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NO END IN SIGHT:
GLOBALIZATION NARRATIVES OF DECLINE, COLLAPSE, AND SURVIVAL

by

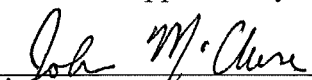

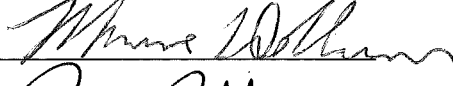
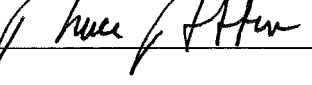
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A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School-New Brunswick
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Program in Literatures in English

written under the direction of

John McClure

and approved by

New Brunswick, New Jersey

October, 2009

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

No End in Sight: Globalization Narratives of Decline, Collapse, and Survival

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This dissertation studies narratives of societal collapse in the late twentieth century by situating these within the theory and critique of globalization. The postwar period's domination by nuclear superpowers led civilizational catastrophe to be imagined as an apocalyptic event, as instantaneous, total destruction. Since the Cold War's end, however, the most prominent writers on this theme have projected futures unfolding in degrees of disorder, toward no certain outcome, with smaller-scale but more plentiful disasters. Their narratives answer to a current sense of unchecked global violence, ecological crisis, and, in the US, imperial decline. These works still loosely qualify as apocalyptic literature by their gloomy preoccupation with the potential ends of civilization, but they break with this tradition by rejecting its sharp-cornered historicity.

The dissertation's first half sets the context for this narrative field. The first chapter traces the emergence of globalization as the dominant post-Cold War narrative. Against the story of transnational integration widely promoted after the Soviet Union's collapse, such disparate observers as Mike Davis, Samuel Huntington, and Robert Kaplan warned of cultural conflict, resource scarcity, and demographic upheaval. Chapter Two turns to British literature with Doris Lessing's innovative novels of the late 1960s and

early 1970s. These predict and perform precisely the narrative shift that occurs in later accounts of globalization, looking past the immediate terror of the Cold War to a future rife with limited catastrophes.

The second half of the dissertation reconsiders the premier American novelists commonly associated with the apocalyptic. Rather than an arch postmodernist, Don DeLillo is, in *The Names*, a prescient narrator of the global future. In *Underworld*, he grandly renders the unraveling of his society's infrastructure and its cultural self-image, then in *Cosmopolis* depicts in microcosm the country's dissipation into the global network of finance capital. Chapter Four is an analysis of *Against the Day*, for which text Thomas Pynchon has revised his characteristically apocalyptic framework. His new narrative structure, I claim, is the "catastrophic sequence," conveying history's apparent convergence upon quasi-apocalyptic events--not world-ending, never foreordained, but which can seem to take climactic place in an ordered succession of like disasters.

Acknowledgements

Literary research is never solitary. Or, it never always is. At Rutgers, I have had more supporters than I perhaps deserved. First among these is John McClure, without whose abundant interest, insight, and passion, I may never have successfully conceived this dissertation, let alone completed it. I was also fortunate to have Marianne DeKoven and Brent Edwards as exceptionally thoughtful and patient readers. And special thanks go to Bruce Robbins for his generous commentary and advice.

This dissertation benefited from a fellowship at Rutgers in 2005-06, a writing seminar led by Emily Bartels in spring 2007, and a Mellon dissertation writing seminar led by Marianne DeKoven in summer 2007. For helpful discussions, single or several, formal or friendly, on various pieces of the project, I would like to thank Paul Benzon, Myra Jehlen, Alison Shonkwiler, Rachel Smith, and Kurt Spellmeyer. And I especially want to thank Cheryl Robinson, Eileen Faherty, and Courtney Borack for their extraordinary regard in all phases of my graduate-school life.

I am more personally indebted to Lesli Jo, for reading many of the pages that follow (and many others that were since deleted), for taking the Paul Chan photos, and for much else besides. I have been lucky to have another astute listener and reader close by, in Allan Rand. And thanks as ever to Fritz Fortmiller and Robert Galligan, for music and collaboration when the time is there and right.

But above all, I am grateful to my parents. My mother, Rita, was and is my first example of a dedicated, discerning, lifelong reader. My late father, Daniel, had, I think, an assurance that things academic would always come easy for me. They haven't, but often in the writing of this dissertation, it helped to remember that he felt that way.

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Introduction: The Threat and the Promise

In the spring of 2008, a series of enigmatic posters began appearing among the more typical signage in New York City, where the unpoliced space on temporary walls and other street-level structures is routinely colonized for commercial but also artistic purposes. These posters used the same materials as the bills around them--were printed on the same size and kind of paper and, like the others, were hung with wheatpaste--but they featured only plain black type on a white background. The messages were brief and easily scanned, even from across the street. But some of the posters' words were struck through, creating at least two possible readings of each text. In a neighborhood near Downtown Brooklyn, a particularly intriguing text could be found, or happened upon, on the boards surrounding a demolished building:

You ~~think~~
~~things~~ will end.
 And ~~that will~~ be the
 opening.

I want you to know
~~things don't think~~ to
 end.

~~And that is-~~
 the promise and the
 threat.

In one installation at this site, in between ads for a cell phone service plan (in Spanish) and a dancehall reggae concert, the poster was doubled vertically, placing one instance of the text above another. Right around the corner, two posters sat horizontally at eye level, in between a flyer for another concert--by a pair of contemporary rhythm and blues acts--and a rat poison warning--a side effect of the building's demolition, endemic to a neighborhood undergoing rapid gentrification. Except for this last, all the other bills were duplicated too, at minimum, so that the poster, with its multiple copies, duly competed in a mainly commercial environment, while it also stood out by its stark registration of absence.¹

Graphics aside, part of the text's arresting effect stems from its loadedness, how it assumes an apocalyptic belief in its reader by positing just this. That is, the text, in its uncanceled version, makes the reader's expectation of an end to things a precondition of its meaning. While the nature of the ending the reader is proposed to believe in is left unspecified, a vast scale is suggested by this same generality, making the message in the text a grave and urgent matter. Moreover, the paratextual trappings of the poster, its anonymity and its subversive claim on a space normally used to promote consumption, connote an insurgency characteristic of radical ideologies, groups on the fringe, who without the resources to mount posters might leave their xeroxed pamphlets on windshields or in subway cars. At the same time, the text speaks knowingly to the mainstream status of apocalyptic or millennial thinking in American culture--hardly less true today than in previous eras, as illustrated by many polls and cultural productions. Chances are, the reader does believe in an end to things, or is instructed to do so by

¹ Photos of this site may be viewed at
 <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/39744043@N08/sets/72157620042198941/>>.

religious tradition or, perhaps even more likely, certain versions of the modern narrative of progress, and believes that this ending will open onto a new, remade world. In this way, the nearly blank poster is a mirror, and the reader--especially in Brooklyn, onetime "City of Churches"--ought to recognize him- or herself in the partially canceled words.

But the second set of lines acts as a rejoinder to the initial thesis, so that even before striking through elements of the apocalyptic script first posited, the speaker makes corrections to the narrative. Instead of the imminent end of all things, "things don't think to end," which suggests not only an opposing sense of time, unbounded, non-rectilinear, but also the ongoing obduracy of the nonhuman world to modernistic projects for the mastering of nature. Although this insight creates a basis for constructing counternarratives that dissent from apocalyptic faith, it does not necessarily lead to a brighter or more peaceful set of temporal expectations. For while the fact of the world's non-ending makes a promise of new and different openings onto the future--futures that may not call for the end of things or for their collapse into divinely ordained homogeneity, as in the Book of Revelation--it also makes a threat by suggesting a lack of resolution or improvement to current problems. With no end in sight, the world may never be remade along the lines we would wish for; there may be no redemption for the unending suffering we witness; things may get worse before (never) getting better.

