Formless Literature, the Novels that Aren't Novels:

Or, The Catastrophic Materialism of Tom McCarthy

by

Whitley Carpenter

(Under the Direction of Adam Parkes)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores three novels by Tom McCarthy—*C*, *Remainder*, and *Satin Island*—which comment on the state of contemporary literature after the decline of modernism and postmodernism. Using Georges Bataille's concept of formlessness, as described in his article "L'informe," I argue that McCarthy's work brings literature down to its base materialism. While still constrained by limitations of the medium, McCarthy blends multiple genres, anti-humanist ideas, and matter to dispel idealism and become as formless as possible. His novels confront literature's relationship with technology, eventually pushing literature to embrace its inherent inauthenticity.

INDEX WORDS: Tom McCarthy, Formlessness, Materialism, Contemporary literature, Modernism, Postmodernism, Technology, Anti-humanism

FORMLESS LITERATURE, THE NOVELS THAT AREN'T NOVELS:

OR, THE CATASTROPHIC MATERIALISM OF TOM MCCARTHY

By

WHITLEY CAPRENTER

B.A., The University of Georgia, 2019

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2020

FORMLESS LITERATURE, THE NOVELS THAT AREN'T NOVELS:

OR, THE CATASTROPHIC MATERIALISM OF TOM MCCARTHY

By

WHITLEY CARPENTER

Major Professor:	Adam Parkes
Committee:	Channette Romero
	Christopher Pizzino

Electronic Version Approved:

Ron Walcott
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2020

Table of Contents

Page

Chapter

Chapter 1

Introduction

The novel is dead, long live the novel. With the decline of postmodernism in the 1990s and early 00s, the question on everyone's mind is: what comes next? Or to ask the tougher question, what challenges and opportunities do contemporary authors face, and how do they approach them? This question, of course, is not easily answered, in part due to ongoing conversations about boundaries, definitions, periods, geographies, and so on. I take the constructivist position. These terms and movements are categories we construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct to suit our needs, depending on the will of the wind. They are flexible points of view. And it's this shifting, unstable landscape that constitutes an emerging trend in contemporary literature, a dedication to formlessness. Defining the formless would defeat the term's purpose, but Georges Bataille described the concept in his 1929 article "L'informe" as:

> not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider … affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spit.

The formless brings objects and art down to its base materialism, the stem cells of matter, or its subatomic particles. We cannot call formlessness an innovative idea, or unique to contemporary literature, but the concept has gained new relevance after postmodernism's collapse, particularly in the work of Tom McCarthy.

Tom McCarthy's four novels—*Remainder* (2005), *Men in Space* (2007), *C* (2010), and *Satin Island* (2015)—as well as his numerous essays, literary criticisms, declarations, and manifestos, have triggered waves of intrigue. In "Two Directions for the Novel," Zadie Smith says that McCarthy "clears away a little of the dead wood, offering a glimpse of an alternate road down which the novel might, with difficulty, travel forward" (Smith 94). McCarthy, for Smith and many others, will lead the novel out of stagnation like a shining beacon. David James and Urmila Seshagiri cite him as the prime example of metamodernist writers in their essay, "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution." His work, in their eyes, "captures this logic of innovation through retrospection—reassessing modernism as a seismic event for narrative form as well as an epochal episode for modern culture" (James and Seshagiri 94). According to them, McCarthy and others push the contemporary novel forward by resurrecting modernism's corpse. And an article by Adam Kirsch asks, "What Is the Future of Avant-Garde Fiction? Read Tom McCarthy's *C* and find out." His contentious writing style, with its disdain for psychological realism, and his repeated interactions with modernism and postmodernism, makes him a valuable case study in analyzing contemporary literature. I will argue that McCarthy's attempt to create a formless novel results in a fall towards base materiality, which shapes, saturates, and destabilizes the novels themselves. Matter dispels any notion of authenticity—which for McCarthy is an alleged faithful representation of reality—and instead finds a sense of realness in inauthenticity.

While materiality is the guiding hand in McCarthy's work, the word itself comes with conflicting meanings. Colloquially, it refers to a money-oriented mindset, accumulating material wealth and possessions, and unfettered capitalism, which is certainly a route we could take in his novels. However, McCarthy's definition is more in line with the philosophical debate between

materialism and idealism. The latter idea states that our consciousness exists independent of matter. Plato's *Meno*, for example, says that all knowledge is recollection. Our souls' traverse through the world of ideas, acquiring knowledge of the perfect forms, and when we arrive on Earth, we merely remember what we learned. By contrast, materialism asserts that matter is the fundamental component of existence. Our consciousness is created from interactions between matter. These abstract notions of souls and forms only distract us from matter. For McCarthy, what makes a novel real, and indeed what makes us real, is matter alone. His protagonists are constantly confronted by their material existence to devastating consequences.

McCarthy's world is the ruins of past civilizations, filled with dead artifacts from long-gone eras. Time circulates, the present collapsing into the past, the future perpetually a notional construction. Thus, to understand the contemporary, we must look retroactively to modernism and postmodernism. For our purposes, we will use these terms from Ezra Pound's and Frederic Jameson's points of view. "MAKE IT NEW," from Pound's Canto LIII (265). While the meaning of "it" could have multiple interpretations, I take the conventional approach and interpret it as shorthand for modernist novelty, an attempt to make art new. This desire for newness, both artistically and technologically, placed a strain on the movement. In "What Was Postmodernism?" Brain McHale says, "Modernism is driven by the imperative to innovate, and every innovation is rendered obsolete by the next one, so that modernism is constantly distancing itself from its own most recent manifestation" (McHale). Modernism is forward thinking and future-oriented, which by necessity implies that it too will become obsolete, replaced by a new movement. Enter the heir, postmodernism. Fredric Jameson's book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* posits that this movement continues the project of modernism to an exaggerated degree. He writes, "Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization

process is complete and nature is gone for good" (Jameson ix). The result is "flatness or depthlessness," an intense dedication to surfaces (9). For McCarthy, both movements attempt to achieve authenticity, either through tragedy in modernism or irony in postmodernism. Neither accept the inherent inauthenticity of art and literature, an inauthenticity based in formlessness and base materiality.

To claim that all contemporary literature strives for formlessness runs the risk of overgeneralizing and oversimplifying. It is possibly too soon to identify the contemporary literary movement—if one indeed exists—though many critics have thrown their terms against the wall, hoping one will stick. Jeffrey Nealon, invoking Fredric Jameson, uses the term "post-postmodernism" in his book *Post-Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism,* arguing that postmodernism has not faded but intensified—just as a tropical storm becomes a hurricane—and situates this within the context of neoliberal capitalism. James and Seshagiri propose the term "metamodernism." Meta- is taken to mean referring to or reflecting on modernism. These writers "move the novel forward by looking back to the aspirational energies of modernism" (James and Seshagiri 93). And again, Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker use "metamodernism" in their essay "Notes on Metamodernism." However, meta- here comes from the Greek word "metaxis," which translates to "between." Their metamodernism "oscillates between a modern enthusiasm and a postmodern irony" (Vermeulen and Akker 5-6). This is less a balancing act than a violent push-and-pull. Still, other terms exist, and it would take more time and space than we have available to discuss all of them. While these critics pose interesting ideas, the fixation on terminology causes them to overgeneralize and ignore authors that complicate their readings. To avoid this pitfall, we will focus solely on McCarthy and three of his four novels—*C, Remainder,* and *Satin Island*—to see how he

differentiates himself from modernism and postmodernism. Unfortunately, limited space does not permit me to discuss McCarthy's second published book but first written, *Men in Space,* with the attention it deserves.

The next chapter will look at *C* and how the novel interacts with modernism. *C* uses the Bildungsroman form to follow the main character Serge Carrefax from his birth in 1898 to his death in 1922, covering World War I and post-war colonialism in between. In *C,* McCarthy confronts modernist innovation and newness, specifically that people will progress to an ideal future through technological progress. But the novel shows that technology does not directly correlate with progress. McCarthy argues that contemporary literature should reject the future and look backwards to the past. As we will see, McCarthy's excavation of modernism's ruins, the uncovering and decryption of its hidden messages and transmissions, creates a catastrophic event that makes us aware of our materiality.

The third chapter will focus on *Remainder* and postmodernism. The plot follows an unnamed narrator who has suffered a traumatic injury when technological "bits" fall on his head (McCarthy 3). In physical therapy, he feels that his movements are inauthentic, and he tries to reclaim authenticity by reenacting events, practicing them until the movements become fluid. To uncover McCarthy's critique of postmodernism, the chapter will compare *Remainder* to Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, J. G. Ballard's *Crash,* and Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*. Postmodern authors attempt to grant their novels authenticity through hyper awareness of the novel as a work of fiction, a mere representation of reality. McCarthy's protagonist is driven to madness through his obsession with authenticity, and in the process, it dispels humanism and psychological realism. *Remainder* pushes the novel beyond mere ironic self-awareness. It must accept and embrace its own inauthenticity.

The fourth chapter will focus on *Satin Island* and its reflection on contemporary literature. The main character U. is a corporate anthropologist tasked with writing the Great Report, an all-encompassing document that will unequivocally define our age. This mirrors contemporary literary critics like Vermeulen, Akker, James, and Seshagiri, who attempt to name the current movement. This chapter pays particular attention to the form of formless literature. To create formless novels—or our closest approximation—the novel itself should fluctuate between forms and genres. For McCarthy, this instability is a space of in-betweenness and liminality, embodied by the amorphous nature of base materiality.

The final section will briefly turn to McCarthy's contemporaries and examine how they have confronted modernism and postmodernism. These include Zadie Smith, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Shelley Jackson, Samantha Hunt, and Ben Marcus. All of these authors provide different perspectives on form and formlessness. Materiality is simply one path for literature. In comparison to these authors, however, McCarthy is the most conscious of the past in his writing.

In any case, the combination of modernism and postmodernism involves finding what is inauthentically real. This is not finding the one genuine object in a sea of intimations or finding some personal or historical quality that grounds fiction in reality. As McCarthy writes in his book of essays, *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish*, the real is "a radical and disastrous eruption *within* the always-and-irremediably inauthentic … the point at which the writing's entire project crumples and implodes" (69-70). In short, it is a structural threat that disrupts our existence and that of writing in general. McCarthy confronts this threat and its traumatic materiality and incorporates it into his novels. By doing so, he embraces inauthenticity and creates novels that are as formless as possible.

Chapter 2

Past and Progress: The Technological Modernism of Tom McCarthy's *C*

Public Service Broadcasting, a UK-based band, takes fragments of old newscasts and government-sponsored broadcasts and sets them to music in a style almost tailor-made for Tom McCarthy. Their single "Progress," released later in the album *Every Valley,* opens with lines, "Continually experimenting with new ideas and techniques. Reconstructing. Developing. Modernizing," followed by the chorus, "I believe in progress." This is the version of modernism that McCarthy responds to and distances himself from: a belief in societal progress, fueled by new technology and experimentation, modernist futurism. While modernism encroaches throughout his writing, his novel *C* directly tracks its legacy and influence on the contemporary novel. Resurrecting the Bildungsroman, *C* archives the life of Serge Carrefax from his birth in 1898, coinciding with Guglielmo Marconi's work in wireless communication, to his death in 1922, the publication year of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land,* James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room*. In modernism, the development of new technology, specifically in the area of communication, will increase our collective pool of knowledge, thus leading to a better future. But McCarthy rejects any notions of progress and the future, instead arguing that contemporary literature should turn its gaze to the past, and in the process, encounter an event that threatens the foundation of the work itself, an event based in materiality.

To understand how the novel responds to the past, we must make two distinctions in McCarthy's view of modernism: what modernism was, and what modernism is, or how did modernism see itself, and how do contemporary writers and audiences see modernism. For the first point, we turn to Ezra Pound's succinct, and perhaps overused, summary of modernism:

"MAKE IT NEW." This call for innovation and experimentation is shared by other sub-movements within the umbrella of modernism. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti echoed this sentiment in the *Manifesto of Futurism.* He praises the automobile, "the beauty of speed," and writes that the poet is a driver, racing on a linear track to the future (Marinetti). To embrace the future and progress is to reject the past, to "demolish museums and libraries," for any energy wasted on the useless past is not spent in pursuit of the future (Marinetti). *C,* however, is the antithesis to this futuristic model. It is saturated with crypts, tombs, and archeology.

Central to the novel is a refutation of the future—here used synonymously with societal progress—for its idealist vision that art can transcend its medium, to achieve meaning outside of itself. Art is bound by matter, whether ink and paper, or paint and canvas. Instead of looking towards an idealist future, McCarthy suggests that literature should focus on the material past. In "Declaration on the Notion of 'The Future': Admonitions and Exhortations for the Cultural Producers of the Early-to-Mid-Twenty-First Century," he writes, "We RESIST this ideology of the Future, in the name of the sheer radical potentiality of the past, and of the way the past can shape the creative impulses and imaginative landscape of the present. The Future of thinking is its past, a thinking which turns its back on the Future" (McCarthy). The future is immaterial, only existing in our imaginations, while the past is concrete. But looking backwards, specifically to modernist authors, is not to endorse their vision, which is obsessed with the future, but to retread old ground with present-day perspectives, recontextualizing their ideas with experiences they could not access.

The second point, how we interact with modernism, is directly tied to this rejection of the future. While modernism focused a linear progression towards the future, the constant need to innovate created an unintended side effect: planned obsolescence. As McHale notes, modernism

was conscious of the movement that would come after. He writes, “Eventually, this relentless logic of *superceding oneself* requires that modernism itself become obsolete, necessitating a successor - a *post*modernism” (McHale). And it’s this self-consciousness that modernism was already slipping from the present into the past that McCarthy often celebrates. The progression from idealistic future to material past is a trend throughout the twentieth century, he argues, most fully encapsulated in the work of James Joyce. While Joyce was a modernist, McCarthy weighs the materialist aspect of his writing more heavily than periodization. In his essay “Why *Ulysses* Matters,” he writes, “Everything in *Ulysses* is *déclassé*, or (to use a term of Joyce’s) ‘netherfallen’. Things aren’t even things in *Ulysses* … they are abject, broken, the excreta of other things” (McCarthy 33). Fallen object extends to time as well: “Time, in *Ulysses*, is fallen too, a by-product of earth-pulled bodies … Joyce time doesn’t move in a straight line from past to future: it too accretes and consumes itself: the future plunges back into the past; ‘now’ is the transit-point or orifice through which this involution passes” (46-47). Joyce time, and McCarthy time, is non-linear and circular. Curved loops instead straight lines. The future collapses into the past. Contemporary writers must reject the future, innovation, and progress. We are called to the past. Indeed, the past is inevitable.

As argued prior, looking backwards to the past is not an attempt to reanimate the corpse of modernism. McCarthy is archiving the past, analyzing its documents and transmissions, collecting its messages and attempting to understand it. In an interview with *The Guardian* he said, “I'm not trying to be modernist, but to navigate the wreckage of that project” (Purdon). This approach is an autopsy of the past, exploring the ruins of a bygone civilization, its symbols and artifacts. We must attempt to decode the past, even if the task is futile, and we may never completely understand it. To borrow a term from Justus Nieland, this retreading of old ground is

"media archaeology" (Nieland 570). As he explains, "McCarthy's work stands not as the empty resuscitation of an avant-garde idiom but as its crypt, as a way of presiding over modernism's death by reenacting it traumatically, by lingering in the remains of its most fecund catastrophes" (570). The emphasis on catastrophe and trauma, here, is not accidental. Archiving modernism is a traumatic process we cannot avoid, and the end result is catastrophe. Born from this event, like Venus rising from sea foam, is the contemporary.

