

THE MEDIA ASSEMBLAGE: THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY NOVEL IN DIALOGUE  
WITH FILM, TELEVISION, AND NEW MEDIA

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

At several moments during the twentieth-century, novelists have been made acutely aware of the novel as a medium due to declarations of the death of the novel. Novelists, at these moments, have found it necessary to define what differentiates the novel from other media and what makes the novel a viable form of art and communication in the age of images. At the same time, writers have expanded the novel form by borrowing conventions from these newer media. I describe this process of differentiation and interaction between the novel and other media as a “media assemblage” and argue that our understanding of the development of the novel in the twentieth century is incomplete if we isolate literature from the other media forms that compete with and influence it.

The concept of an assemblage describes a historical situation in which two or more autonomous fields interact and influence one another. On the one hand, an assemblage is composed of physical objects such as TV sets, film cameras, personal computers, and publishing companies, while, on the other hand, it contains enunciations about those objects such as claims about the artistic merit of television, beliefs about the typical audience of a Hollywood blockbuster, or academic discussions about canonicity. These disparate forces that make up an assemblage are in constant flux as new participants in the assemblage destabilize old relationships and create new ones. Through the use of assemblage theory I am able to look at both the material circumstances that differentiate novels from newer media and the enunciations that have sought to define new territory for fiction apart from film, television, or new media.

Each of the first three chapters focuses on a distinct medium at a different moment in the twentieth century. Chapter One examines novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Nathanael West written in the 1930s. Both novelists spent time working in Hollywood, hoping to make money

writing for the rapidly growing film industry. West and Fitzgerald criticize Hollywood even though both were attracted to film and developed writing techniques influenced by their time working as screenwriters. Both writers use a beautiful but shallow young woman as their symbolic representation of Hollywood, a woman who entices and angers the male protagonist. Such an ambivalent and sexist response, I argue, corresponds to the conflicted feelings of the novelists towards the new medium of film and its potential effects on the novel.

Chapter Two pairs two novels from the middle of the century, Richard Yates's domestic novel *Revolutionary Road* and Jerzy Kosinski's satire *Being There*. Both novels bemoan the superficial quality of much of American life post World War II, manifesting their critique in attacks on television and its negative effects on the family and politics, respectively. Both novels connect television to an emasculated male protagonist, arguing that television contributes to a passive and unsophisticated populace. Yet, television's ability to instantly connect millions of people through a common experience and blur the distinction between private and public life proves attractive to the characters and influential on the writing styles of the novels.

Chapter Three brings together a print novel and a hypertext novel from the mid-90s. Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2* asks whether a computer can be trained to impersonate an English graduate student while Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* brings to life the monstrous female companion from *Frankenstein* as the hypertext novel itself. Both texts discuss the future of the material medium of print through the metaphor of the female body. The protagonist of *Galatea* interweaves his sexual feelings with his love of the printed page, reversing the gender associations made by Fitzgerald and West sixty years earlier, while *Patchwork Girl* criticizes the association of the female body with hypertext. Interestingly, the print novel overloads the reader

with information and allusions that require frequent references to the internet while the hypertext novel depends on allusions to print to give structure and stability to its malleable electronic form.

The final chapter moves away from analyzing individual media assemblages to looking at how media assemblages change over time. I organize Don DeLillo's expansive novel *Underworld* into three separate assemblages active during the Cold War. In so doing I go against the tendency in the scholarship to read DeLillo's novel as critical of or influenced by some monolithic entity known as "the mass media." Instead, the complex relationships at work in not just one static media assemblage but the dynamic shifts between assemblages correspond to the complicated paranoia evoked by the Cold War.

After analyzing how one novel attempts to better understand the past through changes in the American media assemblage, my epilogue examines how a number of science fiction novels, imagine the media assemblages of the future. As these novels describe a future after the hypothetical death of print they reveal that a media assemblage is much more than a set of technologies, but instead a web of fears, ideologies, and definitions that describe the role of the novelist within the culture.

Each of the selected texts makes media a significant part of the narrative, but ultimately the ideas produced by placing the novel within a media assemblage should be useful for better understanding any novel's position in relation to the dynamic mediascape of its time. Even writers that do not specifically address the status of the novel or acknowledge the influence of other media write within a media context that defines conventions of realism, style, and content, and the relationship of the novel to other media becomes interwoven with definitions of art, history, and gender. Reading the twentieth century novel in relationship to other media is not one critical option among many but, rather, an essential reconfiguration of the field.

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## **Introduction: The Novel Medium**

### **The Novel is Both Young and Old**

Mikhail Bakhtin opens his essay on the study of the novel as a literary genre, “Epic and Novel,” with the observation that “the novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted. The forces that define it as a genre are at work before our very eyes: the birth and development of the novel as a genre takes place in the full light of the historical day. The generic skeleton of the novel is still far from having hardened, and we cannot foresee all its plastic possibilities” (3). For Bakhtin the novel is different from all previous literary genres (in particular the epic) because its more recent birth means it continues to incorporate other genres and develop both its form and conventions. While the formats of other genres were developed and codified centuries ago before being passed down to those of us living in the present, the novel remains open-ended and malleable. We do not just analyze the novel form, then, but instead we help shape it, for the novel, unlike the epic with its concern for the ancient past, “reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making” (7).

Such an analogy – novel as growing child – is difficult to reconcile with one of the most pervasive descriptions of the novel in the twentieth century, namely the novel as a medium on the verge of death. To be fair Bakhtin’s article was first written in 1941 and, thus, predates the rise of television in the 1950s, a cultural shift most often associated with the decline of the novel. Jerome Klinkowitz introduces his study of the 1960s American novel by observing “It must feel strange indeed to be an emerging novelist when the novel has just died” (2). Alvin Kernan’s *The Death of Literature* argues that “Television and other forms of electronic communication have increasingly replaced the printed book, especially its idealized form, literature” (3). Leslie A. Fiedler titles an essay “The Death and Rebirth of the Novel” in which the high-art novel passes

away only to be reborn through hybridization with film. Wilson Dizard, Jr.'s 1994 overview of new media, *Old Media New Media*, titles its chapter on print "Gutenberg's Last Stand?" and Peter Schneck jokes that "the novel (and for that matter, the author) have been declared dead so many times over the past four or five decades that literary history almost assumed the form of an endless necrologue" (65).

The idea of death does not mean the same thing in each of these examples, and some of them cite claims of the death of the novel only to reject such conjecture, but we can at least acknowledge that the narrative of the novel as an older media form struggling to stay relevant in the twentieth century has been a firmly established part of popular and academic discussion for several decades. In fact such fears date back even before Bakhtin's essay. F. Scott Fitzgerald lamented that Hollywood would render novelists "archaic" ("Handle" 78), and the director of the Denver Art Association declared in 1922, "The pictures are driving literature off the parlor table" (qtd. in Cohen 6). The death of the novel has also been declared for more aesthetic reasons. John Barth argues in "The Literature of Exhaustion" that the age of the novel is ending due to having nothing original to write about except the lack of something to write about, while Roland Barthes declares in "Writing and the Novel" that the verb form and point of view conventions of the novel are a product of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie and in need of replacement. Questions about the cultural conventions of the novel and questions about the material limitations of the novel are not easy to disentangle, as I will argue throughout, but at this point we can simply note that both Barth and Barthes hope that a new aesthetic form of the novel will emerge rather than declaring the novel mortally wounded at the hands of a newer medium as most other claims of the death of the novel have done. The death of the novel most often refers to a decline in the number of people willing to spend their time and money reading a novel, often

because they prefer to spend that time and money on the movies, television, or communicating via computer. Eugene Goodheart would express these concerns not just for the novel but for the entire profession of literary studies in 1999:

The most serious threat to literature comes from popular or mass culture, supported by the ever-increasing power of technology. If college-age students prefer to watch television to reading, and if, as the propagandists for new technology tell us, the computer with its exponentially increasing power to deliver information is where the educational action is, there may be little hope for the serious study of serious literature. (103)

Goodheart's concern for the death of "serious study of serious literature" at the hands of television and computers highlights his belief that the death of the novel is less due to the sophistication and formal possibilities found in contemporary writing than to the popularity and usability of print in an electronic age. This same distinction can be found in one of the earliest scholarly obituaries for the novel, Jose Ortega y Gasset's 1925 *Ideas sobre la Novela* (*Notes on the Novel*), which begins with the sentence "Publishers complain that novels do not sell well" (57) and later points out that "I believe the genre of the novel, if it is not yet irretrievably exhausted, has certainly entered its last phase" (60). Ortega y Gasset does not directly credit the film industry for a decline in novel sales, but his argument that novelists need to abandon storytelling and allusion for direct description of interesting characters is first illustrated by a reference to "certain American films" (66) before moving on to Dostoevsky.

How does one explain the discrepancy between the claim that the novel continues to adapt itself to the modern world in which it was born and the consistent cries that the modern world is slowly rendering the novel obsolete? Bakhtin's characterization of the novel as the only literary genre born and developed since the rise of industrialization is similar to the thesis put forth in Ian Watt's seminal study, *The Rise of the Novel*. Watt argues that the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding emerged due to the "favourable conditions in the literary and social

situation” (9) in eighteenth-century England, namely the changes in the tastes and composition of the reading public caused by the rise of the middle-class. Social conditions, such as the increase in leisure time for middle- and upper-class women, contributed to the popularity of the novel, and the form and content of the novel – individualistic characters and realistic descriptions of the present day – reflected the concerns of the eighteenth-century reading public.

Both Bakhtin and Watt differentiate the novel from other literary forms based on its relationship to industrialized Western society. Yet, Watt locates the origins of the novel in the early eighteenth century while Bakhtin, two centuries later, speaks of the novel as an undeveloped genre. Many of the values of the Industrial Revolution still linger today, but two centuries of rapid social change and technological advancement is surely more than enough time for the novel to move out of the infant stage. The titles of the two pieces, however, point to a difference of focus: Watt seeks to describe the “rise of the novel” while Bakhtin is interested in developing a “methodology for the study of the novel.” Though Watt analyzes the novels of Richardson, Fielding, and Defoe as important works of literature, his object of study is the novel as an increasingly popular genre. Bakhtin, on the other hand, expresses his concern with the novel as a genre for literary study when he claims “the novel has no canon of its own, as do other genres” (3). Bakhtin writes of the novel in the twentieth century and, hence, of the novel after the great experimentation with form associated with high modernism and the acceptance of the novel as an object of scholarly study. As a popular genre the novel had solidified itself as a commodity produced and consumed by the general public, but as an object of literary study produced and consumed by academics it was still young and unformulated. The death of the novel and the growth of the novel, then, might not be describing the same novel. Ortega y Gasset makes a similar point near the end of his essay on the decline of the novel: “the novel is

one of the few fields that may still yield illustrious fruits, more exquisite perhaps than were ever garnered in previous harvests. As a routine production, as an exploitable mine, the novel may be finished. The large veins, accessible to any diligent hand, are worked out. What remains are hidden deposits and perilous ventures into the depths where, perchance, the most precious crystals grow” (99). The novel is both worn out and still fertile: worn out as popular medium but still fertile as a literary genre that produces exquisite examples of high-art.

The difference between the novel as a medium for popular entertainment and the novel as a genre of literary art is clearest in two of Henry James’s most famous essays. In “The Art of Fiction” (1884) James attempts to formulate a theory of the novel as a work of art, arguing that the genre is “*naïf*” in comparison to the other arts, only recently escaping the commonplace that “a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it” (4). Some novels, according to James, aspire to be art, though as a literary genre the novel is young and still developing its standards and boundaries. Fifteen years later, James would offer a forecast for the genre in “The Future of the Novel.” Here he expresses concern for the novel although he recognizes that “The book ... is almost everywhere” (30). In fact it is precisely the popularity of the novel that concerns James: “The high prosperity of fiction has marched, very directly, with another ‘sign of the times,’ the demoralization, the vulgarization of literature in general, the increasing familiarity of all such methods of communication, the making itself supremely felt, as it were, of the presence of the ladies and children – by whom I mean, in other words, the reader irreflective and uncritical” (34). In 1884 the novel was a naïve art just learning to walk while in 1899 it was a genre at a moment of crisis, overwhelmed by its own success, a success, it should be noted, characterized by its popularity with women.

The twentieth-century American novel is part of a genre of literature still developing and changing and experimenting with form and content. It is one of the youngest of literary genres and one that was not taken entirely seriously as an object of academic study until the twentieth century. In a short time it became “the leading hero in the drama of literary history” (Bakhtin 7), scholars established a canon of great works within the genre, and novel writing became a sustainable profession for many authors. At the same time, the twentieth-century American novel is part of a medium, print, that has been established for some time (computers and other technology have changed the way books get written and published but the ultimate form of the codex would be recognizable to Gutenberg) and that has been pronounced an endangered species numerous times throughout the century. It is a popular medium that relies on a mass audience, a mass audience that more and more has turned to newer media for entertaining and enlightening narratives. It is young and old, developing and dying, culturally relevant and obsolete, elastic and limited, art and mass culture.

Is it possible to study the twentieth-century American novel in both of these guises at the same time? To analyze the formal experimentations and advancements of a genre of literature still relatively young and malleable and at the same time to understand the novel as a medium of communication defined by technological limitations and ideological associations? In short can one analyze how the novel has developed in response to its own demise? To some extent, of course, these two poles – the formal and the cultural – have been the boundaries of literary study throughout the twentieth century. David Kirby offers a synopsis of the history of twentieth-century literary criticism as “include[ing] both theory and poetics in varying proportion” (103). From New Criticism to New Historicism to feminism and Marxism and debates about the canon, the study of the novel has always included some close-reading of a

novel's form and some analysis of the novel as a product of a particular cultural milieu. For a more specific example of addressing both the novel as popular medium and the novel as aesthetic object one can turn to Mark McGurl's description of the dialectical relationship between the popular and the literary in his book, *The Novel Art*. He connects the emergence of the art-novel to the novels and essays of Henry James and the self-conscious attempts by modernists to differentiate their art-novels from the popular novel and the mass audience it had built for over a century. The very existence of the art-novel, according to McGurl, depends on the popular novel as its other. Such a dialectical relationship interweaves the history of the art-novel with the history of the popular novel; it does not, however include the emergence of other popular media, the primary catalysts for claims of the death of the novel as they compete with the novel both as a marketable commodity and as a medium of communication.

In this study I argue that various ideas in media theory can be successfully applied to understanding the twentieth-century American novel in a way that not only bridges the gap between the novel as a literary genre and the novel as a popular medium, but eliminates the gap altogether, making technology and narrative part of the same complex interaction. Certainly a number of scholars have written on film and literature in particular, but no study exists that puts forth an overarching terminology and methodology for apprehending the shifting relationships between the novel and other media over the course of the entire twentieth century. By introducing other media into our conception of the novel's development we can address the novel as high art, the use of formal experimentation, cultural constructions of gender and the public, the effects of technological change, ideological critique, and the role of literature in an age of images, all as part of one interwoven relationship rather than as Balkanized approaches.

## Adaptation Studies as Analogy

Before discussing the particular terms and theories I will employ in my readings of several twentieth-century novels, I would like to illustrate the potential paradigm shift my argument represents by looking at a related field of study, namely the study of cinematic adaptations of literary novels. The relevance of adaptation to the problem I have identified should be clear: adaptation studies explicitly analyzes the relationship between novels and films and attempts to form a theory on the process and effects of transforming a work of literature into another popular medium. The gaps between the literary and the popular, between the print novel and a competing medium *are* the objects of study. From the close study of that object our cultural definitions of high art, the effects of technological change, the formal experiments of both authors and *auteurs*, and the roles of different modes of production become salient topics.

Almost every recent book on the study of adaptation has acknowledged George Bluestone's 1957 study, *Novels into Films*, as the foundational text in the field. Modeled on Gotthold Lessing's *Laocoon*, an essay on the essential differences between painting and poetry, Bluestone argues that a true translation of a work of literature into film is impossible because of the differences between the two media. Just as Lessing wrote that poetry is extended in time while painting is extended in space, Bluestone begins a section titled "Of Time and Space" by arguing "Any comparative analysis of novel and film reverts, finally, to the way in which consciousness absorbs the signs of both language and photographed image" (45). The novel is composed of language and the film of images and recognition of this material difference first and foremost should shape any act of analysis. Midway through his introduction, Bluestone discusses the differences in audience and production between film and novel, expanding his comparison to include cultural rather than just formal differences. This move, however, is brief

and largely serves only to point out that novels are consumed by an educated middle-class and written by individuals less concerned with the marketplace (a description that would seem to ignore a large portion of novel readers and writers) than the collaborative production of films for mass audiences. Though Bluestone describes film as an art and claims to be interested in the limitations of both media, the language he uses (“abandonment of ‘novelistic’ elements” [viii]) and description of the adaptation process (“we often find that the film adapter has not even read the book” [62]) suggests an inherent judgment of filmmakers for damaging the artistry of the novel. His ultimate conclusion is that true adaptation is impossible and filmmakers are best off not even attempting it, but since that is unlikely to happen he hopes a greater awareness of the essential differences between the two media will allow audiences to judge adapted films as distinct works from their literary progenitors.

Although Bluestone acknowledges that film and novels share a narrative form, that both involve making an audience “see” a fictional world, that adaptations often have a profoundly positive effect on sales of the novel, that both depend on a marketplace, that both can be described as art, and that both involve writing at some stage, he argues that the formal differences as well as the novel’s longer history of artistic refinement render their relationship minimal at best. Little was written for the next three decades to expand the field or displace Bluestone’s assumptions. In 1977 Bruce Kavin’s *Faulkner and Film* took an in-depth look at the multiple attempts to adapt Faulkner’s novels to the screen, ultimately concluding “that those films which set out to ‘bring Faulkner to the screen’ failed to do so because they rejected both Faulkner’s techniques and the ‘metaphysics of time’ that ... inspired and justified those techniques” (145). A 1981 article by Seymour Chatman, “What Novels Can Do That Film Can’t (and Vice Versa),” attempts to answer the question posed by its title by focusing on the difficulty

of translating point of view and description from print to screen, reducing the two media to their material conditions in order to determine the impassable barrier that separates them. A 1985 book, *Made into Movies: From Literature to Film*, by Stuart McDougal begins by stating “Every art form has distinctive properties resulting from its medium; a filmmaker must recognize the unique characteristics of each medium before transforming a story into film” and that “By examining some of the principal elements shared by literature and narrative films, we can understand better the unique characteristics of each” (3-4). The rise of post-structural theories in the eighties began to shift discussions of adaptation away from just formal translation, but as late as 1997 James Griffith’s book, *Adaptations as Imitations*, critiques Bluestone’s definition of fidelity and the a priori assumptions about what film can and cannot do only to replace it with an inductive approach to adaptations that, nevertheless, still limits itself primarily to formal choices.

What is the alternative to the analogy of translation? What else can one consider besides the technical means by which a filmmaker reproduces the formal qualities of the novel he or she is adapting? In a 1984 book on film theory, Dudley Andrew argues:

It is time for adaptation studies to take a sociological turn. How does adaptation serve the cinema? What conditions exist in film style and film culture to warrant or demand the use of literary prototypes? Although adaptation may be calculated as a relatively constant volume in the history of cinema, its particular function in any moment is far from constant. The choices of the mode of adaptation and of prototypes suggest a great deal about the cinema’s sense of its role and aspirations from decade to decade. (104)

Andrew moves adaptation studies away from formal questions and towards the specific institutional and cultural conditions in which an adaptation takes place, connecting the choices made in an act of adaptation to the shifting role of cinema within the culture throughout the century. Andrew argues that the study of adaptation is not just the study of certain formal characteristics and how they are translated to a new medium, but the ever-changing relationship between novel and film. It is just such a shift in focus I am proposing for the study of the novel

as a medium interacting with other media. One finds further examples of this change in adaptation studies in the final decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. In her 1985 book, *Double Exposure*, Joy Gould Boyum notes that the emergence of television in the 1950s shifted the definition of mass culture and the film industry reshaped itself as an art form. She then points out that “One problem with determining the ‘essence’ of a film is that it’s not only an art ... but also a medium like print – and one that, among its other uses, can serve to record the other arts” (12). Though Boyum is interested in the adaptation of novels into films, she still notes that both media exist in a world where television also exists and the popularity of television has an effect on how we characterize film and print. In other words adaptation studies must not only consider the relationship between novel and film but between film and television as well. She also draws attention to the distinction between “art” and “medium” and the need to consider both when discussing novels and films. John Orr’s introduction to a 1992 collection, *Cinema and Fiction*, begins with the statement that “from 1930 onwards cinema and fiction have always closely intertwined” (1). Presumably 1930 is selected due to the rapid introduction of sound technology in Hollywood, though I will argue that film and the novel have been intertwined from the moment a film was shown on screen. Nevertheless, Orr’s use of “intertwined” offers a much more complex image of the relationship between the two media than one of film borrowing content and cultural capital from novels. Later he makes the much more revolutionary claim that “All modern fiction ... is a form of writing which has an awareness of the power of the moving image” (4). Though the subject of the collection is adaptation, Orr argues that film transformed all fiction, regardless of the intentions of the author or subject matter of the novel. Once American culture included movies as a popular activity, writing a novel would be permanently altered. Each of the above critics

describes the study of adaptations as not only the study of what makes films and novels different, but also the study of the overlapping histories of film and the novel and how each medium's role within the culture has changed over time. In so doing they bring together material and formal qualities with cultural and ideological qualities.

Robert Stam summarizes the changes to the field of adaptation studies in his introduction to the 2005 collection, *Literature and Film*. Stam spells out the problems with early theories, including “the dichotomous thinking that presumes a bitter rivalry between film and literature ... seen as a Darwinian struggle to the death rather than a dialogue offering mutual benefits” (4). It is precisely the assumption that natural selection will lead one medium to dominate a culture to the detriment of others that encourages fears of the death of the novel and subsequent dismissals of adaptations as unworthy of the literature they adapt. In place of old concerns with formal translation between media and aesthetic judgments of quality based on fidelity, Stam encourages scholars in adaptation studies to take into consideration the context of technological advances, contemporary ideas about race, gender, and art, and the vastly different modes of production of the two media. He then ends with the bold statement that “almost all films can be seen in some ways as ‘adaptations’” (45). Just as almost any American novel written in the twentieth century will be on some level aware of the techniques, connotations, and cultural impact of film, almost every film produced will at the least involve the act of transforming a written script into images and at the most borrow intertextual references, narrative strategies, content, and an aspiration to high art from literature. In short, the act of adaptation is merely one specific example of a vast web of interactions between the novel and film throughout the twentieth century.

In fifty years adaptation studies has developed from formal questions about how film can or cannot reproduce the effects of great novels, to a complex spectrum of questions about the

relationship between film and novel on formal, material, and cultural levels. The novels that I analyze in chapters one and two have all been made into films, and I look closely at differences between the two versions for Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*, however, my primary interest in the history of adaptation studies is as a model for expanding how we discuss the relationship between novels and other media. Can we think of the novel's relationships to film, television, and computers as historical and cultural and malleable rather than simply material or formal? Can we understand the cyclic concerns about the "death of the novel" as particular articulations of the novel's shifting place among popular media rather than as eulogies for a medium that is nearly obsolete? I read individual novels as particularly clear examples of how all novels written at a particular moment participate in and are influenced by the relationships between novels and other media in the hope of developing a new methodology for understanding the novel as both a developing genre and an established medium.

### **The Media Assemblage**

In order to organize my readings of a number of novelists from throughout the twentieth century, I propose the term "media assemblage" as a structuring concept. An assemblage is one of many provocative terms employed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their book *A Thousand Plateaus* in order to understand how social entities function. Deleuze and Guattari do not present a clear theory of how assemblages work, but invoke the term throughout the 500-page text whenever it helps elaborate other terms such as "strata," "body without organs," or "machine." However, in 2006 philosopher Manuel DeLanda gathered the numerous fragments on assemblages in *A Thousand Plateaus* and other of Deleuze's writings into what he describes as an "assemblage theory." DeLanda's *A New Philosophy of Society* lays out the theory and suggests examples of its value to the study of social relationships.

So what is an assemblage? In short it is a means of understanding how wholes are constructed of parts and describing the interactions that occur both between parts within the same whole as well as between the part and the whole. DeLanda contrasts his assemblage theory to the “organismic metaphor” (8). The organismic metaphor describes the identity of a part by its function within the whole, just as in the human body each organ has a particular function to maintain the health of the whole body. The identity of the human heart is entirely determined by its contribution to pumping blood and keeping the body alive. Remove the heart from the body and the heart loses any identity as it no longer has a function, not to mention that the body itself will cease to work. Deleuze and DeLanda describe this as a “relation of interiority,” a relationship between parts determined entirely by their function within the whole. In contrast, assemblages are composed of “relations of exteriority” in which each part is autonomous. The identity of the part is not determined by its essential function within the whole. Though the part might develop a function based on its relationship with other parts, that function is historically contingent and would have been different had a different assemblage been formed. So, for example, an organization is an assemblage of people and rules and information and actions. Each person within the organization might have a function, but that function is not a result of the essence of the person but rather the historically contingent network of people who came together to form that organization at that time. The same person could leave and join a different organization and take on an entirely new function.

Deleuze and DeLanda describe the different parts within an assemblage as existing along two axes. The first axis describes whether the part is material or expressive. An assemblage, then, is formed from relationships between material entities (human bodies, technology, buildings, etc.) and expressions about those material entities (laws, language, beliefs, ideology,

social customs). The second axis describes whether the part reterritorializes or deterritorializes the assemblage. In other words does the part function to stabilize the homogeneity of the assemblage or destabilize it? Because a part is autonomous and not defined by its function it can both stabilize and destabilize the whole at the same time. For instance, a member of a political party could stabilize the party by voting in favor of all its issues while destabilizing the party by engaging in scandalous behavior.

The final point to consider in regards to assemblages is that once the parts are assembled to form a whole, the whole has an ontological reality and can then influence the parts. To return to the political example, an individual member of the party helps shape the platform of the party, but once that platform is established it can then exert influence on how the individual member acts and votes. Assemblages, then, offer a means of understanding the complex interactions between the micro and macro levels of social entities, rejecting the assumption that parts only have identity due to their function within the whole as well as the idea that large social categories such as “the state” or “the media” are only abstractions used to refer to millions of individuals acting on their own. Instead, assemblage theory offers a method for understanding the multifarious relationships between entities that contribute to an overarching whole and how that whole, once constructed, influences the future actions of the individual parts.

DeLanda admits that his version of assemblage theory is based on Deleuze’s use of the term but is not meant to strictly replicate Deleuzian philosophy. In the same way, my concept of a media assemblage is closely connected to DeLanda’s theory, but my goal is less to apply his theory *in toto* to literature and media than to create a valuable terminology that illuminates the literature-media relationship. For example DeLanda’s interest in social relationships means the human body is often the most fundamental organism in each of the assemblages he describes.

Thus, media, which allow human bodies to interact across time and space, are most often labeled destabilizing forces within a social assemblage. Since the assemblage I wish to elaborate is composed of media, however, this same assumption about the destabilizing force of mediation would not apply (though human bodies remain an important component). Likewise, DeLanda's particular interest in how large social entities develop and function means that it is often important to label every component of the assemblage stabilizing or destabilizing, and material or expressive . For each of the novels I examine I will point out both formal and expressive contributions to the media assemblage and stabilizing or destabilizing forces in the novel, but the exact nature of each component is less important than an overall understanding of how novels participate in and are shaped by the assemblage.

I will be using DeLanda's assemblage theory to argue that there is a social entity that can best be described as a media assemblage. This media assemblage is composed of all the different media active at any particular moment in history. Terms such as "mass media" and "mediascape" already exist to group together numerous media, but frequently these terms apply only to electronic and visual media and overlook the numerous differences between media to instead describe one monolithic entity. I believe "media assemblage" accentuates the autonomous nature of each medium within the assemblage and draws attention to the newness of my approach. This media assemblage includes media such as newspapers, television, film, computers, radio, painting, sculpture or anything else used to communicate, but it also includes the popular expectations and uses of those media, the laws regulating each medium, cultural connotations applied to each medium, the technology used and changed to create the medium and who has access to that technology (race, gender, class), the formal conventions of each medium and how it finances itself, individual works and creators within the medium who push

the boundaries of the medium or make the medium relevant to the masses, how the medium is discussed and studied within academic circles, and the interactions between individual media, whether symbiotic, parasitic, or antagonistic.

Given DeLanda's interest in micro and macro interactions, he would likely describe an individual novel as an assemblage on its own, consisting of allusions, authorial intentions, ideology, words, style, paper, and ink, and each novel as part of an assemblage known as "the novel," and "the novel" as part of the assemblage known as "literature," and "literature" as part of the assemblage of print, and print as part of the media assemblage. Such a multi-tiered assemblage of assemblages is useful for understanding the complexity of the media assemblage and the relative autonomy of each component within the assemblage. It also helps to explain how the same component can stabilize one assemblage while destabilizing another. For example modernist novels that seem to emulate film techniques might simultaneously stabilize the "novel assemblage" as a literary genre open to experimentation while destabilizing the "media assemblage" by reconfiguring the perceived differences between print and film. Again, DeLanda's sociological interests necessitate clear differentiations between levels while I am more concerned with establishing the existence of the overarching assemblage even if the assemblages within assemblages remain an important consideration. The list of elements that make up the media assemblage in the previous paragraph is far from exhaustive, yet even it would demand endless discussion. I will focus my attention on establishing the viability of the media assemblage as a means of understanding the novel and its interactions with new media as they emerge. In particular I will discuss the interactions with film in chapter one, with television in chapter two, and with computer-based media in chapter three. One could apply the same approach to understanding the relationship between film and television or how the relationship

between film and the novel changed once television emerged. For example Stuart McDougal's 1985 book calls film "the youngest of the arts" (3), obviously excluding television from that category but including film and the novel. Similarly, Dizard's *Old Media New Media* argues for a regrouping of media in its very title by focusing on the similarities between print, film, and television as mass media as opposed to the computer. Again, the endless permutations of relationships within a media assemblage could prove fruitful for research, but I have limited myself to pairing the novel with one medium from each historical moment, accentuating the importance of these interactions for literary studies.

### **The Value of the Media Assemblage Approach**

The first three chapters will establish that a media assemblage exists, point out differences between media assemblages at different moments in the twentieth century due to the reconfiguration of relationships among media, and explain the significance of these observations for understanding how references to newer media also say something about the perceived state of the novel. Chapter one will examine two novels from the 1930s, *Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *The Day of the Locust* by Nathanael West, both written by novelists who spent time as screenwriters in Hollywood and subsequently wrote novels about the dream factory to the west. Chapter two includes a novel set in the period frequently referred to as "The Golden Age of Television," when the new medium was rapidly proliferating throughout the growing suburbs and still establishing the type of programming it would include, and the conflict faced by the central couple in Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* becomes symbolically intertwined with feelings about television. The second novel in chapter two, Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There*, was written in the 1970s at a moment when network television was a firmly established part of daily life in America, which seemed to give it the power to replace reality for the main character.

Two novels published in 1995 as the internet was becoming a commercial and popular force make up chapter three. Richard Powers's *Galatea 2.2* takes claims of the death of the novel very seriously by telling the story of a computer program attempting to learn to read the canon. In the second half of the chapter I discuss a hypertext novel by Shelley Jackson, *Patchwork Girl*, in order to examine the effects of transforming the novel from print to computer screen. The concept of the media assemblage will build with each chapter, though the specific media assemblage at work will need to be reexamined for each new moment. Also connecting the three chapters together will be the use of gender as an important component of each media assemblage. As I move from the 1930s to the 1990s I will point out how historical conceptions of femininity and masculinity have altered with each new assemblage to define and differentiate the novel in relation to other media, offering a prime example of how an assemblage includes more than just the technological capabilities of various media but the cultural associations of the media as well.

The idea that the media assemblage is in constant flux will be the focus of the fourth chapter and my analysis of a single novel, Don DeLillo's *Underworld*. Covering fifty years of American history in over 800 pages, DeLillo's expansive novel describes the media assemblage at different moments in history and connects the media assemblage to his arguments about American politics during the Cold War. Deleuze and DeLanda also allow for assemblages to change with time (DeLanda: "The identity of any assemblage at any level of scale is always the product of a process ... and it is always precarious, since other processes ... can destabilize it" [28]), but I will borrow a second concept to help explain the process. In 1999 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin argued for the term "remediation" as a means of understanding how older media and newer media interact. When a new medium emerges and becomes culturally

significant it often borrows formal techniques from older media in order to establish familiarity, while also differentiating itself from older media in order to trumpet its superiority for communication. For example the windows on a computer screen resemble the screens familiar to us in film and television, but the fact that we can work with multiple open windows at once helps proponents argue for the superiority of the computer for reflecting the complexity of the Information Age. In response an older medium will borrow formal techniques from new media to reestablish its relevance within the culture, while also arguing for greater authenticity in older media. So the newspaper *USA Today* borrows the graphical layout and snapshot approach to information found on the internet, but also accentuates the authority of print institutions over news on the internet. Ultimately, Bolter and Grusin argue that the history of media interactions is one of constantly shifting valuations and definitions of transparency and hypermediation. It is this back and forth shift in cultural values and definitions that makes remediation a complementary term to media assemblage.

The idea that media assemblages are constantly changing will be implicit in the movement of the opening three chapters, but the process and effects will not be spelled out until the fourth chapter, which ties the entire project together. This continuum from the 1930s to the 1990s is ultimately one of the advantages of the media assemblage approach. Rather than focus on how individual authors have skillfully translated techniques associated with other media into print or how a certain literary movement makes use of some form of mass media as a trope or symbol (modernism and film or postmodernism and television), I am arguing that all novels are written and read within an ever-shifting network of relationships among media. To argue such offers a means for articulating changes in the novel throughout the twentieth century. While much has been written about film in the novels of numerous modernist authors or the potential

changes computers will create for literature in the future, I have yet to encounter a study that ties these ideas together as part of one ongoing process. Previous attempts at understanding the importance of one new medium to a particular novel or novelist are valuable and often referenced in this project, but there is a great benefit to developing a terminology and method that can be applied diachronically to the study of the novel, a terminology and method that can conceivably be used even to study the novel prior to the twentieth century and which certainly can be used in the study of the novel after the twentieth century.

By considering the novel as part of a media assemblage, then, we can overcome the gap between understanding the novel as a young literary genre still open to change and development and the novel as part of an old medium that has gradually lost vitality throughout the twentieth century. The novel is, of course, both, but we have lacked a vocabulary for talking about both these characterizations at the same time. Because an assemblage consists of both material and expressive components, it brings together both medium and message. The fact that novels have traditionally taken the form of the codex is an essential characteristic to consider when studying the novel in the twentieth century, but so is what novels have said about other media. The print novel has not changed a great deal in terms of physical characteristics in the past century but the role of print in society has changed dramatically. When Bakhtin says the novel “is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review. Such, indeed, is the only possibility open to a genre that structures itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality” (39), we can now understand such changes and developments in the novel as, among other things, responses to the shifting media assemblage. In other words the concept of the media assemblage, with its inclusion of both material and expressive components, makes it possible to see stylistic and formal experimentation as a response to material circumstances. The

old medium and new forms are both part of the same overarching process of participating in the contemporary media assemblage.

Therefore, rather than refer to the novel as a genre of literature I will describe it as a medium throughout this project. There is danger of confusion in such a designation since most would consider the novel just one form that the medium of print takes. Or perhaps some would willingly describe the book as a separate medium from magazines and newspapers, but a print novel looks and functions almost exactly like a print non-fiction book or a print book of poetry, so how could one consider it a medium in and of itself? My reasoning is that when I discuss the medium of film or the medium of television I will be referring not only to the use of cameras and theatres and broadcast equipment and film stock but also to cultural prestige, audiences, expectations of content, and formal conventions. The media within a media assemblage are identified by their particular technology but also by their particular roles within the culture. With such an expanded definition of a medium, it should be clear that the novel would occupy a different place within a particular assemblage from a newspaper or a non-fiction book. A new term could perhaps have been chosen rather than redefining an old term, but describing the novel as a medium also draws attention to the primary contribution of my project to the study of the novel, namely the combination of media studies and literary close reading.

If I am going to consider the novel a distinct medium, should I not also consider different types of film or television or computer media as distinct? A documentary or art-film would occupy a different place in the assemblage than a Hollywood blockbuster. Certainly this is a possible direction for future research to take. In my particular readings I do not believe this is an issue. When Fitzgerald and West discuss film they are most often referring to those movies created in Hollywood and seen by millions. When Yates and Kosinski criticize television they

are describing network sitcoms and dramas rather than experimental video or live theatre broadcast by PBS. When novelists fear for the future health of the novel, it is at the hands of these popular versions of media. This is not to discount that further sub-divisions of media might be useful for a fuller understanding of any particular media assemblage, but rather to acknowledge the necessarily limited scope of this study.

Having defended my decision to refer to the novel as a distinct medium, I now, in a sense, must defend just the opposite. Within my close readings of the novels I will at times use textual references to newspapers, hand-written letters, literature, and other arts as support for my interpretations of these novels as responding to the emergence of newer media. Each of these references will make sense in context (for example newspapers, hand-written letters, and novels would all suffer similar threats of displacement by computer technology while theatre and novels would share a similar threat from the movies as a form of narrative entertainment), but as a general justification for this tactic I will argue, again, that the concept of a medium that I am employing includes not only specific physical attributes but the web of cultural associations attached to the medium. So while painting and the novel are different media, the association of the novel with high art in the 1930s warrants reading the use of painting in *The Day of the Locust* as a potential reference to the role of novels within the media assemblage.

The fact that cries of the “death of the novel” have been heard in some form throughout most of the twentieth century, yet novels are still written, published, read, and interpreted should at least offer some hope for the profession of literary studies amidst concerns about a “literacy crisis” or predictions of a “paperless society.” At the same time, the chapters of this study show that each time a new medium emerges and becomes part of the popular culture, new concerns arise about the role of the novel as the relationships within an already complex assemblage

become even more complicated. The Pandora's box of media is open, so to speak, and there's no going backwards as newer media are developed and popularized. Though I would argue that consideration of the novel as a medium within a media assemblage is a valuable and even necessary component of literary studies at any time, I would also argue that such an approach offers a particularly valuable means of keeping the study of the novel relevant in a world where so much of daily life is now interwoven with some form of media.

## Chapter One: The Art of the Future

### Film as an Art

In the June 1929 issue of *Close Up*, a British film journal that identified itself on its cover as “the only magazine devoted to film as an art” (Donald 3), Dorothy Richardson applauds the recent news that H.G. Wells had publicly endorsed film as “the art-form of the future” (Richardson 190). Richardson, a novelist, goes on to explain that the importance of Wells’s declaration is that the cultural power behind the famous writer’s words might yet convince audiences to reject the recent innovation of sound recording, an innovation that many contributors to *Close Up* believed would ruin the visual artistry of the medium of film. Richardson’s interpretation of Wells’s prediction is odd, however, in that he also admits “film’s power of excelling the written word.” She assures her readers that Wells must simply be overstating his case in order to convince us of the importance of film and then argues that film could never replace the novel for “film is a social art” while “Reading, all but reading aloud, is a solitary art” (191). Her proof that literature is hardly in danger? “What film,” she asks, “could supplant *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (recently translated, *All Quiet on the Western Front*).” One year later the recently formed Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences would name the Universal release *All Quiet on the Western Front* Best Picture.

Richardson’s distinction between an art one enjoys alone at home and an art one usually partakes in a theater full of people is worth noting (even more so in Chapter Two, when I discuss the collapse of public/private distinctions due to television), but her essays in *Close Up* and her own novels suggest that the boundaries between film and literature are not so solid. Before settling on the social art/solitary art dichotomy she first argues that “film to date has created more readers than it has destroyed” (190), and “In literature alone it [film] is creating a new

form” (191), suggesting, at least, a dynamic relationship between the two. She also admits that numerous American writers have “produced texts retrospectively labeled cinematographic,” a turn of phrase that is interesting in its choice of verb (“produced” being evocative of Hollywood), its choice of noun (“texts,” even without its poststructural connotations, suggests something different than the traditional “novel” or authoritative “literature”), its choice of adverb (“retrospectively” makes it unclear whether these novels were directly influenced by film or whether it is only their future readers who have been thusly altered), and in its choice of adjective (“cinematographic” literally means “writing in movement” and was the term often used to warrant calling film an art). Every word in her sentence troubles the clear separation of film and literature. Laura Marcus argues for the “centrality of a cinematic consciousness, as well as the relationship between city and cinema” in Richardson’s own novel, *Pilgrimage* (153). In Richardson’s other contributions to *Close Up*, she argues that captions and titles are just as essential to a good film, stating “Art and literature, Siamese twins making their first curtsy to the public in a script that was a series of pictures, have never yet been separated. In its uttermost abstraction art is still a word about life and literature never ceases to be pictorial” (165). She genders the film audience, writing of watching films on wash day with a theater full of weary wives, and she places this female audience in historical context as “upon the path [a contemplative relationship to high art] that men have reached through long centuries of effort and of thought” (176), a state men have reached partly through the reading and writing of novels. Rather than neatly separating film and literature, Richardson’s writings place the two media within a shifting mass of relationships, labels, and power struggles that include formal techniques, content, definitions of high art, the creation of audiences, connections to gender, historical change, conceptions of what artists do, the role of art in our lives, and the contribution

of media to maintaining or resisting oppression. In short, the relationship Richardson writes about between the novel and film is a media assemblage, a dynamic network of material forces and ideologies that both distinguish between autonomous media and link them together.

In this chapter I will focus on the debate about film as art as manifested in novels by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Nathanael West, two writers who decided to try their hands at screenwriting in order to fund their work as novelists, and the connection that forms between gender and definitions of art in the 1930s. Though pragmatic concerns about the potentially damaging effects of film viewing on women and children, the unethical behavior of Hollywood stars, and various legal issues dealing with copyright and patents were part of the dialogue on the burgeoning film industry in the first decades of the twentieth century, the question of whether or not film was art was just as hotly debated by film enthusiasts, cultural critics, and novelists.<sup>1</sup> Drama critic George Jean Nathan spoke for a large number of traditionalists in a 1921 essay when he claimed “They [the movies] have bought literature and converted it, by their own peculiar and esoteric magic, into rubbish. They have bought imaginative actors and converted them into face-makers and mechanical dolls. They have bought reputable authors and dramatists and have converted them into shamefaced hacks” (qtd. in Goldberg 20). One author bought by Hollywood, Theodore Dreiser, famously brought legal action against Paramount over the adaptation of his *An American Tragedy*. Dreiser sued the producers to stop the film version from being released as he feared it would damage his reputation as an artist by failing to achieve the standards of the novel. After a judge ruled against Dreiser on the grounds that Paramount was giving the public what it wanted, Dreiser angrily wrote an article proclaiming the decision “the end of art” (cited in Haberski 75).

Other novelists used Hollywood as fodder for popular novels, revealing “little faith in the movie business as a beneficial social enterprise” and using Hollywood “as a vehicle for cultural complaint, particularly in regard to the influence of Hollywood and the mass culture of the movies on American life and values” (Springer 10). One of the more innovative of these popular novels is *Merton of the Movies* by Harry Leon Wilson. Published in 1922, *Merton* details the rise of Merton Gill from small-town Illinois shop clerk to star of Hollywood slapstick comedies. The tension in the novel comes from the fact that Merton does not know he is acting in comedies and, in fact, detests such comedies as beneath the noble medium of film. The novel, therefore, critiques the idea of film as art by lampooning people such as Merton who believe it can do more than appeal to the lowest common denominator. At the same time it subtly reminds the reader that novels are held in higher regard by the culture in an early scene when Merton reads interviews with his favorite actors in a magazine and notes that each one is photographed in front of an expensive library of books while discussing the artistry of their craft.

Neither Dreiser nor Wilson directly criticizes film as a medium (and even Nathan admits that film could be used artistically), but rather as part of what Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno would later label the “Culture Industry,” the mass-produced culture that eliminates the critical distance from reality that high art is supposed to provide, instead becoming merely an extension of capitalism. Adorno is particularly harsh toward film, arguing that “Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art” (121), complaining of how “a Tolstoy novel is garbled in a film script” (122), and declaring “The sound film, far surpassing the theater of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience” (126). Each of these men argues that Hollywood cannot possibly create art while simultaneously appealing to the masses. True art creates distance from reality, whereas Hollywood films reproduce it. True art

challenges the audience, whereas Hollywood pleases it. True art is the expression of individual minds, whereas Hollywood is a machine or industry that produces pretty faces and familiar pictures.

It was the mechanical aspect of film that attracted many of its proponents, however. While the Hollywood production process was not necessarily defended, those who argued that film should be considered an important art form most often defended their views by referencing the possibilities of the camera. Kenneth Macpherson, the editor of *Close Up*, begins the first ever issue by admitting that the films of the past were terrible and had little to do with art, but that film as a medium “will probably turn into THE art,” surpassing all the other “[o]utworn mediums” because film was the medium with the “fewest limitations” (36). In later issues the poet H.D. echoes the idea that film is a “perfect medium” that will make other media obsolete (112). Hugo Münsterberg’s seminal text, *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, argues that film is the medium that most closely resembles the way the human mind works, and his condensed, layman’s version of his theory, published in *The Cosmopolitan* as “Why We Go to the Movies,” ends with a sentence that echoes the opinion of HG Wells: “This is truly the art of the future.” And Adorno’s friend Walter Benjamin argues that the camera allows film to remove the aura that once surrounded high art: “for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of a painter, since it offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment. And that is what one is entitled to ask from a work of art” (234).

The debate about film’s status as high art, then, involved a disagreement about whether the crass commercialism and mass audiences or the new possibilities for expression made possible by the camera and editing would define the new medium. In theory film offered new

techniques that some thought better reflected the modern mind, but in practice Hollywood churned out interchangeable starlets and scripts that appealed to audiences that cared little for critical art. This conflict is at the heart of how critics have attempted to understand the response of novelists to the rise of film. In his *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* Friedrich Kittler observes that “Since December 28, 1895 [the date of the first public film showing by the Lumière brothers], there has been one infallible criterion for high literature: it cannot be filmed” (248).<sup>2</sup> Modern writers responded to the invention of the film industry by shifting their focus to experimentation, wordplay, and psychological representations that would be difficult to reproduce on film (though many filmmakers have tried). Since critics of the new medium of film argued it excelled at creating passive audiences with representations of reality, the high art novel would henceforth demand active readers who recognized allusions and puns and do away with the conventions of literary realism.

Alan Spiegel’s *Fiction and the Camera Eye* exemplifies the opposite approach taken by critics, revealing how novelists utilized camera-like techniques in their writing rather than how they made their novels unfilmable. Spiegel observes the use of “adventitious detail,” “anatomy of motion,” “montage,” and “depthlessness” in both twentieth-century fiction and film, limiting the connections between film and literature to the formalist level. Though Kittler rarely discusses specific novels, it is likely he and Spiegel are describing the very same Modernist texts, one of them focusing on the challenge to Hollywood simplicity and the other on the excitement of new ways of representing reality.

Rather than side with one approach or another, I will argue that the rejection of Hollywood as inferior to the high art of the literary novel and the interest in film and its repertory of new techniques for expanding the possibilities of art were both components of the media

assemblage of the 1930s in which Fitzgerald and West participated. Closely examining *Tender is the Night* and *The Day of the Locust* reveals the tension between these oppositional pulls, and it is the inability to successfully reconcile the two impulses that leads to the employment of gender as a means of understanding and representing their feelings towards the new medium and its primary practitioner, the Hollywood studios.

**“[T]he most important and the most difficult subject for our time”: *Tender is the Night***

F. Scott Fitzgerald’s time in Hollywood has long interested his readers. This interest, though, seems at first to be out of proportion with the actual influence of Hollywood on Fitzgerald’s career. While he spent some brief time there in 1927 and 1931, the bulk of his Hollywood time, 1937-1940, came after the completion of his final novel, *Tender is the Night*, and resulted in only one screen credit for his years of script-writing (*Three Comrades*, MGM, 1938). Yet, these Hollywood years and the shorter dalliances that preceded them have become the subject of tremendous contention about how we ultimately read Fitzgerald the novelist, producing a broad spectrum of opinions. Initial assessments by those who knew or worked with Fitzgerald tended to regard the novelist and the medium of film a bad fit, but since at least the 1950s critics have sought to point out the integration of film technique into Fitzgerald’s great works of prose. Within this debate exist two distinct objects of study – Fitzgerald’s written work such as novels, stories and screenplays and Fitzgerald’s biography as revealed in accounting records, anecdotes, and personal essays. I propose that *Tender is the Night* allows us a unique combination of these objects for understanding Fitzgerald’s complex relationship to Hollywood. Published in 1934, *Tender is the Night* was written between Fitzgerald’s greatest literary success, *The Great Gatsby*, and his unfinished manuscript about a Hollywood producer, *The Last Tycoon*. By the time he began writing his final completed novel Fitzgerald had visited Hollywood and

made the optioning of his novels and stories an integral part of his yearly income, yet he had not yet taken the final step of becoming a full-time employee of the film industry. Finally, *Tender is the Night*, the story of a brilliant man slowly falling apart, was written during Fitzgerald's own darkest years as his reputation as a brilliant young novelist began to fade. This novel, then, represents a moment when the author had some insider knowledge of the industry along with an outsider's critique, a vested material interest in film along with a sense of himself as an artist who wrote novels and not screenplays, and a subject that if not outright biographical was at least very close to Fitzgerald's heart. The complexity of this relationship – Fitzgerald's simultaneous interest in Hollywood riches and techniques and rejection of Hollywood superficiality and claims to art – ultimately manifests itself in the troubling theme of incest that pervades *Tender is the Night*.

In his "A Note on Fitzgerald" John Dos Passos regrets the early death of his friend before he could finish *The Last Tycoon*, sure to be a "great novel" (339). More striking than the fact that Dos Passos felt *The Last Tycoon* would turn out to be a well-written novel is his opinion that the true greatness of the novel lies in its subject of Hollywood,

probably the most important and the most difficult subject of our time to deal with. Whether we like it or not it is in that great bargain sale of five and ten cent lusts and dreams that the new bottom level of our culture is being created. The fact that at the end of a life of brilliant worldly successes and crushing disasters Scott Fitzgerald was engaged so ably in a work of such importance proves him to have been the first-rate novelist his friends believed him to be. (343)

Not only is Hollywood an acceptable subject for a literary novel in the opinion of Dos Passos, but its choice by Fitzgerald confirms him as one of America's greatest novelists. This is an opinion, about *The Last Tycoon* and about Hollywood, completely rejected by Kenneth Eble in his biographical study of Fitzgerald. Eble sees *The Last Tycoon* as "a departure from Fitzgerald's previous work," a departure that would have ended up truly "second-rate" (148).