With its cancellations registered, the text reads: "You will be the opening to end the promise and the threat." This statement grants the passing reader a momentous, perhaps utopian degree of agency, while it paradoxically reinstates the narrative of ending the main text has just abolished. This effect rehearses a common critique of a

defeatist tendency in postmodernism: that its refusal of all master narratives in turn becomes the ground for a new totalization.² But this path that the text follows is also consistent with postmodernism's more hopeful if limited strategy of retaining the possibility of political or social transformation, but shifting its primary arena to the individual consciousness.³ Thus the second reading retraces the text's initial address and confirms the importance of the exchange, from which the ideal reader goes on, newly attuned to potential openings in the apocalyptic narrative that yet encodes so many discourses in contemporary culture.

The poster's call to the reader, the "you" who thinks that things will end, caught me with special poignancy, as I was then engaged in the writing of this dissertation, whose themes and arguments resonate with those of the discovered text in ways I will explain below. But I also especially felt the seductiveness of the poster's mode. For from the street, it was an impressively seamless work: no data about its origin or intent could be found by examining it up close, where I expected to find fine print with the name of a car or beer maker (it had happened to me before), or at best the URL of a covert web site, which I decided I would be willing to visit, and therefore to ignore the compunction I would normally feel about even acknowledging, let alone participating in so-called viral marketing schemes, all in the name of my project--which naturally I already had in mind when I walked by the poster. I rapidly imagined the detective work of locating the source for this subtle piece of art or propaganda as a scholarly challenge, a rare chance for a reader of contemporary literature to match the archival heroics of specialists in other fields, and thus a distinctive addition to this dissertation. But I could think of no other

2 For a balanced analysis of this and related problematics in postmodernism, see McGowan, especially 21-30.

3 See DeKoven 191 and Chapter Two, below.

first step for exploiting this research opportunity than to plug the basic text into Google. The mystery ended there.

The posters were connected to a current exhibition at the New Museum, a venue for contemporary art on Manhattan's Lower East Side that had just reopened in a much larger, flashier space than it occupied previously. On its web site, the museum published the series of thirty-one texts from which the several posters derived (the one discussed above is text number 9), along with related material.⁴ What the posters were almost invisibly promoting, or indeed extending, was a show called "The 7 ~~Lights~~," a display of the work of Paul Chan, a multimedia artist currently based in New York. Besides the online materials and a small number of drawings and sculptures, the show collected a series of digital animations that Chan first presented separately beginning in 2005. These formed the centerpiece of an exhibition to which the poster was an almost arbitrary sign.

Almost: for the apocalyptic is no less a theme of "The 7 ~~Lights~~" series than it is of the text I found in seeming isolation. Each "~~Light~~" is a landscape, projected onto a wall or floor, that depicts a slow unfolding of chaos. From a still, dawn-like opening, silhouetted objects begin to hurtle soundlessly across the viewing plane, into and out of view as if tossed by a whirlwind, in increasing number and intensity.⁵ The direct evocation of disaster--even if only in shadows thrown on a surface--and the solemn beauty of the settings are at first disappointing when compared to the bold ideological critique made by the poster text. That is, the visual work traffics in the apocalyptic sublime, much like the cheap allegories of many Hollywood disaster and monster movies. But the series

4 See the exhibition web site at <<http://www.newmuseum.org/paulchan/index.html>>. The additional material includes a dramatic dialogue and audio clips of excerpts read from eclectic works of critical theory (see <<http://www.newmuseum.org/paulchan/audio.html>>). These last are selected from the artist's "Private Alexandria," a part of his personal web site, nationalphilistine.com.

5 Films of the full series may be viewed online beginning at <<http://www.newmuseum.org/paulchan/1stlight.html>>.

ultimately demands a different kind of attention: the first six "~~Lights~~" last 14 minutes each before starting again--the seventh is represented only by a musical score--and the cycle of seven works suggests the passing of a week. The longer one views the projections, the more do surprising elements emerge. For example, the foreboding images of destruction find a counterpoint in the animation's gentle pace and by the whimsical randomness in the rendering of disorder. While human figures plummet through the sky, ungraceful cattle float upward amid streams of manufactured detritus, which ranges from cell phones to assault rifles.

Still, it turned out that the eye-opening text, which in hope I took for evidence that my critical instincts had been ratified by an emergent underground sensibility, was attached to an up-and-comer in the mainstream art world, a postmodern star (and a man about my age) whose profile has instead been described in boilerplate phrases of transgression: thus Chan is "one of the most trenchantly experimental artists working today" (Merjian 59) and "a controversial darling of the art world" (Paul). The very poster that was so intriguing on the construction site's temporary walls could be seen again in the less striking context of the museum's gift shop. There was also a deluxe exhibition catalog, and the "~~Lights~~" are now assembled on a DVD available through normal retail channels. By treating the apocalyptic theme with goofy irony, a familiar note in contemporary culture, Chan seemed to vitiate the urgency and originality of his textual commentary on the narrative, much as did the self-importance inherent in the New Museum's rebranding of the Bowery as a fully capitalized destination for downtown art.

On the other hand, despite the canniness on display in his saturation of the market, in other areas of his work Chan embraces techniques of the outsider which recall such

dissident-styled writers of a previous generation as Thomas Pynchon or Don DeLillo: it is conventional for profiles of Chan in the art press to include a recounting of the difficulties the journalist experienced in locating his rented, unmarked studio, or in contacting the otherwise friendly artist after the interview, as he regularly changes his e-mail address and discards his cell phone number. While Chan has placed works in the Venice and Whitney biennials, in parallel he undertakes more forthrightly political activities that demonstrate a mode of compassionate provocation consistent with the message of "the promise and the threat." These have included traveling to Iraq in 2002 with the nongovernmental organization Voices in the Wilderness and shooting a documentary video, "Baghdad in No Particular Order" (2003) about life in that city before the US invasion. In 2004 he collaborated on the "The People's Guide to the Republican National Convention," an exquisitely laid-out and freely distributed pamphlet with copious information of potential use to delegates visiting New York City and, more subtly, to protesters. And in 2007, he was primarily responsible for bringing the Classical Theater of Harlem's production of *Waiting for Godot* to post-Katrina New Orleans, an event he publicized using a familiar technique: white posters with just a fragment of Beckett's stage directions printed in black type. Hung on trees throughout the area, these flyers succeeded in bringing an audience of several thousand to each performance. Chan coordinated the fundraising efforts that attached to the production as well as a months-long program of local educational activities.⁶

The remarkable range of activism that Chan has carried out while also realizing complex artworks such as "The 7 ~~Lights~~" suggests that the crucial revision which his

⁶ See Cotter for a report on this event and accompanying background on Chan's career. Also see Rothkopf for descriptions of and astute commentary on Chan's work before the "~~Lights~~" series.

short text makes to the apocalyptic narrative, that "things don't think to end," may sustain an enabling, critical perspective on the defeatism that the precipitous deepening of global crisis in recent decades has often engendered. And Chan's rising profile as an engaged public artist, if one alternately diffident and complicit, may indicate an increasingly wide recognition for the more open-ended vision of a probably dismal future that his projections symbolize. I would like to take it as such, particularly as the notion is consistent with the thesis of this dissertation, that after the Cold War, writers with insight into the impacts of globalization have drawn heavily on the apocalyptic narrative form for predicting and describing the decline of social institutions and economic wellbeing that this set of processes has entailed worldwide, while they have strongly revised this narrative in order to distinguish the contemporary era by the collapse of any expectation that these trends toward disorder and breakdown might eventually find a clean, permanent resolution. In other words, where the Cold War created a uniquely terrifying and authentic apocalyptic scenario by its distribution of equally world-ending power among two opposing forces, the disappearance of that model and the advance of political and economic globalization have led to different ways of narrating large-scale catastrophe: away from the definitive, terminal disaster and toward endemic decline and breakdown. In a 2006 interview, Chan justifies his frequent claim that his activism should be considered separately from his art, because while collective political action requires the "consolidation" of individual identities and interests, "my art is nothing if not the dispersion of power" (Rothkopf 306). But here Chan seems to miss the place precisely where his art shows its highest attunement to the emerging sense of deepening instability in the contemporary social and political spheres. His landscapes of gradual, open-ended

apocalypse provide an excellent visual metaphor for the shift in narrative this dissertation proposes and details, while his comment on power's "dispersion" provides a theoretical basis for seeing his text's "promise" of non-ending as the opportunity for a diverse reconfiguration of power, rather than as the threat of its complete disintegration. Thus instead of representing the vision of an outcast or marginalized prophet, as I expected from its bizarre method of entry into discourse, "the opening" in Chan's poster is offered to the reader by a voice gifted with insight as well as growing stature in the culture of the day.