This event, or accident, is caused by looking backwards to the past, and its cataclysmic nature threatens the literature's ontology. The accident dispels idealistic progress by confronting literature's materiality. In his essay "Transmission and the Individual Remix," McCarthy meditates on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, and the moment when he glances backwards and loses her once again. Relying on Maurice Blanchot, he writes that it is "a moment of surrender to an impulse that's at once both catastrophic and inspirational" (McCarthy). It is a moment caused by "gazing in the rear-view mirror" ("Declaration on the Notion of 'The Future'"). Impulsivity and distracted writing creates literature that is not bound by progress or transcendence. The crash grounds the writer and reader fully in the present. It traumatically reaffirms our material existence, but this only happens when literature looks to the past, when like Orpheus, it glances backwards and destroys everything.

When McCarthy looks backwards, he sees a landscape defined by technology, which has restructured our systems of communication. Technology reveals that humans themselves are biological robots, from our muscles and bones that function like gears and levers, to our brain, the organic computer. After a young Serge begins experimenting with radio, the narrator says, "The static's like the sound of thinking. Not of any single person thinking, not even a group thinking, collectively. It's bigger than that, wider—and more direct. It's like the sound of thought

itself, its hum and rush" (McCarthy 79). Following René Descartes' dictum "Cogito, ergo sum," our ability to think not only proves our existence, it is fundamental to our self-consciousness. But if thought is like static, then people are like radios, constantly receiving and transmitting information. Serge's father, who runs a school for the deaf, treats his students like machines, teaching them the individual muscular movements necessary to produce speech. "The body's motor must be set to work, its engine-parts aligned, fine-tuned to one another," he explains (20). By his reasoning, we can and should view people in the same light as technology. Every cell works together like gears, cogs, and levers, processing sensory information and broadcasting electrical impulses.

Since the human body is a mechanism, technology was not invented. It has always existed, which subverts the belief that technological innovation sparks societal progress. If technology accompanied humankind out of the primordial ooze, then why must this technology be any different? Joakim Wrethed supports this claim, arguing that the fusion of man and machine threatens this linear timeline of time and progress. He writes, "The core of it is that history and technology do not progress from the perspective of primordial human *technē*. Throughout time we have innovative forms and variations of the same. Something similar could be said about language and literature" (Wrethed 23-24). Writers do not discover new knowledge. They convey old knowledge in different forms. These are additions instead of improvements. Contemporary literature, by extension, is an experiment in form over content.

The push towards materialism in novelistic form that Wrethed identifies and McCarthy writes about in "Why *Ulysses* Matters" relies on Bataille's formlessness, "a term that serves to bring things down in the world" (qtd. in McCarthy). *C,* and McCarthy's work generally, is structured around Bataille's base materialism, a view of matter that is disruptive and resists

concrete definitions. As a child, Serge confronts the mattering of matter. In a near drowning experience, the narrator says, “Then he’s being pushed, right in his chest, and spurts of stream are shooting from his mouth into the air before cascading back onto the muddy grass … He vomits water, gasps, coughs, vomits more and gasps again” (McCarthy 31). In this scene, Serge has no agency. The water acts on him, and his body moves without his control. This traumatic accident in his childhood shows matter acting of its own accord. Matter asserts itself.

The accident caused by distractedly looking into the rearview mirror cannot occur without technology’s influence. A car crash requires a car. But Serge explains that the event is not caused by human operation; it is written into technology’s DNA, regardless of the pilot or driver. While taking a military exam, Serge realizes that the collision of two trains is unavoidable, caused by the invention of railways themselves, saying, “it was hatched *by* the network, at some point no longer capable of being pinned down but nonetheless decisive, so much so that ever since this point was passed—hours, days or even years ago—the collision’s been inevitable, just a matter of time” (McCarthy 149). And inextricably linked to technology is the catastrophe. The accident will not just happen at some point in the future; it has already happened. The time between invention and accident is a technical delay, a recessional between cause and effect, but it has effectively occurred. Returning to “Declaration on the Notion of ‘The Future,’” McCarthy writes, “The INS believes in the Event – in the power of the event, and that of art to carry that event within itself: bring it to pass, or hold it in abeyance, as potentiality” (McCarthy). This version of time resembles less a linear progression from invention to catastrophe and more a circle where we feel the effects of the event before it occurs. The events of the present change the past as much as the past affects the present.

The ability of technology and the event to traverse beyond the bounds of the present causes another rupture in the ideal of progress. Since time is repeating on a circuit, we cannot advance to any particular point. Serge's father explains that all events happen simultaneously. He theorizes that since waves "all bounce back eventually, or loop round everything returns," and if the electrical charges of our bodies produce waves, then we should be able to tune into these frequencies: "just imagine: if every exciting or painful event in history has discharged waves of similar detectability into the ether … These things could still be *happening,* right now, around us" (247-8). The traumatic events of the past are never gone. They are occurring across all time and space, and events that have not happened yet can still be felt before they occur. This is true of the novel itself. Scenarios echo throughout the text, a repetition of crypts, death, and strange signals, which makes the reader feel as though it had already happened, is happening again, and will happen in future chapters. The repetition of trauma, facilitated by technology, exposes the base matter behind the veneer of progress.

The non-linear description of time and the disentanglement of progress from technology may at first seem compatible with postmodern analysis, particularly by draping ontological theories of time and technology over a modernist setting. We could view the novel as a "postmodern intertextual patchwork" (Wrethed 1). For example, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* operates with a similar version of time. The Tralfamadorians tell Bill Pilgrim, "Why *you?* Why *us* for that matter? Why *anything?* Because this moment simply *is.* Have you ever seen bugs trapped in amber?" (Vonnegut 97). But while being "unstuck in time" serves in the novel as commentary on the aftereffects of World War 2—and also the disillusion with technology—the same could not be said for McCarthy (28). Though the novel dispels

progress, it is not disillusioned by technology. Serge not only enjoys his experience as a soldier, he does not view the war as a destructive force:

> Quite the opposite: it's a quickening, a bringing to life. He feels this viscerally, not just intellectually, every time his tapping finger draws shells up into their arcs, or sends instructions buzzing through the woods to kick-start piano wires for whirring cameras, or causes the ground's scars and wrinkles to shift and contort from one photo to another: it's an awakening, a setting into motion. (McCarthy 200)

Serge feels most alive bombing the landscape, shooting down enemy planes, and standing before a firing squad, seconds away from death (a scene pulled from Maurice Blanchot's real life). Again, the emphasis rests on materiality above all other periodized distinctions. Dying, the recessional period before the moment of death, is when we are most tethered to existence. In his book on contemporary authors, Daniel Lea writes, "*C*'s unification of man and machine is never a fearful resistance to hybridity but rather a celebration of the anti-humanism that can be brought about by technology" (Lea 143). And this anti-humanism is a direct challenge to progress. We should not grow jaded with technology but revel in technology's newfound freedom from progress.

The anti-humanist, traumatic aspects of technology are, and always have been, foundational to literature. Though horrific to some, it is nonetheless necessary to writing. In "Remix," McCarthy writes that technology extends the body while replacing it. Technology, specifically in communications, is "at once a form both of self-extension and of amputation" (McCarthy). This trauma is embedded in all media, literature especially. If telephones are replicants of our mouths and ears which extend our voice across space, then literature is the same, extending our thoughts and ideas across time as well as space. And Serge embraces this

dual nature: “Of all the pilots and observers, Serge alone remains unhaunted by the prospect of a fiery airborne end. He’s not unaware of it: just unbothered. The idea that his flesh could melt and fuse with the machine parts pleases him” (206). Through the inevitable catastrophe engrained in technology, the amputation and extension, Serge feels alive. As Catherine Lanone argues in her essay, “Serge is a receptor and transmitter of telecommunications gone haywire, the self turned into a machine-self, encrypting the dead” (Lanone 23). Serge is a human radio tower, receiving and transmitting simultaneously. Writers also receive messages from other writers, splice the signals together, and broadcast it across space and time. Lanone writes, “The craft of writing becomes a space of repetition and re-enactment, wiring pieces of fiction and text” (21). As with *Remainder*, the novel functions on repetition. Sophie’s death in the first section mirrors Serge’s death in the last. The family crypt mirrors the Egyptian crypt where Serge encounters the fatal insect bite. The text is circular, passages looping back and echoing themselves. Contemporary literature must repeatedly confront the materiality of the medium, and like Serge, delight in the melding of author and technology.

Though Serge wants to fuse his matter with technology, the process does not leave him unaffected. In contrast to the other characters, Serge is not inhuman—not cruel, sadistic, or callous—but anti-human, completely indifferent to the concept. While he and Gibbs drop shells on enemy territory, he thinks that “the shell and *he* are interchangeable, just like the radians and secants on his clock-code chart … he *is* the lead, smearing across the paper’s surface to become geometry himself” (McCarthy 179). As he flies over the area, the plane, the shell, and Serge become one. The combination of body and technology, treating them as though they are one in the same, is connected to writing itself. The pencil, paper, and lead are technological tools, the same as the plane and Serge. As a result, all depth collapses as the space becomes pure geometry.

Depthlessness is Serge's perception of the world: "He sees things flat; he paints things flat. Objects, figures, landscapes: flat" (48). Serge not only sees flatness, he is flat. He is a character without character, moving through the world passively, experiencing little human connection and exhibiting muted emotions. The removal of interiority pushes the novel's form, which has for the past decades relied on psychological realism. Like an exoskeleton, the novel's narration is exterior consciousness, a narration that ruptures out of conventional style, blurring the line between first and third person. Everything is bubbling to the surface, flat and depthless.

There are several motivations behind the novel's depthlessness. First, it serves as a caricature of Cubism. For Cubist artists, the sharp lines, shapes, and abstractions portray the subject from multiple perspectives, thus creating depth by removing it. Serge's geometric lines are surgical, invoking amputation and trauma. His flatness removes context and depth altogether. Secondly, it gestures to the depthlessness of postmodern culture as explained by Jameson in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late*. But while Jameson's depthlessness describes the absence of value and the proliferation of surface-level meaning, *C* suffers from the opposite problem. Dennis Kersten and Usha Wilbers write in their essay that the novel has an abundance of value, meaning, and intertextual references, to the point where it resists a unified interpretation: "*C* may be a landscape of so-called 'pure geometry' itself; with its over-patterning of what seem to be heavily symbolic codes (i.e., the recurrence of the letter 'C'), it simultaneously encourages as well as defies reading for coherence. In *C*, there appears to be too much 'meaning' for the novel to be decrypted in any traditional way" (Kersten and Wilbers 27). It is as though the pieces of three puzzles were jumbled together, with the reader finding some pieces that fit and others that do not. The novel's tenuous relationship with "reading for coherence" is the result of McCarthy's combination of Cubist and Jamesonian depthlessness.

Another outgrowth of the novel's geometry, which Kersten and Wilbers recognize, is encrypted language, codes, and symbols. Here, Serge and the reader function as cryptanalysts. Like McHale's detective, the cryptanalyst decrypts codes to find hidden knowledge. In the moments leading up to Sophie's death, Serge observes her strange, potentially encrypted behavior. At her funeral, Serge reflects, "The charts, the lines, the letter-clusters and the fragments Sophie was pronouncing … these, he's more and more convinced, *mean* something and are issuing from *some*where, from a place he hasn't managed to track down" (McCarthy 103). After the war, Serge "starts seeing all of London's surfaces and happenings as potentially encrypted" (264). Likewise, the reader scans through the novel, picking up on repeated phrases, motifs, and potential intertextual references, like a conspiracy theorist's corkboard of pinned photographs connected by strings of yarn. An epistemic approach would try to hide the secret information inside the novel's code, but now, there is not a singular absolute meaning to decipher. Instead there is seemingly an infinite amount of meaning to uncover.

The obsession with secret language is interred in the recurrence of the crypt, referring both to a literal burial place and to encryption itself. McCarthy explores this concept in his book *Tintin and the Secret of Literature,* an analysis of Hergé's famous comics. Tintin is an investigative reporter and adventurer, not dissimilar to the McHale's detective, who frequently explores crypts in search of clues and leads. McCarthy says that the crypt "oozes, crackles and transmits to every corner of the work … the whole sequence of the two-book adventure is burial, transmission, burial, transmission" (83). After Sophie's death, Carrefax plans to attach a small transmitter to the family crypt, in the event that Sophie awakens and needs to signal for her release. As her body slides into the crypt, Serge thinks, "Both death and she are elsewhere: like a signal, dispersed (105). For McCarthy, the crypt represents death, communication, and

technology. Inside the crypt is knowledge—desired by historians, adventurers, and readers alike—which is discovered and transmitted. Relying on Nicolas Abraham and Mária Török's theories, McCarthy explains that the crypt is "the site of encrypted trauma" (84) and that "the crypt has become technology itself" (88). Technology's trauma of self-extension and amputation combines with the trauma of Sophie's death. Serge attempts to solve the encrypted communications are symptomatic of trauma, which translates to contemporary literature as well. Looking to the secret messages of the past, the leftover transmissions from modernism's crypt, is the process of understanding trauma.

McCarthy ties the encrypted trauma of crypts to the death itself, as though death were a space we could explore and transmit information from. The first declaration of the International Necronautical Society's manifesto—a semi-fictitious group McCarthy spearheads—is that "death is a type of space, which we intend to map, enter, colonize and, eventually, inhabit" (McCarthy). Like a crypt, we could break into death and discover its secret information. This idea develops as Serge encounters dead matter and grief throughout the novel. In the first section, for example, Sophie kills a cat and then attaches electric wires to its body to reanimate the dead muscles. Serge "starts to wonder if perhaps the morbid and hypnotic sequences being executed by the dead cat's limb contains some kind of information—'contain' in the sense of enclosing, locking in, repeating in a code for which no key's available" (77). For Serge, death is the most complex encryption; it is transmitting some information to him, but he is unable to find the right frequency and cut through the static. Death's secret messages sent through technology connect with Orpheus and Eurydice. McCarthy references the Jean Cocteau film, *Orphée,* where Orpheus receives fragments of abstract poetry from a dead writer through a car radio (a similar scene occurs in *C* when Serge attends a séance and discovers that the medium uses a small

transmitter to fake communicating with the dead). McCarthy writes, "the speech of poets and philosophers, is listening—and speaking-as-listening is repetition" ("Remix"). Contemporary writers should listen to the encrypted information sent from death through technology and broadcast them in their work. Listening to these messages from the dead is, like Orpheus, a process of looking backwards to the past, in *C*'s case specifically to modernism.

Sifting through the ruins of modernism, its anachronistic artifacts and encrypted transmissions, creates the conditions for the event. In his article on the reconstruction of modernism, Kevin Brazil argues that "when one considers the fascination with modernist historiographies and styles in the recent fiction of Tom McCarthy, Will Self, and Zadie Smith, it seems that contemporary British fiction still imagines modernism as an archive of the literary future" (Brazil 195). But as we have seen, McCarthy rejects the future. His exploration of modernism is not designed to forge a path to the future or to resurrect its themes and ideals. Looking backwards is simply how all literature functions. When Serge returns from the war, he notices that ordinary citizens as well as soldiers are shell-shocked: "It's like a city of the living dead, only a few of those denizens could proffer the excuse of having had shells constantly rattling their flesh and shaking their nerves. No, the shock's source was there already: deeper, older, more embedded…" (McCarthy 268). The imagery of London populated by the undead invokes *The Waste Land.* In the first section, the speaker writes, "A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many. / I had not thought death had undone so many" (Eliot 62-63). But while Eliot's London, reeling from the effects of World War I, is filled with dead soldiers, Serge witnesses businessmen, children, commuters, drug addicts, and more all empty and despondent. In McCarthy's London, the source of trauma is death and the event. Listening to death's transmissions and human mortality sends shock waves of the event rippling throughout time.