Eble admits that all we have of the novel is a fragment and so Fitzgerald very well could have drastically improved it before publication, but then questions “whether a great novel is likely to result from a documentary study, and particularly from one of such a limited and artificial world as Hollywood” (149). The influence of Hollywood on Fitzgerald’s style is praised by Wheeler Winston Dixon, who argues that a new, highly visual style of writing is evidenced in the unfinished novel, but bemoaned by Alan Margolies, who offers examples of several Fitzgerald short stories that “suffered further because they were written with an eye on sales to Hollywood” (65). The failure of these stories, for Margolies, was not just in their being hastily written in the hopes of immediate financial reward, but that their actual content betrayed Fitzgerald’s gifts as a writer by becoming overly concerned with action over dialogue and with impressive visual scenes over psychological development.

Fitzgerald, himself, seemed as unsure about the relationship between Hollywood and his novels as his critics and biographers. His letters and essays suggest a highly conflicted view of the artistic merits of the film industry, spanning from outright praise to total contempt. Most often cited is his eulogy for literature from “The Crack-Up” pieces, a series of essays detailing his own destruction as an artist. Fitzgerald famously mourns that

the novel, which at my maturity was the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion from one human being to another, was becoming subordinated to a mechanical and communal art that, whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of reflecting only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion. It was an art in which words were subordinate to images, where personality was worn down to the inevitable low gear of collaboration. As long past as 1930, I had a hunch that the talkies would make even the best selling novelist as archaic as silent pictures ... there was a rankling indignity, that to me had become an obsession, in seeing the power of the written word subordinated to another power, a more glittering, a grosser power. (“Handle” 78)

The bitterness here is hard to miss. Fitzgerald places the novel and the film in direct opposition to one another and worries that the latter will soon replace the former. The basis for this

differentiation is not merely the whims of popular taste or the ability to make a profit, but the very natures of the respective media – “the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion” as opposed to a medium “capable of reflecting only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion.” Of course condemning Hollywood for its superficiality was as common then as it is today, but Fitzgerald includes Russian montage filmmakers as well and sees little hope for an art that deals in images over words. All of which makes the passage highly quotable as possible evidence of Fitzgerald’s disdain for the audiences who were not buying his books and for the Hollywood machine that would eventually eat him up and reject him. In the third essay of the series, the ironic persona Fitzgerald adopts suggests he will smile like a “hopeful extra swept near the camera” (“Pasting” 83).<sup>3</sup> Not only does the sarcastic comparison reveal Fitzgerald’s disdain for the Hollywood system, but by referencing the smiling extra, stereotypically a young woman with little training in acting who hopes to be discovered and turned into a star, he seems to draw a strong distinction between the contemplative act of novel-writing and the superficial glamour of Hollywood film.

While his “Crack-Up” essays connect Hollywood and his personal depression, his earlier letters betray a different attitude. Looking to John Peale Bishop for advice on *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald asks him to write back with comments on whether “Chap I is like the elevated moments of D. W. Griffith” (“Letter to John” 258), suggesting that film provided a common artistic reference point within his circle of friends, that he saw value in some films, and that he acknowledged at an early age the influence of film on his writing style. Once his first novel was published to great acclaim, Fitzgerald described the whirlwind success as “the presses ... pounding out *This Side of Paradise* like they pound out extras in movies” (“Early” 88). Though this use of “extras” is hardly flattering, it does blur the distinctions between the book and

film trades at the point of mass production. Finally, after the success of *Paradise*, with his career as a novelist rising meteorically, Fitzgerald claimed he was “working like a dog on some movies” (“Letter to Edmund” 259), and a large portion of his income at this time came from selling the movie rights to *The Beautiful and the Damned* (a novel with numerous negative references to the mercantile film industry) to Warner Brothers.

It is hard to discern a sustained pattern in Fitzgerald’s attitude towards film and Hollywood over the course of his life. The “Crack-Up” essays come near the end of his career while most of the enthusiastic references to film are found in much earlier writing, suggesting, perhaps, a growing disillusionment with the film industry in large part due to his own dwindling success as a novelist.<sup>4</sup> Yet, it is early in his career that he writes *The Beautiful and Damned* with its negative portrayal of Hollywood and the end that he writes *The Last Tycoon* with its vision of a Hollywood reborn as art due to the influence of producer Monroe Stahr. It is quite tempting to see Fitzgerald’s extended years in Hollywood as the ultimate degradation for an artist as he was forced to work for the very medium he had bemoaned in the “Crack-Up” essays, but biographical evidence suggests he hardly treated the time period as a degradation, and his financial records reveal that in one way or another he had been working for Hollywood for most of his career.<sup>5</sup> Rather than try to determine which side Fitzgerald was on – Did he resent the popularity of Hollywood or attempt to participate in it? Did the art of moving images inspire his writing or cause it to suffer? Did his artistic crack-up lead to a humbling end or a rebirth of his talent as he began to write about the “most important” subject of his time? – I will read Fitzgerald as a novelist struggling to draw upon the material and cultural power of Hollywood while simultaneously rejecting the new medium in order to protect the position of the literary novel

within American culture, a novelist filled with both desire and repulsion for America's dream factory.

Previous attempts at understanding Fitzgerald's relationship to film have tended to draw a firm line between the two media, with the implication that a great novelist such as Fitzgerald might experiment with the newer medium but would never succeed in writing for a mass audience of filmgoers as he would an audience of individual readers. When Joseph L. Mankiewicz, the producer of *Three Comrades*, justifies his rewriting of much of Fitzgerald's dialogue for the final script because "It was very literary dialogue that lacked all the qualities required for screen dialogue. The latter must be 'spoken.' Scott Fitzgerald wrote very bad spoken dialogue" (qtd. in Dardis 39), or when Nunnally Johnson, another man with extensive Hollywood experience, agrees that "[Fitzgerald] had simply wandered away from the field where he was a master and was sludging around in an area for which he had no training or instinct" (57), the two media are distinguished by supposedly essential characteristics. Whatever it was that made Fitzgerald an important American novelist could not be translated to film because of the nature of the medium. Wheeler Winston Dixon appears to find a way to relate the two media to one another with his study *The Cinematic Vision of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, in which he argues that rather than diminishing his talents, Fitzgerald's time in Hollywood actually contributed new techniques and ways of seeing that he then applied to his novels. While the title of the study suggests a marriage of the novelistic and cinematic, the thesis places the novelist in a position outside the film industry, an artistic alien visiting the world of popular culture for a few months in order to transform its natural tendencies into the stuff of art. Dixon's close readings of *Gatsby*, *Tender is the Night*, and *The Last Tycoon* reveal an ongoing conflict in Fitzgerald about the influence of cinema as well as his own desire to see his novels sold to Hollywood and turned

into films. Strangely, however, after so carefully noting the numerous details in the novels that could have been the result of Fitzgerald's new understanding of screenwriting, Dixon ends the chapter on *The Last Tycoon* with the declaration that we should not take these connections too far for "film is film, and print is print" (99). The ending is strange not because it is false, but because it is stated so plainly as though the differences between film and print require no further discussion, despite the fact that these differences and the attempts by Fitzgerald to alternately overcome and accentuate them is, I believe, the central issue of the book. Interestingly, Gautam Kundu's recent study of Fitzgerald's cinematic style also assures the reader early on that "Fitzgerald himself was well aware of the differences between the two modes of artistic expression" (9), as though it might detract from Fitzgerald's legacy to suggest his borrowings from Hollywood were not always completely self-conscious.<sup>6</sup> Yes, there are differences between film and print, but what these differences meant to Fitzgerald (and to other novelists, to filmmakers, to readers, and to filmgoers all participating in the same media assemblage) is precisely what needs to be discussed. By reducing the relationship between the Hollywood film and the literary novel to a difference of essence, "film is film, and print is print," we miss out on the complexity of Fitzgerald's struggle.<sup>7</sup> In *Tender is the Night* Fitzgerald is not simply dismissing a form of mass culture nor selectively borrowing a few techniques from a newer art form; he is personally engaged in a complex and sometimes contradictory attempt to define the still-amorphous relationship between film and the novel, a relationship that was important to Fitzgerald's sense of himself as an artist and to his financial future.

### **Introducing Rosemary Hoyt**

According to Matthew Bruccoli's extended research of the manuscripts, *Tender is the Night* went through seventeen separate versions. While the setting, plot, and even gender of the

main character changed over the years of revision, each version retained some connection to Hollywood and filmmaking. In the published version this connection is found most prominently in the character of Rosemary Hoyt, a young starlet whose popularity has swept over America due to her performance in *Daddy's Girl*. One of the longest-running debates about the novel concerns Fitzgerald's decision to focus on Rosemary during Book I despite the fact the novel is clearly about the degradation of Dick Diver from bright, young psychologist to an empty shell. Fitzgerald, himself, seemed to doubt his decision as he began outlining a more chronological version of the novel after the initial publication that Malcolm Cowley would eventually transform into reality after Fitzgerald's death. Rather than continue this debate along aesthetic claims of quality or through psychoanalytic readings of Fitzgerald based on his own marital problems, which John B. Chambers claims is the primary reason so many have criticized the original version (127-37), I will point out one of the interesting effects of Fitzgerald's original structure. The opening of Book II, the chronological start of the novel, takes on the voice of a *Bildungsroman* with a Jamesian omniscient narrator. It opens, "In the spring of 1917, when Doctor Richard Diver first arrived in Zurich, he was twenty-six years old, a fine age for a man, indeed the very acme of bachelorhood" (115). The rhythm of the "indeed" and the knowing tone of "a fine age for a man" suggest a narrator in full control of his subject, telling us the story of Dick Diver not as it happens or with any claim to objectivity but with artistic flair. Note also that the chapter starts with a date and basic background information about the hero – his full name and age. We are not shown these facts, we are told them. A little further down the page we receive a brief biography of the young psychologist:

Doctor Diver had been around the edges of the war by that time: he was an Oxford Rhodes Scholar from Connecticut in 1914. He returned home for a final year at Johns Hopkins, and took his degree. In 1916 he managed to get to Vienna under the impression that, if he did not make haste, the great Freud would eventually succumb to an aeroplane

bomb. Even then Vienna was old with death but Dick managed to get enough coal and oil to sit in his room in the Damenstift Strasse and write the pamphlets that he later destroyed, but that, rewritten, were the backbone of the book he published in Zurich in 1920. (115-116)

Other than the image of Dick sitting in his room trying to keep warm, this quick tour through Dick's college years is offered to us as a series of dates. The narrator is also able to seamlessly enter Dick's mind to explain his reason for moving to Vienna, and can offer the reader a description of Vienna, "old with death," that is largely subjective. In short, Book II utilizes the sort of "old-fashioned devices" that Wayne C. Booth claims would have made a better opening for the novel (189-90). As Kirk Curnutt points out in his critique of Booth, however, had these "old-fashioned devices" been used in a chronological narrative, the effect likely would have been identification with Dick and his gradual downfall. Placing this style of narration midway through the novel is jarring and encourages a critical distance from Dick and his feelings, a critical distance that adds to the ambiguous feelings towards Hollywood evoked by our introduction to Rosemary.<sup>8</sup>

The opening Fitzgerald did choose for Book I was far different not just in subject matter (Rosemary) but in style. Book I begins "On the pleasant shore of the French Riviera, about half way between Marseilles and the Italian border, stands a large, proud, rose-colored hotel. Deferential palms cool its flushed façade, and before it stretches a short dazzling beach" (3). Though the language is at times subjective, we are offered far more visual descriptions, with a focus on space over time. This strategy continues in the next paragraph as we see "The hotel and its bright tan prayer rug of a beach," "the pink and cream of old fortifications, the purple Alp that bounded Italy," and "ripples and rings sent up by sea-plants through the clear shallows." The vibrant colors of these descriptions perhaps bear a resemblance to the saturated hues of the recently popularized Technicolor process being used in Hollywood films. The sense that we are

looking through a camera continues as the beach awakens with life. We “see” a man in a blue bathrobe take an early morning swim and then: “Merchantmen crawled westward on the horizon; bus boys shouted in the hotel court; the dew dried upon the pines. In another hour the horns of motors began to blow down from the winding road.” The descriptions are mostly objective and give the sense that one is there on the Riviera watching and listening to whatever random images and sound are caught by lens and microphone. Even more film-like is our introduction to Rosemary and her mother. While Dick is introduced in Book II with his name and age before any physical description, our first impression of Rosemary is entirely visual. First her mother is described but then “one’s eye moved on quickly to her daughter” as the “camera” pans to the side and closes in on the “magic in her pink palms and her cheeks lit to a lovely flame... Her fine forehead sloped gently up to where her hair, bordering it like an armorial shield, burst into lovelocks and waves and curlicues of ash blonde and gold. Her eyes were bright, big, clear, wet, and shining, the color of her cheeks was real” (3-4). It is only after this use of color, lighting, and close-ups to describe Rosemary that we are given her age, eighteen, though her first name is kept from the reader for another page until she feels the stares of the people on the beach who recognize her, and her full name is not revealed until one of the women on the beach says it aloud, “You’re Rosemary Hoyt” (7). Of course the use of objective language and visual description has been used by many other novelists, even novelists writing before the invention of film. By itself the passage is not proof of the influence of film on Fitzgerald’s style, but the drastic difference in style and tone between the respective descriptions of Rosemary and Dick encourages the reader to understand the depths of Dick’s life and mental development but to “see” the surface of Rosemary Hoyt. Given that most critics read Dick as a version of Fitzgerald, and Rosemary, the actress, clearly embodies popular Hollywood,<sup>9</sup> the difference is

significant for beginning to understand Fitzgerald's feelings towards both film and his own work as a novelist.

Though Fitzgerald sees fit to employ a highly visual style to open the novel, the remainder of Book I seeks to convince the reader that Dick's choice about whether to remain faithful to Nicole or sleep with Rosemary is also a choice between the depth of traditional art and culture and the superficial pleasures of the new medium of film. The initial description of Rosemary focuses on her dewy eyes, that vital feature of any emerging film starlet while Nicole is offered to us in portrait:

her face could have been described in terms of conventional prettiness, but the effect was that it had been made first on the heroic scale with strong structure and marking, as if the features and vividness of brow and coloring, everything we associated with temperament and character had been molded with a Rodinesque intention, and then chiseled away in the direction of prettiness to a point where a single slip would have irreparably diminished its force and quality. (16-17)

As with Rosemary Fitzgerald describes Nicole's surface qualities, however, while Rosemary is all bright colors, styled hair, and innocent eyes, Nicole is a work of art, a sculpture that is not just beautiful but has "character" and depth to it. And though Dick is strongly attracted to Rosemary he, too, notes that "the beauty of Nicole had been to the beauty of Rosemary as the beauty of Leonardo's girl was to that of the girl of an illustrator" (104). Even Rosemary's own mother, her greatest supporter, comes to the conclusion that "Nicole was a great beauty, with the frank implication that Rosemary was not" (67). The contrast is not merely one of beauty, however. Dick recognizes quickly that Rosemary's personality and knowledge of life are derived largely from the two-dimensional life she has led on the screen. When she is finally able to get Dick into her hotel room and offer to sleep with him, both recognize that she is playing "one of her greatest roles" (64), that her seduction consists of lines and images planted in her head by Hollywood. In a similar scene with a young Nicole, Dick attempts to convince her to no longer

pursue a relationship with him but is struck to see in her “a creature whose life did not promise to be only a projection of youth upon a gray screen, but instead, a true growing” (141).

Rosemary’s beauty and appeal are momentary and superficial while Nicole’s attractions are timeless because part of her essential structure. As a doctor aware of Nicole’s psychological trauma at the hands of her father, Dick should be just as motivated to reject her romantic approaches as he is to reject Rosemary, yet he quickly succumbs to Nicole and marries her while turning down Rosemary until later in the novel when his life has crumbled. Though Nicole, too, is beautiful, his inability to resist her cannot be put down to her greater physical attractions over Rosemary but rather to Dick’s interest in her traumatized mind and her depth of character for surviving the incestuous relationship with her father. As a man dedicated to his craft, he falls in love with Nicole, while the screening of Rosemary’s hit film *Daddy’s Girl*, with its merely implied incest, causes Dick to “winc[e] for all psychologists at the vicious sentimentality” (69). If, as many critics suggest, “Dick’s practice of psychiatry ... becomes an analogue for Fitzgerald’s vocation as a writer” (Moreland 360), we can see in Dick’s choice not just a preference for Nicole over Rosemary, but a preference for psychological depth over the sensual pleasures of Hollywood.

Michael North agrees that Rosemary seems “a filmed version of the older woman” (134), but goes on to argue that Fitzgerald is therefore criticizing the “appetite for repetition” film creates in its audience. Reading the relationship of Rosemary to Nicole as a degraded image and the novel as a complaint “that movies are responsible for a general lowering of artistic standards,” however, ignores the complexity of Dick’s struggle. He is obsessed with Rosemary, yet he resists her much longer than he resisted Nicole. Dick “cringes” at the metaphorical incest of *Daddy’s Girl* yet becomes involved with a patient of his who suffers from the trauma of real

incest. Though numerous passages early in the novel make clear that Rosemary is a superficial version of Nicole, Dick's actions show a deep sense of internal conflict, a conflict that would hardly be so intense if Rosemary was only the next youthful illusion attracting Dick. Further analysis of Rosemary and Nicole complicates their roles as well. Despite Rosemary's inability to seduce Dick without relying on her Hollywood experiences, she is far from oblivious to this superficiality. When she first meets Dick and his group at the beach she notes that their gentleness is "part of their lives, past and future, not circumstanced by events, not at all like the company manners of actors" (19). And though she clearly wants Dick to become her leading man when she offers him the opportunity to take a screen test (an offer Dick brutally rejects because "The pictures make a fine career for a woman – but my God they can't photograph me" [70]), her attraction to Dick is due to the fact that, unlike the other young men she has met, Dick is "the real thing" (31). Hers is not simply a young woman's crush on a distinguished older man as she realizes the difference between her feelings for Dick and her feelings towards the director Earl Brady, another man she respects. Her attraction to Brady is "not at all the spontaneous admiration she had felt for the man on the beach this morning [Dick] ... she knew she would forget him half an hour after she left him – like an actor kissed in a picture" (24). Though she sees Brady as an intellectual, and perhaps even an artist (though she never uses the term to describe her career) he is easy to forget when not immediately in front of the eyes. Like an enthralling film or a handsome actor, Brady commands the attention of the senses, but leaves little impression on the mind – "But Dick Diver – he was all complete there" (19). Just as Dick's attraction to Rosemary can be unfavorably contrasted to his attraction to Nicole, Rosemary's attraction to Dick can be favorably contrasted to her brief relationships with actors and the college boys who have fallen in love with her screen image. The Divers, as their last name

would suggest, possess a depth of character with which Hollywood, despite its sensual attractions, cannot compete, and Rosemary, the representative of Hollywood, fully realizes this.

### **The Best Show in Paris**

Even though Rosemary and the Divers seem convinced of the superiority of the Divers to upstart Hollywood money, Rosemary first notices him on the beach “giving a quiet little performance” (6) for the rest of his party, including Mrs. McKisco who tells Rosemary “We thought maybe you were in the plot” and “One man my husband had been particularly nice to turned out to be a chief character” (7). In this particular instance “performance” need not refer to film acting, of course, (his performance is later described as an “esoteric burlesque,” which might suggest a knowledgeable parody and an extra layer of depth), but throughout the early part of the novel Dick is associated with acting. After talking to Dick, Rosemary notes that he shows her an understanding she has only ever encountered in other professionals, and despite the previously mentioned differences between Dick and Earl Brady, Dick surely becomes an absurd version of a director himself when he speaks to Nicole via megaphone during one scene at their home. Indeed, Rosemary describes this home, the Villa Diana, as “a stage [on which] some memorable thing was sure to happen” (29), and, later, at the Cardinal de Retz’s palace with Dick, she has “the detached false-and-exalted feeling of being on a set” (71). Lest one think that Rosemary is simply incapable of understanding the world in other than acting terms, a woman is overheard at the palace describing the Divers as “Practically the best show in Paris” (72). Even the narrator utilizes Hollywood to accurately describe Dick, comparing him to “an actor who underplays a part” (92) and later describing the argument between Augustine the cook and Dick as “a gladiatorial combat” (265), a reference that surely would bring to the minds of contemporary readers scenes from the recent blockbuster *Ben Hur*, whose set the Fitzgeralds had

visited. By the end of Book I, then, we are hardly shocked when told that Rosemary says “her most sincere thing to [Dick]: ‘Oh, we’re such actors – you and I’” (105). The dash in the middle of the sentence draws the reader’s attention to the pairing of Dick and Rosemary, “you and I,” actors both.

Though Nicole is not directly associated with acting the way her husband is, she often appears to be as much a Hollywood leading lady as Rosemary due to Fitzgerald’s frequent references to lighting, one of the central tools of Hollywood glamour. At Dick’s intentionally bad dinner party, for instance, Rosemary notes the effects on Nicole’s beauty of carefully placed light sources, her face lit both by “candlelight” and “wine-colored lanterns in the pine” (33). Surprisingly, though, a majority of these dramatically lit scenes occur during Dick’s courtship of Nicole in Book II, the portion of the novel that at first seems associated with depth and traditional narrative devices. During an early meeting at the clinic “Miss Warren emerged first in glimpses and then sharply when she saw him; as she crossed the threshold her face caught the room’s last light” (133); later on during the same meeting but in a new location Dick sees “her face lighting up like an angel’s when they came into the range of a roadside arc” (135); as he tries to break off their relationship her face is “ivory gold against the blurred sunset” (141); and after speaking to Baby Warren, Dick finds Nicole “motionless between two lamp stands” (153). Most remarkable about these examples of lighting is their resemblance to what Laura Mulvey, many years later, would identify as the “male gaze” of Classic Hollywood Cinema. In each example from Book II the beautiful lighting adds to the erotic feelings in Dick as he stares at Nicole, who is either motionless or moving almost in slow motion. This erotic contemplation is not reserved for Nicole, as we “see” such lighting every time Dick spies a young woman. As Baby Warren begins to use her money to tie Dick to Nicole, Dick sees an attractive girl in the

moonlight outside (176), but later that night under less flattering lighting “Dick found the girl devitalized, and uninteresting” (178-9). In the next chapter Dick visits a dying patient, a thirty-year-old woman who had once been “exceptionally pretty.” As he talks to her about her sickness “he went out to her unreservedly, almost sexually” and this is the moment that Fitzgerald describes “The orange light through the drawn blind, the sarcophagus of her figure on the bed” (185), as if Dick’s sexual feelings suddenly made the lighting noticeable. Later, during some time away from Nicole, Dick realizes “He was in love with every pretty woman he saw now, their forms at a distance, their shadows on a wall” (201). In each of these cases the mention of lighting is less an objective description for the reader than a desire within Dick to see these women in the same way he might see Rosemary or any other starlet on the big screen – carefully lit for his erotic contemplation. Lest we think that Fitzgerald, a writer, would not be aware of the intricacies of film lighting, near the end of Book II as Dick visits Rosemary on set we are told the day’s shooting ends early because there was “a fine light for painters, but, for the camera, not to be compared with the clear California air” (213).

As in Fitzgerald’s own life, then, we find that the role of Hollywood and film is not so easy to pin down in *Tender is the Night*. The opening book finds Rosemary falling in love with Dick because he exudes a reality and meaningfulness absent in her Hollywood world, Mr. McKisco making “several withering remarks about movies” (33) to Earl Brady at the dinner party, Dick fleeing from a possible screen test as if the camera might steal his soul, and even the normally neutral narrator mocking *Daddy’s Girl* with baby talk (“Was it a ‘itty-bitty bravekins and did it suffer? Ooo-ooo-tweet, de tweetest thing, wasn’t she dest too tweet?” (69)). This attack on Hollywood superficiality, however, is undercut by Rosemary’s realization that Dick is as much an actor as she, that Mr. McKisco, the “literary man” (45), is disliked by everyone, and

that *Daddy's Girl* seems to evoke a true emotional response from Dick even though it embarrasses him as a professional psychologist. Film is more than just a theme or piece of setting for Fitzgerald as he utilizes a virtual long shot that tracks into a close up of his leading lady in the initial pages, then finds use for Hollywood lighting to make Dick's longing for the various women he encounters more concrete to the reader.

### **An Assemblage of Relationships**

Rather than a simple opposition between film and the novel, between Rosemary and the Divers, *Tender is the Night* offers us a set of complex, overlapping relationships. The movie business is clearly critiqued throughout the novel. Dick cringes at the thought of taking a screen test; Rosemary's mother wants her to be "In the movies but not at all At them" (31); in Paris Dick starts a conversation with a man selling American newspapers, but when the man explains his real goal is to break into the movie business, "Dick shook him off quickly and firmly" (93); and during a drunken evening Rosemary's admirer Collis Clay tells Dick he'd "like to get in the movies" (223), which Dick immediately counsels against. These passages warn against the business of Hollywood, and Dick seems to despise the fact that the most dreadful people can make fortunes in moving pictures. However, the ability of Hollywood to make money is what allows Rosemary to travel Europe and is her calling card for being introduced to Dick's social group in the first place. More generally the issue of money is central in Dick's life – he spends the early part of his marriage with Nicole trying to sustain himself on the money he earns on his psychology practice and writing, but soon finds himself more and more dependent on her family fortune. The potential for profits in Hollywood is both its greatest attraction and power as well as its greatest detriment. The ease with which money can be made is both to its discredit and part of its appeal for an artist like Fitzgerald struggling to live on the income of a novelist.

The film audience who pays the profits to Hollywood is also put under scrutiny. We learn that Violet McKisco's understanding of high society was "born dismally in the small movie houses of Idaho ... together with several million other people" (206), dismissing her true understanding of life and culture as "naïve." Tommy Barban, Nicole's blunt and simple lover, explains his own bravery and heroism as merely "what I see in the cinema" (270), to which Nicole's response, "Very well, whenever I go to the movies I'll know you're going through just that sort of thing at that moment" could be read as a further critique of the tendency of movie audiences to replace real experience with the experience of watching a movie, but could also point out the power of films to make "real" the unimaginable. Dick clearly succumbs to this power when Collis is describing to him a sexual mishap between Rosemary and a Yale boy. Dick places himself in the traditional position of the movie patron – the voyeur: "The vividly pictured hand on Rosemary's cheek, the quicker breath, the white excitement of the event viewed from outside" (88), which enflames his jealousy all the more while also adding a degree of sexual excitement for him. Perhaps Rosemary's sophistication is questioned when we learn that she is "accustomed to seeing the starkest grotesqueries of a continent heavily underlined as comedy or tragedy" (15), since she relies on the broad categories of her movie career to make sense of the real world, but can the same be said of the narrator when we are told that Dick's "party that night moved with the speed of a slapstick comedy" (76)? And though Fitzgerald's use of camera-like techniques to start the novel could be seen as merely a clever method of introducing Rosemary's character as both an actress and a fairly superficial attraction, there is little reason to read the three-page montage of Dick and Nicole's early married life (a highly visual sequence where the scenes follow one another without transition as though cut together on film (159-62)) as critical of the cinema. Editing, lighting, cinematography, and a particular

interest in how the reader “sees” the characters suggest Fitzgerald has latched on to many of the techniques of the film industry not just to complement the subject matter of this novel, but to utilize many of the powerful emotional effects Hollywood has made its most effective selling point.

The emotions of Hollywood films are simple, broad, and sentimental but nonetheless evocative. Rosemary’s first attempt at seducing Dick fails as she “struggle[d] with an unrehearsed scene” (38), suggesting Dick did not disapprove of her claim to love him as much as the quality of her acting. Later, Dick finally succumbs to Rosemary’s allure because “It was time for Rosemary to cry, so she cried” (74) and this clichéd emotional response causes him to tell her he loves her. This is the dilemma for Dick: not that he must choose between Rosemary and Nicole, between something simple and pleasurable and something complex and challenging, between his desire and his responsibility, between the new and the old, between surface and depth, but that the ability of Rosemary to evoke a strong emotional response in him along with the fact that Nicole “ought to be in the cinema, like your Norma Talmadge” (239) means the choice is hardly as simple as either/or. When Dick takes Rosemary to a World War I battlefield the sadness in his throat is not just for the lost soldiers, but for the loss of a previous way of life, one “invented by Lewis Carroll and Jules Verne” and “D.H. Lawrence” (57), a shared culture created and communicated through the novel. It is no coincidence that in Book III, as Dick is preparing himself to finally sleep with Rosemary, he first reads a blurb in the newspaper about Sinclair Lewis’ *Main Street* and “tried to think about Rosemary” (207), and then, in her room while she talks on the phone, examines a novel by Edna Ferber – an author whose novel *Show Boat* would become one of the first American musicals – and the novel of his “friend” Albert McKisco – whose plan was to write of “a decayed old French aristocrat ... in contrast with the

mechanical age” (10). These three references to novels, all connected to mass culture in some form, are Dick’s goodbye to a previous way of life before choosing Rosemary. Choosing Rosemary, for Dick, is less an action, though, than a resignation as the description of their lovemaking, “what had begun with a childish infatuation on a beach was accomplished at last” (213) makes clear. Dick has resigned himself to living in a world shaped more by the experience of watching *Daddy’s Girl* than reading a novel, a world that saddens him at the same time that it fills him with a powerful desire. He explains these feelings to Rosemary and Nicole near the end of the novel when Rosemary asks the Divers if they’ve seen her latest pictures. Dick’s response is philosophical: “What do you do in life? What does anyone do? They *act* – face, voice, words – the face shows sorrow, the voice shows shock, the words show sympathy” (288, emphasis Fitzgerald). Acting is what people do. Rosemary, of course, but also Nicole. Also Dick. It should be no surprise that the novel ends with Dick finally returning to America. The attempted escape to the Old World, to the lands of great art and culture and Freud has failed, for as Rosemary points out, “no matter where we go everybody’s seen ‘Daddy’s Girl’” (13).

### **A Fine Career For a Woman**

Attached to this struggle over the merits of Hollywood, then, are questions of authenticity (Are Rosemary’s emotions less sincere because they are derived from her acting roles, or does their power to affect millions of filmgoers, including Dick, suggest they are as authentic as the most psychologically profound novel?); culture (Dick prides himself on his sophistication yet he fades into obscurity once cut off from his wife’s fortune, while *Daddy’s Girl* not only makes Rosemary financially independent but an icon that transcends all sorts of borders); and gender (As Dick says, “The pictures make a fine career for a woman,” or less bitterly, Anthony Slide claims “Women thrived and, in many cases, dominated the motion picture world as

screenwriters, editors, fan magazine writers, directors, and, of course, stars” (151)). Rather than Hollywood as simple temptress, luring novelists with its promise of easy money, Fitzgerald offers us Hollywood as *Daddy’s Girl*, an object of incest. From the title of her popular film to Dick’s thought that “She was young and magnetic, but so was Topsy [Dick’s daughter]” (207), or to Rosemary’s telling Topsy “I think you’d make a fine actress” (288), which enrages Nicole, the novel makes clear that Dick’s reluctance to sleep with Rosemary is as much about a feeling of sexual perversion as about staying faithful to his wife. George Toles’ claim that in the novel “Sexual incest is a metaphorical marker for fictional incest – the scandalous violation of life material” (425) is on the right track in connecting Dick’s fears to Fitzgerald’s fears, but rather than see the incest as a violation of F. Scott’s personal life with Zelda, a life he had mined for years in his writing, the incestuous relationship is the one he was contemplating with the young medium of film. Ruth Prigozy reads the incest motif as a metaphor for a decaying civilization, which certainly connects to contemporary critiques of Hollywood, but she seems to ignore Dick’s necessary role in the incest motif. Prigozy deftly elaborates the popularity of the “daddy’s girl” character in Hollywood films, but seems to avoid discussing the fact that incest is committed by the older generation against the young and innocent.<sup>10</sup> The novelist, in this struggle with metaphorical incest, is no longer a cool outsider or a mere victim of mass culture but instead the ultimate location of desire and the one who will bear the moral responsibility of any commingling. If Hollywood was merely superficial and representative of cultural decay, it would not require a metaphor so laden with guilt and desire.<sup>11</sup>

There is no doubt that Fitzgerald is critical of Hollywood’s direct effect on American culture as well as its indirect effect on the market for literary novels. To read the novel as merely critical – *Tender is the Night* as “a cautionary tale for Fitzgerald” (Moreland 365) – however, is

to mistakenly remove the novelist and his novel from the media assemblage in which he is writing. The novelist is deeply embedded in a web of associations that define the numerous intersections between novel and film: the camera-like shots of Rosemary associate film with the flat image as compared to the psychological depth of the novel while her sexual attractiveness suggests a difference in the relative abilities of film and the novel to enthrall an audience.

Rosemary is a middle-class American, while Dick is an expatriate who has married into the very upper-class. Rosemary is a barely legal adult naïve about the world, while Dick is experienced and contemplative. Film is represented by the ingénue Rosemary while the old world of psychology and the novel are connected to masculine figures such as Freud and Lawrence. All these relationships are temporary and say more about the attitudes of Fitzgerald (and many other novelists) towards film in the twenties and thirties than they do about the essential qualities of the respective media. Indeed, the association of film with young starlets possibly began to shift with Fitzgerald's very next novel as *The Last Tycoon* made Monroe Stahr, a male producer, its central representative of Hollywood and its potential as an art form, an image that was no doubt enhanced on the film side by the recognition of a number of male directors, such as D.W. Griffith, as artists at this time. By reading *Tender is the Night* as part of a media assemblage, then, we acquire the means for understanding how a novel that consistently critiques the business of Hollywood and the beautiful young women who succeed in it can at the same time borrow the terminology and techniques of filmmaking to enhance the characterization and depth of the novel. Rather than attempt to determine whether Fitzgerald approved or disapproved of the film industry, whether his time working in Hollywood elevated or stunted his writing skills, we can locate Fitzgerald within a web of material and ideological forces that made the theme of incest the most poignant expression of his complicated feelings.

**“Her invitation wasn’t to pleasure, but to struggle”: *The Day of the Locust***

Like Fitzgerald, Nathanael West made his way to Hollywood in order to make the money that his novels could not, though West had failed even to attain the commercial successes of Fitzgerald. Also like Fitzgerald, West found the process of writing for the movies difficult and was unable to make his fortune in Hollywood, but did acquire experiences that would directly contribute to a novel, *The Day of the Locust*. Though he may have been unsuccessful conquering Hollywood as a screenwriter, most critics have understood his novel as providing at least some measure of redemption as he made a “small defiant gesture in writing an artistic novel against mass America and its political threat” (Widmer 91-2), “a mocking denunciation of a false dream,” (Schulz 141), and “the severest literary indictment of the Hollywood dream we have” (Fine 193).

The evidence for naming *The Day of the Locust* the most damning example of the Hollywood novel is strong. Hollywood in *Locust* is almost entirely illusory, from the houses to the people who live in them, nothing is what it seems. The novel opens, much like *Merton of the Movies*, with the author toying with his reader’s own expectations of reality by presenting a movie scene as if it were actually happening. Tod looks out his office window and sees an army of cavalry and soldiers marching between sets as part of the filming of *Waterloo*. The description is straight forward and it is not until a comic-looking assistant director shouts “Stage Nine – you bastards – Stage Nine!” (59) that the reader knows that Tod is observing an army of actors rather than an army of English, French, and Scotch infantry. From that point on we find that nothing in Hollywood is what it seems. Pedestrians wear “sports clothes which were not really sports clothes” (60); the architecture of the city is a pastiche of “Mexican ranch houses, Samoan huts, Mediterranean villas, Egyptian and Japanese temples, Swiss chalets, Tudor

cottages, and every possible combination of these styles” (61); Tod’s friend Claude Estee takes the illusion one step further as he lives in a replicated Southern plantation and dresses as a Civil War colonel, even going so far as to “ma[k]e believe he had a large belly” (68); at a dinner party Tod walks outside to find a rubber horse dead in the swimming pool (70); and silver polish salesman and former vaudeville actor Harry Greener has spent so much of his life playing characters and doing skits that even when he is truly sick his groans of pain come across as “so phony that Tod had to hide a smile” (119). The flat illusions of the movie screen seem to have even transformed the bodies of these Hollywood residents as Faye Greener has a face that is “much fuller than the rest of her body would lead you to expect and much larger” (67), her father Harry is “almost all face, like a mask” (119), and cowboy extra Earle Sloop has “a two-dimensional face” (109) as if they are constantly being shot in close-ups by the camera.

Several critics have therefore read Tod, the young painter from the east, as the critical voice in the novel, the one most closely resembling West’s own perspective on Hollywood. R. W. B. Lewis writes about the threat of mass culture “to the very roots of life in America, a threat as it were to the human nature of American humanity” (137) and concludes that “Tod’s major response is of course his painting, just as West’s major response is the novel that contains it” (139). John Parris Springer would agree thirty-five years later that “Tod, an artist who has come to Hollywood from the Yale School of Fine Arts to work in the movies, represents a viewpoint much closer to West’s own; he is from ‘back east’ and exhibits a critical and aesthetic distance from Hollywood, which suggests that he is closer to the moral center of the book” (162). And Kingsley Widmer draws so many parallels between the values of Tod and West that he uses the shorthand “Tod-West” to talk about the response of the artist to Hollywood.

The textual evidence certainly supports making Tod the critical outsider of Hollywood. Unlike the two-dimensional faces of Harry, Faye, and Earle Sloop or the apparent simplicity of Homer Simpson, Tod is early on described as “a very complicated young man with a whole set of personalities, one inside the other like a nest of Chinese boxes” (60). His Ivy League education has allowed him to see the world through the eyes of great artists. The sight of all the Midwesterners who “had come to California to die” (60) inspires Tod to take on the styles of Goya and Daumier in his painting. He makes sense of Faye’s clichéd ideas for film scripts by noting that her realistic description of fantastic events was “similar to that obtained by the artists of the Middle Ages, who, when doing a subject like the raising of Lazarus from the dead or Christ walking on water, were careful to keep all the details intensely realistic” (107). At Harry’s funeral Tod recognizes Bach’s “Come Redeemer, Our Savior” since his mother had often played it. Though no one else in the funeral parlor seems to even be listening, Tod notes the rising impatience in the music and connects the unfulfilled desire for Christ’s return in the notes to the funeral visitors who have come “hoping for a dramatic incident” (127). Pausing to catch his breath at National Studios, Tod looks out at the jumble of historical sets and “he could see compositions that might have actually been arranged from the Calabrian work of Rosa” or other “painters of Decay and Mystery” (132). And in one of the most frequently cited passages from the novel, Tod compares a Hollywood studio to Janvier’s *In the Sargasso Sea* in the way it collects dreams like a marine junkyard (132).

It is not just Tod’s education that sets him apart from the rest of the Hollywood inhabitants, though. Tod, unlike most of the others, seems capable of seeing through Hollywood’s many pleasant illusions. While Earle Sloop is two-dimensional “Tod found his Western accent amusing. The first time he had heard it, he had replied, ‘Lo, thar, stranger,’ and

had been surprised to discover that Earle didn't know he was being kidded" (110). While Harry is acting sick even while actually being sick, Tod is able to admire the performance and contemplate whether actors actually feel pain and emotions to the same degree as other people. This image of Tod watching a performance is central to his relationship to Faye. Though Faye's single-minded obsession with her career (to the point she will not date Tod simply because he lacks the money or contacts to help her along) annoys Tod, he is actually charmed by her superficial acting:

Being with her was like being backstage during an amateurish, ridiculous play. From in front, the stupid lines and grotesque situations would have made him squirm with annoyance, but because he saw the perspiring stagehands and the wires that held up the tawdry summerhouse with its tangle of paper flowers, he accepted everything and was anxious for it to succeed. (104)

In Homer Simpson's case, Tod is able to watch the bad drama unfold for only so long before he feels the need to intervene and help Homer realize how badly he is being used by Faye. As Mrs. Schwartzen says after Tod asks what the dead horse in the swimming pool is made of, "that mean Mr. Hackett. [He] just won't let me cherish my illusions" (71).

Most central, though, to characterizing Tod as Hollywood's critical outsider is his painting, "The Burning of Los Angeles." As we find out in the beginning of the novel it is supposedly his desire to create this work of art rather than the money or fame that has drawn him to the west coast. As he meets the various characters who populate the novel, he integrates them into the picture as each one is just grotesque enough to fit his new-found style. After his sexual frustrations with Faye build, it is to his painting he turns to cool himself off, visiting the various new-age churches in Los Angeles and thinking "of how well Alessandro Magnasco would dramatize the contrast between their [the churchgoers] drained-out, feeble bodies and their wild, disordered minds" (142). Everything, then, is material for Tod's art – friends, strangers, the

studios, the churches, the masses. Tod occasionally interacts with these people, but with the exception of Faye, seemingly only out of amusement and artistic interest. Even as Tod is swept up in the violent riot at the end, is beaten and nearly killed, he finds he can “think clearly about his picture” (184), and the action pauses for the longest description of “The Burning of Los Angeles” we have yet received even as the real LA seems about to descend into chaos all around Tod.

If, then, “The Burning of Los Angeles” is Tod’s attempt to stand back and make sense of Hollywood and Tod is West’s attempt to do the same, then the divide between novel and film, between high art and mass art, seems quite stable in *Locust*. Even a reading that attempts to argue for an accommodation of mass art by West, such as Thomas Strychacz’ *Modernism, Mass Culture, and Professionalism*, ends up finding it difficult to actually bring the two together. Strychacz argues against the common claim that modernism can be opposed to mass culture while postmodernism is more accommodating. He sees “The Burning of Los Angeles,” however, as “the possibility of a comprehensive framing that would make Hollywood and its film art comprehensible” and “allow the act of centering for which Wilson and other critics have yearned”(198). The reference to “Wilson and other critics” is to the numerous early complaints about the novel’s structure, the way its fragmented plot seems more reminiscent of a poorly written film than a great novel. Although Strychacz’ thesis seems to be that West’s text brings into question traditional notions of authenticity and cultural hierarchy, he defends *Locust* against its critics by stating that the fragmentation of the novel *is* West’s form of cultural critique, that they have simply failed to step back and see the frame within which West’s reproduction of mass culture exists. And since it is in a frame, much like “The Burning of Los Angeles,” it is high art.

### Tod-West the Rapist?

What Strychacz makes no mention of, however, and what is probably the most difficult aspect of the novel to incorporate into a reading where “Tod-West” stands back as the critical voice, is Tod’s recurring fantasy of raping Faye Greener. The sort of cool detachment that characterizes Tod the artist and Tod the critical observer of bad illusions, is difficult to associate with Tod the would-be rapist. Compounding the already troubling fact that our stand-in for the intelligent author, and presumably the sophisticated reader, is contemplating rape is the fact that the rape fantasy is presented to us almost as a B-movie:

She would drive up, turn the motor off, look up at the stars, so that her breasts reared, then toss her head and sigh. She would throw the ignition keys into her purse and snap it shut, then get out of the car. The long step she took would make her tight dress pull up so that an inch of glowing flesh would show above her black stocking. As he approached carefully, she would be pulling her dress down, smoothing it nicely over her hips. (174)

This cinematic description has a number of troubling effects. First, it suggests this is not just a bad, misogynistic joke on Tod’s part (such as in *Miss Lonelyhearts* when a group of men at a bar decide that all female writers need to be raped), but rather a fantasy in which he is deeply invested. Second, the manifestation of his desire in the form of a cinematic fantasy places Tod, and possibly West, under the same Hollywood influence that they are supposed to be critiquing. Third, in Tod’s fantasy Faye becomes the leading lady she has always wanted to be, making Faye’s incessant acting and artificiality less a personal failing than a role she plays, in part, for the benefit of men like Tod. Finally, as so often seems to occur throughout the novel, the text, without notice, drops its critical distance and we find ourselves voyeuristically engaged in the action, eager for the payoff no matter how abhorrent the actual events. A similar experience can be found earlier in the novel when Tod is dragged to a brothel to see a stag film called *Le Predicament de Marie*. At first the trip to the brothel is narrated quickly, and the partygoers only

pretend to want to see the film. Once the film starts, however, West offers a description with little commentary so that when the film projector suddenly breaks down the reader's narrative expectations are thwarted just as much as the film viewers' voyeurism:

"Fake!"  
"Cheat!"  
"The old teaser routine!" (75)

The most common critical response to the rape fantasies in the novel seems to be the one employed by Strychacz, namely to omit them from the reading. W.H. Auden coined the term "West's Disease" in order to understand the consistent inability of West's characters to convert their wishes into desires. A wish, according to Auden, is a dissatisfaction with life as it currently is while a desire is a call to turn those wishes into action. This would seem fertile ground for understanding Tod's rape fantasies, especially as Auden continues:

A sufferer from West's Disease is not selfish but absolutely self-centered. A selfish man is one who satisfies his desires at other people's expense; for this reason, he tries to see what others are really like and often sees them extremely accurately in order that he may make use of them. But, to the self-centered man, other people only exist as images either of what he is or of what he is not, his feelings towards them are projections of the pity or the hatred he feels for himself and anything he does to them is really done to himself.  
(121)

If Auden is correct, then Tod's desire to rape Faye is a reflection of his hatred towards himself and, thus, of West's hatred towards himself. Since Faye is clearly representative of the superficiality of Hollywood, this mixture of hatred and desire would echo Fitzgerald's use of incest as a symbol of complex and contradictory feelings. Yet, the rape fantasies do not make an appearance in Auden's reading. West's Disease seems reserved for men dissatisfied with society and the masses, depressed by the state of the world but unable to do anything about it. Applying the term to the rape fantasies would seem to bring into question some of the nobility (even if a debilitating nobility) Auden sees in West's characters, but would also open up a number of

questions regarding Tod's relationship to mass culture, the association of gender to film, and the connections of violence, sex, and power to definitions of art. One could argue that Auden sticks to generalities about all the novels, but his phrase inspires Rita Barnard's much more in-depth article "When You Wish Upon a Star": Fantasy, Experience, and Mass Culture in Nathanael West" where again the rape fantasies are absent.

Another method for reconciling the rape fantasies with a critical reading of Hollywood might be to understand the fantasies as evidence of just how beguiling and overwhelming film can be. Though Tod has proven to be well-educated and thoughtful throughout the novel, even he is victim of Hollywood's seductions in the form of Faye, a character who seems to consist of nothing more than images and bad acting. Such a reading, however, reduces the rape fantasies to frustrated sexual desire as we see in Robin Blyn's "Imitating the Siren":

Hollywood, as embodied in Faye, inspires Tod's fantasy. Inseparable from Hollywood's dream-machine, his fantasy proves as hackneyed and over-determined as her dealt-out dream narratives for the cinema. In Tod's first imitation of the siren, the novel presents the movement from the Cinderella story to the rape fantasy as a logical progression, thus emphasizing the diegetic structure that underlies them both. In this way, the imagination of the artist appears entirely underwritten by the culture industry he ostensibly seeks to contest. (56)

Here, the way Tod imagines the rape is as important, if not more so, than the fact that it is a rape. It is yet another form of frustration and powerful yet unfulfilled desire, similar to other incomplete dreams created by the Hollywood machine, including Faye's dreams of being discovered and becoming a star. There is no doubt truth to connecting the rape fantasies to the powerful force with which Hollywood film can create desire, as there is in connecting Tod's desire for Faye to Tod's relationship to Hollywood. However, to place the rape fantasies along "a logical progression" with Faye's frequently thumbed pack of dreams is to eliminate the

specificity of the act. Faye and Tod might both be seduced and frustrated, but only Tod dreams of violent retribution.

It is this violence that makes Tod's fantasies difficult to fit into a reading of *Locust* that seeks to uphold a critical distance from which "Tod-West-the reader" can denounce Hollywood and mass culture. Matthew Roberts does not deal extensively with the rape fantasies but does discuss Tod's violent desire for Faye and his tendency to sublimate that desire through his painting. The result, he feels, is that Tod's desire "challenges our assumption that cultural critique must be grounded in a stance of radical distance from the object or dynamic under investigation" (68-9). Roberts connects this elimination of distance with an avant-garde aesthetic, thus making of Tod's desires a new form of critique, one which relies on the shock of complicity to bring out the faults of mass culture. In fact Roberts ends up arguing for a West even more critical and in opposition to mass culture than that proposed by most traditional readings of Tod and West as artistic outsiders in Hollywood; the complicity seems largely for the reader's benefit, to make us realize how dangerous our mass-mediated desires can become. Even more radical, I think, is Susan Edmunds' feminist rereading of Faye as a serious artist in her own right. By taking Faye's desire to become an actress seriously, Edmunds claims, *Locust* becomes "the story of a fierce competition between several artists and several kinds of art to shape the dominant terms of modern taste and culture" (307). Here, finally, we arrive at something like a media assemblage with Tod struggling over cultural definitions and the corresponding power they bring rather than observing calmly from a safe distance as he notes the failings of mass culture. Edmunds continues with the idea that the rape fantasies are part of a struggle for power in the realm of art and culture: "Tod's increasingly violent reactions to Faye must be read as attempts to reassert a position of dominance he feels he has lost" (319-20). Edmunds, unlike so

many other critics, reads Tod's rape fantasies as *rape* fantasies, not shying away from the disturbing connotations. Though the rape fantasies are connected to larger concerns than Tod's desire for Faye, it is important that they are rape fantasies rather than some other form of violence because of the link to gender.

There is a danger, however, to focusing entirely on the power struggle between Tod and Faye. Tod fantasizes numerous times about raping Faye, thus introducing the elements of violence and power to their relationship, but these remain fantasies and, for the reader at least, always unfinished fantasies as Tod stops or is interrupted during the "setup" to the rape. In the real action of the novel Tod turns down the opportunity to dominate Faye during her brief dalliance with prostitution and risks his own safety during the final riot in order to rescue a woman from the groping hands of a strange man. So, while the rape fantasies are very much about power, they only tell part of the story of Tod and his relationship to Hollywood via Faye. While Edmunds does note some instances of Tod's attraction to mass culture, her characterizations of both Tod and Faye are monolithic, with Tod the embodiment of the old social order that seeks to keep Faye from practicing her new art of the body. Such a reading ignores Tod's own critiques of high art as well as his fascination with Faye and the other inhabitants of Hollywood. It also seems to ignore the abundance of criticism reserved for Faye. I agree with Edmunds' assertion that for too long Faye has been dismissed by critics, but Edmunds rehabilitates Faye's image by ignoring her associations with Hollywood in favor of seeing her as a new kind of artist, one who uses her body and sexuality as weapons to attack the status quo. Faye certainly does use her body and sexuality, but reading her prostitution, her Cinderella fantasies, or the complete disconnect between her body and her words as instantiations of her art rather than examples of her own absorption of mass culture is

problematic. It is as if Edmunds wants to champion Faye, yet still criticize mass culture, so she must make the contest not between Tod (high art) and Faye (Hollywood) but between Tod (male-bourgeois social order) and Faye (body artist who enables a complicit critique). Even in the most radical readings we must, it seems, maintain our critical distance from Hollywood.

