saidu stands in for the vast population of hidden third-world laborers who support the Internet as a global mode of production. Establishing this dynamic between the Internet's "aesthetic" and "functional" realms, *Open City* illustrates how liberal fictions of raceless individuality entailed in the Internet's client-side operations actively conceal the highly raced, server-side labor that constitutes them, just as software which is assembled from various sites across the globe assumes a unified, surface form that conceals the actual division of labor that has produced it. In so doing, the novel tells us that while "race" may seem to disappear into a colorblind Web, it reappears at the border controls designed to maintain

economic hierarchies between developed and undeveloped nations, as it is built into the global wage gap and perpetuated by the permanent oversupply of third-world laborers like Saidu. Raising his hand to the Plexiglas that divides him from Saidu, Julius will seem, if only for a moment, to acknowledge this reality. As he listens to Saidu's unhesitating English, and admires his dark complexion, Julius will realize that his own fantasies of bodily suspension and aesthetic "self-constitution"—his sense of Africanness as a skin out of which he might step—reinforces those "postracial" mystifications to which Saidu's fixed, immobilizing Africanness gives the lie. At this moment, too, *Open City*, will seem to indicate the link between Google Search's strategic imposition of fictional identities upon users like Julius, and procedures for racial ascription that vastly exceed Google's commercial agenda, procedures that work to carefully recode racial distinction in a global economy more thoroughly integrated by Internet technologies than ever before.

Throughout her recent treatise on contemporary technoculture, *Updating to Remain the Same* (2016), Chun reiterates that today's networked subjects are both "empowered and more precarious than ever" (39). In reality, she argues, the rhetoric of Internet empowerment has

> accentuated disparities in wealth, increased levels of individual debt, and depressed real incomes. Neoliberal subjects—small *s* sovereigns—are always searching, rarely finding. Shifting from the zoom to the overview, from search term to search term, they defer and extend decisions; the end, like that mythic pot of gold, is never reached. At the same time, though, users' searches produce data that make users findable, even as they wander: searchability grounds findability and vice versa. (39)

Chun's description of the "small *s* sovereign" fits the wandering Julius well. Shifting from his recollection of emotional minutiae to grand historical surveys utterly detached from his own life

experience, Julius defers and extends his aimless quest for some elusive and authentic self-identity, the outline of which Cole provides only in the novel's closing pages. In a dramatic and revelatory final scene, Cole offers a glimpse of what might have propelled Julius's compulsive wandering throughout the city, legible thus far only as evidence of some unspecific melancholy. In this scene, a young banker named Moji, who was once Julius's classmate in Nigeria—and whose name readily evokes the digital "emoji" icons deployed as shorthand in electronic communication—accuses him of having assaulted her when they were both young teenagers. Immediately following the accusation, Julius turns to watch the sunrise over the Hudson.

> Moji's voice, which had never increased in volume, had by now taken on a strained, shattered tone, as if she were getting hoarse. You'll say nothing, she said. I know you'll say nothing. I'm just another woman whose story of sexual abuse will not be believed. I know that. Look, bitterness has been eating away at me all this time, because this was so long ago, and it's my word against yours, and you'll say it was consensual, or that it never even happened at all. I have anticipated all your possible answers. This is why I've told no one, not even my boyfriend. But he sees through you anyway, you, the psychiatrist, the know-it-all. I know you think he's a buffoon. But he's a better man than you. He is wiser, he understands life better than you ever will. That is why, without me having to tell him anything, he knows what a malign influence you have been on my life. I don't think you've changed at all, Julius. Things don't go away just because you choose to forget them. You forced yourself on me eighteen years ago because you could get away with it, and I suppose you did get away with it. But not in my heart, you didn't. I have cursed you too many times to count. And maybe it is not something you would do today,

but then again, I didn't think it was something you would do back then either. It only needs to happen once. But will you say something now? Will you say something?

Other people had woken up, and were beginning to move around inside the apartment. Moji stopped speaking, and kept her eyes focused on the shimmering Hudson. I thought she would begin to cry but, to my relief, she didn't. Anyone who had come out onto the porch at that moment could not have imagined that we were doing anything other than enjoying the play of light on the river.

The just risen sun came at the Hudson at such an acute angle that the river gleamed like aluminum roofing. At that moment—and I remember this as exactly as though it were being replayed in front of me right now—I thought of how, in his journals, Camus tells a double story concerning Nietzsche and Gaius Mucius Cordus Scaevola, a Roman hero from the sixth century B.C.E. Scaevola had been captured while trying to kill the Etruscan king Porsenna and, rather than give away his accomplices, he showed his fearlessness by putting his right hand in a fire and letting it burn. (245-6)

Retreating into aesthetic rumination, Julius is unable and either unwilling or unable to recall the assault. And yet, he senses in Moji's accusation an essential truthfulness:

what does it mean when, in someone else's version, I am the villain? I am only too familiar with bad stories—badly imagined, or badly told—because I hear them frequently from patients. I know the tells of those who blame others, those who are unable to see that they themselves, and not the others, are the common thread in all their bad relationships. There are characteristic tics that reveal the essential falsehood of such narratives. But what Moji had said to me that morning, before I left John's place, and gone up on the George Washington Bridge, and walked the few miles back home, had

> nothing in common with such stories. She had said it as if, with all of her being, she were certain of its accuracy. (244)

Stated with certainty, Moji's accusation points to a gap in Julius's prodigious memory. More damning, Moji lays claim to some repressed "malignancy" at the center of Julius's character, not a surface-level quality derivable from his patterns of consumption, but something psychically deeper and constitutive of Julius's very identity. Earlier, I suggested that Cole sets the traumatic revelation of Moji's rape against the more conspicuous psychic breakdown Julius experiences at the Wall Street ATM, when he fails repeatedly to remember his personal identification number. That episode of failed memory imbricates Julius's emotional turmoil with the control protocols that underwrite our increasingly computational culture, and thus with elements of the "technological unconscious" I have argued structures *Open City*'s narrative form as a whole. Deflating Julius's fantasy of an autonomous existence maintainable within today's ubiquitous techno-economic infrastructures of regulation and control, Julius's failure to recall his ATM PIN illustrates how these infrastructures shore up, rather than undermine, the very idea of an autonomous and empowered modern subject Julius holds dear. "[C]entral to the emergence of what appears to be their antithesis[—]user empowerment and agency[—], writes Chun, "[c]odes and crisis together produce (the illusion of) mythical and mystical sovereign subjects… (17). Julius's breakdown at the ATM contradictorily asserts his commitment to an impersonal, quantitative model of "personal identification," while Moji's accusation insists upon identity's more hidden "personal" registers.

Moji's disclosure of the assault thus stands as an important counterpart to Julius's incident at the ATM, disrupting Julius's imagined sovereignty and revealing him to be a subject whose behavior is not simply quantifiable by apparently neutral algorithms, but whose seemingly

unquantifiable moral characteristics are neither supplanted nor effaced by these new metrics for identity. Just as the elusiveness of Julius's ATM PIN code illustrates contradictions in Julius's sense of sovereignty by showing up Julius's inability to extract himself from the numerical code that designates his economic identity, so too does Moji's account of the assault point to seemingly private and personal aspects of Julius's selfhood apparently available to others but irretrievable by him, undermining Julius's conviction that he truly "knows" himself.[31] These are intrusions into Julius's sovereignty subjectivity on par with those he feels himself to suffer throughout the novel, and likewise evoke his fraught relationship to a "community" undergirded by racial sameness. Compelling Julius to consider the parameters of who he is—what he admits knowingly and what he gives up unknowingly to the "data infrastructure" he inhabits—both incidents probe Julius's vulnerability within networks of sociality wherein his actions are linked to those of the community he eschews, compelling him to admit that he carries traces of these abused others—not just the assaulted Moji, but the minoritized and precarious "Africans" he has rejected throughout the novel. In this way, the "claim" Moji places on Julius reiterates and intensifies those of the other African interlocutors he encounters, pressing Julius to consider his racial personhood not simply in the typifying vocabulary of market-oriented stereotype, but in the more meaningful terms of collective suffering and responsibility.

"Postrace" Allegories of Control

In 2016, Cole published a collection of nonfiction essays under the fittingly elastic title of *Known and Strange Things*. Much like Julius's wandering thoughts in *Open City*, the essays in *Known*

[31] Frank Pasquale notes that Facebook's user profiling resembles "some new, milder version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which categories like 'the slightly stingy,' who need to be induced to buy more, or 'the profligate,' who need frugality prompts." Gary Shteyngart caricatures this type of profiling in *Super Sad True Love Story*.

and Strange range from academic treatises on Henri Cartier-Bresson and VS Naipaul to political commentary on the Nigerian government and the "White-Savior Industrial Complex" Cole famously outlined in 2012.[32] The collection is suffused with Cole's thoughts on technology. Cole confesses to using Google Maps to quell his homesickness for Nigeria. He describes "Dronestagrams" taken over Somalia, Pakistan, and Yemen. He chronicles the "Aluu Four" lynchings in Rivers State, a horrific event that was filmed and uploaded to YouTube by Nigeria's "Internet-savvy youths" (351). He theorizes the permanence of Twitter and the impermanence of Snapchat, worries over data mining and cyberbullying on Facebook, and considers the unsettling clandestinity of "The Cloud." Among such musings, Cole devotes considerable time to discussing a recent trend in avant-garde photography: the appropriation of images from Google Street View and Google Earth by contemporary artists including Doug Rickard, Mishka Henner, Aaron Hobson, and Michael Wolf. Cole compares these men to Picasso and DuChamp, whose "found objects" and "ready-mades" sought similarly to capture and reframe the everyday. "These Google-based photographic practices," Cole writes, "are forms of countersurveillance … [in which] the 'neutral' and panoptic eye of Google itself becomes the camera …." (182). Cultivating an aesthetics of "inadvertency," these photographs, Cole suggests, "say something about what [Google] is up to, about its weird power, and about how we might elude its intentions" (183).

Conceptually resonant with Rickard, Henner, Hobson, and Wolf's Google-based photography projects, *Open City*, I have argued, levels a similar if far subtler critique of technological "neutrality" through its internalization of Google Search's algorithmic principles.

[32] In a widely-noted series of Tweets, Cole attacked the 2012 short film, KONY, which was produced by the charitable organization, Invisible Children, Inc., for pandering to American sentimentalism.

Pressing readers to discern in *Open City*'s formal structures the traces of a "technological unconscious" earlier defined by critics like Thrift, Cole develops a new poetics of algorithmic systems that underscores the continuance of racial identity categories in a "postrace" era ostensibly committed to formal racial equality.

CHAPTER 3

Allegories of Digital Post-Fordism: Colson Whitehead's *Apex Hides the Hurt*

Shortly after Barack Obama's 2009 inauguration, novelist Colson Whitehead credited the new president with having "eradicated racism forever" ("The Year of Living Postracially"). "How do I know?" Whitehead quipped,

> I have observed that journalists employ Google searches to lend credence to trend articles, so I compared recent hits on the word "postracial" with those of a previous year. There have been more than 500,000 online mentions of postraciality this year, as opposed to absolutely zero in 1982. Some say that's because the Internet didn't really exist back then. I prefer to think it's because we've come a long way as a country.

Whitehead's satirical take on the difference between structural and superficial racism underscored Obama's conceptual investments in networking technology. Throughout his 2008 campaign—one whose strategic integration of social media was historically unprecedented and whose success remains unmatched—Obama had promoted a vision of racial equality strongly entailed in the Internet's "postracial" form. His administration would go on to characterize the Internet as the race-neutral apparatus of US economic expansion and national security both. Signaling contradictions in the logic of "postraciality" bound up with Obama's figurative and actual deployment of Internet tech, Whitehead points to a new set of paradigms for how race is made and disavowed in a putatively "postrace" era. Rather than dispute the end of race, Whitehead would have us see how the terms of racial discourse have shifted in response to the United States' election of its first black president, and also with the emergence of new technologies, infrastructural platforms, and large-scale global relations underwritten by corporations like Google—technologies, Whitehead suggests, that cannily reframe questions of

political visibility in the terms and metrics of digital visibility (those of usage, participation, connectivity, and so forth), even as they simultaneously preserve the racial hierarchies upon which US economic interests and the development of global capitalism depend.[33]

Keyed to Google Search's discursive strategies for constructing race—which here allow a disingenuous Whitehead to posit a metric for racial progress by tracking the frequency of an ostensibly anti-racist term—Whitehead's critique of "postraciality" echoes that of critical race theorists like David Goldberg, Nikhil Singh, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Michelle Alexander and Sumi Cho. For these critics, "postraciality" names not the end of race but rather the perpetuation of regimes of racial domination by state policies and institutions no longer permitted to invoke racial criteria explicitly. In her account of the US prison system, for instance, Alexander argues that "[w]hat has changed since the collapse of Jim Crow has less to do with the basic structure of our society than with the *language* we use to justify it" (2). Propelled by the purportedly colorblind mandates of America's "War on Drugs," the mass incarceration of young black males results in the political and economic disenfranchisement of the African American population on a national scale, but does so without recourse to the overtly white-supremacist mechanisms or terminology of Jim Crow. Generating a racial "caste system [that] lurks invisibly within the maze of rationalizations we have developed for persistent racial inequality" (12) the carceral system compensates for the erosion of legal segregation by fostering what Chris Chen describes as "rituals of state and civilian violence which enforce the

[33] In the introduction to *Race After the Internet*, Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White observe that "Obama was both our first black president and our first digital Commander in Chief, a harbinger of a new age in more ways than one. However, Obama's presidency coincides with some of the most racist immigration legislation seen in recent years, as well as a prison industrial complex that continues to thrive and target black males, and a financial and housing crisis that has disproportionately harmed black and Latino Americans. The paradox of race after the Age of the Internet, a period that some have defined as 'postracial' as well as 'postfeminist,' lies in such seeming contradictions" (vii). In a similar vein, Rayvon Fouché has argued that as "digital devices get smaller, our perceptions of race and racism become harder to see" (62).

racialization of [black] wageless life." In a similar vein, Nikhil Singh argues that the allegedly race-blind discourses of "illegal immigration" and the "War on Terror" disproportionately target Latino and Islamic populations for deportation, torture, and extermination without ever naming these populations directly. For Whitehead and his critical interlocutors, then, "postracial" ideology enacts itself chiefly at the level of language: concerned with how *not* to represent race as a relation of economic domination realized through racialized wage differentials and reinforced by the operations of the carceral and national security state, "postraciality" instead defines race through the idiom of cultural difference and particularity—as a dimension of one's identity that is chosen voluntarily, not ascribed.

Framed as a representational problem arising out of race's formal evacuation from political discourse, "postraciality," I will argue, preoccupies Whitehead the novelist in two related ways. First, as a critic of anti-black racism and former tech-industry worker, Whitehead is alert to the Internet as a site for the "postracial" imaginary, and his novels subsequently undertake to challenge this conception both at the level of narrative content and also formally. To this end, I will suggest that Whitehead's novels are broadly concerned with laying bare the "invisible" racial caste system Alexander names by dramatizing functional continuities between ostensibly "visible" and more transparently violent regimes of racial construction and discipline (such as those associated with the pre-Fordist American slavery system, Reconstruction, and Fordist-era Jim Crow), and the racializing and disciplinary mechanisms of contemporary digital post-Fordism, a globally integrated mode of production for which the management of a predominantly nonwhite labor force will seem to operate beyond the scope of visibility, through integrative networking technologies apparently dispossessed of material presence and seemingly incapable of executing physical force. In narratives that variously juxtapose moments of

supposed racial advancement (Reconstruction in *John Henry Days* (2001); Jim Crow in *The Intuitionist* (1999); neoliberal multiculturalism in *Apex Hides the Hurt* (2006) and *Sag Harbor* (2009); the dawn of a "postracial" era in *Zone One* (2011)) with contemporaneous innovations in technologies of economic integration (the transcontinental railroad system in *John Henry Days*; vertical transport engineering in *The Intuitionist*; the mainstreaming of the personal computer in *Sag Harbor*; the advent of networked computing in *Apex* and *Zone One*), Whitehead repeatedly queries the logical entailment of technological and social progress. Read as a whole, his novels subsequently reveal how systems of racial rule evolve alongside technologies often lauded for their capacities to advance formal racial equality, as they bring forth increasingly more "invisible," digitally automated modes of racial classification within a global labor market whose spatial and social segmentation continues to occur along "color lines."

As this chapter will show, Whitehead illustrates race's centrality within digital post-Fordism's current phase of network-intensified accumulation most forcefully in his 2006 novel *Apex Hides the Hurt*, which centers on the renaming of an ex-slave town originally known for its barbed wire production but eager to attract the business of an up-and-coming software firm. An allegory for the changing technologies by which borders are controlled—from the material constraints of barbed wire to the "invisible" fiber optic wires that now mediate economic production, transportation, and communication on a global scale—, *Apex*, I contend, describes new strategies for racial and territorial differentiation peculiar to post-Fordism's now-digitally coordinated labor and supply chains. In these virtual spaces, the novel suggests, race no longer manifests itself solely as a category of physical or cultural difference. Rather, as Alexander Galloway puts it, race now exists in "purely ideological form," a correlate to the global wage differentials that lower production costs developing nations while raising them in developed

ones (124). In this way, *Apex* illustrates how, even within the supposedly open markets and borderless world made possible by Internet tech, race persists as a technical category of economic distinction mapped, like invisible barbed wire, onto the capitalist geostructure, and realized anew through the pervasive, software-encoded systems of global wage differentials that effectively reterritorialize and re-race labor.

Second, I will suggest that in addition to Whitehead's allegorical assertion of race's material and ideological persistence in our "postrace" era, his novels are also formally attuned to the changing technical parameters of the system known as "racial capitalism" to which I have alluded. Elaborated by critics including W.E.B. DuBois, C.L.R. James, and Eric Williams, Stuart Hall, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Cedric Robinson, Cornel West, Michael Dawson, and Nancy Fraser, theories of racial capitalism contend that the oppression of racialized populations is not accidental to capitalism's value-expanding processes but rather central to their historical development.[34] Robinson, who is credited with originating the term, explains that "racialism … inevitably permeate[s] the social structures emergent from capitalism" because it has proven itself to be an especially durable hermeneutic for rationalizing fundamental differences in human capacities (1). These differences, in turn, have served to rationalize the systemic inequalities—between possessor and dispossessed; lender and borrower; capitalist and worker, and so forth—upon which value creation depends. Race enshrines the fiction of human difference that capitalism can then exploit to generate value through relations of inequality—relations that

[34] Thomas Holt writes that "Du Bois suggested that the African slave trade established the first truly global markets of exchange. Eric Williams drew our attention to the credit markets and financial infrastructures that developed with that trade. And C. L. R. James was among the first to suggest how intimately European politics, revolutions, and even the idea of freedom itself were bound up with slavery in the Americas and sometimes even—as in the Haitian Revolution in the 1790s—with slaves' revolutionary initiatives (30). See *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century.*

roughly began in the sixteenth century, when European colonizers forcefully inserted the vast laboring populations of the global South into the capitalist system.[35] Driven toward accumulation, the capitalist system thus realizes a "dialectic in which forms of humanity are separated (made 'distinct') so that they may be 'interconnected' in terms that feed capital" (Melamed 78) In this way, writes Jodi Melamed, capital "draw[s] … the line that constitutes discrete entities and distinguishes between the valued and the devalued, [and] people and situations are made incommensurable to one another as a disavowed condition of possibility for world-systems of profit and governance" (79). Fraser adds that racialized modalities of accumulation have been continuously present throughout capitalism's history, from its beginnings in "racially organized slavery, colonial plunder, and land enclosures [—the so-called era of "primitive accumulation" that] generated much of the initial capital that kick-started the system's development"—to more contemporary forms of racialized dispossession such as "prison labor, transnational sex trafficking, corporate land grabs, and foreclosures on predatory debt," expropriatory practices that continue to sustain accumulation in a "crisis-prone" system (169). In each instance, the confiscation of value from unfree, unwaged, dependent populations is immanently tagged to the social coordinates of race. Returning to Marx's account of primitive accumulation—in which the "diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elites" accrue wealth from the "other, lazy rascals" whose extravagance leaves them with "nothing to sell except their own skins,"—Fraser thus posits primitive accumulation-cum-expropriability as both original to and ongoing within capitalism (873). Rather than yielding to the seemingly race-neutral plight of proletarian exploitation, then, race persists as the very "'mark' that distinguishes free subjects of exploitation from dependent subjects of [perpetual] expropriation" (172).