Death as a space one can explore and receive transmission from implies the existence of an afterlife, and McCarthy uses a religious framing in his discussion of communication, technology, and literature. The belief that art can transcend its medium is a religious transcendence as well as an aesthetic one. At the beginning of the novel, Serge's father quotes the Bible to introduce his method of teaching deaf children speech: "'The Word was with God,' Carrefax continues, 'and the Word *was* God. Which is to say: speech is divine" (McCarthy 17). Towards the end, Ferguson says, "a phone box is sacred" and that destruction and vandalism of telegraph and phone wires are "acts of telecommunicative blasphemy" (305). Returning to Descartes, communication—the medium by which we express our thoughts and subsequently our existence—has divine power. Communication is a form of creation. But as Lea explains, art cannot transcend its medium. He writes, "the failing of art is its inability to transcend either death or itself to offer any mystical cohesion" (Lea 136). Because of the limitations of our communicative mediums—speech, the written word, paintings, etc.—we cannot completely convey our experiences to another, and vice versa. Our understanding will always be incomplete; we can never see the full picture, what rests beyond the borders of the frame.

The failure of art to transcend itself dominates McCarthy's work and *C.* In the "New York Declaration on Inauthenticity," McCarthy and Simon Critchley say, "For us, art is the consequence and experience of failed transcendence. We could even say, borrowing defunct religious terminology, that it produces icons of that failure" (Critchley and McCarthy 4). But what happens after art's failed transcendence? In the story of Adam and Eve, God casts the pair out of the garden, clothing them in "coats of skins" (*King James Version,* Genesis 3:21). While these may be clothes fashioned from animal skins, we could also read this verse as Adam and Eve receiving fleshy, human bodies. This harkens back to Bataille's Formless and base

materiality, of freeing objects from the binds of taxonomy and bringing things back to Earth. Consequently, failed transcendence results in materiality, a fall from grace into matter. While Serge inspects an ancient scroll depicting a woman rising, Petrou explains that her name is Sophia, and she is a symbol of the fall. He says, "desiring too ardently to be united with God, she falls into matter, and our universe is formed out of her agony and remorse" (McCarthy 317). Here we see the event in looking backwards to the fall of mankind, art's failed transcendence to unite with God and overcome death or itself, the resulting trauma from these experiences, and reassertion of matter. Instead of pursuing transcendence, contemporary literature must accept its material existence in our postlapsarian world.

From an early age and throughout his life, Serge acknowledges his own materiality, at times with an unconcerned composure, a response caused by the trauma of the experience, and other times with willfulness. Following a lab explosion from Sophie's chemistry experiment, Serge vomits a stream of matter: "His puke is red, laced with a briny, effervescent silver the same color as potassium" (46). Sophie screams, but there is no description of Serge's reaction. After Sophie's funeral, Serge develops a stomach blockage, which Dr. Filip's describes as "morbid matter," "black bile," and "*meta chole*" (119). Serge's submission to the will of matter caused the blockage: "It needs a host to nurture it, and you are willing" (120). To others, matter is a problem that needs treatment, but for Serge, matter is to be embraced. As we have seen, he enjoyed the war and the prospects of dying in a fiery plane crash. His sexual encounters as well reinforce the fleshy matter of the human body. Serge models McCarthy's version of contemporary literature. Unlike modernist futurism that ignores the fall into materiality by focusing on idealistic progress, the contemporary should look to the past and the event, to technology and trauma, to art's failed transcendence and finally, to matter itself.

All of these qualities combine at the end of the novel on Serge's deathbed. Like Tintin, Serge has adventured out to Egypt, venturing into the crypts and tombs, and showing interest in the encrypted hieroglyphs decorating the coffins and walls. Serge looks backwards to the past—here, ancient Egypt—attempting to uncover the hidden knowledge encoded behind its tombs, language, and iconography. Likewise McCarthy, and the reader, are looking backwards to modernism, applying the same autopsy to its encryptions, transmissions, and technologies. Instead of using the quest for knowledge to fuel the future, we are turning epistemology in on itself (a tactic McCarthy uses again with postmodernism, as we will see later on). While in one crypt having sex with Laura, a bug bites Serge's ankle, an accident that eventually leads to his death; in other words, his death is an event caused by investigating the past. In his final moments, Serge describes feeling the transmissions from death surging through his body:

> it's a burst of static—a static that contains all messages ever sent, and all words ever spoken; it combines all times and places too … The static rushes over the whole crowd, and roars through Serge's body, making his limbs and chest contract and shiver with convulsions. Sweat, or seed, or sediment, spills over him. Everything is spilling … even graves are opening, the dead being catapulted back out of the earth" (385)

Here, McCarthy condenses everything we have discussed into a single passage. The static of communicative technologies carries transmissions throughout all time and space. The technology combines with Serge's body as he becomes a human radio tower, a traumatic event that makes him viscerally aware of his materiality. And as a result, the encrypted messages from death and the past are unlocked. Eventually, the static forms an image, and "looking backwards" (386) Serge sees his own past, memories of playing with Sophia in the orchard, culminating in his last

words: "*The call: I'm being called"* (387). If Serge is our model for contemporary literature, then we must follow the steps, look backwards, and answer the call.

Although McCarthy rejects modernist futurism, it is not to replace or reject epistemology, unlike postmodernism's shift into ontological-based concerns. His novels use epistemology reflectively on the past, and introspectively on ourselves. In "Remix," McCarthy writes, "Our prosthetic condition will not, cannot be transcended" (McCarthy). We cannot transcend into some future utopia, a technologically-driven heaven. We cannot transcend our artistic mediums or matter. But, he explains, "recognizing this produces strangely melancholy joy" (McCarthy). Melancholia, the black bile, alludes to the trauma of technology and looking to the material past, but there is inexplicable pleasure in confronting and accepting that morbid matter.

Chapter 3

Entropy, Hyperawareness, and Inauthenticity in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*

In *C,* we found a rejection of the future in favor of the past, a version of modernism encapsulated by crypts and ruins, and an embrace of materiality and technology. Though written before *C, Remainder* carries these concepts into the twenty-first century and examines how we respond to matter after the event. "Our current age," McCarthy writes, "has to be understood through the lens of catastrophe" ("Declaration on the Notion of 'The Future'"). By this framework, *Remainder,* set presumably in the early 2000s, adopts 9/11 imagery and connotations; the novel concludes with murder and a plane hijacking. Catastrophe, then, is the catalyst of contemporary literature, and McHale seems to agree. In "What Was Postmodernism?" McHale writes, "long before the actual catastrophes of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, we have been *imagining* such catastrophes - staging them, rehearsing them in our imaginations and in our art-works" (McHale). We are, ostensibly, repeatedly reenacting catastrophe, a "foretaste of what comes *after* postmodernism" (McHale). Just as modernism was conscious of postmodernism from its inception—the constant need to innovate, progress, "make it new," creating its own obsolescence—so too it seems that postmodernism's rehearsal of catastrophe anticipates the unnamed narrator of *Remainder*.

After suffering a traumatic accident from falling technological debris, the narrator becomes hyper-aware of his material existence, causing debilitating feelings of inauthenticity. To reclaim his authenticity, he rehearses, or reenacts, first false memories, then real-life experiences, and finally a bank robbery. Here, McCarthy expands his archivist approach to literature to explore

the ruins of postmodernism as well as modernism. And by shifting through the ruins of past literary movements, we will catch a glimpse of the contemporary. Comparing postmodernist novels like *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon, *Crash* by J. G. Ballard, and *Jealousy* by Alain Robbe-Grillet to *Remainder* will expose how McCarthy uses postmodern form to criticize postmodernism. Instead of attempting to achieve authenticity through self-referential style and hyper-awareness of the novel's form, *Remainder* magnifies the inauthenticity caused by traumatic recognition of matter. The novel distinguishes itself from its modernist and postmodernist predecessors by inflaming the entropic structure and hyper self-awareness beyond what Pynchon, Ballard, or Robbe-Grillet ever envisioned, allowing contemporary literature to embrace the strange pleasure of our own inauthentic, material existence.

In "Metamodernism: Narrative of Continuity and Revolution," David James and Urmila Seshagiri examine McCarthy and other contemporary authors through their relationship to modernism. And while acknowledging the influence of other literary movements, Romantic and realist in particular, their argument that contemporary novels like *C* reactivates early twentieth-century modernism from "postmodern disenchantment" misses McCarthy's purpose in looking backwards (James and Seshagiri 87). His novels are not concerned with futures. The central hurdle for the unnamed narrator—how to live when confronted with the inauthenticity of our material existence—is a question for the contemporary novel as well. Retrospection is about process, not progress. In an interview with *BOMB Magazine*, McCarthy says, "*Don Quixote* is a novel about how novels don't work … about a fundamental, systematic dysfunction written right into the medium's core. And that's more or less the first major novel" (Tuten). McCarthy seeks to settle the authenticity or inauthenticity debate. All literature, as well as all art, is inauthentic. Looking backwards is a method of processing inauthenticity. This is not to argue that these terms

lose all meaning, but that we must live in full knowledge of inauthenticity, instead of denial. As Simon Critchley writes in the afterword to *Men in Space,* "The undoing of the entire fantasy of authenticity, where action would coincide with reality, is *matter* … The only possibility of procreation in this inauthentic universe is through a violent trauma, a mechanical accident" (McCarthy 288-289). While inauthenticity is the default, unchangeable setting of literature, its force is largely ignored, in McCarthy's view. The stark materiality of our lives, brought before our consciousness by the catastrophe, stipulates the acceptance of inauthenticity.

As we saw in *C,* the outburst of communication technology in the early 1900s heightened our self-consciousness of matter and subsequently inauthenticity, and *Remainder* follows the same development. The narrator invests millions from the Settlement into the telecommunications and technology industries, stemming from his obsession with connections: "the rails were linked to the wires that linked to boxes and to other wires" (McCarthy 15). The novel itself is interconnected, with physical therapy foreshadowing the narrator's reenactments, and catastrophe at the end looping back to the narrator's initial trauma, when "bits" of technology fell from the sky (4). C. Namwali Serpell points out in *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* that "the novel is largely built of repetitive descriptions of actions, spaces, and objects" (Serpell 232) that create a "dizzying sense that all events are always and/or already happening," (242) like Simeon Carrefax's theory that all events occur simultaneously. In any case, we could hardly claim that the novel's interest in technology, communication, and connection is aspirational, nor unique to modernism.

Postmodernism, and *The Crying of Lot 49* specifically, is built around communication and repetition, but instead of creating a circular experience of time, Pynchon wants to deconstruct the reality of modernist works. Inspired by the pulp detective genre, Oedipa Maas, our protagonist

and detective, stumbles upon the mystery of Tristero, an underground mail system that might exist, after becoming the executor of the estate of Pierce Inverarity. While a traditional detective would uncover definite facts about the case and the world around them, Oedipa finds nothing but possibilities. In *Postmodernist Fiction,* McHale compares *Lot 49* to Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw,* writing that the "crucial difference" between the two is "that James's governess is herself unaware of the alternatives … Whereas Oedipa is only too aware of her alternatives" (McHale 24). There is not a reality that exists independent from Oedipa. She must create her own reality based on possibilities rather than axiomatic facts: "*Shall I project a world*" (Pynchon 69). Tristero is either real, Oedipa's hallucination, a conspiracy mounted against her, or her paranoia of a conspiracy. "Those, now that she was looking at them, she saw to be the alternatives," Oedipa observes, "She didn't like any of them, but hoped she was mentally ill; that that's all it was" (141). Skepticism of reality reappears in J. G. Ballard's *Crash* as well. The narrator, also named James Ballard, says, "The crash between our two cars was a model of some ultimate and yet undreamt sexual union. The injuries of still-to-be-admitted patients beckoned to me, an immense encyclopedia of accessible dreams" (Ballard 21). For the characters, the car crashes represent endless possibility—an intimacy that is real but intangible—one that can, might, and will some day exist.

Unlike Pynchon's Oedipa, *Remainder*'s narrator is less interested in solving the epistemological crisis of skepticism. Because of his trauma, the narrator cannot remember the accident, and he doubts that he could ever remember it: "But who's to say that these are genuine memories? Who's to say my traumatized mind didn't make them up" (McCarthy 3). And even if he learned, the knowledge is forbidden to the reader. Per terms of the Settlement, he is prohibited from disclosing "the nature and/or details of the incident, on pain of forfeiting all financial

reparations made" (4). Much like Oedipa, the narrator begins constructing his own reality: the reenactments. Through building sets, writing dialogue, practicing actions and gestures, they are like films or novels brought to life. Serpell argues that the reenactments are exercises in ontology. She writes, "*Remainder*'s re-enactments thus afford readerly uncertainty about what is real and what is not. Ontologically, the novel's repetitions are a matter of matter; experientially, they mime mimesis" (Serpell 235). And it is literal matter that the reenactments control. His reenactments begin with a textured crack in a plaster wall that triggers a memory. But the narrator cannot determine where or when the memory took place. It is possible, then, that this is not a memory at all, but a construction of his traumatized mind. But it does not matter if the memory or reenacts are genuine, if they provide certainty to the reader. To the narrator, it is real. He says, "They'd been *real*; I'd been real—*been* without first understanding how to try to be: cut out the detour. I remembered this with all the force of an epiphany, a revelation" (McCarthy 67). While Oedipa is obsessed with skepticism and uncertainty, these problems do not plague the narrator. He knows that the internal memory, the strange déjà vu episode is real.

In addition to representing subjective constructions, the narrator's reenactments explain the motivating force that transformed modernism into postmodernism. The reenactments, the repetitions, embody entropy. Jameson places the two movements, writing that "Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good" (Jameson ix). In thermodynamics, entropy is the tendency of systems to decline into disorder and randomness. The theorized heat death of the universe will occur once entropy evenly distributes all free energy. For Jameson, the repetition of modernism functions in the same manner. Repetition has led to "the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the

postmodernisms to which we will have occasion to return in a number of other contexts" (9). This depthlessness caused by repetition is the loss of supposed authenticity. Postmodernism is comparatively inauthentic since any genuine meaning has been lost to swarms of repetition.

Lot 49 starts on this depthless, entropic foundation. Midway through the novel, Oedipa meets John Nefastis, a man who claims to have created a machine that can defy entropy. Oedipa learns "that there were two distinct kinds of this entropy. One having to do with heat-engines, the other to do with communication" (Pynchon 84). Nefastis explains that entropy is a metaphor for the flow of information, and that his machine "makes the metaphor not only verbally graceful, but also objectively true'" (85). To defy entropy, then, is to be authentic, a fundamental violation of the laws of matter. The breakdown of communication is Pynchon's essential thesis. Oedipa's life falls apart as she tries to find meaning in a sea of meaningless symbols. Steve Vine argues that the muted horn, the symbol of Tristero, validates Oedipa's theories, but the horn's repetition reignites her paranoia: "On one level, the post horn dissolves into thermodynamic entropy—for, apparently everywhere, it collapses into a generic lack of 'differentiation.' It loses identity and meaning in its 'replication,' and it becomes a token of sameness" (Vine 170). Jameson's depthlessness is here embodied by entropy. And just as the muted horn drives Oedipa's paranoia, Pynchon's naming conventions makes the reader scramble for meaning. Names like Dr Hilarius, San Narciso, The Paranoids, Mike Fallopian, Genghis Cohen, are treated with normalcy.

Though ridiculous, these names serve three purposes: comedy at the reader's expense, hyper-awareness of the novel's form, and communicative entropy. Serpell claims that the "self-aware mockery of linguistic interpretation" makes the reader experience Oedipa's paranoia first-hand: "The rampant decoupling of signifiers and signifieds induces an eagerness to interpret matched by a sense of futility in the enterprise" (Serpell 64). We simultaneously attempt to decipher the

meaning behind the metaphor in full knowledge that there may be nothing to decipher. As Oedipa says, “The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost” (Pynchon 105). Pynchon is inside, and we are outside. The progression of entropy has made it near impossible for the reader to construct a unified picture of the novel. Whatever meaning we construct will be one interpretation of many, based entirely on a multitude of possibilities.