My evolving judgment of Paul Chan's work corresponds to the turns in context that this dissertation has undergone in its writing, though these have been more jarring. When I began conceiving the thesis in 2005, criticism of the apocalyptic formations in contemporary American society seemed an urgent if futile task. The government's "Global War on Terror" was using the rhetoric of crusade against intractable enemies in order to perpetuate, indeed to enhance Cold-War levels of militarism at home and aggression abroad. After the nation suffered a terrible, revelatory act of violence on September 11, 2001, its illegitimate leader had crudely translated the Manichean, Cold-War narrative of good versus evil onto what was, supposedly, a new problem, and his handlers' divisive strategy had been vindicated in the 2004 election. Missing from the new (old) framework was how this conflict could ever resolve in such a definitive way as promised by the Cold War's ultimate threat, which was mutual destruction of the two superpowers, along with the rest of the human world. Even if the spirit of the age were granted to terrorism--just as the military-industrial complex and its burgeoning security sector wanted--the narrative clearly needed adjustment, in favor of insecurity,

uncertainty, and irresolution. Or as the title of an acclaimed documentary about the US invasion and occupation of Iraq puts it: "No End in Sight." (Directed by a former Brookings Institution fellow, this 2007 film is a devastating anatomy of the extreme negligence that characterized the war's planning and execution. This won it praise from most anti-war commentators, who did not notice its total absence of consideration of the invasion as a legal or moral offense; one meaning of this dissertation's title is a reclaiming of the phrase for a study that I hope contains a more deeply engaged ethical perspective.)

It was in this context that I began to analyze the 1990s discourse on globalization to bring out its minoritarian strand, those contrary narratives that with varying shades of pessimism project disintegration as the trope of the post-Cold War future. The subject of my first chapter, these come from writers as ideologically various as Mike Davis and Robert Kaplan, as well as Samuel Huntington, who after a round of academic notoriety in the mid-'90s had reemerged in media discourse after September 11 as the prophet of civilizational clash. But his text more pertinently suggests that the ideal states of order and anarchy are in reality relative terms, and that the break-up of the Cold War geopolitical model would necessitate an ability to distinguish among levels of chaos. Policy pundits endorsing Huntington's vision of violent encounters with the Islamic world mainly ignored his accompanying recommendation that the US prepare for an era of declining power and influence as the geopolitical scene settled into a more diffuse, multipolar arrangement. In this sense, a critical project promoting slow decline and collapse as the dominant style of contemporary doomsday narrative still seemed to go against the grain of popular wisdom.

Thus Chapter One establishes the presence of this narrative in recent nonfiction writing on globalization and, in so doing, explicates the historical and theoretical framework for my argument, in greater detail than I therefore will attempt here. The remainder of this dissertation takes up the major contemporary novelists whose analysis of and insight into disorder mainly precedes--and exceeds--the theorists'. Chapter Two makes an exception to the American perspective of my study for the extraordinary work of Doris Lessing, whom I describe as a "prophet of global crisis" for her prescient texts of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While many critics still identify Lessing with the feminist persona suggested by her early, realist writing, or dismiss her for her late-'70s experiments in cosmic space fiction, what I call the "global phase" of novels in between displays the author's keen sense of contemporary trends toward increasing violence, incapable governments, and ecological devastation, as well as her foresight about how such disasters would come to be narrated by the end of the century. The proleptic "Appendix" to her 1969 novel, *The Four-Gated City*, warns against fixating against "apocalyptic convulsions" at the cost of neglecting "local catastrophic occurrences" already happening--a virtual thesis statement of this dissertation completed 40 years later.

In Chapter Three, I return to American literature, but to argue for Don DeLillo as a more globally attuned writer than has often been recognized due to his fiction's more obvious engagement with American themes and because of his connections to literary postmodernism, a movement forwarded by American critics and arguably limited to the Western perspective. I analyze *The Names* (1982) as an early statement of informed interest in the dynamics of globalization, then discuss *Underworld* (1997) as an epic rendering of post-Cold War malaise. Long fascinated with what he calls "the hinge of the

atomic age" that occurred in the postwar years, DeLillo depicts the unraveling of the American half-century as an equivalent hinge, but one that by contrast leads to nowhere, for, stripped of the oppressive but knowable parameters that the Cold War psychic regime instilled, the new age begins in chaos. *Cosmopolis* (2003) inhabits this chaos from inside one of its most privileged sites, the perspective of a superrich trader in currency flows who, at the height of the end-of-the-millennium dot-com boom, self-destructs while encountering the resentment of the disenfranchised.

Finally, Chapter Four is a reading of Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* (2006) as a text that represents the author's attempt to revise the apocalyptic framework he has maintained over nearly all his works, most notably *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). I conclude that with this text Pynchon corrects his analysis of global capitalism by setting his narrative at the turn of the twentieth century, which becomes a means of allegorizing the present. That is, the massively agglomerated cartelized state warned against in the earlier novel has been replaced in Pynchon's vision of evil with a loose network of predatory capitalists who pursue power unrestrained by law or scruple. The new narrative is structured according to what I call a "catastrophic sequence," a mathematical concept that Pynchon employs to convey history's loose convergence upon quasi-apocalyptic events such as the First World War, which are not truly world-ending and are never foreordained but which can seem to take climactic place in an ordered succession of like disasters. This stress on linearity, however hedged, opposes the disordering that Lessing and DeLillo perceive and suggests that despite his impassioned and astute portrayals of globalization's impact on masses of the world's populations, Pynchon retains an apocalyptic outlook, which is the narrative of the Cold War era, conditioned by his longtime gnostic

framework that persists in the novel's motifs of light against dark as a static conflict permanently shadowing history's surface changes.

The chapters of this dissertation then chart a double movement: from the establishment of the present theoretical moment as one of global disintegration, back to this formation's brilliant prediction by Lessing, then forward to DeLillo's murkier vision of the era's unraveling world, and then most recently to Pynchon's conflicted sense of history as open to revision but guided by catastrophe. Thus as the literary productions I select approach the contemporary moment, their apprehension of the crisis they describe only gets more uncertain, as befits the topic.

The rage at finance capitalists that Pynchon makes evident throughout *Against the Day* qualified as a prophetic stance in 2006, when that novel was published. As I write, in the spring of 2009, it is no longer a minority opinion. But as US government leaders continue to manage the global financial crisis according to the needs of US banking elites, it is a perspective that threatens to go underground in frustration once more. The current economic crisis marks the mainstreaming of the narrative of breakdown and disorder that is my subject, an outcome that in my view only adds to its importance. Whereas early in George W. Bush's tenure, clarity in decision making and "moral vision" was by many called a virtue, the emergence of the country's grievous financial position as an unignorable fact in the fall of 2008 made instability, unpredictability, and meltdown the keywords of the day. Suddenly, not knowing what might happen became the best reason to act promptly, and the existence of complexity was not only admitted, but worried over, as yet again the narrow range of a powerful sector's expertise was exposed. As reported in *The New York Times*, the "once-straightforward" operations of investment

trading, "developed for markets that everyone assumed would be like they were then, only more so, with capital freely flowing, rational minds prevailing and fear kept in check," were now recognized to have been "based on assumptions that ... no longer hold," just "a generation or two" later (Schwartz). The first explanation of the crisis was that no one knew what was happening. This was a sea change from the discourse of moral certainty that made neoconservatism a powerful and ultimately reigning ideology in US policymaking circles in the previous era.