[35] See Holt.

Using fiction to allegorize race's historical entanglement with capitalism—from the unfree, expropriable subjects of New World slavery to the semi-proletarianized and ostensibly free workers of digital post-Fordism—Whitehead, I will suggest, is interested to show how this entanglement plays out across technological modernity's evolving determinations of race and, correspondingly, within the novel of ethnicity's also-evolving formal strategies for representing it. Tracing race from slavery's regimes of violent dispossession through the rise of mechanized manufacturing and into our current era of tech-intensified financialized capitalism, Whitehead gives the lie to technology's seamless integration of the capitalist world system by paying attention to how racial and territorial distinctions are maintained, increasingly by means of digital market pricing. Alert to the antinomies of accumulation through which digital post-Fordism has come to operate—wherein the Internet, famed medium for the "postracial" era, transcends national borders and de-races labor—Whitehead thus probes the seemingly "invisible" technologies that re-territorialize and re-race at the level of the wage, and illustrates the role they continue to play in race's formal subsumption under the contemporary mode of production.

Black Codes

In *Apex Hides the Hurt* an unnamed "nomenclature consultant" whom the novel gradually reveals to be African American ventures out of a mysterious convalescence on an assignment to rebrand the town of Winthrop. Winthrop, we learn, was originally settled by ex-slaves under the name of "Freedom," but the town's governance was soon ceded to a white citizen, Sterling Winthrop, on the condition that Winthrop incorporate the town legally and equip it infrastructurally. Predictably, Sterling Winthrop renamed the town after himself, before going on to establish it as a manufacturing site for Winthrop-brand barbed wire. Over a century later, Winthrop has become a hub for Aberdeen, Inc., a software firm that hopes to revitalize and

diversify Winthrop by replacing the town's stodgy name with the cheery, ahistorical "New Prospera." After much deliberation, the nomenclature consultant, whose assignments have heretofore involved the naming of such products as automobiles and children's toys, determines to reinstate one of the names given to Winthrop by its original freemen founders—not the affirmative "Freedom" but the less popular "Struggle." This decision coincides with the revelation that the consultant's convalescence was necessitated by the amputation of an infected toe, the result of compulsively "hiding" a minor wound with an Apex-brand multicultural bandage, one that matched his skintone so well he managed to forget about the festering wound it covered over. Through a series of flashbacks that disclose the events leading up to the consultant's injury, the novel reveals his role in devising the Apex campaign, indicating that its success is what put him in the running for the Winthrop account.

Critics both mainstream and academic have almost uniformly read *Apex* as a racial allegory. But not all have endorsed the novel's allegorical style. In a widely-read review for the *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, Erin Kaplan observes that *Apex* is a "satire on several levels, not all of them successful." Driven by a protagonist who is little more than a "corporate archetype," this "man with no name makes perfect sense thematically, but themes do not draw us into a novel, people do." "Too often," Kaplan continues, Whitehead's "big ideas are…overwhelmed by one wink-wink or metaphor too many." This novel about the "multilayered identity crisis of a black man living large but still living in the shadows," she concludes, sets up but does not resolve the "existential riddle of race" it poses. Instead, *Apex* simply boils down to one man's "quest for truth and identity." Similarly ambivalent to *Apex*'s "audacious," high-concept style, the Kirkus Review praises Whitehead's "[c]ultural insight, conceptual ingenuity and cutting edge humor," but faults him for making virtually "no attempt at depth of characterization." The *New*

York Observer's Anna Shapiro essentially reiterates these critiques when she calls *Apex* an "intellectual puzzle" designed to gratify readers looking for "complex ideas" and not "direct emotional access to the characters."

Extending Kaplan, Kirkus, and Shapiro's accounts of *Apex*, Chloe Schama reads the novel as an allegory for the "large-scale implications of the seemingly small-scale choices that are made in speech, especially speech that relates to race." Like Kaplan and Shapiro, Schama struggles with a fundamental "hollowness at the heart of its [the novel's] cleverness." "The conflict [in *Apex Hides the Hurt*]," she writes, "is so starkly and simplistically drawn that it almost immediately assumes a dry allegorical tenor, reducing the people in the book to a kind of shorthand for cultural and historical forces. Whitehead's people are never quite individuals. More often they are occasions for the writer tiresomely to exercise his wit." For critics like Kaplan, Shapiro, and Schama, then, although a novel of great ambition, *Apex* remains stilted as a work of fiction, its central figures mere caricatures or stereotypes whose actions unfold in what Lev Grossman describes as a "shadow play of symbols of things." "There *are* things around the [conceptual] hurt [to which Whitehead's novel attends]," Grossman writes, "—vacant late-capitalist follies, personal disillusionment, buried historical crimes. But Whitehead is unable or unwilling to reveal them" (emphasis mine). Instead, his novel conveys a number of basic "truths," like the notion that "names can reveal the hidden essence of a thing, but they can also conceal it."

Mainstream critics more sympathetic to Whitehead's allegorical style have pointed out that his novel's starkness is essential to its thematic evaluation of language. David Gates of *The New York Times*, for one, praises Whitehead for offering up a "parablelike" tale that acknowledges language's fundamental "corruption" and its "purity." "Whitehead," Gates writes,

"communicates his critique of language by way of language—which is the only imaginable delivery system," and the only way that Whitehead can effectively use and "sabotage words to get at the truth." Darryl Pinckney adds that it is precisely Whitehead's "gift for allegory" that allows his otherwise "stark" characters and settings to broach weighty entanglements of race, language, and history.

Not surprisingly, *Apex*'s academic readers have tended to side with critics like Pinckney and Gates in awarding Whitehead credit for his novel's thematic ambition and stylistic particularity rather than chiding him for failing to articulate a realistic cast of satisfyingly "deep" characters. Notably, these critics, too, read the novel allegorically. Christopher Leise, for instance, delves deep into the connotations of the name "Winthrop" to argue that *Apex* "[s]ignifies on the legacy of the Puritan lawyer John Winthrop." A "labyrinthine allegory of social processes" (288), Leise continues, *Apex* consistently deploys the "terms of early New England's theocratic discourse" so as to "identify the colonial origins of economic conditions faced by many hardworking people in twenty-first century America. Using diction laden with puns and multiple meanings [that evoke colonial Massachusetts], Whitehead reintroduces a fuller range of significance that lurks behind these idealized terms of America's beginnings" (286). In this way, while *Apex* is diegetically concerned with rebranding the fictional town of Winthrop, at the figurative level the novel "reassess[es] the legacy of America's most famous Winthrop, the man renowned for making the phrase 'a city upon the hill' a mainstay of contemporary American political self-representations" (286). Keyed to the historical Winthrop's commitment to class- and race-based hierarchies, Whitehead's "symbolic allegory of social and racial relations" explodes the idea of "one America" and of the "singular 'black America' or 'African American community'" that ostensibly lives within it (286). In contrast to these singularities,

Whitehead's "Puritan allegory" reveals continuities between historically distant and more immediate versions of the same "aristocratic order, [in which] a white elite profit[s] from [racial] division" (296).

Leise's sustained allegorical reading of *Apex* overlaps with those put forth by Stephani Li and Jesse Cohn, who similarly understand the novel in terms of continuities between older and newer orders of African American experience. Like Leise, Li reads Apex's central "hurt"—the consultant's injured toe—as a figure for the abidingly "hurtful" realities of racial inequality in present-day America. In her view, the consultant's wound operates as a "sign of race that metaphorically demonstrates what [Anne] Cheng calls 'racial melancholia,'" a psychic predicament in which nonwhite subjects, caught between the marginal identities they inhabit and the dominant ones they are compelled to desire, remain incapable of reconciling their racial identifications (94). Conceiving of racial identity in terms of trauma—as something original to the condition of black subjectivity and perpetually insurmountable by black subjects—Li's reading considers the identitarian predicament of black social novelists like Whitehead. A melancholic subject himself, Whitehead struggles to produce a psychically unified black literature just as his protagonist, the nomenclature consultant, struggles to find the single "name" that might unify black experience in America.

Cohn interprets *Apex* in self-reflexive terms similar to those proposed by Li, as an allegory for Whitehead's professional relationship to the language and politics of his African American literary forebears. "Where the generation of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, facing an overwhelming exclusion of African-Americans from cultural representation, sought to construct a distinct 'soul aesthetic' as the repository for its aspirations," Cohn writes, "the 'post-soul generation' to which Whitehead belongs is one for

which, [as cultural critic and historian Mark Anthony Neal suggests,] 'the significant presence of African-American iconography within mass consumer culture/mass media' is 'a state of normalcy'" (20). For Cohn, the widespread commodification of African American cultural identity calls into question the possibility of a "precious racial 'essence'" and summons the desire for some "ineffable aura of [African American] authenticity and realness" (20). This essence or aura is what Whitehead's nomenclature consultant is twice tasked with identifying—first, when he is charged with finding a single "name" for the Apex-brand multicultural bandage designating the "black" skintone, and later, as he struggles to recover the "name" that might unify Winthrop's historical orders of African American experience. As Cohn has it, *Apex* thus represents Whitehead's attempt to grapple with the notion of an "essential" black character and politics, as well as to negotiate the political stakes of his own, "post-soul" literary moment. Allegorizing Whitehead's professional "struggle" to define and justify his own work as a black social novelist, *Apex* reflects deeply on the black novelist's commodification of her racial identity, and the perpetual reduction of racial experience within neoliberalism's glamourous, consumer-driven raciologies.

My suggestion that *Apex* might be understood as an allegory for the emergence of new paradigms of racial rule associated with the rise of networked computing builds on the reading methods of critics like Leise, Li, and Cohn. Keyed to the industrial transition from barbed wire to fiber optic wire that lies at the center of the novel's plot, such a reading also aims to extend their accounts of *Apex*. Just as Leise's exposition of the historical Winthrop tracks racial-hegemonic continuities between older and newer discourses of American political identity and self-representation, so too does my account of *Apex* aim to reveal continuities between post-emancipation industrial technologies of labor containment (e.g. barbed wire) and digital post-

Fordism's putatively "postracial" regimes of global labor management and coordination (e.g. fiber optic wire). By focusing on *Apex*'s thematization of the shift from barbed- to fiber optic wire, then, I am interested in how the novel allegorizes the changing technological infrastructures of capital accumulation in ways that are especially attuned to the racial politics that subtend these infrastructures, illuminating the role now played by seemingly "invisible," networking forms in determining the inevitably racialized borders that persist in our apparently "borderless," hyper-integrated world. Registering how transformations in the dynamics of technological capitalism correspond with the changing dynamics of racialization, my account of *Apex* thus pursues the relation between technology and literary techne earlier described, specifically by showing how *Apex* develops the notion of "executable" language. In developing this relation I am indebted to meta-critical readings in the style of Li and Cohn's. Just as these two critics, among others, argue that *Apex* figures forth Whitehead's professional relationship to the African American literary tradition out of which he writes, so too does my account aim to reveal formal and figural resonances between the evolving strategies of racial capitalism that *Apex* takes as its subject matter, and the literary strategies Whitehead himself deploys in order to represent how racial identities are made and experienced today.

To begin to argue these claims, I make recourse to Thomas Holt and Rayvon Fouché's provocative mapping of the history of U.S. race relations onto David Harvey's periodization of the pre-Fordist, Fordist, and post-Fordist eras. In *The Problem of Race in the Twenty-First Century*, Holt traces the history of racialization by looking not only at the conditions of "racist constraints but also … the conditions of possibility for resistance to racism," conditions he links to each era's dominant mode of production (89).

> The racial regime of the pre-Fordist era was organized to transport racialized groups to places of labor and to keep them physically in place—whether on slave plantations, in sharecroppers' cabins, in convict labor gangs, or tied to indentured contracts. … The racial regime that evolved in the Fordist era was of a very different sort, involving more-complex constraints but also more diverse possibilities for resistance … [keyed to the state's emergence as] a powerful and interested player with business and labor in the management of the national economy, [which enabled it to serve as] a potentially decisive arbitrator of private sector conflicts in which state or political interest were perceived to be at stake. … [Finally,] the most promising and widespread mass movement for racial justice peaked on the eve of fundamental changes in the political-economic base of labor militancy, that is, post-Fordism…. (89-90)

Here is Fouché's similar formulation.

> During the pre-Fordist era the dominant racialized regime circulated around the effects and outcomes of the American slavery system. The Fordist era began shortly after the "separate but equal" decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* institutionalizing racial segregation. Finally, the current post-Fordist era that took hold by the oil crisis of 1973 maps onto the illusionary triumphs of the civil rights movements. (67)

Reading racial and economic regimes in tandem, Holt and Fouché discern conceptual isomorphisms between the two, such that each economic era's distinct configurations of labor, production, and sociality correspond with its institutional mechanisms for racial subjugation and resulting conditions of possibility for political advancement. Understood in this way, their analysis is instructive to the allegorical reading of *Apex* I propose, which aims to elaborate similar structural relationships between contemporary procedures for racial ascription and the

evolving features of productive technologies. Indeed, I have begun to suggest that *Apex*'s fictional periodization begins by juxtaposing the productive affordances of industrial pre-Fordism with the emergence of institutionalized racial segregation, and ends by juxtaposing digital post-Fordism with the political affordances of "postraciality." Doing so, *Apex* expands upon the conceptual interplay named by Holt and Fouché, and begins to point to new modes of racialization—and hence of racism—that are both materially and logically embedded in our network infrastructures.

In *Apex*, Winthrop's mayor Regina Goode, a descendant of the town's original freemen settlers Abraham Goode and William Field, recalls that her ancestors were compelled to accept the political leadership of white barbed-wire entrepreneur Sterling Winthrop because they lacked the legal status and resources to develop the town properly.

> Winthrop comes to town, he has the resources to build that thing [the town]. What are Goode and Field going to say? They didn't have a choice, did they? Back then. What could they do? They lose this land, this land is what they are at that point. They lose that, they lose themselves. He's not threatening them, Winthrop. But he wouldn't have to say it. (116)

At the turn of the nineteenth century, when "[l]and grants, [and] land grabs [meant that] you needed something cheap to keep everything in, and keep everything out," Sterling Winthrop's barbed wire factory promises to transform the "untamed wilderness" into "endless bounty and prime opportunity" by attracting the business of hundreds of regional farmers and homesteaders (*Apex* 60). In exchange for Winthrop securing the town's economic viability, however, Goode and Field must accept "Winthrop" as the town's official name, and they are also forced to give up many of their chosen street names. With the town's renaming comes an implicit policy of

racial segregation that divides Winthrop into "the white part of town" (whose street names are chosen from the thirteen original US colonies) and the "black" (whose street names derive from the black settlers' surnames) (127). This overhaul coincides with the loss of Field's voting presence in Winthrop's fledgling town government. Following Holt and Fouché, we might read *Apex* as mapping the characteristics of the pre-Fordist factory system—characterized by "craft skills; non-linear and stationary assembly; [and] non-standardized parts and a low volume of high-quality products" (Edgell 92)—onto the infamous post-emancipation "Black Codes" that quarantined African Americans in southern states and compelled them to work under a predatory system of debt peonage. Having not yet achieved the status of "separate but equal," Winthrop's black residents remain both separated from and unequal to their white working counterparts, kept physically in place within a white-dominated labor economy by the very systems Holt enumerates (sharecropping, convict labor gangs, indentured contracts, and so forth). Regina later explains to the consultant that in addition to owning the town's barbed wire factory, Sterling Winthrop also owned the adjacent residences in which its workers lived, residences that have since been acquired by tech magnate Lucky Aberdeen, CEO of Aberdeen, Inc. Amplifying the significance of Winthrop's economic regime as well as its principles of racial organization, barbed wire emerges as a complex figure for pre-Fordist stationary labor containment practices and post-emancipation racism both, a signal of the carceral, paramilitary, and white-supremacist violence that would continue to afflict African Americans into the Jim Crow era and beyond.

Implying that the infrastructure Sterling Winthrop brought to the town carried with it a dubious racial politics, Regina makes clear that Goode and Field's arrangement with Winthrop was unavoidable. Earlier, in describing Aberdeen, Inc.'s takeover, she expresses a similar sense

of compulsion. "Can you argue with prosperity?" Regina asks the consultant (115). "Can you protest change? It's jobs, money for the town, money for the 'infrastructure.' We didn't have an infrastructure until Lucky [Aberdeen] came back. We had 'stuff that needed fixing.' How can you fight a word like *infrastructure*?" (115). Unlike Winthrop, whose pre-Fordist barbed wire factory system resonates formally with the "Black Codes" used to control newly-freed black bodies, Aberdeen's "new wireless standard" (84) for file-sharing and digital commerce cultivates the image of multiculturalism and "postraciality" both. Nearly always surrounded by a "multiculti crew" composed of tech enthusiasts like the nameless "young Latino woman … CFO of some fledgling e-commerce outfit," Lucky, the consultant notes, "possessed a zone of power. The computer entrepreneur and his … [associates] were separated from him [the consultant] by invisible barbed wire that maintained a border" (85).[36] Later, the image of "invisible" barbed wire appears again when, in Lucky's office, the consultant observes a "long … string of the stuff [Winthrop wire] that spell[s] out ABERDEEN" (164). The new majority owner of Winthrop's housing market, Lucky Aberdeen and his "invisible," "wireless" barbed wire maintain Winthrop's segregationist practices but do so discreetly and without recourse to explicitly racializing terminologies: to recall the features of "postracial" discourse laid out at the beginning of this chapter—which centered on the evacuation of explicit racial content from institutional policy—what was, under Sterling Winthrop, known as the "black part of town" is now, under Aberdeen Inc., simply the "cheaper … side of town" (157).

If barbed wire is the figure that enjoins crude labor exploitation with the openly racist practices of Reconstruction—the figure that mediates the transition from a slavery system that

[36] Earlier, the consultant reminisces about a similar "zone of power" possessed by his elite alma mater, whose "invisible waves sorted the world into categories, repelling … [dissimilar] alloys, attracting those of kindred ore …" (71).

excluded African Americans from the wage to a system in which they are included as wage slaves for capital—then with invisible barbed wire Whitehead describes yet another transition, from the segregationist practices contemporaneous with pre-Fordism and Fordism (those eras spanning Reconstruction through Jim Crow and the Civil Rights movement) to the post-Fordist present's putatively "invisible," "postracial" apparatuses and institutions. Voting to reinstate "Freedom" as Winthrop's official name, Regina perversely disavows her town's abiding history of economic inequality and spatial segregation, so invested in a "postracial" future that she cannot perceive the ideological and infrastructural continuities between Winthrop's past and present productive regimes. Opting to rename the town "Struggle," however, the consultant perceives them clearly, digging deep into the history books provided by Albie Winthrop (Sterling Winthrop's only remaining heir) in order to find the "name" that best evokes the racial bias of Winthrop's infrastructures. Linking the "struggle" of ex-slaves to the "struggle" of present-day waged minority subjects laboring under digital post-Fordism, Whitehead here exposes the seemingly "invisible," continuing practices of racial subjugation in Winthrop and in the vast world lying beyond it. But he also implicates software in this racial subjugation, linking software to the "invisible," "wireless" infrastructures of contemporary racial capitalism's latest expansive phase. More than asserting the social truism of racial inequality's persistence into the "postrace" era, then, *Apex* also begins to illuminate the features of what Wendy Chun terms "Racism 2.0": a new iteration of racial differentiation embedded in the seemingly neutral forms and logics of software and the digital networks across which it proliferates ("Crisis + Habit = Update"). Depicting "Racism 2.0" as a counterpart to the tech-industry-enhanced version of "Winthrop 2.0" promised by Lucky Aberdeen, *Apex* thus develops a theory of "postracial" racialization—of racialization as it now operates through data proxies and network infrastructures, forms of

"invisible barbed wire" that continues to redline neighborhoods (no longer overtly divided into "black" and "white" but reconceived as "expensive" and "cheap") and segregate the global labor market along "color lines. Doing so, the novel considers the rapport between past and present capitalist infrastructures and the intermittently "visible" racialization schemes they both require and support, between the "real" world riven by systemic inequality, and the "virtual" worlds of digital post-Fordism in which these inequalities are nurtured and proliferated.