As I mentioned earlier, *Remainder* follows an entropic structure as well. The narrator’s seemingly benign goal for authenticity leads to increasingly convoluted reenactments, culminating in a bank heist and airplane hijacking. The novel’s entropy, however, does not and cannot achieve authenticity through hyper-awareness. The reenactments consistently reiterate the forcefulness of matter and inauthenticity. “And re-enact and re-enact again, one presumes,” the short councilor says, “His ultimate goal, of course, being to–how shall we put it? To attain–no, to *accede to*–a kind of authenticity through this strange, pointless residual” (McCarthy 259). The narrator constructs multiple realities through the reenactments in hope that one will be authentic and real, but he is always undone by matter. By contrast, Oedipa when confronted with endless possibilities is undone by her own paroxysms of paranoia: “Waves of nausea, lasting five to ten minutes, would strike her at random, cause her deep misery, then vanish as if they had never been. There were headaches, nightmares, menstrual pains” (Pynchon 142). To Pynchon, the madness from our inability to cope with depthlessness is the apotheosis of modernism, but his diagnosis ends here without investigating the long-term effects of entropy on the novel itself.

McCarthy’s narrator begins at Oedipa’s end. The effects of depthlessness are clear from the start; the narrator seems empty, affectless. He cannot connect with his friend, Greg, or his potential love interest, Catherine, nor does he mourn the loss of those relationships. The

reenactments are all that matter, the only pursuit immune to apathy: "one day I got an urge to go and check up on the outside world myself. Nothing much to report" (McCarthy 165). The narrator at the beginning of the novel is still human, at least in comparison to the conclusion or to Serge Carrefax's anti-humanist characteristics. In an interview with *gorse* in 2013, McCarthy says that the narrator's reenactment of the shooting of a black man pays a form of reverence. "For all that he's a fascist and really exploitative, my hero does have an empathy for others and really wants to imagine himself into this guy's death. He's deeply moved by it in a perverse way," he says (Gavin). Of course, the reenactment itself is purposefully exploitative, a dramatization of a marginalized community's trauma under the guise of empathy in art. Just as the fusion of technology and human bodies in *C* leads to anti-humanism, so too does repetition and entropy, all leading back to matter and inauthenticity.

For McCarthy, repetition is the means to accepting and embracing our inauthenticity and literature's. If the first modern novel, *Don Quixote,* is about how novels do not work, then what should contemporary novels be? What should they look like? These questions are at the center of *Satin Island*, as we will see. In addition to fiction, McCarthy writes essays, literary criticism, declarations, manifestos, and more. Regardless of the genre, his authorial voice is detached and inquisitive, like a medical examiner or mortician. The narrator "poked" at the bank robber's "exposed flesh," comparing it to a sponge (McCarthy 300). He "pricked" his own finger with a knife and "squeezed the flesh and skin until a small bauble of blood grew on it" (199). The blending of writing genres and autopsy tone gestures towards his perspective that contemporary authors must wade through the wreckage and ruins of the past and death. According to the INS founding manifesto, the group's "ultimate aim shall be the construction of a craft that will convey us into death in such a way that we may, if not live, then at least persist." In McCarthy's

eyes, modernism and postmodernism were always cognizant of their death and replacement. It has already happened and is still happening. This space of death that necronauts intend to colonize is where literature thrives since the novels of today will become the novels of yesterday and indeed already are.

Death and repetition saturate the pages of Ballard's *Crash*. After surviving a car-crash, Ballard meets Vaughan, who relentlessly documents car-crashes and reenacts them for voyeuristic pleasure. Ballard is at first repulsed, but the experience awakens in him the same sexual desire: "My horror and disgust at the sight of these appalling injuries had given way to a lucid acceptance that the translation of these injuries in terms of our fantasies and sexual behavior was the only means of re-invigorating these wounded and dying victims" (Ballard 174). The car, a symbol of modernity, is destroyed repeatedly, and the destruction fetishized. And yet, modernism is kept alive by reenacting its death. McCarthy, along with INS Head Philosopher, Simon Critchley, expand on this principle in the "New York Declaration on Inauthenticity." Their necronaut is a person who navigates through death, through the flotsam and jetsam of literary history. They write, "Question: how do we navigate? How do we deal with matter? Answer: *inauthentically*" (Critchley and McCarthy 9). The trauma of a car-crash, or falling bits of technology, makes us aware of death and consequently, of our inauthentic existence.

Death in modernism was tragic and absolute, as opposed to the comedic, cyclical death of the necronaut. Critchley and McCarthy point to Oedipus Rex who can live and die authentically because death is controlled. Consequently, modernism is unaware of its own inauthenticity. The tragic death confers a false sense of meaning and fulfillment. In "Being Dead? Trauma and the Liminal Narrative in J. G. Ballard's *Crash* and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*," Jim Byatt argues

the finality of death can be avoided when Ballard and the narrator repeatedly construct ontological worlds. He writes:

> As long as there is a universe in which the (un)dead can exist, the potential to return to that universe persists. When there is no longer a tension between life and death, when there is no tangible space to which to return, only then is the cycle broken and the situation resolved. (Byatt 257)

This is reflected in the figure eight, which the narrator sees everywhere. The narrator says, "The eight was perfect, neat: a curved figure infinitely turning back into itself" (McCarthy 8). The eight contains within it a closed loop, a recursive system. It is also the symbol of infinity. "I liked the process, liked the sense of pattern," he says (96). Running the reenactments, even when he is not physically present, defies finality. The coffee shop loyalty card, the hijacked plane drawing figure eights in the sky, loops and loops. Death postponed indefinitely. The difference between Ballard and McCarthy, then, is that Vaughan is dead at the end of the novel, while *Remainder* ends before the narrator's plane crashes. As far as the text is concerned, the cycle never stops. Modernism and postmodernism are dying and will continue to die, but they are not dead.

While modernism attempted to gain authenticity through tragedy, postmodernism's fatal flaw is that it seeks authenticity through ironic means. But its hyper-awareness does not bring literature any closer to reality than modernism's method. The deceleration states, "The ironic self-awareness of the poet or philosopher can only be that of his own inauthenticity, repeated at increasingly conscious levels, and 'to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic" (Critchley and McCarthy 12). The narrator's trauma wrought hyper-awareness of his inauthentic, material existence, and as the doctor explains, "The stronger the trauma, the stronger the dose" (McCarthy 220). The narrator breaks down every movement his body makes into individual parts

and actions, executing them in perfect sequence. The trauma of the accident has made his body foreign him: “But I still had to think about each movement I made, had to understand it. Doing without Understanding: the accident bequeathed me that for ever, an eternal detour” (23). His inauthentic materiality finally exposed and made aware, there is now no return to a state of ignorance. The same is true of reading the novel. Facilitated by repetition of phrases and fragments, we break the book into chapters, scenes, sentences, and words, analyzing its muscles and movements. Both for the author writing the book and the audience reading it, the process is inauthentic, impossible to emancipate doing from understanding.

The hyper awareness of inauthenticity in modernism leads back to technology and anti-humanism. Nieland says that “Modernism, for McCarthy, is especially aware of what Hal Foster called the ‘double logic of prosthesis’: technical media's status as both an extension and constriction of the body, a fetishistic monument to a foundational lack in the self and its disavowal in a form of technological overcoming” (Nieland 581). Technology has allowed the narrator to expand his body. The Settlement provided millions of dollars to run his reenactments. During the reenactments, the narrator and Naz’s team communicate with walkie-talkies, shrinking the physical space between them. But like Serge, technology also expedites his anti-humanism. As Ballard writes, “The deviant technology of the car-crash provided the sanction for any perverse act” (Ballard 123). While technology heightens his body’s ability, the hyper-awareness of his body’s inauthenticity twists empathy. Placing oneself in another’s shoes becomes aberrant voyeurism. At first this is localized to the narrator alone. Robert De Niro can simply exist while he cannot. But hyper awareness spreads. He starts judging other people for pretending to have authenticity—“Usurpers. Frauds”—further departing from a humanist perspective (McCarthy 60).

The perversion, deviance, and fetishism in technology carries religious connotations, and through the reenactments, the narrator creates a cult-like environment with himself as the leader of religious extremist group, ending in acts of terrorism and catastrophe. “They were my loyal servants”, he says, “I pictured all my people lifted up, abstracted, framed like saints in churches’ stained-glass windows” (276-277). This is a similar dynamic between Vaughan and Ballard, who becomes his disciple. Ballard frequently describes the car-crashes like a form of baptism, with the old self dying and the new self reborn from the wreckage. Remembering Gabrielle’s car-crash, Ballard says, “She sat in the damaged car like a deity occupying a shrine readied for her in the blood of a minor member of her congregation” (Ballard 97). She is concurrently the object of worship and the sacrificial lamb. Vaughan, however, is the group’s figurehead, the prophet and pastor. In *Remainder*, the narrator fills this role, and the reenactors his disciples. Naz in particular becomes a steadfast apostle, working on the reenactments with “a kind of measured zeal, a quiet passion” (McCarthy 233). The narrator observes that “he’d become an addict” that was “edging into a delirium” (264). He coldly suggesting they “vaporize” everyone involved, utterly unconcerned with the plan’s ethics (275). The narrator’s project is deleterious. We helplessly, and voyeuristically, watch the scene unfold. For McCarthy, the inability to cope with inauthenticity leads to extremism.

It seems as though hyper-awareness and anti-humanism has led to an affectless narrator; McCarthy’s narrator is distant and cold. But despite his overt, detached behavior, he still has an affective personality. The narrator mirrors the third-person narrator of Alain Robbe-Grillet’s *Jealousy*. The novel meticulously recounts interactions between “A...” and her neighbor, Franck. Robbe-Grillet implies, though never outright confirms, that the absent narrator is the husband of A…, watching the pair from behind venetian blinds (the French title “La Jalousie” refers to

jealousy and to a Jalousie window). The narrator's dedication to describing their exchanges in a purely objective manner exposes his ulterior motives: he is jealous of Franck and suspects A… is cheating on him. In one retelling of a dinner scene, occurring after Franck and A… spend the night together in town, the narrator writes:

> the left hand puts the fork in the right hand, which sinks the fork into the piece of meat, which approaches the mouth, which begins to chew with movements of contraction and extension which are reflected all over the face, in the cheekbones, the eyes, the ears, while the right hand again picks up the fork and puts it in the left hand, then picks up the bread, then the knife, then the fork… (Robbe-Grillet 58)

The paragraph ends with an ellipsis, presumably because this retelling continues forever. The account is intended to provide a neutral perspective for the reader; the narrator presents us with a retelling, and we formulate our own conclusion. But the assiduous commitment to detail betrays the narrator's neutrality. The scenes are retold ad nauseum either to persuade the reader that A… is unfaithful, or to persuade the narrator himself that there is no affair. These retellings have an ontological function. Like the reenactments, the slight variations between each make them unique worlds. In one version, Franck and A… stayed overnight because of the car's engine trouble; in another, they planned the excursion to consummate their affair. When Franck and A… discuss a book they had both been reading, the narrator tells us that "they construct a different probable outcome" for the book, and "They seem to enjoy multiplying these choices, exchanging smiles, carried away by their enthusiasm, probably a little intoxicated by this proliferation" (43).

The unnamed narrator is, of course, participating in the same construction of meaning. He is as besotted with their interactions as they are. Pieter Vermeulen's essay "The Critique of

Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*" explores the shift from psychological depth to affectless narration that recontextualizes trauma and pushes against the conventions of psychological realism. He writes, "*Remainder* fails to leave its reader unaffected … In this way, the novel figures trauma as a frustrated expectation of emotional fullness and centered subjectivity, and as the emergence of an affective remainder unable to disappear" (Vermeulen 555). Had he not named the novel specifically, we would be justified in thinking that Vermeulen's essay was about *Jealousy*. In both novels, hyper-awareness of spatiality and kinetics has created narrators that are anti-human in their actions and effective in their motivations. As a consequence, the narrators' hyper-awareness feels counterintuitively real and inauthentic.

The difference between the two novels, however, is that Robbe-Grillet's narrator is hyper-aware of others, and McCarthy's narrator is hyper-aware of himself and others. This changes the dynamic between the text and the reader, where McCarthy's narrator and the reader are codependent. Serpell argues that *Remainder*'s narrator desires synchronicity. He wants to be in sync with matter, for his movements to be fluid and natural. The novel too pushes synchronicity between the narrator and the reader, where his desires become ours. Serpell writes, "Metareading heightens the novel's experiential synchronicity, coordinating our feelings and knowledge with the narrator's until they are near simultaneous" (Serpell 251). The audience then is like Naz, who works "like some Gnostic monk toiling away by oil lamp copying scripture" (McCarthy 264). His zealous dedication is matched by our perverse curiosity. He cannot stop facilitating, and we cannot stop reading. The narrator says, "And so out goals aligned, mine and Naz's. He needed me as much as I needed him" (265). The narrator needs an audience. He needs

us to watch, understand, and facilitate. And we are spellbound and captivated, the young Trilby to his Svengali.

Hyper-awareness of inauthenticity heightens inauthenticity, for the narrator and the reader. But though the dynamic between both parties is built of mutual necessity, there still remains a power imbalance. It is the narrator's story; we are merely the passengers: "The idea that the novel is enthralling captures an anxiety about losing autonomy when reading it … *Remainder*'s affective dimensions thus portend a troubling impingement on readerly boundaries, subjectivity, and agency" (Serpell 252). In juxtaposition, the narrator of *Jealousy*, and *Lot 49* as well, does not exercise control over the reader. Though we see the world through his eyes, the absent narrator makes no judgements, no interpretations, not even acknowledging his own existence. Through dramatic irony, Pynchon denies Oedipa any epistemological satisfaction, but the audience is hyper-aware of Pynchon's authorial presence. If we were to create a hierarchical model, Pynchon would sit atop the pyramid, readers in the middle, and the characters at the bottom. But in *Remainder*, the hierarchy is reversed: "My pyramid was like a Pharaoh's pyramid. I was the Pharaoh"' (McCarthy 276), and we are "like a set of devotees to a religion not yet founded" (282). As Pharaoh, the narrator has power over the readers, and we are synchronized to his will.

But synchronicity and authenticity are undone by matter. The ultimate goal of the narrator's reenactments is to get in sync with his body and become unaware of his material existence. His religious experience at the tire shop, for example, provides a moment of escape from matter. At the mechanic's, the attendants refill the windscreen washer container in the narrator's car, but the blue cleaning fluid seemingly disappears. He is overjoyed at the experience: "It was as though I'd just witnessed a miracle: matter—these two litres of liquid—

becoming un-matter—not surplus matter, mess or clutter, but pure, bodiless blueness" (171). In the cycles of repetition, matter is completely in sync with reality, no remainders. The "transubstantiated" matter is now authentic (171). The narrator then observes that the attendant, covered with stains, has "taken on these smears so that the miracle could happen, like a Christian martyr being flagellated, crucified, scrawled over with stigmata" (171).

In the narrators' mind, the surplus matter has been transferred to the attendant, who sacrifices his own materiality for others to transcend inauthenticity. McCarthy says, "for Christianity, the highest knowledge is of God. God is the most real thing there is" (Critchley and McCarthy 5), but for the necronaut, the most real thing "is not form, or God, but matter, the brute materiality of the external world" (6). The narrator learns this lesson moments later. He starts the engine, and the blue cleaning fluid oozes from every orifice of the car's dashboard. Our material existence cannot be escaped. Like the trauma of the accident, the narrator is hyper-aware of matter.