The medieval mystic trope that DeLillo borrows to title a section of *Underworld*, "the cloud of unknowing," persists after the first shock. In Chapter One, I analyze what I call Mike Davis's disaster-driven theory of history, a propensity to seek a catastrophic form of the dialectic in all manner of natural and social phenomena. Yet even Davis was perplexed by the onset of the crisis. In an October 2008 essay, he compares the moment's attempts to think about it to explorers' first efforts to perceive the Grand Canyon, for "we are looking into an unprecedented abyss of economic and social turmoil that confounds our previous perceptions of historical risk. Our vertigo is intensified by our ignorance of the depth of the crisis or any sense of how far we might ultimately fall" ("Grand Canyon"). Asked five months later by PBS journalist Bill Moyers if he now had a better view, Davis said: "No. And the consensus is that no one does. ... [A]most nobody believes that the financial bailout is going to work. Nobody's seen the bottom here" ("American Dissenters"). Thus the experts are still in agreement that they don't know what's going to happen, leading paradoxically to measures taken at half-strength in the full expectation that they are unlikely to be effective.⁷ Davis speculates on the

⁷ While the right way forward remains obscure, within months of the crisis's advent, illuminating research into the system's failure emerged. Lewis and Einhorn offer one of the most lucid accounts; Taibbi the most pungent.

opportunity the crisis presents for right-wing nativism to resurge, and he moots the possibility of a left-driven "de-globalization" movement under the theory that "history ... can be reversed" ("American Dissenters"). But he has focused his research on the devastating impact of the downturn on the working class in his region, including the immigrants who he notes are the most vulnerable in light of how "the border economy has collapsed. The tourist economy along the border is dead. The maquiladoras, the border assembly plants are laying off ... How are people surviving?" His answer: by accepting ever worse living conditions and greater risk of incarceration, the kind of insecurity that has long been a principle of economic globalization's operation.

For describing upheaval, a rhetoric more measured than comparisons to sublime natural wonders comes from Immanuel Wallerstein, who since the late 1990s has referred to the contemporary period as "an age of transition" away from the capitalist world-system, a "time of troubles" in which structural change leads to chaotic violence at all levels of society. Interviewed about the current crisis, Wallerstein is almost blasé: "There it is. It's got a big financial crisis, the US, worst of all, I suppose. The dollar is just one currency among several and one power among others. ... There we are. ... [I]t's a chaotic situation and it will continue to be for some time ... a very unpleasant situation in terms of everyday life. A very dangerous one on the individual level and, I suppose, on a collective level" (Suh). This language draws on his analysis elsewhere, following physicist Ilya Prigogine, of how social structures transform under turbulence. Yet in a different text, Wallerstein like Davis finds use for a nature metaphor:

It's a bit like being in the path of a tornado. The worst can come upon governments suddenly. When that happens, they have only minutes to take shelter in their cellars. The tornado then passes, and if one is still alive, one comes out to survey the damage. ... But then the real argument begins--about how one rebuilds,

and how one fairly shares the benefits of rebuilding. ... [W]hat we do when we emerge from the cellar, whenever that is ... will be the real political battle. The key thing to realize is that rebuilding can take us into a far better world--but it can also take us into a far worse one. In either case, it will be a far different one. ("Politics of Economic Disaster")

Even when considering the financial crisis as a natural disaster, Wallerstein presents a more detached perspective than does the socialist-cum-journalist Davis, who openly champions the lineage of American radical progressivism and casts the current crisis as an opportunity for the left to "swell its ranks" and participate in the shaping of the future ("American Dissenters"), prone to catastrophe though his other writings suggest this will be. After all, Wallerstein implies, tornadoes happen. He nevertheless retains the utopian alternative within his field of possibilities, if the right forces can be applied at the right time. On the other hand, he suggests that an endless decline of wellbeing and a descent into insecurity and expanded inequality are equally likely to take place.

Thus is the apocalyptic narrative reframed as a source of rhetoric and images for powerfully describing the complex of crises that has arisen from and been exacerbated by the advance of economic globalization, as in the literature I discuss in the following chapters of this dissertation. But in these texts as in the political discourse of the present, we see that comfort is no longer sought in a narrative that promises ultimate resolution at the end of a dark period or of a campaign against a demonized enemy. Rather, these narratives map a world of many threats, marked by large- and small-scale catastrophes, by the chaotic disintegration of power, but also by its dispersion across the globe, wherein, they suggest, lies the potential for future political and social transformations.

Chapter One

Orders of Disorder:

Varieties of Globalization Narrative After the Cold War

At the beginning of the 1990s, the broad consensus on a single basic narrative of world power, shared for decades by policymakers on both sides of the Cold War as well as their academic and journalistic observers, fell away. In the resulting discursive gap, new narratives proliferated in the space of the "post-Cold War." Immediately, even before East Germans swept over and dismantled the Berlin Wall, many Western commentators adopted and promoted those narratives which portrayed the geopolitical scenario as an ideological vindication for the US and its allies. More specifically, the disappearance of the Soviet bloc as a "Second World" counterweight to the West sponsored a boom in narratives of the democratic integration of the world by capital and telecommunications. With the longstanding obstacle removed, this line of thinking assumed, Western-style institutions and practices would take their rightful places in every part of the globe, where the formerly benighted have-nots would emerge from their ideological chains to embrace Western ways and reward Western investments.

At virtually the same time, however, emerging from the same areas of discourse, and often articulated in response to this very narrative of globalization, was a set of darker alternatives to the simplistic story of how the West had won and of what riches this victory foretold. These contrary, gloomy visions of the near future, based on such concepts as "the clash of civilizations" (or "the West vs. the rest"), "the coming anarchy," and "the planet of slums" are by no means less ideologically fraught than the triumphalist

celebrations of self-righteous "progress," and perhaps even more so, as subsequent debate on them has demonstrated. Samuel Huntington and Robert D. Kaplan openly espouse a pessimistic conservatism with ancient roots that sits uncomfortably and perhaps not unconsciously close to modern racist and xenophobic ideologies, whose adherents welcomed and promoted the authors' arguments. Mike Davis's disaster-driven theory of historical change often resembles the paranoid genre of conspiracy theory, which has long been a venue for apocalyptic thinkers on the right as well as the left, where rather different objections to the contemporary social, political, or cultural order are likewise formulated as an impulse to wipe the slate clean and start over.

But as I will argue in this chapter, these often disturbing narratives, aside from having commanded considerable attention in the theoretical discourse on globalization in the 1990s and beyond, also carry out at least two important functions. First, more judiciously than the optimistic globalization narrative, they illustrate through reportage and theorization the negative consequences of the new geopolitics, in the wake of the dismantling of Cold War political structures and the onrush of economic globalization. That is, they offer material for challenging the histories being written by the victors and in this way join observers on the left, such as Eric Hobsbawm, who characterizes the post-Cold War world by increasing instability and vast inequality, who sees the crumbling of those institutions that had given shape and meaning to modern life on a collective and individual level, and who as a result states as the twentieth century closes that he cannot "look to the future with great optimism" (*On the Edge* 167).

And second, on the level of narrative, this pessimistic imagination, which warns of problems that globalization's prophets omit, if often itself omitting even any hope for

solving the problems it perceives, finds new and more varied expression for the doom-oriented narratives that Western culture has produced for many centuries. That is, the Cold War's rigid arrangement of massive power blocs, its tense atmosphere and unprecedentedly destructive weaponry led envisioners of catastrophe naturally and predominantly toward full-scale apocalyptic narratives of world-ending confrontation between two superpowered rivals. The writers of the new, quasi-apocalyptic narratives by contrast perceive a slowly spreading chaos, a gradually encroaching disorder. Rather than dreading, or relishing, the prospect of an apocalyptic event that wipes the slate clean, these writers instead describe a trend toward anarchy or, importantly, some level of it: the ending of a world but into a world precisely without an end to look forward to. Thus they open up possibilities for varied landscapes of decline, disorder, and decay, as well as providing a rejoinder to those who would cap world history with Western economic domination. While they hardly qualify to be called encouraging or enabling, such narratives do argue against the narrative relentlessly promoted in the 1990s by the Western elite. And by the early twenty-first century, as the easy promises of globalization had mainly failed to materialize--and the US in particular had clearly defaulted on securing them for its citizens, or enacting them abroad--many readers surely put more credence in these near-apocalyptic visions of slowly diminishing life conditions throughout the world, threats to safety from all directions, and permanent insecurity than in the globalization narrative that had flown high in the optimistic decade before.