Apex Hides the Hurt's eponymous Apex multicultural bandage campaign illustrates Chun's concept of "Racism 2.0" and clarifies its implication for the new data-driven conception of identity politics that is evoked by the novel's core thematization of the industrial shift from barbed- to fiber optic wire. Flashbacks to the Apex campaign occur throughout the novel, alternating with the linear action centered on the consultant's assignment in Winthrop. Through these flashbacks, Apex is gradually recalled as the consultant's crowning professional achievement. It is also recalled as the indirect cause of his "misfortune": in branding Apex the consultant earns himself the highest possible industry honors, but it is also during this period of his professional ascendancy that he over-applies Apex's skintone-matched adhesive bandages to a minor abrasion on his little toe. After weeks of compulsively "hiding" what is, at first, nothing more than a tiny scratch, the consultant finally loses his toe to acute sepsis, its amputation occurring the same night he is awarded "Best Name" for his work on the Apex campaign.

In the Apex commercial, three young boys—one white, one black, and one Asian—each seek out their respective "middle-class, suburban" mothers after skinning their knees (108). In three successive scenes, each mother is shown dutifully applying the appropriate shade of Apex to her child's wound: "Shade #A12" for the white son; "Shade #A25" for the black; and "Shade #A17" for the Asian (108). The campaign's emotional premise is that while each boy's injured

body is unique, his "hurt," which Apex promises to "hide" more discreetly than its competitors, is common, even universal. Apex thus appeals to each child's desire that his racial particularity be acknowledged rather than suppressed by a one-skin-tone-fits-all adhesive bandage, while offering the child access to a multi- or even "post"-racial community for which race is but one dimension of his social identity, and a superficial one at that. "The boxes didn't say Sri Lankan, Latino, or Viking," the consultant reminisces, (109). "The packages spoke for themselves. The people chose themselves and in that way perhaps he [the consultant] had named a mirror" (109).

Stephani Li observes that despite its apparent celebration of racial diversity, the Apex commercial effectively offers up a "neatly segregated vision of bourgeois mainstream America" (83). In promising to "hide the hurt," she argues, Apex "presents a kind of color-blind utopia that is clever enough not to be color-blind. Race is reduced to the variety of colors on an adhesive bandage, a difference neatly contained in a crayon box of skin tones" (82). "The repetition of the three scenes," she concludes, "compartmentalizes racial difference as if intermingling between black, white, and Asian is, if not impossible, at least undesirable" (82). In this way, while Apex seems to transcend race as a determiner of social or market inequality, the commercial's otherwise rigid definition of what "the social" is—that is, its uniform construction of "the family" as middle-class, suburban, and patriarchal—subtly undoes those racial-egalitarian claims. Embracing the "great rainbow of our skins," Apex casts race as an "unvisible" yet utterly stable and stabilizable category of social difference—as something that can be "seen but not known in meaningful ways" (69).

Seizing on those "unvisible" features of contemporary social life—features like racial identity that have achieved new levels of commercial visibility while becoming harder to engage in politically "meaningful ways"—the Apex campaign makes a series of appeals to what

Alexander Galloway describes as the "fully unique, customized, qualitatively special" post-Fordist consumer, the "subject for whom everything is tailored and targeted" (140). As Galloway has it, within the now-predominant digital mode of production "desire and identity are part of the core economic base, and thus woven into the value chain more than ever before" (120). "[E]very economic transaction today is [thus] also [registered as] an affective transaction (which is to say a transaction that will likely deal with aspects such as, but not limited to, racial identity)" and every "affective predilection" likewise corresponds to a market poised to satisfy it (140). Under this new economic paradigm, alleged consumer equality has replaced an older "politics of identity," such that "each woman [is now comprehensible as] a woman consumer, each black [as] a black consumer, each gay [as] a gay consumer, each chicano [as] a chicano consumer," and so forth (140).

For Galloway, identity's incorporation into post-Fordism's digital markets has accomplished both the normalization of historically disenfranchised groups within the mode of production, and the foreclosure of a "politics of identity" that has traditionally sought to liberate these groups from global, systemic forms of oppression associated with their dispossession from the productive apparatus. Bound to the communications networks that now integrate labor and production on the global scale, today's subjects—even marginal ones—achieve provisional equality in the very act of their "deliver[ance] onto new sites of consumption," as they are indoctrinated into the "new customized micropolitics of identity management, in which each human soul is captured and reproduced as an autonomous individual bearing affects and identities" (141-142). For this reason, Galloway questions the critical usefulness of "affect" and "identity," suggesting instead that the discourse of liberation must update its terminology to account for the digital's new paradigms for economic sovereignty and social control. "The

question today," Galloway reasons, "is not so much *can* the subaltern [, marginal, or disenfranchised subject] speak, for the new global networks of technicity have solved this problem with ruthless precision, but *where* and *how* the subaltern speaks, or indeed is *forced* to speak. It is not so much a politics of exclusion as a politics of subsumption" (128).

Galloway's exposition of post-Fordist economic subjectivity helps us to see that the Apex campaign work to subsume racial difference precisely by mobilizing race toward value creation, opening up new market spaces oriented to the identitarian and affective predilections of its racially-marked (e.g. "subaltern") consumers. As such, Apex exemplifies a contradiction at the center of post-Fordism's "fully unique, customizable" consumer: between that consumer's ostensible freedom to choose the racial representation that best accords with her identity, and the mimetic predetermination of that identity (and thus her choice) by the campaign's otherwise unambiguously epidermal logic.[37] In this way, Apex imagines race as what Lisa Nakamura calls a "menu-driven identity"—a seemingly abstract, simulated category of racial difference that nevertheless mirrors offline racial essentialisms and remains rooted in the idea of race as a biological marker of difference. Both endorsing and resisting the more recent concept of "racial individualism"—a kind of expressive racial freedom that has come to be associated with the "postrace" moment—Apex instead collapses the freedom to choose the visual sign of one's race with the injunction to self-select one's visually appropriate racial type.[38] Vaunting its capacity to match an adhesive bandage to each consumer's unique "shade," Apex simultaneously anchors race to the material details of the body and reduces it to the domain of appearance,

[37] On the racial-epidermal schema, see Frantz Fanon.
[38] For an account of "racial individualism" that focuses particularly on Whitehead, see Cameron Leader-Picone.

systematically delinking race from class, culture, and sexual difference so that it might operate as a chosen set of visual cues that play out upon the user's human interface: her skin.[39]

Recast in the mold of those dubious identitarian and affective freedoms granted post-Fordism's "fully unique, customized, qualitatively special" consumers, racial identity, in the Apex campaign, is thus logically supplanted by the seemingly neutral and self-chosen yet highly controlled category of "shade," a surface-level signifier ostensibly unrelated to non-surface-level, innate, or otherwise "invisible" subjective qualities.[40] As Samira Kawash argues, the kind of biological-essentialist racial thinking Apex thus purports to rupture—thinking that has long sought to naturalize correlations between somatic and mental attributes—imagines that while "race is on the skin, … [that] skin is [also] the sign of something deeper, something hidden in the invisible interior of the organism (as organic or ontological)" (130). Citing the eighteenth-century Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, who inaugurated the science of taxonomy and once memorably described the male of the subspecies then known as *homo sapiens asiaticus* as "yellowish, melancholy, endowed with black hair and brown eyes … severe, conceited, and stingy," Wendy Chun extends Kawash's formulation when she claims that race has long been "wielded—and is still wielded—as an invaluable mapping tool, a means by which origins and boundaries are simultaneously traced and constructed, and through which the visible traces of the body are tied to allegedly innate invisible characteristics" ("Race and/as Technology" 10). In a similar vein, Saidya Hartman has offered one of the most compelling theorizations of race's power to make and enforce ontological boundaries. Writing on the practices of US slavery, white constructions of dark skin, Hartman suggests, not only ontologized blackness as the mark

[39] On skin as interface, see Jennifer Gonzalez.
[40] In a similar vein, Edward Bonilla-Silva has argued that "race" has gradually become detached from communal responsibility.

of enslaveability but also deployed it as a rationale for "the wanton use of and the violence directed toward the black body … [which violence came] to be identified as *its* [the black body's] pleasures and dangers" (26). In the Apex commercial, such links between race and the material histories of discrimination and exclusion are broken, as race gets disengaged from the social and economic formations to which it has been historically bound through the imagined leveling of those formations (in the commercial's bourgeois suburbia, all little boys suffer and are comforted identically).

Apex's delinking of race from its historical determinants, and its repositioning of one's "shade" as an abstract visual and alphanumeric element to be played out upon a human interface also operates by way of a detour into the also-abstract and seemingly ahistorical, context-less digital environments of data analytics. Here is the passage that describes Apex's data-driven method for determining the various "shades" it offers consumers.

> They [Ogilvy and Myrtle, Apex's manufacturers] devised thirty hues originally, later knocked them down to twenty after research determined a zone of comfort. It didn't have to be perfect, just not too insulting. What they wanted was not perfect camouflage but something that would not add insult to injury. In the modern style, the gentlemen of Ogilvy and Myrtle learned to worship databases, and linked fingers before altars of data. There was a large population of Norwegian Americans in the Midwest; O and M sent them a certain shipment. And there was a denomination of Mexican Americans in the Southwest; O and M sent them a certain shipment. The cities and hamlets had hues. The shipments were keyed, bands of color were strategically bundled together. Given their particular business history, O and M possessed longstanding supply networks to poor countries—their cruddy craftsmanship demanded this—and to these poor countries they

> shipped appropriate boxes for their inevitably brown-skinned populations. The school nurses of integrated elementaries could order special jumbo variety packs, crayon boxes of all the melanin spectrum, to serve diversity. (89)

Just as the Apex commercial recodes traditional racial designations like "Sri Lankan, Latino, and Viking" along an alphanumeric scale, so too do Apex's market strategists here remake race out of the "altars of data" they both "worship" and cull. Moving beyond what Li calls *Apex's* "race-specific, race-free" language (a kind of language Whitehead deploys throughout the novel, one that refuses to employ explicit racial signifiers and instead compels readers to infer characters' racial identities by way of stereotypes), Apex achieves a version of "race-specificity" and "race-freeness" insofar as its alphanumeric color system shuns the traditional parameters of language altogether, encoding race in a specifically non-linguistic set of variables. In Apex's marketing scheme, then, race appears as an individually-chosen "hue" that is not only decoupled from race's collective significance—moved away from historical designations in the manner of "Norwegian-American" or "Mexican-American"—but also emerges as an abstract codifiable value that is functionally decoupled from language altogether, migrated into the digital realm of statistical data-modeling and visual simulation. In Apex's production scheme, that is, data serves as a proxy for racial identity.

Conceiving of race in this way—as a "menu-driven" visual commodity delinked from race's material histories, and moreover as a data-derived informatic variable according to which subjects can be categorized, compared, classified, and grouped—Apex's data-worshipping manufacturers devise and allocate their product using a common data mining technique known as "matrix multiplication." As Oscar Gandy, Jr., glosses it, matrix multiplication works by comparing and processing individual data responses with the goal of generating group norms,

calculating an "optimal number[s] of 'groups' or categories that are characterized by a high degree of similarity within each group, and to the greatest extent possible, the least similarity, or overlap between those groups." (128). Frequently inverted as a means of identifying, classifying, and evaluating individuals "on the basis of the populations or groups to which they have been assigned through analysis," matrix multiplication is generally used to uncover "complex set[s] of relationships between variables that appear to be stable across a large number of individuals" (128). Gandy notes that by characterizing individuals in relation to "as many norms as are deemed relevant to the theoretical and statistical generation of groups within a particular analytical model," matrix multiplication produces a kind of feedback loop between the "individuals" being assessed, and the particular norms or normative groupings into which they are inscribed—an effect exemplified by the racial-identitarian "zone of comfort" devised by Apex's manufacturers. Read against matrix multiplication's operations and implications, Apex's consumers understandably play a vital role in determining the brand's racial simulations, as they participate in a feedback loop between racial "denominations" and the "data" that concerns these denominations. Supplying a set of technically-configured racial representations into which its users are called upon to inscribe themselves, Apex stabilizes racial difference and delimits "racial individualism" by fixing the otherwise fluid, hybrid racial identities ostensibly opened up by digital liberal humanism, locking race, once more, to determinate subject positions organized visually and spatially. In such a loop, demographically indexed racial "denominations," which are initially presented in the traditional language of Norwegian American, Mexican American, etc., get translated into a "bands of color" tagged to particular, sited racial populations. "We come in colors," the consultant recalls of the campaign. "We come in many colors. And we want to see ourselves when we look down at ourselves, our arms and legs…At Ogilvy and Myrtle they knew

the neighborhoods, some block by block, and they knew the hues of the people who lived there. They knew the cities and the colors of their mayors. They knew the colors of clientele and zip codes and could ship boxes accordingly." (88-89). In the race-data feedback loop that underwrites Apex's production scheme, then, not only are individual racial identities dissolved into "menu-driven" types but "informed [market] segmentation" serves as reinforcement to offline patterns of spatial segregation. As Charles Raab writes, the seemingly abstract identities that are "established and inscribed in information systems … [inevitably] relate to decisions and judgments that are made concerning [actual] citizens or customers." (237). Abstract and virtual though they may be, the "shadow worlds" of data analytics stand as powerful conditioners of actual experiences—material advantages and disadvantages—faced by individuals in the "real world" of consumer capitalism.

In Apex's production campaign, the shadow world of consumer data operates as an aid to geodemographic market segmentation and targeted distribution, but is also easily legible as a potential reinforcement to offline racial inequalities. Determining a set of visual norms within which its consumers feel "comfortable," Apex subsequently identifies those consumers not as "fully unique" post-Fordist subjects but as clusterable subjective types understood in relation to established norms. As the physical segregation of neighborhoods converges with virtual segregation of "bands of color," Apex's virtual borders gradually become real, showing how the seemingly banal practice of grouping individuals onto an alphanumeric scale might well "improve the reliability, efficiency, and effectiveness of the discriminatory choices that are made on the basis of what are often invidious distinctions among people" (Gandy 129). Once more, Apex draws upon the conceit of personal choice—of the consumer's prerogative to "choose herself"—so as to naturalize the segregation it supposedly discovers, distancing its "bands of

color" from such practices as redlining by ignoring race's social constructedness and infrastructural maintenance. Indeed, Whitehead's description of Apex's "longstanding supply networks to poor countries" evokes the broader systemic reality of racial segregation Apex would occlude, pointing to those "inevitably brown-skinned populations" laboring behind the global wage differential's invisible barbed wire. What's more, as consumer interactions, both online and off, are increasingly surveilled and integrated, it is hard not to see how Apex's demographic market clustering might participate in the generation of actual forms of discrimination, given race data's historical associations with commercial exploitation and cumulative market disadvantage. Here Gandy summarizes this interplay between model and reality, emphasizing that data analytics' "fundamental purpose is the enhancement of discriminatory choices regarding whose interests are to be met and whose needs are to be set aside (140).

> Of particular concern is the use of informed segmentation to identify targets for predation, or the marketing of harmful products. Although there have been attempts to 'blame the victims' for their role in the Great Recession that began in the housing market, the fact is that target marketing of predatory loans to minority communities was at the heart of a rapidly spreading cancer that placed the global economy at risk. The evidence seems quite compelling with regard to the targeting of low quality, high-risk products to segments of the population with lower levels of income, information, and power. The fact that these segments happen to also be composed primarily of racial and ethnic minority group members underscores the fact that disadvantage cumulates over time and space. (140)

Like Gandy, Whitehead is interested in the feedback loop between virtual and actual segregation, and in the dynamic that enjoins statistical models or simulations with social and economic realities. Katherine Hayles describes this dynamic in terms of subjects' "reconfigur[ation] for an economy of information and … reconfigur[ation] again, as bodies … [are] pulled back into the constraints of energy and matter" (64). In *Apex*, such reconfigurations abound, exemplified by the consultant's injury, where a racial simulation literally corrodes and destroys a racially-marked body; by the EHKO playset campaign, a LEGO-style kit that models "demographic reality" by including appropriate numbers of "brown" and "yellow" figurines[41]; by the "inevitably brown skinned" populations who manufacture Apex bandages, not simply abstract laboring entities but also vulnerable brown bodies in need of the company's "harmful product"; by the consultant's overwhelming task to discover a name reflective of Winthrop's sited, material racial history instead of one engineered to occlude it.

The consultant's injury is no doubt *Apex*'s most detailed illustration of the feedback loop between racial simulation and racial reality, signaling by way of caricature how modes of "virtual" predation might manifest "actual" suffering. A "harmful product"—low quality and

[41] This early assignment involved the branding of a LEGO-style brand of toy building blocks manufactured the fictional company, Ehko. Once the most popular toy set in the western world, Ehko sought out the consultant's advice after realizing that their efforts to keep up with "the spirit of the times" (121) by "stamping out more [and more] extravagant sets, like Ehko Stock Car Racing Track and Ehko Metro Hospital[,] … Ehko Andromeda Space Station, [and] Ehko Lost City of Atlantis" (118) had begun to alienate consumers more accustomed to simpler designs like the original "Ehko Village." Of a piece with Ehko's attempts to "modernize" the franchise, the company had also sought to render Ehko's various sites of play more "demographic[ally] reali[stic]" (120). No longer populated by uniformly-colored "bulbous moppets with painted smiles," Ehko's plastic locales now featured "brown bulbs (that were not too brown) and yellow bulbs (that corresponded to some hypothetical Asian skin pigment) according to ratios informed by [the company's] sales research" (120). These newly "realistic" Ehkotians had, in turn, spawned equally "realistic," if altogether unscripted, play settings, like "Ekho Boomtown Gone Bust [and] Ehko Ghetto… Ehko Abraham Lincoln Public Housing [and] Ekho Methadone Clinic"—each one a far cry from Ehko's original and comparatively innocuous sites such as the "Town Hall, the Fire Station, and the Church." (122). As with the Apex campaign, "race" exceeds the realm of mere surface and appears as a determining social infrastructure.

high risk, in the manner of the predatory home loans outlined by Gandy—the Apex multicultural bandage figures not simply the interpenetration of actual raced subjects and datafied racial simulations, but also imagines the erosion of the former by the latter. Inscrutably compelled to over-apply Apex to his injured toe, the consultant fails to notice the festering wound beneath, so well does Apex match his skintone. Finding that his toe has "been strangely magnetized by injury so that whenever there was something in the vicinity with stubbing polarity, his toe was immediately drawn to it," the consultant relinquishes control over his very body, never thinking to treat his worsening injury with antibiotics (139). Instead, he accepts that "his toe ha[s] developed an abuse pathology," as it is drawn to "curbs, stools, against imperfections in the sidewalk that made him trip but left no visual evidence when he looked back," (139) and simply "put[s] a new Apex on the injury" which leaves it "look[ing] good as new" (150). "When he stubbed his toe while stepping into the shower, a thin ribbon of blood snaked from beneath the Apex bandage for a few seconds and then disappeared into the drain. It was blood from an invisible wound" (139).

A figure for the subject's dissolution into a simulated racial type, the consultant's body is not merely covered over or "hidden" by the Apex bandage but effectively disappears beneath it, as he finds himself displaced by an informational self—a self, to recall Hayles' terminology, that has been "reconfigured" for an economy of information. Even as his actual raced body recedes, the consultant begins to "look down at his [body] …[and] observe business opportunities, an unexploited niche, an overlooked market … [and most of all] "the job" (90). Seeing himself as capitalism would see him, the consultant's interpellation into "Shade #A25" allegorizes his reconfiguration by capitalism's rapacious drives, as Apex literally eats him away from the inside. In the complex feedback loop between his actual and his informational body, then, the

consultant's racial simulation acquires a malignant kind of agency, no longer a passive, manipulable object but one capable of transforming him at a fundamental level, capable of reminding him that even as his body is reconstituted to serve the interests of capital accumulation, it still remains, inescapably, a real, material site of "hurt."