Given the mattering of matter, the meaningless induced by repetition and entropy, the hyper-awareness of our own inauthenticity, what remains for twenty-first century literature? Sydney Miller briefly mentions in his essay that "the novel could potentially be read as a commentary … on the status of the novel in the wake of postmodernism—that is, as a plea for fiction to continue its retreat from the brink of crippling self-consciousness" (Miller 635). But retreat to where? Modernism and postmodernism could not resolve the problem of authenticity. McCarthy turns to matter and the event, that is to say, he embraces the novel's inauthenticity. "The response to the materiality of our inauthentic state is a more passive and less heroic decision. This calls for comic acknowledgement rather than tragic affirmation," says the declaration, "repetition, incompleteness, rupture and mess over neatness, uniqueness and

transcendence" (Critchley and McCarthy 11-16). By this framework, authenticity is simply a myth. Inauthenticity and materiality are real, and acknowledging this is traumatic and catastrophic.

The narrator realizes that despite his numerous reenactments, the closest moment of synchronicity occurred by accident, when asking passersby for spare change. Still, the spontaneous action was "almost real" (McCarthy 242). He considers reenacting this moment but dismisses the idea: "Re-enacting it wouldn't be enough: there'd be something missing, something fundamental" (242). Later with the bank heist, the narrator creates the accident through repetition, moving from "re-enact" to "pre-enact," (260). The heist is inauthentic in that they rehearsed the scene like actors, but despite this, the narrator calls the heist "*real*" because of the accident created by their repetition (293). Though occasionally getting close, the reenactments were never authentic. Instead, the real is bathed in the messiness of matter, the inauthenticity, and the remainder.

The bank heist is where all the pieces come together, the constructed realities, cyclical time, accident and trauma, inauthenticity, and matter. The narrator says, "In one sense, the actions we'd decided to perform had all happened already … in another sense, though, it had never happened–and, this being not a real event but a staged one, albeit one staged in a real venue, it never would" (281-282). And indeed the preenactment is like the reenactments, insofar as it is a construction of the narrator, fake and inauthentic. The difference between the two is the accident, the "ghost kink" that causes the entire plan to fall apart and causes entropy to accelerate (296). And with the practiced stumble during the bank heist rehearsals, the accident was solidified, becoming a structural inevitability. It had already happened. The death of robber reenactor four creates "something miraculous" (292). The narrator notices that the props look

"like wedges of surplus matter stripped away to reveal them," and something "palpable" in the air is revealed (292). Before he despised surplus matter, the half attached to his eight million, the bits that did not neatly conform to the loop. But now the surplus makes the preenactment feel real. "Everything's fine—even the shard in my knee, the half," he says (295). By accepting materiality, he finds a sense of realness in inauthenticity.

Where authenticity is proved false, matter persists as the true constant. After murdering robber reenactor two, he says, "Isn't it beautiful … You could take everything away—vaporize, replicate, transubstantiate, whatever—and this would still be there" (300). On the plane, his face and clothes have splatters of blood and coffee, which he wears proudly like the stigmata on the tire attendant. And when the pilots turn the plane making a figure eight, there is the beginning trail—"fainter, drifted to the side by now, discarded, recidual, a remainder"—mirroring the half from the Settlement (306). All of these remainders have the cumulative effect of creating an inauthentic world that is real, nevertheless. Before inauthenticity was a cancer that the narrator hoped to cure, but now his perspective has changed. In the final paragraph of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Albert Camus writes, "Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Camus 123). The narrator's boulder is inauthenticity, and his reenactments form their own world as well, each marked with reminders of matter. As with Sisyphus, we must imagine the narrator happy. This is an effortless task, since the narrator proclaims, "it was a very happy day" (McCarthy 282). Like Serge's strange joy at accepting melancholic matter, the narrator embraces inauthenticity.

Acknowledging matter is a task for the audience as well. McCarthy encourages us to read inauthentically. Miller's essay concludes with the revelation that "For just as surely as the sun

will set on McCarthy's narrator, so, too, will critics inevitably approach his text, decontextualize his words, and misconstrue his intentions. We, as readers, are the agents of the accidental in narrative. We are the kink. We are the remainder" (Miller 652). Though we can add one clarification: McCarthy intends, and indeed expects, for us to dissect his novel, to read inauthentically and navigate through the debris like the necronaut. On the last page, the narrator says:

> Eventually the sun would set for ever—burn out, *pop*, extinguish—and the universe would run down like a Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to its very end. Then there'd be no more music, no more loops. Or maybe, before that, we'd just run out of fuel. For now, though, the clouds tilted and the weightlessness set in once more as we banked, turning, heading back, again. (McCarthy 308)

The narrator refers back to entropy and the heat death of the universe in the first three lines. Perhaps one day the cycle of repetition will end completely, a day when no more literature is produced. But once the plane crashes, the debris might hit someone else, and the cycle will restart. The novel, however, ends before this occurs. For now, the loop continues; the novel becomes a self-contained world within itself, where the plane never crashes, repetitions never end, and inauthenticity reigns.

For McCarthy, full acceptance of inauthenticity must become the foundation of contemporary literature. Zadie Smith writes that given the choice between *Netherland*'s lyrical realism and *Remainder*'s "comic simplicity," we should follow McCarthy's example (Smith 84). In her famous and oft-quoted passage, she writes, "In its brutal excision of psychology it is easy to feel that *Remainder* comes to literature as an assassin, to kill the novel stone dead. I think it means rather to shake the novel out of its present complacency" (93-94). Clearly, if a path for the

novel exists, it is here. But how might contemporary authors come to find their identity? McCarthy gives us an answer: “Art is governed by what Mark E. Smith of the mighty Fall calls the three R’s: repetition, repetition and repetition. As a consequence, we think artists should continue to do what they have always done: *steal*” (Critchley and McCarthy 18). In this sense, he carries the spirit of T.S. Eliot, who envisioned the author as a catalyst of literary tradition. Indeed, McCarthy has taken the ideas of his artistic and philosophical predecessors—that of entropy, hyperawareness, and inauthenticity– transforming and remixing them into a novel element.

Chapter 4

"Strike through the mask": Dissecting the Contemporary in Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*

This new element of literature strives for formlessness, like base materiality. And, of course, it fails. It is impossible for literature to exist without a medium. It must have a form. This is the prowling dilemma in *Satin Island*: what should the contemporary novel's form be? What should it look like? How should readers experience it? The plot of *Satin Island*, what little there is, follows a corporate anthropologist named U. who is tasked with writing the Great Report, a comprehensive document that will unequivocally define our age. His task mirrors that of literary critics, to name the contemporary moment, and that of aspiring novelists, to write the next great novel. U.'s attempt to create the Great Report, and his inevitable failure, result in the creation of *Satin Island*, a document that rests in-between research and art. And it is this liminality that McCarthy brings to our attention. For literature to model itself after base materiality—"to let matter matter by making form as formless as possible"—then its form must flow and circulate, always in flux, shifting in uncertainty on unstable ground (Critchley and McCarthy 7). For McCarthy, contemporary literature is a space of in-betweenness, pause, and recession.

Satin Island begins where *Remainder* ends. U. is stuck at an airport—that is to say, stuck in-between destinations—on account of some "rouge airplane … flying in idiosyncratic patterns over Southern England and the Chanel" (McCarthy 4). Like the unnamed protagonist of *Remainder*, U. begins the novel talking about stains, leftovers, and matter. He muses over the Shroud of Turin, a linen cloth that bears a negative image of a man's face. U. explains that despite the evidence, many believe this shroud depicts Jesus' face. From this, He explains:

> We see things shroudedly, as through a veil, an over-pixellated screen. When the shapeless plasma takes on form and resolution, like a fish approaching us through murky waters or an image looming into view from noxious liquid in a darkroom, when it begins to coalesce into a figure that's discernable, if ciphered, we say: *This is it, stirring, looming,* even if it isn't really, if it's all just ink-blots. (McCarthy 3-4)

The landscape of *Satin Island* is hypermediated by screens and shrouds, all of which color our experience of the world. We can understand these shrouds as barriers between two entities, ones that connect and separate us, like a joint. It also gives form to the formless. There is something beneath the shroud, supposedly, and the shroud takes its shape, like draping a sheet over furniture, or in its literal use, like cloth laid over a corpse. And what we believe rests beneath the shroud takes on religious significance, even if the hidden entity is nothing at all. U. says, "People need foundation myths, some imprint of year zero, a bolt that secures the scaffolding that in turn holds fast the entire architecture of reality, of time" (3). The shroud is a vital piece in maintaining this structure. It invites speculation to what rests beneath it, which leads to the creation of myths and beliefs that ground our existence.

As a corporate anthropologist, U. traffics in these foundational myths. Like McHale's modernist detective, he attempts to uncover the meaning behind our culture, which he then sells to his employer, simply named "The Company" (7). As U. explains, "Behind all behavior, issuing instructions, sending in the plays—just as behind life itself, its endless sequencing of polymers—there lies a source-code. This is the basic premise of all anthropology" (112). Instead of crimes, U. investigates culture. But more often than not, he creates meaning in culture rather than uncovering it. He writes, "my job was to put meaning *in* the world, not take it from it" (34). He does this by providing a framework for understanding what an aspect of culture "truly and

profoundly *meant*" (32), which in practice translates into recycling "vanguard theory" (33) and removing all the "radical baggage" (33). On the Jameson continuum of modernity and postmodernity, it is difficult to categorize U. He spends his youth idealizing Lévi-Strauss while also writing a post-structuralist critique of anthropology. This indicates that U. is in-between these two ends of the spectrum, sliding from one side to the other, or that the continuum itself is inapplicable, that the constant fluctuation and combination of both literary movements has destabilized the reader's framework of interpretation. In either case, the result is an ideologically fluid novel, one whose foundations are myth—in that stability is a fictitious shroud.

The fluidity makes the reader focus on the shroud, rather than what may appear beneath it. This manifest most frequently in the technological shrouds that U. encounters. He says, "Around me and my screen, more screens: of other laptops, mobiles, televisions" (6). Technology embodies the arthrological function of connection and separation, similar the self-extension and self-amputation of technology found in *C*. While technology extends the human body—phones enable our voices to travel thousands of miles, the internet expands our repository of knowledge—they nevertheless serve as barriers. While talking to Madison, U.'s partner, through Skype, the call fails: "Her face froze in mid-sentence too. Its mouth was open in an asymmetric, drooley kind of way, as though she'd lost control of its muscles following a stroke … A little circle span in front of her, to denote buffering" (9). U. switches between pronouns, from "her" to "it," demonstrating the anti-humanizing effects of technology. The severed connection leaves behind a contorted body as the remainder. At the end of the passage, it is the screen itself, the buffering circle, that dominates the reader's attention. Madison is not actually there. All that exists are the pixels of the screen.

The anti-human qualities of technology are embedded in the form and structure of the novel. In "The Rise of the Fragmentary Essay-Novel: Towards a Poetics and Contextualization of an Emerging Hybrid Genre in the Digital Age," Ansgar Nünning and Alexander Scherr argue that the segmented style of *Satin Island* reflects technology's the technology's dual connection and separation. They write, "the humanist view gives way to a posthumanist conception of personhood in which human agency appears as always connected to and restricted by digital networks" (Nünning and Scherr 499). U. is connected to Madison, but that connection is tenuous. At any moment, technology can revoke the benefits it provides people. The same is true of U. himself. The reader experiences the novel through his eyes. We are connected to the world through his experience and restricted by it. This is an inherent quality of literature, as McCarthy explains in "Remix," writing that literature "can't be separated from the topics of dismemberment and death, of loss, dissolution, vanishing" (McCarthy). Since literature is a form of technology, it cannot escape the arthrology of connection and separation, extension and amputation. The result, as Nünning and Scherr describe, is a novel that resists its own form, somewhere in-between essay and novel.

Formalistic uncertainty is again represented by the technological shrouds. Something could lurk beneath the pixels, or it could be nothing at all. Behind the pixelated screen, U. imagines giant servers feeding him endless streams of data: "it was this gift, I told myself, this bottomless and inexhaustible torrent of giving that made the circle spin … the thought was almost sublimely reassuring" (73). Though mocking the religious believers of Turin's Shroud, U. places the same religious significance to the data beneath the screen; it comforts him. He has faith that technology will prevent isolation and connect him to the bank of human knowledge and interaction, that something exists behind the screen. But the sublime sensation never lasts. He

thinks, “what if it were just a circle, spinning on my screen, and nothing else? What if the supply-chain, its great bounty, had dried up, or been cut off, or never been connected in the first place?” (73-4). Technology could restrict his interaction with others, and what if there is nothing behind technology? What if behind the curtain is another curtain, a corridor opening into another corridor? Or as Jacques Derrida explains in “Différance,” “Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences” (Derrida). U. stumbles into post-structuralism, another example of McCarthy combining modernism and postmodernism.

Important to note, however, is that the shroud and buffering are two separate but interconnected phenomena. Buffering takes place on the shroud, but it is simply a mark, a stain, a remainder—just as the Shroud of Turin bears the negative image of a man. While watching the buffering circle, U. sees this as emblematic of how we process information. “We require experience to stay ahead, if only by a nose, of our *consciousness* of experience … But when the narrating cursor catches right up with the rendering one … then we find ourselves jammed, stuck in limbo: we can enjoy *neither* experience *nor* consciousness of it” (74-5). Our understanding of the contemporary requires a retrospective lens. To experience and understand the contemporary at the same time would cause an overload. McCarthy expands on this concept in *Recessional, or, the time of the hammer,* which draws its title from MC Hammer’s “U Can’t Touch This.” He argues that we should stop looking for hidden meaning and instead focus on pauses, in-betweenness, the “Stop Hammer time.” He writes, “Perhaps I’m hoping, in some paranoid (Pynchon-influenced) way, for a *Eureka!* instant; hoping to unearth a codex … That, of course, is as much a fantasy as the Romantic/tragic one of owning one’s own death: there is no single codex” (McCarthy 23). Likewise, U. looks for one single answer that will bring the world into

focus, that one answer that will give form to the formless, like the fish approaching in muddy water. But that codex does not exist. The only thing that remains is matter.

Matter only has meaning as a result of human imposition; without a codex, meaning is indecipherable. Without an understanding of language, for example, words are merely scribblings of ink. And even with a cheat sheet, that meaning is artificially constructed; it is not inherent to the material itself. U. runs into this conflict while visiting an anthropology museum in Frankfurt. The curator, Claudia, shows him rooms filled with artifacts, thousands of the same object. "A hammer or a pair of scissors might tell you as much about a culture as a sacred fetish—suddenly release its inner secrets, like some codex," she explains (104). And while there is a codex for some of these objects, "no single codex" exists that will explain all of them. Thus, the "material culture" is left in the museum to gather dust and fill space (108). The objects will simply exist, no addendum attached. In *Rubbish Theory: The Creation and Destruction of Value*, Michael Thompson writes:

> Physical objects have certain important properties imposed on them as a result of the processes of human social life, and, conversely, that if these properties were not conferred upon them then human social life itself would not be possible. Since people are physical objects, they too are subject to the same process. Nor does it stop here. Ideas, since they must always be generated and communicated in a social context, are also constrained so as to become, to a somewhat variable extent, thing-like. (88)

Under this framework, objects, people, and ideas are all matter; U., his friends, his office, the oil, writing, and even the Great Report, are all matter. However, as Thompson explains, this matter, including ourselves, has been processed, and we cannot see the raw, unprocessed state of matter. Consequently, we can never glimpse the inherent meaning of matter, only the processed,

artificial meaning imposed on it by people. Material culture is an unsolvable puzzle, a safe with an unpickable lock. Instead of searching for the codex and artificial meaning, McCarthy redirects our focus to this raw materiality. In *Recessional*, he says we should look to the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé—who is quoted in the epigraph of *Satin Island*—and the buffering: "*Fiction* would not be un-truth … nor would it be story … rather, it would be recessionality itself. Fiction would be Hammertime" (McCarthy 28). We should focus on the material rather than what the material may signify. Matter is key accepting inauthenticity, precisely because it opposes the idealistic, foundational myths that promise authenticity.