### **Inspired by the Masses**

While the novel, as previously shown, offers plenty of evidence for composing a critical reading of mass culture, it also maintains an opposing voice, one that explores the possibility that mass culture is less the cause of violent desires than a response to those desires. For all his critical commentary and artistic interpretation, Tod shares a great deal with the many “actors” who surround him. Tod’s career path is actually quite similar to Faye’s father’s as we discover when told of Harry’s habit of telling his life story to strangers in bars. Harry “made his audience see him start out in his youth to play Shakespeare in the auditorium of the Cambridge Latin School, full of glorious dreams, burning with ambition. Follow him, as still a mere stripling, he starved in a Broadway rooming house, an idealist who desired only to share his art with the world” (120). Harry, the idealistic artist, is forced to sell out to vaudeville in order to make a living, much as Tod’s friends back east have accused him of doing by going to Hollywood. Perhaps most interesting in this passage is that Harry adds sound effects to his performance, “yelping like a pack of bloodhounds when describing how an Evil Fate ever pursued him” (120), the “Evil Fate” being his love for a woman who deceived him and led him along. This detail stands out for only a few pages earlier Tod indulges in one of his rape fantasies and “shouted to her [Faye], a deep, agonized bellow, like that a hound makes when it strikes a fresh line” (117). Both men express their frustrated desires with the hound imagery, but, strangely, Harry’s use of the sound is as an artistic representation of his “Evil Fate” while Tod’s bellow lacks any sense of

distance or self-reflection. A similar bit of imagery connects Tod to Homer. In an early characterization of Homer we find out that prior to Faye's arrival in his life one of his few pleasures was watching a lizard attempt to catch flies on his patio. Homer rooted for the flies to escape the lizard tongue but never interfered or frightened the lizard away. The story suggests Homer's dullness while also adding to a common refrain in the novel – a desire to see violence occur. Much later as Tod is listening to Faye tell her ideas for Hollywood screenplays, Tod responds by “staring at her wet lips and the tiny point of her tongue which she kept moving between them” (106). Faye, too, is a lizard and one that Tod enjoys simply staring at as she captures flies, never warning away Homer or Claude or any of the other men who are beguiled by Faye's darting tongue (a gesture Tod explains she uses “to promise all sorts of undefined intimacies” [157]). In another set of parallel scenes Homer offers money to a prostitute who has an unpaid hotel bill, then finds himself overwhelmed with desire for her; Tod offers money to Faye so that she can pay her father's funeral bill without turning to prostitution and yet is titillated by the possibility of finally having Faye for a mere thirty dollars. So while Tod's voice is undoubtedly privileged in the text, this privilege seems more due to quantity than quality as Tod's background is little different from Harry's, and Tod's desires for sex and violence tie him not only to the masses he wants to represent in his painting but to the character most incapable of maintaining a critical distance to the world – Homer Simpson. It takes awhile, then, but eventually even Tod “began to wonder if he himself didn't suffer from the ingrained, morbid apathy he liked to draw in others” (141).

If we do not read Tod as the talented artist corrupted by his environment nor as ironically complicit with the forms he wishes to critique, how do we read him? Using the idea of an assemblage for understanding the ever-shifting relationship between novel and film, we can see

Tod, and the novel in which he appears, as one of many sites of contact between the two, autonomous components of a historical process of stabilization and destabilization. In fact, the complexity of relations within this assemblage means Tod and the novel can participate in both the stabilization of the film-novel relationship (high art superior to and critical of mass culture) and the destabilization of that same relationship (mass culture redefines the role of art in people's lives). As Tod says about Faye early on, "Her invitation wasn't to pleasure, but to struggle" (68). If Faye, and, thus, Hollywood, were merely tempting and pleasurable, Tod would likely be able to resist or at least recognize it when he failed, but the invitation is to struggle, to work over the concept of art to the point where Tod can shift rapidly from uninvolved observer to potential rapist to self-critical artist.

Reading Tod as a participant in an assemblage allows us to finally open up some of those "Chinese boxes" Tod claims make up his complicated personality. While he is Ivy League trained and constantly refers to classic painting to make sense of what he finds in Hollywood, we should note that his decision to come to Hollywood is, in part, a rejection of that training in preference of finding his inspiration and subject matter in the cheap and artificial world of the mass-produced. Though he is often critical of Hollywood and its inhabitants "He would not satirize them as Hogarth or Daumier might, nor would he pity them. He would paint their fury with respect, appreciating its awful, anarchic power and aware that they had it in them to destroy civilization" (142). The emphasis in this passage from Tod's travels among the new-age churches has often been put on the destruction of civilization, but I would place the emphasis on the contradictory pulls of the language – "respect" and appreciation mixed with "anarchic power" and the ability to "destroy civilization." Similar mixtures of attraction and disgust appear at other points in the novel. Tod thinks of his friend Abe Kusich and notes that "Despite

the sincere indignation that Abe's grotesque depravity aroused in him, he welcomed his company. The little man excited him and in that way made him feel certain of his need to paint" (62). The ridiculous pastiche of plaster houses in Hollywood is described as "truly monstrous" (61) though at the same time Tod recognizes in their references to foreign locales a "need for beauty and romance." Faye's pack of dreams are clichéd and ridiculous, but Tod understands that "Faye did have some critical ability" (104) so that his realization that for Faye "any dream was better than no dream" reveals both the limit of Faye's aesthetic tastes as well as the immense power of her desire for change and escape. In each of these moments Tod finds himself at the center of a struggle (not an outsider looking in) over cultural definitions of aesthetics, politics, the role of art, and authenticity.

Eliminating the assumption of Tod's critical distance further allows a rereading of some of the most often cited scenes in the text. At Claude's dinner party Tod overhears a conversation among Hollywood screen writers about the relationship of Hollywood to high art. Many critics have cited the remark by one of the men that Hollywood needs to set up a philanthropical foundation in order to gain respectability for the industry (a plan that was already being utilized by some of the studios) as evidence of "Tod-West's" behind-the-scenes critique of the pictures. What gets left out in such a reading is an earlier critique of literary writers from the east who take money from the studios, then return home to write articles and books about the moral decay they witnessed during their excursion into the uncivilized imaginations of the masses. Rather than a simple critique of Hollywood's replacement of art with business, this scene offers a critique of supposed outsiders hypocritically using Hollywood as a means of selling their literary work, of the reduction of all concerns in Hollywood to financial ones, of the refusal to grant some artistic merit to the work of screen writers and other cinema workers, and, possibly, of the

negative effect legitimation might have on the ability of Hollywood to represent the desires and anger of the masses. In a scene immediately following a rape fantasy, Tod tries to replace his thoughts of conquering Faye with plans for “The Burning of Los Angeles.” As he imagines the destructive details of his painting he “told himself that it didn’t make any difference because he was an artist, not a prophet. His work would not be judged by the accuracy with which it foretold a future event but by its merit as a painting. Nevertheless, he refused to give up the role of Jeremiah” (118). This desire to maintain the role of prophet has rightfully been identified as a rejection of art for art’s sake in favor of a critical art. However, there’s little reason to see the critical art of the prophet as perfectly in line with a high art criticism of mass culture. Tod describes the figures in his painting as the “cream of America’s madmen” and wonders why his vision of a violent future gives him such satisfaction. Were Tod merely critiquing the violent desires of the masses, he surely would not take such pleasure in imagining a cultural civil war. Furthermore, if we consider how these thoughts and feelings assuage his frustration from his rape fantasy, then we can read this role of the prophet as one in opposition to, or at least preferable to, the violent return to the status quo that his desire for rape would seem to represent. Finally, the “Sargasso of the imagination” (132) comment has been central to several criticisms of mass culture. The fact that dreams are “dumped” into Hollywood and reborn as plaster sets and bad acting seems proof that “Tod-West” is critical of the role Hollywood plays in inciting the unhealthy desires and violent responses of the masses. This reading is particularly convincing for the scene in which Tod wanders among the studio sets, moving from one historical epoch to another just by walking through a door, is a standard episode in Hollywood novels (including *Merton of the Movies*), used to reveal the artificiality of the worlds Hollywood creates. Tod, however, never utters a critical word about the scene and, in fact, sits down to

enjoy the spectacle while comparing it to the work of several Italian painters. More importantly, Tod views the Sargasso Sea as a “history of civilization in the form of a marine junkyard” (132) and so the dream dump that is Hollywood becomes not just the collecting point for a nation’s unfulfilled desires but a historical record and rearticulation of those desires, of the longings and pains of the country at any particular moment. We should note that Tod, himself, contributes to this dream dump as he was the designer for several costumes, which he admits to putting great care into, and when he hears the guns of *Waterloo* go off he begins to run for fear he’d miss the epic scene, suggesting, at least, that Tod is neither totally outside nor totally critical of the Hollywood reproduction of dreams.

*The Day of the Locust* was a commercial failure for West. As he explained it in a letter to Edmund Wilson, “The radical press, although I consider myself on their side, doesn’t like it, and thinks it even fascist sometimes, and the literature boys, whom I detest, detest me in turn. The highbrow press finds that I avoid the important things and the lending library touts in the daily press think me shocking” (793). Interestingly, West saw a parallel between his failure to gain an audience for his books and his failures as a screen writer, quoting in the same letter a meeting with a producer who rejected his screenplay because “there’s no message” (794). Since his death critics have been trying to discover the message in *Locust*: early critics read it as a diatribe against mass culture and its central weapon, Hollywood, and dismissed the use of violence, flat characters, and a jumbled plot (all elements associated with “bad” movies) as minor mistakes in a work of otherwise literary importance. The language of postmodernism has seemingly allowed for a new reading of *Locust*, one in which he self-consciously employs the techniques of the very mass culture he is critiquing. These more recent readings at least complicate the relationship between high art and mass culture, but both approaches demand that Tod, West, and the reader

maintain enough critical distance from the lures of mass culture that they can be rejected or re-employed. As participants in a particular media assemblage that includes the literary novel and the Hollywood film, however, Tod and West do more than criticize Hollywood. Faye invites men to struggle and Tod and West struggle over the cultural significance of Hollywood's massive power and financial rewards, the ability of high art to reflect the frustration of the masses, and the distance between traditional arts such as painting and the novel and the new art of film. Rather than acting as an outside observer, Tod is saddened by Hollywood's artificiality, inspired by Hollywood's grotesque features, dismissive of Faye's acting ability, desirous of Faye the actress, employed by a large studio, labeled an artist, critical of the potential for frustrated violence, but eager to see that violence take place. Tod maintains these contradictory impulses simultaneously not because the distinctions between high art and mass culture do not matter, but because those distinctions are constantly being recoded by people like Tod and West, particularly at this moment in history as debates about the artistic merit of film and the commercial future of the novel overlap.

### **Conclusion**

F. Scott Fitzgerald died of a heart attack on December 21, 1940, and Nathanael West died the next day in a car accident on the way to Fitzgerald's funeral. This last bond between them and the overall similarity of their experiences as authors trying to finance their art by joining the Hollywood production machine prompted Edmund Wilson to memorialize them in 1941 as gifted writers who had seen the inside of the Hollywood monster and suffered accordingly: "their failure to get the best out of their best years may certainly be laid partly to Hollywood, with its already appalling record of talent depraved and wasted" (112). The inability of Hollywood to find a use for two such talented minds is to its own discredit, Wilson makes clear, and the novels

each created out of his experiences only hammers home the difference between novels and early Golden Age Hollywood films – Fitzgerald and West could not write for Hollywood but they could write sophisticated novels about Hollywood. The general critical consensus has been that both men left Hollywood bitter and disillusioned and their novels have been read as reflecting these feelings. The problem with such readings is that they ignore the sincere incorporation of film techniques and terminology in the novels, and, more importantly, the conflicted male leads who simultaneously long for and disparage the female symbols of Hollywood in the books. A new approach to the texts is necessary in order to make sense of these contradictory impulses and to explain the need to connect gender to the film/novel debate. The idea of a media assemblage provides this approach, situating the authors within a matrix of forces: their own material dependence on Hollywood, the cultural prestige of literary novels, the success of female screenwriters and actors, the mechanical advances in cameras and sound, the rise of film journals and auteur directors, and the urge within literary Modernism to explore new techniques of perception and representation, to name a few. These various forces intersect one another in numerous ways and any individual participant in the assemblage is bound to act as a stabilizing force at one point and a destabilizing force in another. As participants in an assemblage, Fitzgerald and West can still be read as important cultural critics, but we must recognize that they are cultural critics with a vested interest in the definitions of art and connotations of gender they present in their texts.

### Notes

1. Psychologist Hugo Münsterberg was one of the first to write seriously about film in his book *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, but he also felt obligated to write an article for *Mother's Magazine* in 1917 on the dangers of movies to children. Though he agrees

that children can be adversely affected by the depiction of crime and sensuality, he encourages adults to see the potential for movies to educate and enlighten. Gerald Mast and Bruce Kavin argue that “several national scandals rocked the film industry far more severely than had the letters and speeches of the zealots. Hollywood did not just sell pictures to the public; it sold the stars who sold the pictures” (113) and describe the scandals involving Mary Pickford’s divorce, Fatty Arbuckle’s manslaughter trial, and Wallace Reid’s drug use. These scandals contributed to the voluntary formation of the Hays Office to help rebuild Hollywood’s image with vague moral guidelines. Mast and Kavin also describe the early years of film as “commercial chaos” (46) as competing companies pirated films and machinery.

2. Kittler’s discourse networks, much like my media assemblages, are influenced by the thought of Deleuze and Guattari as well as the media philosophy of Marshall McLuhan. Kittler, too, argues that literature should be considered within the category of media studies, though his focus is far more on the technological determinism of a particular epoch. He shows how the technological changes between 1800 and 1900 altered our relationship to language and meaning. Though technological changes play a role in my conception of media assemblages, I am much more interested in how cultural interpretations of those technologies shift over time.
3. Bruce L. Grenberg describes this as the “most devastating passage” in Fitzgerald’s indictment of “new America” (212). Grenberg’s overall reading of the essays argues that they are evidence of Fitzgerald’s growth as an artist, admitting that the world that he once wrote about so famously was gone and a new one, represented, in part, by Hollywood, was emerging. Though Fitzgerald’s relationship to Hollywood is not central to

Grenberg's reading, his final claim that the essays "allow him to give a most poignant statement of all his dreams in a most pervasive account of their loss" (213) captures the same ambiguous mixture of acceptance and disgust that I will connect to Dick Diver's feelings towards Rosemary Hoyt. The essay also demonstrates the tendency in the last ten years of Fitzgerald criticism to take Fitzgerald's conflicted relationship with film and use it to further valorize the genius of his prose.

4. Michael North notes the growing complexity in Fitzgerald's relationship to film during his years working in Hollywood, but describes the years as a "crushing failure" and argues for a trajectory of increasing despair as he contrasts the optimistic attitude towards film in *Gatsby* to the pessimistic attitude in *Tender is the Night*:

There is something compulsive about the relationship that recording makes possible with the past, and Fitzgerald was to focus on this particular form of mental instability in his next work. All the quickness that seems so brilliantly to annihilate time in the 'fast movies' now rebounds on itself in an endless rewind, a metaphor that seems to withdraw all the promises of film and simultaneously to retract the optimism of Fitzgerald's earlier work. (129)

Ruth Prigozy describes Fitzgerald's "gradual disappointment in the art form he celebrated throughout his youth" in her discussion of the flapper as a character in Fitzgerald's novels that did not survive the translation to the new medium (135).

5. This is the central argument in Tom Dardis's *Some Time in the Sun*.
6. Kundu's claim becomes hard to maintain as he briefly discusses Fitzgerald's failures as a screenwriter. Noting the quote by Mankiewicz about Fitzgerald's inability to write good film dialogue, Kundu suggests the real problem was that Fitzgerald was inspired by the recent introduction of sound to "lace his film writing with talk and more talk" (83). He then goes on to note the preponderance of talking in the novels, arguing that Fitzgerald was inspired by "talkies" to write cinematic novels but unsuccessful screenplays. While

this explanation of Fitzgerald's failures might be a possibility, it does not support the idea that the distinction between film and novel was an easy one for Fitzgerald.

7. To demonstrate the complexity of this relationship one can compare Scott F. Stoddart's attempt to explain why *The Great Gatsby* has proven "unfilmable" to Ronald Berman's claim that the novel "is full of instructions on its own translation" into film (154). Critics have read the novel as both unfilmable and ready to be filmed.
8. More specifically Curnutt argues that the distance created by Fitzgerald's choice of narrative style and order critiques Dick's "theatricality" (138). Curnutt does not associate this term with film acting, but Curnutt's argument is of a piece with my analysis of the complex relationship to film throughout the novel.
9. "Rosemary is the Hollywood product incarnate" (215) agrees Ruth Prigozy in her discussion of the incest motif in the novel. I take exception to her use of the word "product" as it makes it easier to dismiss Rosemary as entirely superficial, as Prigozy does, although she is well aware of Fitzgerald's attraction to Hollywood films.
10. Prigozy does claim that "The father-daughter movies allowed both male dominance and female power to exist harmoniously by depicting feminine strength in little girls who could still be controlled" (197) but does not suggest that Dick, and certainly not Fitzgerald, might be one of those people highly vested in controlling Rosemary and Hollywood.
11. Fitzgerald's short story "Jacob's Ladder" is generally agreed to be closely related to *Tender is the Night*. In the story Jacob takes it upon himself to help a sixteen-year-old in dire straits to become an actress. In New York he protects her from other men and when she tries to thank him "he was chilled by the innocence of her kiss" (357), but once she

leaves for Hollywood and becomes a star he falls in love with her image and goes to California to propose marriage, jealous of every man she talks to. She rejects Jacob because she loves him “But not that way” (365), suggesting she sees him as a father figure. The connection between Hollywood and incest is not restricted to the novel.

## Chapter Two: Private Problems, Public Medium

### The New Cultural Dominant

After the 1971 publication of *Being There*, the tale of a mentally defective man who has experienced American life almost entirely through television viewing, interviewer after interviewer asked author Jerzy Kosinski for his opinions on the apparent object – television – of his satire. For George Plimpton and *The Paris Review*, Kosinski stated his feelings as plainly as possible: “television is my ultimate enemy and it will push reading matter – including *The Paris Review* – to the extreme margin of human experience” (35). Although Kosinski admitted to watching and even enjoying television (and he would take his place in popular culture as much through his appearances on Johnny Carson’s talk show as through his writing) he describes a solid boundary with television on one side and himself, other novelists, and *The Paris Review* on the other. Not only were television and novels clearly demarcated, the former was “the ultimate enemy” of the latter, as they battled over the finite territory of the public’s attention.

Such claims of essential opposition and cultural warfare between two media echo the cries of a half-century earlier when Theodore Dreiser saw a simplified Hollywood adaptation of one of his novels as “the end of art.” Given that the concerns articulated by Dreiser, Fitzgerald, West, and others about the medium of film focused on its mass audience and its reliance on the visual, one should hardly be surprised that similar criticisms might be leveled towards television, a medium (at least as it developed in the United States) even more dependent on a large audience and constant visual stimulation. Yet, by the time television emerged as a cultural force in the fifties, the participants of the novel-film assemblage had negotiated a peace, of sorts: novelists managed to both describe exclusive terrain for the written word while borrowing from cinema’s repertoire of techniques, and several films attained the status of high art partly through the

application of the tradition of the “great author” to film directors. If, indeed, the reterritorializations and deterritorializations of the novel-film assemblage resulted in some form of negotiation between the two media, why did the appearance and rapid growth in popularity of television after World War II lead to Kosinski’s battle cry against the effects of television on the audience for novels? Why is the ultimate symbol of spiritual corruption in Sloan Wilson’s best-selling 1955 novel (and eventual hit film) *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* not just working for a giant corporation but working for a giant television corporation? There were, of course, television enthusiasts who saw the new medium as a viable art form<sup>1</sup> and academics who took it seriously,<sup>2</sup> but the attacks by novelists against television programming and television audiences appear easily as vehement, if not more so, as those directed toward the early manifestations of film. The question to ask, then, is whether these fears are simply an example of blindness towards history or does the novel-television assemblage hinge on different points of intersection than did the novel-film assemblage?<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter I will first consider Fredric Jameson’s claims that video serves as the cultural dominant of the era of late capitalism in order to locate one of the primary differences between the novel-film assemblage of the early part of the century and the novel-television assemblage in the decades following WWII – namely fears about the reconstitution of the public sphere to fit the commercial and domestic nature of television programming. The ideal of the public sphere, as argued by Jürgen Habermas, is an arena for civic discussion free from the influence of government and economic forces that, nonetheless, helps shape the state. Media theorists have long debated the role of American-style commercial television on the formation of such an arena and the maintenance of a democratic state.<sup>4</sup> The public sphere, ideally, requires participation by all its citizens and freedom from the influence of economic concerns, yet

American television, according to many of its critics, encourages passivity and commercial saturation. Even without visions of an idealized public sphere for democratic debate, television theorists have been fascinated by the manner in which television problematizes any boundaries between public and private. It is a technology that at times unites millions of people as they simultaneously view the same program, yet the images of the world it provides are consumed primarily within the home.<sup>5</sup>

The suburban home is the setting for Richard Yates' 1961 novel, *Revolutionary Road*, and the television set becomes a metonymy for the problems he sees in America's middle-class culture. In the earlier, and much more popular, novel *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, the television set represents a disruption of the private sphere of the home, an invading force from the public sphere that needs to be rebuffed or at least tamed lest the family unit disintegrate in its eye-catching glow. In Yates' novel, however, the problem is not so simple. Frank Wheeler, the protagonist, is unable to indulge in the fantasy of an isolated private sphere since it was precisely his disgust for middle-class isolation that made him attractive to his wife April in the first place. Television, he recognizes, is less a threat to the family than it is to the public sphere. Yet, when April threatens to have an abortion, Frank finds that the television, surprisingly, is his best ally in sanctifying the home and family.

Jerzy Kosinski's *Being There* gives this public/private divide mythic connotations. The isolation of the private sphere is literal as the protagonist, Chance, grows up on the grounds of a mansion with no contact with the world outside the gates except via the television sets he watches constantly. As an adult he is finally expelled from his Eden and into New York where he becomes a public figure of great interest to both the KGB and the U.S. President. In *Being There* the effects of television on the public sphere are acted out for the reader with dark humor.

Chance, an illiterate man with almost no first-hand experience of the world, is able to become one of the most influential people in politics in the matter of one week, simply because his personality has been entirely shaped by television programming. As America struggles with an economic recession, its citizens take hope not from serious discussion of the issue but from the nearly meaningless gardening metaphors offered by Chance. Kosinski loved to quote statistics to friends and interviewers about the importance of television for getting elected to political office, and to many critics Chance appears a modern fable warning against a future in which politics and television are nearly synonymous. For all the clear criticism directed at a passive American public, however, the television set has helped make a socially, emotionally, and mentally damaged human being into a highly likable person who functions well within the world outside his garden.

Both Yates and Kosinski, then, are highly critical of an American culture that has rendered its public debates and concerns as superficial as possible in order that they might safely enter the private sphere of the home through the television set. Though television might help legitimate the private sphere with its focus on family programming or offer information access to members of society who otherwise would be excluded from public debate, it remains “the ultimate enemy.” Problematically, in both novels this domestication of the public sphere gets represented through the use of metaphors of male sexual potency. Frank points to the bumbling father figure – a stock character on family sitcoms – as evidence of the emasculation of the American male, while Chance is completely impotent due to the fact that despite all he has learned from watching TV, sex was only ever presented to him via innuendo and metaphor. Much like with the novel-film assemblage in which conflicted feelings of attraction and disgust manifested themselves in novels as Hollywood ingénues and taboo sexuality, the stakes of the

novel-television assemblage shift from concerns about television's effects on high art to definitions of male sexuality. If television leads to emasculation and impotence, then the opposite side of the boundary inhabited by novelists must be associated with male sexual power. Though neither Yates nor Kosinski might articulate their feelings about the novel this way, as vested participants in an assemblage (rather than biting social critiques distanced from the object of their scorn) their novels become the locus of numerous binaries and definitions open to negotiation – novel/television, high art/mass culture, visual/verbal, but also public/private and masculine/feminine.

**“[A] prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas”**

Just as film was becoming an accepted art form in post-WWII America (though Hollywood was and still is a frequent target of criticism) another major shift in the media landscape occurred with the explosive growth in popularity of television.<sup>6</sup> The importance of this new addition to American media was not immediately identified. While cinema offered a very different experience than reading a book or listening to the radio, television seemed the natural offspring of the visual aesthetics of motion pictures and the live broadcasting capabilities of radio. As William Boddy points out in *Fifties Television*, the radio and motion picture industries struggled over the initial direction for the new medium, with the major film studios hoping to keep television out of the home and in the theatres (23-4). Even after the in-home, advertiser-sponsored model for television won out over closed circuit theatre productions, the relationship between film and television would remain close as the two would share actors, writers, directors, producers, Hollywood, and programming.

Despite the numerous similarities between film and television, however, television threatened established conceptions of art and culture in ways cinema had not. Though

Hollywood's introduction of assembly line production, massive budgets, passive reception, sensory overloading visuals, and audiences full of women and children were anathema to many novelists and proponents of traditional high art, the two found enough common ground to coexist. The collaborative process of film production infuriated both Fitzgerald and West in their attempts at screenwriting, yet it remained, nevertheless, a type of writing not altogether different from the creation of novels. Although broad action might take precedence over careful description or subtle dialogue, the development of plot and characters were still important parts of screenwriting. More important to the acceptance of cinema as an art form than an appreciation for the difficulties of good script writing, though, might have been the emergence of the director as a sort of writer with the camera. Despite the large number of people contributing to any Hollywood production, D.W. Griffith showed that one could understand a film as the expression of a singular creative mind, much like a novel. That the "great" American directors were almost exclusively male, as opposed to screenwriters and actors who were often women, made this new artist even more palatable to traditional conceptions of high art.

Initial fears of the very impossibility of artistic cinema have been assuaged by directors and writers who successfully worked within the studio system while producing challenging work, the gradually decreasing cost of the technology that allowed experimental and independent work to get made, the importation of foreign films created under less commercial circumstances, and even by the creation of the Academy Awards in order to acknowledge so-called prestige films that studio heads (such as Fitzgerald's fictional Monroe Stahr) might put into production with the realization that they would gain more critical praise than financial success. Although the financial difficulty of creating and even more so distributing a film remains a barrier to

experimentation, by the 1950s enough alternatives to the Hollywood blockbuster had emerged to maintain some distinction between high culture and mass culture.

Given this uneasy peace between Hollywood and high culture, why did the explosion in popularity of television reignite all the old complaints used against film? In his 1978 diatribe against television, Jerry Mander claimed television's crimes included that "It encouraged passivity, not involvement" (23); it was "little more than the tool of [the biggest corporations]" (152); the images of television are mistaken for true representations of the world (254); and the content of television tends to favor strong emotions and highly visual action rather than subtle and complex human drama. And what does Mander offer as a counterexample to television's need for simplistic action and characters? Film! "If you will think back to a time when you first saw a film in a theater and then saw it on television, you will realize how much richness is lost in the translation from one medium to the other" (268). As different as viewing a film might be from going to live theatre or staying home and reading a novel, one still went through a similar process of identifying what titles one was interested in and paying for access to that particular work. Similarly, film critics and theorists could point out the use of *mise en scene* or cinematography in a particular film as distinct from reality because individual titles were understood to be self-contained works that one could go back to and view again (assuming a copy survived, which was not always the case), much as the literary critic encourages the rereading of novels by pointing out subtle uses of language or characterization. Television programs, however, did not offer this familiarity.

In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson claims that "every age is dominated by a privileged form, or genre, which seems by its structure the fittest to express its secret truths" (67). In previous ages the spirit of the time was best captured

by a particular style or genre of writing, but, according to Jameson, the late capitalist era has exposed the “underlying materiality of all things” so that the differences between media become more important than those of style. Jameson concurs with several voices quoted in my previous chapter that film was the central art form of the early century, but then qualifies that notion by pointing out that film “remained an essentially *modernist* formulation, locked in a set of cultural values and categories which are in full postmodernism demonstrably antiquated and ‘historical’” (69). Jameson proposes video as the new cultural dominant of the latter half of the century, in large part due to the difficulty of fitting it into a traditional definition of the autonomous work of art.<sup>7</sup> Though television critics have a long tradition of celebrating the teleplays of the early fifties, made-for-TV movies, mini-series, or even the recent commercial free dramas associated with HBO, such easily delineated programs are the exception to television’s rule of episodic serials interrupted by commercials. The paradigmatic nature of short-segment programming in American television is exemplified in Raymond Williams’ concept of “flow.” The flow of television programming, for Williams, emerges from the tendency of all the elements of a night’s viewing – commercials for products, promos for upcoming shows, introductory credits, fictional shows, and news broadcasts – to take on similar cultural values and images so that the constant interruptions merge into a carefully planned continuous experience, one that encourages viewers to continue watching. Despite the subjective nature of Williams’ definition (he uses his own initial bewilderment watching American television as the primary case study), the concept of flow has become entrenched in academic criticism. Williams describes flow as “the characteristic organisation, and therefore the characteristic experience” of television (86). While a number of prominent television theorists have critiqued the limitations of Williams’s analysis, particularly the claim that “flow” is the characteristic experience of television viewing, the term

inevitably gets remade rather than dismissed, suggesting that for all its limitations it at least captures the idea that viewing a television program is essentially different from viewing a film or reading a novel.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of whether the particular definition of flow offered by Williams or any variation on the concept utilized by other theorists is most accurate, the persistence of the idea in television studies points to the fascination with the institution of television over and above any particular programs that are produced. Jameson, too, picks up on Williams's idea as his central concept and sees the perpetual flow of television programming and commercials as exemplary of postmodern culture's loss of historical memory, waning of affect, and "depthlessness." Though Jameson claims commercial television and experimental video are "twin manifestations" (69) of the medium of video, it is odd that he devotes the greater part of his chapter on video to an analysis of the experimental video work *AlienNATION*. Though he places the word "work" in scare quotes, surely this piece produced at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago with its identifiable creators and clearly defined limits is far closer to being an autonomous work than a block of prime time network television. Jameson's choice further baffles when one considers that he argues that postmodernism is the cultural logic of late capitalism because late capitalism is the period of "a prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas" (36). Commercial television would seem a far better example of the cultural dominance of video than an experimental work that seeks some space for critiquing late capitalism. Jameson claims that commercial television is too interwoven into our everyday experiences to be easily studied, but, putting aside the problems with that statement, it is precisely the everyday nature of commercial television that makes it the cultural dominant of late capitalism rather than the peculiar material qualities of videotape.

Though television might be no more or less commercial, visual, or mass produced than a Hollywood film, its differences from the traditional notion of an autonomous work of art (or even a series of autonomous works broadcast one after another) has made it easier to integrate into everyday life (one needn't leave the home or really pay particular attention to it at any particular moment to enjoy it). This position television occupies in American life, along with the quality of live broadcast, allows television to aid and exemplify late capitalism's commodification of every aspect of our lives. Television appears a portal through which the private sphere is exposed to public scrutiny (and commodification), and the public sphere is beamed directly, and sometimes instantaneously, into the home.

If, indeed, television is the cultural dominant of the postmodern age, it surely is largely because commercial television in America turns every aspect of life into part of the capitalist system and makes the functioning of the capitalist system a daily part of private life. Television is a public medium heavily regulated by the government that maintains as one of its primary functions, unlike cinema and novels, the distribution of public information. However, it is also consumed largely in the home by individuals or families, with the most popular programming, particularly in the 1950s, consisting of representations of family life. The power of these representations of family life led John Corner to posit that for most of us it is difficult "to determine the origin of our ideas about family life, about other kinds of occupation than our own, about what would constitute the 'good life'" without reference to television (4). More than just shaping our ideas about family, the activity of watching television has long been seen as a peculiarly family activity, one that has altered how members of families relate to one another. In Lynn Spigel's study of the early reception of television in the home she cites numerous popular magazines that claimed this new invention was a necessity in the middle-class family for it

“would bring the family ever closer ... as a kind of household cement which promised to reassemble the splintered lives of families who had been separated during the war” (76). Ella Taylor claims that “the language and imagery of family break obsessively through the surface forms of all its [television’s] genres – comedy and dramatic series, daytime and nighttime soaps, made-for-TV movies, even news programming” (17), suggesting the domestic focus of television programming is not limited to particular shows or decades. Yet, because television broadcasts images that millions of people consume, it makes the private experience of watching a show a public one at the same time. The television set is as important a piece of furniture in most homes as a table or chairs (Spigel discusses the interest within 1950s women’s magazines about how to design a room around the television), yet it is a piece of furniture that immediately grants one access to a whole world outside the home. The activity of watching reshapes how families understand themselves, both by directly altering how time is spent at home and by indirectly promoting particular representations of family life via programming and commercials, representations approved by multi-national corporate sponsors and, in fact, used by those sponsors in advertisements broadcast on television (Spigel 77). The emergence of all those families watching comfortably from their homes has meant the public sphere has had to change in order to fit in. John Ellis points out the ubiquity of “direct address” (138) in news broadcasts and political debates, a tendency to speak to the viewer as if having a private conversation. As Rudolph Arnheim foresaw in 1935, bringing the world of politics and culture into the home is a great service, but it tends to “give a cozy family touch to public life” (9) that isolates the individual even more despite gaining access to so much new information. Because of, and within, television the private realm of the family is given new emphasis as a sphere autonomous

from the public sphere while at the same time making the activities within that private sphere the business of politicians, corporations, and millions of viewers.

**“All the men end up emasculated”: *Revolutionary Road***

In her study of the post-war popular novel, Elizabeth Long notes a definite thematic shift in the bestselling novels of the mid and late fifties, a shift characterized by “a rupture in connection between individual success, personal happiness and social progress” (91) and exemplified by Sloan Wilson’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Wilson’s novel about Tom Rath’s quest to find both personal and financial success without losing his family is one of many bestsellers from this period that are set in the suburbs and where the central conflict is that “the comfortable balance between family and work is undermined” (94). In Tom Rath’s case the threat to the family comes from his new job at the United Broadcasting Corporation. Although Tom’s job is doing public relations work for Ralph Hopkins, the head of the company, he makes clear that the association with television makes this corporate job worse than most as he mentally answers a question during his job interview by stating “The most significant fact about me is that I detest the United Broadcasting Corporation, with all its soap operas, commercials, and yammering studio audiences, and the only reason I’m willing to spend my life in such a ridiculous enterprise is that I want to buy a more expensive house and a better brand of gin” (13). Tom’s wife Betsy names television as the threat to familial bliss even more clearly when she responds to Tom’s increasingly long work hours by reorganizing the family’s social rituals:

“No more television.”

“What?”

“No more television. I’m going to give the damn set away.”

“What for?”

“Bad for the kids,” she said. “Instead of shooing them off to the television set, we’re going to sit in a family group and read aloud” (66).

Although, as Long argues, the suburban novels of this period are responding to the failure of the American Dream of individual success actually to fulfill people and to the growing emptiness of “organization men,”<sup>9</sup> it is the television set that is often seen as the real intruder within the private sphere. The idea that “giv[ing] the damn set away” and reading more books as a group will reestablish the cohesion of the family is particularly ironic given that the image of family life Betsy so desperately wants – home-cooked meals eaten together, evenings spent talking to one another, church on Sundays – is a version of the family far more likely to be found on the “damn set” than in almost any piece of literature. The novel makes clear that Betsy’s plan and Tom’s disgust have little hope of holding out against corporate jobs and corporate entertainment. Though the Rathes end up compromising their image of domestic happiness, the novel never compromises in its insistence that television is a poor substitute for reading the classics. Tom, despite writing meaningless speeches about the importance of mental health for Ralph Hopkins, retains the soul of a poet throughout. As a paratrooper in Europe during World War II, Tom remembers a friend lost in battle “running with the grenade in mid-air, poised there forever like Keats’s lovers on a Grecian urn” (95), and back in the present he argues against his constant reveries of the war by an indirect reference to Wordsworth: “The past is something best forgotten; only in theory is it the father of the present” (97). When Tom ultimately turns down a promotion that would intrude even more into his private life, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* assures its readers that while the American Dream of individual success has been found lacking, a negotiated sense of fulfillment is still possible as long as the family is kept intact and true culture remains favored over passive entertainment.<sup>10</sup>

As Richard Yates worked on his 1961 novel *Revolutionary Road*, it was initially rejected by a publisher as being “one of the many imitators of *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*” (qtd. in

Bailey 178). Yates took this bit of criticism to heart and made it his goal to write a novel as different from Wilson's as possible. In fact, he saw Wilson's portrayal of family life as essentially television in a novel form with superficial characters who always said exactly what they felt. Rather than imitate Wilson, Yates's goal had always been to follow in the footsteps of F. Scott Fitzgerald. For the most part he accomplished this goal, both in the style of his writing (almost every critic and reviewer has made some comparison to Fitzgerald, almost always positive, though an early *San Francisco Chronicle* review dismisses Yates's short stories because "a close inspection of his four stories reveals that his stylistic graces are imitative, in the bad sense, of Scott Fitzgerald" [qtd. in Bailey 191]) and the style of his life (like Fitzgerald, Yates was a writer struggling for financial success that matched his critical success, and like Fitzgerald, Yates suffered from drunkenness and a difficult marriage). Here, though, the differences between Yates and Fitzgerald might be more interesting. Kurt Vonnegut, speaking at Yates's memorial service in 1992, pointed out the similarities between the two men's lives and then claimed,

[Yates] was a more careful writer than Fitzgerald, and one who was even more cunningly observant. He is not nearly so famous as Fitzgerald because he did not work with a glamorous cast: Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, Picasso, Gay Paree. Unlike Fitzgerald and Hemingway, he had to endure the humiliating and dreary ordeal of being a foot soldier in combat day after day. Unlike them, he did not and could not run away from middle-class life in America. So that is what he wrote about. (14)

Vonnegut paints Yates as Fitzgerald without the star-studded cast, a man who wrote with the same careful style but wrote about the daily struggles of the middle class rather than the slow demise of the upper class. To put it another way: Yates was to Fitzgerald as television was to film. David Castronovo and Steven Goldleaf say as much in the introduction to their critical study of Yates's work when they argue Yates rewrote "Fitzgerald's winter dreams of love and social ambition in a minor key. Yates's people are also almost always strugglers on their way to

jobs in business rather than golden people at the country club,” (7) and then compare the plots of Yates’s novels to “Ralph Kramden’s schemes from *The Honeymooners* turned tragic” (14). Yates, they note, made “a firm commitment to the language and thought patterns of ordinary people” (6), and they sound as though they could be describing a popular family sitcom when they observe that his novels contain “surprising plot twists, including just about every social mishap and inappropriate action that a middle-class person can fall prey to” (19). Of course the goal of Castronovo and Greenleaf is not to compare Yates’s novels to television (they describe the plot of *Revolutionary Road* as like a “well-made play” [39]) but to marshal support for a critical reading of a relatively obscure novelist. In fact television is hardly mentioned in the introduction or the chapter on *Revolutionary Road*, and while I would not argue that Yates was influenced by television in the same way that Fitzgerald was influenced by film, it is clear from the above descriptions that Yates’s novels were as much a product of the rise of television as Fitzgerald’s were of the rise of Hollywood.

Yates, himself, would likely have shuddered at any such comparison of his style to the television of his day. In his course description for his writing class at the New School for Social Research, Yates warned would-be students that “Emphasis is on the craft and art of the short story as a serious fictional form, rather than on its commercial possibilities” (qtd. in Bailey 197), and the most common sentiment at his memorial service was stated succinctly by novelist Jayne Anne Phillips: “Dick Yates was an artist. His passion and commitment to craft conquered all” (41). *Revolutionary Road*, indeed, was nominated for the 1962 National Book Award, and critic James Atlas would call it “one of the few novels I know that could be called flawless” (84) so any comparisons to the family sitcom are not meant as a judgment of quality. Rather, much like with Fitzgerald and Nathanael West, it is precisely Yates’s desire to create a work of art in

opposition to the perceived superficiality of mass culture that makes any similarities to television so important to analyze.

### **Life in the Suburbs**

*Revolutionary Road* is the story of the Wheeler family – Frank and April and their two small children Jennifer and Michael – who live in a suburban enclave of Connecticut in 1955. Frank works for his father's old company, Knox Business Machines, as part of the Sales Promotion Department while April, once an aspiring actress, stays home with the children. Both adult Wheelers detest the suburbs and spend their evenings discussing the dire state of American culture with their friends, the Campbells. After a fight April comes up with the idea of moving to Paris where she will support the family with secretarial work while Frank finally "finds himself." Frank, at first enthused by the plan, becomes less sure when he is offered a promotion at Knox and is genuinely relieved when April gets pregnant since it ends their fantasy without his having to admit that he likes their conventional lifestyle. After Frank confesses an affair to April, she dies trying to administer an abortion to herself, and Frank becomes an empty shell of a man who can only talk about his job and his therapist. Even in this final version, the similarities to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* are numerous. Both novels take place in the suburbs of Connecticut and stay focused on the inner turmoil of the husband as he commutes back and forth between the world of work and the world of home. Like Tom Rath, Frank Wheeler fondly remembers fighting during the war as a time of clarity and true manliness and finds his current work meaningless. In both novels the central conflict involves a potential promotion at work along with the discovery of another child – in Tom's case he learns that he left a girl pregnant in Italy during the war and that she needs his help now to support the child. The major difference, of course, is that while Tom is able to negotiate a temporary peace between the demands of home

and the demands of work, Frank is exposed as all talk by his wife and the family is quickly torn apart.

Though the conflicts get resolved quite differently, both Frank and Tom face the same dilemma – a superficial life outside the home that has nevertheless begun to take on family-like characteristics and a less-than-ideal family life that is both dependent on and torn apart by the success offered by their unfulfilling jobs. Any sense of traditional boundaries between the public and private is made all the more confused as their wives grow dissatisfied with their domestic roles – April plans to become the breadwinner in Paris and Betsy Rath hopes to become a real estate mogul – while the men suffer the consequences of extra-marital affairs that had offered the comforts of the private sphere while away from home. Despite the obvious critiques of corporate capitalism and traditional gender roles seen in this basic synopsis, for both novels the television set lurks always in the background, an objective correlative for the emotional conflicts of the main characters. For the Rath family the conflict is about how to protect the family from the demands of the world outside the home, and Betsy's answer, get rid of the television, is unrealistic but attractively simple. For the Wheelers the problem is quite the opposite. As sophisticated former city-dwellers, the Wheelers see the images on television as the drug that Americans take in order to pretend the public sphere does not exist. Early in the novel, Yates flashes back to the first time the young Wheeler couple drove down Revolutionary Road and discovered the home where they would establish their future family. The crassness of the suburban neighborhood is remarked by the Wheelers as well as their real estate agent Helen Givings, but they see potential in the house to set up a comfortable room for reading – “a solid wall of books would take the curse off the picture window” (30) – and socializing. The eventual distance between this vision of a European-style salon and their present reality is summarized by

a short description of the room as they return home from April's failed performance in an amateur play:

Only one corner of the room showed signs of human congress – carpet worn, cushions dented, ash trays full – and this was the alcove they had established with reluctance less than six months ago: the province of the television set ('Why not? Don't we really owe it to the kids? Besides it's silly to go on being snobbish about television...'). (31)

Still fighting with April a few days later, Frank attempts to win back her love by doing what he thinks attracted her to him in the first place – criticizing American culture. After hearing from the Campbells that Helen Givings has had to commit her son to an insane asylum, Frank grandly orates that "Wasn't this, he asked, a beautifully typical story of these times and this place? A man could rant and smash and grapple with the State Police, and still the sprinklers whirled at dusk on every lawn and the television droned in every living room" (65). For Frank the television represents the insularity of the suburban world, the reluctance of the suburban family to confront reality except in the form of television images: "let's all be good consumers and have a lot of Togetherness and bring our children up in a bath of sentimentality – Daddy's a great man because he makes a living, Mummy's a great woman because she stuck by Daddy all these years – and if old reality ever does pop out and say Boo we'll all get busy and pretend it never happened" (66).

For the Wheelers, then, the danger is not that domestic bliss will be shattered by the outside world, but that television seems to deaden the minds and insulate the emotions of the American family. Frank recognizes what Betsy Rath does not, that the best place to find praise for the family is, in fact, on television. Were Yates simply to continue with this characterization of television through the rest of the novel, he would already have a more complex understanding of the medium's contradictory effects on the public/private divide than Wilson offers, but Yates sets up this image of Frank early in the novel in order to show that it, too, simplifies television's

power. Frank's speech does have the intended effect of ending his fight with April, but not in the way he had planned. Rather than make April remember the man she had fallen in love with, April comes to the realization that "everything you said was based on this great premise of ours that we're somehow very special and superior to the whole thing, and I wanted to say 'But we're not! Look at us! We're just like the people you're talking about!'" (110). April therefore plans to put Frank's words into action. They will leave suburban Connecticut behind and move to Paris, "the only part of the world worth living in" (22) according to Frank in college. There the artificial, or "unrealistic" as April calls them, boundaries of the public and private worlds will dissolve as Frank stays home to "find himself" while April goes to work each day as a secretary for an embassy. After some initial reluctance Frank gives in to the dream April presents him and they begin to make preparations for their expatriation. Frank and April renew their sex lives, encouraging Frank to indulge in another diatribe against American culture, this time with April's full approval:

"This whole country's *rotten* with sentimentality," Frank said one night, turning ponderously from the window to walk the carpet. "It's been spreading like a disease for years, for generations, until now everything you touch is flabby with it."

"Exactly," she said, enraptured with him.

"I mean isn't that really what's the matter, when you get right down to it? I mean even more than the profit motive or the loss of spiritual values or the fear of the bomb or any of those things? Or maybe it's the result of those things; maybe it's what happens when all those things start working at once without any real cultural tradition to absorb them. Anyway, whatever it's the result of, *it's* what's killing the United States. I mean isn't it? This steady, insistent vulgarizing of every idea and every emotion into some kind of pre-digested intellectual baby food; this optimistic, smiling-through, easy-way-out sentimentality in everybody's view of life?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes."

"And I mean is it any wonder all the men end up emasculated? Because that *is* what happens; that *is* what's reflected in all this bleating about 'adjustment' and 'security' and 'togetherness' – and I mean Christ, you see it everywhere: all this television crap where every joke is built on the premise that daddy's an idiot and mother's always on to him." (128-9)

Although Frank directs his complaints at family sitcoms only at the end of his speech, I quote it at length in order to note Frank's posturing style – he had always thought of himself as “an intense, nicotine-stained, Jean-Paul-Sartre sort of man” (23) and here turns “ponderously” after looking contemplatively out the window to deliver his thoughts to an eager audience – as well as the associations of traditional culture and art with masculinity. The speech above becomes a version of sexual intercourse for the couple – April is “enraptured with him,” “‘Yes,’ she said. ‘Yes’” – and Yates had already established that the newly invigorated sex life of the couple was tied to their ability to talk to one another about Paris: “they would take their places in the living room – April curled attractively on the sofa, usually, and Frank standing with his back to the bookcase, each with a cup of black Italian coffee and a cigarette – and give way to their love affair” (126). Where television emasculates all the men, using their incompetence within the domestic realm as a source for endless jokes, high culture instills their rational, political words (the very basis of the public sphere according to Habermas) with sexual potency. A few nights later Frank tries to explain to April how wonderful he now feels and attempts to compare his feelings to the rush of military combat. April, however, supplies a better point of comparison: “I felt that way once too,” she says. “The first time you made love to me” (130).

Unfortunately for the health of his marriage, this bond in Frank's mind between a critical high culture and sexually potent masculinity had already pushed him to begin an affair with Maureen Grube from his office. Unable to impress April anymore with his observations Frank decides to try his material on a new audience, taking Maureen out to lunch so that he might ask her, “how did she feel about the death of Dylan Thomas? And didn't she agree that this generation was the least vital and most terrified in modern times?” (96). The act works and Maureen takes Frank back to her apartment. Leaving her apartment afterwards he is almost run

down by a woman with a baby carriage but he does not let it bother him because “He felt like a man” (102) and is obviously above interacting with this symbol of the private sphere.

Not only are Frank’s reasons for supporting the Paris plan undercut by the scene with Maureen immediately preceding April’s transformation but also by the chapter immediately following the “time of such joyous derangement.” Here Yates takes us into the home of the Campbells for the first time. By this point the Wheelers have already declared the Campbells to be exemplary of the crass American culture they are trying to leave behind, yet the chapter begins with a brief narrative of Shep Campbell’s life, a life not all that different from Frank’s. Just as Frank had tried to rebel against the American Dream by briefly working as a longshoreman, Shep had gotten himself kicked out of private school so he could join the army and later get a mechanical engineering degree from a “third-rate institute of technology in the Middle West” (138). Like Frank, Shep suddenly looks up to find he is living in a middle-class nightmare punctuated by a house with “five brown engineering manuals in the whole naked width of its bookshelves, a box that rang every night to the boom of television.” Shep fantasizes of returning to “the East,” where “a man went to college not for vocational training but in disciplined search for wisdom and beauty” and afterwards “you could put off going seriously to work until you’d spent a few years in a book-lined bachelor flat, with intervals of European travel, and when you found your true vocation at last it was through a process of informed and unhurried selection; just as when you married at last it was to solemnize the last and best of your many long, sophisticated affairs” (139-40). Shep, too, has longed for the authenticity promised by traditional high culture. And Shep, too, has intertwined his fantasy of sophistication with images of sexual potency. When the Wheelers tell the Campbells of their plans that night at dinner, Shep is in agony. Infatuated with April, Shep can imagine nothing more fulfilling than

having the culture of Paris and the body of April Wheeler at the same time, a life quite the opposite of the one that had revolted him earlier that night as he almost tripped over his four sons “all propped on their elbows to stare at the flickering blue of the television screen” (145).

In their chapter on *Revolutionary Road*, Castronovo and Goldleaf point out that Frank, like all the characters, is constantly acting and creating fantasies of the good life in order to survive in suburbia. For them, however, Frank’s constantly playing the part of a “Jean-Paul-Sartre sort of man” does not negate the fact that “His diatribes are often witty, and certainly the best commentary that comes out of anyone’s mouth” (40). Though Castronovo and Goldleaf recognize that part of Yates’s accomplishment in the novel is to refuse any simple solutions to suburban malaise, they proclaim that Frank’s great failure, ultimately, is that he is unable to act upon his accurate criticisms of 1950s America. While the Wheelers’ fantasies of lives full of Old World culture might be naïve and outdated, Castronovo and Goldleaf credit their desires for being earnest and basically positive. The tragedy of the novel is that despite finally having the education and financial resources to appreciate high culture, most Americans settled for “the throwaway culture of 1950s suburbia, the gaping ‘maw’ of the TV, the tackiness of Route 12, the half-hearted and amateurish forays into culture of their neighbors” (37). Castronovo and Goldleaf take the image of “the gaping ‘maw’ of the TV” directly from Frank’s thoughts as he and April battle over whether or not to abort her pregnancy. They do, however, leave out the observation that immediately precedes it: “the furniture that had never settled down and never would, the shelves on shelves of unread or half-read or read-and-forgotten books that had always been supposed to make such a difference and never had; the loathsome, gloating maw of the television set” (221). The television, and the “throwaway culture” it represents, is just part of Yates’s critique. High culture, as the Wheelers understand it, has failed to deliver on its promise

of authentic experience and a sophistication unavailable on television. More importantly for Frank, novels and philosophy have failed to bridge the public and private spheres while maintaining male domination.