Drawing on work by seminal media theorist Friedrich Kittler, who cautioned that human-information feedback loops might eventually yield machines clever enough to "bypass humans, their so-called inventors," and thereby bring about the end of "so-called man," Sherry Turkle and Jodi Dean have both argued that online feedback loops, such as those operative in most users' social media interactions, frequently determine and distort users' self-perceptions (258). In her recent treatise on "communicative capitalism"—an economic paradigm underpinned by networked communication technologies that works to monetize users' online activity and facilitates the capture of users' political affects—Dean suggests that the heightened reflexivity of today's computational "realities" has radically transformed the basic categories, construction, and experience of "identity" and "sociality." Caught within a web of "open, distributed, recombinant, [and] chaotic feedback loops," Dean writes, today's subject oscillates between an Imaginary and a Real self, crafting an "ever-adaptable, morphing identit[y]" (103). Building on Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's account of the decline of Symbolic, determinate subject positions attendant with the dissolution of disciplinary societies and the rise of networked societies of control, Dean contends that contemporary subjects now seek out "Imaginary identifications" seemingly extraneous to their institutional social identities (e.g. those rooted in categories like race, ethnicity, sexual orientation). Whereas "Symbolic identification," Dean writes, "establishes the setting that determines which [of the] images [that constitute one's social subjectivity will] appear and how it is that some are more compelling or attractive to us

than others," the Imaginary identifications that define our current moment of ubiquitous networked communication refer "only to … [one's] self-image" (76). "Encountering the endless possibilities of contemporary reflexivity," Dean concludes, "post-disciplinary subjects are propelled to move through a variety of imaginary identities. We imagine ourselves one way, then another, never sure of how we appear because we don't know before whom we appear" (77). In short, the "networked interactions of communicative capitalism do not provide symbolic identities, sites from which we see ourselves as loci of collective action. Rather, they provide opportunities for new ways for me to imagine myself, a variety of lifestyles that I can try and try on" (78). With the passage from disciplinary to control societies, then, post-disciplinary subjects find themselves less inclined to identify with social positions administered by such institutions as the family, church, and state. Instead, they come to view their identifications as fluid, varied, hybrid, mobile, and ultimately incapable of discipline—classification, sorting, categorization. Like Apex's consumers, they imagine that they are simply free to "choose themselves."

Caught in an endlessly reflexive feedback loop that oscillates between Imaginary and Real racial identifications, the consultant's body gets articulated together with data, undergoing various changes as it is reconfigured for the "economy of information" before being drawn back to the material constraints of living flesh. Compulsively drawn to Apex as an expression of his "Imaginary identifications," the consultant's skin eventually becomes so disfigured by infection that it no longer matches the shade of Apex he has selected: "The toe had turned a strange, rotten-apple pulp of red and gray, and there was no community on Earth that might be served by the Apex that corresponded to that color" (162). Similar to the identitarian feedback loop named by Gandy—in which a relay between the identity politics of race and the tacitly racist political assumptions of data analytics ultimately serves to naturalize racial segregation under the

banner of individual choice—the consultant's injury bodies forth new digital-post-Fordist iterations of the logic of racial capitalism, just as Lucky Abderdeen's "invisible" barbed wire effectuates new modes of labor discipline and racial segregation.

Digital post-Fordism's updating of older racialization schemes is Galloway's concern in "Can the Whatever Speak?," an essay he concludes by describing the digital's ushering in of the "next phase in racial representation":

> After Jim Crow, after civil rights, race today has been liberated, but only so that it may persist in a purely simulated form (and in its being simulated it finds a natural home in the digital). With the media of simulation we have entered the phase of purely idealized racial coding, no longer merely the dirty racism of actual struggle. Now after the 'formal' subsumption of racial logic comes the 'real' subsumption (124).

Here, Galloway's discourse of "formal" and "real" intersects with Dean's. If, for Dean, the "virtual" is where Imaginary identifications are meant to play out, then Galloway helps us to see that these Imaginary identifications are always circumscribed by the Symbolic, no matter its declining efficiencies. Apex's alphanumeric races are ideological absolutes, but they are also "virtual" Reals. This is what Galloway means when he describes the virtual as a realm of "purely idealized racial coding." That coding exists within spaces that also purport to be "postracial," but whose effects are not to challenge systems of racial sorting, classification, and categorization but rather make them compatible with digital post-Fordism's new paradigms for identity production. Allegorizing the transition from older (barbed wire) to newer (software) paradigms of racial rule, Apex codes "software" as a figure for the new strategies of a post-Fordist digital marketplace, while showing how at the level of the individual, racial simulations impelled by capitalism's imperatives, come to infect, consume, and reconstitute raced subjects in their image.

Through new acts of "Symbolic" violence, then, Apex shows how the "Real" violence of racial capitalism adapts and persists.

Between an Ethical and "Executable" Language

In *My Mother Was A Computer*, Katherine Hayles suggests that literary texts resemble computer simulations in their capacity to bring forth imaginary worlds. "[O]ne of literature's main fascinations," Hayles writes, "[is] its ability to create vividly imagined worlds in which readers can 'hallucinate' scenes, actions, and characters so fully that they seem to leap off the page and inhabit the same psychic space as the readers themselves" (6). While Hayles goes on to note several important ways in which computer simulations and literary texts differ—"[w]hereas computation is essential for simulations that model complex phenomena, literature's stock-in-trade is narrative," something that computer code can only anthropomorphically be thought to generate—her abiding interest lies with theorizing how a computational "worldview" underpinned by artificial programming languages might intersect with and inform those literary worldviews ostensibly structured by the syntax, grammar, lexicon, and logic of natural languages (6). Hayles reasons that as code gets ever more tightly integrated into cycles of commercial production, penetrating the infrastructures and large-scale organizational practices of global capitalism, it becomes harder to justify the material and semiotic discreteness of artificial and natural languages. "Language alone," she writes, "is no longer the distinctive characteristic of technological societies; rather, it is language plus code" (16). Consequently, Hayles undertakes to think language and code "dialectically," calling for a theoretically nuanced investigation into how an embodied human lifeworld governed by the meaning-making logic of narrative might operate in conjunction with the supposedly disembodied and inhuman world of numerical calculation generated by digital algorithms.

In this pursuit, Hayles draws on the theory of a "Computational Universe" advanced by media critics including Stephen Wolfram, Edward Fredkin, and Harold Morowitz. In their account of a functionally algorithmic world system, Wolfram, Fredkin, and Morowitz stipulate that "computation does not merely *simulate* the behavior of complex systems … [but] actually *generates* behavior in everything from biological organisms to human social systems" (19). Consequently, they envision the universe as being "generated through computational processes running on a vast computational mechanism underlying all of physical reality…[which] is continually produced and reproduced on atomic, molecular, and macro levels [of existence]" (3). Elevating code to the "lingua franca not only of computers but of all physical reality," digital algorithms thus emerge as the underlying determiners of all living systems (8). Hayles makes clear that the Computational Universe represents a highly fraught model for understanding reality. And yet she also appreciates the dynamic relationship it posits between computation and culture, a relationship Hayles finds conceptually useful for imagining "new configurations [of subject and world] that put traditional and computational perspectives into synergistic cooperation with one another" (3-4). In this way, the Computational Universe serves Hayles' overall articulation of language and code, the implications of which she describes here in detail.

> [T]he issue of how code can be related to theoretical framework for the legacy systems of speech and writing … [begins with] a systematic comparison of Saussure's semiotics, Derrida's grammatology, and programing languages….[From this comparison] implications emerge that reveal the inadequacy of traditional ideas of signification for understanding the operations of code. In instances where code becomes important—as is the case for virtually all forms of textuality in the digital age—the dynamics at work bring into question such long-held verities as the arbitrariness of the sign, while

> simultaneously highlighting processes given relatively little attention in Saussurean semiotics and Derridean grammatology, such as the act of 'making discrete.' The result is a significant shift in the plate tectonics of signification, with a consequent rethinking of the processes through which texts emerge. (8)

Hayles stresses that the upshot of comparing language and code is not to nullify the "worldview" upheld by natural languages and human culture. Rather, thinking computer code and natural languages in conjunction presents an opportunity to theorize language anew, allowing Hayles to reconsider relatively unchallenged and under-remarked aspects of traditional semiotics. Attuned to language's intermediation with code, Hayles thus aims to rethink the dynamic conceptual interplay that exists between their two semiotic systems and respective worldviews.

The language deployed by *Apex*'s nomenclature consultant is unambiguously tagged to "commercial product cycles and, consequently, [integrated] into capitalist economics" (15). It is conceived as an informational discourse system precisely calibrated to market imperatives. "As a nomenclature consultant," writes Stephani Li,

> the protagonist is responsible for finding the "right name" for commercial products—a sleeping pill, a brand of toys, a new detergent, or style of diapers. He recognizes, however, that, although he has an exceptional talent to find the "right name," the "true name" (*Apex* 182) of things continues to elude him. The "right name" is that which will sell the most products, which will make material profit of words. This distinction between the demands of the market and the essence of objects and people makes his entire profession a sham. He is charged not with the job of naming things, but of misnaming them, of finding the label that will most resonate with the needs, real or

> manufactured, of consumers. The names he develops do not reflect upon the objects themselves but reveal the deliberate manipulation of the people who will buy and use them. As a result, he disrupts the conventionally understood relationship between signifier and signified. His names do not seek to represent objects in and of themselves, but aim to strategically position the products within the marketplace of consumer goods. His objective is not to name, but to sell. (80)

Li's sense of the consultant's disruption of the conventional relationship between signifier and signifier, and his involvement in generating a language shot through with economic purpose—a language whose explicit goal is to produce market effects by "mak[ing] material profit of words—resonates with Hayles' sense of language's imbrication with code's fundamentally capitalist mandates. Crafting a language designed to galvanize consumption, the consultant engages in a deliberate and performative enunciatory practice—one he dubs product "christening" (23)—that subtly resembles coding itself, producing a kind of "executable" language whose directives are concrete and un-arbitrary: consumers and markets both respond favorably to the items the consultant names because he inexplicably and always names them "rightly," drawing on a dense web of cultural connotations and precise phonemic calculations that inevitably precipitate the impulse to buy. In the remainder of this chapter, I hope to show that the novel's allegorical preoccupation with the emergence of new technological paradigms of racial rule, paradigms that render race as increasingly abstract variable within an equally abstract global economic infrastructure, corresponds with Whitehead's imagining and indictment of an "executable," "modular" linguistic practice of naming—a practice that mimics the abstract functionality of computer code. Using the bizarre profession of "nomenclaturing" to describe language's thorough integration with economic institutions, *Apex* also showcases its dangerous

divorce from a material and racial history. The novel's culminating and highly self-reflexive gesture of recovery thus inheres in the consultant's decision to rebrand "Freedom" and "Struggle," a decision that illustrates language's reversion from its modular and codic orientation, and its attempt to recuperate a historical frame of reference and real-world ethical functionality.

Throughout *Apex,* the consultant describes the work of nomenclaturing in technical terms, congratulating himself for having the ability to confer "perfect" names upon products: "When the products flopped, he told himself it was because of the marketing people. It was the stupid public. The crap-ass thing itself. Never the name because what he did was perfect" (4). Conceiving of language as a machinery capable of being "br[oken] down into parts … each part referring to a quality [he] wants to attach [to the product]," the consultant also pictures it in material terms, something comprised of actual substances and vulnerable to physical damage (105). At the start of the novel, for instance, he recalls that he

> came up with the names and like any good parent he knocked them around to teach them life lessons. He bent them to see if they'd break, he dragged them behind cars by heavy metal chains, he exposed them to high temperatures for extended periods of time. Sometimes consonants broke off and left angry vowels on the laboratory tables. (3)

Later, when the consultant describes the process of configuring prefixes, suffixes, syllable counts, "trendy morphemes and phonemes" (71) into the "right" product name, he likens nomenclaturing to interlocking cultural symbols properly, their resonances manipulated the better to solicit market enthusiasm (69). Speculating on the "right" name for various products, the consultant imagines building names out of "bits of words with sharp teeth … Latin roots, syllables to be added or subtracted to achieve an effect, kickers in their excellent variety, odd

fricatives" (53). This conception of an abstract, unit-based language is caricatured when the consultant is asked to provide a name for a failing luxury sedan; offering a solitary "Q," the consultant still manages to brand a winning product: "A Q," he later remarks. "It was a name reduced to abstraction. To meaninglessness" (203).

Keyed to language's imbrication with the market, *Apex* also evokes its resemblance to the functional abstraction and discreteness of a computer coding system, intolerant to ambiguity and dependent upon clearly interpretable signal units. A coding system's functional discreteness is referred to as its "modularity." In a modular system, individual coding functions are broken down into single modules, which can then be manipulated apart from the coding system's total function. This makes large bodies of code easier to maintain, allowing for a diverse programming workforce to simultaneously work on it. Modularized code is thus comprised of units that are made to be as functionally "narrow" (i.e. simple) as they possible can, a result of the abstraction and compartmentalization of the data variables they contain. Viewing language as a highly manipulable system of modular phonemes and cultural resonances, the consultant envisions the relationship between signifier (name) and signified (product) not as arbitrary but immanent, even programmable. This is a language that posits words as commodities whose purpose is to make money for their respective brands, a language that effectively issues "commands" to consumers, producing nearly immediate market effects.

"Float[ing[in neon before [the consultant]," this language also emanates from an interior mental space the novel depicts as a database of imaginary functional objects, a space filled with names awaiting correspondence with real-world products (4).

> He pictured it like this: The door opened up on a magnificent and secret landscape. His interior. He clambered over rocks and mountain ranges composed of odd and alien

> minerals, he stepped around strange flora, saplings that curtsied eccentrically, low shrubs that extended bizarre fronds. This unreckoned land of his possessed colors he had never seen before. Flowers burst petals in arrangements never considered by the natural world, summoned out of dirt like stained glass. These beautiful hidden things scrolled to the horizon and he walked among them. He could wander through them, stooping, collecting, acquainting himself with them until the day he died and he would never know them all. He had a territory within himself and he would bring back specimens to the old world. (34-5)

Merged with the aesthetic features of the prelapsarian world, the consultant's interior landscape evokes a simulated "landscape" or "territory" much like those constructed with computer code. In this world, the consultant "christens" each "unreckoned" thing, and each thing he christens is part of a carefully calibrated ecosystem. To recall Hayles sense of how "computation gets invested with world-making power," this world reflects both the implicit rules of the market and the direct authority of the "programmer," designer and controller of its modules.

Having considered how *Apex* fantasizes about—and ultimately condemns—a kind of functional language steeped in market-based cultural connotation but deeply estranged from historical significance, I'd like to close this brief section of the chapter by returning to the infrastructural questions that preoccupy Whitehead's text, questions that tie together Whitehead's interest in the semiotic quality of African American experience, and his acute critique of race's evolving imbrications with networking technology—especially the provocative claim that "race" might itself be understood as a "technological" form.

Wendy Chun and Caroline Levine have both formulated race as a social technology and infrastructure. Both draw on work by seminal race theorists including Stuart Hall, Michael Omi,

Howard Winant, Toni Morrison, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., each of whom has shown race to be an ideological rather than a cultural or biological construct. Omi and Winant, for instance, posit race as an ontological and social formation that is perpetually being adapted and revised to maintain the capitalist status quo. A "fundamental *organizing principle* of social relationships," they write, race and the institutionalized practices of racialization through which it is made manifest ultimately refer to a dynamic array of political and economic systems according to which individuals are classified in order to uphold specific racial and class hierarchies (3). Attuned to the discursive underpinnings of these institutional practices, Hall extends Omi and Winant's account by suggesting that race is a modality of social discourse whose linguistic terms and visual signs, though instrumental to the construction and deconstruction of raced subjects, are ultimately devoid of real-world referents. Similarly, Gates Jr. has argued that while "race" achieves an array of social, political, and economic effects, it is itself an effect of language "willfully" misused:

> Race is … a trope of ultimate, irreducible difference between cultures, linguistics groups, or adherents of specific belief systems, which—more often than not—also have fundamentally opposed economic interests. Race is the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its difference. The biological criteria used to determine "difference" in sex simply do not hold when applied to "race." Yet we carelessly use language in such a way as to *will* this sense of *natural* difference into our formulations. (5)

Linking "race" to language, Gates' theory rhymes with Toni Morrison's sense of race as a "metaphorical" phenomena, a way of "referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was" (63). Exceeding the economic utility critics like Omi and Winant

deem central to race's operation, Morrison seizes on race's fundamentally psychosocial power—its capacity not just to index difference but also to conceal and "disguise" it.

Chun's argument that race might productively be understood as a technology synthesizes the predominantly socioeconomic arguments of critics like Omi and Winant with the more language-conscious accounts of Gates and Morrison, extending the sense in which "race" is a discursive framework used to create and codify class difference. Proposing that race is a "heuristic, a way to understand, to reveal, the world around us," Chun turns to the histories of eugenics, U.S. slavery, and Jim-Crow segregation to elaborate the sense in which race functions as a social technology ("Race and/as Technology" 14). Citing Saidya Hartman's account of the Thirteenth Amendment which, in Hartman's words, "made 'black' virtually synonymous with 'slave,' and 'white' with 'free,'" Chun traces the codification of racial distinction alongside the evolution of transportation and communication technologies that threatened to break these distinctions down, such as the intercontinental railroad system and, later, the intercity bus system (187). Where these technologies promised greater mobility and integration, counteracting racist technologies like segregation and eugenics rearticulated claims of absolute racial difference. In the case of eugenics, the effect was to reduce subjects to "standing reserves" of genetic qualities. This mindset, Chun argues, allowed race to function as a technology according to which "subjects are taken into 'account' as quantities" (47-8). For this reason, Chun reads "race" as a statist technology akin to those described by Foucault—a modality of biopower according to which certain subjects are protected by the law and others punished under it. "Raced" subjects, she concludes, are made and unmade in the terms of their denial or enjoyment of social protections and welfare. As *Apex* shows, raced subjects are equally made over as data—not

simply in the manner of eugenics-era biological categorization, but through far subtler market and administrative practices of supposedly neutral data-driven proxies.

With its interest in race, language, and industrial infrastructure, *Apex* illuminates the semiotic and the actual technologies of blackness and shows the dangers of conceiving of "race" as a modular technical category detachable from history. Like Cole's *Open City*, preoccupied with "search terms" and the algorithmic mediation of core categories of identity, *Apex* also meditates on what language *means* by pursuing its immediate relationship to what it might be *worth*, considering the shifting and obscure technical "value" of words themselves. In the next chapter, I turn to another of Whitehead's novels: the 2011 thriller *Zone One,* which depicts a post-apocalyptic world devastated by a viral zombie pandemic. Here, I will suggest that while *Apex* allegorizes the emergence of digital post-Fordism as a new paradigm for racial capitalism, and, through its extended meditation on the ideological power of acts of naming, fantasizes about a kind of "executable" language that in many ways resembles computer code, *Zone One* implicates the digital even more fully in its narrative form. The novel, I will suggest, not only thematizes viral transmission through its narrative of a zombie plague but also embodies in its narrative techniques the basic technical principles of malware.

CHAPTER 4

"Insistent as Malware": Reading *Zone One* from a Distance

Over a decade before Franco Moretti debuted "distant reading"—a quantitative approach to literary analysis that uses computational methods to detect textual patterns and trace generic evolutions across large literary corpora—he advanced a far lower-tech means of visualizing an individual text's structural dynamics. In *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998) Moretti suggests that explanatory insight into a text might be gleaned simply by plotting, on a map made up of the text's key sites of action, the events that transpire at those sites. Here he describes the enterprise.