Our corporate anthropologist, and his desire to pierce the shroud, has a literary predecessor. Introducing himself to the reader, he says, "Me? Call me U." (13). This, of course, harkens back to Herman Melville's opening line of *Moby Dick*, "Call me Ishmael" (Melville). But the figure U. most resembles in Captain Ahab. Ahab's hatred of the Great White Whale goes beyond revenge for his lost leg. Justifying his vendetta to the crew he says, "All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask" (Melville). For Ahab, Moby Dick is not just a force of nature. Beneath the mask, the whale holds the suffering of all mankind. He wants to literally pierce through the shroud with a harpoon baptized in blood.

U., likewise, chases his own whale. His boss, Peyman orders him to create the Great Report, "not just *a* book: *the* fucking *Book,"* the Rosetta Stone that will define the contemporary era (McCarthy 61). "What I want you to do, he said, is *name* what's taking place right now. To name it? I repeated; like the princess does with Rumpelstiltskin in the fairytale? Yes, he said: exactly" (63). The religiosity of this framing—the capital B, holy "*Book"*—is intentional. U. will

be the prophet, bearing the sacred text, and the Company his church. The Great Report rests beneath the shroud, and U. must strike through it so that the "shapeless plasma" will form into something tactile. When periodically asked about the Report's status, U. replies, "it's finding its form" (39). For U. the text must have a material form and escape from its over-pixelated shroud that obscures it. And as with the buffering circle downloading data, the Great Report might not actually exist. Maybe nothing stirs in the dark waters.

U.'s mission also mirrors that of contemporary literary critics. What form has the contemporary age taken? Is it a continuation of modernism or postmodernism, or perhaps a new term like metamodernism or neomodernism? What is its "secret name" (61)? U. frequently returns to the question of form. The Report, with its endless data, could not be written down. His first major breakthrough is that it might be experienced rather than documented: "What if the Report might somehow, in some way, be lived, be *be*-d rather than written?" (77). From there he determines that the contemporary is nowness:

> Then the Great Report would not be something that was either to-come or completed, in-the-past: it would be all *now*. Present-tense anthropology; anthropology as a way-of-life. That was it: Present-Tense Anthropology™; an anthropology that bathed in presence, and in *now*ness–bathed in it as in a deep, bubbling and nymph-saturated well. (78)

But we cannot write about present experience in the present. When we sit down to record the experience, it has become the past. Though nowness has a physical dimension, it is innately amorphous and ephemeral, since it morphs into the past when we communicate to others. Without some form, some medium, it cannot be transmitted. And an inarticulate idea, one that cannot be expressed to others either colloquially or commercially, is worthless. This vision for contemporary literature is not only impractical but impossible. We cannot separate literature

from its form—"the medium is the message," as the saying goes (McLuhan 9). It must have a form.

And contemporary literature does have a form, and in fact, it already exists in the Internet. However, technology presents new challenges for literary criticism: an overload of data. Mass media, omniscient surveillance, and the Internet document every facet of our lives: "Write Everything Down, said Malinowski. But the thing is, now, it *is* all written down. There's hardly an instant of our lives that isn't documented … the truly terrifying thought wasn't that the Great Report might be un-writable, but—quite the opposite—that it had *already been written*" (133). Technology has rendered U.'s job meaningless. It has been written, but given the amount of data, humans cannot read all of it; only technology and software can analyze it. Likewise, the contemporary movement exists, but we cannot understand it. The amount of data is too much to process; it's written in another language and hidden by encryption. U. has the fear of every aspiring novelist: that the Great American Novel—or perhaps the Great Global Novel—already exists, that there is nothing new under the sun to write. This is McCarthy's point. In "Remix," he writes, "I have nothing to say. Indeed, I'd go as far as to claim that no serious writer does," and he goes on to explain that writing is listening and "speaking-as-listening is repetition" (McCarthy). The writer does not say anything different; they say it differently. This returns to the question of form, of how we communicate instead of what we communicate.

A second problem with the contemporary arises: the buffering dilemma. We can only understand the present through a retrospective lens, the rendering grey line ahead of the narrating red line. U.'s friend Petr, who is dying of cancer, says that he was once in a shootout, and while the guns were firing, he imagined telling this story in the future: "I was practicing relating the episode when it was over. *He had a huge pistol—a gold one, no less* … Trying out different

ways of telling it, you see" (McCarthy 138). The problem with death, he explains, is that there will not be a future framework to understand it or anyone to tell about it. "I'm about to undergo the mother, the big motherfucker, of all episodes—and I won't be able to dine out on it" (138). Our conception of the contemporary is likewise muddled. We can only understand it once it has become the past. But in the moment, when we are bathed in nowness, any attempts to understand result in informational overload. We need to process literature, and that requires time.

Experiencing a moment and understanding that same moment are fundamentally in conflict. Giving a speech in Frankfurt, U. questions periodization: "The Contemporary was a suspect term … Instead of making periodic claims … we should return to understanding *epoch* as a place from which one looks at things" (100-101). James and Seshagiri argue in favor of periodization, claiming it "amplifies, rather than constrains, scholarly discourse about modernism, its several legacies, and the moment of contemporary literature" (James and Seshagiri 91). Periodization "endows literary history with clarity" and establishes "a literary-cultural basis" for contemporary literature (92). But for McCarthy, periodization does the opposite. As we have seen, attempts to compartmentalize modernism and postmodernism fail because these time periods bleed into one another, always conscious of what comes next. In interviews, McCarthy frequently reiterates that the defining aspect of a movement is its philosophical perspective, whether epistemological, ontological, or some other foundation. What framework rests underneath contemporary literature?

McCarthy links this buffering dilemma and contemporary framework back to the liminality and the recessional. U. investigates the mysterious death of a skydiver whose parachute was sabotaged, noting that he suffered two deaths: the actual death and the effective death. In one scene, he determines that the actual time of death would have been when his kit had

been sabotaged, rather than the moment of impact: “For the last hours–days, perhaps–of his life, he had (this is how Schrödinger would formulate it) *been* murdered without *realizing* it. I tried to picture him walking around in that state: already effectively dead” (McCarthy 60). In Schrödinger's thought experiment, a cat is trapped in a sealed box with a vial of poison that could break at any moment, and until the box is opened, the cat is both alive and dead. From this scenario, we might conclude that the shroud is the box, and the parachutist is the cat. Or, more pointedly, that the Great Report is the cat, both dead and alive, and unknown to us until the shroud is dropped. But U. describes the skydiver’s death as “a technical delay, a pause, an interval … the interim between an action and its motion” (60). Being dead and alive, like Schrödinger's cat, is the recessional.

Being both dead and alive criticizes the periodization of literary movements and the influence of technology on our material bodies. In “Pure Formalities: Living With the Nescient Dead, or the Dead Who Don’t Know They Are Dead,” Richard Hardack explores a genre of characters ignorant of their own death and the questions it creates for media: “the ND are always *avant la lettre* [before the concept existed] and often undermine notions of periodization; they presuppose events that haven’t happened yet and that can be understood only retroactively. The ND also confirm that periods can bleed into each other and re-emerge as ghosts, traces, and remainders” (162). From the moment his kit was sabotaged, the parachutist was nescient dead. Everything afterwards was just the buffering remainder. During this interval, the parachutist is stuck between two deaths, the sabotage and the impact. For Hardack, the key feature of nescient dead is “oscillating between” (198) the “symbolic” death (172)—the collapse of our societal role, position, or standing—and the “real” death (172)—our biological death. Likewise, McCarthy oscillates between epistemology and ontology, between modernism and postmodernism, between

the actual and effective deaths. Speaking specifically on *Satin Island,* and on mass media and surveillance, Hardack writes, "As we become more Real technologically, we become less Real symbolically, a condition the ND portend as beyond inscription" (197). Because our entire lives are always documented, our societal lives lose significance. We are replaced by a digital double, a virtual actor. And if technology can extend the human body, it can also extend our deaths. U. learns of Petr's death from a text message, and although it was his wife that sent the text, the sender listed is Petr. "To almost all intents and purposes, the sender *was* Petr," U. observes (149). The digital record will show Petr as alive ever after his symbolic death: "Key to immortality: text messaging" (149). Thus, the technological life supersedes our symbolic life, and this influences the writing process itself.

For McCarthy writing should exist between the symbolic and real deaths, within this liminal, buffering space. Recessional writing allows for oscillation in ways that previous literary movements do not. This idea takes form in U.'s obsession with oil spills. The coast covered with black liquid mirrors a blank page covered in ink and the marks on Turin's shroud. U. imagines giving a conference presentation on oil spills. He argues that the coast and animals are "*improved*: augmented, transformed into monumental versions of themselves" (114). With the spill, "Earth wells back up and reveals itself; nature's hidden nature gushes forth" (116). This transformation and revelation sounds oddly similar to the Great Report. Eventually the shroud will dissipate, and murky depths would transform into the Report. But the oil spill is not driven by "foundation myths," by codices, but by material culture: "God's first act, we are told, was to conjoin and divide as he moved through the waters. This, then, is the primal deed replaying itself—but godlessly, driven and orchestrated by the whims of matter alone" (117). The brute materiality of our own existence—letting matter matter—is the only thing that is real, and

recognition of matter is violent and traumatic. Cynthia Quarrie argues that oil represents the shame of British colonialism. She connects the process of writing to the exploitation of other countries and peoples, including the extraction of oil, by the British empire. She writes, "This is the oil of late capital and environmental devastation, oil that is implicated in the violence of the Middle East and the cancer that kills U.'s friend. But it is also implicated in writing itself" (159). Writing, then, is violent. Instead of Captain Ahab's blood-soaked harpoon, U.'s wields a pen coated with oil. And it is only through violence and the resulting trauma that we can become aware of our material existence and learn to embrace our inauthenticity.

McCarthy, however, is not the first author to recognize the importance of violence in literature. Violence for modernist authors is used to reset literary history and start anew. This is reflected in U.'s violent, revolutionary fantasies. His attitude toward the Company's Koob-Sassen Project undergoes a "sea-change" (134). He imagines sabotaging the Company: "we could turn Present-Tense Anthropology™ into an armed resistance movement" (137). His terrorist group, "armed with the very latest, anthropology-derived search-and-destroy techniques, would be the sexiest, best-dressed, most orgasmic revolutionaries ever" (139). Their goal is to tear down everything that came before. They will start a literary movement that relies not on intertextuality and repetition, but pure, unfiltered originality. U.'s sentiments mirror the introduction of William Carlos Williams' *Spring and All*, where he writes, "To it now we come to dedicate our secret project : the annihilation of every human creature on the face of the earth" (Williams 5). The poet, according to Williams, uses the power of imagination to revitalize emotion, thus creating a new form of reality: poetry. This process of writing destroys the past to create the present and future. Likewise, U.'s fantasized sabotage of the Company would return

the world to its prelapsarian state, just as the flood narrative in Genesis cleansed the Earth, a complete break with the past.

McCarthy often returns to the revolutionary figure in his work. In 2005 as an artistic exhibition, along with Rod Dickinson, he reenacted the 1894 bombing of the Royal Observatory in Greenwich Park. This event inspired Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent*. The Royal Observatory is the site of the Prime Meridian, degree zero in longitude. It is the beginning not only of geographical space but time as well, since time zones are divided by longitude. Thus, the bombing is an attempt to reset the clock, to restart time itself. For McCarthy, this is the base assumption of avant-garde modernism. But this obsession with remaking the past undercuts their revolutionary zeal.

Modernism, in McCarthy's eyes, and it's opposition to the past is immature and misguided, like a child rebelling against their parents. After telling Madison about his orgasmic, violent fantasies, she calls U. a "boy" and says, "You all want to be the hero in the film who runs away in slo-mo from the villain's factory that he's just mined, throwing himself to the ground as it explodes. But the explosion's taking place already—it's always been taking place. You just didn't notice …" (McCarthy 139-40). The system, whether it's the Company, capitalism, governments, or literature, destroys and reinvents itself. It does not need the avant-garde writers' help in this task. Indeed, they are part of the system they seek to supplant, just as the Genoa government digests and reincorporates Madison's youthful activism, and just as U. himself removes "all the revolutionary shit" from leftist philosophy and feeds it "back into the corporate machine" (33). U.'s and modernism's violence is consequently misplaced.

The revolutionary spirit should be cyclical instead of linear, rely on repetition instead of originality, and serve materiality instead of idealism. In his essay "Get Real, or What Jellyfish

Have to Tell Us About Literature," McCarthy argues that literary realism, though opposed to overly romanticized subjects and language, does not actually represent reality and is not authentic. A novel's verisimilitude—"the real" as McCarthy calls it—comes from violence that threatens the structure of a text (64). For example, the bull's horn makes a bullfight real since the spectacle would be destroyed if the matador were gored. This realness is "an *event* that would involve the violent rupture of the very form and procedure of the work itself. This rupture—*nota bene*—is emphatically *not* the same thing as authenticity" (68). This is the same event found in *C*—the train collision created by the network—as well as Orpheus' fatal backwards glance in "Remix." The concept also reappears in *Remainder*. The pre-enactment becomes "*real*" only after one of the bank robbers is shot and killed (McCarthy 293). The bank robbery and plane hijacking make the narrative real, but it subsequently ends the novel. The reader never learns what happens to the narrator after the spectacle presumably concludes.

But no such event takes place in *Satin Island*: "(*events!* If you want those, you'd best stop reading now)," U. tells us (14). If there is no violent event, how then does the novel depict the real? Raw materiality, the amorphous oil, and the writing itself all contribute to this sense of realness. McCarthy writes, "Viewed from this position, a thing's real would be touched in its own materiality: a sticky, messy and above all *base* materiality that overflows all boundaries damming in the thing's—and everything's—identity, and thus threatens ontology itself" (68-71). This base materiality is reminiscent of Thompson's raw, unprocessed objects, the simplest component of something that we are unable to visualize. Because we cannot comprehend unprocessed matter, base materiality threatens our state of existence. It negates both "cognition"—the process of assigning meaning to matter—and "cognitive frameworks"—the processing system in that process (Thompson 88). For the human body, base materiality conjures

images of single-celled organisms swimming in primordial ooze, but even this is too organized and processed. And for writing, we can imagine ink stamped onto fibrous, pulpy paper. This image, too, inadequately captures the ontological threat of raw, unprocessed, formless matter. Attempts to describe unprocessed objects and formless matter fails because, as Thompson explains, we assign a cognitive framework to the object when we seek to understand it. We are left with inadequate metaphors that are as formless as possible; there is always a remainder. The realization of our material existence, while unpleasant, creates the real.

The event makes us real as we become hyper-aware of matter, causing an ontological crisis as the byproduct. By focusing on our bodies and identities, we oscillate—or buffer— in liminal space like the nescient dead. For McCarthy, the contemporary literary movement should recognize its materiality and journey into in-betweenness. We learn that U. never writes the Great Report. In his failed attempt to give the Report form, we are left *Satin Island* as the residue. U. tells us that Lévi-Strauss once wrote a drama on the back of his research notes:

> On one side, scientific, evidence-based research; on the other, epic art. If my Report had come to be completed, which side of the paper would it have been written on? More to the point: to which side does this not-Report you're reading now, this offslew of the real, unwritten manuscript, belong? Perhaps to neither side, but to the middle: the damp, pulpy mass that forms the opaque body at whose outer limits, like two mirages, the others hover. (125)

The novel, and McCarthy's other novels, resist categorization. It is not purely an essay, since there are characters and some semblance of plot. But as the ink-stained cover designed by Peter Mendelsund illustrates, *Satin Island* is not a book in the traditional sense, nor is it a manifesto, treatise, confession, or report. It is a novel simply by process of elimination. From the

meandering plot that complicates the common three-act structure; the nonlinear narrative that reflects the cyclical perspective of time; the first-person narration that counterintuitively creates distance between the reader and U.; and, the anti-humanist undertones and analytical voice that disregards psychological realism, all push the boundaries of novelistic form to make it as formless as possible.