### **Father Knows Best**

The earliest evidence that Yates does not see salvation from the illusions of television in traditional high culture is found in the opening chapter as April Wheeler plays the female lead in an amateur production of *The Petrified Forest* by Robert E. Sherwood. As the audience shuffles in, they discuss the importance of the ideas of the play (it is about a girl working in a diner in the desert of Arizona who longs to move to France to study art) and point out that regardless of the quality of the performance the most important thing “was not the play itself but the company – the brave idea of it, the healthy, hopeful sound of it: the birth of a really good community theater right here, among themselves” (7). As the goal of the theater group seems to be to bring high culture to the Connecticut suburbs, the choice of *The Petrified Forest* is doubly ironic – first, because many members of the group had wanted to do a play by Ibsen, Shaw, or O’Neill but had given in to the choice of “a common-sense majority” (4) to do a less challenging and more action-packed play, and second, because *The Petrified Forest* had already been made into a successful Humphrey Bogart film and would appear that very year, 1955, on live television. The production fails due to the incompetence of the actors, but even a great performance would hardly have offered the suburbanites a new experience.

April is crushed by her poor performance and begins a long fight with Frank. Though Frank has clearly done nothing wrong outside of a few awkward attempts at cheering her up, he becomes the object of her anger. Notably during their argument Frank protests that she is “doing a pretty good imitation of Madame Bovary” and placing him in “the role of dumb, insensitive

suburban husband” (25) that he would later declaim as television’s emasculating portrayal of men. Here we see both Frank’s fear of being associated with the culture of television and his superficial use of literature. Yates would later admit he used Flaubert’s novel as a guide for creating April (“Some” 3), yet Frank can only see her dissatisfaction with her life as an act. Unlike in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, where the value of television is dismissed, in part, by the ability of Tom Rath to use bits of literature to authentically express his feelings, Frank’s literary references are always ironic. He calls upon *Madame Bovary* in order to dismiss his wife’s unhappiness and fails to see that her life is, indeed, quite similar to Emma Bovary’s. As previously mentioned he sees himself as a “Jean-Paul-Sartre sort of man” while trying to pick up girls during his college days and uses Dylan Thomas to help him start an adulterous affair. Later, April chooses Paris as their future destination, for Frank has convinced her he speaks the language and knows the area, but he silently admits that his knowledge of the city is limited to his searches for prostitutes during the war and his high school reading of *The Sun Also Rises*. Finally, he justifies his decision to accept his promotion at work by imagining that the family might use the extra money to eventually make it to Europe where they might impress “a Henry-James sort of Venetian countess” (208) with their un-American-like sophistication. Frank has read a number of books in his life, but Yates rejects a simple opposition between novels and television, high culture and mass culture, by revealing that Frank’s actual relation to the novels is entirely superficial. Frank associates literature and high culture with male power and potency and so his initial rejection of the suburban life represented by television is more his rejection of the loss of that power than it is a defense of literature.

It is not surprising, then, that Frank quickly reverses his feelings about the image of the private sphere offered by television. Though it has been a long-standing joke for Frank that he

has the most boring job in the world, the first bit of approbation he receives for his work pushes the Paris fantasy to the side and replaces it with a vision of coming home from the city, telling April about the praise for his sales piece, and having her lovingly reprimand him for being too modest about his obvious talents. April, instead, asks him why he hadn't just quit right then rather than finish a meeting for a job he would soon be leaving. Frank, upset that he cannot share his success at work with April and fearful that in Paris he will end up "hunched in an egg-stained bathrobe, on an unmade bed, picking his nose" (109), suddenly finds television quite interesting as one night "they watched a television drama which he found wholly absorbing and she declared was trash" (206). This is the night April tells him she is pregnant again. Frank responds to the news of another child and their ruined plans by transforming their lives into a television program. Part three of the novel opens with the line "Our ability to measure and apportion time affords an almost endless source of comfort" (213), making direct reference to Frank's military training but perhaps indirectly commenting on one of the pleasures of television – the regular schedule.<sup>11</sup> As they discuss what to do about the pregnancy, Frank becomes an expert television actor, utilizing carefully practiced facial gestures to help make his points: "When he lit a cigarette in the dark he was careful to arrange his features in a virile frown before striking and cupping the flame (he knew, from having practiced this at the mirror of a blacked-out bathroom years ago, that it made a swift, intensely dramatic portrait)" (219). Television actors, of course, had to do far more acting with their faces due to the dependence on close ups during the early days of tiny screens. He is also careful during this period to never mention work or the outside world, but instead to keep the spotlight intensely on the private world of the home, and he finds himself admiring her "heavy and soft and vein-shot" (221) legs because they are more "womanly" now. When April points out how conventional his morality has become, he

wants to shout “when are you going to get over this damn Noel-Coward, Nineteen-Twenties way of denigrating every halfway decent human value with some cute, brittle, snobbish little thing to say?” (222), sounding like an advertisement for the benefits of wholesome, family entertainment on TV over dreary and pretentious high culture. And once he gets his raise and the deadline for safely having the abortion passes, Frank breaks off the affair with Maureen and happily decides, “The whole episode could now be dismissed as something separate and distinct from the main narrative flow of his life – something brief and minor and essentially comic” (273), using language that could easily be applied to the writing of most any serial television sitcom.

While Frank is slowly becoming a character in a sitcom, April realizes during the weeks leading up to the abortion that her love of Frank has always been an act and that Frank’s diatribes against the superficiality of American art and culture have always been more about displaying his masculinity than anything else. After deciding to go through with the abortion despite having passed the safe period, April decides to play her part in Frank’s sitcom, meeting him that morning with eggs and juice and a kiss. She asks him to explain his “complicated” job to her, signaling that the public sphere belongs to him while she is content in her domestic space. This is the last time Frank will see her alive. After Frank leaves for work, April calmly goes about the process of administering an abortion to herself. Yates would later claim that this scene was the central theme and inspiration for the novel (Bailey 177), a scene that represents the antipode of the television sitcoms at this time in which censors would not even allow the word “pregnant” to be used. Just as important as this rejection of television’s limitations is the destruction of the association of the private sphere with femininity and family. Though Yates likely agreed with Frank’s criticisms of suburbia and television sitcoms, the second half of the novel rejects the simple association of literature with masculinity and the public sphere and television with

femininity and the private sphere. April offers Frank an opportunity to truly escape suburban life and end the artificial separation of life into work and home, a man's world and a woman's world. She offers him the opportunity to put his words into action, and he balks at the thought, grasping for the comforts of family-life as portrayed on television instead.

The end result of this analysis is a complex picture of the relation between literature and television. *Revolutionary Road* does not concern itself with the relative aesthetic merits or technical limitations of the two media but with the associations middle-class Americans made with each in the 1950s. A prosperous middle-class finally had the money and leisure to partake of the critical ideas of high culture, but many of those critical ideas might threaten traditional gender hierarchies by offering middle-class women the tools to enter the public sphere. At the same time, television was daily bringing the public sphere into the home. In response to this blurring of boundaries, the media assemblage of the period developed in such a way that the novel became associated with male potency and public power while the television was associated with femininity and the private sphere. Television seemed to emasculate men by making them bumbling fools within the domestic sphere, yet it also reaffirmed the separation of spheres that had helped men retain power. Writing a few years after the period he portrays in his novel, Richard Yates criticizes the retreat from public life by making television the primary symbol of suburbia, yet he also dismisses the simple association of literature with masculinity by revealing the shallowness of Frank's sophistication and the artificiality of associating television with femininity. Yates does so by writing a novel that, like television sitcoms and dramas, takes the life of an average American family in the suburbs seriously. Though there is no reason to think Yates was attracted to television in the same way Fitzgerald was attracted to film, his novel participates in the novel-television assemblage by addressing the same subject that dominated

television programming – the family – while simultaneously critiquing a simplistic defense of literature that associates it with masculinity.

**“A simplified vision of reality”: *Being There***

One reason that television is able to complicate the public/private divide in ways that a newspaper or novel, which also brings the outside world into the home, does not is the association of television with “liveness.” Of course, television presents us electronic representations of live figures no more real than the subjects of film or photography, and a great deal of television programming is either rehearsed or recorded ahead of time, yet, since its very beginnings, the ability of television to immediately transmit images of another place into our homes has been seen as one of its most defining features. Again turning to Arnheim’s early prognostications for the new technology: “Through television radio becomes a documentary medium. Only when it ministers also to the eye, radio fulfills its task ... of making us witness immediately what is going on in the wide world around us. ... The detour via the describing word becomes unnecessary, the barrier of foreign languages loses importance. The wide world itself enters our room” (6-7). Even radio, for Arnheim, is not as live as television as we must rely on the interpretations of others and the slow flow of language rather than the immediacy of our own vision. William Boddy offers numerous opinions by industry insiders that show that “According to many early writers on television, the essential technological feature of television versus the motion picture was the electronic medium’s capacity to convey a simultaneous distant performance visually” (80). For Arnheim the liveness of television is important only in its ability to transmit information with seemingly little alteration. For Boddy, though, one of the most enduring effects of this unique feature of the new medium was its influence on fictional programming. Boddy quotes Gilbert Seldes’s claim in his 1952 book *Writing for Television* that

“The tension that suffuses the atmosphere of a live production is a special thing to which audiences respond; they feel that what they see and hear is happening in the present and therefore more real than anything taken and cut and dried which has the feel of the past” (81). For many of the writers and critics cited in Boddy’s chapter on live television, this “more real” feeling noted by Seldes necessitates television drama that presents settings and characters unadorned by artistic interpretation so that “television celebrates the ordinary” (Taylor 19) or at least transforms the ordinary into an event merely by the feeling of watching something live. Because the program is being viewed on a small screen by a small group of people, the writing and acting must be more sincere and less stylized. In short the power of a television program was to be found not in its unique aesthetic qualities but in its ability to best utilize the medium’s capacity for overcoming the physical boundaries of space and time. The claim by one of Britain’s first television producers, Gerald Cock, that “viewers would rather see an actual scene of rush hour at Oxford Circus directly transmitted to them than the latest in film musicals” (qtd. in Corner 25) certainly runs counter to the expectations of a carefully crafted work of art associated with the novel or film. And although the transmission of the current traffic situation or any other such live event actually constitutes a very small portion of television programming, television executives have long noted and made use of the power of immediacy, whether in news shows or fiction.

The two most oft-cited articles on the subject of live television are Heath and Skirrow’s 1977 study of a British current affairs documentary and Jane Feuer’s 1983 look at *Good Morning, America*. After an exhaustive analysis of how the editing and cinematography of a documentary on school truancy makes its argument about the issue through a reliance on the live presence of the camera despite few of the segments satisfying any common sense definition of

live, Heath and Skirrow conclude that “*the television programme is then effectively identified with the ‘live’ television programme*” as against the film or novel (emphasis Heath and Skirrow 53). Feuer examines how an American morning news show utilizes the powerful connotations of “liveness” in order to affirm an ideology of familial and national unity, a bringing together of the public and private. As she argues, “Network television never truly exploits its capacity for instantaneous and unmediated transmission. Only the ideological connotations of live television are exploited in order to overcome the contradiction between flow and fragmentation in television practice” (16). Television becomes a window into the real world rather than another medium for transmitting fictional representations of the world. The power and dangers of this metaphor of transparency are explored in Jerzy Kosinski’s 1970 novel *Being There*.

*Being There*, Kosinski’s third novel, recounts the rise of Chance, over the course of one week, from humble gardener to vice-presidential candidate. What makes this meteoric change in fortune all the more remarkable is the fact that prior to the day Chance was struck by the limousine of EE Rand, the precipitating event of his ultimate fame, he had never set foot outside the walls of the house where he was born. Chance, mentally defective from birth, spent all his time either tending the gardens of the wealthy old man who owned the house or watching television. When the old man dies Chance is thrust into the outside world with no money, no identification, no past, and an understanding of American life based almost entirely on countless hours of television consumption. Kosinski presents to the reader, then, a protagonist raised by television, a satirical exaggeration of the millions of Americans in 1970 who now watched television an average of six hours a day and had grown up with the medium as their primary source of entertainment and news. The fact that Chance is expelled from a garden and that the novel takes place over seven days, Sunday-Saturday, led many reviewers, whether enthusiastic

or critical, to label the novel a modern fable of the re-creation of man in the image of television, a simple satire of the emptiness of America's media culture.<sup>12</sup> The novel was popular enough and straightforward enough for Jerry Mander to cite it as evidence against the substitution of television for real-life experiences in his call to eliminate the medium (283-4).

Mander accurately describes the plot of *Being There* in his quick summary, yet the conclusions he draws – that the images presented to us on television can hardly substitute for real life and therefore television should be eliminated before any more damage can be done – seem hardly borne out by the novel. Chance, the man who knows only what television has taught him, gets along very well in the real world. True, he is incapable of a sex life and responds to the death of the old man and to meeting the President with the same bland affect, yet Chance, or Chauncey Gardiner as he becomes, seems to make everyone he comes into contact with happier; he forms an emotional attachment to EE; he is described by experts as “emotionally one of the most well-adjusted American public figures to have emerged in recent years” (127); and the novel ends with Chance filled with a sense of peace. If Mander hopes to reveal how ruinous television can be Chance hardly seems like the ideal cautionary tale. Kosinski's critique is largely directed not at Chance but at the media-saturated world that transforms him into a star and his literal proclamations about gardening into sage wisdom about the economy. The people who meet Chance seem to only see what they want to see, never getting past his expensive wardrobe (borrowed from the old man) or his polite, quiet demeanor. However, despite their misinterpretations of Chance's intelligence and meaning, the positive effects of Chance's presence remain authentic. The sickly Benjamin Rand draws new vigor from his time spent “talking” to Chance; his wife EE finds herself sexually liberated thanks to Chance – “You make me free. I reveal myself to myself and I am drenched and purged” (116); and the thousands of

people watching him on television are quite genuinely taken by his apparent optimism and lack of guile. Chance, of course, intends none of these responses (he evokes EE's sexual awakening by merely watching while she masturbates), yet none of them would have occurred without Chance's presence. Hence, John W. Aldridge's comparison of *Being There* to Orwell's *1984* – "Kosinski has imagined what might result if existing social conditions were developed to their logical conclusions, and he has chosen for a protagonist exactly the sort of man who would exemplify those conclusions in their full absurdity and horror" (73) – only makes sense if one reads the book with an already healthy dislike for television and its effects on American culture. Chance's adventures might, indeed, approach absurdity, but the dystopian horror of *1984* must be brought to the book by the reader.

### **The Father of Chauncey Gardiner**

Kosinski, himself, would have more likely taken issue with Aldridge's claim that *Being There* presents a future or hypothetical society rather than with his horror. In a 1971 interview Kosinski bristles at the interviewer's assumption that the novel takes the form of a myth or fable: "I don't think *Being There* is a fable. To dismiss it as some critics suggest, as a sort of contemporary *Candide*, reflects a simplified vision of reality. It's a novel about a social and emotional process which is by now so common that we don't even perceive it anymore" (Tartikoff 17). Though this social process might be extremely common, Kosinski's numerous comments on television reveal it is far from simple. At times Kosinski discusses television as the most dangerous threat to the novel: "as a visual medium I consider it to be the ultimate enemy of language, of imagination, and insight" (Tartikoff 19). At the same time he admits "Reading novels has always been an experience limited to a very small percentage of the so-called public" (Plimpton 34) and defends his decision to create a film version of *Being There* by

pointing out the novel “is completely visual” (Zito 160) despite an earlier proclamation that “My novels are not meant to be films. They are meant to be decoded” (Silverman 116). Kosinski sounds a bit like Jerry Mander when he claims “This is the first time when there is a perfect match between crude political ideas and the complex technology that makes those ideas acceptable” (Amory 8); “Television is the total medium; it almost becomes a substitute for tangible reality. Its accessibility, its digestability is far greater than that of any other medium” (Tartikoff 16); or “For me, imagining groups of solitary individuals watching their private, remote-controlled TV sets is the ultimate future terror: a nation of videotots” (Sohn 98). Despite these warnings Kosinski admits “I see no reason to dismiss a medium to which 6.5 hours a day are devoted to an average American. For one, it is still politically free and, a quite liberal medium – and think how many people it reaches – even if so slightly” (Tartikoff 17) and that “I watch it a lot” (Sohn 91). Kosinski even became a frequent guest on Johnny Carson’s talk show after his successful first appearance promoting the publication of *Being There* and became such a favorite of the host and audience that biographer James Park Sloan describes him as a “crossover pop-culture star” (296). Television, therefore, propelled Kosinski’s career both by giving him a popular target that middle-class readers were eager to see satirized and by giving him access to millions of people who otherwise would never have heard of him or read his books. Kosinski seems prescient of his own future stardom when he places Chance on the set of a talk show and has him realize in amazement that “He would be seen by more people than he could ever meet in his entire life – people who would never meet him” (64). The film version of *Being There*, also written by Kosinski, connects this observation about television’s reach to the decline of older arts. As Chance is preparing for his television debut the stage manager excitedly asks him:

“Do you realize more people will be watching you tonight than all those that have seen theater plays in the last forty years?”

“Oh yes?”

“Yes!”

“Why?”

“Hell, I don’t know.”

The stage manager laughs uncomfortably at the situation, aware that the ridiculous proportion in popularity between television and traditional theater is somehow both a testament to the simplicity of television audiences and the impressive influence of the televisual medium.

There is, obviously, an irony to Kosinski appearing on a popular talk show to promote a novel that appears to criticize the inanity of popular talk shows, their guests, and their audiences. The irony would hardly matter, though, to television audiences who had grown used to a medium that was often self-referential and self-deprecating,<sup>13</sup> but the willingness to indulge in irony is more surprising from the point of view of Kosinski, a novelist who wrote of popular culture in 1979, “the more of such entertainment we have around, the less we think” and “I’m not contemptuous of popular culture – which has a place in a free society – but I have a right to counter it” (“Our” 42). It is by no means imperative that Kosinski shun television in order to criticize it, though one might expect someone who sets up such a clear opposition between the novel and television to be less enthusiastic about contributing content to the already more prevalent medium. However, whether one judges the irony harmless, intentional, or potentially damaging, the contradiction appears to go deeper than mere hypocrisy. In a 1971 interview Kosinski makes the somewhat cryptic remark “Remember: I am the actual father of Chauncey Gardiner” (Tartikoff 17). Interviewer Brandon Tartikoff lets the proclaimed parentage pass without comment, though earlier in the interview Kosinski had defended Chance as “the only man who truly reflects the contemporary life. He’s at peace with the environment, which is already so broken, that he, as a little fragment of it could not survive in it on his own” (15). In a separate interview Kosinski had jokingly been asked whether *Being There* was as

autobiographical as his first two novels, leading him to answer “it’s not directly autobiographical in terms of my past, but it certainly is in terms of my future” (Amory 7). Each of these comments can be interpreted as examples of Kosinski’s famous quick wit or as dark observations on the inescapability of popular culture. Such is the tack taken by Wayne Warga when Kosinski explains in 1973 that “If anything, *Being There* and *Devil Tree* are more autobiographical than my other books” (64). Warga interprets this observation for his readers:

Perhaps it is because Kosinski sees quickly and acutely the dark side of the American dream. He writes in lean sharp compositions which cut through to the core of thought and feeling. *Being There* is about a man with no past suddenly and fatefully thrust into prominence, a prominence enhanced by the media. Kosinski himself talks little of his past and has never publicly spoken of his marriage until now.

When Kosinski compares himself to Chance, then, it can reveal his bleak outlook on American culture or his own thoughtful reflections on his surprising media popularity, but what it cannot mean, apparently, is that Kosinski, like Chance, is deeply influenced by the medium of television.

Kosinski does admit that the powerful influence of television is impossible for novelists to completely resist: “I think the American novelist will have great difficulty in fencing off the influence of television and of film, the media which have very short attention spans, which bombard quickly, which are gimmicky in their attitudes; but conversely, some novelists will quite consciously try to do the very opposite” (Klinkowitz 55). Though he does not say so here, Kosinski would seem to place himself in the latter group, as a novelist trying to create an experience directly opposed to what one finds when watching television. In several interviews Kosinski discusses his writing style, one generally noted for its spare use of description, and contrasts it to television viewing. Unlike television, which distances us from its images because those images are so concrete and particular, “The printed page offers nothing but ‘inking’; the

reader provides his own mental props, his own emotional and physical details. From the infinite catalog of his mind, the reader picks out the things which were most interesting to him, most vivid, most memorable as defined by his own life” (Sohn 91).

What Kosinski is describing in television is the effect of “liveness.” As he tells George Plimpton, “Television is everywhere. It has the immediacy which the evocative medium of language doesn’t. Language requires some inner triggering; television doesn’t. The image is ultimately accessible, i.e., extremely attractive. And, I think, ultimately deadly, because it turns the viewer into a bystander” (34). For Kosinski, then, the threat posed by television is not just that it is visual, but that those visual images are perceived as immediate and transparent, requiring little effort on the receiving end other than to passively consume.

### **He Looks Taller on Television**

The opening chapters of *Being There* display just how totalizing the experience of television can be. Chance uses television to create his sense of identity “By changing the channel he could change himself” (5). Television becomes the primary means of marking time: “The last time he had seen this part of the house some of the trees in the garden, now tall and lofty, had been quite small and insignificant. There was no TV then” (7); “I was here before there were big bushes and before there were automatic sprinklers in the garden. Before television” (16); and “As a matter of fact, they were planted when there was no television yet, only radio” (21). Once television takes such an important role in one’s life, one becomes disconnected from the world: “By turning the dial, Chance could bring others inside his eyelids. Thus he came to believe that it was he, Chance, and no one else, who made himself be” (6) and “As long as he didn’t look at people, they did not exist. They began to exist, as on TV, when one turned one’s eyes on them. Only then could they stay in one’s mind before being erased by new

images” (14). And all of these images are absorbed as passively as a plant taking in sunlight: “He sank into the screen. Like sunlight and fresh air and mild rain, the world from outside the garden entered Chance” (6).

The all-consuming nature of Chance’s television obsession has led critics to read him as a very one-dimensional figure, one as incapable of depth as any television image. Jerry Mander calls him “a mechanical person, a humanoid. He is there physically, but like the television images, he is also not there” (284). Elizabeth Stone describes him as “a man who isn’t there; though he has physical substance, he has no experiences, or doesn’t know he has had the experiences he *has* had” (156). Paul R. Lilly, Jr. sees Chance as the passive “victim of TV” (188). As mentioned before, describing Chance as a victim or hollowed out shell of a human being becomes harder to maintain if one looks at how effective he is once forced into the real world, how powerfully he is able to evoke emotions in those around him, and how the novel ends with a sense of inner peace (how does “a mechanical person” or an unwitting victim attain inner peace?). Though one might be able to salvage this simplified reading of Chance by taking the responses he evokes in others as part of an overarching critique of American society, one cannot reconcile it with a closer look at the characterization of Chance. The first page of the novel warns us against dismissing Chance as non-human: “Plants were like people; they needed care to live, to survive their diseases, and to die peacefully. Yet plants were different from people. No plant is able to think about itself or able to know itself; there is no mirror in which the plant can recognize its face; no plant can do anything intentionally: it cannot help growing, and its growth has no meaning, since a plant cannot reason or dream” (3-4). Even though Chance seems to gravitate toward the TV light the way a plant turns towards the sun, he recognizes that “The figure on the TV screen looked like his own reflection in a mirror” (6) something a plant could

not do. Rather than being passively pushed into the world Chance “was glad that now, after the Old Man had died, he was going to be seen by people he had never been seen by before” (14), suggesting both that he has inner desires and that he is aware of his relationship to other people. Though several reviewers and critics characterize Chance as someone who cannot tell the difference between reality and television, Chance recognizes that the two are separate, “He knew that a man’s name had an important connection to his life. That was why people on TV always had two names – their own, outside of TV, and the one they adopted each time they performed” (16), and is actually “surprised” (28) upon first stepping outside the garden walls that the real world so closely resembles what he had seen on his TV. Stone’s assertion that Chance is incapable of retaining experiences is countered by his ability to mine his lifetime of gardening as well as his interactions with the Old Man and the servant Louise for applicable references, and however dismissive one is of the experience of watching television, Chance has clearly seen and retained enough information to understand how to converse (37), the social stigma of illiteracy (23), and the effects of alcohol (41). Certainly these minor insights into society do not make up for his inability to understand fear, death, or sex but there is a vast difference between someone damaged by television and someone rendered inhuman by it, a difference that can lead either to trying to identify with and understand a character or dismissing him as merely a parable.

Worst of all, I think, is the assertion that Chance is a victim. While he, indeed, is not fully aware of the experiences and emotional nuances of which a lifetime of secluded television viewing has deprived him, to see Chance as a victim is to see television as a monolithic evil one must simply avoid. Kosinski’s comments about his own television viewing habits as well as his numerous appearances on television suggest that it is far too simplistic to see Chance as a television addict, victim to the pleasures of image and sound the medium offers. It makes sense

to read the ending of chapter one, the death of the Old Man, as a pointed critique of Chance's dehumanization due to television: "Chance gazed once more at the Old Man, mumbled good-bye, and walked out. He entered his room and turned on the TV" (9). Chance responds to the death of one of the only people he has ever known, and quite likely his own father, with no emotional response, returning instead to his daily routine. However, Kosinski explains one of the differences between television and literature thusly:

From way back, our major development as a race of frightened beings has been towards how to avoid facing the discomfort of our existence, primarily the possibility of an accident, immediate death, ugliness, and the ultimate departure. In terms of this television is a very pleasing medium: one is always the observer. The life of discomfort is always accorded to others and even this is disqualified since one program immediately disqualifies the preceding one. Literature does not have this ability to soothe. You have to evoke and by evoking, you yourself have to provide your own inner setting. When you read about a man who dies, part of you dies with him. (Plimpton 34)

Juxtaposed to this comment, Chance's retreat to the television after the death of the Old Man seems less the robotic response of a victim drained of his emotions by television and more the choice of a human being defending himself against humanity's oldest foe. Such a reading, of course, remains critical of television, but it at least opens up the possibility that rather than victimizing the population, television satisfies long-standing needs and desires. By this point in the novel (nine pages!), however, most critics have already decided Chance is incapable of anything but plant-like gestures.

Once we see Chance as a willing participant in his relationship with television, several of his comments transform from the empty responses of a TV-addled mind to complex insights into television's power. After the President's visit, Chance turns on the TV, watches the President waving from his motorcade, and wonders "if he had actually shaken that hand only moments before" (56). This final line from the scene with the President appears to punctuate Chance's inability to appreciate what has happened to him and the rare honor he has received in

participating in a private meeting with the head of the country. Yet, before the President arrived Chance had remembered a previous appearance by the President on TV as he

stood on a raised platform, surrounded by military men in uniforms covered with glittering medals, and by civilians in dark glasses. Below, in the open field, never-ending columns of soldiers marched, their faces riveted upon their leader, who waved his hand. The President's eyes were veiled with distant thought. He watched the thousands in their ranks, who were reduced by the TV screen to mere mounds of lifeless leaves swept forward by a driving wind. Suddenly, down from the skies, jets swooped in tight, faultless formations. The military observers and the civilians on the reviewing stand barely had time to raise their heads when, like bolts of lightning, the planes streaked past the President, hurling down thunderous booms. The President's head once more pervaded the screen. He gazed up at the disappearing planes; a fleeting smile softened his face. (52)

I quote this memory at length to emphasize the language used. It would be difficult to attribute this somewhat flowery description to Chance, but since the paragraph offers no indication that this is anything but Chance's memory we must at least acknowledge that he experienced this series of images with a similar sense of grandeur. Here, again, the President waves his hand amidst a background orchestrated precisely for television. Given the juxtaposition of images, the careful use of close ups, and the pervading sense of watching a live, historic event is it at all surprising that the real handshake of a President in a quiet residential library might seem completely unrelated? Once one compares the two television appearances and notes the power of the medium to enhance the importance of whatever it shows, Chance's evaluation of the President, "he looks taller on television" (55), becomes quite discerning.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, Chance's excitement about appearing on a late night talk show – "He wanted to see himself reduced to the size of the screen; he wanted to become an image, to dwell inside the set" (60-1) could easily be dismissed as the mistaken understanding of the technology one might expect of a mentally challenged man who has never been outside his home. Such a reading remains possible, though much more difficult, to maintain when he subsequently "wondered whether a person changed

before or after appearing on the screen. Would he be changed forever or only during the time of his appearance? What part of himself would he leave behind when he finished the program? Would there be two Chances after the show: one Chance who watched TV and another who appeared on it?" (61). Coming from any other mouth these questions would display a penetrating mind trying to come to grips with a medium noted for its ability to present its viewers direct access to live events but which in practice altered the very identity of everything that appeared before its cameras. When Chance finally sits down for his interview he is enthralled by the thought that he "became only an image for millions of real people. They would never know how real he was, since his thinking could not be televised. And to him, the viewers existed only as projections of his own thought, as images" (65). Not only do these thoughts lay waste to any idea that Chance is unaware of the difference between television and the real world, they suggest that Chance is genuinely excited by the idea of hiding his true identity from millions of viewers while simultaneously standing before them, an excitement shared by Chance's creator, who told *Penthouse* magazine that "my visibility is my ultimate camouflage: nothing hides one better from the public than appearing on the Johnny Carson show" (Leaming 201). In neither of these scenes, of course, is television being praised exactly, but by seeing Chance as an expert on television rather than an idiot on real life, one can better understand the nation-wide fascination with a medium that communicates only shallow images, images that nevertheless become so much larger and more important when broadcast simultaneously to millions of tiny screens.

### **The Language of Television**

It is Chance's complete impotence and inability to understand sexuality that appears to offer the greatest proof of his victimization and distance from real human experience. When EE

first attempts to seduce Chance he is “bewildered” and we can both laugh at and feel sympathy for this man as he thinks of similar situations on television and realizes that what occurs after the seduction is always cut out. Chance only knows what he sees on TV and since television, at this time, never shows the endpoint of sexual seduction Chance has no idea how to respond. Chance is little more than a child. EE interprets Chance’s impotence and confusion as self-restraint, but eventually attempts to seduce him again. This time Chance is more prepared, and he explains “I like to watch you” (114). Again, this seems like pure comedy; Chance had been examining EE as if she were an image on the television screen from the first moment they had met (“He had seen many women who looked like her on TV” (30)) so we can only smile as EE translates his literal comment into a sexual request and masturbates in front of him. However, to read this scene as a repetition of the first seduction scene is once again to sell Chance short. As EE first begins to kiss and touch him Chance

wanted to tell her how much he preferred to look at her, that only by watching could he memorize her and take her and possess her. He did not know how to explain to her that he could not touch better or more fully with his hands than he could with his eyes. Seeing encompassed all at once; a touch was limited to one spot at a time. EE should no more have wanted to be touched by him than should the TV screen have wanted it. (113-4)

Chance, then, is being sincere when he tells EE he wants to watch. Whether we would describe this as sexual desire or not on his part is up for debate, but it is a desire of some sort, a desire for the simultaneity of the visual experience, the ability to absorb vast amounts of information in a single glance. Watching, for all its associations with passivity, is the only way he could “possess her,” a way of connecting that, for Chance, is preferential to the limited contact of sexual touch. Before identifying this preference in Chance as a form of sexual perversion or sexual immaturity we should take into account Kosinski’s final interview when he seemed to surprise himself by claiming “I love social life and yet, yes, I am also a loner. There’s no contradiction. I like to

watch, to observe. Here I have a great deal in common with the character of Chance in *Being There*” (Gefen 231). Kosinski, too, liked to watch others, to possess them with his eyes even while protecting his own privacy and inner life.<sup>15</sup>

Naturally, just because Kosinski understands and even identifies with the pleasures of television viewing (and expresses those feelings through Chance) does not negate his comments on the superiority of written fiction and the dangers of America’s television obsession. What does complicate matters, however, is the strange similarity between what he sees as the function of a novelist and what Chance does for the people around him. Just as Kosinski uses each draft of his novels to further pare down his language to the bare minimum – “First, I pick up words rather indiscriminately and I type them on the page almost as if it were a poem. And then I begin to remove as many of them as possible” (Klinkowitz 49) – Chance appeals to Benjamin Rand because “You’re direct: you grasp things quickly and you state them plainly” (42) and it is his “uncanny ability of reducing complex matters to the simplest of human terms” (106) that makes him an instant hit on television and in the newspapers. While spare language is not necessarily simple language, the effect that Kosinski professes to aim for in his novels seems all too similar to the effect Chance has on those around him. Chance provides only the raw material which others imaginatively transform into truths about the world drawn from their own experiences. The most memorable examples of this process are Chance’s observations about gardening that Rand, the President, and eventually a large part of America understand as metaphors for the economy. While I agree with the critics and reviewers who see humor and absurdity in the situation, one should note that Chance does, indeed, provide people with the imagery they need to make sense of their own situation. They transform his literal comments into metaphor and his simple sentences into complex thoughts, but how different is this process from the literary critic

who reads Kosinski's description of the old man's garden and immediately assumes the author is making reference to Eden? One might make a distinction on the basis of intentionality; Chance clearly does not intend his words as metaphor, but Chance does not utter his thoughts on gardening arbitrarily. For example, when Ben interprets Chance's desire to find a new gardening position as a metaphor for the self-satisfaction of hard work and entrepreneurship, Chance picks up on the idea and agrees: "'Ben.' Chance nodded. 'The garden I left was such a place, and I know I won't ever find anything as wonderful. Everything which grew there was of my own doing: I planted seeds, I watered them, I watched them grow'" (40). Just as Benjamin filters Chance's words through his own experience, Chance does the same with Benjamin's words, a cycle of communication that, just as Kosinski insisted about novels, does connect two humans together even if the "decoding" process is not perfect. The code name the Russians eventually give to Chauncey Gardiner – "Blank Page" – suggests not only that he is a man without past or personality, but that he embodies the end point of Kosinski's writing philosophy. Rather than an exaggeration of America's television-obsessed "videots," Chance appears an exaggeration of Kosinski's relationship to language.<sup>16</sup> The most renowned theorist on television as *Being There* went to press, Marshall McLuhan, would come to quite similar conclusions as he identified television as a "cool medium" because it is "high in participation or completion by the audience" (23). McLuhan's oft-quoted mantra, "the medium is the message," makes clear that just as much as Kosinski he sees print and television as having entirely different effects on their audiences. In McLuhan's account, frequently criticized as it is, print is a hot medium that focuses intently and uniformly on one aspect of the visual (black ink on white paper organized in lines) and thus distances the reader while television invites the viewer to engage with the images and sounds in multiple ways. If McLuhan is correct about the difference between print and television, a matter

of some debate, it would explain Kosinski's seemingly contradictory feelings about television both in *Being There* and in his numerous interviews: in paring down his writing and eschewing the postmodern fascination with language as a system, Kosinski is actually hoping to attain the effect of television in his novels. He seems to say as much as he slips into visual metaphors during an interview and states, "I wanted to make the language of my fiction as unobtrusive as possible, almost transparent, so that the reader would be drawn right away into each dramatic incident ... For me a novelist is not a displayer of stylistic bonfires; he is primarily conveying a vision. Of course, whether the vision will 'ignite' the reader's mind is something the writer will never know" (Plimpton 29).

Even if one disregards McLuhan's controversial claims, a small number of critics have also noted the similarities between Kosinski's novels and television. Gerald Weales seems to stumble onto this association in his hasty dismissal of *Being There* as "a simple, mildly satirical parable, devoid of character and obvious in its message" (151), a description many other critics applied to Chance, assuming him to be the embodiment of television-soaked stupidity. Other critics have made more direct reference to Chance's resemblance to Kosinski's language. Samuel Coale suggests the writing "never rises above a certain flatness of tone or the simple descriptive diction that imitates the grayness of the television screen" (363), a style that, he feels, perfectly suits the subject matter though he is less enthusiastic about the novel than about Kosinski's first two. Paul R. Lilly, Jr. explores the metaphor of writers and writing throughout Kosinski's oeuvre and claims that "Chance is not an embryonic writer seizing the right language; he *is* that language to all those who hear him" (63). From this observation Lilly concludes that while the novel clearly questions the power of television over its audiences, the real power in the novel belongs to Chance through his use of language. Finally, and most notably, Ivan Sanders

observes that “Chance is an interesting projection of the author himself” for Kosinski and Chance both experience the English language as “something external, a contrivance, a game, like television” (179). Sanders then goes on to briefly point out that just as Kosinski has always been both fearful and fascinated with television, Chance appears to be both a frightening caricature of America’s future and a character who is easy to like.

Surprisingly, perhaps, each of the above readers, after noting the complex relationship between Kosinski and Chance, novels and television, ends up judging *Being There* the lightest and least interesting of the author’s first three works, primarily because it lacks “the sentence-by-sentence richness” (Lilly 67) of the first two novels, *The Painted Bird* and *Steps*, while *Being There*’s most enthusiastic reviewers have read Chance as little more than a horrific vision of America’s future if it continues to choose television over books. In other words, those who see the novel as making a clear differentiation between books and television have found much to like about it while those few who have noted the sometimes troubling overlap between the novel’s language and the popular medium it seems to critique have dismissed it. This apparent distaste, or even fear, of a muddled relationship between novels and television extends even to the author himself. As mentioned previously Kosinski was the primary screenwriter for the 1979 film version of *Being There* and he has anointed it a very accurate remake of the novel. For the most part this is undoubtedly true yet there are some significant differences. As already noted, Chance’s amazement at having his image seen by more people in one night than he could ever hope to meet in his life is placed in the mouth of a rather unattractive stage manager who adds the fact that more people will watch Chance than have been to the theatre in forty years, a clear critique of America’s entertainment choices. When meeting the President, Chance comments that “On television, Mr. President, you look much smaller,” (rather than “taller” as in the novel)

suggesting Chance truly believes the TV screen is a transparent window into reality and eliminating any insight on his part into the aggrandizing power of the television event. Chance's intriguing questions about how appearing on television will change him are eliminated, as he has no internal thoughts in the film, and his entire TV appearance is shown to us after the fact as he rides back to the Rands' house, watching himself on TV in amazement, as if he doesn't understand how he could be in two places at once. In the novel the television is on while EE masturbates, but there is no indication Chance is watching it until she finishes, but in the movie the camera makes a point of panning from EE (now just Eve) convulsing on the floor to Chance, oblivious, watching TV from the bed. The film then strikes the President with impotence (in a scene completely original to the film) as he watches Chance on TV, fearful of Chance's popularity with the crowds, removing any doubt about the correlation between television viewing and sexual failure. The film also adds several scenes of Chance wandering outside his home for the first time, scenes of urban decay and racial tension meant to critique the sanitized and predominantly white reality of television. The film version of Chance, who in the novel is actually surprised that television corresponds to reality as well as it does, reacts to an angry gang leader by pointing his remote control at him and trying to change the channel. Finally, the novel ends with Chance emptying his mind of all the images he had encountered since leaving the garden, including his own image he sees reflecting back at him in a pool of water. In doing so "Peace filled his chest" (140), a subtle ending in which Chance is able to find happiness only through divesting himself of the many connections he has made over the past week, an ending in which the shallowness of images is critiqued at the same time that we see that only through these images has Chance been able to become part of society. The film ends with Chance taking a walk, arriving at a lake, and then stepping out into it, walking across the water, and becoming no

more than a myth or parable himself. Though these changes constitute only a small portion of the film and, other than the ending, have hardly been noted by film or literary critics, they work together to transform the novel into exactly the straightforward satire of television that many reviewers initially saw in the print version. Though Kosinski claimed to think the film version was quite good, he admitted in 1991 that “The screenplay took a great deal of time, and frankly I thought it could have been better spent. I realized I could have written the novel differently, and that’s a wrong thought for a writer to have” (Gefen 231). If Kosinski truly believed the film version was a faithful adaptation of the novel then he had, indeed, “written the novel differently” this second time.

In pointing out these changes to the film version I do not wish to suggest the film is a failure or a watered down version of a complex novel. The film, to me, is an entirely different text, one that is interesting largely for its inclusion of race as part of its discussion of television. When Chance’s long-time caretaker, Louise, sees him on TV and remarks “It’s for sure a white man’s world in America” the film declares its focus on TV’s historical effect on American politics rather than the more ahistorical insights into the medium with which the novel engages. I also do not wish to claim that Chance represents Kosinski or that Chance represents language or novels any more than he represents television. To do so would be to reduce the novel, again, to parable. Instead, we need to think of Chance as a point of contact between novels and television within the 1970s media assemblage. Chance is a literary character, rendered to us only in words, who has spent most of his life watching television. Over the course of the novel he appears on TV and uses his knowledge of TV to survive in society, but most of the humor derives from the inherent ambiguity of words, particularly when used in social situations in which metaphor is allowed. Kosinski claims the simple sentences that constitute the novel

exemplify his attempts at countering the visual overload of television viewing with the active imagination of reading, yet the minimalist style of presentation hints at a transparency and objectivity audiences would most readily associate with television and its ability to capture historical events “as they happen.” In the character of Chance, then, we find not a simple projection of television’s impact on human society, but a complex point of negotiation and struggle between two media that compete with one another for cultural influence, share a sense of the ambiguity of human communication,<sup>17</sup> and redefine, through their relationship, our understanding of the public sphere. The public sphere should ideally be open to anyone, but if a man can succeed in the public sphere as fantastically as Chance with only television as his guide, one must either reconsider the negative impact many see television having on a successful public sphere (including Habermas: “the world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only” [171]) or reconsider the constitution of a contemporary public sphere in an age where the cultural dominant is television.

### **Conclusion**

Richard Yates and Jerzy Kosinski both utilize television in order to produce probing critiques of their societies (the 1950s and 1970s respectively). In these novels television is indicted as a cause of the cultural problems due to its ability to distance middle-class America from the public sphere and simultaneously make the public sphere safe and familiar within the private sphere. Television also takes on a symbolic role as an easily identifiable representative of American cultural decline. The popular success of both novels suggests there were a large number of Wheelers in America eager to see television and the popular culture flayed in this manner. High culture audiences and artists have been satirizing television ever since it first became popular, however, so the critiques of television are somewhat less interesting to our

understanding of the mid-century media assemblage than the subtle uses and defenses of the new medium.

Yates allows Frank to excoriate television in his monologues throughout the first part of the novel, but by the end he reveals Frank's ulterior motive for dismissing the feminizing effects of television on a generation of males, namely to associate the public sphere of politics, work, and novels with masculine potency. When his wife imagines a plan that will allow her, too, to escape the house, Frank's rejection of television disappears as he attempts to preserve the status quo by turning the Wheelers into a television family. Though Yates offers no direct praise of television, his interest in an average American family living in the suburbs and the day-to-day episodes of their lives bears a great resemblance to the television practice of making the private sphere public. Kosinski creates a character that is almost a thought experiment on the effects of television. Through Chance Kosinski is able to satirize the way television simplifies complex social issues and emotions. Yet, Chance is not nearly as one-dimensional as most critics have read him. He recognizes the power of television to transform reality, yet enjoys it all the more. Television has allowed a human being nearly isolated since birth to function almost normally once he enters the public sphere, and it allows Chance, for the first time, to project his private thoughts to people all over the world. There is a power to television that Kosinski both wrote about and lived in his many public appearances. Though Kosinski warns us of television's all-powerful immediacy, his writing style ends up aspiring to the sort of direct communication more associated with television than literary novels.

The emergence of film led to debates about artistic merit and the association of film with a seductive young woman. The emergence of television led to debates about the boundaries of a work of art and the association of television with emasculation. In both cases novelists do far

more than just criticize the newer media or borrow formal techniques. As participants in an ever-shifting media assemblage Yates and Kosinski defend the importance of literature and language in an age of images, complicate the too-easy association of high culture with masculinity, showcase the blurring of boundaries between public and private, and attempt to make sense of the effects of television's immediacy on political life.

### Notes

1. One example is Tedd Thomey's nostalgic 1971 book memorializing the golden age of television in the fifties. Thomey suggests that the work of Milton Berle will eventually be accepted as more culturally significant than that of John Milton, if only for the far, far greater number of people exposed to it.
2. Raymond Williams's *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* offers probably the most significant early academic analysis of television. Though frequently criticized, Williams's concept of "flow" is still an important term in television studies. Williams ends his book by pointing out the potential boons television might grant to democracy, though he hedges his hopes by acknowledging that such benefits would only result if corporate control of the medium is weakened.
3. Though I discuss the "novel-television assemblage" in this chapter, the media assemblage of this time period naturally includes film as well. Film producers, auteurs, and audiences had their own battles with television. Any attempt at exhaustively mapping the entire assemblage would go well beyond the scope of this project. It is interesting, though, that many of the same critics who cite television's dependence on visuals as a cultural problem, praise film as part of high culture. For example in the 1978 diatribe *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, Jerry Mander decries the simplicity of

television and its dependence on the close-up and contrasts it with the rich information found in a film image (268).

4. See Monroe E. Price's *Television, the Public Sphere, and National Identity* for an example of the use of Habermas to discuss television.
5. Most of these generalizations are directed towards television viewing habits before the growth of cable and satellite as that is the period of the novels I will associate with this debate. Anna McCarthy's study of the effects of television outside the home, *Ambient Television*, points out that scholars have neglected the frequent use of television in public places. That the association of television and family is both non-exclusive and non-essential does not detract from my future arguments about how novelists responded to television, as they are responding less to a technology than to a social construct. Nevertheless, McCarthy, too, argues "Television shapes the way we experience a place as public or private" (4).
6. The technology for television had been around since the 1920s, yet the distribution system of broadcast stations and in-home receivers did not grow rapidly until the early 1950s. Between 1950 and 1955 the number of sets in homes grew from 4.6 million to 32 million and the number of stations grew from 98 to 522 (Walker 13). Probably more important than the sheer number of sets sold in this short period to the future direction of television as a national force was the realization of the type of entertainment programming that could attract vast audiences to the small screen. Originally developed as largely a method of transmitting information and news or as a complement to theatre, the immense popularity of *Howdy Doody*, Milton Berle, and *I Love Lucy* during this time

was indicative of TV's future focus on serial programming as well as its focus on programming directed at children, housewives, and families.

7. "The autonomous work of art thereby – along with the old autonomous subject or ego – seems to have vanished, to have been volatilized" (Jameson 77).
8. In his overview of television studies, John Corner devotes a chapter to the history of the term "flow," although he himself questions its theoretical usefulness. He cites the critiques made by John Ellis, Rick Altman, John Fiske, and Richard Dienst, but each time notes the unwillingness or inability to replace the concept.
9. "The organization man" is the term coined by William H. Whyte, Jr in his 1956 book of the same name. Organization men "are the ones of our middle class who have left home, spiritually as well as physically, to take the vows of organization life, and it is they who are the mind and soul of our great self-perpetuating institutions" (3). Whyte points out that the suburbs are the natural environment of the organization man, the place where the junior executives of major corporations are able to apply their organizational skills to home life.
10. In 1984 Wilson would publish a sequel to *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* in which Tom and Betsy gradually grow apart as each finds true love with another. The disgust with television is perhaps even more pronounced as Ralph Hopkins has become "the king of the wasteland," a reference to the 1961 address by Newton Minow to the National Association of Broadcasters in which he famously described television as a "vast wasteland." Tom's solution to the growing problems at work and home is to escape into an affair with his assistant Annie, one in which the outside world becomes nearly irrelevant to them. In probably the only interesting scene in the book, Tom and Annie

emerge from their lovenest to find that the whole world has seemingly stopped. Totally absorbed with their affair, Tom and Annie missed one of the most important communal moments in television history – the assassination of President Kennedy. The importance of this public event, however, pales in comparison to their private happiness so the two retire to Hopkins's private island in the Bahamas to ghost write his autobiography and find complete sexual fulfillment in one another – a private sphere with no intruders.

11. Patricia Mellencamp declares that “US network television is a disciplinary time machine, a metronome rigorously apportioning the present” and goes on to state that “Time itself is a gendered, hierarchized commodity capitalizing on leisure,” connecting the regular TV schedule to gender hierarchies (240).
12. Barbara Tapa Lupack summarizes the initial response to *Being There* as praise for the Candide-like satire of mass culture or criticism of the book's simplicity (12-13).
13. In his essay “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction” David Foster Wallace claims that he is part of a generation that grew up in the sixties and seventies “as much with people's disdain for TV as we did with TV itself” (27), but that while many postmodern writers have established an ironic relationship to television in preference to simple disdain, television undercuts the effectiveness of that irony by so frequently mocking itself.
14. Mary Ann Doane points out that through its sense of “present-ness” “There is often a certain slippage between the notion that television covers important events in order to validate itself as a medium and the idea that because an event is covered by television – because it is, in effect, deemed televisual – it is important” (222).

15. David Foster Wallace identifies this as the reason television seems exceedingly popular among fiction writers of his generation as they are able to observe others intently without worrying about being observed themselves (21-22).
16. Kosinski assigned code words, rather than working titles, to each of his novels and the code word for *Being There* was also “Blank Page” (Plimpton 31).
17. Kosinski: “*Being There* is almost entirely devoted to the ambiguity of our communications with each other” (Griffin 133).