> the most challenging part … [of mapping out a text in this way occurs when] one looks at the map [one has drawn], and *thinks*. You look at a specific configuration—those roads that run towards Toledo and Sevilla; those mountains, such a long way from London; those men and women that live on opposite banks of the Seine—you look at these patterns and try to understand. (7-8)

Elements of Moretti's mapping enterprise rhyme with Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best's widely discussed critical practice of "surface reading," a formalism that seeks to "describe … accurately" what lies on a text's surface by attending to the "intricate verbal structure of [the text's] literary language" and the "patterns that exist within and across [various] texts" (10). In Marcus and Best's view, "paranoid" or "symptomatic" approaches to literary analysis of the sort epitomized by Fredric Jameson risk missing what is "evident, perceptible, [and] apprehensible [on a text's surface level]: what is neither hidden nor hiding; what, in the geometrical sense, has length and breadth but no thickness, and therefore covers no depth" (9). "A surface," they reiterate, "is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see

through" (9). Corroborating Marcus and Best's emphasis on descriptive "looking," but scrupulously avoiding their denial of a text's deeper logical structures, Moretti maintains the usefulness of attending to a text's surface form by imagining how a critic might literally visualize it, engaging the text not just as a "surface" but as so many data points subjectable to nontraditional, informatic styles of unpacking. Echoing remarks about the exegetical power of data visualization made by Edward Tufte and John Tukey, who have argued that "graphics *reveal* data" (14) and that "pictures based on [the] exploration of data [are valuable precisely because they]… force their message[s] upon us," Moretti champions literary mapping as a compelling analytical tool, one that illuminates surface dynamics that might otherwise go unnoticed, leveraging new perspectives on traditional interpretations of specific texts, and challenging the supposedly fixed parameters of genre (v). Signaling the more expansive computational techniques and bigger critical-historical ambitions of "distant reading," Moretti's mapping enterprise illustrates how quantitative (i.e. "surface") analyses like data visualization might assist qualitative (i.e. "symptomatic") readings by shifting the critic's frame of reference and interpretive position vis-à-vis the text at hand, "forc[ing her] to notice what [she might] never [have] expected to see" (Tukey vi).

Near the narrative climax of Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011), a genre-bending zombie thriller that has frequently been read as an allegory for "postracial" America, a similar call to shift perspectives so as to better visualize patterns written upon the surface of things is made. Well over two hundred pages into the novel, and only thirty pages from its end, *Zone One*—which has, to this point, all but excluded explicit racial signifiers, and left its characters' racial identities unremarked—suddenly reveals that its protagonist, human survivor of the zombie apocalypse Mark Spitz, is black. Spitz has just lost his closest living friend to a sudden

zombie attack, and he is only moments away from surrendering himself to the zombie horde gathered at the fallen barricade to lower Manhattan's last remaining human encampment, the eponymous Zone One. As his friend lies dying, Spitz describes to him a moment of sublime "reading" he experienced in the early days following the outbreak of the zombie virus. Working as a civilian volunteer clearing vehicles and erecting roadblocks on the New Jersey interstate, Spitz recalls seeing, from the vantage of a government helicopter, what his months-long and meticulously overseen effort to tow the abandoned vehicles to specific locations had yielded.

> He finally saw it from above, what she [Spitz's supervisor, whom he nicknames the Quiet Storm] had carved into the interstate. While the other wreckers, indeed all other survivors, could only perceive the wasteland on the edge, the Quiet Storm was in the sky, inventing her alphabet and making declarations in a row of five green hatchbacks parked perpendicular to the median, in a sequence of black-and-white luxury sedans arranged nose to nose two miles down the road, in a burst of ten minivans glinting enamel tilted at an acute angle half a mile farther north. The grammar lurked in the numbers and colors, the meaning encoded in the spaces between the vehicular syllables, half a mile, quarter mile. Five jeeps lined up south by southwest on a north-south stretch of highway … Ten sport-utility vehicles arranged one-eighth of a mile apart east-west were the fins of an eel slipping through silty depths or the fletching on an arrow aimed at—what? Tomorrow? What readers? … What readership did she address? (232-33)

Might Spitz's elevated perspective on the "wasteland"—and his decoding of its apocalyptic "alphabet" and "grammar," its carefully configured "syllables" and "spaces"—be Whitehead's provocation to read *Zone One* distantly? To take a "surface" view, or even a computational one, of this unusual text's complex semantic field, a field wherein generic distinctions are openly

queried and the typical signifying features of the race novel conspicuously elided, recast in the mold of a certain discursive "postraciality"? Reflecting *Zone One*'s complicated generic status, it is important to note that Whitehead's novel is also thematically preoccupied with acts of counting, classification, and data-driven prediction, with the calculation of aggregates and the location of outliers. Fixed on the identification and sorting of the novel's zombies, *Zone One*'s human protagonists, including Spitz, struggle to disambiguate the aggressive flesh-eating "skels" that comprise 99% of the fictional zombie population from the remaining 1% of "stragglers," harmless outliers caught in banal muscle-memory loops. Similarly, *Zone One*'s narrative of human survival and the resettling of downtown New York is fixated on numerical prediction. Survivors collect historical data about the zombie (their ages, genders, driver's license numbers, occupations, zipcodes, and so forth) in an attempt to map out the virus' trajectory. They use statistical algorithms to model and detect patterns in the physical movement of the dead. They monitor food and supply inventories shipped from one survivor camp to another. They even use data to forecast price-points for New York's soon-to-be-revived downtown housing market. The challenges of classifying data and predicting future outcomes within the novel, then, get reflected in the challenge of classifying *Zone One* generically, of making sense of Whitehead's formal experimentation, lexical choices, and elisions.

This essay will suggest that the challenge of reading *Zone One* comes down, in part, to achieving a perspective on the text akin to Spitz's perspective on the Jersey interstate, an interpretive position from which, to recall Moretti, we might look at the text's patterns and try to understand them. Such a position, I will argue, yields explanatory purchase on the relation between the novel's "genre-fiction" surface (its zombie narrative features and predominantly race-free language) and what the majority of *Zone One*'s critics have intuited to be its "literary"

allegorical core (the novel's latent race-conscious ideological program). In particular, I will suggest that such a perspective reveals *Zone One*'s formal production of a kind of "viral" intertextuality, one whose operation reflects the novel's computational concerns and illuminates its racial argument. Implicit to this claim is the notion that "surface" formalisms of the sort advocated by Marcus, Best, and Moretti, and "symptomatic," historical-materialist close readings, of the sort practiced by Jameson, are not only reconcilable but methodologically co-productive. The former approaches do more than verify or empiricize the latter's "symptomatic" hunches; they also "force us to notice what we might not have expected to see" in ways that testify to the longstanding "methodological and discursive pluralism" Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian recently attribute to formalism's disciplinary vitality and rigor (669).

Compelled by *Zone One*'s generic eccentricity and the complexity of its semantic coding, then, this essay deploys the techniques of formalisms both "distant" and "symptomatic." Beginning with an account of *Zone One*'s figurative and terminological preoccupation with the technical operations of data management and Internet-based communication, I go on to take a "distant" approach to *Zone One* by quantifying the distribution of racial signifiers in the novel, reading it as Spitz does the Jersey interstate, and as Hugh Kenner, in one of the earliest computational analyses of any novel, famously did Joyce's *Ulysses*: as a "block [of words] delimited by spaces" (24). Keyed to the detection of a racial "patterning" or "grammar" lurking beneath *Zone One*'s predominantly "postracial" (i.e. racially-unmarked) lexicon, this approach, I will argue, yields insight into the novel's unusual formal design. Proceeding contrapuntally, *Zone One* alternates between a linear surface narrative that tracks Mark Spitz's activities in Zone One as they unfold in the novel's temporal present, and a subterranean narrative composed of Spitz's memories from the pre-zombie era and the viral epidemic's immediate aftermath. As we will see,

the occurrence and distribution of racially-charged signifiers in the novel—including "black," "white," "slavery," "segregation," and "Reconstruction"—although rare, is far from random. In fact, the pattern that emerges from this distribution shows that *Zone One*'s racial signifiers are disproportionately located in the novel's forward-moving surface narrative, the narrative preoccupied with Spitz's sorting and annihilation of zombies, and one whose action sequences provide little context for the elaboration of these racial terms. At the same time, *Zone One*'s subterranean "memory" narrative contains proportionately fewer racial signifiers, but does offer a number of explanatory historical paradigms that ostensibly aid in the contextualization of the surface narrative's otherwise isolated racial terms. I will argue that this lexical patterning reveals *Zone One*'s "viral" intertextuality, a formal dynamic through which racial meaning gradually accrues in the novel, finally triggering the revelation of Spitz's blackness and the capitulation of the human encampment at Zone One. Such an intertextuality is meaningful not simply because it formalizes a relation between "memory" and the "now" in which historical memory is posited as a site for the "infection" of racial meaning in a putatively "postracial" present, but moreover because this dynamic also resonates strongly with the novel's computational sensibility, its emphasis on processes of viral transmission, datafication, and statistical forecasting. Indeed, I want to suggest that the qualitative payoff to this basic quantitative exercise is a fuller understanding of *Zone One*'s complex formal engagement with the representational conditions of "postraciality" out of which its author, Whitehead, writes. These conditions bear witness not to race's social or categorical transcendence but to its technical obfuscation and experiential metamorphosis within a networked economy whose interfaces effectively hide racial distinctions within the global division of labor. In this view, race, run through the abstract software algorithms that coordinate global labor and production, no longer appears as a category solely

derived from biological or cultural difference, or as one that is strictly enforceable at the level of physical, material constraint. Rather, race now moves between an evident and an inevident category of economic distinction, "lurking" within technologies of global labor coordination, and resurfacing at the level of the global wage differential. Understood in such a way, *Zone One*, I will suggest, does not simply thematize viral transmission through its narrative about a zombie epidemic, but also embodies in its contrapuntal narrative technique and through its careful distribution of racial signifiers the basic algorithmic principles of a common form of malware known as a memory-resident stealth virus. Riffing on the technical affordances of viral transmission, *Zone One,* I will finally suggest, produces a "postracial" racializing form keyed to processes of racial formation occurring beneath the discourse of "postraciality" and within the hidden technical registers of the networked global economy, formalizing race's viral "infection" of a discursively "postracial" present. The novel thus challenges the zombie's pervasive figuration as a racially-unmarked avatar for late-capitalism's drives and effects by reconceiving of it as a member of the vast reserve army of spectral workers who hail from the global South, laborers whose exploitation under the current digital infrastructure's new articulations of capital signals race's conceptual "mortification"—its disappearance and reappearance, putative "death" and "reanimation."

Genre Thrills Aplenty

Roughly one year before *Zone One*'s release, literary critic Mark McGurl nominated the zombie as a symptom of the novel's waning purchase on and commitment to the realist tradition. Turning to a handful of recent zombie novels—Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009) and Max Brooks' *Zombie Survival Guide* (2003) and *World War Z* (2007)—McGurl pursued the significance of the zombie's ubiquity in cultures "high" (e.g. the

novel) and "low" (e.g. comics and television series, videogames, Facebook applications, iPhone games, and the like). His wager was that the zombie's appearance in the novel not only testified to literary culture's persistent struggle with how to represent the capitalist world-system and its myriad predations but also bespoke the novel's own status as a cultural form that is "neither alive nor dead but undead"—its status, that is, as a kind of "zombie genre," widely adrift its realist origins. Specifically, as figures for the "pure negation of the concept of character at the heart of … realism," zombies, McGurl argued, call into question realism's most basic cultural ambitions, namely the rendering of individual selves and, with this, the pursuit of so-called "truths" about the human experience. In contrast to realism's fully-imagined individuals, zombies represent little more than "tottering skin-bag[s] animated by neural subroutines," "monster lumpenproletariat" or a "drone workers commuting to service industry job." Elsewhere, they simply encode "spastically violent population[s]," or vague "existential threats." Creatures of "symbolic excess," zombies are consequently ones of characterological shallowness; they crush realism's long-held belief in the self's rational autonomy, and take us "downward to the physical truths that determine our organic being." For this reason, McGurl concludes, zombie stories signal realism's decline along with the rise of a new novelistic form: political allegory. Offering a new view on consciousness—one that realism's frank narrative strategies rarely grant— zombie stories thus ask to be read differently: "their designs may constitute the ultimate reality, in comparison to which ordinary experience is only a kind of dream, but when they are rotated into the space of representation they can look very 'unrealistic' indeed." To make sense of these designs, then, a reader must be prepared to "rotate" her own sense of "reality," undertaking a speculative journey populated by monsters in order to better apprehend the monstrousness of the everyday.

Promotional material for *Zone One* prepared prospective readers to make just these kinds of adjustments by "rotating" their senses of "literary" and "genre" fiction both. Early blurbs reassured readers that *Zone One* was "not just a juicy experiment in genre fiction" or "the work of a serious novelist slumming it with some genre-novel cash in." At the same time, readers were cajolingly told that if they were "going to break down and read a zombie novel, [they ought to] make it this one." Reinforcing these admissions of *Zone One*'s generic idiosyncrasy, Whitehead has, on numerous occasions, avowed that his novel is infused with elements drawn from the science fiction novels of Stephen King, Isaac Asimov, and Richard Matheson; the cult horror films of George Romero, Dario Argento, and John Carpenter; Marvel's Spider-Man and X-Men comic series, and DC's horror comics, among others. Additionally, *Zone One*'s mechanics—its action, point-of-view, and pacing—have widely been compared to those of film and first-person shooter videogames.[42] Although Whitehead resists the latter comparison, claiming that *Zone One* would make for a "pretty boring shooter, what with all the thinking' and meditatin' and musin' about society and whatnot," he does acknowledge a wide range of media influences ("Six Questions for Colson Whitehead"). Dismissing the idea that fiction writers can only source material from their own medium, Whitehead equally rejects taxonomies that would prioritize "literary" over "genre" fiction. Indeed, he sums up his writerly ethos as follows: "The world is a junkyard—take the parts you need to make the machine work the way you want it to. A song, a poem, an essay" ("Six Questions").[43] In this spirit, Whitehead cites Romero's *Night of the Living*

[42] See in particular Rochelle Spencer.

[43] In an *Atlantic* interview, Whitehead writes: "I was inspired to become a writer by horror movies and science fiction. The fantastic effects of magic realism, Garcia Marquez, the crazy, absurd landscapes of Beckett—to me, they're just variations on the fantasy books I grew up on. *Waiting for Godot* takes place on a weird asteroid heading towards the sun, that's how I see it. It's not a real place—it's a fantastic place. So what makes it different from a small planet in outer space? What makes it different from a post-apocalyptic landscape? Not much in my mind."

Dead (1968) as *Zone One*'s governing influence, a film that was foundational to his conception of protagonist Mark Spitz. Romero's "story of a black man on the run from the mob of white people who want to destroy him, literally devour him," Whitehead remarks, was a "revelation," a "crucial subplot [of *Zone One* and] of the America narrative [writ large]" ("Six Questions").

While *Zone One*'s mainstream critics have largely expressed bemusement at Whitehead's decision to write a zombie story, they have also praised Whitehead for his unusual treatment of altogether serious social themes. Glen Duncan, of the *New York Times Book Review*, memorably compared the enterprise of a "literary novelist [like Whitehead] writing a genre novel" to an "intellectual dating a porn star," and ultimately lauds Whitehead's ability to throw into relief the "strangeness of the familiar and the familiarity of the strange." "As a literary writer," Duncan continues,

> hard-wired or self-schooled to avoid the clichéd, the formulaic, the role … [Whitehead] knows reality—even the reality of a world overrun by gaga revenants—is always going to have more to it than the dictates of genre allow. So in the action sequences we get essayistic asides and languid distensions, stray insights, surprising correspondences, ambivalence, paradox. We get, in short, an attempt to take the psychology of the premise seriously, to see if it makes a relevant shape.

That shape is, if not explicitly racial, then at the very least deeply existential, concerned with the "absurdity of our [human] predicament and the certainty of [our] death." *Zone One* is simultaneously a "celebration of modernity and a pre-emptive wake for its demise." The novel is also a stunning feat of stylistic variety, the odd marriage of "sub-Victorian constructions" and "shoot-from-the-hip phrases." Confirming Duncan's sense of the novel's dual character, Olivia Laing of the *New Statesman* labels *Zone One*'s style the ingenious "combination of dreamy

inventiveness and modish irony," while literary critic Andrew Hoberek describes the novel as bodying forth a "new form," emergent out of "the breakdown (however painful) of the old" (413). This "elaborately nested" zombie narrative, Hoberek continues, is told in such "highly polished, formally perfect prose" that it immediately distances itself from the stylistic mediocrity of most zombie novels, "allegorical[ly] concern[ed, as they often are,] with the limits of individuality and realist characterization (409). By contrast, each sentence of *Zone One* is as meticulously crafted as the larger plot structure, and each bears the mark of Whitehead's voice—arguably the most distinctive and recognizable in contemporary U.S. fiction" (408-9). *Zone One*, Hoberek concludes, owes as much to *The Wasteland* as it does *Night of the Living Dead*; subtly allowing the novel's genre elements to "assert themselves over and against [his] prose style," Whitehead diligently extends *Zone One*'s thematic investigations "beyond genre fiction into the forms of defensive individualization that structure the high literary canon as well" (410-11). The novel, these critics agree, does indeed grant "genre thrills aplenty" to those "self-appointed aficionados of the undead" (Duncan). But it also renegotiates and exploits its "genre" premise. "[A] zombie novel [transformed] into an allegory of contemporary Manhattan (and, by extension, America)," *Zone One* stands as the peculiar contrivance of an author who has "[sunk] his teeth into a popular format and emerge[d] with a literary feast" (*Kirkus*).

What exactly *Zone One* allegorizes such critics as Duncan and Laing leave vague. Lev Grossman loosely ventures to suggest that "Whitehead uses the tropes of classic George-Romero-style zombie movies to reflect on millennial disasters like Sept. 11 and Hurricane Katrina." Hoberek, drawing on Thomas Jones' early review of the novel, suggests that *Zone One* oscillates between allegorizing the effects of "modern deindividualization … [and] more specific fears of immigrants, of terrorists, of the people who want to get into our gated communities."

(411).[44] This oscillation "points to the very real contemporary reorganization of American racism in which the traditional black-white binary is partially submerged within xenophobic fears about Muslims, terrorists, immigrants, and others" (413). Manipulating his readers' identifications—which are made to lie at once with the survivors and also with their zombie attackers—Whitehead compels his readers to experience the breakdown of a post-identity politics "future we have yet to visit," and may never realize (413).

In ways similar to Hoberek, most academic critics have read *Zone One* as an allegorical critique of "postracial" America. Ramon Saldivar, Leif Sorensen, and Jessica Hurley have variously celebrated *Zone One*'s unconventional coding of its racial content, arguing that Whitehead takes up the zombie apocalypse the better to illustrate racism's persistence in a putatively "postrace" era. Conflating the post-apocalyptic with the "postracial," *Zone One* posits racism as an anachronism that lives on long after the world has ended. Despite Spitz's inclination to view his community of survivors as "post-identitarian"—there was, Spitz remarks hopefully, only "a single Us now, reviling a single Them" (*Zone One* 231)—the novel gradually breaks down apocalypse's social-utopian impetuses.[45] Along with the late revelation of Spitz's blackness, *Zone One* steadily exposes race and class' systemic entrenchment in the survivors' doomed project to "Make Tomorrow" (24). As Saldivar writes, Whitehead's apocalyptic premise suggests that "[o]nly here, in a country populated by the living dead who nostalgically linger among the ruins of their former lives, might we finally, unequivocally, encounter[ing] a 'postracial' era," one Whitehead can only convey by way of "speculative realism," a "hybrid

[44] This reversibility, as Jones puts it, allows *Zone One*'s reader to identify equally with the "plucky band of sympathetic individuals defending themselves against the murderous onslaught of an undifferentiated horde" and with that very horde."