Boom Time: The Globalization Narrative Has Its Day

Globalization in the 1990s, then, starred as the subject of a boom which the term itself in part describes. If its conceptual status never acquired the consensus which the Cold War "Three Worlds" model achieved,¹ still "globalization" was central to the most prominent accounts of the world's new ordering. With an articulate and charismatic proponent, President Bill Clinton, fortuitously coming to power as the US economy recovered from a recession early in the decade, the globalization of so-called free-trade capitalism came to seem an inevitable sequel to the falling of the Berlin Wall, to be hoped for no less than the spreading of democracy which the event most immediately called to mind. Equally important for the authority of the globalization idea was the simultaneous development of the Internet, a technology whose revolutionary power naturally fueled wild predictions for harmonious prosperity and democratization. For one of its most widely read promulgators, *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman, the narrative went like this:

globalization involves the inexorable integration of markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never witnessed before--in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations, and nation-states to reach around the world farther, faster, deeper and cheaper than ever before, and in a way that is also producing a powerful backlash from those brutalized or left behind by this new system. (7)

Thus the post-Cold War period as it unfolded took on, for its dominant narrative, an optimistic story of integration along three main dimensions, each of which promised to enhance prosperity and happiness. These dimensions were: the *political*, or the "one world" of liberal democracy, which was now to be universalized; the *economic*, or the

¹ Most succinctly described by Huntington--"During the Cold War global politics became bipolar and the world was divided into three parts" (*Clash* 21)--the narrative by which this model was produced is also clearly related by Blouet: "Quickly the postwar world was divided into blocs: a Western bloc led by the United States and a communist bloc dominated by the Soviet Union in Europe and by China in East Asia" (133).

"McWorld" of globalized free trade, which sought to render state controls over trade policies obsolete and to saturate world markets with goods and services designed for Western consumers; and the *technological*, or the "wired world" of effortless transnational flows, exemplified by the global Internet, which promised to accelerate the transmission of cash and selling of services as staggeringly as it would simple communication. These promises funded the arsenal of Western ideologues seeking to re-arm for the task of justifying and capitalizing on the unexpected collapse of the state-socialist system that had been the target of their criticism for decades. In this demise, such ideologues saw the opportunity as well to redress the borrowings Western governments had made, since World War II, of socialist premises of wealth redistribution and the state's responsibility for public welfare. As shown by Samir Amin and Eric Hobsbawm, who both argue a relative "golden age" existed in the postwar decades, Western countries had become to varying degrees--less so in the US than in Europe--welfare states, in order to reward the great sacrifice of their citizens and to avoid the prewar excesses and depredations of laissez-faire capitalism which, it was widely recognized, had wrecked the world's economy and contributed to the viability of fascism, not to mention the popularity of communism itself.

A number of prominent pundits therefore seized upon the globalization narrative in its various dimensions in order to preserve and carry over their roles seamlessly into the new era, when events in fact should have exposed their lack of credibility as seers. But it was also the case that "[t]he new situation required a new narrative" (Miyoshi 290), and so there was an opportunity for new commentators to emerge, so long as their narratives featured the superior Western mode of politics, economics, or technology at

the center. Friedman was the most successful of these new voices, and in a revealing account, he describes himself as a reporter casting about for what he calls "the lens, the perspective, the organizing system--the superstory--through which I would ... make sense of events, prioritize them, opine upon them and help readers understand them" (7).

Within the broad shift in cultural narrative that I have identified here, Friedman sets a personal narrative of discovery, one that takes him--and his career--from wayward confusion to order and light: "For several years, I, like everyone else, just referred to 'the post-Cold War world.' ... The more I traveled, though, the more it became apparent to me that this system had its own logic and deserved its own name: 'globalization'" (7). For Friedman--a journalist whose influential position has often been compared to that of Walter Lippmann, a wide-ranging commentator in earlier decades--the development of the "globalization system" is the master narrative of the late twentieth century, as the "new, very greased interconnected system called globalization" has, in an odd phrase, "firmly replaced" what he calls "the slow, stable, chopped-up Cold War system that had dominated international affairs since 1945" (xiii). Friedman writes with the zeal of the convert: "Globalization is not a phenomenon. It is not just some passing trend. Today it is the overarching international system shaping the domestic politics and foreign relations of virtually every country" (7).

As described by such promoters as Friedman, the political, economic, and technological dimensions of globalization often appear woven together, mutually imbricated and mutually dependent. Indeed their conflation is itself an important aspect of the integrationist narrative, which because it leaves the case unargued, elevates to common sense the notion that democracy and capitalism are existentially linked, that they

go together, and that their power and reach are indubitably enhanced by the Internet. Benjamin Barber, a political scientist whose project is the defense and renovation of democratic practice, notes this slippage already in 1994, when President Clinton referred to "democratic capitalism" while visiting the former Soviet republics (14). As Barber observes, this phrase indicates that the conceptual project of obfuscation was well underway:

The claim that democracy and markets are twins has become a commonplace of statesmanship, especially in light of the demise of state socialism, which has left capitalism's zealots free to regard themselves not only as victors in the Cold War but as the true champions of a democracy that (they are certain) markets alone make possible. Thus have they managed to parlay the already controversial claim that markets are free into the even more controversial claim that market freedom entails and even defines democracy. (14)

It can be argued that a mutualistic relationship between democracy and capitalism was already long stipulated by the West. During the Cold War, according to one of its chief historians, John Lewis Gaddis, these political-economic "twins"-- to use Barber's term-- underlay the Marshall Plan, whose purpose in 1947 was consciously "to create an alternative to communism, within the framework of democracy and capitalism, which would remove the economic and social desperation that drove people to communism in the first place" (98). However, crafted as it was with the real appeal of the socialist alternative as well as the disastrous prewar failures of capitalism in mind, the Marshall Plan represented a very different sort of capitalism than the free-market style ubiquitously promoted at the end of the century. Likewise, postwar internationalist institutions, namely the IMF and the World Bank, began their tenure under Keynesian principles, before turning into agents of market liberalization in developing nations after the Cold War. Still, it has been a commonplace to associate democracy with capitalism, along with the

technological innovations that advance capitalism's evolution while arguably decreasing actual freedom, from Eli Whitney's cotton gin to Henry Ford's mass production techniques, and Clinton's phrase "democratic capitalism" is then only an improvement in semantic efficiency.

But by that token, rhetorically articulating discrete dimensions of activity becomes yet more crucial to the pro-globalization narrative's task to provide a rationale for extending the Western style of life around the world. Yet as Arjun Appadurai has shown, the various dimensions of globalization can be distinguished conceptually even when they are tangled factually ("Disjuncture and Difference"). Toward that end, I want briefly to lay out the integrationist narrative in its three main types, so as to highlight my claim, stated above, that in the 1990s they are increasingly undercut by a set of darker alternatives, which therefore persist as a minoritarian argument throughout the salad days of globalization theory.

Political Integration: "One World," or the End of History

The most immediate dimension of the post-Cold War integrationist narrative was the political, as suggested by the dramatic images from Berlin in 1989 (and, more problematically, from Romania and Tienanmen Square). Here Francis Fukuyama's essay "The End of History?" claimed priority in the campaign to identify and control the new world order. The essay was published in *The National Interest*, a journal that had been recently established by Irving Kristol, one of American political culture's foremost neoconservative-née-Marxist intellectuals, and which was supported by several foundations and "think tanks" of like ideological bent (Atlas 38). But the writer was a

previously unknown State Department official, whose near anonymity and canny timing lent mystique to the essay's prophetic attitude when it was published in 1989. It gained wide publicity in the generalist media, as well as in specialist circles, where it was often dismissed but nevertheless solicited comment. Of these, the most valuable is, perhaps surprisingly, by the eminent Marxist critic Perry Anderson, who praises the essay for "its clarity and boldness," and in a genealogical critique of some length, demonstrates the "substantial and intricate history behind the idea with which Fukuyama startled the world's journalists in the summer of 1989" (283, 331).