We have mostly read U.'s journey as a criticism of modernism, but as Christa Grewe-Volpp claims in her essay, U.'s obsession with oil spills, and his willful ignorance of its material effects, also criticizes poststructuralist theory: "McCarthy highlights how U's detachment from his material (and social) environment exposes its limitations which must be read as McCarthy's critical response to the extreme positions of a postmodernist mind" (Grewe-Volpp 150). But U.'s detachment is also a result of his obsession to write the Great Report, to which most of his attention is devoted to and to which most of his social interactions inform. If this isolation is a reaction to the "postmodernist mind," then it's a mind whose foundations rest on modernist thought. As with *Remainder*, modernism is continuous with postmodernism, and neither approach will reveal any hidden secrets within the novel. But, as Grewe-Volpp notes, neither would a materialist analysis: "After all, the second of McCarthy's concerns was the buffering sign which imposes 'incompleteness' and 'waiting' and certainly not closure" (150). Indeed, the novel does not have a satisfying conclusion—no dominant chord resolving neatly to the tonic chord—or any conclusion at all. It simply ends, messy and incomplete. And we are left with the air unsettled, anticipating the final note. But this feeling is deliberate—"repetition, incompleteness, rupture and mess over neatness, uniqueness and transcendence" (Critchley and McCarthy 16)—it exposes the limitations of any theoretical approach in literary criticism to provide authenticity and catharsis for the reader.

Authenticity, and the reader's impressions of authenticity, are then a myth. The shroud only provides the illusion of meaning. Even at the beginning of the novel, U. recognizes the artifice of authenticity: "The world functioned, each day, because I'd put meaning back into it the day before. You didn't notice that I put it there because it was there; but if I'd stopped, you'd soon have known it" (35). Whatever meaning in the world does not exist independently from human interference and our cognitive frameworks. It is a deliberate fabrication that grants comfort to the reader, in the same manner as belief in a higher power. But when U. goes to Staten Island, hoping to find meaning from his dream about Satin Island, he decides not to leave the ferry at the last minute: "And so I found myself, as I waded back through the relentless stream of people, struggling just to stay in the same place, suspended between two types of meaninglessness" (186). U., and contemporary literature, are suspended in liminality, between two ends of the spectrum that are equally inauthentic. Quarrie continues to argue in her essay that "this fiction of purity, of the mystery and authenticity of a coherent culture, cannot withstand the frames of interpretation that the anthropologist necessarily brings to bear" (Quarrie 159). No culture, and no literary movement, is authentic. And since "to know inauthenticity is not the same as to be authentic" (Critchley and McCarthy 12), and since materialism is also inauthentic, where does that leave the contemporary novel? We are left in messiness, in-betweenness, and the recessional. From U.'s example we learn, not on whatever meaning the shroud may obfuscate, but on the materiality of the shroud itself, on the buffering surface. While letting matter matter is messy and incomplete, we must acknowledge our materiality that makes us and literature inauthentically real.

U.'s dream of Satin Island paints a dirty yet optimistic portrait of contemporary literature. As he approaches the island in his dream, he sees factories covering the entire surface. Inside

mountains of trash were slowly burned away. The opposite of a shining city, the dirty island was "*regal,*" and though unseemly, it was strangely an ancillary system for the city: "the feeder, filterer, overflow-manager, the dirty, secreted-away appendix without which the body-proper couldn't function; yet it seemed, in its very degradation, more weirdly opulent than the capital it served" (McCarthy 142). If the utopian city—in its cleanliness and neatness—is analogous with the idealism of prior literary movements, then Satin Island is the materialist foundation that they relied on but refused to acknowledge, the ontological threat they retreated from. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, McCarthy and Critchley's term "necronaut,"—"modern lovers of debris, radio and jetstreams," (6) in their own words—is made of "necro-", relating to "death, dead bodies, or dead tissue"; and "-naut," which is "used to form a number of words with the sense 'voyager, traveler.'" Thus, the necronaut is a person, or thing, who travels to death. Satin Island is the embodiment of dead ages, the discarded trash of those movements, and U. must wade through it. In the same manner, contemporary literature must sail through the ruins of modernism and postmodernism. But contemporary literature, McCarthy's novels imply, should not be defined by its relationship to history. It must move past the past, not ignoring or destroying it, but retreading old ground in a new form.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

If a new literary movement is on the horizon, as some critics propose, then other contemporary authors would share some similarities with McCarthy. For his part, McCarthy has expressed skepticism about the emergence of a new movement. In an interview with *Contemporary Literature*, he said the British literary and publishing industry has "got a kind of humanistic, idealist [operating manual] that is just no good. It's not going to produce anything interesting. It's become a branch of the entertainment industry" (Hart et al. 667). The art world draws his attention instead, allowing for more freedom and experimentation, and carrying his anti-humanist, retrospective outlook. But I would like to turn our attention to other authors that I believe are sailing through the wreckage of modernism and postmodernism, and exploring the landscape of contemporary literature, albeit by different means than McCarthy. The list of important contemporary writers cannot fit in the pages remaining, but we will briefly examine how Zadie Smith, Jean-Philippe Toussaint, Shelley Jackson, Samantha Hunt, and Ben Marcus consider these questions in their writing.

With the publication of *White Teeth* in 2000, Zadie Smith quickly cemented herself in contemporary canon, drawing both praise and criticism, most notably from James Wood's essay "Human, All Too Inhuman." He argues that the novel is hysterical realism, where the trappings of realism are super-charged, "it is how they structure and drive themselves on" (Wood 179). He writes, "As realism, it is incredible; as satire, it is cartoonish; as cartoon, it is too realistic; and anyway, we are not led toward the consciousness of a truly devoted religionist. It is all shiny

externality, all caricature" (183). But Wood assumes that Smith and other authors want to, and should, cultivate realism in their novels. Unbelievability, inauthenticity, and exterior consciousness are goals, not side-effects. Though not formless in McCarthy's use of materialism, Smith's novel shares his critique of realism. We should read hysterical realism both as a natural outgrowth of postmodernism, which Wood explains, and as extending the boundaries of novelistic conventions and form. Novels filled with "inhuman stories" rebel against the predominantly humanist perspective that McCarthy sees as polluting the literary landscape (180).

White Teeth filters several common topics prevalent in McCarthy's work through the eyes of first and second generation immigrants in the United Kingdom. The novel preoccupies itself with moments of catastrophe, accidents, and trauma. In a passage anticipating McCarthy, she writes, "A trauma is something one repeats and repeats, after all, and this is the tragedy of the Iqbals—that they can't help but reenact the dash they once made from one land to another, from one faith to another, from one brown mother country into the pale, freckled arms of an imperial sovereign" (Smith 136). One criticism Smith brings against *Remainder* in her essay is the sidelining of racial identity. If McCarthy "wants to destroy the myth of cultural authenticity," then that must include the racial "authenticity baton," an easy position to take for middle-class white writers with less at stake (Smith 88). Why then does *Remainder'*s narrator reenact the death of a black man? A more charitable interpretation comes from Serpell, who argues that *Remainder* satirizes not identarian politics but the "empathy model of art" and "white saviorism" (Serpell). The scene exposes the grim possession of non-white bodies by white society under the guise of empathy, that walking a mile in their shoes essentially equates to inflicting trauma on those individuals for self-aggrandizement and entertainment.

For Smith's position, *White Teeth* attempts to answer racial authenticity by analyzing how immigrants and other minorities respond to a multi-cultural, yet predominately white society. While the Iqbals and Bowdens understand trauma, people like the white, upper middle-class Chalfens cannot: "Born of a green and pleasant land, a temperate land, the English have a basic inability to conceive of disaster, even when it is man-made" (Smith 176). And the emotional toll of immigration and post-colonial influence affects each character in turn. Samad attempts to preserve his Bengali Muslim heritage, but he cannot hinder the erosion. Millat joins a fundamentalist Muslim organization, KEVIN, as an escape mechanism. And despite Samad sending him away from Britain to live in his homeland, Magid becomes a mimic man, fully adopting white culture and Chalfenism. If we must understand contemporary literature through the lens of catastrophe, as McCarthy claims, then writers like Smith are fluent in expressing its impact on white and non-white people.

We find a non-traditional catastrophe with Jean-Philippe Toussaint, that of a failing, romantic relationship in his tetralogy, cycle of Marie. The first in the series, *Making Love* (2003), follows the couple, an unnamed narrator and Marie, in the final days of their relationship in Japan. Two earthquakes occur in the novel, small ones that happen off screen: one when the couple arrive in Japan, and another when the narrator leaves Marie for Kyoto. For the first, he writes, "watching the chandeliers take forever to stop trembling after that quake of such feeble magnitude that I wonder if it didn't happen simply in our hearts" (Toussaint and Coverdale 8). Here, the external natural disaster connects to the internal struggle of the narrator's relationship, reinforcing what he has already told the reader, that a traumatic breakup approaches. The second earthquake is more explicit: "I knew the mention of the earthquake had provoked those tears, for the earthquake was now inseparably linked for us with the end of our love" (74). And yet, we

never see the earthquake, just the small tremors shaking beneath their feet, on the television screen, in people's conversations, through Marie's tears. The catastrophe is only ever implied. The narrator wishes for the moment to finally come, saying, "I then began to pray for it, that much dreaded earthquake, wishing in a kind of grandiose fervor that it would immediately happen right in front of me, reducing Tokyo to ashes, to ruins and desolation, wiping out the city and my fatigue, making an end of time and my dead loves" (29). Unlike postmodern media, which flooded screens and pages with images of destruction, Toussaint shows the shockwaves of a catastrophe that exists offscreen, in the minds of the characters and readers. The same follows for the narrator's breakup. Their final separation does not occur. The relationship dies throughout the novel, but it is never dead. We also see the suspension of time before the moment of death in *Remainder* with the implied plane crash whose effects we feel from the first page.

Both external and internal catastrophes rupture throughout the text, affecting the form of the novel. In "L'Art de la catastrophe chez Jean-Philippe Toussaint [The Art of Catastrophe in Jean-Philippe Toussaint]," Sandra Rodriguez Bontemps argues that catastrophe "is as much a source of chaos and destruction as it is of creation through revelation and the state of presence it generates, which seems to echo the all-sustained writing process itself" (Bontemps 180). Through these disasters, both the natural and romantic, the implied and imagined, the narrator enters a state of constant fear and paranoia. Toussaint embeds the same dramatic anxiety in the reader with a Chekhov's gun. In the first sentence, the narrator explains, "I'd had a bottle filled with hydrochloric acid, and I carried it around at all times, with the idea of one day throwing it right in someone's face" (Toussaint and Coverdale 5). As the novel progresses, the reader waits for the moment when he will throw the acid in Marie's face. But like the final breakup, it never comes.

In the final scene, the narrator pours the acid on a flower, which withers away at his feet: "There was nothing left, just a crater smoking in the faint moonlight, and the feeling of having been at the origin of this infinitely small disaster" (114). But this is not, as Bontemps suggests, an act of creation. It is postponement. Since the narrator cannot destroy Marie, he kills the flower, and the relationship is left open-ended, the reader left hovering. And indeed, the story of the narrator and Marie continues in three more books, which flash backwards and forwards from this moment. In "Stabbing the Oliver," McCarthy, while writing on Toussaint's work, says, "we're left, appropriately, in suspension: held, geometry-bound, in a space, or time, that has become pure interval" (McCarthy 28). And catastrophe creates this suspense, which defines the novel's structure. As the narrator explains, "But breaking up, I was beginning to realize, was more a state of being than an action, more a period of mourning than a death agony" (Toussaint and Coverdale 82). Toussaint's work envelopes itself within this space of delay, in the ripples of the catastrophe that echo into the past.

For Toussaint and McCarthy, catastrophe and form are inseparable. The same applies to Shelley Jackson. Her ongoing project "Skin," for example, is a story published in tattoos on the skin of 2,095 volunteers. She has created three hyperfiction texts, a genre of electronic literature that uses hyperlinks to create a non-linear, interactive story. The most well-know of these, *Patchwork Girl*, forces the reader to patch the pieces together. She carries this technique into her 2018 novel, *Riddance: Or: The Sybil Joines Vocational School for Ghost Speakers & Hearing-Mouth Children.* The book is a massive amalgamation of documents complied by a mysterious, unnamed editor. The main story is of Jane Grandison, an 11-year-old with a stutter who enrolls in the school and becomes Headmistress Sybil Joines' stenographer, and Joines' Final Dispatch, transmissions from the land of the dead. Accompanying these stories are images and diagraphs

of the school, Joines' letters to dead authors, observations from a visitor to the school, excerpts from *Principles of Necrophysics,* and three appendices. Again, Jackson allows the reader to interact with the novel however they wish. We can read the novel chronologically or read each section individually. If like *Satin Island,* to be as formless as possible equates to incorporating and blending various genres, then Jackson's work unquestionably achieves this, and thus destabilizes the novel's form.

Jackson places herself at the center of McCarthy's International Necronautical Society, to explore the space of death and send transmissions from it. Joines broadcasts The Final Dispatch, "*a mortal necessity for the necronaut*" as the editor tells us, from the "*unexplored regions of the necrocosmos*" (Jackson). As a necronaut, she journeys into the land of the dead and describes what she finds. This space is, among other aspects, the page: "I am alone on a blank page. This is not a metaphor … I exist, at present, only on this page, since I exist, at present only in these words" (Jackson). From the space of death, she speaks through the stenographer, who becomes her medium. Ghosts haunting the present, possessing the bodies of subjects, speaking through spiritual mediums, becomes a model for writing itself. The haunted writer mirrors McCarthy's radio writer from *C.* They both listen and are spoken through, repeating messages on the page. As Joines explains, "I was practicing to channel the dead, who have always found in the printed page their most reliable medium" (Jackson). But ghosts are also essentially remainders of the past, the bits of our consciousness that linger and fester. The land of the dead is also the past, and by looking backwards, we experience the past as present. Joines writes, "it is not possible to tell a story about the past without living that past again, and not as a memory, but as current events. So when I saw she screamed, what I mean is that she is screaming" (Jackson). Events of the past

happened, are happening, and will happen. Form, death, and past intersect, tangled beyond repair in an insoluble knot.

Broadcast messages from ghosts—writing as listening—is repetition, and Samantha Hunt's short story collection, *The Dark Dark* (2017), uses repetition to reflect on the literature's form. In the first story, "The Story Of," Hunt introduces us to Norma, a woman who cannot become pregnant, and whose marriage with her husband, Ted, aches as a result. Duplicates, copies, and repetitions fill the short story. "Strip malls, hills, grasshoppers, people, they all multiply," the narrator says (Hunt 6). Ted's father has two families, one kept secret from his wife and Ted. Norma meets his sister, who coincidentally is named Dirty Norma. While McCarthy uses repetition in proportion with the trauma of inauthenticity, in Hunt's hands repetition comments on motherhood and womanhood. Norma thinks, "Reproducing is nothing more than making photocopies. Or plagiarism. It comes easily to cheaters" (19). Motherhood, then, is creation from duplication, repeating your genes in another person. And as with *Remainder*, each repetition entails variation. "It's never all the same," Norma says, "It changes a tiny bit every time" (3). As with genetic mutations inside the DNA of dividing cells, a residual will always permeate the loops. Norma's trauma stems from her infertility, and in her mind, this makes her less of a person and justifies her violent thoughts. In the final scene, evocative of Eudora Welty's "A Curtain of Green," she contemplates cutting Dirty Norma in half, thinking "*I could divide her like a worm, cut her into chunks, seeds I'd bury in the yard, planting baby trees*" (20). Creation and division bear the mark of violence, and like with *Remainder*'s bank robbery, this threat creates a sense of the real.