[45] Annalee Newitz adds that zombie narratives from the 1980s onwards present racism as an anachronism. Consigning racism to a pre-apocalyptic past, apocalypse offers a decisive impetus to "postracial" solidarity.

amalgam of realism, magical realism, metafiction, and [various] genre fictions" (13). Similarly, Sorensen contends that Whitehead's decision to locate *Zone One* in a post-apocalyptic future allows him to draw on the formal and conceptual resources of the apocalypse genre in order to theorize "postraciality" anew. In this view, *Zone One*'s polemical thrust lies in its anti-teleological apocalyptic narrative form, its resistance to the pull of "futurism" in political and economic discourse. Rather than enlist the zombie apocalypse in futurism's cycles of "creative destruction," and thus exploit it as an opportunity for society to transcend the evils of racism, *Zone One* imagines the "ending of all stories" (562). The novel thus forecloses futurism's traditional narratives of political and economic perfectibility through crisis, "us[ing] the zombie narrative to explore the unthinkable possibility of a crisis so severe that it might not have a future at all" (560).[46] Refusing to allow its human survivors to overcome their zombie attackers, the novel's temporality is neither redemptive nor forward-looking but rather remains radically closed; refusing the possibility of an ameliorated future, *Zone One* equally denies the improvement of race relations. The novel imagines only the "scandalous persistence of divisions among humans" (572). Guided by similar questions pertaining to with *Zone One*'s "postracial" apocalypticism, Hurley traces the zombie's cultural evolution from the explicitly racialized figure of Haitian folklore (the slave raised from the dead by Voodoo priests to labor in the fields at night) to a more-or-less deracialized, effectively "postracial" avatar for late-capitalism's global expansion and its effects. Whitehead's racially-unmarked skels, she argues, allegorize America's suppression of its traumatic racial histories, but also its fervent "desire for a post-black future" (313). Figures for the "continuing presence of traumatic racial histories that American modernity

[46] Inspired by McGurl's provocation that the novel is an "undead" genre, Carl Swanson pursues similar questions of narrative closure in *Zone One*, arguing that the novel "derives its most powerful figures and motifs from variations on the formal conventions of the zombie genre."

would rather forget," the skels embody the "nightmare that haunts the postracial dream: a nightmare of the past come to life" (313).

Like Hoberek, Saldivar, Sorensen, Hurley, and other critics, I am interested in how *Zone One* conveys Whitehead's opposition to "postracial" discourse as well as his ostensibly anti-futurist conviction that humanity is incapable of prevailing over systemic racism. Additionally, I am interested how the "surface" characterology McGurl associates with the zombie gets manifested in *Zone One*'s lexical and narrative "surface" features, features that ask us to take a step back from familiar reading practices and "rotate" our formal perspective on the text. In this vein, I want to suggest that *Zone One* illustrates Whitehead's formal interest in the current global capitalist infrastructures that prop up "postracial" ideology, infrastructures like the global Internet into which differential categories like race are thought to disappear. In this view, *Zone One*'s zombie apocalypse is something more than a "genre" conceit that allows Whitehead to propose, in Saldivar words, that it "may well be necessary to imagine the end of the world before we may imagine the historical end of racialization and racism" (13). The zombie apocalypse also serves to allegorize race's technical obfuscation within the networked division of labor, giving the lie to pervasive cultural investments in the Internet as a "postracializing" global mode of production. Whitehead's persistent description of his zombies as datafied and racially-unmarked "anti-characters" (to recall McGurl), "eerily synchronized" in the manner of a networked labor force associates the zombie's effaced racial character with networking technologies' seeming abilities to de-race labor and level racial difference. At the same time, the novel stages race's categorical renewal through the dramatic "reveal" of Spitz's blackness, a revelation that coincides with the zombies' storming of Hudson street in downtown New York, one of the world's five most densely populated Internet hubs. Extending allegorical accounts of

Zone One keyed to Whitehead's formal experimentation, I am interested in how his novel allegorizes race's hidden operation within the current digital mode of production by exploiting figures and terminologies of network virality, data processing, and statistical prediction that are also immanent to its "postracial" lexicon and "viral" contrapuntal design.

Whitehead persistently describes *Zone One*'s skels and stragglers in the computational language of data processing: they are said to be "programmed" (57) and "malfunctioning" (48) with "bugs roosting deep in their code" (181), their minds wiped, and the "data of their selves" rewritten by the plague (28). What's more, in the post-plague world any non-quantifiable dimensions of these onetime humans no longer matter, as civilian volunteers like Spitz are simply instructed to annihilate them and then record them as numerical data (by age, driver's license number, and zipcode). Just as the plague "converts the human body into the perfect vehicle for spreading copies of itself" (96) so too does Spitz partake in their conversion into data, which data is then forwarded to American government scientists and officials in Buffalo, New York. Sorensen observes that these bureaucrats engage with the dead as pure data forms, building statistical models that "promise access to a more complete picture of the present" at the expense of any "immediate, embodied perspective" on the disaster and its victims (564).

Immediate and embodied as his perspective on zombies may be, Spitz's encounters with them are nevertheless mandated by Buffalo's data-collecting imperatives. In one of the novel's opening scenes, Spitz discovers a handful of skels trapped in a Human Resources office on Duane Street—the type of place, he recalls, "where human beings were paraphrased into numbers, components of bundled data to be shot out through fiber-optic cable toward meaning" (17). Attacked by a skel who reminds him of his sixth-grade English teacher, Spitz manages to shoot it in the face, "converting resemblance to red mist," before finding and

recording its identifying information (16). Michael Szalay reads this and other scenes of conversion in the novel, where human bodies are permutated into symbolic data, as allegorical illustrations of labor's growing alienation from value within a late stage of financial capitalism that "shuffles paper and moves numbers while divorcing profit from all relation to value" (16). Figures for the "'perverse dialectical inversion,' that now obtains between ostensibly human inputs and the post-industrial constant capital fed by those inputs" (8), Whitehead's zombies stand in for the disposable human labor force that underwrites an increasingly automated global economic system, one in which, as Chris Harman argues in *Zombie Economics*, the circulation of money operates at a remove from value creation. As such, Whitehead's zombies

> represent seemingly productive labor that continues to work after it has left the bodies of living workers and, indeed, the manner in which workers can be said already to have left their bodies when living and laboring, alienated beyond hope into forms of work that now claim their every waking moments. … [At the same time] Whitehead's zombies capture the radical atrophy of value-productive labor within the West's post-Fordist information economy. Living workers are mortified … like the automated bots and zombies that will eventually replace them, to the extent that they have no chance to add value (what Marx will at moments call an animating "soul" or "spirit" to the product of their labor. (15)

Szalay reads the zombies' final assault on downtown New York as a "return of the unproductive repressed—a final reckoning forced upon the living by all the unpaid work they can be said to have performed" (16). Although this reckoning resembles the proletariat revolution, its aim, he stresses, is not revolutionary in the traditional sense; if they can be understood to have any purpose at all, the angry dead are not looking to reclaim the means of production. Rather, their

storming of the city offers a terrifying and inspiring glimpse of some yet unimaginable postcapitalist future.

Szalay's reading of *Zone One* extends Marxist accounts of the zombie that have interpreted it as the figure for an increasingly alienated and disposable class of laboring subjects, those mortified by capitalism and trapped forever within its relentless productive machineries. Many of these accounts emphasize the zombie's figural relation to industrial and, more recently, "postindustrial" labor regimes. Here, for instance, Steven Shaviro proposes that zombies represent curiously "informatic" subjects.

> In contrast to the inhumanity of vampire-capital, zombies present the "human face" of capitalist monstrosity. This is precisely because they are the dregs of humanity: the zombie is all that remains of "human nature," or even simply of a human scale, in the immense and unimaginably complex network economy. Where vampiric surplus-appropriation is unthinkable, because it exceeds our powers of representation, the zombie is conversely what *must be thought*: the shape that representation unavoidably takes now that "information" has displaced "man" as the measure of all things. In a posthuman world, where the human form no longer serves as a universal equivalent, the figure of the zombie subsists as a *universal residue*. (288)

Echoing McGurl's account of the zombie's anti-realist orientation, Shaviro nominates the zombie as the new surface of "informatic" subjectivity covering over what was once a deeper characterization of "man." A "human" productive force caught up in the "immense and unimaginably complex network economy," the zombie expresses man's growing ontological estrangement from his sense of self, labor, and place under capitalism's increasingly obscure conditions of production and unconventional new manifestations of wealth. Specifying this

estrangement further, Jean and John Comaroff stress the particularity of the zombie's present historical iteration.[47] While zombies, as their mythological origins suggest, are generally read as bodies whose social utility has been reduced to "raw labor" (McNally 142-3), today's zombies, the Comaroffs contend, must be understood in light of the

> social and material transformations sparked by the rapid rise of neoliberal capitalism on a global scale, a process that has intensified market competition; translocalized the division of labor; rendered national polities and economies increasingly porous, less sovereign; set many people in motion and disrupted their sense of place; dispersed class relations across international borders; and widened the gulf between flows of fiscal circulation and sites of concrete production, thus permitting speculative capital to appear to determine the fate of postrevolutionary societies. (797)

"Spectral, floating signifiers" of neoliberal capitalism's changing configurations of labor, production, and wealth today's zombies reflect the "globalization of the division of labor [that] reduces workers everywhere to the lowest common denominator, to a disposable cost" (779; 784). This division sees the "factory and the workshop, far from secure centers of fabrication

[47] Sarah Lauro and Karen Embry trace the zombie's figural-economic passage from the "somnambulistic slave" of Haitian mythology to the "convenient boogeyman" for capitalism's rapacious drives and their effects. Having originally represented a slave, the zombie now represents a new "whitewashed" slave, "the capitalist worker, but also the consumer, trapped within the ideological construct that assures the survival of the system" (99). This revision of the zombie into a deracialized capitalist icon, they continue, amounts to "yet another imperialist act [performed by Western culture]—one that dispels the dark fury of the slave and, in turning the iconography inside out, makes the zombie's insatiable hunger figure the white consumer instead, effectively swallowing the slave body as the icon is reappropriated" (97). Similarly, in "We *Are* the Walking Dead," Gerry Canavan defies critical tendencies to whiten or deracinate the zombie, challenging accounts that would seek to render the zombie's Haitian origins irrelevant, and hold the zombie up as an unmarked figure for contemporary economic practices. Using the lens of biopolitical theory to consider the zombie's always-already racial construction, Canavan suggests that the zombie is instead allegorizes blackness in a specifically biopolitical register. I have been arguing that, in *Zone One*, Whitehead illustrates a new biopolitical order in which the zombie's "whitewashing" coincides with the subject's datafication under the new digital-post-Fordist mode of production.

and family income … increasingly experienced by virtue of their closure: either by their removal to somewhere else—where labor is cheaper, less assertive, less taxed, more feminized, less protected by states and unions—or by their replacement by nonhuman means of manufacture" (781). Updating the figure of the slave made to toil in the fields by night, the zombie now symptomatizes the global devaluation of labor power wrought by a world of "flextime employment," (787), "part-time piecework, menial make-work, [and] relatively insecure, gainless occupation" (781)—a world in which it even said that "some people are made into 'part-time zombies,' whose exhaustion in the morning speaks of an unwitting nocturnal mission, of involuntary toil on the night shift" (787). In such a world, commodities and services flow freely across global borders, while the workers who produce them are bound ever more tightly to the national economies out of which their labor emanates (784). This binding of production to national markets is what generates labor's "lowest common denominator." In turn, it is enabled by the "explosion of new monetary instruments and markets, aided by ever-more-sophisticated means of planetary coordination and space time compression, [which] have allowed the financial order to achieve a degree of autonomy from 'real production,' unmatched in the annals of modern political economy" (784). At a time when the nation and its borders are claimed to be obsolete, then, capital circulates with increasing virtuality, seemingly independent of material production. But the unseen laboring forces whose competencies capital exploits remain fatefully nation-bound to material sites of production, "reserve armies of spectral workers" whose relationship to the goods they manufacture is now "all but unfathomable, save in fantasy" (784). Considered in this way, the Comaroffs conclude, the zombie articulates a "recognition not merely of the commodification of labor, or its subjection to deadly competition, but of the

invisible predations that seem to congeal beneath the banal surfaces of new forms of wealth" (795), such as those derived from financial capital speculation.

In *Zone One*, the zombie's "symbolic excess" with respect to capitalism's depredations maps onto its "informatic" subjectivity. Figures for neoliberalism's increasingly opaque configurations of capital and labor, Whitehead's skels evoke a global "reserve army of spectral workers" coordinated by a now dissipated "Cloud" of "puffy data" to which they are frequently compared (92). For one, these creatures are curiously "linked," and not in the way zombies usually are. Unlike the pack hunters depicted by Romero, aimless and unperceptive beasts drawn to living human flesh like sharks to blood, Whitehead's skels act in remote unison, a twist on the trope of zombie telepathically: like a networked labor force, their attacks appear to be remotely coordinated, as though marshaled by some lingering power in the Cloud with which they seem, somehow, synced. Elsewhere, Spitz recalls them falling dead in synchrony in meadows and mall parking lots "as if someone had neutralized them and departed without sterilizing the area—their heads [left] … intact … as if they'd [simply] dropped in place" (110). At the novel's end they will rise in explicable unison to storm Zone One, breaking down the barricades at Hudson Street, the very spot where the Internet's core infrastructure can literally be seen and touched.

Zone One's zombies' "informatic" qualities are focused by its stragglers, the curious 1% of zombies who remain harmless and inert. Unlike their aggressive counterparts, the skels, the stragglers are not motivated to seek out and consume living humans; instead, their only discernible compulsion is to haunt the places of their pre-plague lives. An "imponderable tableaux" of "brain wiped" mannequins, their lives

> had been an interminable loop of repeated gestures; now their existences were winnowed to … [a single, repeated] discrete and eternal moment. In the bath, fully clothed before

> the nippled showerhead and its multiple-flow settings. Tilting a fluted vacuum attachment toward the scrunched curtains and their legendary hard-to-reach places. Underneath blankets and duvets whose number and thickness referred to a different season, a previous winter of mysterious significance. Slipping a disc into the game machine. Crotch-down on the yoga mat. Spooning bran from a bowl. Surfing the dead web. Yawning. Stretching. Flossing. Wound down and alone in their habitat. (50)

Inhabiting a "discrete and eternal moment," Whitehead's stragglers perform a kind of automatic labor—"an interminable loop of repeated gestures"—that is nevertheless deeply personal, so much so that Spitz and his volunteer detail are constantly drawn to decipher the meaning behind the "perfect moment[s]" these creatures have chosen to relive (158):

> after more contact with the creatures, grid after tedious grid, he [Spitz] wondered if they chose these places or if the places chose them. No telling the visions wrought by the crossed wires in their brains, that bad electricity traipsing through their blighted synapses. He thought of that first straggler, standing in the disappearing field with his stupid kite. The easy narrative held that he played there as a kid, gazing up at the sky, oblivious to the things that made him stumble. Maybe it wasn't what had happened in a specific place—favorite room or stretch of beach or green and weedy pasture—but the association permanently fixed to that place. That's where I decided to ask her to marry me, in this elevator, and now I exist in that moment of possibility again. The guy had only spent a minute in that space but it had altered his life irrevocably. So he haunts it. This is the hotel room where our daughter was conceived and being in here now it is like she is with me again. It wasn't the hotel room itself that was important, with its blotched carpet and missing room-service menu and pilfered corkscrew, but the outcome nine

> months later. The straggler was in thrall to Room 1410, not the long nights in the nursery making sure those diminutive lungs continued to rise and fall, or the sun-kissed infinity pool of the resort where they spent their best four days/three nights, the steps at stage left where they hugged after the school play. So she haunts it, Room 1410. Relieved of care and worry, the stragglers lived eternally and undying in their personal heavens. Where the goblin world and its assaults were banished and there was nothing but possibility. (159)

Illustrating the self's absorption into now-routinized and mechanical forms of production, the stragglers' interminably "looped" behavior reflects David McNally's argument that zombies caricature the "troubled relations between human bodies and the operations of the capitalist economy," an economy in which laborers are continually stripped of their integrities, and where "individual survival requires selling our life-energies to people on the market (2-3). Like Shaviro, McNally keys his investigation of the zombie to Marx's account of abstract labor, which suggests that capitalism's ability to detach labor from the "concrete and specific individuals who perform unique productive acts," has the effect of rendering all workers as "pure quanta of qualitatively undifferentiated human labor in the abstract" (14). The consequence of this abstraction, he continues, is the worker's "zombification," a denial of her "life-force" and "fundamental creative energy":

> As a commodity, labour is not seen as integral to human personhood but, instead, as something that can be isolated and given to a buyer for a stipulated period of time. In buying labouring power, then, capital takes possession of labour, effectively draining it of its substance as a series of unique and unrepeatable acts tied to specific human personalities. Commodified abstract labour is thus effectively *disembodied*, detached from

> the persons who perform it. This detachability of commodified labour allows capitalists to break up and dissect work-processes into their component parts, confining individuals to the repetition of a limited number of human movements. As identical and interchangeable units of homogeneous labour-power, workers' skills and bodies are dissected, fragmented, cut up into separable pieces subjected to the direction of an alien-force, represented by a legion of supervisors, and embedded in rhythms and processes of work that are increasingly dictated by automatic programmes and systems of machinery. (14)

Nuancing the terms of labor alienation elaborated by Marx and McNally, the stragglers engage in a kind of fragmented and compulsive work that does not alienate their "human personhood" so much as capture it in a series of unique acts immanently tied to their "specific human personalities." Their human memories appropriated by the virus, the stragglers reflect McNally's sense of the "profound and thorough-going restructuring of human experience" wrought by labor's commodification and by the mental-immaterial labor's commodification especially, which has altered and isolated "people's sense of their very bodies, of their capacities and creative energies, of the interrelation of self and things, and of self and others" (15).

At the same time that they evince some residual "human personality" lurking within their rotting flesh, the stragglers' compulsive gestures indicate their managerial reprogramming by the viral plague itself, which emerges as the "alien-force" and "supervisor" that has fragmented their actions, cutting them up into separable pieces and dictating their ceaseless repetition of some inscrutably "perfect" act. Victims of this reprogramming, the stragglers embody the specific effects of the memory-resident viral mechanism I have begun to argue structures *Zone One* as a whole. A form of malware that lurks in an operating system's memory after its host program has

been terminated, the memory-resident virus operates by "hiding itself in memory … using various tricks to also hide changes it has made to any files or … records" (Rouse). Embedding itself in "executable [memory] file[s] without damaging [them,]" the virus uses an "interrupt mechanism to direct execution to itself whenever certain interrupts occur. A typical example is the interrupt sent by a removable disk drive every time a disk is inserted. A virus that replaces the handling routine for this interrupt will be invoked every time a disk is inserted and will therefore be able to infect the disk and release any other payload" (Salomon 47). Overwriting the operating system's core code so that its attempts to access a given file or disk sector are continually intercepted and redirected to the viral code, the memory-resident virus exploits these interruptions to hide itself. Their core routines modified by the zombie virus, *Zone One*'s stragglers are essentially denied the ability to multitask, finding themselves continually reverted to a single routine, one Whitehead locates in the deep identitarian registers of memory. I am suggesting that this predicament encodes a key tension between "human personalities" that are at once repressed by and crucial to the operations of labor. This tension, in turn, captures both the latency of "human personhood" to "abstract labor" (or, to recall Shaviro, the "human face" that lies beneath the "informatic subject"), and also the specific latent necessity of racial-identitarian difference to labor's value-accumulating imperatives. Evoking the "hidden circuits of capital through which human capacities become things" (McNally 7), Whitehead's stragglers also signal identity's abstraction and permutation under digital post-Fordism's increasingly "disembodied" labor formats. Driven by some inscrutably "personal" compulsion, the stragglers' violent awakening at the novel's end models identity's recovery from out of this abstraction. As we will see, of the identitarian registers that matter to Whitehead, race is foremost. Ultimately, he would have us see that race, having underwritten value's accumulation

in an "immense and unimaginably complex network economy," doesn't simply disappear in the process of its permutation into abstract data; rather it "lurks," awaiting reanimation, to finally assume an utterly corporeal and social form. The remainder of this chapter turns to Whitehead's formalization of this dynamic racialization, showing that *Zone One* does not simply associate the zombie with the "postracial" economic subject, but also describes the mechanisms by which the subject's "post-" and re-racialization occur. Those mechanisms, I have begun to suggest, are computational, keyed to the technical platforms that purport to deracialize labor in the networked global economy, and bound up with a surface/subterranean narrative form and "postracial" lexicon that carefully enacts race's structuring, yet ever-shifting and unstable, presence in contemporary social and economic life.