In the essay, Fukuyama reports as if from a remote but privileged vantage point, whence he surveys "the flow of events over the past decade or so" and in this turbid stream, clearly perceives an "unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism" (3). Grounded in an interpretation of Hegel and, to a lesser extent, Weber, Fukuyama's argument presents the triumph of the First World as proceeding not from the strategic interests of the US and its allies so much as from longrunning tendencies inherent to the human race: "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (4).

Fukuyama's argument is an implicit attack on styles of thought that disclaim the importance of cultural norms or morals on group behavior, such as "realist" foreign policy and neoclassical economics, as well as Weberian theories of rationalization, which emphasize top-down bureaucratic command--though Max Weber's historical notions of culture driving social change are touchstones for the thesis. In "The End of History?" as

well as his later writings, Fukuyama continually envisions a strong and inevitable tendency toward political, economic, and social integration--integration with the prevailing order, for which his work simultaneously apologizes. No matter the area under study, for Fukuyama, modernity's once-dialectical "evolution" is essentially complete, rendering a static political scene where all phenomena flow through the readymade categories of the Western philosophical tradition. Although his "end of history" thesis does not announce an end to all violence, reserving the possibility that international conflicts would continue for some time on a reduced scale, the problems he sees facing "contemporary democracies[,] ... from drugs, homelessness, and crime to environmental damage and the frivolity of consumerism," are precisely the subjects he sees an end for in subsequent books (*End of History* xxi).

This serenely integrated future defines Fukuyama's identity as a visionary of political globalization, so much so that the only notes of discontent in his thesis come from the essay's concluding twist: the idea that the settled future state will bore those lucky enough to live in it.

The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. ("End of History?" 18)

The sense of melancholy here Krishan Kumar describes as "sober to the point of depression," in that for Fukuyama the universal spread of liberalism "seems to drive out of human life much that made that life worthwhile" (206). This nostalgia for a premodern world of honor derives from reading Friedrich Nietzsche, and Fukuyama borrows from Nietzsche's language when he suggests that people at the end of history are "men without

chests," hollowly committed to the forms of liberal tolerance, unattached to any of the ideals whose expression liberalism protects (*End of History* 300-14). In a subsequent retrospective exchange with critics of the "end of history" thesis, he coyly questions "the assumption that I am fundamentally optimistic" ("Five Years Later" 42). That is, he endorses Susan Shell's description of *The End of History and the Last Man* as the "most pessimistic of optimistic books" (45), and raises the question of whether we can know that ultimately "liberal democracy is a good thing" for society's future. He stops at an ironically postmodernist "*aporia*," he says, claiming to lack enough epistemological insight into which parts of the soul, if it exists, a political system should satisfy (43).

Economic Integration: "McWorld," Here We Are

While the rapidly unfolding political dimension of the globalization narrative had the most immediate and dramatic impact on the narrative's discursive visibility, the economic dimension had equally or more important consequences. From the perspective of economic integration, the wave of "democratization" in 1989 was most useful for selling the world on the globalization of free market capitalism, which was the more deeply motivated and longrunning project. Fukuyama leaves no doubt that he sees the triumph of "economic *and* political liberalism" in the signs of the times (3, emphasis added). Friedman is more direct: "The driving idea behind globalization is free-market capitalism--the more you let market forces rule and the more you open your economy to free trade and competition, the more efficient and flourishing your economy will be. Globalization means the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world" (8). The term means many other things, but Friedman's comment reveals the core

concern of the pro-globalization narrative: to seize all the world as a potential market or trading partner, subtracting the tariffs and other regulations that sovereign states traditionally imposed to give their citizens and native industries a competitive advantage. In its pursuit of efficiency and profit margins, globalized free market capitalism encourages the disassembly of local, integral manufacturing set-ups in favor of a global separation of labor, removing unskilled work from otherwise advanced countries to developing regions. It consolidates local businesses into multinational corporations, leading to a smaller range of products that are, however, available worldwide, at least where consumers can afford them.

This and related trends are well captured by Barber's term "McWorld," which he describes as the result of "economic forces that have globalism as their conscious object ... the latest round in capitalism's long-standing search for world markets and global consumers" (13). Like the set of phenomena defined as globalization, McWorld refers to a number of processes, but fundamentally, "McWorld is nothing if not a market" (28). The accession of this ideology to unchecked supremacy in the West means, for Barber, the decline of democratic publics, as citizens lose their consciousness of membership in a public larger than themselves and think of themselves only as consumers, particularly in the developed countries from where production has been removed. As Barber suggests, this drive toward the marketization of all areas of life is not new in the post-Cold War world, for it is inherent to capitalism's operation, but it received a new wave of endorsement from global institutions and ultimately Western society at large in the years following the Cold War, as globalization-as-integration emerged as a dominant cultural narrative.

The economic dimension of globalization circulated through more insidious forms of promotion than the political dimension, because it was more diffusely located than were the rarefied policy debates of Fukuyama and his pundit peers. But Barber and Friedman show that the primary sources for this narrative in the 1990s were definitively the corporate discourses of management and advertising. Thus Barber's chief sorts of evidence for describing McWorld are not related theories in political science or economics, but advertising campaigns and the public statements of corporate executives. His analysis of their power at times verges on genuine admiration. Likewise, Friedman mainly abjures academic perspectives on his subject, preferring to consult hedge fund managers--"the only real thriving school of globalists in the world today," he remarks approvingly (21). Economic globalization has become a more indelible narrative than globalization's political dimension, the narrative of universalized democracy, not only because empirical developments confirm it, but also because the economic narrative was woven more tightly and located more widely in the cultural consensus in the late twentieth century. Through popularizers like Friedman, the notion of a rising tide that lifts boats globally came to seem indisputable to Western investing classes, with the only dissent coming from researchers on the left and advocates of strict monetary policy on the right. Nonetheless, by the 2008 election season, a significant percentage of American workers--if not the more mobile "middle class" continuously addressed by Democratic candidates--articulated its deep opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement secured by President Clinton in 1993, indicating that even economic liberalism could exceed an outer limit.

This "backlash" to globalization Friedman briefly considers toward the end of *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999), perhaps the most important text for popularizing the economic globalization narrative, but the concept is more fully theorized by Barber in *Jihad vs. McWorld* (1995). "Jihad" is his collective name for the various parochializing responses entailed by globalization. In an important qualification of his book's title, he writes: "Jihad stands not so much in stark opposition as in subtle counterpoint to McWorld and is itself a dialectical response to modernity whose features both reflect and reinforce the modern world's virtues and vices--Jihad *via* McWorld rather than Jihad *versus* McWorld" (157). Thus the globalizing forces of capitalism take priority over agonized reactions to their effects, and they have the upper hand all along their way to the ultimate victory Barber also predicts. Ironically, however, because of the "freedom" with which McWorld structures its markets, "McWorld has no choice but to service, even to package and market Jihad" (155). That is, many different anti-globalist, anti-Western, anti-capitalist, and anti-modern constituencies use advanced or semi-advanced economic and technological capabilities to broadcast their opposition to these trends.

However, while Barber envisions these aggrieved parties fading in the long run, as "McWorld's homogenization is likely to establish a macropeace that favors the triumph of commerce and its markets ..." (19), others have suggested that the dialectic Barber describes is more deeply inscribed in globalization's operation. According to Stuart Hall's theory of "global mass culture"--the cultural dimension and product of Barber's McWorld--the homogenization entailed by globalization is "enormously absorptive ... but the homogenization is never absolutely complete, and it does not work for completeness" (28). That is, global capitalism thrives on cultural differences, even produces them, in

order to profit from them, even as it wants to "absorb those differences within the larger, overarching framework of what is essentially an American conception of the world" (28). Thus outside of Barber's tragicomic (comic-but-tragic) narrative of fiercely contested but ultimately prevailing integration, against which he endorses the hope for a social democratic revival, there exists a more chaotic possibility, that of endlessly produced differences within a loosely centralized authority. The stronger sense of globalization's homogeneity and inexorability expressed by Barber, writing in 1995, as compared to Hall, writing in 1989, testifies to the globalization narrative's enhanced acceptance through the decade, such that even a critic like Barber sees it as a fait accompli by the mid-1990s.