## **Chapter Three: Coded Binaries**

### **The End of Print as We Know It**

Like the threat of cinema before it, television's explosion in cultural significance failed to bring to fruition the most dire predictions of the demise of books. Looking back from 1993, Richard Lanham observes that "Our first round of technological perturbation, which pitted the codex book and *Culture As We Know It* against commercial television, didn't turn out so badly as we feared. The print media continued to thrive during TV's great expansion period. And literature continued to be taught in American schools and colleges much as before" (3). Leaving aside Lanham's mistaken claim that television provided the first technological threat to the print novel, his attempt at providing some historical context for understanding the unique circumstances of print in the age of the computer is an accurate portrayal of the new situation. Fitzgerald, West, Yates, and Kosinski feared a turn away from words and towards images, feared a shift in cultural values and tastes spurred on by the commercial power and passive pleasures of staring at a screen. However, they did not so much fear that print literature was in danger of being found lacking or limited as they did that print literature would gradually see its audience reduced to a dedicated minority. Though we have seen how film and television altered definitions of art, realism, space, time, public space, and gender through their relationships with the print novel within the contemporary media assemblage, they did not threaten to render the print novel obsolete. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, the age of the rapid rise of personal computers and internet access, such a fear once again seemed a very real possibility for a number of wary readers.<sup>1</sup> The first sentence of Lanham's book on the new digital medium ponders, "Perhaps the real question for literary study now is not whether our students will be reading Great Traditional Books or Relevant Modern ones in the future, but whether they will be reading books at all." A

number of other studies from this period open with similar grave predictions for the future of print. “It is assumed that, as a form of technology, microcomputers represent a critical force that is bringing to an end typographic culture and creating in its place a post-typographic culture and consciousness” (3-4), claims Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr. “Could the book – by far the oldest means of mass-communication in our society – be nearing its end as anything other than a historical manuscript, a curiosity?” (3), asks Clive Bradley in his introduction to the 1982 report by the Publishers Association on “The Future of the Book.” George Landow admits the attraction of using hypertext to revitalize our understanding of print but then warns that “One *should* feel threatened by hypertext ... Descendents, after all, offer continuity with the past but only at the cost of replacing it” (183). “As we look up from our computer keyboard to the books on our shelves,” Jay David Bolter begins in *Writing Space*, “we may be tempted to ask whether ‘this will destroy that.’ The question does not have a definitive answer. What is characteristic of the late age of print is, rather, that we pose the question” (2-3). Though Bolter defines “the late age of print” as simply a transformation in print rather than an ending, his history of print’s remediation through the ages certainly suggests the end of one form and the birth of its replacement. And perhaps most famously and controversially, Robert Coover’s 1992 *New York Times* article on hypertext novels was titled “The End of Books.”<sup>2</sup>

Some of these positions are held by extreme enthusiasts of the digital medium while others are merely the opening queries in a more complex study of print’s future. Even if only a minority of voices were seriously considering the possibility of print’s demise, the fact that computers offer not just an alternative to print but a possible replacement dramatically alters the relationships within the media assemblage. In this chapter I will approach the question through two texts which, on the surface at least, appear almost complete opposites – Richard Powers’s

print novel, *Galatea 2.2* and Shelley Jackson's hypertext novel *Patchwork Girl*. *Galatea* offers the point of view of a male writer steeped in the tradition of Great Literature who finds himself in a state of mourning both for his crumbling personal life that has left him bereft of ideas for his next novel and for the state of his art, the novel, which he sees in the last throes of cultural relevance. Offered the opportunity to participate in a computer science project that will seek to train a neural network to read and interpret literature, Richard (the character) jumps at the chance to engage his own fears about his vocation. It is not clear whether Richard wants the experiment to fail, thus proving the durability of the well-written word, or to succeed, and thus excusing him from continuing to write, but in either case his experiences with the various iterations of the neural network help him to see his own relationship to print anew. In *Galatea 2.2* the relationship between the novel and the computer is not just an underlying context but a central component of the plot, and as Richard feeds the Western canon to the computer he contemplates what makes his own relationship to the print books he read different from this computer program's relationship to the data he inputs. Most notably Richard more and more associates print with the body and sexual desire, a combination we have seen in various forms in the previous two chapters. As we have also seen in the previous chapters, when media get defined in sexual terms by male authors the result is rarely favorable for women, and Richard's nostalgia for the heady days of love affairs and musty novels proves no different. Richard attempts to reinvigorate the print novel by setting up a stark binary between the disembodied world of the internet and computers and the embodied world of print and real life only to find that such binaries get easily connected to gender binaries. For Richard Powers the author, however, this binary view of the world, though comforting for an admitted humanist, fails to propel our society, or the print novel as a medium, forward.

Shelley Jackson displays none of Powers's nostalgia for literature's past, even as she makes loving use of one of its canonical texts – Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Jackson, an experimental “writer” who has created hypertext novels, written enigmatic short stories, illustrated children's books, and utilized real human bodies as a medium, transforms Shelley's horror tale into perhaps the most important hypertext fiction of the nineties – *Patchwork Girl*; or, *a Modern Monster*. In *Patchwork Girl* the mate Victor Frankenstein promised his creature and then later destroyed is resurrected, first as a character in a narrative that begins in the pages of Mary Shelley's journal and ends in the Death Valley desert 175 years later, and second as the hypertext itself with its tapestry of stitched together pieces. Engaging with the new techniques offered by the computer, Jackson argues for an understanding of women's bodies as sites of multiplicity rather than wholeness, making hypertext, rather than print, the most natural association for the body. Where Powers worries about the durability of print, Jackson's text rejoices in temporariness and an endless present. Where Powers considers print a prime means for expressing that which is at the core of humanity because all of us are embodied in roughly similar ways, Jackson uses the freedom of hypertext links to allow each reader to construct the textual body however he or she pleases. Where Powers mourns the passing of print, Jackson celebrates the birth of hypertext. Or at least these are the sorts of differences the secondary criticism on Jackson's text would suggest.

Every reading of Jackson's hypertext is in agreement that Jackson seeks to dispel the power of binary logic, particularly as it applies to women's bodies. Yet, in insisting on the perfect fit between feminist critique and hypertext literature, many of Jackson's readers make the mirror move of Richard in Powers's novel. Richard attempts to bolster the value of print by associating it with the body and contrasting it to the disembodied world of computers. Jackson's

readers attempt to champion the new technology of hypertext by associating it with the complex body and contrasting it to the linear world of print narrative. In each case a clear binary is formed between print and computers. A closer look at Jackson's text, however, shows that her critique of binaries extends not just to gender binaries but to a binary view of media as well. Where Powers recognizes that nostalgia for print literature's past results only in a stunted future, Jackson recognizes that enthusiasm for the technology of the future without a lively relationship to the past results only in a repetition of the binaries one sought to resolve in the first place. These two novels, then, enter the novel-computer assemblage from very different points but both contribute to a reterritorialization of the body as a metaphor for writing and reading. In *Galatea* the body gets associated with print in order to save print from obsolescence; in *Patchwork Girl* most critics have connected the body to hypertext in order to confirm the revolutionary potential of the new medium. These two opposing positions reveal one of the stakes in the novel-computer assemblage of the nineties, one of the boundaries being negotiated and struggled over. I will argue that both Powers and Jackson end up rejecting a binary logic that would make the body the primary domain of one medium and offer instead a more complex relationship between print and computers that reveals that bodies, too, are assembled from many different components.

### **“[T]he novel as a supreme connection machine”: *Galatea* 2.2**

Most historians of hypertext point to Vannevar Bush's 1945 article, "As We May Think," as the foundation of hypertext theory, seeing in his vision of the Memex machine (a desk at which one can sit and call up any page of any book in the database and then leap from one book to a related one with minimal effort due to associational connections) the first developed vision of what we would come to know as hyperlinks. As suggested in the title of the article, the most

important contribution made by Bush was not the Memex itself, which was never built, but the reasoning for its invention: “The human mind does not work that way [via alphabetical and numerical indexing]. It operates by association. With one item in its grasp, it snaps instantly to the next that is suggested by the association of thoughts, in accordance with some intricate web of trails carried by the cells of the brain” (1/49-1/50). Here Bush advocates the revolution of information technology not merely out of convenience or efficiency, but in order to better model the way the human brain stores and retrieves information.

Fifty years later the neural scientists who inhabit the Center for the Study of the Advanced Sciences in Richard Powers’s novel *Galatea 2.2* are still involved in fundamental disagreements about how the human mind works, but at least one of these researchers, the connectionist Philip Lentz, believes in a version of thought that echoes Bush: “Associations of associations” (154). Whether or not the human mind actually works like a hyperlink or a neural network, however, would seem to be of little matter to the primary career – the writing of novels – of both Richard Powers the author of *Galatea* and Richard Powers the character in *Galatea* except for two important facts: one, Philip Lentz claims he can build a neural network that can pass for a master’s candidate in English literature, and, two, the ability of the digital medium to emulate human consciousness has been one of the major arguments used by advocates of electronic literature to support the superiority of the new medium.

Judy Malloy, an author of electronic fiction, nearly quotes Bush when she explains that “Computers can store and retrieve information in ways that simulate the human mind,” and then extrapolates from that observation that electronic literature will only grow in popularity in the twenty-first century: “Because they remind us of ourselves, we become connected to our computers and to the works which run on them” (139). Michael Joyce, the “godfather” of

hypertext authors, begins his collection of essays, *Othermindedness*, with the claim that “Network culture is an othermindedness, a murky sense of a newly evolving consciousness and cognition alike ... We ache with it, almost as if we could feel the evolution of consciousness in the same way a sleeping adolescent feels the bone ache of growing pains” (1). Joyce does not make as strong a statement about the nature of human thought as Malloy and Bush, but makes the perhaps bolder claim that the human mind has evolved a new form of cognition since the Internet explosion. Comparable claims about the similarity of hypertext and the contemporary mind are made in *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, one of the first book-length studies of electronic literature: “The novel can put things in their place, can let us figure out what is right and wrong by offering us a specific context for human behaviors. But in a global society we have outgrown our ability to contextualize. We are tormented by our sense of multiple conflicting frameworks for every action. We need a kaleidoscopic medium to sort things out” (Murray 282-3). They also appear in *Electronic Literature*, one of the most recent studies on the subject of electronic literature: “This kind of interaction [overlapping passages in Judy Morrissey’s *The Jew’s Daughter*] is very similar to the ‘Multiple Drafts Model’ that Daniel C. Dennett, in *Consciousness Explained*, argues best explains the nature of consciousness” (Hayles 80). Certainly these critics are not all making equivalent claims about the nature of the human mind or the future of the medium of print, but all share an excitement about the digital medium based in part on the idea that the way humans currently experience the world (at least in societies flooded with information) is better reflected in multiform fictions, hyperlinked narratives that change with each reading, multimedia programs that combine text and images, interaction between author and reader, and associational rather than linear reading strategies.

I will not attempt to refute such claims on biological grounds, but the argument each of these critics is making – that the aesthetic capabilities of electronic literature can mirror the human mind and how it “really works” – is problematic. The metaphors a society uses to describe the human mind and its complexity say a great deal about that society, and electronic communication may, indeed, provide a useful metaphor for describing how we experience contemporary life with its abundance of stimuli and information, but claims that a new technology has finally provided an authentic representation of how we think risk reducing a medium to its technological components. As I have argued previously, the concept of a media assemblage does not allow for such a reduction of media to their material instantiation; electronic media, too, are composed of both the computer technology that enables networking and hypertext as well as the way we describe, interpret, and use that technology. Jay David Bolter illustrates the easy move from metaphor to mirror early in *Writing Space*:

With any technique of writing – on stone or clay, on papyrus or paper, and on the computer screen – the writer may come to regard the mind itself as a writing space. The behavior of the writing space becomes a metaphor for the human mind as well as for human social interaction. Such cultural metaphors are in general redefinitions of earlier metaphors, so that in examining the history of writing, and in particular electronic writing today, we should always ask: How does this writing space refashion its predecessor? How does it claim to improve on print’s ability to make our thoughts visible and to constitute the lines of communication for our society? (13)

Bolter points out that our writing materials have always been associated with the mind and provided a useful metaphor for talking about the acts of thought and memory, but by the end of the paragraph he is asking how the computer has improved on print’s ability to make our thoughts visible. In other words the computer screen is not just the next in a long line of metaphors but an evolutionary step towards a clearer understanding of human thought. Once such a move is made it is easy to entertain the possibility that print has become obsolete. What value can print have if the computer offers a more authentic representation of our thoughts? In

*Galatea 2.2* Powers interrogates this popular metaphor (computer as brain) throughout his novel, considering its literal possibilities in the form of Helen (can a computer model consciousness?) as well as its cultural implications for novelists and for the medium of print.<sup>3</sup> Scrutiny of the use of the mind as a metaphor will, therefore, also lend itself to examining the connotations of the body within the novel-computer assemblage. If the computer mirrors the mind, what mirrors the body?

### **The Death of the Humanist Author**

*Galatea 2.2* tells the story of a novelist named Richard Powers, whose life and career bear a notable resemblance to the author of *Galatea*, as he returns to the college town of U. and becomes involved in a barroom bet among cognitive scientists about whether a computer can be built and trained to read literature. Richard agrees to assist Philip Lentz in training a neural network to read the English Department master's exam list partly out of intellectual curiosity, but largely due to his sense that he has written his last novel. The neural network grows more engaging with each implementation until Richard is convinced that it has attained a form of consciousness and even finds himself near tears during a bomb threat at the research center. As it increases in complexity, the network, named Helen by Richard, asks more and more questions about human life until Richard finally attempts to explain the history of human violence and oppression, a lesson so traumatic to Helen that she refuses to participate any longer in the bet. After some coaxing by Richard she does end up answering the test question posed to both her and a human graduate student. Helen fails the Turing test, yet her answer reveals a very human sense of despair before she shuts herself down forever. Richard finds that the year-long experience, despite numerous traumatic events, has enabled him to write another book, presumably the one we are reading. Interwoven with this science-fiction tale of a computer brain

coming to life are accounts of Richard's career as a novelist and its deleterious effects on his relationship with C., a Dutch-American girl he met as a student at U. and with whom he eventually moved to Holland before their relationship ended after Richard's success as a writer. Powers interweaves as well the sciences and the humanities, competing conceptions of language, the human mind as object and subject, and life as experience as opposed to life as printed representation. The centrality to the narrative of Richard's history both as writer and reader of print novels and his sense of disorientation at the cutting edge of computer technology make the novel a valuable participant in the novel-computer assemblage as Richard wonders what role remains for the traditional print-based novel in a culture increasingly taking place over fiberoptic connections.

Although the epigraph to the novel, Emily Dickinson's "The brain is wider than the sky," establishes from the outset the hopelessness of modeling the workings of the mind, Richard arrives in U. with a distinct feeling that a major shift in literature's role has occurred in the culture and finds himself surprisingly eager to believe in the possibility of building a neural network that can read and interpret the literary canon. Arriving at the Center for the Study of Advanced Sciences, Richard refers to himself as "the token humanist" (4) and clearly considers his an obsolete vocation in comparison to the cutting edge researchers with whom he shares the building. While the research into complex systems beyond the capacity of any one scientist to understand makes "the Center ... a block-wide analog of that neuronal mass it investigated" (6), Richard describes the last stages of writing his fourth novel as a largely mechanical process (despite using a computer to write it): "I tinkered at my new novel" (7) and "What little diversionary work remained I dragged out for all it was worth. Two Kbytes of new text or four of reasonable revision honorably discharged me of the day" (10). The mundane work of

finishing the novel is further contrasted with the intoxicating wonder of exploring the electronic information network for the first time. The network not only overwhelms Richard with its vastness and speed, but he soon describes it in terms that suggest it has taken over much of the work once done by print: “I eavesdropped on international discussion groups, ongoing, interactive Scheherazades that covered every imaginable theme from arms control to electronic erotica.... Inexhaustible protagonists from every time zone posted to the continuous forum a dozen or more times a day” (8). Richard describes these newsgroups as if they were the sort of interactive, endless narratives imagined by the most fervent supporters of electronic literature. He compares his introduction to the vast networked world to “a boy happening onto a copy of the *Odyssey* in a backwater valley library” (8), further developing the web-as-story motif while also suggesting that an old experience once associated with printed texts and brick-and-mortar libraries has been emulated and even enhanced by the new medium. He then goes on to note the more practical advantages of digital technology over print: “The groups at the Center could now read journal articles months before they hit print” (9), notes Richard. And unlike in the slow days of print, “The net reduced duplication of effort and helped pinpoint crucial results they otherwise might have missed altogether. Instant telemessaging produced an efficiency that fed back into steeper invention. And invention accelerated the universal linkup” (9). This description of the future of scholarship on the web reiterates the claims being made in the early nineties by George Landow about the inevitable future of even the print-loving humanities, namely that the intervention of computer technology within the study of literature would not only increase speed and efficiency but would change our very conceptions of what the study of literature should involve.<sup>4</sup>

Richard does note the difference between the ability to communicate a message instantaneously across the globe and the ability actually to say something meaningful – “when the terminal drop box brought the last barefoot, abused child on line and everyone could at last say anything instantly to everyone in existence, it seemed to me we’d still have nothing to say to each other and many more ways not to say it” (9) – but such a realization does not deter him from spending more and more time on line, nor from agreeing to spend a year of his life working on a project that from the outset seeks only to simulate the production of meaning. Perhaps his willingness to indulge in such projects derives from his sense that the age of the novel and its promise of exploring “the common core of humanity” (286) has passed and failed. “The world had enough novels,” he tells himself before accepting the offer to help Lentz win his bet. “Certain writers were best paid to keep their fields out of production,” he adds, utilizing a metaphor that both ties the novelist to an old-fashioned way of life and to government assistance for its survival (47). Even more to the point he describes himself as an “archaic man of letters” (75) and protests the idea that novelists are still cultural icons: “‘You’re joking. Were, maybe. A hundred years ago. It’s all movies and lit crit now’” (24). Carrying such feelings of obsolescence around renders Richard nearly defenseless against the barbed comments of Lentz, despite the fact that Lentz actually is quite familiar with and fond of literature. When Lentz asks “What passes for knowledge in your so-called discipline? What does a student of English have to do to demonstrate acceptable reading comprehension?,” Richard immediately becomes self-effacing – “I shrugged. ‘Not a whole hell of a lot’” (43). This feeling of inadequacy even follows him across campus to the English building. First he points out the vast differences between his two offices – “The Center possessed 1,200 works of art, the world’s largest magnetic resonance imager, and elevators appointed in brass, teak, and marble. The English

Building's stairs were patched in three shades of gray linoleum" (75) – a comparison that suggests not only that the Center is vastly better funded, but that it has the inside track on understanding the mind and even has become the more important cultural site. Then Richard discovers that rather than finding allies inside the dilapidated building, he sits embarrassed in front of English graduate students imagining them asking "how I could have missed the fact that the age of reading was dead" (116).

According to George Landow these confluent attitudes between the denizens of the Center and those of the English Building should not surprise Richard. Landow sees the rise of poststructural theory and the personal computer as components of the same revolution: "one theme appears in both writings on hypertext (and the memex) and in contemporary critical theory – the limitations of print culture, the culture of the book" (46). Both electronic literature and critical theory bring into question textuality, the respective roles of author and reader, narrative, and those aspects of the print medium we tend to see as natural. Richard never makes these connections as explicitly as Landow does, but he does notice while attending his first cognitive science lectures that "Science looked a lot like literary criticism, from across the room" (38), and he is only mildly surprised that Lentz has a passing familiarity with the terms of deconstruction. When Lentz jokes that "We can get our supernet to sound exactly like a fashionable twenty-two-year-old North American whiz kid imitating a French theorist in translation by, say, this time next month" (91), he is mocking the entire English department, but he is also, perhaps unintentionally, pointing out that the goals and language of theory more readily lend themselves to the strengths of a neural network (making numerous links, handling language as concrete units to be manipulated) than does the type of relationship to books for which Richard waxes nostalgic from his own childhood and his early years living with C. When Richard observes his English

Building colleagues and concludes that according to contemporary theory “if mind were no more than shrill solipcism [sic], then best make a good performance of it” (191), he could as easily be quoting Lentz’s thoughts on the best-case-scenario for their neural network – “a good performance” of the mind. Richard, consummate lover of books, finds himself trying to hold on to a way of thinking rendered slow and limited by the rapid technological developments on the other side of the “two cultures” divide, and being dismissed as “Neolithic” (286) by those whom he would hope would rally to his defense.

What are we to make of Richard’s sense of hopelessness for the future of the novel? The novel’s final scenes include the total dismissal of Richard’s humanist viewpoint by the graduate student A., Helen shutting herself down upon learning “how little literature had, in fact, to do with the real” (313), Richard’s realization that he was the true subject of the experiment, the defeat of Helen by A. in the reading comprehension exam, and Richard’s final declaration that “I might have another fiction in me after all” (328). Richard’s faith in the novel seems renewed on the final page, but why? No part of the denouement supports the “great books” model of literature for which Richard is nostalgic, yet he is inspired to write again. Rather than reaffirm the cultural role novels held previously or dismiss the novel as an out of date medium, Richard discovers a third option in which the novel does not die but does realign its relationships within the media assemblage.

### **Reading Richard**

Joseph Dewey and Kathleen Fitzpatrick offer opposing interpretations of Richard’s renewal, one sympathetic and one critical, but neither allows for the possibility of an assemblage relationship between print and computer, a relationship in which boundaries and associations get redefined. For Dewey the neural network experiment in *Galatea* serves as a complicated

metaphor for Richard himself and his own relationship to his books. Dewey describes Helen as “an entity in fact remarkably similar to its loving programmer” (101) due to its isolation in a world constructed entirely of language. Like Helen, who shuts down after reading about “the real world” in the form of a story of random racial violence, Richard loses faith in literature after the end of his long relationship with C. and the death of his mentor Professor Taylor, moments when fine language and careful reading seem to offer little consolation or guidance. Just as Helen returns at least to complete the Turing Test against A., however, Richard realizes he, too, still has another book to write, the story of his own life. Richard, according to Dewey, “is ready to assume the role of the generous artist, to retreat, yes, but temporarily there to give depth and heft to the enterprise of living by rendering it into the shape and elegance of narrative” (109). In short, Richard’s year-long dalliance with computer science has not confirmed the death of the novel, but renewed a traditional conception of the artist as one who takes the real material of experience and gives it depth and meaning through the act of aesthetic narrative.

Such an interpretation of Richard’s despair for the author reduces the “threat” of computers to metaphor, a metaphor that ends up bringing back to life an author who is quite a bit more than the “Author Function” to which Richard believes theory has reduced his kind. Though Dewey says little in his reading about the numerous references to poststructural theory, the conclusions he draws suggest that we can take Richard’s criticisms of theory at face-value, that both Richard and Powers understand the valuable insights into language and narrative offered by contemporary theory but reject the ultimate reduction of books and stories to texts. Richard, then, is a sympathetic hero – someone who understands and has faced the despair of postmodernism, but has found new life for the novel in a traditional notion of the author as one

who draws upon the emotions and experiences of real life and transforms them into narratives that any reader can appreciate.

A second interpretation of Richard is far less sympathetic to his fears. Kathleen Fitzpatrick writes of the “anxiety of obsolescence” in which “The humanist writer, in confronting the computer and sensing his imminent demise, imagines not simply the marginalization of print in an electronic age, but the demise of the hierarchies that have supported his dominance” (525). Fitzpatrick applauds Richard’s despair as the first sign of growth – he realizes “the damage done by authority, and ... the impossibility of sustaining originality in a position of dominance” (553), but argues that the conclusion reaffirms the humanist tradition in two ways: first by having the human A. defeat Helen in the reading comprehension exam, and second by quoting Helen’s simple answer to the passage from *The Tempest* –

You are the ones who can hear airs. Who can be frightened or encouraged. You can hold things and break them and fix them. I never felt at home here. This is an awful place to be dropped down halfway. (326)

Richard vaguely labels A.’s answer as “brilliant,” as though her years of graduate school had rendered her a sophisticated piece of programming able to take any question, process it, and regurgitate a sufficiently theorized reading. Given these two versions of response the reader is likely to sense that though A. won the contest, Helen was the one with the true insight into the play, the one who managed to apply her experiences to her interpretation, and, appropriately, A. gives up graduate study to teach high school students. In this way, according to Fitzpatrick, “The human ends the novel fully recentered within the field of inquiry” (555) and the category of human remains connected to the “universals” of the white male.

For Fitzpatrick the role of the computer in making print obsolete (or at least in creating anxieties about that possibility) is made much more explicit than in Dewey. She opens her

article with a concise yet thorough history of the major figures and debates in the eighties and nineties that composed the discourse on the death of the novel in the age of the computer, yet her focus on Richard's implicit sexism renders the specific characteristics of computers that make them a rival to print less important than the anxiety of white, male, heterosexual humanism towards any change at all in the status quo.

While each of these readings offers a consistent interpretation of both Richard's initial despair for, and eventual return to, the novel as an art form, neither addresses the specific points of contact and debate that composed the novel-computer assemblage in the nineties. What characteristics of the computer medium were perceived as a threat to the print-based novel? What aspects of the traditional novel were reconfigured or reprioritized by novelists in response to the rise of computers? Were novelists able to translate some features of the digital medium into print? Certainly ideas of narrative and gender are crucial to understanding the full effects of the novel-computer assemblage at this historical moment, but these concepts need to be connected to specific discourses about computers and novels in order to provide the necessary context.

Other readings of *Galatea* have been more explicit about the specific qualities of the computer to which Powers is responding. D. Quentin Miller argues that *Galatea* "diminishes the threat of computers as it accepts them as an integral part of the contemporary world" (382). He claims Powers offers the traditional novel as a valuable alternative to the information superhighway and reads the contest between A. and Helen not as a battle between humanism and posthumanism but as a moment when humanism gets redefined in order to include artificial intelligence as well. A similar argument is made by Jeffrey Pence as he analyzes the role of memory in *Galatea*. According to Pence "Newer technological and textual forms appear

overwhelmingly successful in remodeling memory and identity along their more dispersed and immediate lines” (344). Such changes wrought to human memory by new data storage devices serve not as a threat to humanity and the traditional novel but as inspiration for both a new understanding of memory as a selective process as well as a new understanding of the role of the print novel as a welcome linear alternative to hypertext links. In each of these articles, then, the relationship between computers and the print novel takes center stage, with both authors discovering new value in the print novel because of its differences from the computer.

Miller and Pence each focus on particular qualities of computers (artificial intelligence and information storage, respectively) to which novels of the nineties are in part responding. However, both readings argue for a response to computers that appears far too easy. Where Dewey and Fitzpatrick note Richard’s despair and attempt to account for it, Miller and Pence describe a character who seems quite confident that the information age will continue to have a strong need for novelists. Miller introduces Richard as one “encouraged to bridge the schism between humanists and scientists” (393) as though his goal from the beginning of the novel was to act as liaison between the English Building and the Center. Pence believes in the inevitable need for narrative memory, claiming “the end of technology, its terminus as well as its telos, is narrative” (362). The version of Richard that appears in these articles is a man who enters the world of advanced computer science with little fear that the literary tradition to which he had devoted the last fifteen years of his life might be under any threat. If anything Richard is confident that computers will inspire a new age in which “Whatever its apparent deficits in cultural prestige at present, literary narrative may find, in the register of memory, the renewal of its centrality to cultural life” (Pence 344). Even though Miller and Pence identify the relationship between computers and print as an important thematic in the novel, neither

recognizes a true assemblage relationship in which the new medium triggers a series of negotiations, fears, redefinitions, and conflicts. While both predict an alteration in the cultural role of print, both assume that this new role will be shaped entirely by willing novelists eager to continue the teleological development of their art. Such a prediction hardly seems borne out by Richard's sense that he has written his last novel and become a mere relic of a past age.

It is possible that the hopeful merging of technology and tradition some critics see in *Galatea 2.2* is as much a response to Richard Powers the author as Richard Powers the character. Powers, after all, is one of the few non-science-fiction writers with a background in computer programming, and his books are frequently noted for the ease with which they employ scientific and technological discourse. As he has granted more interviews and become a more public figure in the latter portion of his career, interviewers have discovered that he used simple computer programs to help shape the different prose styles of his first novel (Nielson 19-20), that he sometimes reads fiction on a Pocket PC (Powers, "Literary Devices" 339), that he composes novels on a Tablet PC with voice recognition software (Powers, "How to Speak a Book"), that he taught a college course in "multimedia authoring and publishing" (Hendricks 31), and that his understanding of writing and literature is closely connected to his experiences with computer code (Eakin B1). There is little doubt, then, that Powers has integrated both the computer as metaphor and the computer as medium into the composition of his novels.

Still, an ability to work with a new technology, and even an excitement about a new technology, is not in and of itself proof against apprehension. As already noted, Fitzgerald and West both worked for Hollywood and Kosinski made frequent appearances on television all while writing novels that questioned the effects of these new media on the culture at large and on the state of the novel in particular. And, indeed, one finds that Powers the author does share a

number of the concerns expressed by his fictional namesake. He describes all his novels as “very stubbornly dependent upon the kind of linear focus that a reader needs and desires when he or she removes from the world of overstimulation” (Hendricks 29), and *Galatea*, in particular, as “an apology for fiction in a post-fictional age” (Nielson 22). Though neither description is completely at odds with an acceptance of new media, the terms “stubborn” and “apology” signal a degree of resistance to the rush into the future. The most notable example, though, of his concern for the future of the book is a 2000 article titled “Being and Seeming: the Technology of Representation,” in which Powers describes what he imagines as “the great art of the future,” a massive data structure representing a virtual reality neighborhood in which the “reader” is able to travel anywhere at whatever speed he or she wishes and even interact with the virtual inhabitants. Powers argues that as enticing as such a freeform version of narrative appears on the surface, it is actually an impediment to the true power of artistic representation – the ability to interrupt our engagement with the world and confront us with someone else’s representation. Here, Powers argues that the computer simulation offers us more mediation rather than more immediacy, that the linear and static quality of the printed text is less a limitation of the codex novel than one of its most important attributes, and that the print novel can be just as interactive, if not more so, as the most open hypertext since the novel forces us to see not just ourselves but the author who is constantly thwarting and fulfilling our expectations and desires as well. Again, such defenses of the print novel do not necessarily express an outright fear of the cultural dominance of the computer, but the claim “Now that we may lose forever the art of contemplative and private fiction, the novel has developed an urgency of purpose it never had when it was the new tech on the block” (Powers, “Being and Seeming”) certainly argues against a novelist completely confident about the future of the novel.

## The Finite and Infinite

In an interview with Sven Birkerts, author of *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, Powers is asked if he wishes he could turn back the clock on our rapid technological change and return to an age when print was king (a desire one imagines Birkerts contemplates quite often as evidenced by his *Elegies*). Powers responds, “The desire to put the binary genie back in the bottle is real, and I do feel it. But I think you can learn more by examining that desire than by acting on it” (63). In this, one of the first interviews after the publication of *Galatea 2.2*, Powers makes absolutely clear that his own proficiency with computers has not eliminated a sense of loss and trepidation. His advice for handling such feelings – “examining that desire” – is precisely what previous readings of *Galatea* have failed to do, either by generalizing the desire into a fear of any loss of cultural authority or by denying the full complexity of the desire and its potential for contradictions or difficult negotiations. Richard, for instance, is certainly aware of the benefits characteristic of the information superhighway or any computer-based form of data storage and access. Early in the novel the evolution of cultural memory is made explicit as Richard writes out the first lines to as many books as he could remember. When he doubts the accuracy of his mind, however, he turns to the computer for verification rather than the university library. This need for and promise of instant access to information becomes more serious for Richard as he attempts to locate the source for the line “Picture a train heading south,” the line on which he wants to build his fifth novel. Frustrated with his own memory he “did Boolean searches across incomprehensibly huge textbases. South, train, and picture, ANDed together, within a ten-word range of one another. [He] substituted every conceivable synonym for each term, verbal almosts piped in from hyperlinked thesauri” (25). Though the feeling that the line is plagiarized stays with him, this

short description of his exhaustive internet search stands in as near absolute proof of the line's obscurity. If it's not on the internet, how important could it be? The irony of a lover of print turning to the computer to help him remember books he has read is not lost on Richard. Though these late night data searches seem harmless enough, their cultural import is made clear later in the novel as Lentz attempts to remember the plot of an H.G. Wells story about the future of mediation and Richard remarks "We could look it up on the Internet" (244), a joke at the expense of the permanence of print and human memory that even Lentz finds too detachedly ironic.

It takes the computer program Helen to articulate the crisis for print at which Richard's guilty internet sojourns and sad irony only hint. As Richard attempts to describe to Helen how many books there are in the world he explains that "That's what print means. The archive is permanent" (290), naming permanence as the defining quality of print. For Helen the permanence of print, along with the relatively slow rate at which any one human can read, leads to the logical conclusion that there will be "Always more books, each one read less ... The world will fill with unread print. Unless print dies" (291). Richard, despite his earlier remarks about the death of the novel, realizes that "Helen alone was capable of thinking the unthinkable: the disappearance of books from all but the peripheries of life" (291). Of course this is not true; very intelligent people had been thinking, if not outright predicting, the disappearance of books for nearly a hundred years and had seen the superior ability of computers to store and sort information as the primary cause for at least forty years.<sup>5</sup> Richard, though, had long displayed a certain naiveté about the medium in which he worked, a simple notion of literature as a transparent inscription of universal human experiences that led A. to tear him apart with critical theory.

Powers, however, offers a more complex response to the idea that computers must replace books as the gatekeepers of cultural memory – allusion. Proust, Cervantes, Carroll, Kipling, Faulkner, Gray, Steinbeck, Houseman, Robinson, Eliot, Rabelais, Mann, Balzac, Freud, Donne, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Alcott, Wharton, Arnold, Dickens, Conrad, Thomas, Joyce, Twain, James, Poe, Dickinson, Nabokov, Austen, Stowe, Spenser, Larkin, Beckett, Ellison, Wright, Frost, Chaucer, Keats, Whitman, O'Neill, Blake, and Rossetti are just some of the authors who are referenced or quoted in *Galatea* along with several children's books and folk tales. The sheer number of allusions, more probably than any one person could place without a few trips to the internet, serves a number of purposes. The references are so numerous they begin to take on the sense of infinite connections one associates with the internet. Compare the description of Richard's first trips into cyberspace to a list of Helen's questions about literature and one notes the similarity in tone and the sense of connections among diverse elements:

The snap of a finger, a satellite uplink, and I sat conversing with a mainframe in my old coal-mining ex-hometown seven time zones away. I could read the evensong schedule from off a digital valet in Cambridge, download Maurya painting, or make a Cook's tour of New Zealand. In seconds, I could scroll through dinner menus in languages I could not even identify. From my chair in the virgin Center, I revisited every city I'd ever spent time in and hundreds I would never get around to visiting in this life. (7)

She wanted to know whether a person could die by spontaneous combustion. The odds against a letter slipped under the door slipping under the carpet as well. Ishmael's real name. Who this "Reader" was, and why he rated knowing who married whom. Whether single men with fortunes really needed wives. What home would be without Plumtree's Potted Meats. How long it would take to compile a key to all mythologies. What the son of a fish looked like. Where Uncle Toby was wounded. Why anyone wanted to imagine unquiet slumbers for sleepers in quiet earth. Whether Conrad was a racist. Why Huck Finn was taken out of libraries. Which end of an egg to break. Why people read. Why they stopped reading. What it meant to be "only a novel." (292)

The dense information available on the internet appears to have little on the dense information contained in a novel. As Richard moans early on in the project, the amount of information necessary for the neural network to understand just one line of a Tennyson poem quickly spirals

beyond their ability to input.<sup>6</sup> At the same time that Powers's liberal use of allusion demonstrates this surprising similarity between the novel and computers, his focus on canonical texts warns against a future of endless linking. One can imagine a hypertext version of *Galatea 2.2* (*Galatea 3.0*?) in which each of Richard's quotations is written in blue and linked to a database of English literary history. When Richard reads "He clasps the crag with crooked hands" (85) the reader of *Galatea 3.0* can click on the line and find the complete text of "The Eagle" along with biographical information on Tennyson and possibly several scholarly interpretations. But to what does one link the comment by Lentz, "Oh no. Not him. Anybody but him" (85), in reference to the poem? Tennyson is the "him" to whom Lentz refers, but a biography hardly fills in the gaps. A history of Tennyson's critical reception reveals little about why Lentz responds the way he does. Unless one has sat in a literature class, agonizing over each word of the short but obtuse poem, it's hard to imagine any amount of factual information that would paint a more complete picture of the role of the poem in the novel.

Though Richard's attachment to the literary canon as the shortest path to understanding the core of human experience gets rightfully attacked by A., Powers's use of seemingly endless allusions to canonical texts argues for the necessity of *some* shared references rather than for these texts in particular. The subtle difference gets illustrated by the story of Richard's father's death as he sends his son the poetry of Robert Service, a non-canonical author who nevertheless becomes intimately connected to Richard's feelings about death, especially after Professor Taylor is able to quote him as well while he lays in bed, weakened by chemotherapy. Richard fumbles to express his love of reading, but Powers actually demonstrates for the reader the importance of shared reading experiences as opposed to merely hyperlinked lists. In other words, Powers hints at the possibility of never-ending links even in the print novel, but then

rejects that possibility in favor of knowledge composed not of endless linked facts but of discrete experiences. In this way the apparent limitations of print become its strengths. Richard observes that “the only universally valid generalization about stories [is that] they end” (219), to which Helen adds that Richard’s relationship to C. was like a book because it was “Something that seems always, *because* it will be over” (310, emphasis Powers). This static and limited quality of the print book is what, for Powers, maintains its value. Whereas the virtual reality art he imagines in “Being and Seeming” and the experience of navigating one’s way through the internet seem to offer a substitution for experience by tailoring an electronic text to one’s immediate desires and needs, Powers claims “my books try to work their way to an ending where the reader realizes that the story starts when you put it down” (Birkerts 62). Hence the title *Galatea 2.2* – there is the experience from Richard Powers’s life, transformed into the aesthetic experience of a novel, and then altered once again by the act of reading. As Espen Aarseth puts it in his discussion of hypertext fiction: “a fiction is a portrayal of invented events or characters, usually in the form of prose ... constructed in a way that invites rather than dispels belief. A successful fiction must, therefore, in one sense be interactive, just as a lie needs a believer in order to work” (50). *Galatea 2.2*, then, is interactive precisely because there is a distinction between author and reader, and in order to continue with the book the reader must submit to the author’s fantasy of a talking neural net that can shut itself down and contemplate its own race and gender. And once the reader has finished reading the novel, has reached the inevitable end, then the real story begins, the story in which real human beings think about the way we understand knowledge, artificial intelligence, and literature. Though Richard can defend literature only with irony and claims of the value of reading “the great works” (284), Powers uses seemingly endless allusions; a plot that requires a reader to suspend his or her disbelief; and

even a sometimes opaque prose style that draws attention to its own construction through alternative syntax, puns, and neologisms in order to show that the print novel is every bit as interactive and information rich as the internet. For Powers the value of the print novel rests on its status as a discrete object separate from the narratives of our real lives rather than the “limitless possibility” (90) of instant access to all the world’s facts. In an interview with Jeffrey Williams, Powers argues for the importance of novelists understanding both science and critical theory, because we can “think of the novel as a supreme connection machine – the most complex artifact of networking that we’ve ever developed.” *Galatea 2.2* acts as “a supreme connection machine” by emulating the never-ending hyperlinks of the internet with its abundant allusions and by arguing that the novel does not just connect endless lists of facts and opinions, but connects the reader to the author as well as one reader of the text to any other due to its permanent and limited nature.

As a participant in the novel-computer assemblage of the eighties and nineties, then, *Galatea 2.2* addresses several concepts at stake in the assemblage processes of reterritorialization and deterritorialization. Many advocates of digital literature pointed to interactivity and limitless expansion as the essential difference between dynamic computers and static print; Powers’s heavy use of allusion complicates the idea that the ability to link texts into a network will easily differentiate these two media. Powers also argues against the idea that the material limitations of print necessitate its eventual dismissal to the peripheries of culture. Hypertext advocates rejoice in “freeing the reader from domination by the author” (Coover “End” 23), while Powers suggests the domination of the author allows the author to “make the reader reflectively aware of the degree to which his life too is both received and invented” (Birkerts 63). From early on in the history of computers, Vannevar Bush and others have used the computer as both a metaphor for

the brain and a tool for the literal reproduction of the brain's functions. Richard remembers Professor Taylor, though, as the man from whom he "discovered how a book both mirrored and elicited the mind's unreal ability to turn inward upon itself" (141), suggesting that print's ability to represent experience without becoming experience is a more accurate model of how the mind manages to work than Lentz's neural network or Bush's Memex.

The role of narrative in the twenty-first century is also a point of contention. Recent work into new media art has tended to disavow the early claims of hypertext novelists in favor of a focus on digital poetry, arguing, in part, that poetry better suits the nature of new media because of the emphasis "on the act of making rather than the thing made, on forces rather than stable formations" (Morris 7) and "a focus on the narrative or 'story' or even alternative or permuted versions of stories can obfuscate the malleability, permeability, and materiality of the medium" (Glazier 91-2). Narrative, in short, even hypertext narratives that loop and change with each reading, are too stable and fixed to display fully the possibilities of literature made on computers. As we see throughout *Galatea*, however, narrative is not a limitation but a necessity in a world of complex associations and overwhelming data. When he decides to join Lentz on their quixotic quest Richard makes his decision because "The story grabbed [him]" (31); Richard describes his time with C. in B. as an improvised narrative (33); as Richard attempts to learn the theories of cognitive science he finds he "could follow the *story* of the math, if not the substance" (74, emphasis Powers); as his relationship with C. begins to falter they each try to keep it alive with stories, and Richard realizes "You tell the stories you need to tell to keep the story tellable" (159). It is the inability to pare down the sea of information into a stable narrative that thwarts the earliest versions of the neural net, and as the novel ends Richard discovers that the experiment all along was not about teaching a computer to read but about examining to what

lengths of narrative a human would go to make sense of difficult information. Whether or not narrative best uses the capacities of computers, Powers makes clear that as contemporary life grows more and more complex, the stable narratives of print novels provide the best models of how our minds make sense of experience and information.

### **Shacked Up with Literature**

The importance of stable narratives, the best model of the mind, the limitations of permanence, what constitutes interactivity, the speed of the internet for finding information, the humanist tradition, and the roles of readers and authors are all components of the computer-novel assemblage in the 1990s. As with film and television, however, the novel-computer assemblage also includes associations with gender and sexuality. In the novels of Fitzgerald and West one finds Hollywood linked to the seductive, young female, reducing the response of the male artist to rape or incest. In Yates's portrayal of the 1950s home and Kosinski's fable of a world experienced entirely through the television screen, once again the new form of mass media gets associated with femininity, this time a more domesticated femininity, and the male characters are threatened with metaphorical castration or literal impotence. Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues that this trend extends to *Galatea 2.2*, in which the traditional artist is associated with the white, straight male while the new technology that threatens the status quo is represented by the feminine (the neural network gets labeled female and the most vocal advocate of poststructuralism is a woman). Yet the question of gender in the novel is more complex than Fitzpatrick admits. Richard, in fact, repeatedly connects his feelings about reading print novels to the female body. During the opening description of his life, Richard describes U. as "the place where I first saw how paint might encode politics, first heard how a sonata layered itself like a living hierarchy, first felt sentences cadence into engagement" (4). He then immediately follows

the references to painting, music, and literature with “I first put myself up inside the damp chamois of another person’s body in U.” This is the whole of his description – high culture and sex – of the town he returns to, an association that gets strengthened in the next paragraph: “I betrayed my beloved physics in this town, shackled up with literature.” This connection in Richard’s mind links print and the female body in particular as he borrows Diana Hartrick’s vintage copy of *Don Quixote* and suddenly “I was fifteen again, and working up the courage to tell the Egyptian empress who sat in front of me in sophomore humanities that the hair on the back of her neck stopped my breath to look at” (39). Why does an old book immediately bring to mind adolescent sexuality? In this moment the relationship is merely an associative memory, but when Richard describes his time alone in B. he informs us that he was able to read anything he wanted to at night and then in the next paragraph says, “In my few daylight hours, I fell in love with women constantly” (66), suggesting an almost causal relationship between literature and falling in love, a suggestion further confirmed when he describes the dilapidated English Building as “erotic” (75). Finally, Richard makes the connection explicit as he recalls that as he wrote his first novel, he and C. would make love after he read her a chapter and “as [he] kissed the birthmark that stained the small of her back, this seemed to [him] the point of literature” (105). These associations are not just taken from the younger Richard still in love with books and C. As he falls in love with A. in the present of the novel he describes his obsession with A.’s body as an “open text” he had “hope of reading through to the end with her” (251).

It is debatable whether associating women with great literature is any less sexist than associating them with Hollywood or television. Perhaps we can at least absolve Richard of the reactionary fear of women gaining any power of which Fitzpatrick accuses him. I will argue that Powers is emphasizing the importance of embodiment to our ability to know the world. When

Richard speaks of his love for literature, he means not just the meaning of the words but the physical experience of reading them in print. Richard tries to convince Lentz that “Reading knowledge is the smell of the bookbinding paste. The crinkle of thick stock as the pages turn. Paper the color of aged ivory” (148), and he imagines how different his reading experience is to Helen’s: “Each book became a knot. Yes, the strings of that knot were theme and place and character ... But into that tangle, just as crucial, went the smell of the cover, the color and cream resistance of the pages, the week in which I read any given epic, the friends for whom I synopsisized, the bed, the lamp, the room where I read” (229). Unlike the disorientation Richard feels during long hours spent on the internet, and unlike Helen who has only limited vision and hearing and does not even have a body which Richard can save when the Center receives a bomb threat, print offers us an embodied experience that computers, even in the future of virtual reality, cannot replace.

Richard’s distinction between literature and computers, embodiment and disembodiment, is too absolute, however. His desire to connect literature to the body (both the materiality of the printed book and the body of the reader) causes him to fall back on the sexist reduction of women to their bodies, while men remain minds that happen to reside in bodies. Richard, of course, reads with his body as well as his head, but we quickly associate him with the vast inner workings of his mind rather than his rarely described body. However, the novel offers long descriptions of the bodies of C. and A., and, though we are told C. is very intelligent, our most lasting impression of her would probably be that she cries while reading *Ethan Frome*. She later admits to Richard that “[she] cannot read a work with [her] head but only in [her] ribs” (261-2), making her relationship to literature far more visceral than even Richard’s. A.’s knowledge of contemporary theory makes Richard seem naïve and simplistic, especially when he claims

biology is the foundation upon which humanism can be maintained, yet after her numerous intellectual critiques Richard only admits that “She convinced me at blood-sugar level, deep down, below words. In the layer of body’s idea” (286). Richard does have a foot in both the sciences and humanities, yet memories of reading literature never fail to turn into memories of sexual longing, while his time spent downloading cognitive science articles off the internet all but eliminates his sex drive (111). The only woman Richard doesn’t associate with literature is Diana Hartrick, a woman who hates *Don Quixote* and does her scientific research by purposely damaging the bodies of monkeys. Richard’s momentary romantic interest in Diana, though, is more politeness than passion, and he seems more attracted to her when she is reading bedtime stories to her sons than when they are engaged in conversation about theories of the brain. Though Richard does find an instant friend in Diana’s genius son, William, the ability to quote Shakespeare does not make him feel much closer to Philip Lentz or Harold Plover. Perhaps the most likeable character in the novel, Ram Gupta, is one of the few with almost no connections to literature. Though Richard is fond of this theoretical scientist, it is not until the very end of the novel that he realizes Ram’s body is wasting away from cancer. Without the erotics of literature, it seems, the body hardly exists for Richard.

Not only does Richard overemphasize the connection between the body and print literature, he also overemphasizes the disembodiment of the computer medium. Richard thinks that Helen “would be hated by everyone for her disembodiment” (230) and soon makes it his goal to give her as much of a body as he can through cameras as well as the name of a literary character famous for her body. N. Katherine Hayles argues that true disembodiment is an impossibility and instead we must understand Helen as posthuman and “embodied in significantly different ways than are humans” (“The Posthuman Body” 252). This is not to say

that Helen is superior to humans or signifies the end of humanity, but that Richard cannot fully understand the role of materiality in print literature and the body in reading until he recognizes that Helen, and computers in general, do not offer a disembodied experience but rather an experience defined by its own materiality and relation to the body. Though Richard learns a great deal about himself through his time spent with Helen, the novel ends without him escaping the binary logic that separates print and the computer. Richard gradually attributes the qualities of a body to Helen to the point that he sees the idea of Lentz severing any of her connections as a form of murder, but after Helen shuts herself down Richard “didn’t know what to call it anymore” (328), no longer willing to grant it a name or even the feminine pronoun. As long as he is reading to Helen he can at least imagine her embodiment (and, thus, her gender), but once the dream of a computer network that can read fades away Richard is left sad at the loss of his friend but emboldened by his renewed sense that literature offers an embodied form of knowledge that all the connected databases of the world cannot replace.

Powers, however, rejects the conclusions of his namesake in a 2004 essay. “Literary Devices” is presented as an essay, though it reads as a kind of rewrite of *Galatea*. “Literary Devices” has a protagonist named Richard Powers who is offered the opportunity to participate in a cutting edge computer experiment by a maverick scientist. Where Philip Lentz proposes creating a neural network that can read, “Bart” claims to have created a computer program that can write. Like Lentz Bart is familiar with Richard’s work – he cites the essay “Being and Seeming” as well as *Galatea* – and like Lentz he argues that he can produce a simulation of the human mind that is not controlled by anyone. Both Richard in *Galatea* and Richard in “Literary Devices” join their respective projects incredulous but curious and slowly find themselves engrossed in conversation with the computer. In the latter’s case, the program takes the form of

letters Richard can send to anyone, including literary characters such as Goethe's Young Werther. Bart's program takes Richard's letters, scours the World Wide Web for background information on the recipient, and writes back in the proper voice. More astonishingly the various recipients of Richard's letters begin to write to one another, and Richard receives letters from characters in Goethe's novel with whom he did not initiate correspondence. Young Werther eventually discovers that he is merely a story actant produced by a computer network and, like Helen, commits suicide. Werther's suicide, however, does not warn Richard of the dangers of disembodied computers, but forces him to realize "this is what will save us finally: even self-telling stories end" (340). The computer-generated Werther was embodied as much as the print version, though just in a different form. This realization leads Richard to conclude that "the greatest worth of our machines will be to show us the staggering breadth of the simplest human thought and to reawaken us to the irreducible heft, weight, and texture of the entrapping world" (341). Powers is not nearly as sure as Hayles that "Print books are far too hardy, reliable, long-lived, and versatile to be rendered obsolete by digital media" (*Writing Machines* 33); he can imagine a world in the not-too-distant future that might turn away from print out of a powerful desire for more immediacy and versatility. What the endings to both *Galatea* and "Literary Devices" do suggest, however, is that Powers has faced the allure of nostalgia for one kind of materiality and rejected it. For Powers and many other readers, print may be embodied in a way that the internet, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence can never duplicate, but what computer-based media can do is force one to question one's assumptions about print and determine what aspects of the embodiment are truly worth saving as technology marches forward. Rather than clinging to the smell and touch of paper or the masculinist association of female bodies to literature that leads the Richard of *Galatea* astray, the Richard of "Literary

Devices” finds embodiment in the structure of narrative, the form of story-telling, even if that structure and form is created by a piece of advanced software.

**“I am a double agent, messing up both territories”: *Patchwork Girl***

Published in the same year as *Galatea 2.2* (1995), Shelley Jackson’s hypertext novel, *Patchwork Girl*, resembles a version of *Galatea* told from Helen’s point of view. Richard fears Helen will be hated for her disembodiment, but Jackson’s creation is all too aware of her body and how it has been pieced together from parts of other people’s lives. Early on in the experiment Richard imagines that some future version of the neural network will identify closely with Frankenstein’s monster. Jackson’s monster – who is both a character in the novel and the series of hypertext links that compose the novel – does not merely sympathize with Mary Shelley’s creature, she herself is one of Mary Shelley’s creatures, the female mate Victor Frankenstein claimed to have built and then destroyed. Jackson therefore draws upon many of the same connections Richard makes among reading, writing, gender, and the body but literalizes them into a character who is both a body and a text.