The final story in the collection connects these ideas to writing and form. "The Story of Of" is a complementary story to the first, reusing the same characters, setting, and passages. But

each new repetition brings variations. Some changes are slight, like the inclusion of fresh, short paragraphs, but slowly the changes intensify, altering the structure of each retelling. The first retelling ends with Norma and Dirty Norma reading their story on a stenographer's pad, effectively resetting the narrative back to the beginning. The second retelling, shorter than the first, leads to the creation of third, shorter than the second, and finally a fourth. "Procreation by division, just like the amoebae," Norma thinks (198). She becomes aware that the story rewinds and repeats, but she's stuck in the loop. The story continues. In the final iteration, before the Normas read the pad and restart the story, "Norma grabs the notebook from Dirty Norma's hand and dangles it over the hole" (239). By refusing to read the story, the loops stop, but so does the narrative, ending abruptly a few paragraphs later as Norma asks the reader to "guess" how the story ends (239). Here, the ontological threat to the story's structure is the end of the divisions, the point where either the reader closes the book, or where the story hits its base components, single letters and ink blots. And yet without repetition, without procreation by division, the story would not exist. In this manner, repetition represents the foundation of literature and writing as well as its structural threat.

The last author we will cover, who shares McCarthy's penchant for materialism more than any writer discussed so far, is Ben Marcus and his 2012 novel, *The Flame Alphabet.* The book follows Samuel, his wife Claire, and daughter Esther as a virus tears through their small Jewish community. The virus, however, is language. First, the speech of children becomes toxic, and before long, television, radio broadcasts, writing, facial expressions, and all other forms of communication result in worsening symptoms. The face shrinks, the tongue hardens in the mouth, vomiting, sores, fatigue, and eventual death. *The Flame Alphabet* brings language down to the world, in the Bataillean use of the concept. Sam writes of Esther, "Each piece of the

alphabet that she wrote looked like a fat molecule engorged on air, ready to burst" (Marcus 11). Every word she speaks takes physical presence, infecting her parents: "The sickness washed over us when we saw it, when we heard it, when we thought of it later. We feasted on the putrid material because our daughter made it. We gorged on it and inside us it steamed, rotted, turned rank" (11). This is linguistics as matter. It soaks, swells, swallows, and penetrates. It violates, disrupts, and kills. All of which reaffirms the material existence of both Sam and the reader, showing how language can reshape our bodies and lives.

Marcus situates materialistic language in the biological and technological world of *C.* While language mediates our interaction with technology, it also becomes a corporeal extension of ourselves. Laura Shackelford argues that Marcus' novel reflects a recent shift in contemporary language practices, becoming an interface between systems of information and the biological world: "*The Flame Alphabet* anatomizes a persistent tendency to conceive of language in what Roberto Esposito and others identify as the distinctly immunological terms of modern biopolitics" (Shackelford 150). Many people have noted the virological description of the digital environment—Facebook posts, Tweets, and YouTube videos "go viral"—but thinking about language through a bioinformatic lens is another method of evaluating language's status as matter, highlighting its material force on the world and the people who inhabit it. And the emphasis on the human body is deliberate. Sam writes, "There was something blackening to the act of writing words, like carving into flesh" (Marcus 135). In his experiments to detoxify language, he creates an almost biological letter: "this wasn't a letter anymore but a gristled cluster of cells, nearly bone-like, smitten around the rim with hair" (222). Language becomes biological, pages are skin, words are tissue, and letters are cells. If language is an extension of the human body, then it can affect, specifically poison, those bodies as well.

As we have seen, the biological and technological are intertwined. In *The Flame Alphabet*'s case, all avenues and aspects of language lead to a physical and material death. In another scene, Sam tries to receive a message from Jewish broadcast, and in the process, uses his own body as a radio, writing, "From here I used the final length of wire to bridge the signal into the best point of conductivity I could think of, the most natural audio speaker there is, at least when you have no other radio equipment on hand: the flesh inside of one's own mouth" (157). Like McCarthy's Serge, he has become a human radio tower, uniting the technological, biological, and philological. And as the human body deteriorates over time, communication erodes over space. Sam says, "Spreading messages dilutes them. Even *understanding* them is a compromise. The language kills itself, expires inside its host … Language is another name for coffin" (44). Like a game of telephone. the more people that hear a message, the more chances we have to misconstrue that message, twist and change it until the original meaning is lost. The meaning curdles and sours like spoiled milk. But as Sam theorizes, the opposite is true. From its first utterance, language is deadly: "At my desk each day I chased the notion that the alphabet as we knew it was too complex, soaked in meaning, stimulating the brain to produce a chemical that was obviously fatal. In its parts, in combination, our lettering system triggered a nasty reaction" (169). Fresh language, which its inherent complexities, kills both the broadcaster and the receiver, and aged language kills itself, dying within the speaker. Regardless the content, either with an abundance of meaning or barren, the form of language concretizes thanatological drives, death made material.

Smith, Toussaint, Jackson, Hunt, and Marcus are only a sampling of contemporary authors processing the past and interacting with the novel's form. Unfortunately, curation by necessity excludes numerous other writers that deserve recognition and examination in their own

right—Jesse Ball, Ben Lerner, Lucy Wood, Helen Oyeyemi, to name a few—not to mention the breadth of non-American or British authors writing today, and those that operate in different media, like theater, poetry, and comics. The idea of formless literature, and more specifically formless novels, presents a contradiction on the surface. If all art must have a form, then formless literature cannot exist. And yet, we should make the effort. We must attempt to transcend the form, in full knowledge of the task's futility, like Sisyphus, and to fall short, producing icons of failure, to bathe in the catastrophe and materiality of that descent. The call for formlessness is a rejection of metaphysical restrictions placed on art, "to let things thing, to let matter matter, to let the orange orange and the flower flower" (Critchley and McCarthy 7). Embracing the thingliness of things unwraps the possibilities of our century. Without the constraints of authenticity, idealism, psychological realism, and sentimental humanism, formlessness splits literature open, revealing a breadth of opportunity.

References

Ballard, J. G. *Crash*. Noonday Press, 1994.

Bontemps, Sandra Rodriguez. “L'Art de la catastrophe chez Jean-Philippe Toussaint.” *Contemporary French and Francophile Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2020, p.177-184. DOI: 10.1080/17409292.2020.1763083

Brazil, Kevin. "Histories of the Future: The Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Reconstruction of Modernism in Post-war Britain." Modernism/modernity, vol. 23 no. 1, 2016, p. 193-217. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/mod.2016.0009.

Byatt, Jim. “Being Dead? Trauma and the Liminal Narrative in J. G. Ballard’s Crash and Tom McCarthy’s Remainder.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, vol. 48, no. 3, July 2012, pp. 245–259. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2012701692&site=eds-live.

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus.* Vintage Books, 2018.

Eliot, T. S. “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” *Poetry Foundation*, Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69400/tradition-and-the-individual-talent.

Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land.* W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2001.

Gavin, David. “Existential Ground Zero: Tom McCarthy Interviewed by David Gavin.” *gorse*, 25 Sept. 2013, gorse.ie/portfolio/existential-ground-zero/.

Grewe-Volpp, Christa. “Oil as Matter, Oil as Discourse: Tom McCarthy’s Satin Island.” *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2019, pp. 141–151. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1080/14688417.2019.1650662.

Hardack, Richard. "Pure Formalities: Living With the Nescient Dead, or the Dead Who Don't Know They Are Dead." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 59, no. 2, Summer 2018, pp. 161–203. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.3368/cl.59.2.161.

Hunt, Samantha. *The Dark Dark.* First Edition, New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

Shelley Jackson. *Riddance : Or: The Sybil Joines Vocational School for Ghost Speakers & Hearing-Mouth Children.* Black Balloon Publishing, 2018. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1875949&site=eds-live.

James, David, and Urmila Seshagiri. "Metamodernism: Narratives of Continuity and Revolution." *The Changing Profession*, Modern Language Association of America, 2014, www-mlajournals-org.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/doi/pdf/10.1632/pmla.2014.129.1.87.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.* Duke University Press, 1991.

Kersten, Dennis and Usha Wilbers. "A Tale of Two Labels: The Use of 'Modernism' and 'Avant-Garde' in the Reception of Tom McCarthy's *C*," *Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History*, vol. 12, 2020, p. 21-37. *Project MUSE* muse.jhu.edu/article/758965. https://muse-jhu-edu.proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/article/758965/pdf

Kirsch, Adam. "Tom McCarthy's C Shows the Future of Fiction." *Slate Magazine*, Slate, 13 Sept. 2010, slate.com/culture/2010/09/tom-mccarthy-s-c-shows-the-future-of-fiction.html.

Lanone, Catherine. "'Only Connect': Textual Space as Coherer in Tom McCarthy's *C*," *Études Britanniques Contemporaines*, 47, 24 November 2014, 7 July 2020. https://doi.org/10.4000/ebc.1830

Lea, Daniel. *Twenty-First-Century Fiction : Contemporary British Voices*. Manchester University Press, 2017.

Marcus, Ben. *The Flame Alphabet*. 1st ed., Alfred A. Knopf, 2012.

Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso. *Manifesto of Futurism.* Dodd, Mead and Company, Inc., 1960. http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/English104/marinetti.html

Matthew Hart, et al. "An Interview with Tom McCarthy." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2013, p. 657.

McCarthy, Tom. *C.* Vintage, 2011.

McCarthy, Tom. "Declaration on the Notion of 'The Future' : Admonitions and Exhortations for the Cultural Producers of the Early-to-Mid-Twenty-First Century." *Frieze*, Frieze, 1 Sept. 2011, frieze.com/article/declaration-notion-%E2%80%98-future%E2%80%99. https://frieze.com/article/declaration-notion-%E2%80%98-future%E2%80%99

McCarthy, Tom. "INS Founding Manifesto." *International Necronautical Society*: necronauts.net/manifestos/1999_times_manifesto.html.

McCarthy, Tom. *Men in Space.* Vintage Books, 2007.

McCarthy, Tom. *Remainder*. Vintage Books, 2005.

McCarthy, Tom. *Satin Island*. Vintage Books, 2016.

McCarthy, Tom. "Stabbing the Olive." *London Review of Books,* vol. 32, no. 3, 2010. http://www.jptoussaint.com/documents/5/52/La-verite-presse--angleterre-LRB-Tom_McCarthy_%C2%B7_Stabbing_the_Olive_(print_version).pdf

McCarthy, Tom. *Tintin and the Secret of Literature*. Granta, 2006

McCarthy, Tom. "Transmission and the Individual Remix." *Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group*. Kindle Edition.

McCarthy, Tom. *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish : Essays*. New York Review Books, 2017.

McCarthy, Tom, and Elisabeth Bronfen. *Recessional, : Or, the Time of the Hammer*. 1st edition., Diaphanes, 2016.

McCarthy, Tom, and Simon Critchley. "New York Declaration on Inauthenticity." *Necronauts.org*, 25 Sept. 2007.

McHale, Brian. *Postmodernist Fiction*. Routledge, 1996.

McHale, Brain. "What Was Postmodernism?" *electronic book review*, 20 Dec. 2007, https://electronicbookreview.com/essay/what-was-postmodernism/. Accessed 1 April 2020.

McLuhan, Marshall, and W.Terrence Gordon. *Understanding Media : The Extensions of Man*. Critical ed., Gingko Press, 2003.

Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick*. Project Gutenberg, 2001.

Miller, Sydney. "Intentional Fallacies: (Re)Enacting the Accidental in Tom McCarthy's Remainder." *Contemporary Literature*, vol. 56, no. 4, Winter 2015, pp. 634–659. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.3368/cl.56.4.634. http://proxy-remote.galib.uga.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=hlh&AN=113309526&site=eds-live

"-naut, comb. form." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/235936. Accessed 29 March 2020.

Nealon, Jeffrey. *Post-Postmodernism : Or, the Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism*, Stanford University Press, 2012.

"necro-, comb. form." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, March 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/125686. Accessed 29 March 2020.

Nieland, Justus. "Dirty Media: Tom McCarthy and the Afterlife of Modernism." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 58, no. 3, 2012, pp. 569–599. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26292921.

Nünning, Ansgar, and Alexander Scherr. "The Rise of the Fragmentary Essay-Novel: Towards a Poetics and Contextualization of an Emerging Hybrid Genre in the Digital Age." *Anglia-Zeitschrift Für Englische Philologie*, vol. 136, no. 3, Sept. 2018, pp. 487–507. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1515/ang-2018-0047.

Plato. *Plato: Five Dialogues Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*. Hackett Publishing Company, 2002.

"post, n.2." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, Mar. 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/148388. Accessed 1 April 2020.

Pound, Ezra. "THE CANTOS OF EZRA POUND." The Cantos of Ezra Pound; the Cantos of Ezra Pound, New York., New York, 1972.

Public Service Broadcasting. "Progress." *Every Valley*, Tracyanne Campbell, PIAS Recordings, 2017, track 4. https://www.publicservicebroadcasting.net/

Purdon, James. "Tom McCarthy: 'To Ignore the Avant Garde Is Akin to Ignoring Darwin' | Interview." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 31 July 2010, www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/01/tom-mccarthy-c-james-purdon.

Pynchon, Thomas. *The Crying of Lot 49*. The Penguin Press, 2012.

Quarrie, Cynthia. "Sinking, Shrinking, Satin Island : Tom McCarthy, the British Novel, and the Materiality of Shame." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2018, p. 147. *EBSCOhost*, doi:10.2979/jmodelite.41.2.09.

Robbe-Grillet, Alain, and Richard Howard. *Jealousy : A Novel*. Grove Press : distributed by Random House, 1978.

Serpell, C. Namwali. "The Banality of Empathy." *The New York Review of Books*, 26 June 2020, www.nybooks.com/daily/2019/03/02/the-banality-of-empathy/.

Serpell, C. Namwali. *Seven Modes of Uncertainty*. Harvard University Press, 2014.

Shackelford, Laura. "In Toxicating Languages of Bioinformatic Circulation: Poetics and Other 'Smallwork' in The Flame Alphabet." *Experimental Practices*, Mar. 2016, pp. 147–171

Smith, Zadie. "Two Directions for the Novel." *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*. Penguin Books Ltd., 2011, pp. 71–96.

Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth : A Novel*. First U.S. edition., Random House, 2000.

The Bible. King James Version, Bible Gateway, https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+3&version=KJV

Theophanidis, Philippe. "Georges Bataille: 'L'informe' ('Formless') 1929." *APHELIS*, 24 July 2014, aphelis.net/georges-bataille-linforme-formless-1929/.

Thompson, Michael, and Joshua O. Reno. *Rubbish Theory : The Creation and Destruction of Value - New Edition*. Pluto Press, 2017.

Toussaint, Jean-Philippe, and Linda Coverdale. *Making Love*. New Press, 2004.

Tuten, Frederic. "Tom McCarthy by Frederic Tuten - BOMB Magazine." *BOMB Magazine*, 18 Mar. 2015, bombmagazine.org/articles/tom-mccarthy/.

Vermeulen, Pieter. "The Critique of Trauma and the Afterlife of the Novel in Tom McCarthy's 'Remainder.'" *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 58, no. 3, 2012, pp. 549–568. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26292920

Vermeulen, Timotheus, and Robin van den Akker. "Notes on Metamodernism." *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, vol. 2, 2010. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mzh&AN=2014403075&site=eds-live.

Vine, Steve. "The Entropic Sublime in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49." *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1/2, 2011, pp. 160–177. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41328517

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse-Five.* Dial Press Trade Paperbacks, 2009.

Williams, William. *Spring and All.* New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2011.

Wood, James. "Human, All Too Inhuman." *The New Republic*, 24 July 2000, https://newrepublic.com/article/61361/human-inhuman

Wrethed, Justin. "'Where danger is, there rescue grows': Technology, Time, and Dromology in Tom McCarthy's *C*". *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings* 5(3): 3, pp. 1–28. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.26