Technological Integration: Hype the "Wired World"

The technological dimension of the globalization narrative received no less attention than the political or economic dimensions, and in the popular press, perhaps more. Friedman and Barber each assign crucial roles in their arguments for the impact of the Internet and related technologies, which they see as indispensable for free market capitalism's successful global search for profit and its expansion of the range of services available to be performed in the virtual realm or moved around to take advantage of low-wage labor. For Friedman, these technologies are marvelous and indispensable to the definition of what he calls "Globalization Round II," as a sequel to the early-twentieth-century expansion of trade based on improved transportation technology. In contrast, "[t]oday's era of globalization is built around falling telecommunications costs--thanks to microchips, satellites, fiber optics and the Internet. These new technologies are able to

weave the world together even tighter" (xv). The parochialist "backlash," not to mention the uneven and temporary nature of the Internet boom, is mainly absent from Friedman's view here, as Barber points out, commenting on a 1994 Friedman column which claims that ethnic and territorial conflicts around the world are subsiding as the parties are "compelled to beat their swords into plowshares simultaneously by economic forces" (qtd. in Barber 223). Barber responds that rather, "McWorld's denizens are consumers and clients whose freedom consists of the right to buy in markets they cannot control and whose identity is imposed on them by a consumerism they scarcely notice" (223).

But Barber also engages in hyperbole, seemingly an inescapable register for discussions of the Internet, when he comes to the concept he repeatedly coins, "the infotainment telesector." Again relying primarily on corporate self-promotion and advertising jargon, he defines this area as "goods [which] are increasingly associated with or defined by symbolic interactions that belong to the service sector in its postmodern, virtual economy manifestations ... soft technologies rooted in information, entertainment, and lifestyle ... in which products are emerging that blur the line between goods and services" (59). Barber spins a narrative of deep techno-economic transformation, and the narrative has the surprisingly parochialist message of trumpeting the US's performance in the global economy:

tomorrow's McWorld will be less about resources than about goods, less about manufactured goods than about goods tied to telecommunication and information; less about goods than about services; less about services in general than about information, telecommunication, and entertainment services; less about software per se than about cultural software of the kind found in images and sound bites being manufactured in advertising agencies and film studios. As we follow this logic and move along the economic spectrum it describes, the United States looks better and better and bigger and bigger and the story of the fall of America from economic grace looks more and more suspect. (77)

With this analysis, Barber means to counter and, it would seem, assuage the fear spread by declinists, those who see America in the process of falling from its position of dominance, particularly in economic terms, in favor of China, Japan, or India--theorists such as Paul Kennedy, whose *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) Friedman also attacks, for deferring excessively to the lessons of history and failing to recognize the "fundamentally new state of affairs" that, he claims, is globalization (19).

The prophetic precursor for technology boosters such as Barber and Friedman is Marshall McLuhan, a literary scholar who in the 1960s acquired extraordinary popular recognition for a series of deeply theoretical but pointedly cryptic texts that announced a transformation in the culture's psychic relationship to information and technology. As Lewis Lapham notes in his introduction to a timely 1994 reissue of McLuhan's seminal book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, not only did the author "introduce[] into the language our present usage of the term *media*, as well as a number of other precepts, among them 'global village' and 'Age of Information' that have since become commonplaces" (x, emphasis original), he "anticipate[d] by two decades the dissolution of international frontiers and the collapse of the Cold War" (xv). That is, McLuhan, rather as Benedict Anderson would later argue, saw nationalism as a political-cultural correlative of the print revolution in technology, "breaking the individual out of the traditional group while providing a model of how to add individual to individual in a massive agglomeration of power" (172). The unstoppable drive into the new information age, or "electric" forms of communication, meant a corresponding psychic shift, this time toward the global: "The immediate prospect for literate, fragmented Western man encountering the electric implosion within his own culture is his steady and rapid

transformation into a complex and depth-structured person emotionally aware of his total interdependence with the rest of human society" (50-51). Thus McLuhan's relevance for the 1990s' technological integrationists, "the more visionary promoters of 'the Information Superhighway'" Lapham finds in the magazine *Wired*, who "talk about the late-twentieth-century substitution of 'the Icon of the Net for the Icon of the Atom,' about the virtues of 'the hive mind' ... about the connectedness of 'all circuits, all intelligence, all things economic and ecological,' about the revised definitions of self that take account of mankind's 'distributed, headless, emergent wholeness'" (xviii). Enthusiastically speculating on the effects of undeniably significant innovations, promoters of technological integration shift the discourse on globalization to another plane with their creation of "the virtual realm," where no rhetoric is too broad, because no claim can be tested.

McLuhan, however, did not foresee a utopia. Rather, he theorized sweeping changes already in process, for which he feared all societies, but especially those which had long since completed the shift toward and were therefore settled on modern individualism and rationalism, were unprepared. Like the prophets he was derided for resembling, he sought to avert dire consequences at what he perceived as a crucial moment, when business cannot go on as usual: "So what is to be done? Do we dare to confront such facts at the conscious level, or is it best to becloud and repress such matters until some violence releases us from the entire burden? For the fate of implosion and interdependence is more terrible for Western man than the fate of explosion and independence for tribal man" (51). Prefiguring Barber's terms, he describes "[r]epresentatives of the older Western individualism"--elements of Barber's "Jihad" in

the Western world--such as, perhaps, the John Birch Society, as "tribally dedicated to opposing the tribal" (51), a potential backlash to the backlash. In terms of political organization, McLuhan advocates an order of partial disintegration as a strategy for adjusting to the now globally dispersed, but "electrically" integrated organization of consciousness: "The implosion of electric energy in our century cannot be met by explosion or expansion, but it can be met by decentralism and the flexibility of multiple small centers" (71). While these lines might be inserted into a management manual for a 1990s "dot.com" corporate venture, McLuhan's aim is to make such a wholesale transition imaginatively possible, not profitable: "If we persist in a conventional approach to these developments our traditional culture will be swept aside as scholasticism was in the sixteenth century," by print technology (71).

Thus there is contained in McLuhan's vision of boundless, inexorable technological change a dialectical possibility of catastrophic disintegration, premised on societies taking tribalist, expansionary, or aggressive responses--responses on the wrong plane, based on false or outmoded concepts--to the civilization-wide psychic "implosion" his work was often received as simply promoting. To evoke an apocalyptic tone for describing the consequences of such failure to adapt, McLuhan cites Arnold Toynbee, the mid-twentieth-century author of a massive, portentous work of world history: "More often geographical expansion [of a society] is a concomitant of real decline and coincides with a 'time of troubles' or a universal state--both of them stages of decline and disintegration" (qtd. in McLuhan 71).

Similarly, however much Barber overestimates the novelty and totality of his "McWorld" and "Jihad," often taking their agents' claims at face value, his vision of the

failure that would be--or already is--entailed by systemic neglect of democratic institutions and practices is as dark and backward-looking as Toynbee's or McLuhan's: "And so we are returned to the metaphor of feudalism, that puzzling world of fragments knit together by the abstraction of Christianity. Today's abstraction is the consumers' market, no less universal for all its insistent materialist secularism" (12). The lords of this neomedieval landscape are "the irresponsible and wholly random individuals or ... corporations that are [McWorld's] current proprietors" (151). The ultimate victory of the seamless McWorld predicted by Barber is as much his nightmare as if Jihad were to prevail, and he uses the same concepts to express the idea of political disintegration--anarchy and neomedievalism--that also color the prominent counternarratives which describe globalization's alternative scenarios, as I will show next.