Zone One's "Postracial" Racializing Form

Zone One's narrative action centers on protagonist Mark Spitz, a self-described "average" and "typical" civilian who has managed to survive the zombie apocalypse (9). Enlisted in the state-run project known as "Reconstruction," Spitz's task, in the wake of a devastating zombie pandemic, is to comb Manhattan high-rises for any dead that might remain there, and promptly eliminate them. This narrative is punctuated by flashbacks to Spitz's life both prior to and during the zombie plague. These memories include Spitz's witnessing of his zombified mother simultaneously fellating and castrating his father; Spitz's brief romance with a fellow survivor named Miriam Cohen Levy; his role in a highway-clearing detail led by a "new skinhead" known as the "Quiet Storm" (141); his pre-plague-era occupation as a customer relationship manager in the new media department of a coffee multinational; and his days-long defense of an embattled Northampton farmhouse. The novel's main action takes place over three successive days during which Spitz and two members of his volunteer unit, Kaitlyn and Gary, attempt to secure New

York against a mounting zombie attack, before the barricades protecting the city finally give way. Importantly, Spitz's memories serve to clarify several otherwise inscrutable details in the novel, while gesturing obliquely to aspects of Spitz's identity left entirely undescribed in the unfolding linear narrative—including Spitz's race. Indeed, one of *Zone One*'s most striking disclosures, noted by nearly all of the novel's critics, is that Spitz is black, and that the name "Mark Spitz" is but a racist moniker derived from the "black-people-can't-swim" stereotype (231). This revelation coincides with the falling of the barricades that have, to this point, protected New York from an enormous horde of the dead. The barricades' collapse, coupled with race's resurgence as a category of difference within the novel, set the tone for *Zone One*'s strangely exuberant conclusion, in which Spitz elects to join, rather than oppose, his zombie attackers, whom he has finally come to recognize as "the ones who would resettle the broken city" (258).

In the remainder of this chapter I hope to demonstrate that within *Zone One*'s total narrative, Spitz's memories serve as sites for the operation of racial-historical formations that look and act like a common form of malware known as memory-resident stealth virus, one that hides in computer memory, awaiting activation. Once accessed, the racial histories and content that lies within Spitz's memories, I suggest, comes to infect and subsequently change how we read the more explicit racial signifiers that appear in the novel's linear action. The viral, secondary narrative of Spitz's memories operates by restaging key tropes in the tradition of racial spectacle, including a scene of cannibalistic castration resonant with the most brutal accounts of slave lynchings; an account of Spitz's romance with a Jewish survivor that invokes Black-Jewish political alliances of the 1960s; another scene that riffs explicitly on *Night of the Living Dead*; yet another scene in which the "skinhead," figure for a "postracial" racism, comes to embody a

working class whose political grievances are inseparable from those of a racial precariat; and a final scene located in the new-media present, where the difference between an artificial intelligence algorithm and a human being comes down to the un-programmable and immanently racialized element of "soul." Within *Zone One*'s overarching narrative, these scenes gradually accrue racial meaning, "infecting" but also illuminating the novel's unfolding linear narrative, and finally triggering the revelation that Spitz himself is black. The scenes and scenarios delivered in *Zone One*'s flashbacks thus operate to produce a kind of "postracial" racializing form, one that represents "race's" categorical movement between visibility and invisibility, between being an explicit and an excluded criteria of social division. Framed by the novel's persistent technical metaphors, this intertextual dynamic, I suggest, works to map race's hidden operation within the current mode of production.

The brief close reading to follow shows how one particularly prominent memory from Spitz's life on the run becomes a site for the viral embedding of a specific historical paradigm for interracial coalition, a paradigm that subsequently activates the racial terminology and "postracial" formation of *Zone One*'s unfolding linear narrative. Twice described, this memory involves Spitz's romance with a fellow survivor named Miriam Cohen Levy. Spitz meets Levy—whom he calls Mim—in a Connecticut toystore. There, the two spend months scavenging for supplies, trading stories of their lives before the plague, and making love. Mim's Jewishness is carefully contrived, if never rendered explicit: not only is Mim the bearer of two mythic Jewish surnames—Cohen and Levy—she is also inscribed in a larger, nominal tradition of Jewishness. Mim has recently arrived from Darien, Connecticut, a concentrated community of Wall Street titans (including former Securities and Exchange Committee chairman Richard Breedman), and former "sundown town," whose development history features the explicit, legal discrimination

of Jewish and African American populations.[48] Encountering Spitz shortly after having been betrayed by a madman named Abel, Mim's own daughter, now deceased, was named Eve—the Biblical Abel's mother. But Mim is also something more than an affluent suburban Jewish mother. Upon meeting her, Spitz finds himself compelled by the "stubborn ordinariness of her soft eyes and round, vigorous features…[and notes that] the yellow bandanna tight around her scalp tokened of weekend chores … scraping last summer's black residue from the grill" (127). And so, despite an initial distaste for Mim's optimism about "Reconstruction," Spitz decides to "maintain [the] mask" that covers over *his* pessimism about the future, and the two begin an affair (124). Evocative of the "mammy" figure who rose to prominence during Reconstruction, (and indeed, the toystore in which Mim and Spitz hideout is owned by someone named "Manny,") Mim's presence in Spitz's narrative signals the discourse of Black-Jewish representational agon and interracial solidarity outlined by critics like Michael Rogin, Henry Louis Gates, Jr, and Cornel West. A pertinent clue to the presence of this discourse appears in a section of the "Mim" passage, where Mim mentions that her husband worked for a sales company that compiled factoids about popular music produced between 1946 and the "1964 summer of love" (129). As historian Cheryl Greenberg has argued, this period marked the height of Jewish participation in the Black Civil Rights movement, a moment when Jews comprised a disproportionately high number of white Civil Rights Activists. Among other gestures of political solidarity, the period saw rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel march alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Selma. It was also during the 1964 Summer of Love that Jewish activists

[48] See James Loewen on the history of Darien: "According to an easement laying out the extent of those beach rights in 1931, 'bona fide' guests of the property owner were welcome but with some exceptions: beach privileges were never to be extended to 'any person or persons of the Hebrew race'."

Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were murdered by the Ku Klux Klan while assisting with Mississippi voter registration, a tragedy later cited by Dr. King as evidence of Jewish commitment to the African American cause.

Importantly, Mim's association with the Jewish upper-middle class challenges the easy reading of Black-Jewish alliance that Spitz's memory of their romance would seem to imply. As Cornel West points out, accounts of a so-called "golden age" in Black-Jewish political relationships of the mid-forties through the late sixties have tended to neglect the history of class divergence in the period, which saw Jews on a trajectory toward the upper-middle class, while African Americans continued to face impoverishment. These historical contexts for Black-Jewish friction and interracial solidarity offer clues for understanding a number of *Zone One*'s broader topics and tropes: inter- and "post"-racial solidarity and the limits of a politics of liberal inclusiveness; the dubiousness of racial representation and the political facility of cross-racial masquerade (as given by the novel's persistent language of masking and unmasking); ethnic assimilation and the putative unassimilability of African Americans; the conceptual difference and overlap between a politics of race and a politics of class; and, not least of all, Whitehead's unusual decision to name his black protagonist after the world's most celebrated Jewish Olympian.

I want to suggest that one passage in *Zone One*'s linear narrative that seemingly stages the figure of interracial coalition—and in which the signifier "black" appears three times more frequently than in does in the rest of the novel—gets infected and therefore gets unlocked by Spitz's memory of Mim, and by the historical paradigm of a Black-Jewish political "golden age" that that memory, in turn, memorializes. Here, I would also like to reiterate that the "viral" intertextual dynamic my reading method nominates is legible across *Zone One*'s contrapuntal

narrative, operating to reveal race's oscillation between stealth and detectability in a "postrace" era ostensibly committed to formal racial equality. When, for instance, in another of the novel's subterranean "memory" passages, Spitz's recalls seeing his mother, recently infected by the zombie virus, "hunched over … [his father], gnawing away with ecstatic fervor on a flap of his intestine, which, in the crepuscular flicker of the television, adopted a phallic aspect" (70), this memory focuses on the threatening aura of black sexuality and the spectacular racial violence of lynching throughout American slavery and Reconstruction, eras in which the black victim's penis was deemed the lyncher's ultimate souvenir.[49] Spitz's account of a "break dancing skel" set ablaze by survivors, which is given just pages earlier, assumes, in light of this memory, a distinctly racial character (36). Likewise, *Zone One*'s immediately following and repeated scenes of skel burning, mutilation, necrophilia, and "hillbilly torture" (62) are animated by the connotations of mob lynching, their "black" or "blackened" teeth and gums, fingers, fingernails, eyes and lips and charred skin, no longer abstract and unmarked but tied into the specific historical iterations of racial abuse. In these scenes, emblematic racial memory works like a virus to disrupt and reroute the novel's "postracial" surface form through specific historical paradigms and institutional contexts.

In a similarly disrupted and rerouted surface-narrative passage to which I now turn, Spitz and fellow volunteers, Kaitlyn and Gary, descend into the New York subway system to clear it of skels. The scene recounts how each volunteer must "drape their disparate masks over the

[49] On castration and self-cannibalism in the America practice of lynching, see Carol Adams. I would add that Spitz's memory of this "primal scene" points to yet another moment in American history with which racial identity is crucially imbricated. The reason that Spitz witnesses his mother's "grisly ministrations" is that he is an underemployed millennial living at home, having just returned from a trip to a casino. Spitz remarks that his parents were extremely proud home owners who happily invested their salaries in home improvement and renovation. Taken as clues to Spitz's post-apocalypse occupation rezoning New York city for rehabitation, this scene might unfold an account of *Zone One* that reads it as an allegory for racial segregation's renewal following the 2008 financial meltdown and housing crisis.

faces of the damned so they could be certain of who and what they were killing" (213). Gary, a member of Spitz's detail who was previously a mechanic, imagines the skels as those "proper citizens who had stymied and condemned him … all his life, excluding [him] from the festivities—… the neighbors across the street who called the cops to bitch about the noise and the trash in their yard" (213). Gary's enemy is the class system itself, excluder and suppressor of his own working-class "noise" and "trash"—the very stuff of his economic disadvantage, but also the potential stuff of proletarian revolt. Although the skels seem bent on obliterating Reconstruction's project of class renewal, Gary cannot see them as rebuke to the class system; instead, he imagines them as stewards of that system—as those who would confer the abstract rights of "citizenship" to a "properly" classed few. Importantly, then, Gary is able to perceive this unevenness of citizenship, but only through the lens of class.

> For Kaitlyn, however, the novel's quintessential bourgeois heroine, this scourge came from a different population. She aimed at the rabble who nibbled at the edge of her dream: the weak-willed smokers, deadbeat dads and welfare cheats, single moms incessantly breeding, the flouters of speed laws, and those who only had themselves to blame for their ridiculous credit-card debt. These empty-headed fiends between Chambers and Park Place did not vote or attend parent-teacher conferences, they ate fast food more than twice a week and required special plus-size stores for clothing to hide their hideous bodies from the healthy. Her [Kaityln's] assembled underclass … simultaneously undermined and justified her lifestyle choices. (213)

Neither Kaitlyn nor Gary's—nor, indeed Spitz's—"masks" for the skels are overtly racial. Indeed, all are bereft of racial signifiers. And yet Kaitlyn's account of the skels here evinces a total inability to comprehend them as anything but an implicitly racialized underclass. Hers are

the fictive, racial identities imposed on already-subordinated populations: welfare cheats, single moms incessantly breeding, criminals, and debtors, members of a wageless underclass of dispossessed and superfluous laborers, those redundant and expendable to the capital relation yet still trapped within it. Like Gary's assessment of the "proper citizen," whose fitness is measured only by class, Kaitlyn's language of debtors and criminals evacuates race from understandings of the class relation. This is one of the places where Whitehead's novel most vigorously engages debates over the theoretical relation between race and class. Kaitlyn, of course, asserts the unimpeachable priority of the latter—and hence neglects, as Walter Benn Michaels and, to some degree, Kenneth Warren have—the histories of exclusion and subjugation wherein racialized populations were installed into the capitalist system, a system in which they now comprise, as Chris Chen writes, a "disproportionately non-white industrial reserve army of labor … [made] up [of those] vast, superfluous urban populations from the close to one-billion slum-dwelling and desperately impoverished descendants of the enslaved and colonized." Kaitlyn's despised welfare cheats and deadbeat dads comprise this system, too, for they exist at the limits of the wage relation and the political system both (as assumed non-voters). Their class status is, in this understanding—which Chen shares with a number of critics including Frank Wilderson, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Saidya Hartman, Hortense Spillers, and Jared Sexton—inextricable from their racial status. To think otherwise is to attempt to cleave race from class in ways that dismiss capitalism's historical racialization of nonwhite wageless life—and its reproduction of "race" as the "socially dead" constituents of a "global surplus [of] humanity" (Chen).

It is curious, then, but also significant, that in his "masking" of the skels, only Mark Spitz can indulge in fantasies of class leveling and coalition, as his nominal Jewish sympathies harken

him back to a putatively "golden age" of Black-Jewish alliance. For here, I would suggest, the significance of that alliance—which points to the especial failure of an interracial coalitional politics to subsume race in its vision of abstract civic equality—is raised most pointedly. In Spitz's mind, Whitehead writes,

> the dead were his neighbors, the people he saw every day, as he might on a subway car, the fantastic metropolitan array. The subway was the great leveler—underground, the Wall Street titans stood in the shuddering car and clutched the same poles as the junior IT guys to create a totem of fists, the executive vice presidents in charge of new product marketing pressed thighs with the luckless and the dreamers, who got off at their stations when instructed by the computer's voice and were replaced by devisers of theoretical financial instruments of unreckoned power, who vacated their seats and were replaced in turn by unemployable homunculi clutching yesterday's tabloids. They jostled one another, competed for space below as they did above, in a minuet of ruin and triumph. In the subway, down in the dark, no citizen was more significant or more decrepit than another. (214)

Absent the "unemployable homunculi," yet another figure for the laborer denied access to the wage, Spitz's account of class leveling is rather predictably utopian. Significantly, it is also entailed in an equally utopian account of infrastructure as the engine and logic of that leveling, fixed, as this passage is, on the subways that here stand in for the global networks of technicity that cannily recode "citizens" as laborers, ostensibly de-racing and de-classing them along the way.

But here we must recall that, at this moment, Spitz himself remains racially masked. The novel has not yet divulged his identity as a black man; he remains bleached—remasked as a

Jew—although it will not be long, before Spitz's mask crumbles. As the novel draws to a close and Spitz' is "outed" as black, his fantasies about the purportedly leveling power of information infrastructures also crumbles, as the re-racialized dead literally begin to crawl out from the subways and break down the barriers that have segregated them from the still-living, reclaiming and simultaneously destroying the mode of production in the manner of a "giant reserve army of third-world labor" and as members of the wageless class of the "socially dead" (Chen). Indeed, the novel's parting image of the skels describes them in all their racial particularity: as "immigrants" with distinct "bloodlines" hailing from different homelands (243). Previously a figure for a dispersed, de-racialized labor force, networked and coordinated by the "Cloud," their races and classes return as categories of difference, if only for a brief moment before those categories disappear along with the institutions that have enforced them.[50]

Significantly, the dead emerge less than a mile from the New York Stock Exchange; specifically, they appear at Hudson street in lower Manhattan, a location Whitehead identifies thrice.[51] Hudson street is where the Internet colloquially "lives." The 60 Hudson street block that extends from Thomas and Worth Streets to West Broadway and into Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood is home to one of world's densest Internet hubs, a key infrastructural site where

[50] Hurley usefully elaborates the formal relationship between Spitz's racialization and the falling of Zone One's barricade: "The narrative structure of racial revelation typical of the passing novel, in which the revelation of the fact of blackness serves as the destructive climax of the plot, works here to align these three conceptual apparatuses, as the boundaries between spaces, times, and races simultaneously collapse. At the moment that Mark Spitz is revealed as the black double of the zombie, the zombies are no longer outside, and the world is no longer moving beyond them. Mark Spitz is here and now, inside the wall and the narrative present, bringing with him his racialized zombie-double, and so the wall comes down, and the world along with it."

[51] *Zone One* offers a remarkably precise geography of New York. Whitehead repeatedly invokes streets and neighborhoods by name—from Wall Street, Tribeca, and Times Square, to Duane Street, Baxter, Water, Canal, South Seaport, Fulton, Spring, Main, Chambers, Franklin, White, North Moore, Gold, and so on. Pinpointing the geography of the global Internet at Hudson street seems equally deliberate.

"channel upon channel of local, national, and global fiber optic cables all converge to exchange traffic," and the Internet can be physically seen and touched (Mendelson). Initially developed by Western Union telegraph services shortly after the historic stock market crash of 1929, the 60 Hudson street building now serves as a massive colocation datacenter for over one thousand telecommunications firms and datacenters, including AT&T. This, in short, is where the "Cloud" exists.

60 Hudson's proximity to Wall Street is, of course, no accident of design. *Fortune* columnists Andrew Nusca, Jonathan Vanian, Barb Darrow, and Robert Hackett note that 60 Hudson's colocation with the New York Stock Exchange is intended to facilitate Wall Street's "black box" trading practices, anonymized split-second financial transactions underwritten by complex algorithms. Media critic Kevin Slavin observes that these high-speed trading practices, which entail the algorithmic fragmentation and reassembly of enormous bundles of shares, are functionally derived from the technical principles of stealth warfare.

> [A]lgorithmic trading evolved in part because institutional traders have the same problems that the United States Air Force had, which is that they're moving these positions—whether it's Proctor & Gamble or Accenture, whatever—they're moving a million shares of something through the market. And if they do that all at once, it's like playing poker and going all in right away. You just tip your hand. And so they have to find a way—and they use algorithms to do this—to break up that big thing into a million little transactions. And the magic and the horror of that is that the same math that you use to break up the big thing into a million little things can be used to find a million little things and sew them back together and figure out what's actually happening in the market. So if you need to have some image of what's happening in the

> stock market right now, what you can picture is a bunch of algorithms that are basically programmed to hide, and a bunch of algorithms that are programmed to go find them and act.

That the re-racialized dead congregate at Wall Street—the very place where those "financial instruments of unreckoned power" Whitehead names are devised and deployed—and promptly destroy its infrastructure, tearing up Hudson street and overrunning the subways that lie beneath it, illuminates New York's neo-imperial status as a metropolitan control center undergirded by powerful data and communication infrastructures. But the dead's emergence here also, and importantly, works to reiterate the technical achievements of vastly-moving positions: fragmented, this vast "spectral army" reunites; hidden from view behind another wall—as by a "black box"—the dead reemerge, re-particularized, at Wall Street. Just as Wall Street's enormous bundles of shares stealthily avoid detection en route to their trading destinations, so too do labor's racial points of origin "hide" beneath complex technical interfaces, masked by the social division of work in the global economy. Taking stock of the "magical" and "horrifying" dynamics of finance capital, Whitehead brings its cryptic transactions into alignment with race's equally cryptic mutations in the networked global labor economy: like those invisible mechanisms that regulate economic relations, race, too, underwrites capital's inequitable modes of accumulation, an invisible social technology immanently tagged to capitalism's "rapacious modes of dispossession" (Hitchcock 155).