In 1996 Barbara Page published an article surveying several female authors who utilized hypertext, or used print in a way that was “hypertextual in principle” (1), in order to resist patriarchal forms of narrative. She concludes that “hypertext should prove to be a fruitful site for innovative writing by women” (26). *Patchwork Girl* is referenced only at the end of her article, but N. Katherine Hayles shares her conclusion in what is probably the definitive article on Jackson’s novel. Hayles argues that early copyright law privileged a version of the male author by ignoring the material conditions of the text in favor of the transcendent style of the genius creator. For Hayles, Jackson’s hypertext novel offers a new version of subjectivity, one that is embodied in the fragmented and multiple nature of hypertext. “The feminine associations with

sewing serve to mark this as a female – and feminist – production” (“Flickering” 34), Hayles writes after pointing out the use of sewing in the text as a metaphor for the patching together that characterizes hypertext. Hayles then provides a sophisticated close reading of several key lexias in *Patchwork Girl*, suggesting the text cannot be understood without careful consideration of its material existence as a hypertext, rather than print, novel. Indeed, Hayles’s claim that “Electronic Hypertexts Initiate and Demand Cyborg Reading Practices” (13) suggests that, for her too, hypertext was the future of literature.<sup>7</sup>

In these early reactions to hypertexts written by women, the excitement about the revolutionary potential of hypertext to change how we read is connected to feminist projects that critique male-dominated versions of subjectivity supposedly privileged by the traditions of the print novel. Consequently, the failure of hypertext novels in general, or *Patchwork Girl* in particular, to gain a significant readership or alter drastically the connection of literature to print threatens to undercut the genre’s potential for liberating female subjects. Subsequent readings of *Patchwork Girl*, few as they are, address this problem in one of two ways. A number of articles simply ignore the brief lifespan of first-generation hypertext novels<sup>8</sup> and continue to build on the foundation laid by Page and Hayles, locating radical feminist potential in the fragmentation and multiplicity of the hyperlink. Most explicit in this regard might be Astrid Ensslin’s reading of *Patchwork Girl* as an example of cyberfeminism where “the concept of the female is no longer pre-defined in corporeal, biological terms but produced by female imagination itself” (212) because the body of the creature exists only in the reader’s mind. It is unclear how, exactly, the body produced by the female imagination as it traverses the links of *Patchwork Girl* is radically different from the body produced by the female imagination as it reads *Frankenstein* in print.

Nevertheless, Ensslin insists that “virtual space is, according to Jackson, to be seen as women writers’ ideal breeding ground” (214).<sup>9</sup>

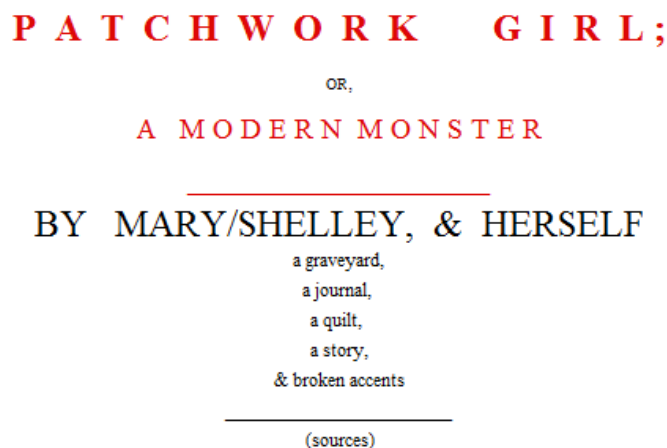
The second path is that taken by Hayles herself, namely to bracket *Patchwork Girl* as a particularly impressive example of a once-ballyhooed technological moment now surpassed. Two years after arguing for the essential role of the hypertext medium in understanding the text’s critique of subjectivity, Hayles “realized that these first-generation works were more like books than they were like second-generation electronic literature, because they operated by replacing one screen of text with another, much as a book goes from one page to another” (*Writing Machines* 37).<sup>10</sup> Though Hayles insists that first-generation texts remain important, she argues that technological limitations and a book culture built on print models kept these early attempts from truly breaking new ground. Ironically, those recent readings that seem direct descendants of Hayles’s initial article value the text’s rejection of print in favor of the multilayered subjectivity embodied by hypertext, while Hayles now contends that the text has diminished in relevance precisely because it borrows too much from the print tradition. One group believes the age of the hypertext novel is yet to come, the other claims it has already passed as authors produce more mature literary experiments in digital media. Both agree that any connection to print in *Patchwork Girl* can only damage its literary value and feminist potential.

A lexia within the “broken accents” section of *Patchwork Girl* rejects the exclusive focus on hypertext: “I am not the agent of absolute multiplicity any more than I am some redoubtable whole. I am a double agent, messing up both territories” (double agent).<sup>11</sup> The novel is an agent of hypertext but also of print, a double agent working for two sides at once and “messing up both.” My analysis builds on Hayles’s insight that *Patchwork Girl* clings to the traditions of print even as it extols many of the qualities of hypertext, but I read Jackson’s patchwork of

media as the text's central argument, not its shortcoming. Hypertext allows Jackson to critique claims of wholeness and stability, but the tradition of print remains necessary to make sense of the hypertext as anything but a series of fragments, making the interaction between the two media more important than celebrating one at the expense of the other. Jackson's novel participates in the novel-computer assemblage by reevaluating print's role within the assemblage and offering new connotations to the idea of embodiment that include both hypertext and print as valuable metaphors.

### Multiplicity and the Body

*Patchwork Girl; or, A Modern Monster* is a stand-alone hypertext novel published on a CD-ROM. It offers the reader the choice of five major starting points from the title page.



(Fig. 1)

Multiplicity and female identity surface from the very beginning, then, as Jackson merges her name with Mary Shelley's and includes the patchwork girl, herself, as a third co-author and allows the reader to start reading from any of five very different points. Whatever choice a reader makes, she is bound to find explicit connections between female bodies and hypertext. The link labeled "a graveyard" leads to the statement "I am buried here. You can resurrect me, but only piecemeal. If you want to see the whole, you will have to sew me together yourself"

(graveyard), and from there to an apparent epitaph for the patchwork girl (although the “story” section of the novel suggests she is still alive) that reads “Here Lies a Head, Trunk, Arms (Right and Left), and Legs (Right and Left) as well as divers Organs appropriately Disposed. May they Rest in Piece” (headstone). Here the reader finds a list of several different parts of the patchwork girl’s body, each one linked to a brief description of the part’s previous owner: the left hand belonged to Dominique the pickpocket; her lungs to Thomasina the mountain-girl; her liver to Roderick the apparently homosexual importer of fine fabrics. The reader may choose whatever order she wishes to reconstruct the body, and even once the body is made whole again by the reader, the act of linking actually reminds one that each body part remains distinct in its history.

The link labeled “a journal” opens a series of lexias that reproduce Mary Shelley’s journal as she tells of meeting the female monster in the flesh that she had conceived in her mind. Creator and creation develop an intimate friendship that ends with Mary slicing off a small piece of skin from her inner thigh and attaching it to the creature’s body. Through this gesture the writer becomes a literal piece of the text she has created, and the “journal” section connects directly to the opening of the “story” section. Because Mary Shelley is rarely mentioned in the “story” section, the reader’s choice of whether or not to read “a journal” first makes a significant difference in her understanding of the patchwork girl’s subsequent trip from Europe to America.

The section of the novel labeled “a quilt” consists of a series of short paragraphs, each composed of interwoven scraps of text taken from diverse sources, in particular L. Frank Baum’s *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* and Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Jackson also includes feminist and poststructuralist theory and the instructions for using the Storyspace software. The texts that Jackson breaks apart and merges together connect feminist concerns about the construction of

female bodies to the act of creating a hypertext. Furthermore, the reader can choose to view the paragraphs as uniform pieces of writing (Fig. 2) or as a patchwork of different fonts and styles with citations designating the original sources (Fig. 3).

I have had plenty of time to make the girl. Yet the task was not so easy as you may suppose. I found that I could not compose a female without devoting several months to profound study and laborious disquisition. I began to collect the materials necessary for my new creation: magic lanterns, peep show boxes, waking dreams, geometrical demonstrations, philosophical doctrines, fortifications and impediments, cartographic surveys, and engineering machines of all sorts.

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(Fig. 2)

I have had plenty of time to make the girl. Yet the task was not so easy as you may suppose. *I found that I could not compose a female without devoting several months to profound study and laborious disquisition. I . . . began to collect the materials necessary for my new creation:* **magic lanterns, peep show boxes, waking dreams, geometrical demonstrations, philosophical doctrines, fortifications and impediments, cartographic surveys, and engineering machines of all sorts.**

<sup>1</sup> L. Frank Baum, *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, first published in 1913. Mine is the Ballantine edition, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, first published in 1818 (mine is the Penguin edition, 1985), p. 191, p. 200, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> *Mary Shelley, Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition [1831], included in the Penguin edition of Frankenstein cited above, p. 51, p. 54.*

<sup>4</sup> *Body Criticism: Imaging the Unseen in Enlightenment Art and Medicine* (MIT 1991), p. 362, and snippets from other paragraphs, p. ?

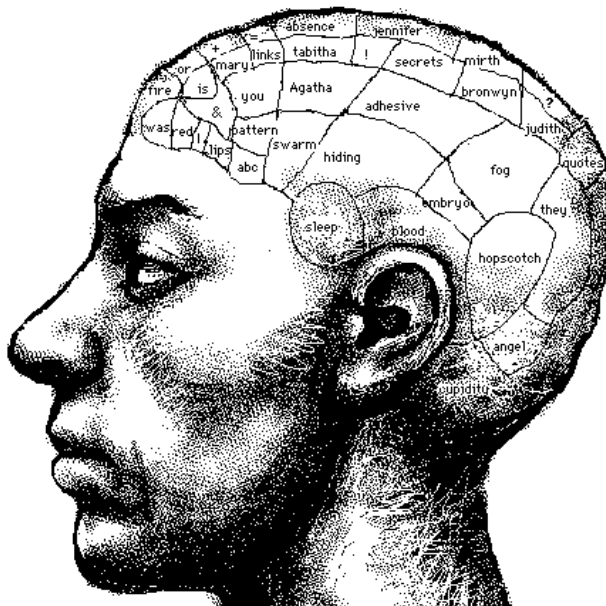
(Fig.3)

Though “a quilt” seems the one section that is separate from the patchwork girl’s story, the patchwork girl often refers to herself as the chain of hypertext links that each reader creates, so this patchwork of secondary sources becomes a graphical representation of her stitched-together body.

The “story” section is the narrative of the patchwork girl’s life after leaving Mary Shelley. The story splits at one point into two different paths, though they soon merge together, and there exist a few opportunities to leap from “a story” to one of the other sections by clicking

linked words. The patchwork girl's monstrous, stitched together body, unsurprisingly, makes simple travel an ordeal, and at various moments in her tale appendages fall off or threaten to float away in the bath, always reminding the reader her body is not whole.

Finally, the link labeled "broken accents" first opens a picture titled "phrenology" in which a diagram of a human head is partitioned into sections, each containing a word, most of which link to a number of lexias gathered under the subheading "body of text" that discuss the multiplicity of the human body and the multiplicity of hypertext.



(Fig. 4)

It is not always clear in "broken accents" whether one is reading Shelley Jackson's commentary on creating hypertext fiction or the patchwork girl's feelings on being pieced together by hyperlinks, but it is hard to miss the connection between female bodies and multiplicity in a lexia such as "mosaic girls": "Inside each cell of a human girl's body one of the two chromosomal X's curls up on one side of the nucleus and sleeps. It's called the Barr body, a little snarl of DNA, a microscopic badge of femininity. Each cell decides independently which X will sleep. Not all choose the same one. This gives girls a genetic flexibility boys don't have." The female body,

in particular, is noted here for the biological benefits of its genetic multiplicity, though the complexity of DNA does not preclude structure and predictability.

### **Needle and Pen**

Each of the five major sections makes use of techniques and metaphors that can identify hypertext with multiplicity and with female subjectivity. In a lecture at MIT on the future of the book Jackson herself proclaimed “Hypertext is everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine” (“Stitch Bitch: the patchwork girl”), a clear statement in favor of the feminist associations of hypertext, but also one that already suggests problems with celebrating that connection. Jackson does not argue that hypertext represents the feminine, nor that it more ably expresses or embodies female subjectivity, but only that it includes characteristics that have historically been labeled feminine. Feminist critics may make productive use of multiplicity, but this does not make multiplicity a *de facto* critique of patriarchy. The fragmentation that enables this multiplicity might very well work against feminist goals. Reducing women to legs, breasts, or wombs is an example of “everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine,” but not a characteristic feminists would want to perpetuate in the age of new media. Or, as Jackson colorfully puts it in the “double agent” lexia, “Jennifer’s leg lying next to Bronwyn’s foot ... can’t kick anyone’s butt.”<sup>12</sup> Multiplicity is undoubtedly a central concern in Jackson’s text, but so is the necessity of wholeness, making print as important a medium for representing female subjectivity as hypertext.

From the title page one can link to a fictional account of Mary Shelley’s journal, a hypertext representation of a document that originally would have been written on paper. The interaction between hypertext and paper appears early in “a journal” as the reader must choose to

follow a link titled “written” or a link titled “sewn.” In “written” Mary Shelley remembers writing her horror story until “the tiny black letters blurred into stitches”; “sewn” is the mirror image of the act of creation as “the tiny black stitches wavered into script.” Because “stitching” is connected explicitly to hypertext linking throughout the text, the reader, upon reaching this fork, chooses whether to witness print transforming into hypertext or hypertext transforming into print. The choice makes no difference to the plot of the narrative because the two paths immediately converge, indicating that the text’s multiplicity lies not in the act of choosing but in the act of conjoining print and hypertext.

Jackson admits the “story” section of *Patchwork Girl* is “deliberately, the most like a conventional novel” (Amerika) and, indeed, it reads for long stretches in a linear, page to page manner with little metacommentary, textual experimentation, or ontological disorientation. The opening lexia is the creature writing 175 years after leaving Mary Shelley. She describes herself, noting that “Women and men alike mistake my gender and both are drawn to me.” If the reader clicks on the phrase “I am never settled” she links to “Interrupting D,” a lexia in the “broken accents” section in which a quote from Derrida’s “Disseminations” is interrupted by commentary that connects writing to the creation of monsters. Should the reader click on any other word in the initial lexia, she opens up the lexia “birth.” In “birth” the creature claims to have been born many times, including both “under the needle, and under the pen,” again setting hypertext and paper side by side rather than in clear opposition. From this lexia there are six possible paths to take. The phrase “under the needle” takes the reader to “sewn” while “under the pen” links to “written.” The lexia also connects to a quote from *Frankenstein* in which the male creature asks Frankenstein for a mate, to the graveyard section of the hypertext, and, again, to “Interrupting D.”

To begin the narrative of the creature's westward travels, one must click on the words "a good story." A lexia in the "broken accents" section makes clear that a good story is one that follows a linear path: "We live in the expectation of traditional narrative progression ... we protest bad writing" (lives), and the story of the creature's travels is largely linear, though it is available in two different flavors that the reader can move back and forth between until finally the narrative settles into a long sequence of lexias, each with only one possible link. From "birth" the reader has multiple options for abandoning the promised history of the patchwork girl and instead freely exploring other sections of the hypertext, though each of these options leads to further discussion of the necessity of both print and hypertext to the birth of the text. If one wants to learn the story of the patchwork girl, however, one has to choose "a good story" and commit to an almost "conventional novel." The linear narrative associated with print becomes an option within the multiplicity of the text rather than multiplicity's other.

The first three lexias after selecting "a good story" tell of the creature's parting from Mary, focusing on a scene in which Mary sews a piece of her own skin onto the creature and the creature sews one of her scars onto Mary's leg. This act of sewing that joins two female bodies continues the metaphorical references to hypertext. Halfway through the narrative, however, the creature longs to hear from Mary again and stabs a quill pen into her creator's patch of skin, drawing blood to use as ink. The creature uses an implement of pen and paper writing in order to "activate" the skin graft that resembles a hyperlink. Long dead by this point, Mary does not write back and the creature begins literally to fall apart without an author to make her whole. Body parts fall off and stitches burst open until a friend, Elsie, squeezes the floating parts together in a bathtub and the creature "began to invent something new: a way to hang together

without pretending I was whole” (I made myself over). Complete fragmentation renders the creature helpless, but she realizes she cannot rely on Mary to make her whole through writing.

The creature’s story ends alone in Death Valley where she sits either writing on paper or typing on a laptop computer. She worries that “Sometimes it bothers me to put my words on paper. Set in ranks, they argue I possess a ‘life’” (a life). She feels a need to write her history down, but worries about the illusion of wholeness it creates. At this point the reader, after a long period of linear links, is offered a choice. One link leaps to a lexia titled “this writing,” that begins by reminding the reader she is not looking at print but at a computer screen: “Assembling these patched words in an electronic space, I feel half-blind, as if the entire text is within reach, but ... I can see only that part most immediately before me.” The link juxtaposes concerns about the wholeness of print with concerns about the lack of any shape or history in a hypertext. The other link from “a life” ends the “story” section of the novel with the creature admitting that though she can never be perfectly whole, she still keeps this image of wholeness as “something to fondle in my pocket while I work” (beauty). A perfect wholeness is an illusion, but a necessary one to keep in mind lest one be left “half-blind” and “without story” (this writing).

### **The Danger of Binaries**

A reading of print and hypertext as oppositional and exclusionary sets up a binary that the text rejects time and time again. Within the “story” section this same critique is applied to a binary rendering of gender. After leaving Shelley the creature takes a boat to America. During the trip she disguises herself as best she can, but instead only stimulates endless guesses about her true identity:

Among the ladies aboard the general belief seemed to be that I was a man, in lady’s garb. Some believed me to be a homosexual, seeking a more tolerant climate; others did not doubt I was a mysterious, no doubt extremely handsome and rich, brigand fleeing capture ... Some held I was a woman, but eccentric; I was a woman, suffering a disfiguring

disease; I was a half-man, half-woman, who had lived my life as a man, and who now sought peace as a woman ... I was a woman who had lived my life as a man ... As for Chancy, others supposed him my confidant, but in fact he was merely deeper initiated into doubt. Consequently, his attraction to me was complex, but nonetheless unwavering. I know now that he held simultaneously the belief that I could not possibly be a woman (was therefore a man), and the conviction that I could not possibly be a man (and therefore had to be a woman). He had no great urge to solve the mystery, since he liked me either way: as a man I was more interesting for my feminine guise, as a woman more interesting for what seemed to me my failures: my awkwardness and my uncanny strength. (guises)

I quote this scene at length to demonstrate that multiplicity cannot be associated with just one gender but, rather, with the seemingly endless combinations of gender the people on the boat imagine upon encountering the patchwork girl.<sup>13</sup> The debate is not just whether she is a man or woman but whether she is a woman borrowing the conventions of a man or man trying on the conventions of a woman. Even Chancy, the cabin boy who believes if one is not a woman one must be a man, “had no great urge to solve the mystery” and, in fact, enjoys the company of the creature precisely because she thwarts any label. A feminist reading of the use of hypertext in *Patchwork Girl* therefore necessitates the same understanding of multiplicity be applied to the relationship between print and hypertext. Just like masculinity and femininity, print and hypertext are distinct categories with characteristics determined by historical conventions rather than essential differences. A productive multiplicity arises not from embracing those aspects of hypertext that have been “damned by [their] association with the feminine” but from combining those aspects with print in ways that unsettle both categories.

The “graveyard” section, often cited as evidence of the attraction of hypertext to feminism given the numerous female histories and body parts sewn together, includes the story of Charlotte, who writes letters to her dead children using her breast milk as ink, and Livia, whose calloused hands wrote the books of her academic husband. Each of these images links the female body to paper rather than to hypertext. Charlotte relies on the material qualities of paper

to remind her of the children she has lost. Pen filled with breast milk, she writes invisible ink letters to the dead: “Then she held a match under the page and watched her words come back” (left breast). It is not clear whether Livia’s husband passed her thoughts off as his own or if he dictated his books to her while she inscribed them, but in either case she was able to mark her existence in the world through the permanence of paper. Whatever order one navigates through the list of body parts, one returns to the lexia “headstone” that contains the epitaph. A headstone is not a piece of paper, but the quality of permanence associated with print by early advocates of hypertext literature is also the very reason for memorializing the dead with carved headstones.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, by forcing the reader to return to “headstone” after reading about each body part, the text creates a whole body out of the disparate parts. The body exists as a whole both as a result of the reader’s mouse-clicks and as a result of the written epitaph. The headstone combines the multiplicity of hypertext choice with the metaphor of writing fixed in a permanent material.

Although the quilt imagery throughout *Patchwork Girl* is often appropriated as support for the feminist nature of hypertext writing, the “quilt” section of the novel actually makes little use of techniques exclusive to the computer.<sup>15</sup> That which is most experimental in the “quilt” section, namely the quotes cut and pasted together from diverse sources, does not use hyperlinks or encourage multiple readings. The artistic intent, as numerous critics have noted, seems to be closely aligned to hypertext because diverse sources are stitched together into one coherent narrative. The actual execution of the stitching, however, could as easily be done in print as on a computer screen. The dismissal of print in favor of hypertext is even more difficult to reconcile with lexias such as “write,” which reads “‘I beat my books; I caressed them. Page after page, O beloved, licked, lacerated,’ said the Patchwork Girl,” and “beauty patches,” which informs us that “One of the first proposals for using computer graphics was to assemble a composite of the

best features of various actresses – Garbo’s eyes, Bardot’s mouth, Welch’s breasts.” The first quotation grants the patchwork girl a physical and intimate relationship to print similar to that expressed by Richard in *Galatea*, while the second demonstrates that the computer’s capability for fragmenting bodies can be used as easily for patriarchal projects as feminist ones.

In her original reading, Hayles identified dotted lines as a central concept in the novel’s discussion of the hypertext medium. Each lexia of “a quilt” contains a dotted line beneath the text (see Fig. 2) that the reader must click to advance to the next link. Elsewhere in the text the dotted line is an image of joining, a scar that designates both separation and linking at the same time – the epitome of hypertext. Throughout the rest of the text one can almost always move to the next lexia simply by clicking any word on the screen, but in the “quilt” section one must click the dotted line in order to continue. In this unusual case, the dotted line forces a particular action by the reader every bit as specific and repetitive as turning a page. Jackson hints at this meaning when she discusses the way reading print has become naturalized by centuries of practice: “Turning the page, for example, has become an invisible action, because it has no meaning in most texts, the little pause it provides is as unreflective as breathing, but if we expected something different, or sought to interpret the gap, we might find ourselves as perplexed by that miniature black-out as by any intrusive authorial device we get exercised about in experimental literature or hypertext” (“Stitch Bitch: the patchwork girl”). Invited to speak on the nature of hypertext novels, Jackson finds herself contemplating the untapped possibilities of print, and in her own hypertext, as Hayles points out, she relies on individual pages of text that a reader connects together by a subtle movement of the hand. By forcing the reader to click on one particular spot, Jackson is both placing the technology of hypertext in the service of authorial

control and reminding readers that the act of changing pages, even in print, can be a self-reflective task that involves the reader bodily in the production of meaning.

The “broken accents” section takes the greatest advantage of hypertext linking. The starting point is the diagram labeled “phrenology” in which each linked word leads down a very different reading path. Many of the lexias accessed from this point offer three or four “hot words” that connect to new paths. Since the “I” that narrates several of the lexias in this section is so vague the choices the reader makes have a real effect on the reader’s experience of the text. A problem arises, however, because the structure is open-ended. The “I” in the mostly linear narrative of “a story” is clearly Mary Shelley’s female creature living in a mobile home in Death Valley, remembering her travels from Shelley’s side to her present life of solitude. Though the creature fears that linear writing creates a whole subject who does not really exist, the illusion seems necessary to make sense of the story. In “broken accents” the lack of any such linear connections makes it nearly impossible to grant the narrator an identity. Elisabeth Joyce interprets the “I” as “Jackson’s direct address of the act of creating this hypertext” (46); Hayles interprets the section as “containing the female monster’s narration and theoretical speculations on hypertextual and human bodies” (23); Teresa Dobson and Rebecca Luce-Kapler argue that “the strand is narrated by the text itself” (270). Each of these reader’s choices were different enough to suggest Jackson, the creature, or the text itself could be the subject of this section’s numerous short comments. Here, finally, is a true example of hypertext structure creating multiple female bodies, but the result is a fragmented subjectivity that blurs the lines among author, text, and character. The title page claims “Mary/Shelley, & Herself” as authors, suggesting Jackson, at least, is willing to acknowledge the potential of hypertext to break down

once clear distinctions, but even critics invested in championing the unique qualities of hypertext find it useful to reduce the fragmented hypertext subject to one manageable whole.

The iconic image most associated with *Patchwork Girl* is found in the opening lexia, “her,” preceding even the title page. The black-and-white image is of a woman’s body separated into sections by dotted lines with an additional dotted line cutting all the way across the body and background.



(Fig. 5)

This same image appears in altered form – the body parts cut apart and rearranged – as the opening image of four of the five major sections, making it a ready symbol for the divided and multiple body that is literally the case for the creature and figuratively a metaphor for the entire hypertext. The image also clearly invokes the materiality of paper: the image looks hand-drawn with pencil (Jackson admits that “Patchwork Girl started as a drawing on a page of my notebook, a naked woman with dotted-line scars” [Amerika]), the edges appear frayed or torn, spots of white appear against the black background as if the image had been through a photocopier or a scanner, and the dotted line that slices across the entire image turns into a “wrinkle” at one edge as if the page had been folded in half. The text later suggests just such a folding: “It is a potential line, an indication of the way out of two dimensions (fold along dotted

line): In three dimensions what is separate can be brought together without ripping apart what is already joined, the two sides of a page flow moebiusly into one another” (dotted line). This image of the dotted line as a joining without ripping and a potential action that has not yet occurred gets cited frequently in readings of *Patchwork Girl* and, strangely, associated with the hyperlink.<sup>16</sup> The hyperlinks in *Patchwork Girl* replace one two-dimensional window of text with another, while a book exists in three dimensions with pages that can be folded and marked in ways that join without fragmenting. In this lexia Jackson explicitly makes use of the materiality of paper in order to discuss the value of wholeness, yet many readers have insisted that folding along the dotted line can only be a reference to hypertext linking.

If one selects “a graveyard” from the title page, one is taken to “hercut4,” a rearranged version of the picture of the patchwork girl.



(Fig. 6)

In addition to mixing up the body parts of the patchwork girl like a puzzle, reminding the reader that only by the act of choosing links and reading can the body be put back together, one corner of the picture has been “peeled away” to reveal a segment of the instructions for using the software program, Storyspace, upon which the text was created. In another example of explicit

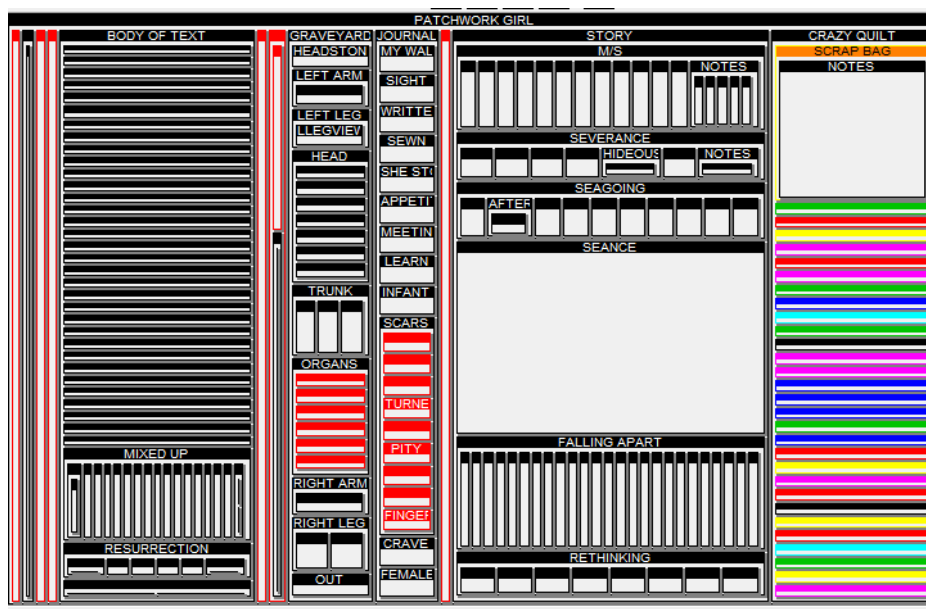
references to print being ignored in favor of the exciting potential of hypertext, Carolina Sánchez-Palencia and Manuel Almagro note that “the instructions of the software program are revealed under one torn fragment of the image, so that we get a glimpse of the different tissues of a multilayered artifact and its scaffolding, in a kind of metafictional strategy whereby the material circumstances of the process of creation are made apparent” (118). The authors actually use the terminology of paper – “torn” – although the conclusion they draw is exclusively about the “material circumstances” of the hypertext. Jackson’s inclusion of the instructions for Storyspace does bring to the surface the material nature of the hypertext medium, but it is important that she reveals the printed instructions for using Storyspace rather than, say, the binary code that the computer reads. The “page” from the Storyspace instruction manual is written in a font one might associate with Microsoft’s Notepad application, yet the edges are faded as though the image is taken from a printed page that did not get enough ink. The few words visible in the instructions talk about “flesh[ing] out” one’s plans for the story by using links to connect “documents.” “Links” brings to mind hypertext, but “documents” is one of the many examples of words associated with paper and print that have made their way into the argot of computer users. Since Jackson’s “planning” for the novel was done on paper – “I wrote most of the text in fragments in my notebook” (Amerika) – fleshing out her initial plan for her meant transferring it from paper to computer screen. It is paper, then, that acted as the skeleton upon which the flesh of the finished hypertext version was built.

In each of these instances print is used as a metaphor or a graphic representation. Of course I am not arguing that *Patchwork Girl* is a multimedia work, nor that the medium of hypertext plays no part in how we read it. *Patchwork Girl* is a hypertext novel with no paper to touch or smell or fall apart and its use of hypertext should be integrated into any reading of the

text. However, even as a hypertext work the novel relies on conventions familiar from reading print materials, characteristics of wholeness and permanence associated with paper and print, and the materiality of paper as a metaphor for the patchworked body of the creature. Jackson has claimed that “In the early days of electronic literature, claims for its revolutionary potential were weakened by ignorance of the long tradition of multilinear, multimedia work in print” (Rettberg). Jackson’s career outside of *Patchwork Girl*, rarely referenced, suggests an author eager to explore and combine both the old and the new. Beyond hypertext works, Jackson’s oeuvre includes a print short story collection, *The Melancholy of Anatomy*, containing stories titled “Heart,” “Sperm,” “Hair,” and “Blood,” and, most recently, she has published a traditional print novel, *Half Life*, about a future in which conjoined twins become a potent subculture. She has also worked on a project called “Skin,” in which 2096 volunteers each have one word of a story tattooed onto their bodies. The body has thus been a primary concern in Jackson’s work throughout, but she has never restricted her exploration of the subject to the medium of hypertext.

### **Mapping Multiplicity**

Perhaps the most vivid example of the interplay between print and hypertext is found in the several different types of maps for the reader to use to navigate through the text. The maps included with *Patchwork Girl* are both functional and aesthetic. In a text so obsessed with the idea of creating a whole body out of disparate parts, a map provides a visual representation of wholeness. The map I used most often in rereading the text is called the “Treemap”:



(Fig. 7)

What is impressive about this map is that it condenses the entire open-ended hypertext into one graphical representation. A reader can click on any box, each of which is titled, and instantly leap to that lexia. The map functions like a table of contents, allowing the reader to “flip” to any “page” she wishes.<sup>17</sup> The map, then, in which the complex novel is represented in two dimensions resembles print while simultaneously accentuating the freedom attributed to the reader of hypertexts. From the map one can juxtapose any two lexias one wants (one can even open several lexias in different windows and literally place them next to one another), but one also sees how fixed and structured the text actually is. The map combines characteristics associated with both print and hypertext into one visual representation – showing the permanent structure of text set down by the author and unchangeable by the reader, while also making every lexia of the text simultaneously available to the reader.<sup>18</sup> As the ambiguous narrator of “broken accents” states, “When I open a book I know where I am, which is restful. My reading is spatial and even volumetric” (this writing). With the aid of the maps a reader of *Patchwork Girl* also knows where she is at all times, and the different levels of maps can easily make reading the hypertext “spatial and even volumetric.” In this same lexia the narrator describes hypertext as

placing “the entire text ... within reach,” again a feature which is ably demonstrated by the “Treemap.” The map, as a spatial object, resembles a paper and glue book, but as a temporal object it offers the entire novel to the reader at once. Debates about whether the maps are essential to hypertext or remnants of our print past miss the point that they can be both simultaneously, that they represent the interplay of media rather than the exclusive domain of either one.

*Patchwork Girl* presents print as the companion to, rather than opponent of or precursor to, hypertext. Hypertext clearly offers Jackson a medium and a metaphor for exploring the fragmented nature of subjectivity, a fragmentation that has long been associated with the feminine, though it is not exclusive to the female gender. This exploration of fragmentation only makes sense, however, within the context of the print tradition, as both a contrast to and reevaluation of the association of print with qualities of permanence and wholeness. Rather than seek out a purely hypertextual novel or define the essential qualities of print, *Patchwork Girl* makes use of and questions how our world and sense of self is structured by both the illusion of wholeness and the impossibility of complete fragmentation. As numerous voices at the end of the twentieth century spoke of computers in general, or *Patchwork Girl* in particular, as tools for escaping the essential material limitations of print and paper and books, Jackson’s novel stabilizes the associations within the media assemblage of print with wholeness and permanence and hypertext with fragmentation and multiplicity, but destabilizes the idea that one is superior to or can fully replace the other. Like Powers she acknowledges the exciting potential and advantages of computer media, but argues that one of the most important contributions of computer media to society is to force us to reevaluate the importance and role of print both as a material medium and a metaphor for how we think and construct an identity.

## Conclusion

Novelists working during the novel-film assemblage of the 1930s and the novel-television assemblage of the 1960s and 1970s perceived a threat in the new media technologies, but it was a threat from the outside, the threat of images and mass culture and passive consumption. Even if Hollywood and television quickly overwhelmed novels in terms of the amount of time and money Americans spent on each medium, novelists could at least count on the continued support of most academics and fellow writers. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the novel-computer assemblage of the 1990s, then, is that some of the most enthusiastic champions of the new medium and its eventual displacement of the print novel were literary critics (Landow) and novelists (Coover, Joyce). This difference is evidenced in Richard's feeling that the graduate students of the English department see him as a relic and in the blindly enthusiastic readings of *Patchwork Girl* that argue that Jackson relegates print and all its heterosexist, masculinist baggage to the past. Indeed, one reason for including a hypertext novel in my analysis of the novel-computer assemblage is to emphasize one of the unique characteristics of this assemblage – the discourse includes not only the question of whether novels are still relevant (as in *Galatea*) but what form the novel of the future should take. Richard feels threatened by the money, prestige, and relevance of the neural scientists but also by an English department seemingly no longer interested in the joy of reading. Jackson wishes to expand the boundaries of the novel by exploring a new medium, but finds that doing so elicits a new binary logic, one, ironically, created by many literary critics who seek to demonstrate the very limitations of binary logic. In other words, both novels exist within, and contribute to, a number of discourses, discourses that at times come into conflict with one another. Rather than read *Galatea* as simply a defense of the novel or an example of a white, male author anxious

about maintaining his cultural power, an assemblage reading allows one to include these reactionary aspects along with the novelist's obvious knowledge of and enthusiasm for computer technology. Rather than continue a verbal war about whether the computer will or will not make print obsolete, I read *Galatea* as both defending old associations of print (the body, shared culture) while simultaneously accentuating new ones (interactivity, the necessity of narrative). Rather than read *Patchwork Girl* as a feminist critique of the linearity and stability of print or as an experimental work that nevertheless remains closely tied to the conventions of print, an assemblage reading attempts to account for both possibilities and to question the assumptions many critics have made about the essential differences between print and computer media and how those differences get connected, again, to the body and gender. As in the previous two chapters, I am not arguing that the fears of the death of the novel are based on illusion. The emergence of computer media posed a threat to the novel, or at least to the novel as it had been culturally constructed. The result of this threat was not the obsolescence of print, however, but the rearticulation of the role of the print novel within a complex assemblage of media. This rearticulation included reactionary defenses of print's superiority to the computer based on the idea that print is more embodied, and therefore feminine, than a computer, but also new ideas about the novel and what form it will take in the future in order to remain a valuable part of our culture. Both *Galatea 2.2* and the story section of *Patchwork Girl* end with the protagonist inspired to write about their experiences, suggesting that the death of the novel is always followed by the birth of the novel as its new role and set of associations form within the media assemblage.

## Notes

1. I will be combining computers as multimedia machines, computers as data storage and processing machines, hypertext novels, and internet communication into one medium. Though there might be very good reasons for keeping each of these functions separate – a stand alone hypertext novel will, after all, offer a very different experience from an evening spent surfing the internet – I believe it is safe to say that the threat to the print novel is multi-pronged and if there is any real credence to the idea that print might someday be rendered obsolete it will be due to the combined uses of computer technology rather than any one function.
2. In 1994 Richard Grusin would respond to Jay Bolter's, Richard Lanham's, and George Landow's predictions about the future of print and the humanities. Grusin critiques these early enthusiasts of electronic writing for "transfer[ing] political agency from people to things" (479) and ignoring the cultural situations in which new technology emerges. Grusin does not disagree that computers might change our understanding of print and how we read and teach books but argues against the idea that the technology, in and of itself, will determine its ultimate role in society. As Grusin puts it, "we need to look at the way in which the network of inscriptions that constitute electronic writing circulates within a heterogeneous social space of cultural, linguistic, and technoscientific practices" (483). Grusin's desire to connect the technological and cultural, then, resembles my description of the media assemblage as comprising both material and expressive components.
3. From this point on I will refer to the author of *Galatea 2.2* as "Powers" and to the character in the novel as "Richard."

4. Landow: “The manipulability of the scholarly text, which derives from the ability of computers to search data bases with enormous speed, also permits full-text searches, printed and dynamic concordances, and other kinds of processing that allow scholars in the humanities to ask new kinds of questions. Moreover, while one writes, ‘the text in progress becomes interconnected and linked with the entire world of information’” (24).
5. In 1955 the Graduate Library School of the University of Chicago devoted their annual conference to “The Future of the Book” in order to understand how computers and telecommunications would affect the libraries of the future. Even at this early stage in the history of computing, however, Lester Asheim notes that to many librarians even asking the question was to acknowledge “that the future of the book is a precarious one” (2).
6. In an example of life following art, Belinda Barnet and Darren Tofts recall a 1998 James Joyce Symposium during which Michael Groden presented a hypermedia *Ulysses*. During the subsequent discussion, Fritz Senn suggested that surely in *Ulysses* every single word in the text should link to something (294).
7. Hayles has argued for the importance of understanding ourselves as cyborgs in constant interaction with computer technology in *How We Became Posthuman*, among other places.
8. “First-generation” hypertext novels are characterized primarily by their creation before the popularization of browsers for the World Wide Web. Instead, these novels exist on CD-ROMs or floppy disks that are sold much like a book would be. Robert Coover, at least, describes these initial attempts at creating “a new literary art form” as “the Golden Age” of literary hypertext and names *Patchwork Girl* “the true paradigmatic work of the

era” because it addresses the process of creating hypertext fiction in its narrative (“Literary”).

9. Other articles that connect hypertext to feminist projects include Christopher Keep’s argument that the otherness of the medium of hypertext breaks down the mind/body divide in a way similar to gothic texts that contemporary critics feared would overwhelm female readers. Carolina Sánchez-Palencia Carazo and Manuel Almagro Jiménez claim the fragmentary nature of hypertext allows *Patchwork Girl* to “be contrasted with classic (and masculine?) forms of composition” (127). Teresa Dobson and Rebecca Luce-Kapler propose *Patchwork Girl* be taught alongside Shelley’s *Frankenstein* because the digital medium of *Patchwork Girl* will focus more prominently on questions about gender than its print forerunner. Laura Shackelford admits to the influence of Hayles on her reading of *Patchwork Girl* as “the resistance of a dynamic, multiple category of the feminine” (94).
10. This portrayal of *Patchwork Girl* as too adulterated by the traditions of print is repeated in Hayle’s latest book, *Electronic Literature*. She describes *Patchwork Girl* as “an appropriate culminating work for the classical period” (7), but fears “early claims for electronic hypertext’s novelty seem not only inflated but misguided, for the features that then seemed so new and different – primarily the hyperlink and ‘interactivity’ – existed in a context in which functionality, navigation, and design were still largely determined by print models” (60).
11. Each lexia in *Patchwork Girl* has a title which appears in a field at the top of the window or within any of the maps one can use to navigate through the text. The titles are frequently central terms discussed within the lexia but other times are more abstract or

thematic. In this way Jackson both replicates the print tradition of page numbering and defamiliarizes it by making the “page numbers” part of the text.

12. In a roundtable discussion a few years after her remarks at MIT Jackson “reject[s] the idea that there’s anything biologically feminine about this mode [hypertext]” (Ley).
13. Laura Shackelford reads this scene as a critique of gender binaries, claiming the creature’s monstrosity “is a product of binary sex and gender, which produce the masculine and the feminine, the male and female, and their respective (hetero)sexual orientations as mutually exclusive oppositions, forcing subjects to disavow the discrepancies that make such distinctions far from absolute” (86). She then connects this critique to the relationship between print and hypertext: “[j]uxtaposed to print narrative in several important respects, digital hypertext, in *Patchwork Girl*’s tactical reading, operationalizes combinatory principles that diverge from a heterosexist logic of conjoinder” (93). Shackelford uses the critique of binary sex to describe a new binary opposition between print and hypertext. Print is the medium of heterosexist and masculinist logic, while digital hypertext is the medium of everything multiple and, thus, feminine. The problem with this reading, as I show, is that the people on the boat never insist on binary categories, and the text rejects the idea that multiplicity is the exclusive domain of hypertext.
14. Hypertext author Michael Joyce, for instance, claims several times in *Of Two Minds* that print stays itself while electronic text replaces itself.
15. Elisabeth Joyce argues for the importance of this section to understanding the nature of hypertext bodies by claiming “The connection to the original source remains and influences its meaning, but the new context will change that meaning, will force the

appropriated material to adapt to the new situation” (43-4). This reading astutely connects the “quilt” section to vital themes developed throughout the text, yet makes claims about the use of quotations in a hypertext novel that could as easily be made about quotations and allusions in a print novel.

16. Hayles interprets the same lexia, even with explicit references to “pages,” as a metaphor for hypertext: “The movement out of the flat plane evokes the hypertext's stacks, which suggest through their placement a three-dimensional depth to the screen and a corresponding ability to emerge from the depths or recede into them” (“Flickering” 26).
17. Contrast the accessibility of Jackson’s maps to Michael Joyce’s seminal hypertext novel, *afternoon*. Critics have argued that buried at the center of Joyce’s text is a lexia titled “white afternoon” in which the mystery of the car accident is explicitly revealed. Many readers, however, never find “white afternoon” because it can only be accessed after completing certain paths. In this instance the gap between author and reader is strengthened as the author can literally control what parts of the novel the reader can access.
18. The overlap between print and hypertext in these maps is illustrated by the disagreement between Elisabeth Joyce and Hayles. Joyce argues the unyielding structure of the mapping in *Patchwork Girl* “contrasts directly with its precursor form of the novel” (41). Hayles, on the other hand, claims that “As a result of its construction as a navigable space, electronic hypertext is intrinsically more involved with issues of mapping and navigation than are most print texts” (“Flickering” 11). Joyce sees the permanence of the maps while Hayles sees the freedom for the reader to navigate, yet both insist they have stumbled upon one of the defining differences between the new and old media. It matters

less, in this case, whether one is right and the other wrong than the fact neither believes print plays any part in understanding the maps.

## **Chapter Four: America and the Media Assemblage in Flux**

### **DeLillo and the Mass Media**

The previous three chapters have collectively sought to establish the existence of a media assemblage and the value of that concept for understanding the complex and sometimes even contradictory responses of novelists to the emergence of new media throughout the twentieth century. Although a media assemblage contains numerous relationships among all the different forms of media in existence at any particular time, I have focused my attention on the novel and the threats to its continued cultural relevance readers and writers have perceived each time a new popular medium has arisen. This tactical decision was made in order to draw attention to the fact that the novel should be analyzed not just as narrative or language but as a medium with a particular role within the culture at any given moment.

Taken as a whole, the first three chapters demonstrate the changes in the novel's role over the course of the twentieth century, but since twenty years pass between chapters and each chapter focuses on the novel and only one other medium, the constant flux and complexity of the media assemblage might get lost or at least diminished. The mutability of the media assemblage, however, is part of what makes it a valuable concept for the study of the novel as it allows for a diachronic understanding of the novel in the twentieth century, uniting the novel's relationships to film, television, and computers as parts of one ongoing process. The focus on a different medium in each of the first three chapters also threatens to accentuate the technological changes in the shifting media assemblage. The addition of sound to Hollywood films, the invention of color TV, and the creation of graphical web browsers all affected the popularity of their respective media as well as the role of the novel within the culture, but, as I have argued, the media assemblage comprises much more than just material or technological components. This

chapter, then, will act as a complement to the previous three chapters, filling in the gaps by investigating the protean nature of the media assemblage over the course of four decades and the connection of those changes to the contemporary political situation in Don DeLillo's novel, *Underworld*.

In the previous three chapters, I have also pointed out the often unintentional contradictions that arise as a novelist attempts both to preserve the role of print and adapt to a changing media assemblage. I have described the novelists (and their novels) as participants in the media assemblage, but the focus on contradictions and influences might suggest novelists write without awareness of the assemblage and their place within it. The complexity of an assemblage might very well prohibit any single novelist from pinpointing his or her contributions to the assemblage, but I would argue that a novelist can make the media assemblage an explicit subject of his or her work. DeLillo's *Underworld* is such a work, making the shifting media assemblage of the Cold War an essential scaffolding for the complex narrative. Though DeLillo makes few direct references to print or writing in the vast novel, his descriptions of the changes in the media assemblage during the second half of the century and their effects on high culture and mass culture, the public sphere and private space, and nostalgia and technological advancement reveal a novelist directly engaging with the complexity of the media assemblage and the place of his novel within his own contemporary moment.

In his book-length study of DeLillo's career through the 1997 publication of *Underworld*, Mark Osteen argues that "DeLillo's work undertakes a dialogue with American cultural institutions and their discourses," institutions that include television and film (1). It is this prominent interest in the media and the discourses both about them and that they enable that makes DeLillo's novels valuable for better understanding the media assemblage. In his first

novel, *Americana* (1971), DeLillo tells the story of David Bell, a TV executive who is the “child of Godard and Coca-Cola” (269) and filters his relationships with those around him through the language and conventions of film and television. DeLillo’s 1977 novel *Players* describes Pammy and Lyle, an affluent but bored couple that does little together besides watch television until Lyle becomes involved in a plot to set off a bomb in the New York Stock Exchange and plays his role like an actor in a bad drama. In 1978 DeLillo would write about the search for a lost film from the final days in Hitler’s bunker in *Running Dog*. In this novel the aura of Hitler and the aura of the unseen film footage combine to create an irresistible object for collectors. In 1985 DeLillo would make television not just a theme or prop in *White Noise* but arguably a character in the Gladney family with its own stream of dialogue interrupting the text. The television set in this novel becomes instrumental in understanding how families interact, how we perceive national tragedy, and how we connect the personal to the public.

In each of these novels, DeLillo is less concerned with the technology of film or television than with the relationship between the medium and how individuals make sense of their lives within society. In other words DeLillo takes as his central concern the way media mediate the relationships among people. This concern is perhaps best demonstrated in *Libra*, DeLillo’s 1988 account of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. During an interview with Anthony DeCurtis, DeLillo agrees that television was an essential part of the significance of the Kennedy assassination:

It’s strange that the power of television was utilized to its fullest, perhaps for the first time, as it pertained to a violent event. Not only violent, but, of course, an extraordinarily significant event. This has become part of our consciousness. We’ve developed almost a sense of performance as it applies to televised events. And I think some of the people who are essential to such events ... are simply carrying their performing selves out of the wings and into the theater. Such young men have a sense of the way in which their acts will be perceived by the rest of us, even as they commit the acts. So there is a deeply self-referential element in our lives that wasn’t there before. (48-9)

DeLillo initially responds to television's ability to transmit events almost immediately and, thus, the experience the nation shared following the President's death. Quickly, however, his thoughts on television turn away from the technology and toward the effects of television on how individuals such as Oswald understand their place in history. In *Libra*, Oswald notes that "Once you did something notorious, they [the media] tagged you with an extra name, a middle name that was ordinarily never used. You were officially marked, a chapter in the imagination of the state" (198). As he prepares for the fateful day, Oswald thinks about the plot to assassinate Kennedy and "felt he was in the middle of his own movie" (370), and after Ruby shoots him Oswald "could see himself shot as the camera caught it. Through the pain he watched TV" (439). Although DeLillo acknowledges that the technology of the television and the Zapruder film shaped the American experience and reaction to Kennedy's death, his fictional exploration of that historical event says little about the nation watching the events on TV and, instead, explores how film and television altered Oswald's sense of his relationship to history and American society. In short DeLillo's interest in media has always been in media as assemblages of technology and discourse and how the combination of technology and discourse shapes our sense of politics and society.

When DeLillo does describe someone watching Oswald's death on television, he notes that "The camera doesn't catch all of it. There seem to be missing frames, lost levels of information" (446). What the camera doesn't catch, Nicholas Branch attempts to fill in as he assembles all the information remotely related to the assassination into "the megaton novel James Joyce would have written if he'd moved to Iowa City and lived to be a hundred" (181). *Libra*, too, attempts to fill in the holes in the official account, imagining the numerous plots and coincidences necessary to make sense of the extant footage. In this way DeLillo describes the

role of the novel in the latter half of the twentieth century. If film and television overwhelm with the power of the image then the novelist must provide something different – an outsider’s perspective that questions the “reality” created by film and television. DeLillo claims that “American writers ought to stand and live in the margins, and be more dangerous” (Arensberg 46). If the center is dominated by film and television then the novelist must find new space in the margins in order to remain relevant.

Two other DeLillo novels suggest he has contemplated the “death of the novel” and his vision of the novelist as cultural outsider is part of his response to this shift in the novel’s cultural relevance. In *The Names* (1982) a character observes that he “would enjoy being told the novel is dead. How liberating to work in the margins” (77), and the 1991 novel *Mao II* takes as its subject a reclusive novelist who believes writers are slowly losing ground to terrorists who employ the power of the spectacular image. Bill Gray believes “The novel used to feed our search for meaning” but now has been replaced by the images on the nightly news (72). In *Mao II* the author, Gray, literally dies, but the novel does not as DeLillo incorporates images into his text, in part, to revitalize the medium at a moment when its cultural role within the assemblage is unclear.