In this view, the dead's emergence at Hudson Street signals a number of material contradictions: between the physical, sited infrastructures that underwrite finance capitalism's putatively "immaterial" technological forms of accumulation and dispossession; and between the human subjects whose labor supports the Internet as a global mode of production, and

pervasive fantasies of subjectlessness and automation in an Internet-facilitated global economy.[52] As figures for a vast disposable labor force whose flexibility, automaticity, and precarity have been intensified by Internet-based technologies, Whitehead's siting of the dead at Hudson street probes similarities between two "invisible" modes of accumulation: the one, material, human, and historied; the other algorithmic. His point, it seems, is not simply to illustrate race's imbrication in today's global-hegemonic structures of communication—showing how race disappears, abstracted into an obscure financial circuitry, only to reemerge in the figure of a "spectral reserve army" of surplus and disposable workers come to reclaim their "raw labor—but to disclose this raw labor as the hidden yet essential engine of a global economy increasingly defined, as Szalay observes, by the "shuffl[ing of] paper and mov[ing of] numbers," and by fantasies of accumulation via automation that envision the total redundancy of human workers (16). Referred to by Chris Harman as "zombie capitalism"—accumulation in the presence of mounting global inequality and unrest—the current technologically-backed modalities of capitalism, writes Peter Hitchcock, are functionally "posthuman" insofar as they conceive of their operation beyond human capacities and independent of human oversight (143).[53] Giving the lie to such fantasies, Whiteheads' skels' dramatic final siege on Zone One stresses the human infrastructures—and beneath those, the racial ones—that subtend the network economy's "black boxed" financial practices, infrastructures as necessary to capital's accumulation as physical sites like 60 Hudson. If the dead do violence at this site, perhaps it is because the

[52] On these fantasies, see Peter Hitchcock. It is also worth noting, as Szalay does, that the coffee company for which Spitz worked prior to the plague was at the time developing an automated advertising bot that would eventually replace him. Szalay reads this scene as capturing tensions between embodied human labor and imminent regimes of labor automation.

[53] In his investigation into finance capitalism's "dark pools," Hitchcock suggestively asks, "How do the dispossessed and the destitute fight the digital domains of fictitious capital? How do you defeat an algorithm?"

algorithmic instruments existing there have also done so. That violence, Whitehead would have us know, is not "immaterial," but all-too-real and inarguably racialized.

In *Zone One*'s final pages, just as Spitz is about to join the horde of zombies attacking New York, he looks out onto the last barricade separating the living from the dead. There, he observes, "[a]ll the misery of the world [seemed] channeled through this concrete canyon, the lament into which the human race was being transformed, person by person" (243). Were we to zoom out from where Spitz stands, we would eventually perceive a canyon of a different sort: the 825-mile trench between New York City and Chicago, which contains fiber optic cable that was laid just so that one traffic signal can be sent, as Slavin observes, "37 times faster than you can click a mouse," That fiber optic canyon was never intended to be filled with the miserable dead; rather, it was built exclusively for those "financial instruments of unreckoned power," so that, as Slavin pithily remarks, an algorithm could "close the deal three microseconds faster." Figuring forth the sublation of capital and subjects both, *Zone One*'s parting image meditates on the parallel fictions that go to fund "capitalism" and "race," raising the question of how capital is made to disappear and reappear, and how race is made to disappear and reappear in the service of its accumulation. For Slavin, what is most "magical" and "horrifying" about the fiber optic trench lying between New York and Chicago is that it exists not for humans but for an algorithmic "communications framework that no human will ever know." Marveling at how these algorithmic forms have come to transform the very surface of the earth, Slavin likens their effects to a new "manifest destiny." But the frontier they define, he stresses, isn't for us. Written in a language "that we can no longer read," these algorithms support our world even as they render it increasingly "illegible," transforming the landscape "seismic[ally], terrestrial[ly]," in the manner of an "evolutionary" force. I have argued that *Zone One* discloses something of this

transformation through a carefully contrived isomorphism between technical and literary systems, in which "virality" metaphorizes racial formation in a "postracial" era of intensified global labor dispersal and precarity. For Spitz, as for us, "reading" the crisis unfolding on the surface of things requires a certain facility for "rotating" one's reality; it means perceiving in post-Fordism's new digital infrastructures the continuation of older biopolitical orders that have long separated the living from the dead.

CODA

Sentiment Analysis: Market Indexification and Racial Character in Novels by Bharati Mukherjee, Ruth Ozeki, Ed Park, and Gary Shteyngart

In a short position paper titled "Influences of the Digital," Katherine Hayles writes that

> [t]o think about contemporary literature is inevitably to encounter digital media. At every stage of the production and consumption of contemporary literature, digital media are transforming the functions of writers, readers, publishers, printers, distributors, and booksellers. So massive are these cumulative changes that they outweigh all the other influences on contemporary literature—combined. (209)

Hayles states her claim forcefully: digital media are impacting the literary world far more than anything else is. Additionally, this impact isn't just conceptual, evidenced by literature's longstanding thematic engagements with the digital technologies of its moment. Rather, it is immediate and actual: "[t]he materiality of digital media are completely enmeshed with the conceptual, and the present landscape [of literary production] cannot be grasped without considering the effects of both together" (209). In brief, literature is so heavily interpellated with technology that it cannot help but reflect, by dint of various textual strategies and innovations, aspects of the digital culture with which it is "enmeshed." I have argued that novels like Teju Cole's *Open City* and Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* similarly bespeak digital influences by miming common technical protocols (the logical operations of search technology in Cole's case, which serve to displace a more sustained narrative form and to deliver a critique of racial typification in the Internet age; and the affordances of malware in *Zone One*, deployed by Whitehead as a figural means of modeling race's stealthy ideological presence and necessity in a putatively "postrace" era). In line with Hayles' sense of digital technology's "interpenetration" with the form and

content of print novels, I have argued that these authors fashion an "algorithmic poetics" keyed to racial identity's shifting parameters within increasingly technologically-mediated labor formats.

This brief coda attempts to show how the "algorithmic poetics" Cole and Whitehead develop joins them to a cohort of contemporary writers similarly interested in the racial relations that subtend the novel's depictions of technology, and whose innovations to novelistic form are similarly keyed to race's reconfiguration under networked global capitalism. In this final section, I will suggest that novels concerned with Asia's techno-economic rise—by Bharati Mukherjee, Ruth Ozeki, Ed Park, and Gary Shteyngart—not only feature nonwhite tech laborers but also imitate the vernacular tech-based practice known as "sentiment analysis": the quantification of online expression for purposes of advertising, economic prediction, and political forecasting. Explicitly modeling the textual formats culled by sentiment analysis algorithms (including social media microblogs, online recommendations, ratings, and reviews), Mukherjee, Ozeki, Park, and Shteyngart's narratives illustrate the novel's material "enmeshment" with digital culture in ways that underscore technology's shaping effects on aesthetic practice. Additionally, these texts update our account of the novel as an integrative social "technology" in itself, one that no longer figures an "imagined community" structured around the time of the nation, but rather evokes an online public synchronized to the time of global capital.

The novels to which I now turn share two striking features: a granular, almost overwhelming real-time parsing of characters' emotions; and an allegorical rendering, via plotlines that center on romances and/or friendships between Asian and American characters, of the defining economic conjuncture of our historical moment: US-Asia interdependency. I read the former as a means by which these novelists choose to aestheticize the latter: throughout

these narratives, characters on either end of the US-Asia conjuncture struggle to transform their own and others' emotional states into "data" they can then use to predict the durability of an otherwise fraught bilateral relationship. At an allegorical remove, this process mirrors now-pervasive post-recession methods for tracking affect within emerging Asian markets. Alternating between broadly "Asian" and "American" archetypes, who sometimes share a locale but differ in their racial composition (as in Mukherjee's Indian-born protagonist Anjali, a call-center worker in Bangalore, and her love interest, the American-born heir to an multinational IT company); or share an ethnic background but are located across the US-Asia divide (as in Ozeki's Ruth, a writer of Japanese descent living in Canada, and her pen-pal Nao, the ethnically-Japanese, American-born daughter of a Silicon Valley engineer living in Japan), these novels draw on new modes of technological mediation to represent relationships between the current world-system's two most vital economic players. In so doing, they exploit sentiment analysis' procedures and affordances to link personal and social "mood" with models of national-economic stability. The characters that emerge out of these narratives thus stand as metonyms for their respective national markets in ways that reveal both the persistence of racial and national stereotyping and the emergence of potentially contradictory articulations of "postnational" ethnic subjectivity.

Outlining sentiment analysis' financial applications, sociologist Huina Mao writes that the past decade has seen

> considerable success in leveraging large-scale social media data at the intersection of social sciences and computational sciences with myriad applications in socioeconomic measurement and prediction. An early study … finds that the message volume of stock message board on Yahoo! Finance and Raging Bull can predict market volatility, and

> disagreement among posted messages is related to high trading volume. Public mood indicators extracted from social networks [such as Facebook and Twitter] … can predict stock market fluctuations. (75)

Mao adds that data measured from online message boards, Twitter accounts, and social media sites correlates so well with Dow Jones, NASDAQ, and Standard & Poor (S&P) indices that a "multidimensional mood analysis model" now boasts the ability to track collective Twitter "mood" along six major axes (of calmness, alertness, sureness, vitality, kindness, and happiness), finding that "Twitter calmness has significant predictive power on daily Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) price changes" (76). By measuring the ratio of positive to negative tweets on a given topic, these models have also been positively tagged to economic indicators such as national unemployment rate, consumer confidence, and investor sentiment are well into development.

I want to suggest that in Mukherjee's *Miss New India* (2011), Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), Park's *Personal Days* (2008), and Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), "sentiment analysis" underwrites what Christopher Fan describes as a US-China aesthetic of interdependency. This aesthetic, Fan suggests, delineates a "contiguous, interdependent US-China [economic] space" in which "Chinese savings and overproduction underwrite U.S. debt and overconsumption," signaling both the "waning of American exceptionalism" and the "painful acceptance of a world system rebalanced by China" (4). *Super Sad*'s epistolary narrative of a relationship between aging, Russian-born American salesman Lenny Abramov, and his twenty-year-old Korean-American lover, Eunice Park, not allegorizes a waning "America" and an ascending "Asia" (the novel inhabits a dystopian future in which China is the unquestioned global-hegemonic "rising Sun" (8)) but also encodes this ascendancy in Eunice's canny

survivalism and social-media prowess, which the novel sets against Lenny's retrograde affection for print novels and long-form reading. As Annie McClanahan has shown, *Super Sad* consistently links race and nationality with data-backed financial credibility to produce stereotypical caricatures of "national character." In the novel, futuristic "credit poles" scan and announce each passer's solvency in explicitly racial terms:

> In the Chinatown parts of East Broadway, the signs read in English and Chinese—"America celebrates its spenders!"—with a cartoon of a miserly ant happily running towards a mountain of wrapped Christmas presents. In the Latino sections on Madison Street, they read in English and Spanish—"Save it for a Rainy Day, *Huevon*"—with a frowning grasshopper in a zoot suit showing his empty pockets. (54)

Designating a link between racial character and financial volatility, *Super Sad*'s credit poles draw attention to emotional details—the ant's "miserliness," the grasshopper's "frown"—in ways that indicate something akin to the collective social mood indices outlined by Mao. If, in the world of the novel, race gets reduced to economic stereotype (the creditworthiness of "old Chinese woman," the irresponsibility of "young Latina mother," and the "profliga[cy of] teenaged Hasid[s]" (54)) then by way of his novel's textual construction (its contrapuntal epistolary form, alternating between Lenny's voluble, long-form accounts of his overwhelming feelings for Eunice; and Eunice's account of her affair with and ultimate betrayal of Lenny), Shteyngart also shows race to be determined by an algorithmic microdynamics of social mood that attaches itself to macroeconomic categories, scaling the individual (Chinese) miser to the geopolitical (Chinese) hegemon. In this narrative scaling, Shteyngart cannily aligns Eunice's emotional arc with that of the novel's fictional rising Asian economic superpower, just as Lenny's romantic downfall rhymes with the U.S. economy's collapse.

The earliest novel under examination, Park's *Personal Days* uses "sentiment analysis" to stage US-Asia economic conjuncture in far subtler ways. Although nearly bereft of racial identifiers, Park's novel, like Whitehead's *Zone One*, reveals mere pages from its end that one of its protagonists is half-black. Colleen Lye has argued that this late but symbolically loaded revelation must be read alongside the novel's treatment of a minor Asian character known as HABAW ("half Asian British Accented Woman" (102)), and that doing so illuminates the novel's "epistemic perspective" on racial identity (236). Centered on a group of white-collar employees at a literary magazine who have been forced to endure several rounds of layoffs, *Personal Days* uses various textual strategies (a fragmented narrative form culled from its protagonist's emails, and an unusual "we" narration that effaces the identity of the novel's speaking voice) to depict post-Fordism's destabilizing effects on working subjects. HABAW, who is desired by several of the male employees, and who has arrived at their workplace as part of the new managerial order responsible for the layoffs, extends the novel's allegorical illustration of post-Fordist labor dynamics: combining "facets of the old [global hegemon, Britain] and the new [Asia]," HABAW, writes Lye, presages "nostalgic forms of empire and a coming dystopian one" (246). At the same time, her ability to dissolve the group's internal solidarities, as male colleagues vie for her attention and female colleagues' resentment mounts, figures the Asian laborer as an exemplar of "neoliberal disposability and … industrial capitalist alienation," illustrating a capitalist present (and future) into "whose global circuits Asian labor has been so integrated as to represent a near-universal standard for human flexibility and disposability" (248). Building on Lye's account of the novel, I am suggesting that *Personal Days'* unusual chronicling of sentiment through a narrative in which each character meticulously records her feelings in what amounts to a communal diary, seizes on the techniques and

economic valences of "sentiment analysis" as an aesthetic through which to explore the effects of a global market in a state of extreme transition and on the cusp of a crisis in which familiar objects of value and generators of market stability will be undermined and other more unfamiliar objects overestimated. In *Personal Days,* then, the compulsive performance and decoding of one another's sentiment is precisely what compels characters into the shadowy new value forms of a putatively "New Economy" that will paradoxically depend upon intensified labor coordination but not upon the more traditional forms of communication and communality which logically attend it.

Like *Personal Days*, Ozeki's *Tale for the Time Being* is acutely interested in the real-time tracking of and correlation between social mood and economic event. Ozeki's novel centers on the Canadian-Japanese novelist Ruth's belated discovery of Japanese-American teenager Nao's diary shortly after the 2011 tsunami that devastated much of Japan. The novel is staged in mock-epistolary fashion: while chiefly concerned with Ruth's overcoming of an extreme case of writer's block, portions of Nao's diary help to focus Ruth's actions and objectives. Indeed, the novel chronicles Ruth's obsession with locating Nao and redelivering her diary, oblivious to the fact that the girl is likely dead: killed in the tsunami. The novel thus depicts, through Ruth's a-temporal reading of Nao's diary and her irrational desire to "save" the girl from a disaster that has already occurred, the impulse to synchronize temporally the "mood" of Northern America and Japan so as to avoid crises both economic and ecological. Ruth's parsing of Nao's diary—her "sentiment analysis" of Nao's belated emissions from a bilateralized Japanese source—serves as the mechanism for this irrational desire, even in the face of its apparent temporal impossibility. Like *Personal Days*, which ends with an elevator carrying the last surviving employee hurtling toward the financial crash feared by all of Park's characters—a crash that

remains, like Nao's unconfirmed death, suspended in a state of perpetual contingency and manifestation—Ozeki's Ruth fantasizes about a more-than-human time of synchronicity and recovery, about being able to "scan for [the right] evaluative keywords" (Hitchcock 153) that will allow her narrative—and all narratives—to resolve historical contingencies, erase historical traumas, and even rewrite historical outcomes.[54] Having lost sight of the reality of the tsunami, Ruth struggles to reinstate the "Nao," (read: "now"), to attach her circulating affect—the strange emotional ticker of the out-of-time diary—to some more stable subjectivity and nationally-delimited source. In seeking after this more stable and reterritorialized subjectivity, Ozeki, I suggest, at once laments the shifting and increasingly reference-less parameters of race wrought by network globalization and also celebrates the transnationalized Asian identity it brings into being.

Mukherjee's novel, which is the least experimental in its form and also the least formally preoccupied with sentiment analysis is also perhaps the clearest elaboration of how the technological relations that subtend the current world-system, defined in terms of US-Asia interdependency, provide the essential materials for making the ethnic subject of literature and politics today. Following Georg Lukacs's seminal work on realism and subjectivity, Rey Chow and Yoon Sun Lee have argued that ethnic literary subjects have long found themselves bound by realism's enduring models of national-economic typification. Lee, for instance, argues that

[54] Writing on the post-human speed of algorithmic capital circulation, Peter Hitchcock observes that the "acceleration of transactions now seeks to integrate sentiment through algorithms that hinge trades directly to proprietary newsfeeds whose effects then become news items in themselves, in the dark and machine generated" (153). "Sentiment," he stresses, is not sentience in the world of algos (although the desire is demonstrable), but a capacity to scan for evaluative keywords and convert these into price-point probabilities. Like trades themselves, such newsfeeds need to be faster than a human to create positive returns: the question of news as real or fiction is defamiliarized by algorithmic circulation."

despite ethnic literature's so-called liberation by non-realist forms like magical realism, speculative realism, fantasy, it is precisely realism's tendency toward ethnic typification that makes it the richest genre for rethinking the literary parameters of ethnic identity. Like the other novels treated in this coda, *Miss New India* recuperates Lukacs's exposition of literary types; to some degree, the novel also weaponizes literary typification it in the manner Lee prescribes. Most strikingly, and similar to Shteyngart's account of the "rising" Eunice, Mukherjee explicitly binds her protagonist's narrative ascendancy to her account of an emergent "New India." A lower-middle caste girl from the village of Gauripur, Anjali rebrands herself "Angie" upon arriving in Bangalore, inventing herself in the image of some Americanized ideal that Mukherjee reiterates in her description of the Indian tech market, the corresponding "invention" of western capital. Mirroring Anjali's developmental narrative with India's economic one, Mukherjee contrives to make Anjali so strongly "typical," from an American perspective, that she is even mistaken for the Muslim terrorist Husseina, similarity to whom Anjali exploits in her effort to bring the imaginary "Angie" into being. Donning Husseina's luxury clothes, and attempting to pass for an upper-caste Indian woman by day, Anjali spends her nights working in Bangalore call-centers handling American clients, who fail to mistake her for the fictional American telephone operator from Idaho she has been instructed to mimic.[55] Concerned with what racial formation in the US-Asia economic alliance entails, Mukherjee's depiction of the ethnic subject's typicality, then, embraces aspects of Lukacs's account of typification while challenging others: Anjali's "Americanization" does not finally enable her to transcend her caste (in fact, it renders

[55] With this subplot, Mukherjee draws out the notion of Anjali's "economic terrorism" against American workers which is implicit to her employment in the offshore IT industry.

her dangerously interchangeable with a terrorist), just as India's economic "Americanization" cannot undo the fact of global wage arbitrage.

In closing, I would like to suggest that all of these novelists revise Benedict Anderson's influential notion of an imagined national community by illustrating the new spectral race-and-national formations borne of accelerated capitalism. For Anderson, national imaginaries are constituted through acts of "horizontal comradeship" underwritten by the circulation and collective reading of print forms like newspapers and novels (7). These collective enterprises generate a shared sense of time Anderson describes as "homogeneous and empty," and thus gives rise to a "sociological organism [that] mov[es] calendrically through [this] homogeneous empty time"— the "imagined political community" of the nation (26). Novels like Shytengart's and Ozeki's explicitly juxtapose print culture with the "post-print culture" of ubiquitous new media: Lenny fetishizes print novels while Eunice can barely think beyond emojis; Ruth is a novelist, while Nao struggles with being bullied online. In these works, new media signals post-national global formations and the waning of national sovereignties, but the newly-instantiated "we" they announce is not, I suggest, simply or vaguely "global." Instead, these novels describe and locate implicitly American readers in relation to prominent and "rising," yet also opaque and largely unknowable Asian subjects. In turn, the time they evince is no longer "homogeneous" and "empty" but far too fast, a time of lagging and waning, of lovesickness, longing, and loss.

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