In an interview with Maria Moss, DeLillo insists that “I am not one of those novelists who feels he is competing with visual media” (156), “The role of the writer doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with the visual society at all” (158), and “the novel has changed ... but not because of other media” (159). DeLillo insists on the autonomy of the novel and rejects the idea that the novelist must attempt to compete with television and film in providing an attractive spectacle for the audience. When he writes to fellow novelist Jonathan Franzen, however, he claims that “The novel is whatever novelists are doing at a given time” (Remnick 143) and in

another interview points out that “when we talk about the novel we have to consider the culture in which it operates” (Begley 96). In these observations DeLillo describes the novel as a medium that morphs to fulfill different roles and expectations depending on the culture of the time. Taking both sets of quotes together, along with the consistent thematic interest in the media throughout his career and the admitted influence of film on his style,<sup>1</sup> suggests DeLillo is describing the novel as a medium that cannot and should not directly compete with film and television because of the material differences, but that does have a shifting role within the culture depending on the status of the media assemblage at any given time.

The importance of other media has also been a staple of the secondary criticism on *Underworld* for some time. Yet, DeLillo’s numerous references to television, film, and computers throughout the 827-page novel often get conflated into one single discussion of “mass media.” This approach is taken despite DeLillo’s professed admiration of film and dislike of television (Moss 156), despite the inclusion in *Underworld* of references to both Jayne Mansfield and to Sergei Eisenstein, and despite the use of computers by both the military and civilians. One would expect such differences, along with the broad chronological scope of the text, to make easy generalizations about a monolithic entity known as the mass media to be difficult to make. Instead of attempting to unpack the layers of relationships among media in the novel, however, critics have mostly debated (similar to the debates on the influence of Hollywood on Fitzgerald’s writing) whether DeLillo is critical or accepting of the mass media. Though there are differences among critics in how they articulate DeLillo’s influence by and criticism of the mass media, I will note two particularly strong examples as representative of the two sides.

Probably the most vehement attack on the mass media in DeLillo’s name is perpetrated by Nicholas Spencer as he argues that the media in *Underworld* represent an extension of Cold

War military technology. Extensively citing the work of Paul Virilio, Spencer sees the military technology of the atom bomb “mutate into media technologies in *Underworld* in terms of the power of the image, which in Virilio’s terminology represents the replacement of reality by a visual ‘reality effect’” (95). The materiality of human life gets replaced by the ephemeral light of television and film images in Spencer’s reading of “the novel’s consistent technological critique” (101). Spencer’s employment of Virilio usefully connects technological developments in the mass media to developments in military technology during the Cold War, thus placing media in an assemblage relationship in which technology and political discourse combine to determine the role of media at a particular moment. He also notes changes in media effects as well as artistic responses to media/military technology over the course of the Cold War and the novel, but these changes take on the form of a smooth progression – the media further distancing us from materiality with each new technological advancement and artists progressing in the sophistication of their response from Eisenstein’s film to Klara’s *Long Tall Sally*. Despite the appearance of numerous characters that see in the media a means of connecting to reality, Spencer reads each such instance as an ironic critique on the part of DeLillo, whom, Spencer assures us, is entirely critical of the effects of the mass media.<sup>2</sup>

Timothy L. Parrish, on the other hand, discusses “the virtuosity of [DeLillo’s] multimedia mimicry” (697) and the problems this creates for those who want to read DeLillo as entirely critical of the mass media. Where Spencer argues that DeLillo critiques the increasing ability of media to replace our sense of the real, Parrish believes “there is no real that might be confidently opposed to the fictional” in DeLillo’s novels and, thus, he “has replaced the solitary and singular artist-observer familiar from Henry James and James Joyce with a multiplicity of competing aesthetic technologies” (698). This “multiplicity of competing aesthetic technologies” resembles

a media assemblage, but Parrish never follows up on the claim to explain how the technologies are competing nor does he suggest that the terms of competition can change from decade to decade. The mass media remains a monolithic entity which the postmodern novelist must successfully incorporate into his work since reality is no longer accessible except through mediation. The idea that definitions of “real” and “mediation” can change with time or that different media mediate in different ways does not arise in Parrish’s discussion. Though his examples of DeLillo incorporating styles and techniques associated with other media are helpful for understanding *Underworld* as a participant in a media assemblage, his focus, like Spencer’s, on general differences between mediation and reality diminishes the complexity of the media assemblage during the Cold War and the connections DeLillo makes between changes in the media assemblage and changes in American politics over the forty-year period of the novel.<sup>3</sup>

### **Remediation**

Both Spencer and Parrish share an interest in how media affect our sense of “the real.” Spencer argues that mass media replaces “the real” while Parrish argues that DeLillo mimics techniques from other media in order to draw attention to the fact that there is no unmediated “real.” I propose that these seemingly oppositional descriptions of the effects of mediation are precisely why a media assemblage approach is preferable for understanding the use of media in *Underworld*. It is precisely such discourses about what constitutes a real or authentic experience that change over time and need to be incorporated into a description of a particular media assemblage. That assemblages are constantly changing is not even a question for Deleuze and Guattari. Because assemblages are composed of heterogeneous and autonomous parts, the more important concern for Deleuze and Guattari is “What holds things together?” (327). Deleuze and Guattari answer this question by examining bird mating rituals, but Jay David Bolter and Richard

Grusin have coined a term specifically to understand the shifting relationships between media, in particular how claims of authenticity and mediation affect those relationships. Bolter and Grusin have developed the concept of “remediation” to explain the relationship of new media to old. They argue that each new medium “promises to reform its predecessors by offering a more immediate or authentic experience” but that this claim of immediacy “inevitably leads us to become aware of the new medium as a medium. Thus, immediacy leads to hypermediacy” (19). Hypermediacy and immediacy are inextricably linked together as new media claim greater authenticity than the old and older media often draw attention to their own acts of mediation in order to resist claims that immediacy is possible.

Remediation, then, is an active interplay among individual media in which formal exchanges between media rearticulate the relationship of the medium to “the real” and, thus, shift the medium’s role within the media assemblage. For example, television news stations remediate the multi-tasking capabilities of the computer by adding various graphics and news tickers to the screen so that the viewer can follow multiple stories at once. At the same time a news blog on the internet might remediate the layout and terminology of a newspaper. In the former example an older medium seeks a greater degree of hypermediacy while in the latter the newer medium attempts to attain a greater sense of authenticity. According to Bolter and Grusin these acts of remediation can have material effects on a medium (changes to technology or production to make the medium more relevant) as well as expressive effects (changes to how people use and discuss the medium), making remediation a complementary concept to the media assemblage. One would expect that whether a culture describes a particular medium as immediate or hypermediated would reveal quite a bit about that culture, but Bolter and Grusin never take their study of remediation in this direction. I, however, believe that connecting the process of

remediation to other discourses within a culture is the logical next step in a media assemblage approach and a means for connecting DeLillo's use of media in *Underworld* to the Cold War politics he describes.

Although DeLillo rarely describes individual media in enough detail to observe examples of the formal remediation that Bolter and Grusin discuss, we can note how characters in the novel describe changes in the way they perceive a medium as transparent or hypermediated over time. In one oft-cited scene, protagonist Nick Shay is at a Dodgers-Giants baseball game with his co-workers Brian Glassic and Simeon Biggs in the early nineties when a discussion breaks out about the famous Bobby Thomson home run in 1951. Glassic, during the conversation, makes two sweeping statements about the game. First he compares the moment to the assassination of President Kennedy: "When JFK was shot people went inside. We watched TV in dark rooms and talked on the phone with friends and relatives. We were all separate and alone. But when Thomson hit the homer people rushed outside. People wanted to be together. Maybe it was the last time people spontaneously went out of their houses for something" (94). Later he expands on this idea that the Thomson homer signified the end of a more innocent age: "The Thomson homer continues to live because it happened decades ago when things were not replayed and worn out and run down and used up before midnight of the first day. The scratchier an old film or an old audiotape, the clearer the action in a way. Because it's not in competition for our attention with a thousand pieces of action. Because it's something that's preserved and unique" (98). In each of these quotes Glassic appears nostalgic for an earlier time, a time of communal gatherings and black-and-white film. There is then and there is now, and in between our relationship to "the real" completely changed. Or, in a more succinct version from Glassic: "We had the real Dodgers and Giants. Now we have the holograms" (95). Technological

sophistication, in other words, has replaced reality in his opinion. Though Glassic is a minor character, and a rather untrustworthy and superficial one at that, a reader of *Underworld* might take his observations as DeLillo's own critique of mass media due to the similarity to DeLillo's thoughts in his essay "The Power of History":

Newsreel footage of Bobby Thomson's home run resembles something of World War I vintage. But the shakier and fuzzier the picture, the more it lays a claim to permanence. And the voice of the announcer, Russ Hodges, who did the rapturous radio account of the game's final moments, is beautifully isolated in time – not subject to the debasing process of frantic repetition that exhausts a contemporary event before it has rounded into coherence. (62)

Though Glassic insists that something real has been lost, what he is really describing is a shift in the media assemblage. Though the three men are physically at the ballpark, they are watching the game through a window and listening to the game via radio. When Bobby Thomson hit his homerun, a much younger Nick was experiencing the game through the radio as well, as was Biggs all the way in Missouri. If anything, then, the men have gotten closer to the real event, eliminating at least one layer of mediation as they can physically see the game without relying on Russ Hodges's verbal description. Yet, Biggs explains that "people claimed to have been present at the game who were not" (94), making the 1951 radio broadcast an example of technology replacing reality. Indeed, it is hard to imagine how one could maintain that scratchy, black and white film or a broadcast on a cheap radio is more authentic or transparent than live television, let alone attending the actual game. The technology itself, then, can hardly be the cause of any sense of hypermediation. Instead, DeLillo is arguing that our relationship to different media has shifted. Radio broadcasts and low-quality film footage mediated our experiences no less than technology today, but as singular accounts of that historic moment, as the medium through which baseball fans across the nation experienced the game, they seemed to have a cultural authority and authenticity the multimedia world of today cannot duplicate. In fact, as DeLillo argues in his

essay, it is our very desire for authenticity, for the live camera feed and the latest news story, that has weakened our relationship to any singular event.

Before examining the shifting media assemblage relationships throughout the Cold War, I will focus on a single medium to show how drastically definitions of authenticity and hypermediation can change in a forty-year period. For example, the radio broadcast of Bobby Thomson's homer was an authentic enough experience to send young Simeon Biggs out into the streets shouting "*I'm Bobby Thomson, I'm Bobby Thomson*" (94) and for thousands of people to insist they attended a game they actually did not. The broadcast was this authentic despite the fact that Hodges's commentary is as much emotion as description – "Then he raises a pure shout, wordless, a holler from the old days.... The thing comes jumping right out of him, a jubilation, it might be *heyyy-ho* or it might be *oh-boyyy* shouted backwards or it might be something else entirely – hard to tell when they don't use words," (43) – and his famous call of the final hit consists largely of repeating "The Giants win the pennant." Sixteen years later on Dow Day at the University of Wisconsin, student protesters take over a radio station and broadcast repetitive "Pig" chants and advice to rioters for resisting the police. Here the role of the radio is not to offer the "official" version of a live event to a national audience, but to be a tool of resistance against the "official" versions of the Vietnam War presented by the government and their corporate partners. The radio is useful because it is low-tech enough to be controlled by amateurs and because, unlike network television or major newspapers, it can survive with only a niche audience, such as students. When Nick's future wife, Marian, tunes into the radio in hopes of finding out facts about the chaos happening throughout her hometown, she realizes "the riot out there, if that's what it was, was being augmented and improved by a simulated riot on the radio, an audio montage of gunfire, screams, sirens, klaxons and intermittent bulletins real and

possibly not” (588). The protesters, in other words, have found the radio useful for acts of political resistance precisely because of the mediation between the audience and the real event, the possibility of creatively reconstructing reality with simulation and sound effects in order to make a point about the oppressive acts of the government. No longer a primary news and entertainment source for most Americans, no longer the technology that offers the most immediate access to public events, the cultural role of the radio shifts, becoming available to the counterculture precisely because it allowed for a mediated intervention into history. The technology of the radio had hardly changed in these sixteen years, yet the assemblage of media and cultural forces had.

One of the Vietnam War protesters who might have used the radio as part of his resistance was Jesse Detwiler, a “garbage guerrilla” who utilized underground communication to expose the household waste of J. Edgar Hoover and other powerful people. By 1978, however, he is a waste theorist, an industry visionary who argues that toxic waste will become the tourist attraction of the future. Once an outsider, Detwiler now “talked in his talk-show way” while “looking for book deals and documentary films” (287). Nick clearly associates Detwiler with popular television and slickly produced films, a man who has made himself comfortable in the consumer culture of bright images and clever sound bites. Detwiler is also the first character in the novel to observe that “everything’s connected” (289), a statement that, in the novel, is frequently a reference to the far-flung power of computer technology to gather data, further demonstrating his association to cutting edge media and communications technology. As Detwiler attempts to explain to Biggs and Nick his maverick theories on waste and civilization, the two slightly older men joke that they cannot possibly match his insider information and state-of-the-art theories because they’re old-fashioned, simple people who “listened to the radio”

(288). The radio, now competing with cable television, a resurgent Hollywood bolstered by the blockbusters of Coppola, Lucas, and Spielberg, and the very beginning of the personal computer boom, appears ridiculously ancient and simple by comparison. More than just the simplicity of the technology, however, Biggs and Nick are referring to a imagined simplicity in the culture, a culture that had not yet experienced the devastation and alienation of the JFK assassination, Vietnam, and Watergate. The faith necessary to accept the descriptions of events over the radio as reality (remembering that Russ Hodges, the baseball announcer, used to create whole ballgames for his audience based entirely on a box score) had disappeared, or never even been part of Detwiler's generation. The temporary nature of any characterization of a medium is made all the more clear another decade into the future as Biggs and Nick join Brian Glassic at the baseball stadium, listen to the game over the radio, and hear Brian declare "this isn't reality. This is virtual reality" (92). Roughly the same group of characters, then, vacillates in their feelings towards a technology that hasn't changed all that much in their lifetimes, finding the radio a source of the most real and immediate experiences in the fifties, a tool of creative resistance in the sixties, an object of nostalgia in the seventies, and a part of the vast media landscape in the nineties that has almost totally replaced real life with a simulation. If the radio, a medium that has undergone relatively few technological changes over the time period of the novel, can shift back and forth between immediacy and hypermediation depending on the social context, how much more complex will the relationships among television, film, computers, and the novel be during the Cold War?

### **Containment and Exposure**

Though it may be possible to chart the changing attitudes towards other media on a decade-by-decade basis, for ease of comparison I will divide *Underworld* into three sections –

the fifties and sixties, the seventies and eighties, and the nineties. Placing the fifties and sixties together is obviously a debatable choice, but DeLillo himself does the same in Part 5 of the book, “Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry: Selected Fragments Public and Private in the 1950s and 1960s.” The seventies might seem to have as much in common with the sixties as the eighties, but the earliest chapter set in the seventies is Part 4, which takes place in the Summer of 1974 in the midst of the Watergate scandal, a possible watershed moment in America’s cultural attitudes towards television and mediation. Separating the post-Cold War chapters (Part 1 and the Epilogue) from the rest of the book, however, is a clear choice. Even within these subsections of the book there are shifts and changes within the media assemblage as well as both stabilizing and destabilizing forces. My goal is not to pin down a single version of the media assemblage but to demonstrate the potential for complexity and change over the course of forty years.

While watching the famous 1951 baseball game between the Giants and Dodgers, J. Edgar Hoover receives the news that the Soviet Union has just successfully tested a nuclear bomb. He approves of Truman’s decision to announce the news immediately to the American public for “People will understand that we’ve maintained control of the news if not of the bomb” (28). Hoover’s belief, that controlling the media dissemination of an event is as important as controlling the actual event, echoes what Alan Nadel has described as the primary narrative of the early Cold War period – containment. Nadel argues for “the power of large cultural narratives to unify, codify, and contain ... the personal narratives of its population” (4) and believes the primary national narrative of the early Cold War was one of struggle between two antipodal superpowers that demanded a population diligent in their efforts to remain unadulterated by the opposing ideology. Nadel further associates the narrative of containment

with the rapid advances in technology associated with the nuclear arms race and space programs and locates his evidence for the widespread nature of the narrative in several films and television programs. But if the mass media and the technology race are the tools of encouraging containment, they are also threats to the possibility of containment. As Hoover's words above suggest, the success of the Soviet bomb test threatens the perceived safety of the American people so the government must counter by controlling the news. Unchecked information about the enemy is almost as dangerous as the enemy itself. This is the conflict one finds throughout the chronologically earliest chapters of *Underworld*.

In the Bronx in the 1950s, it seems, one of the worst sins a young man can commit is to abandon his Italian roots in hopes of a career in Hollywood, as we find out when a boy named Alfonse changes his name to Alan and is ridiculed by the neighborhood. Nick's mother, Rosemary, informs her boss, "I don't want TV in my house" (754) in response to his assurances that everyone has to have access to the new medium. In both cases film and television are perceived as threats to the insulated ethnic neighborhood and its culture, transmitting images and values from around the country and world into the Bronx.

Such distrust of the mass media is not exclusive to the working class, however. College students, middle-class couples, and cultural critics gather together to hear Lenny Bruce tell them "This is what the twentieth century feels like" (584) as he attempts to fit a condom over his tongue. What Bruce suggests is that the same advanced technology that has been created to protect us (from disease in the case of the condom), also serves to distance us from the reality of an experience. Bruce makes this observation during the Cuban Missile Crisis and quickly connects the observation about condoms to the role of television during the political standoff. Protected for so long by television and the movies from the invasion of the Soviet ideology,

Bruce argues that it becomes difficult to take the unfolding television drama between Kennedy and Khrushchev seriously: “They all needed Lenny to help them make the transition to the total global thing that’s going on out there with SAC bombers rumbling over the tarmac and Polaris subs putting to sea, like *dive dive dive*, it’s dialogue from every submarine movie ever made and it’s factually happening but at the same time they find it remarkably unreal” (504). Bruce taps into these confused feelings and does a joke about a woman coming home from work who tunes into the President’s speech on television and thinks he’s promoting a movie titled “Abyss of destruction” (507) and another joke about a movie version of the crisis that would make the situation more familiar and understandable in which “Rod Steiger play[s] Khrushchev as an Actor’s Studio chief of state. Dig it, he’s deep, he’s misunderstood, he’s got the accent down pat ... Steiger plays him as a moody and sensitive loner burdened by the whole mishegas of Russian history. We see his tender feminine side when he has an affair in a coat closet with an American double agent played by Kim Novak in a butch haircut” (545). The TV screen can bring us the President’s words as he speaks them during a moment of crisis, but it can also offer us so many comforting representations of our enemy that the situation can be difficult to take entirely seriously.

Even the Demings, the quintessential suburban family sought out by television producers and Jell-O advertisements, finds containment through the media a difficult goal to achieve. Erica Deming has faithfully acquired the latest in domestic goods and technology in order to achieve the safe insulation of the American suburban lifestyle. Yet, when Sputnik is launched into space she suddenly finds herself anxious about her “guided-missile” Jell-O mold and “satellite-shaped” vacuum cleaner. For Erica, the potential dangers of technology include exposure to the television set. She notes that her son, Eric, “could sit in the family room and watch their super

console TV...and he could anticipate the dialogue on every show. Newscasts, ball games, comedy hours. He did whatever voice the announcer or actor used, matching the words nearly seamlessly, and he never stuttered” (519). Eric, then, is as much a child of television as of Erica and Rick Deming, yet his long hours in front of the television have also granted him a fascination with modern war technology so that he eats Hydrox cookies “because the name sounded like rocket fuel” (519) and uses a condom to masturbate “because it had a sleek metallic shimmer, like his favorite weapons system” (514). His ability to mimic the television has even exposed him to the enemy as he eats his milk and cookies and tells his mother “Is verry gud we poot Roosian moon in U.S. sky” (519). The same media technology that offers advertisements that assure the Demings daily that they are good Americans, also brings international politics and sexual curiosity into the Deming home. Eric, who will grow up to work on nuclear bombs and be fascinated by conspiracy theories, appears to understand this contradiction much better than his mother. Alone in his room Eric stares at a photo of Jayne Mansfield, later described by artist Acey Greene as “the most photographed woman in the world” (484), and becomes aroused by the media-created starlet (Mansfield’s fame was partly due to a number of orchestrated publicity stunts in which her breasts would “accidentally” be exposed). At the same time he is enjoying this carefully constructed image of American beauty, Eric imagines “the movie version” of his life in which “everything is projected on a CinemaScope screen, all the secret things he did alone over the years, and now that he is dead it’s all available for public viewing” (517). The movie industry has created Jayne Mansfield for him, but it also threatens to expose what he does with Jayne’s photo in the privacy of his bedroom.

This conflict between containment and exposure exists even for characters one expects to be most vigilant. Father Andrew from the Bronx confesses that his one regret about joining the

Jesuits is never getting to “screw” a movie star, “The greatest, blondest, biggest-titted goddess Hollywood is able to produce [Mansfield, perhaps?]” (672). Sister Edgar, who thrives on the power of fear and duck-and-cover drills and believes the KGB is responsible for every epidemic in America, nevertheless, “knew a lot about the [movie] stars.” (720). Fellow anti-Communist and germaphobe J. Edgar Hoover is at the heart of America’s secret intelligence gathering and Communist containment, yet he too “loved celebrities” and “came to life in the presence of show people and other living icons” (557). At a time, then, when the House Committee on Un-American Activities was busy containing the threat of Communist ideology being passed through Hollywood films, Sister Edgar and J. Edgar were nevertheless obsessed with movie stars. Hollywood was both America’s cultural warrior and a potential source of Communist infiltration. Television was both the hawk of capitalist values and the means of exposure to the international world.

The complexity of the relationship between different media and the politics of the fifties and sixties is, perhaps, best exemplified by a quote from Associate FBI Director Clyde Tolson as he and boss J. Edgar Hoover prepare to attend Truman Capote’s Black and White Ball. As the sound of Vietnam War protesters reaches their hotel room, Tolson scoffs “Vietnam is the war, the reality. This is the movie, where scripts are written and actors perform. American kids don’t want what we’ve got. They want movies, music” (564). Tolson, as several readers have claimed of DeLillo, associates the movies with a simple distancing from reality. Unlike Nadel’s claim that the mass media helped quell protest against the state during this period through its narratives of containment, Tolson views the mass media as instigators of strong but misguided emotions in America’s youth as they are presented evocative images and memorable songs that ignore the grim realities of global politics. On the other hand, Tolson also informs Hoover that protesters

plan to steal his household garbage, eat it, and expel it as part of a documentary film, invading the director's privacy and exposing his daily habits to the world. The media both allows J. Edgar Hoover to control information about the Soviets and protesters to aesthetically present the inhumanity of the Vietnam War. One group interprets film as hypermediated, as a means of distancing the audience from "the real," while the other group describes film as a transparent medium that might expose the government's dirty secrets. The same debate applies to television: does it so desensitize its audience that a true nuclear threat comes across as fictional drama or does it offer a window that brings the details of the Cold War even into the suburbs? My goal is not to answer such questions definitively, but to point out that it is the combination of discourses – the discourse of remediation about hypermediacy and immediacy and the discourse of containment – that constantly stabilizes and destabilizes the media assemblage of the fifties and sixties.

Contrast the debate on film and television during this period to the memories characters have of film from before the fifties. In 1946, when Nick and Matt's father left the family, six-year-old Matty instinctively walked to Loew's Paradise to wait for his father to return because the theater "was a thousand times more holy than church" (407), but a year later HUAC would begin to question the political sympathies of a number of Hollywood artists and the epic grandeur of the big screen would shift from religious experience to potentially dangerous influence. As Russ Hodges calls the famous baseball game in 1951, he recalls watching sporting events on newsreels when he was younger and how "When you see a thing like that, a thing that becomes a newsreel, you begin to feel you are a carrier of some solemn scrap of history" (16). The emergence of television in the 1950s shifted the role of film within the media assemblage by replacing newsreels with the nightly news and making ornate movie theaters financially

unviable. However, the changing political discourse and changing characterizations of film and television's respective mediating effects also played an important part in altering the media assemblage.

### **Return to Reality**

In *Underworld* the seventies and eighties stretch out over three chapters: "Cocksucker Blues" (Summer 1974), "The Cloud of Unknowing" (Spring 1978), and "Elegy for Left Hand Alone" (Mid-1980s-Early 1990s). As the novel puts it, the earliest of these chapters "was the summer of Nixon waving on TV" (475) as he resigned from the position of President. Stephen Paul Miller points out that Watergate "is often delegated to the sixties as the prior decade's symbolic culmination" (20) of the increasing questioning of the official version of reality sanctioned by the government. After Vietnam and Nixon's resignation there was a concerted effort to "return to reality" (16) in reaction to a decade of upheaval. In order to recover from the sixties and the "long national nightmare" of Watergate, corporate and government leaders desired a renewed faith in American democratic and capitalist institutions (Zinn).

The relationship between television and characters' definitions of "the real" clearly shifts within these sections. Eric Deming identifies television as a unifying experience in the 1950s when he tells Matt Shay that "Everybody dressed and spoke the same way. It was all kitchens and cars and TV sets" (410) as the two young men discuss nuclear bomb conspiracy theories. Deming universalizes his middle-class suburban childhood, but Matt points out that in the 1950s television was not yet so widespread: "You were there. I was somewhere else." Matt grew up without television due to his mother's resistance, instead finding his sense of identity in "what movies you saw growing up" (450). By the 1980s, however, television defines Matt's perceptions of reality. Matt is obsessed with the oft-shown video of the Texas Highway Killer,

not because of the shock value of seeing another human being die, but because the home video shot by a child “has a searing realness” (157). Matt contrasts the “realness” of the video to “fancy movie violence” (158) and feels an urgent need to watch the footage with his wife every time it is shown. This video, shown over and over again whenever the Killer strikes or is discussed is famous not because the event itself is significant but “because it is on tape” (159). Matt, whose work on secret nuclear projects left him paranoid about how “Everything connected” (408), cannot look away from the video whenever it is shown on TV because “There’s something here that speaks to you directly, saying terrible things about forces beyond your control” (157). The video’s ability to grant direct access to an experience without intervening layers of space and time contrasts with Matt’s experiences in Vietnam and in The Pocket. During the war Matt analyzed reconnaissance film and tried to determine whether a dot “was a truck or a truck stop or a tunnel entrance or a gun emplacement or a family grilling burgers at a picnic” (463); afterwards Matt worked on secret nuclear projects, designing safety mechanisms with “his face pressed to a computer screen” (402). In both situations he worked largely alone or in a small community and felt distanced, due to the technologies of film and computer, from the real people his analysis or design might help kill. Disturbed by the moral consequences of his career, Matt finds relief in the “reality” of the THK video and longs to share the experience with his wife, unlike the secrets he had to keep from her about his military life.

Rosemary, Matt’s mother, who had once banned television from the house, now prefers to watch animals on TV rather than go across the street to the Bronx zoo. Matt argues that the televisual experience cannot replace the real, but she responds “These are animals that live in the Bronx. On television I can see animals in the rain forest or the desert. So which is real and which is fake” (207). Rosemary prefers television programs that show animals in their natural

habitat for the same reason Matt cannot look away from the THK video – the sense that what they are seeing on TV is less altered by human intervention. The Texas Highway Killer himself claims that talking to a television anchor while the famous video played “made him feel real” (269). Though his voice is disguised, no one knows his name, and he doesn’t appear on the screen he feels confident in himself and sure of who he is as he watches the TV anchor talk to him. Richard Gilkey, the killer, is watching a woman on TV as she converses with his disguised voice over the phone. Clearly there is a great deal of mediation at work in this moment, a great distance between anchor and killer, yet Gilkey describes the experience as more authentic and transparent than his daily face-to-face interactions with friends and family. Though certain technological changes to television (better picture quality, hand-held video cameras) contribute to Gilkey’s feelings of authenticity, they cannot fully explain the changing description of television. Similarly, Nick’s wife Marian cannot bear to watch local news stories about crime and death, but hungers to hear about Nick’s life growing up in the Bronx and his interactions with organized crime. The television stories are too vivid and gruesome and real for her, but her own husband’s proximity to and participation in acts of violence are stories she longs to hear. For each of these characters television promises a “return to reality,” and, at least in the cases of Matt and Richard, the possibility of connecting to people around the country through the sharing of a television experience.

In his earlier novel, *White Noise*, DeLillo describes a family watching natural disaster footage on television, unable to look away. Later when a chemical spill forces the family to evacuate their home, one of their fellow refugees is upset that the national television stations have not picked up on the story and communicated their ordeal to the country. This association of television with traumatic events is continued in *Underworld*. The “long national nightmare”

of Watergate was a national nightmare, in large part, because it was televised every day, and the Texas Highway Killer became a national obsession. *Underworld* also includes a description of watching the Challenger explosion on television. Bronzini, Matt's chess teacher, remembers how powerful the images were as the nation experienced them in real time, and "found this experience even more profound than the first moonwalk" (227), which lacked the same feeling of direct access. The earlier, successful space mission gave rise to conspiracies and doubts about the government while Bronzini remembers the Challenger disaster as beautiful in the way it displayed real human suffering and hope. A second spectacle with links to the earlier decade is the Zapruder film. Though the Zapruder film captures an event from the 1960s, it was not available to the public, except as stills, until the seventies. In the novel, Klara Sax does not watch the national television broadcast of the film, but, instead, an artist's use of the footage as part of an installation. The footage runs on a wall of televisions, each showing different segments or showing it at different speeds. Over and over again the twenty seconds of film is looped. Klara remarks that "The footage seemed to advance some argument about the nature of film itself" (494), but also that it "marked the conceptual end" of the sixties. The footage, by exposing the direction from which the bullet came, resists the official explanations for Kennedy's assassination, achieving the homemade, on-the-spot character of a protest documentary. However, suppressed by the government for so long, the footage no longer has the same impact, shown, instead, on dozens of television sets as a piece of artwork. The footage itself and its importance to American history is not the primary reason for the underground viewing; by showing the footage on television screens the unnamed artist argues that the television has taken over the role of truth-teller for many people in the aftermath of the sixties,

that the nation would rather access traumatic events from the comfort of the living room (as shown by the TV guides placed next to the numerous sets) than have to confront them.

There are two documentary films made in the seventies discussed in “Cocksucker Blues.” The first is a theoretical project championed by Klara’s cinephile boyfriend Miles called *Normal Illinois*. Miles wants to use a woman from the town of Normal who contracts the illnesses of celebrities as the subject of a low-budget documentary, presenting her as a symbol of contemporary celebrity worship. The second documentary is Robert Frank’s film of the 1972 Rolling Stones tour from which the title of the chapter is taken. Miles, Klara, and Acey Greene manage to see a copy of the unreleased film that documents the constant sex, drug use, and self-destruction of life on the road for the rock stars. Klara loves the film’s “tunnel light that suggested an unreliable reality – not unreliable at all in fact because you have no trouble believing what you see but a subversive reality maybe, corruptive and ruinous, a beautiful tunnel blue” (383). The documentary is shot in *cinéma vérité* style, yet its revelations about the antics of The Rolling Stones and their fans is less memorable than the artistic qualities of the lighting and the way Mick Jagger’s mouth becomes a satirical commentary on capitalism and the cult of celebrity. The focus on celebrity culture in both these documentaries is a counterpart to Sister Edgar’s loss of faith in movie stars at the same time (251). Neither the almost religious aura of the large movie theaters and larger-than-life stars of the fifties nor the political protest films of the sixties remain in these two documentaries. The aura of celebrity becomes not the effect of film but the subject, and the ability to reveal the truth on film is subordinated to aesthetics and irony.

The shift away from film as a window into reality is noted by several minor references in these chapters. While at a party, Matt listens to Eric discuss conspiracy theories “in a ridiculous

movie accent” (421), and later Matt compares the experience of taking some unknown hallucinogenic drugs to watching an experimental film: “He seemed to be in another time frame, Eric did, cut and edited, his words in stop-start format and his position frequently altered in relation to the background” (422). In both instances the references to film evoke a sense of distance from reality or irony. During the 1951 baseball game Russ Hodges remembers how important sporting events would be immortalized as newsreels, but as Klara and her art dealer friend Esther search for Moonman 157 in the Bronx Klara feels as if she is in a foreign land: “It was like a newsreel of some factional war in a remote province, where generals cook the livers of their rivals and keep them in plastic baggies. A thing totally spooked by otherness” (395). The newsreel, now an antiquated genre, is no longer the official document of history but a representation of how Hollywood production creates a sense of otherness in whatever it films. Miles is fascinated by Japanese horror films and notes how fleeing crowd scenes “always included a mother with a baby and a woman with bulging breasts and a man with his arms flung up to shield him from some terror in the sky” (388). What attracts Miles to obscure low-budget films is that the illusion of reality is easily unveiled by shoddy special effects or cliché. In 1978 Nick encounters a swinger named Donna and they exchange flirtatious but empty dialogue that Nick describes as “movie scenes, slightly elliptical in tone, with the shots maybe a little offhand, slurred by incidental action” (292). The fast-paced and witty banter that was once considered realistic and natural in the forties and fifties now is used to empty a potential act of adultery of its seriousness. Nick is able to distance himself from what he is about to do by imagining himself and Donna as characters in a movie. Ironically, Nick’s wife would do much the same thing several years later when she sleeps with Nick’s friend and coworker Brian. Brian is worried

about Nick finding out and tries to end the affair, but Marian keeps it going, in part, by imagining “what she would say in the movie version” (260).

Just as the shifting role of television within the American media assemblage is illustrated by the first public showing of a film shot in the sixties, the new role of film is most thoroughly demonstrated by the first public showing of a film likely shot in the thirties. Miles invites Klara and Esther to the one and only showing of Sergei Eisenstein’s fictional lost film *Unterwelt* at Radio City Music Hall. Though the film is silent, black-and-white, and made by a master of early cinema, the context in which it is first shown alters its meanings. Klara notices the significance of the theater space right away, the contradictions of “the work of a renowned master of world cinema screened in the camp environment of the Rockettes and the mighty Wurlitzer. But a theater of a certain impressive shapeliness, a breathtaking place, even, for all its exaggerations and vanities” (425). Radio City Music Hall refers back to the old ornate movie palaces and the Golden Age of Hollywood cinema while simultaneously reducing those references to empty style. Eisenstein, too, made films famous for their skillful use of editing and film techniques, but which now seem “riddled with mannerisms whatever the level of seriousness.” The juxtaposition of the old and new, the serious and the ironic, continues as a full orchestra plays, much as one would expect in the glory days of silent film, but then the music transforms into march music as the Rockettes appear and dance. These juxtapositions draw attention to the mediations of film and changes in cultural context.

Characters in these sections describe television as transparent and immediate while film is associated with irony and mediation. These shifts from the previous decades are not connected to any particular technological advancements but to the political changes post-Watergate and Vietnam. Television fulfills a cultural need to “return to reality” while the aesthetic distancing of

film allows for “sneak attacks on the dominant culture” (444) according to Klara. As Klara observes that the artifice of Eisenstein’s film and the ironic context of the Radio City Music Hall combine to critique the desire for transparent media, graffiti artist Moonman 157 is riding the subway beneath her, admiring his own handiwork on a train: “I’m your movie, motherfucker” (441). Moonman’s graffiti reveals his existence to subway passengers who otherwise would never think twice about who lives in the run down tenements they pass by, but it does so precisely because of its exaggerated and unique style. Moonman’s tags resemble a movie in the way they flicker and flash and grab your attention with their vivid colors. In other words Moonman admires the lack of realism in film, the exaggerated characteristics that draw attention to themselves and comment on reality without trying to reproduce it.

While the separation of film from the immediate moment allows space for interpretation and reflection, the perceived hypermediation of computers remains troubling in this time period. Marvin Lundy, aging dry-cleaner and baseball memorabilia collector finds himself near the end of years of searching to establish the lineage of the famous Bobby Thomson home run ball. As he remembers all he has been through as part of the hopeless chase he recalls “The shock, the power of an ordinary life. It is a thing you could not invent with banks of computers in a dust-free room” (308). Again, computers are associated with exclusion but here Marvin points out their inability to truly represent reality and dismisses them. Several years later Richard Gilkey makes similar claims when he calls the television station to discuss his murders and complains that “my situation has been twisted in with the profiles of a hundred other individuals in the crime computer” (216). The computer, for all its data-gathering capabilities, misrepresents Gilkey’s motives and character, unlike the television which makes him feel real. Finally, Matt returns to his old Bronx neighborhood and visits his chess tutor Bronzini and notes the difference

between the run-down urban apartments and his own “computer suburb,” which was “situated to discourage entry” and “so completely unconnected to root reality” (211). The word “computer” becomes an adjective to describe something that purposely excludes reality in order to create a more appealing, if unrealistic, version of life. In each of these examples the computer is noted for its ability to control and connect information and to create a new reality from that information, and each of the characters rejects the new realities offered by computers in favor of film in the case of Lundy and television for Matt and Richard.

The politics of containment and the fear of exposure in the fifties and sixties contribute to a media assemblage in which oppositional political groups characterize television and film as either transparent or hypermediated depending on the context of how they are being used. In the sections of the book that take place during the 1970s and 1980s, several characters, including characters who had dismissed television in the previous decades, describe the television as a window into reality. Technological improvements surely contribute to this shift towards a perceived greater immediacy, but the characters in the novel seem to attribute the shift more to the shared televised experiences of the Watergate scandal, the Challenger explosion, and the Texas Highway Killer video. Watching these events on television at a time a large portion of the country was eager for a “return to reality” after the turmoil of the late sixties and early seventies helped define a new position within the media assemblage for television. At the same time, several more left-leaning characters in the novel draw attention to the hypermediation of film, not to discredit it but as an act of resistance to the idea that reality is accessible through any medium. The computer also emerges during this period and offers both a new technology for organizing the increasingly complex world and a further threat to a “return to reality.” Most of the characters in the novel immediately associate the computer with conspiracy and

hypermediation and are wary of its effects on real individuals. The media assemblage of the seventies and eighties, then, again reflects the political conflicts of this period in America's history, manifesting these political differences in changing descriptions of the transparency or mediation of individual media.

### **Nostalgia and the Computer Age**

Dry-cleaning magnate and baseball memorabilia expert Marvin Lundy predicts the changes that the end of the Cold War will bring to America: "You need the leaders of both sides to keep the cold war going. It's the one constant thing. It's honest, it's dependable. Because when the tension and rivalry come to an end, that's when your worst nightmares begin" (170). The "nightmare," according to Lundy, is the loss of reference points for understanding the world. In the opening chapter of the novel, Nick meets with Klara Sax and the former lovers confirm Lundy's prescience: "it held us together, the Soviets and us. Maybe it held the world together. You could measure things.... Things have no limits now" (76). Klara and Nick have both found success in their respective careers, both moved on from their days in the Bronx, yet their conversation is tinged with nostalgia. Klara suggests that life has become "fictitious" and "unreal" (73) as compared to her early life. Nick later tells himself that he "didn't accept this business of life as fiction" (82) because he believed there was a real historical narrative available to us all. Nick's final scene in the novel (a few months and seven hundred pages later), however, finds him once again thinking to himself: "I long for the days of disorder. I want them back, the days when I was alive on the earth, rippling in the quick of my skin, heedless and real" (810).

The post-Cold War media assemblage, then, is forged, in part, by nostalgia for earlier forms of mediation and the relationship to reality they offered. The epilogue, "Das Kapital," opens with the claim that "Capital burns off the nuance in a culture. Foreign investment, global

markets, corporate acquisitions, the flow of information through transnational media, the attenuating influence of money that's electronic and sex that's cyberspaced, untouched money and computer-safe sex, the convergence of consumer desire" (785). The references to global capitalism are not surprising since the Cold War was a battle not just of politics and military power but of economic systems. However, DeLillo also characterizes the nineties by the rise of "transnational media" and "computer-safe sex," connecting the spread of capitalism to shifts in the media. With the association of condoms and mediation made in the fifties and sixties by Eric Deming and Lenny Bruce, respectively, the reference to sex in cyberspace suggests both an advance over older forms of mediation as well as sex so mediated that the participants need never know or see or touch one another. In an era dominated by an ever-growing web of computers the hopes and fears of containment no longer make sense, and any promise of recovering some access to reality rings false.

References to film, which had been plentiful through much of the other chapters, nearly disappear in the two sections that take place after the end of the Cold War. The bizarre sight of a New York City taxi driving through the desert reminds Nick of "a hundred movies in which something comes across the wavy plain" (64), while his son's juvenile belief that he could blow up a plane just by thinking about it is "horror-movie stuff" (107). Nick's nostalgic memories triggered by holding the famous baseball reveal "a day now gone to black and white in the film fade of memory" (134), and hurtling through the air in a second-hand plane in Kazakhstan causes Nick to imagine himself "racing through the rain and wind as if in a swift scene from an old-black-and-white movie, scored with urgent music" (790). The bizarre, the surreal, and the long gone trigger comparisons to film, and not just to film in general but to the B-movies of Nick's childhood. Film, for Nick, is now associated with the time period when he was "dumb-muscled

and angry and real” (810) and its technological limitations are not “sneak attacks on the dominant culture” but comforting reminders of the past.

Nick’s mother appears to treat television in a similar manner, as the device she once banned from her home now provides her only moments of happiness as she watches reruns of *The Honeymooners*. Nick believes she enjoys seeing “things that were close to what she knew.... A closeness that was shallow but still a bit touching and maybe even mysteriously real” (103). Like Nick she indulges in nostalgia for the fifties, but unlike Nick she longs not for the medium itself but for the real experiences it represents. Uncomfortable in the modern world, Nick thinks of genre films while his mother thinks of a life in New York that she can only re-experience through television. Later Nick meets Brian at a condom store and Brian explains how his daughter has been shunned by her classmates because of her participation in Apartheid Simulation Day. By simulating oppression, Brian’s daughter has created real oppression, and Brian punctuates this observation by making “a TV screen with his hands, thumbs horizontal, index fingers upright, and ... look[ing] out at [Nick] from inside the frame, eyes crossed, tongue lolling in his head” (112). The creation of reality through simulation triggers Brian to reference television.

Nick’s references to film focus on the elements of mid-century filmmaking that marked it as separate from reality. Eisenstein would use these elements as part of his social critique, but Nick now just draws comfort from their clear distinctions. For Matt Shay and many others in the eighties, television could invest real moments with new intensity through the strange combination of immediacy and repetition. In the epilogue Sister Edgar visits Ismael Munoz and discovers he has added a television set to the apartment where he employs several children in his salvaging operations. The television is old with bleeding colors and intermittent sound and is

powered by a child on a bicycle, yet when CNN does a news story on the nearby death of a homeless child, everyone feels “charged with a kind of second sight, the things they know so well seen inside out, made new and nationwide” (817). These impoverished children look at their television the same way Matt once did, though there is an ironic commentary given that the ridiculously poor condition of their set suggests what they are seeing does not actually resemble their reality at all. Just as global capitalism has “burn[ed] off the nuance in a culture,” something has been lost. The struggle over what information needed to be contained and what should be exposed, the tension between the real and the mediated, loses intensity in the computer age of global networking.

While the changes to the effects of film and television cannot be attributed to significant technological innovations, the role of computers in everyday life increased rapidly during this decade in large part due to the expansion of the internet. Certainly one could argue that the ability of computers to quickly spread ideas, as well as money, around the world could have contributed to the end of the Cold War. As Nick enters a former Soviet republic in order to explore a new business venture he notes the dreams of ancient leaders for massive kingdoms of land have been replaced by today’s barons who “want computer chips” (788). Nick believes computer technology has changed the world, thus explaining his longing for the past, but his son, Jeff, reveals a continuation between old media and new as he pores over the central object of *Underworld*’s discussion of television, the Texas Highway Killer video. When the tape first emerged, Matt was mesmerized by the raw footage, anxious to watch the video with his wife and share this seemingly unmediated experience of human death. A decade later Jeff pores over a digital version of the video as obsessively as Matt, but now he is alone with his computer, “using filtering techniques to remove background texture ... looking for lost information ... trying to

find some pixel in the data swarm that might provide a clue to the identity of the shooter” (118). Just as Marvin Lundy believed in the “dot theory of reality” (175) and searched film for the identity of the famous baseball’s first owner, Jeff uses his computer in the hopes of stripping away even more layers of mediation, to discover some hidden objective truth unavailable to television audiences.

The novel’s ending further accentuates the connection between Cold War politics and popular media. The final scenes begin with a URL: “[http://blk.www/dd.com/miraculum](http://blk.www.dd.com/miraculum)” (810), though at this point the novel simply continues with the story of Sister Edgar and her visit to see the orange juice billboard where Esmeralda’s picture appears. Earlier we learn that Jeff visits a website on miracles, so it is safe to assume the URL leads to this site and that Esmeralda’s miracle has become part of it. Sister Edgar, Cold War warrior, germaphobe, and movie star fanatic joins with hundreds of others by the billboard and presumably many more online to witness the miracle, and after doing so she dies. She is resurrected not in heaven but in cyberspace, secretly observing the reader as he or she navigates a site on hydrogen bombs. Every hydrogen bomb ever tested is detailed on this page, yet the mass of information does not create the same terror that Edgar’s bomb raid drills once did. One type of mediation has replaced another. Information can no longer be contained, but there is no clear reference point from which to judge the endless connections. “Is cyberspace a thing within the world or is it the other way around?” (826) the novel asks, suggesting that cyberspace is both a tool used within the world as well as a representation of the world. The hydrogen bombs on the screen are replaced by the word “Peace.” The computer is able to offer the history of the word and its various translations and definitions, yet the question remains whether knowing more about the word means knowing more about how to make it real. How to make peace a reality was the central

question of the Cold War. Diplomacy or conflict? Mutually assured destruction or disarmament? Capitalism or socialism? But it was a question that was shaped by and reflected in whatever media assemblage reigned at the moment. Containment or open information? Faith in the nightly news or paranoia on the web? Mediation or immediacy? The cutting edge future or black and white nostalgia? By ending the novel with an echo of the first line – “it’s your voice you hear” (827) – DeLillo reminds us that between the opening radio broadcast and the web surfing at the end changes in media technology have indeed occurred, but more important are the changes in the people who use the media.

### **Conclusion**

*Underworld* continues DeLillo’s career-long interest in media. In his previous novels this interest has more often than not been in the way we perceive reality through different media and the political effects of those perceptions. Such a focus on the discourse about media suggests DeLillo’s interest is in media as assemblages of both material and expressive components. The expanded scope of *Underworld*’s narrative allows the reader, then, to note how the American media assemblage changes over the course of forty years and how those changes correspond to debates and changes within the political scene. Though Bolter and Grusin’s concept of remediation primarily describes formal and technical changes in media, their argument that all acts of remediation are understood as movements towards transparency or hypermediation is a particularly good fit to the descriptions of the media assemblage throughout *Underworld*. The manner in which characters describe film, television, and computers as granting access to or distancing us from “reality” changes from decade to decade even as the technologies remain relatively stable. The shifts in the media assemblage that *Underworld* describes, then, are not necessarily material facts about the different media as much as changing

political contexts that reemploy media for different purposes throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

My reading of *Underworld* demonstrates that changes in the media assemblage are not strictly a result of the introduction of new technology. Because an assemblage is composed of both material and expressive forces, a relatively stable technology can still take on very different roles within the media assemblage over time depending on whether the discourse on the medium describes it as transparent or hypermediated. And because the discourse about whether a medium is transparent or hypermediated is often connected to the contemporary political context, as seen throughout *Underworld*, insight into the complex relationships of the media assemblage is also insight into contemporary culture and politics.

The complexity of DeLillo's discussion of Cold War politics is enhanced by understanding media as autonomous assemblages of material and expressive components that shift and change in relation to other media rather than as one monolithic institution that DeLillo critiques or incorporates. And if we acknowledge that film, television, and computers change their relationships among each other in response to other media and contemporary politics, we should also acknowledge that the novel has changed during the second half of the century.

*Underworld* charts not only the changes in American politics over the course of forty years and not only the shifting definitions of transparency and hypermediation within the media assemblage but also the changing role of the novel. DeLillo presents the long chapter covering the 1950s and 1960s ("Better Things For Better Living Through Chemistry: Selected Fragments Public and Private in the 1950s and 1960s) in short non-chronological fragments. During the time when a national narrative of containment was at work in much popular television and film, DeLillo draws attention to the instability of the narrative due to the conflation of the public and

private associated with television (as I discussed in Chapter Three). In the 1970s DeLillo began his career as a novelist under the influence of European filmmakers who drew attention to the act of mediation. At the very center of the novel *Underworld* is the fictional film *Unterwelt*, the work of a European filmmaker who draws attention to the act of mediation, a film that is not seen by anyone until the 1970s. Finally, the novel ends in the 1990s with a scene that takes place on a computer screen and includes a URL on the page, transforming the hyperlinks on the internet into a coherent narrative. Critics have compared *Underworld* to “deep-focus cinematography” (Yetter 28), television in its use of repetition (Cowart “Shall” 55), an electronic hypertext (Hayles “Flickering” par. 3), a film montage (Myers 174), and a “literary search engine” (Howard 119). *Underworld* is an assemblage of all these different media, demonstrating how the novel can continue to participate in the culture and the media assemblage even if pushed into the margins by proclamations of its death.

### Notes

1. DeLillo cites Godard, Antonioni, Fellini, Bergman, Kubrick and Hawks as directors who inspired him with the way “they seem to fracture reality.... They seem to find an art and a seriousness which I think was completely unexpected and which had once been the province of literature alone. So that a popular art was suddenly seen as a serious art” (DeCurtis 59). Here DeLillo admires directors who destabilized the role of film within the media assemblage and redefined the relationship between film and literature. I would argue that DeLillo does something similar with his novels, redefining the relationship between film and literature (and television and computers) from a different starting point.
2. Other readings of *Underworld* as a critique of the mass media’s replacement of reality include Paul Gleason’s (“For DeLillo two forms of waste define culture in the second

half of the twentieth century: nuclear waste and the waste produced by mass-media capitalism” [133]) and David Cowart’s (“experience is pithed as it becomes endlessly replicated as mass consumption image or soundbite” [*Don DeLillo* 191]). Gleason compares the products of mass media to toxic waste, despite acknowledging the Eisenstein film as one of the most important artistic voices in *Underworld*. Cowart almost personifies the mass media as a creature physically attacking and beating down reality.

3. Other readings of *Underworld* that resemble Parrish’s claims include Stephen J. Mexal’s discussion of terrorism in the novel (““The terror act thus returns us to the ‘absolute space’ of the real, but this reality is also necessarily a simulation. This would seem to be a contradiction –a simulation of reality is not, after all, reality – but ultimately it is not, we will see, an especially consequential one” [332]) and Philip Nel’s comparison of *Underworld* to avant-garde art (““Realness’ is more a quality of intensity than ‘authenticity’: by focusing on the relationships between historical context and the object in question, we may gauge the intensity with which we experience said object. What is ‘real’ is contingent” [742])). Both readings argue that DeLillo borrows techniques associated with film, television, and computers in order to draw attention to the fact that there is no “real” experience from which we are removed by the media. The arguments are sophisticated, but the conception of the mass media as one single entity remains.

## **Epilogue: The Art of the *Future***

### **Genre Fiction and the Death of the Novel**

In my analysis of Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, close attention to the roles different media play at different moments reveals the constant shifting of media assemblages as well as the effects these assemblages have on our understanding of America's political history. DeLillo looks backward at the history of media assemblages while an entire genre of twentieth-century fiction has looked forward. I speak, of course, of science fiction or speculative fiction, particularly novels that posit a future human society in which the place of the print novel within the media assemblage has diminished.

I have chosen to look at SF in this epilogue because it offers both an affirmation of and a supplement to my readings of the novels analyzed thus far in the project and their relationship to emerging media. Though possibly set in distant futures or far-off planets, SF novels, like literary novels, remain products of their particular time and place. In one of the most influential attempts at defining the genre, Darko Suvin suggested SF is "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (7-8): in other words it presents a world that is strange but plausible, noticeably different but still based on the real world in which the author and reader exist. In this way Suvin attempts to differentiate SF from fantasy fiction in which magic or impossible creatures create a narrative world that is largely foreign to the readers. Though Suvin's definition has been criticized for its narrowness,<sup>1</sup> the novels I examine all fit his definition of SF by describing a future human society derived from the moments in which they are writing. Hence, the media

assemblages described in these imaginations of the future still share characteristics with those found in the literary novels set in the present time that I have examined.

SF novels, however, differ from many of their literary counterparts due to the nature of their audience. Deemed a low culture genre and unworthy of academic study for decades, SF's appeal to a mass audience shares a characteristic with Hollywood films and television programs (media where SF has also flourished) that most literary novels do not. More specifically, a large portion of SF readers are likely interested or even enthusiastic about the rapid pace of technological change. Hugo Gernsback, the first great editor of SF for whom the Hugo Award is named, argued that one of the goals of good SF writing should be educating readers about the possibilities of science.<sup>2</sup> Though SF futures can both affirm and criticize the shaping influence of new technologies on human life, the centrality of technology to many SF narratives surely differentiates its audience from, say, the typical contemporary reader of a Dreiser novel.

An association with popular culture and the centrality of technology combine to further complicate the already complicated relationship between novelist and emerging media. Though fiction about science or the future has been around for some time, the definition of science fiction as a marketable genre is a twentieth-century phenomenon (Gernsback popularized the term in June, 1929 [Landon 51]). While Fitzgerald was memorializing the death of the financially successful literary novel in the 1930s, SF writers were just beginning to establish and create a market for their work. Fears for the "death of the novel" at the hands of mass media, then, would have been less poignant for writers who were just starting to appeal to a mass audience than for writers who already saw the Golden Age for their work slipping ceaselessly into the past<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, writers of low culture novels hoping to establish their own

credibility might have had an even more vested interest in maintaining the cultural capital of print than writers who had already established their names through literary novels.

The question of SF's relationship to print and other media is not exclusive to the early years of the genre though. In 1988 Brooks Landon suggested that cyberpunk fiction would soon move away from a print medium that was too slow and verbal to represent a postmodern culture obsessed with images and constant self-editing. He ends by arguing that cyberpunk's interest in film, video, and computers "seems likely to me to mark the end of cyberpunk's print stage, but to transfer its energy, innovation, and commitment to the global arena of electronic culture" (244). Like many of the claims I have noted in Chapter Three about the inevitable shift away from print and towards computer-based media, Landon's argument is insightful about the complex relationship between print and emerging media but wrongly suggests that this crisis is new to the print novel and relies on a rigid definition of the media. Print is "an ancient system for processing information" (240) that cannot represent our new reality, he claims, assuming that print has been relatively unchanged in the last 200 years. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. discusses this "crisis" for cyberpunk from a much more negative point-of-view, noting that "it's hard to see the 'integrated' political aesthetic motives of alienated subcultures that adopt high-tech tools of the establishment they are supposedly alienated from" (183). Csicsery-Ronay is interested in the cyberpunk claim of being a countercultural movement to corporate capitalism, but his observations could apply equally well to the "establishment" known as the print novel. For all the predictions of a near future in which visual media dominate every aspect of our lives, cyberpunk novelists, like the SF novelists who preceded them, continue to rely on many of the established conventions of the print novel to communicate to a wide audience.

By looking at major works of SF from the twentieth century I will revisit many of the observations I have made about literary novelists participating in a particular media assemblage while also showing that even in their visions of futures in which print is severely diminished, SF novels participate in creating new associations for print and ultimately finding new ways for it to remain relevant to contemporary reality.

### **Asimov and the Golden Age**

In his 1888 novel, *Looking Backward*, Edward Bellamy sends a contemporary man to the America of 2000. Mr. West, upon accepting that he has slept for a century, is amazed at the socialist utopia America has become. Though the novel is primarily concerned with the economic system of the future, Mr. West does have the opportunity to visit the public library and marvel at its popularity and grandeur. His host, Dr. Leete, informs him the twentieth century was a time of “literary productiveness to which no previous age of the world offers anything comparable” (117). Books are now printed by the state at the author’s cost, but perhaps the most important change for the novel, according to Leete, is that “the universally high level of education nowadays gives the popular verdict a conclusiveness on the real merit of literary work” (118). In this utopian future, the novel is both an object of high culture and a medium of the masses, with little to no conflict between the two.

In H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*, the reading of print novels is no longer a popular pastime in the year 802,701. The gentle and lazy Eloi neither read nor write, but the Time Traveler does find an old museum that contains “the decaying vestige of books” (87). Though these books are unreadable now, their physical remains and placement in the museum at least suggest the printed word survived and was revered for thousands of years after the present day. Humanity has slowly evolved, or devolved, into the underground Morlocks and the above

ground Eloi. The Morlocks are the descendents of the working class and the Eloi those of the upper class, though neither group has use any longer for any aspect of intellectual life.

*The Time Machine* was published in the same year, 1895, as the Lumiere brothers' first public film screening and *Looking Backward* preceded the "invention" of film by just a few years. Though the technologies that would contribute to the creation of the new medium (the magic lantern, still photography, etc.) would have been known by the authors, both connect intellectual and public life to the printed page. For Bellamy, the utopian future necessitates a well-read citizenry and thriving libraries while for Wells the ultimate fall of mankind as a thinking species is represented, in part, by the loss of the printed page and literacy. Though one could hardly expect an author at the end of the nineteenth century to foresee the rapid rise of film, television, or computers in the next hundred years, it is notable how fixed print remains in these early visions of the future.

As the Golden Age of SF began in the late 1930s, however, print's position in the future became less static. Isaac Asimov published the short stories that would be collected into the hugely influential *Foundation* series between 1942 and 1949. The stories take place 20000-50000 years into the future (Asimov would change the timeline over the years as other stories and novels were integrated into the fictional universe) and describe the fall of the Galactic Empire and the rise of a second empire. The first four stories plus a new introductory story were collected as the novel *Foundation* and begin with an entry from the *Encyclopedia Galactica* on the book's most important figure, Hari Seldon. A footnote at the end of the entry tells us that "All quotations from the Encyclopedia Galactica here reproduced are taken from the 116<sup>th</sup> Edition published in 1020 F.E. by the Encyclopedia Galactica Publishing Co., Terminus, with permission of the publishers" (3). Here we find the terminology of present-day print publishing

and copyright laws. More importantly, as we discover in the first two sections of the novel, the future of the galaxy depends on the completion of this Encyclopedia. Hari Seldon is a “psychohistorian” who has mathematically analyzed patterns in the behavior of large groups of humans and determined that the Empire will crumble in 300 years. After the fall of the Empire, humanity will live in barbarism for 30,000 years unless a vast Encyclopedia of human knowledge is composed to retain several millennia of scientific advancement and propel humanity back to peaceful civilization in 1000 years. Seldon’s followers are exiled to a distant planet by the current Emperor, ostensibly to work on this project, though really just to eliminate their doomsday predictions from the public mind.

Several thousand years in the future, then, the fate of humanity rests on a book, a book that represents the culmination of print culture and the preservation of knowledge. Asimov, however, is somewhat vague on the exact nature of books in this distant time. At the beginning of section two we are introduced to Lewis Pirenne, one of the Encyclopedists exiled to the planet Terminus to work on the immense project. As he says himself, “The Encyclopedia takes up all my time” and when we first meet him we see his “stylus ma[k]e the faintest scraping sound as it raced across paper” (44). At least some of the work, then, is done on paper, though the reference to a “stylus” suggests the paper of the future might be made of a more permanent material than wood pulp. A few pages later, however, Pirenne gives a tour to a visiting envoy from the nearby planet of Anacreon, showing him “the vast storehouses of reference films and the numerous projection rooms” (49) that support the Encyclopedia project. When a second ambassador arrives the Encyclopedia itself is connected to film as Pirenne shows the visitor the second volume of the book projected on a screen in a dark room. They spend a half hour in the projection room and we are told “The book upon the screen made little sense to [the

ambassador]” (63). It is not clear if the book on screen is a microfilm version of printed pages, a film version of the collected information with images and sound, or some sort of interactive encyclopedia more closely resembling our current electronic ones. Though Asimov has incorporated the new medium of film into his vision of books in the future, the terminology and practices of print culture in the early twentieth century still hold considerable sway over his imagination.

The second novel in the series, *Foundation and Empire*, does little to clear up the ambiguity. At the very beginning a young general of the Empire visits a distant planet to gain information about the Foundation and upon entering a residence “recognized the small black-ivroid boxes that lined the shelves to be books. Their titles were unfamiliar. He guessed that the large structure at one end of the room was the receiver that transmuted the books into sight-and-sound on demand” (6-7). This image of books being projected is confirmed near the end as psychologist Ebling Mis visits what’s left of the Imperial Library, and we are told that the “library reading room” consists of a number of projectors where one can read novels and romances as well as do scientific research (216). This second novel in the series also uses the term “book-film” for the first time to describe the medium used by the projectors (179). However, newspapers are certainly not on film as copies of the *Imperial News* are “printed” and then immediately read without a projector (75), and when the Mayor of the Foundation receives a report on a possible political enemy it takes the form of “a bulky, metal-bound volume” (132).

The exact nature of books and films in Asimov’s imagined future, then, remains vague, but nevertheless some patterns can be noted and conclusions drawn. The first is that the terminology and culture of reading print have absorbed the newer medium of film. It should be noted that much of the *Foundation* novels takes place on planets far from the galaxy’s cultural

center so little time is spent describing the typical leisure activities of the well-educated. Still, the film culture that existed in the 1940s with theaters for public showings, Hollywood production companies, the star system, and terms like movie or cinema appear absent in the distant future. Instead people “read” book-films and own individual copies of their favorites for projection at home. In *Foundation and Empire* there are even references to hand-held projectors: “They put kids to sleep at night with the stuff. The young squirts curl up in the spare rooms with their pocket projectors and suck up Seldon thrillers” (41). In the present we curl up with a good book and in the future they curl up with a pocket projector. The medium for reading books has drastically changed on a technological level yet the associations and ways of speaking about the medium still resemble those of the media assemblage of the 1940s. Asimov skillfully divides the two components of an assemblage (the material forces and the cultural forces) in order to fulfill the demands of a SF audience for projections of future technology while still promoting the culture of print novel reading upon which sales of his books would also depend.

A second pattern throughout the stories is the association of print and paper with authority. In *Foundation* political treaties are formalized with a “paper signing” (50), Trader Limmar Ponyets asks a potential customer to “at least put your promise in writing” (162), the leader of a planet sends communications on his “own stationary” (187), the Foundation’s legal system still requires signed papers (221), and in *Foundation and Empire* the Emperor must sign a piece of paper to grant access to the Imperial library. Despite the existence of voice and image recordings on film, holographic broadcasts, and “hyper-video,” the affairs of state are formalized on paper and by personal signature. The most significant example, however, of the connection between print and authority comes from Hari Seldon. Through his psychohistorical knowledge, Seldon is able to predict a series of critical moments in the future of the Foundation. At each one

of these moments, known to the Foundation as “a Seldon crisis,” a holographic image appears of Seldon to offer some guidance. At the first of these crisis moments the Seldon hologram “said nothing for a few moments, but it closed the book upon its lap and fingered it idly” (78). Seldon appears in the pose of a man leisurely enjoying a book. It is a minor detail yet notable for its lack of fit to the moment. The hologram resembles a video recording, yet Seldon is not caught off-guard. He prepared himself for the message and obviously decided this image of him reading a book was the first impression he wanted to make on a group of people who would only know his famous name. And although the message would have been recorded before the fall of the Empire and, thus, at a high point of technology, Seldon is clearly holding a traditional print book rather than a “book-film.” Even the god-like Hari Seldon here makes use of the lingering cultural respect for the print book in order to establish his authority.

This carefully chosen connection between books and the primary figure in the *Foundation* universe warrants exploration into more thematic connections to print throughout the series. Seldon’s psychohistory relies on the predictability of mass humanity and the ability to learn from history. Though print, of course, is a mass medium in its own right, as I have argued in Chapter One, the media assemblage of the first half of the twentieth century tended to emphasize film’s appeal to the masses and valorize the individual (male) author. In the *Foundation* series the references to paper frequently involve important individuals (the Emperor, Seldon, other leaders) and legal documents where the identity of the individual signing is vital, while the books of the future are bound in metal and even the paper appears to be of a metallic nature, ensuring long life. As the Empire decays in *Foundation and Empire*, books are associated with the preservation of history: the brash, young General Riose states “books were for old men” (7) and tells an old man from whom he needs information that if he cooperates he

will be able to “go back to [his] books” (35). His mission is to find the “magicians” of the Foundation who have preserved their knowledge of nuclear power in “books, old books” (58). A man of action and instinct, General Riose wins one military victory after another, before being executed after failing to learn from the Empire’s history that great generals are an Emperor’s worst fear.

Written in the 1940s, the first three books of the *Foundation* series (Asimov would add sequels and prequels in the 1980s) participate in a media assemblage that has begun to accept the growing importance of film while still insisting on the importance of the physical nature of books. Asimov imagines a hybrid medium, the book-film, that addresses the generic requirement of technological marvels, reflects the growing respect for film as an artistic medium, yet maintains the continued importance of a culture of reading. Though paper and books make only sporadic appearances throughout the novels, their existence at all in a highly mechanized society thousands of years in the future seems important, and the fact that they are associated with matters of history, knowledge, and individual authority in a novel about mass humanity as it acts blindly suggests Asimov, much like Fitzgerald or West, is protecting his medium of choice in a time of uncertainty. Asimov does not employ a trope similar to the incest or rape found in, respectively, *Tender is the Night* and *Day of the Locust*, possibly because the SF audience had much in common with that of a Hollywood film so that the mixture of contempt and desire expressed by Fitzgerald and West would not have applied. However, the great rational individuals of the *Foundation* novels are almost exclusively male, with one of the only references to women in the first book being to the ease with which they can be manipulated by household gadgets and costume jewelry, associating women with the masses whose self-destructive appetites Seldon predicts and seeks to restrain through the power of scientific

knowledge. Writing in a historical moment after the initial emergence of the sound film but before the emergence of television and in a genre that shared attributes with both the literary novel and the Hollywood film, Asimov's *Foundation* novels, though they take place far in the future, demonstrate the qualities of the pre-television media assemblage as well as the unique contributions and concerns of the SF genre. A distant future in which media technology has not advanced beyond print and paper would clash with the mechanized world of the Galactic Empire, but a future in which the authority and physical longevity of print culture has been completely replaced by film projection is unthinkable or, at least, unattractive to a young writer trying to start his career in the medium of the print novel.

### **Bradbury Predicts the Future of Television**

By the 1960s mass media had become an important element in many SF imaginings of the future, perhaps most notably in the work of the New Wave authors and Philip K. Dick.<sup>4</sup> The most famous and most critical attack on television, however, comes from a novel published at the very onset of the television age – Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953). Although Bradbury's vision of America at the turn of the century is far darker than reality, his novel impressively anticipates many of the same critiques of television that would emerge in the fifties, sixties, and seventies, which I discussed in Chapter Two. Specifically, Bradbury describes a future in which the immediacy of television and its shifting of the public sphere renders books an endangered species.

The novel focuses on Guy Montag, who makes his living burning the libraries of those outlaw individuals who still own and read books. After meeting a neighbor girl who prefers conversation to television, witnessing his wife's attempted suicide, and seeing a woman set herself on fire in order to burn with her books, Montag begins to wonder what books might

actually offer and steals a copy of the Bible before it can be ignited. Montag is eventually punished for his crime and becomes a fugitive after murdering his boss while watching his own home set on fire. He escapes the city with an exciting, televised police chase and meets a band of roving ex-professors who have each memorized favorite texts in order to preserve literature until a time it is no longer illegal. The book ends with a massive air strike against the U.S. and the suggestion that the country now needs the preserved wisdom of books more than ever as it tries to rebuild.

The title of Michael Moore's 2004 film *Fahrenheit 9/11* suggests the popular association of Bradbury's novel with the idea of state-sponsored censorship.<sup>5</sup> It is, after all, a novel about burning books. Yet, the novel actually contains little of what one would normally associate with censorship – namely the suppression of oppositional ideas by the powers that be. In Bradbury's dystopia all books are burned without the firemen or the population at large having any idea what they contain. It is the medium itself that is under attack rather than one particular ideology. Print and reading are not completely eradicated from society, as seen when Guy's wife Millie watches a TV show while reading along with a script, but self-contained books are prohibited. As Montag's boss, Beatty, explains "It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship to start with, no!" (58). Of course the books are being burned for the ideas they contain rather than some fear of paper and binding, but both Beatty and ex-professor Faber, the two intellectuals in the novel, suggest the medium of the book plays an important role in fostering those dangerous ideas that might make people unhappy. Beatty describes the necessary simplification of all media as the population grew and argues that while television, motion pictures, and radio were able to survive and even thrive with watered down content, books could not. Since contemporary books were dull and classic texts were too

difficult and jarring to the modern reader, the medium as a whole was banned. When Montag seeks out Faber to find an alternate opinion he finds, instead, a confirmation of Beatty's history lesson. Though Faber first claims that it's the message, not the medium that matters, he immediately goes on to praise particular qualities of books. "The televisor is 'real.' It is immediate, it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It *must* be right. It *seems* so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn't time to protest," he explains (84). Books, however, maintain a distance from reality that keeps the reader in control: "You can shut them, say, 'Hold on a moment.' You play God to it.... Books can be beaten down with reason." Though the ideas in books are what threaten the happiness of the population and warrant their prohibition, Faber and Beatty agree that reading is by nature more contemplative than viewing, that in a fast-paced world full of dissenting opinions the medium of print enflames the population while television levels everything out.

In Chapter Two I referred to arguments by several theorists that the immediacy of live television combined with the usual consumption of television within the home created a strange mixing of the public and private spheres in which domestic life became prime content for public broadcast and politics became infused with the emotions and terminology of family. Frank Wheeler, in *Revolutionary Road*, struggles with these newly blurred boundaries as he uses political discussion to seduce his wife but recoils at the potential loss of his power as the breadwinner of the family if they move to Paris. Bradbury most notably manifests these same concerns in Mildred Montag's television viewing habits. She refers to the characters on TV as her family while she has no children of her own because reproduction has become a public concern. When she and her friends discuss politics they compare the relative attractiveness and manners of the two candidates and defend their opinions by stating "they were right in that parlor

wall, not six months ago” when Guy questions their knowledge of either man, as though they had actually been to the house for a social visit (97). Bradbury describes new technologies such as a small box that says the viewer’s name whenever someone on the screen is addressing the audience and interactive programming that allows Millie to play a minor role in a television drama from her parlor. In each case any distinction between real life and televised life, between private concerns and public concerns is difficult to make, all the more so in a future in which idiosyncratic behavior, conversation, and public gatherings outside the home have nearly disappeared.

The result of television’s dominance, according to Bradbury, is a citizenry that has chosen constant stimulation and simple pleasure over political involvement or personal reflection, a perfect description of the main character, Chance, in Kosinski’s *Being There*. Just as Chance grew up isolated from the rest of the world except through the television screen, Millie spends most of her time in the “TV parlor” surrounded by giant television walls (she asks her husband to add a fourth television wall to make her immersion complete) or with tiny radio buds in her ears that allow her to blot out the rest of the world. Chance’s obsession with television has rendered him almost affectless so that he has no response to the death of the only man he has ever known, and Montag is horrified to realize that if his wife’s suicide attempt had been successful he would not have cried at the loss. And just as Chance’s expertise on television grants him a strange charisma to those who meet him, Montag’s neighbor, Clarisse, complains that she has been labeled “antisocial” at school because she likes to discuss topics other than television. Chance would fit right into Bradbury’s future.

Montag also shares with Chance the sense of awe when he, too, appears on television for the first time: “That’s all for me, he thought, that’s all taking place just for *me*, by God” (134), he

exclaims as he watches the police chase begin. Montag then contemplates what use to make of this massive audience, what he could say that would positively affect the thirty million people staring at him on their screens. Again, note the similarity to Chance's realization that more people would see him on TV than he could ever meet face to face, but also note that while Chance is excited by the thought that he could protect his real self by presenting only an image to the TV audience, Montag despairs at the impossibility of saying anything meaningful in the few seconds before his public capture and death. This difference reflects the different contexts of the respective authors. Kosinski, who publically claimed sympathy for and similarities to Chance, had published two critically acclaimed literary novels (*Steps* won the 1969 National Book Award) prior to writing *Being There*, and was on the cusp of stardom, a stardom that would largely come to fruition thanks to his television appearances. He published *Being There* in 1970, long after television had established its place in American life. Bradbury's career prior to starting *Fahrenheit 451* mostly consisted of publications in pulp magazines and SF fanzines and in 1953 the public dominance of television was not yet complete. Though both men contemplate a media assemblage that includes television and express similar fears about its effects, Kosinski seems enticed by the power of the media machine to connect millions in a way Bradbury is not. Kosinski describes television as a tool in the profitable creation of a public image, while Bradbury bemoans the impossibility of meaningful self-expression through a medium that thrives on speed and the illusion of immediacy. Kosinski had achieved critical success but had also been the subject of controversy due to accusations of plagiarism and blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. Television provided a means for him to both expose himself to the public and guard his private life. Bradbury was a writer who had read voraciously as a child and clearly was a precursor of the New Wave SF writers who hoped to raise SF from a popular to a

literary genre. In the “Coda” to the novel Bradbury exclaims “If teachers and grammar school editors find my jawbreaker sentences shatter their mushmilk teeth, let them eat stale cake dunked in weak tea of their own ungodly manufacture” (178). Bradbury’s imagery connects the printed word with adulthood and complex thought, the opposite of the simple-minded television addicts of his novel. The entire Coda, in fact, argues for the inviolability of the author’s original words and the literary significance of the work. Though Bradbury and Kosinski agree on the negative powers of television, their individual concerns and situations differentiate their ultimate conclusions about the relationship between television and the novel.

The meaning of book burning shifts with this reading. Rather than exemplifying censorship, a future of book burning is horrific precisely because the material nature of books is important to Bradbury. Professor Faber takes Montag’s Bible and sniffs it because “books smell like nutmeg or some spice from a foreign land” (81), and Bradbury opens his “Afterword” by fondly recalling the physical conditions of the novel’s creation on a typewriter in a public library. The imagination and thought required to work through pages and pages of difficult words along with the control the reader has over when to start and stop made books, in Bradbury’s opinion, an essential receptacle for the world’s knowledge. In Bradbury’s version of the future, oppositional ideas are not necessarily illegal, just their publication in books, but this loss of a material medium serves to eradicate the ideas as well.

The rise of television is connected to a symbolic impotence in the case of Frank Wheeler and a literal one in the case of Chance. There is no blatantly sexual metaphor in *Fahrenheit 451*, but Montag’s initial feelings of helplessness arise upon watching two men pump his wife’s stomach with “the throb of the suction snake” (15) while smoking cigarettes. The next day Clarisse teasingly rubs a dandelion under Montag’s chin and tells him he must not be in love

since his chin failed to turn yellow. The final straw for Montag before choosing books over Millie, is their inability to recall how and where they first met. Stuck in a loveless marriage, Montag risks everything to discover the secret of books, and what he discovers is an overwhelmingly male world. The wandering band of exiled professors Montag meets outside the city are all male and have each memorized the work of a canonical male author. Even before meeting Faber or any of the other professors Montag feels books must have some importance because “It took some *man* a lifetime maybe to put some of his thoughts down” (52, emphasis mine). Clarisse is an important female dissident, but she attributes all her insights about life and television to her uncle, and Millie and her female friends clearly represent the emptiness of the masses. The most telling metaphor, however, appears in the “Afterword” as Bradbury quotes from the two-act play he wrote based on the *Fahrenheit 451* characters. Chief Beatty reveals to Montag that he actually owns hundreds and hundreds of books, but refuses to read any of them anymore. He explains “It’s like having a house full of beautiful women and, smiling, not touching ... one. So, you see, I’m not a criminal at all. If you ever catch me *reading* one, yes, then turn me in! But this place is as pure as a twelve-year-old virgin girl’s cream-white summer night bedroom” (170). To read is to be a sexually potent male; not to read is to be a sexually innocent girl. The words belong to the villain of the novel, yet Bradbury takes pride in quoting the scene at length and the revelations it makes about the Fire Chief’s character, and given the disgust he expresses in the “Coda” for a “young Vassar lady” who wonders why there aren’t more female characters in his work there’s reason to believe the gender associations reflect his own feelings.

*Fahrenheit 451*, finally, is remarkable in its anticipation of television’s growth as a cultural force, revealing many of the same fears and criticisms novelists would develop towards

the new medium over the next three decades. And, similar to *Revolutionary Road* and *Being There*, fears about television's effect on the public sphere manifest themselves in gender associations that connect women to television and men to the novel. In addition a further concern about the material nature and longevity of print arises in Bradbury's text. Bradbury was an unknown author who deeply admired the great names of Western literature, but who was working in a genre known for its cheap printing and the speed with which works went out of print. Like Yates and Kosinski he recognized the power of television and defended the importance of books, but the particular imagery he chose – the physical destruction of all books – would be all the more potent for an author eager to see the genre in which he worked attain a more permanent and respected place in the literary canon.

### **New SF and Old Books**

In the eighties and nineties one of the most influential movements within SF was cyberpunk, a sub-genre focused on the effects of computers on humanity's near-future. Without doubt the leading author within this movement was William Gibson.<sup>6</sup> Gibson's *Sprawl* trilogy – *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988) – is set in a near-future time, post-WWIII, in which the Eastern United States has become one endless urban sprawl, massive corporations send armed forces to steal or assassinate top executives, and satellite colonies have begun to emerge in outer space. Information has become the world's most valuable commodity, and that information is stored and accessed through cyberspace. In Gibson's version of cyberspace one does not merely look at data on a computer screen, one "jacks in" to a 3-D representation of the data, a "consensual hallucination" humanity has constructed to make sense of the vast amounts of information being stored (*Neuromancer* 5).

Each of the three novels is structured around a quest for some mysterious object, and the MacGuffin in each case is some form of powerful computer technology. Henry Case, the protagonist of *Neuromancer*, is a cyberspace cowboy or computer hacker who has been employed to help free an artificial intelligence from the legal restrictions limiting its power. The title character of *Count Zero* is Bobby Newmark, a neophyte cyberspace cowboy, who gets entangled in a plot to acquire “biosoft” that will allow a human being essentially to live in cyberspace. Seven years later, Bobby becomes the object of desire for powerful forces in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, after acquiring an Aleph, or massive hard drive big enough to contain all the information in the world. There are numerous subplots within each novel, but the suspense and thrill of the fast-paced narratives usually stems from the dangers and possibilities advanced technology offers to whomever controls it.

Books and print play very small roles in the trilogy. Other than the paper “faxes” that get sent and printed out and usually used for cleaning dirt rather than storing information, print is associated with the past. Unlike in Asimov’s future in which books are old yet venerated or Bradbury’s dystopia in which books are illegal because dangerous, in Gibson’s future books are little more than antiques gathering dust on shelves. In *Neuromancer* Case and his partner Molly Millions locate the hermit-like Finn and find his apartment full of “crumbling paperbacks” (48). Seven years later, in *Count Zero*, the Finn, despite success dealing and repairing computer hardware and software, still lives surrounded by “damp-swollen books stacked shoulder-high” (116). The OED appears a little later, though it is a “frayed, blue-backed copy of the second volume” used only to prop up a window (138). At the end of the novel, an AI is discovered that has been creating art objects out of discarded trash, including “brown leaves of old books” (235). And in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Henry Slick describes his home at the Factory, essentially an

abandoned warehouse full of junk, and notes the “books, old books with covers made of cloth glued over cardboard. Slick hadn’t ever known how heavy books were. They had a sad smell, old books” (79). As new characters enter the Factory, they, too, notice the “ancient books” (153) and the “ragged, faded books” (281). The number of references to books are few over the course of the three novels, in and of itself a telling detail, but most interesting is that when they are mentioned they are inevitably described as falling apart, drawing attention to their material nature and lack of use.

Not only are books themselves old, but the few people who own or use them are categorized as old or out of touch with society. Finn and Gentry, the owner of the Factory, are both skilled with computers but the fact their homes are filled with old books demonstrates their anti-social attitudes. At the beginning of *Neuromancer*, Case visits Deane, a 135-year-old friend, to find out information, and one of the key features of his office is a pair of wooden filing cabinets, “The sort of thing, Case supposed, that had once been used to store written records of some kind” (13). Deane, like Finn and Gentry, lives surrounded by the detritus of an earlier time, and the old-fashioned filing cabinets, as well as Case’s reaction to them, signal that an interest in books and print marks one as an outcast. It should be no surprise, then, that the most bizarre outcasts in *Neuromancer*, the obscenely wealthy Tessier-Ashpool family, possess the only well-kept library mentioned in the novel. Even when books are mentioned somewhat positively, the effect is still to mark them as relics of the past. *Count Zero* opens with an account of the mercenary Turner’s three months of physical reconstruction after being blown up by a bomb. While surgeons replace most of his body, his mind is deep in the simulated world of “an idealized New England boyhood of the previous century” in which he “read Conan Doyle by the light of a sixty-watt bulb” (1). Turner, a hired gun, begins to question his career over the course

of the novel and this opening look into his fantasy world associates reading with childhood, innocence, and a long-lost way of life. Bobby Newmark admits he found his cyberspace nickname, Count Zero, from reading old print computer manuals, but notes that “I don’t read too well” (*Count* 81), a skill fellow cowboy Case also seems to lack in *Neuromancer* as he has the computer read print documents for him (82). A minor character in *Count Zero* actually still works for a print publisher, but she is described as an “assistant editor in the fashionably archaic business of printing books” (101). Tripping on drugs, Mona Lisa remembers her father “reading one of his books, crumbly brown leaves, never a page with a corner on it” (*Mona*, 95). Her memory combines all the previous associations with print: age (she refers to her father as “the old man”); social isolation (she describes a dirt yard and games played by herself); childhood (the memory is from years earlier); and physical deterioration. Even the entire country of Turkey can be rendered foreign and behind the times with the simple observation of people writing letters because “the written word still enjoyed a certain prestige here. It was a sluggish country” (*Neuromancer* 88).

In *Galatea 2.2* Richard gradually anthropomorphizes the computer program, Helen, even going so far as to give it “eyes” and “ears” so it might better understand the world and the literature it was “reading.” In *Patchwork Girl*, the human body becomes the central image of the text both as a metaphor for the hypertext novel itself and as the defining characteristic of the “monster” protagonist. In each case the question of print’s role in an age dominated by computers becomes a question of the human body, more specifically the female body. *Neuromancer* identifies a tension between the world of cyberspace and the human body in its opening chapter. As the novel begins, Case is physically unable to project “his disembodied consciousness” into cyberspace because some former employers damaged his nervous system as

punishment for stealing (5). So instead of “the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he’d frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh” (6). The ultimate thrill for the cyberspace cowboy is to escape the limitations of the body, to replace the natural-born body with computer hardware, as symbolized by Case pornographically stroking his new computer after having his nervous system repaired by his mysterious new employer.

Case’s belief that the meat of the body can be escaped gets tested throughout the first novel in the trilogy: he finds an old acquaintance has been turned into a personality construct or computer program that simulates the mind of a once-living human; he is forced to experience the pain of his partner’s broken leg during a mission as he is connected to her senses through the technology of simstim; the artificial intelligence that is behind everything visits him in the guise of people he has met in order to make him more comfortable; and he is betrayed by Peter Riviera, a man who can project holographic illusions with his mind and some special implants. In these examples the difficulty and danger of separating the mind and body is a central concern. Case gradually comes to the conclusion that the more connected one becomes with technology and information, the less human one acts, with Wintermute, the rogue AI that eventually merges with the entire matrix, acting as the ultimate example of power and information free from physical limitations. Yet, his response to this realization is not to change his line of work or give up his love of powerful hardware, but to become emotionally attached to Molly and later to find a new girlfriend in the Sprawl as he returns to hacker work. The cowboy response to being constantly disembodied in cyberspace is not to re-evaluate his relationship to his own body, but, instead, to keep a female body close by.

Case's solution draws attention to the gendered nature of bodies throughout the trilogy. The most obvious example is the cyberspace cowboy, an exclusively male occupation throughout the trilogy that makes use of an explicitly masculine label. The female characters throughout the three books are often central to the plot, strong, rich, and/or powerful, yet they are also more often defined by their bodies than their ability to manipulate computer hardware and explore cyberspace. In *Neuromancer*, Molly Millions is a razorgirl, or assassin, who is defined by the sharp blades inserted into her fingertips and the glasses permanently implanted over her eyes. In other words, though she is a product of advanced technology, it is technology that has been used to enhance her body rather than replace it. In fact, near the end of the novel we find out that she paid for these enhancements by working as a "meat puppet," a prostitute who has her memories erased afterward so that she does not recall the uses customers make of her body.

*Count Zero*'s most important female character is Angie Mitchell, daughter of a cutting edge researcher. Through special implants created by her father, Angie is able to access cyberspace without the mediation of a computer deck. Though this would seem to make her the apotheosis of cowboy-life, she has little control of how and when she enters cyberspace. She is more or less an incubator for her father's advanced technology that others are eager to acquire. Eventually we learn that Angie's father was given this technology by followers of a voodoo-like religion that incorporates Haitian lore and cyberspace, and that they have named Angie "the Virgin" (229) for her ability to enter cyberspace as a body of light. By the end of the novel Angie becomes a simstim star. Simstim is the entertainment medium that has replaced television in the future, offering viewers the ability physically to experience what it's like to be the star of the show. As Case explains in *Neuromancer*, "Cowboys didn't get into simstim...because it was basically a meat toy" (55). Simstim is a technology that makes bodily sensations all the more

central, so it is perhaps not surprising that the biggest stars of the simstim world are women (Tally Isham was the biggest star before Angie), as are the most ardent fans (Bobby Newmark's mother is obsessed with simstim soaps). Despite the unique ability Angie possesses, like Molly she is valuable to the male cowboys for her body and eventually makes her living with her body.

Finally, the title character of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is a prostitute who has been sold by her boyfriend and pimp to a corporation that intends to make use of the fact she looks remarkably like Angie Mitchell. She is given cosmetic surgery to enhance the likeness, and she is intended to be Angie's replacement since Angie's work has suffered from her drug problems. As with Molly and Angie, advanced technology plays an important part in Mona's story, but again it is only to enhance her body, not to escape it. Given all these examples of female characters defined by their bodies, it perhaps is all the more significant that Case refers to the powerful AI Wintermute as "he" throughout *Neuromancer*, even after being warned that Wintermute is not a human but an "it." The personality that has literally become the matrix, diffusing its physical existence across the world, has to be male in this future.

Books in William Gibson's future are defined by their physical existence and limitations, in opposition to the seemingly disembodied world of information in cyberspace, and physical existence is considered a feminine quality. As with *Galatea 2.2* and *Patchwork Girl*, however, this association with women is not intended to be disparaging. As much as the heroes of Gibson's future are cyberspace cowboys hoping to achieve disembodied access to vast amounts of information, there remains a fear for humanity should such a condition become the norm. In *Galatea* this association of print and women takes the form of nostalgia; in *Patchwork Girl* it reminds us of the continued relevance of bodies in a future of hyperlinks. Gibson shares concerns with other authors in the 1980s for what it means to be human and the role print can

play in the turn-of-the-century media assemblage as it redefines humanity as a globalized, networked creature. As he explains in an interview with Larry McCaffery, “My feelings about technology are *totally* ambivalent – which seems to me to be the only way to relate to what’s happening today” (274). Still, Gibson’s use of print in his trilogy also speaks to his particular position as a SF writer in the eighties. In the same interview Gibson describes his rejection of hard SF that seeks to describe and predict the technology of the future in realistic detail and often posits technology as the solution to many of humanity’s limitations: “I felt I was writing so far outside the mainstream that my highest goal was to become a minor cult figure” (274). The infrequent mentions of crumbling books throughout the trilogy, then, allow Gibson to address the importance of technology in the future while reminding us of the fragile human bodies that exist behind the technology, to engage the SF demand for technological predictions while positioning himself as a critic of a too-easy acceptance of a cyberspace future. A generous reading of gender in the trilogy might see the association of women and print with physical bodies as a comment on the masses of people whose physical labor and existence remains necessary even as the upper-classes lead cyberlives. A less generous reading might point out that as a male making his living writing about cyberspace for a mostly male audience, Gibson is able to have his cake and eat it too by creating this exciting male world of the cyber cowboy while placing the responsibility of resistance on the shoulders of women. In either case one can see the importance of the human body to the media assemblage at the end of the twentieth century even within the very specific context of cyberpunk fiction.

### **Cadigan and the Return of Meat**

As we saw in the example of Shelley Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl*, media assemblages are not monolithic entities, but instead are made up of many autonomous participants interacting

with one another and arguing over definitions, boundaries, and associations. Though the genre of SF has long been dominated by male authors and readers, there are, of course, dissenting voices that offer alternative visions of print's role in the future. The association of print with physical bodies and both with humanity's past in the wake of a future shaped by computer technology, for instance, is not a necessary connection. In Octavia Butler's *Dawn* trilogy (1987, 88, 89) print becomes obsolete in humanity's future, not because humans finally escape the physical limitations of the body, but because aliens cross-breed with humans, thus granting photographic memories and the ability to communicate thoughts through physical contact. The enhancement of the human body rather than its abandonment makes print unnecessary and unwieldy. In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) the remaining fertile women in the isolated republic of Gilead are reduced to walking wombs by the male-dominated government. This reduction of women to their bodies is accomplished, in part, by making it illegal for women to read. Computers exist in the society and were used to rob women of their savings and keep track of the citizens, but the real loss for the women, and the reason they have no value beyond their bodies, is the lost access to print.

Perhaps the most apt novel to use in comparison to Gibson's *Sprawl* trilogy, however, is Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991) because it shares so much with Gibson's work. *Synners* takes place in a near-future world in which computer hacking has become an important skill for disenchanted youth, where a strip of America (California this time) has become an underground haven for hackers and other subcultures, where mega-corporations seem to operate above the law in their pursuit of power, where almost all information is exchanged online (the dataline is the term in *Synners*), and where an artificial intelligence program eventually becomes sentient. Like Gibson, Cadigan weaves together a number of narratives around the quest for control of a new

piece of technology, a surgical procedure that allows the patient to connect his or her brain directly to a computer and essentially exist in cyberspace.

All these similarities to Gibson's cyberpunk-style make the differences all the more striking. One difference that is immediately noticeable is that the female characters are not kept apart from the cyberculture. The hacker subculture that lives on the Mimosa (a squatter community that stretches from Manhattan Beach to Hermosa Beach) is evenly divided between males and females. More importantly, the novel's two main female characters, Gina and Sam, are both involved with computer technology. Gina is a synner, a synthesizer of music and video into a virtual experience, and Sam is a highly-skilled hacker. Their differences from Gibson's female characters is even more striking when they are compared to the males in their lives. Gina is the lover of Visual Mark, the most successful synner in the business. Visual Mark, out of his desire to create even more realistic and immersive videos, becomes the first person to try the new implant technology that directly links him to his computer and the dataline. Like Gibson's cyber cowboys, Mark becomes addicted to this new life online because "He lost all awareness of the meat that had been his prison for close to fifty years" (232). Mark, like Case, describes the human body as meat and thrills at the opportunity to leave it behind. Sam is the daughter of Gabe, an advertising man who has lost all interest in his job and instead uses his company's technical resources to engage in virtual reality adventures all day. Gabe has recently been kicked out of the house by his ambitious and successful real estate agent wife, and his lack of confidence in his middle-aged body and masculinity lead him to become addicted to the escapist fantasies of the virtual world. Both men see technology as a means of leaving behind the body. Though Gina and Sam are equally as interested in technology, they don't view the body as an albatross. Gina is interested in synning rock videos because of her love of the visceral impact of

rock music, not as a means of creating a virtual world of sensations: “I want it to come out of human-fucking-*beings*, I want it to be something that makes you know you’re alive, and not another part of a bunch of fucking pels in a high-res video!” (199). She later refuses Mark’s invitation to join him permanently online, and instead becomes Gabe’s lover, curing him of his addiction to the virtual. Sam acquires a second piece of cutting edge computer technology, a portable microcomputer that is powered by inserting a needle into a human body. This autonomous, human-powered computer becomes essential to the plot when Visual Mark accidentally unleashes a virus that shuts down almost the entire global dataline. In each case the men’s desires to escape their bodies prove unrealistic, selfish, and potentially damaging while the two women find ways to integrate the human body and the machine. Anne Balsamo argues that in *Synners* “technology isn’t the means of escape from or transcendence of the body, but rather the means of communication and connection with other bodies” (703). Cadigan, then, does not simply replace the male cyber cowboys of Gibson’s novels with female hackers, but questions the opposition between bodies and computers. Computers do not eliminate the need for bodies but instead connect more and more bodies together, and in order to cognitively map such complex networks of humans we need to maintain an understanding of humans as embodied.<sup>7</sup> Such an integration of the old and the new, of embodiment and technology, is very similar to the reading I offered of Jackson’s *Patchwork Girl* and the continued necessity of print as a means of understanding and utilizing the new technology of hypertext.

Indeed, print also takes on different connotations in Cadigan’s novel. Though it seems novels have been more or less replaced as entertainment options by the ubiquitous dataline, the inability to read, an unremarkable trait in cyber cowboys, is unusual enough to warrant a lengthy discussion among even the most hardcore hackers (in *Synners* Adrian can’t read but only due to a

brain lesion rather than a lack of use for the skill). Paper is also still valued as a storage medium; one of the corporate executives at Diversifications, the company that is developing the brain implants, asks that important files and reports be sent to him in hardcopy because he “like[s] to have something [he] can make notes on in an informal setting. Without hardware” (70). A similar preference for paper is expressed by a judge when the court’s computer filing system shuts down due to a virus. When the defense attorney attempts to delay the case until the system is working again, the judge informs him that “it may come as a shock to people of your generation, but courts were not always computerized, and it was not only possible but routine to conduct business without being on-line. We will continue, using hard copy as needed; that is why we maintain court clerks and court reporters” (10). Though there is an implication in this scene that paper files are a less common part of contemporary society, the fact that the court continues to maintain such files suggests paper is not the antique it appears to be throughout the *Sprawl* trilogy. Though the references to print, books, and paper remain few in *Synners*, nearly every one is to paper as a viable alternative to sometimes failing computer technology as opposed to the descriptions of deteriorating books that populate Gibson’s novels. Though Cadigan references paper rather than novels, it is the material nature of paper that many people were questioning in the eighties and nineties when predicting the death of the novel. Paper ages, takes up too much space, and allows less interaction and manipulation – in short it does not allow one to transcend embodiment the way computers might. Gibson describes antique books that remain valued for their thoughts even though trapped in crumbling bodies, whereas Cadigan defends the bodies themselves and their importance and relevance in an age of computers.

The point of the comparison between Cadigan and Gibson is not to suggest that Cadigan’s version of the future is more accurate nor that she somehow values and understands

print more than Gibson. Rather, the comparison illustrates the complexity and value of using media assemblages to understand what novelists have to say about their medium and others. Even when writing at very similar moments within the same genre, different novelists still write from different material and ideological contexts that shape the associations they make with different media. Gibson wrote “in the opposite direction from most of the stuff [he] was reading” in the late 1970s (McCaffery 274), and was publishing his work at a time when SF works were getting increased attention from major publishing corporations.<sup>8</sup> Writing in opposition to the sort of hard SF that was being published by large publishing houses to appeal to an adolescent male audience, Gibson’s dirty near-future of cyberspace cowboys both working for and resisting massive corporations reflected his own ambiguous feelings about computers as well as the future of the print novel. Although *Synners* was published only a few years after Gibson’s trilogy, the world in which she was publishing was different from Gibson’s even if only for the fact that Gibson had quickly made cyberpunk a prominent and accepted genre within SF. Cadigan’s novel reveals that even if Gibson’s feelings towards technology were ambivalent, they still maintained gender associations with technology and the body that reduced print to a bit of nostalgia rather than an active participant in the future. Though both write cyberpunk fiction concerned with many of the same questions about a future dominated by computers, Cadigan writes at a slightly different moment (post-Gibson), as part of a different tradition (the feminist SF of the 1970s), and for a different audience than Gibson, and these differences help shape novels that offer different associations with computers and print.<sup>9</sup> The historical moment does not wholly determine how either author envisions the future for computers and novels, but rather creates a number of forces that influence their assumptions and associations, even as their own books, once published, change those forces for others.

The idea of an assemblage of voices and texts allows one to examine the patterns that emerge from the similarities (for example the interest in the human body among all the texts from this period) while still allowing for the possibility of tension and eventual change due to the differences (can the human body, particularly the female body, be integrated with this technological future or must it be the ever-present other that preserves our humanity while men enjoy their cyberlives?). Cadigan and Gibson, as novelists, both had a vested interest in helping to preserve some role for print in the present and future even as they wrote about a future in which computers and online interactions would predominate. As SF novelists, and even more specifically as cyberpunk SF novelists, their interests were not exactly the same as those of an established literary novelist such as Richard Powers or an experimental multimedia artist such as Shirley Jackson, and as a female and male SF novelist, respectively, their interests did not perfectly coincide with each other. These disparate participants, along with millions of readers, scholars, computer-users, programmers, and others, helped to shape, and were shaped by, the media assemblage of the eighties and nineties.

### **Conclusion**

Print is print. This tautology has been the basis for most thinking about literature as a medium. It suggests there are essential qualities to print that define its existence and use. Of course there is truth to this: being made of paper is different from being made of film is different from being made of binary code. However, how members of a society at a particular historical moment talk (or write) about those differences is just as important as any ahistorical material facts. Books are made of paper, but does this make them less expensive to produce and consume or more authoritative because more time is put into their production? Are they more permanent than a fleeting image or less permanent than a piece of code that never degrades? Are they part

of the private sphere because they can easily be enjoyed at home or part of the public sphere because they circulate ideas broadly? Are they more convenient for locating particular passages or less convenient to manipulate and edit? Are they more feminine because more tactile or more masculine because more mediated from physical reactions? Such claims have been made about the book at different moments throughout the twentieth century despite the medium itself hardly changing at all. The role of print has to change continually, however, because the media assemblage is constantly changing, particularly in the last hundred years as new media have been born and proliferated at a rapid pace. By identifying media assemblages and admitting that literature, too, is part of those assemblages, one can both take a cross-section of the assemblage at any historical moment and understand the multitude of forces that contribute to it as well as compare assemblages from different historical moments in order to note how certain associations have changed over time. Authors writing about other media do not write from the safety of a print tradition set in stone, but participate in defending, altering, and redefining their own medium, sometimes out of very material concerns and sometimes for ideological reasons. Even authors who have nothing to say in their novels about film or computers or even print, nevertheless write from within a certain media assemblage that shapes their expectations for what role their novels can and should play once published and read. The concept of the media assemblage allows us to reexamine the literature of the past to better understand novelists' investment in certain aspects of print and to look to the future, even 20,000 years from now in a Galactic Empire built on metal and nuclear power, and find hope for a continued role for novels and print, even if that role is very different from what it is today.

## Notes

1. Roger Luckhurst calls Suvin's definition "a profoundly prescriptive and judgemental formulation" (7) that allowed him to dismiss most SF as either not part of the genre or unworthy of criticism.
2. In his survey of twentieth-century SF, Brooks Landon offers several examples of Hugo's interest in promoting science through literature, describing him as "Infatuated with the idea of science and the potentially shaping value of a literature that contained significant amounts of scientific exposition" (51). Many writers since WWII have rejected Gernsback's vision of SF filled with explicitly described technology in favor of greater psychological depth (see Clareson 16), but the idea that science fiction appeals to readers interested in science and technology remains important.
3. A recent *Publisher's Weekly* cover story reports "strong sales on all sides of science fiction" (Fox 20), suggesting the continued financial stability of SF throughout the shifting media assemblages.
4. "New Wave" SF turned away from traditional "pulp" SF's interest in technology and towards formal experimentation and more political or psychological content, influenced by writers like William Burroughs. See Philip José Farmer's *Riders of the Purple Wage*, Thomas M. Disch's *334*, and Dick's *Simulacra* for examples of dystopian futures that connect television-like technologies to political ambivalence and social isolation.
5. Bradbury even felt it necessary to publically reject the censorship interpretation and explain the novel is "about how television destroys interest in reading literature" (Boyle).
6. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. suspects that "most of the literary cyberpunks bask in the lights of the one major writer who is original and gifted enough to make the whole

movement seem original and gifted. That figure is William Gibson” (185). Dani Cavallaro uses Gibson’s novels as “a lens” for examining the entire movement because “Gibson is referred to in legion articles, essays, chapters in books and websites” (xi).

7. Laura Chernaik expands on Balasmo’s reading by arguing that “Rather than opposing the individual to the ‘ungraspable totality’ of technology, *Synners* coheres around a series of encounters between subjects” (74). In other cyberpunk novels, she explains, technology is conflated with corporate capitalism, so that only the masculine individualist hacker can heroically master technology and reject any loss of autonomy. Cadigan, too, critiques corporate capitalism, but the hero need not be the traditional masculine individual but rather a group of characters who connect their bodies, in part, through their skilled use of technology.
8. See Sarah Brouillette’s “Corporate Publishing and Canonization.” Brouillette argues that the underground resistance to corporate domination found in Gibson’s novels resonated with SF fans upset about the takeover of small SF publishers by mega-publishers. At the same time, these mega-publishers were paying large advances to SF authors, creating a tension between making money and making art.
9. Jenny Wolmark argues that Cadigan, in the end, does not escape the patriarchal tendencies of cyberpunk: “*Synners* nevertheless suggests that cyberpunk is fairly intractable as far as the representation of gender relations is concerned” (126). Wolmark’s critique is based on the idea that any attempt to understand the relationship between humans and technology without explicitly including the role of gender is immediately suspect because the “universal” is always male. She believes Cadigan’s “strong female characters” (125) are not enough to compensate for cyberpunk’s implicit

rendering of women as other, despite the fact that Cadigan's characters are not just "strong" but also technologically astute, thus questioning the association of technology with masculinity.

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