Finally, another suggestion of this alternative set of narratives, contained within the optimistic would-be master narrative of globalization, appears in Friedman's bold overview of the "fundamentally new" world he has so deftly navigated. Unexpectedly, the risk accompanying the rewards his narrative promises elsewhere appears as a pervasive, threatening underside:

If the defining anxiety of the Cold War was fear of annihilation from an enemy you knew all too well in a world struggle that was fixed and stable, the defining anxiety in globalization is fear of rapid change from an enemy you can't see, touch or feel--a sense that your job, community or workplace can be changed at any moment by anonymous economic and technological forces that are anything but stable. (11)

Friedman here provides a remarkably pithy example of my argument in this chapter, if deemphasized and also delimited to the mundane terms of the white-collar, capital management world he takes to be his primary audience. Besides the narrative of massive but knowable and structured Cold War fears dissipating into generalized anxiety and

insecurity, note also the extreme anarchy that slips unnamed into Friedman's social vision. Later in the text, he claims that globalization "gives more power to individuals ... than at any time in history" and asserts the new existence of "[s]uper-empowered individuals able to act directly on the world stage without the traditional mediation of governments, corporations or any other public or private institutions" (13). The first quotation describes the converse of the phenomenon imagined in the second, seemingly a state of nature where everything outside the individual and his office is an attacking "enemy," including the modern social institutions that, following Thomas Hobbes, were created centuries ago to ameliorate insecurities of just this kind.

The convergence of these darkly atavistic or anarchic undertones in globalization's most popular theorists is an apt point for turning to countertheories of globalization, the near-apocalyptic narratives which, yet more than Toynbee, emphasize the "decline and disintegration" issuing from political, economic, and technological globalization and, in so doing, map ways for envisioning large-scale collapse at the end of the twentieth century. My main subjects are the most prominent and complex outlets for these themes: Samuel Huntington, like Fukuyama a political scientist who found general appeal in the 1990s, and Robert Kaplan and Mike Davis, more or less scholarly writers of geopolitical journalism who come to some similarly near-apocalyptic conclusions from opposing ideological starting points.

Disintegration and Retrenchment: Samuel P. Huntington

Like the globalization narrative itself, its rejoinders took shape first along the political dimension, where the narrative could be debated theoretically but also most

visibly contested empirically. Thus Samuel Huntington was one of the first grave naysayers to Fukuyama but in turn developed his own counternarrative. The terse "No Exit: The Errors of Endism" followed Fukuyama's "The End of History?" in *The National Interest* in 1989 before the author published a similarly theoretical essay with a pointedly similar title, "The Clash of Civilizations?," in the more established *Foreign Affairs* in 1993.

With this essay, Huntington proposed a narrative that generated controversy not only for emphasizing the differences between cultures, and for insisting that such differences necessarily lead to violence, but also for suggesting that the post-Cold War scene would be increasingly dominated and defined by such violence, and that globalization rather than ending conflict in fact would further it by bringing these differences into greater contact than in any previous era. Thus early in the essay's book-length sequel, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996), Huntington criticizes the partiality of simplistically peaceful integration theories such as Fukuyama's, in order to establish his contrasting vision for the disintegration of the Cold War geopolitical arrangement: "The forces of integration in the world are real and are precisely what are generating counterforces of cultural assertion and civilizational consciousness" (*Clash* 36). On the other hand, also partial for Huntington is the strictly bifurcated "two-part world picture" used by these counterforces--Barber's "Jihad"--to simplify the scene of global conflict (32). In Huntington's view, "[a]s people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an 'us' versus 'them' relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion" (29).

It bears articulating here that the premise shared by Huntington and Fukuyama, despite their different theoretical outlooks, is that the "Three Worlds" model of Cold War geopolitics has been totally dismantled, necessitating a new model, all the more so because of the speed and abruptness of the breakup. In contrast to the decades of clearly drawn, tightly wound antagonism that defined the Cold War--what Friedman above calls "a world struggle that was fixed and stable"--the period ended in sudden confusion. Despite the fast changes in the USSR's politics and economy since 1985 under Mikhail Gorbachev, no Western analysts were prepared for the Communist world to collapse so quickly (Gaddis makes this point repeatedly). Free marketeers may have crowed, but the actual defenders of democratic capitalism, Western military leaders and policymakers, such as Huntington, tasked with responding to these real changes, faced a crisis, as they had for decades depended for their strategic projections on the long-term existence of a monolithic enemy.

Importantly, their sense of alarm at the lack of a model for imagining the world was shared across the ideological spectrum, even by critics whose Marxist sympathies had long been jaded, and now were likewise set adrift. For example, Giovanni Arrighi writes, "the sudden demise of the USSR as one of the two main loci of world power ... at the close of the twentieth century eminently subverted the intellectual conceptual landscape" (21). Susan Buck-Morss concurs: "this fundamental shift in the historical map shattered an entire conception of the world, on both sides" (8). Whereas the Cold War geopolitical model could be described tersely--"During the Cold War global politics became bipolar and the world was divided into three parts" (Huntington, *Clash* 21)--what followed was conceived as fragments, as Buck-Morss vividly describes: "From 1988 to

1993 ... the Cold War disintegrated. The imaginary topology of two irreconcilable enemies, ready and able to defend themselves by destroying life on this planet, dissipated with the abruptness of a disappearing dream" (xx).

Such a ruined theoretical milieu suits Huntington's narrative propensities. "This is Samuel P. Huntington's moment," begins a summer 2002 article by Stanley Kurtz in the conservative journal *Policy Review*. As they had in the 1990s, many commentators after September 11 compared Huntington and Fukuyama, but now at the latter's expense. For social conservative ideologues such as Kurtz, it was a vindication: "The world of cultural and religious strife anticipated by Huntington in his much-discussed (and widely excoriated) book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, has unquestionably arrived." Kurtz's parenthesis points to the earlier round of mainly left, mainly academic criticism of Huntington's work upon its publication in the mid-1990s, when his argument was a minoritarian voice. Then Huntington seemed to be speaking from an atavistic fringe of the academy, as if in oblique service to the conservative campaign against "political correctness."

By contrast, Huntington's narrative found authority and approval in popular discourse after September 11, as Kurtz claims, precisely because the US putatively entered a state of war after the attacks, and particularly as their perpetrators resembled Friedman's very type of enemy under globalization, one "you can't see, touch, or feel," because in this case lacking a clear national, military source. Huntington's "moment" was one of frightened confusion, when redefining the risks and rewards of globalization seemed as suddenly necessary as it did after the Cold War's disappearance. In a study of Huntington's reception in this period, Ervand Abrahamian finds that "the mainstream

media in the USA automatically, implicitly and unanimously adopted Huntington's paradigm to explain September 11" (529-30). And Philip Seib explains that the media "were receptive to a new geopolitical scheme" to orient their international coverage in the absence of the Cold War model (72).

Huntington's circulation in current events discourse in 2001 renewed and elevated academic criticism of his theory. The most serious attack came on the status of his central premise of "civilizations," and then on Huntington's controversial assessment of Islamic civilization in particular, which in his view has had "bloody borders" (*Clash* 254). Seifudein Adem Hussien notes that Huntington does not write, "for instance, 'the borders between Islam and other civilizations are bloody.' After all, when we talk about a border our points of reference are two or more phenomena" (32). Most prominently, Edward Said recalls that civilizations in fact always display "internal dynamics and plurality" and that "the definition and interpretation" of a civilization is always at issue within the civilization itself ("Clash of Ignorance"). In contrast, Huntington's civilizations are internally monolithic and essentially unchanging. Said calls his mapmaking "cartoonlike" and alludes to Popeye and Bluto. In his text, Huntington argues plausibly that to function as an abstraction an intellectual construct needs to simplify from reality, even if it "omits many things, distorts some things, and obscures others" (*Clash* 29). But the specific distortions Huntington makes, as well as his decision not to consider his "civilizations" as in fact "the trope of civilizations," to cite one of his more recent and gentle critics (Appadurai, *Fear* 116), open his thesis to severe ideological critique.

Like the other writers under study in this chapter, Huntington aims at prophecy, looking into the future for its broad outlines, even its mood, which, as Said notes, he

maps in broad strokes of culture. Significantly, with the "clash of civilizations" theory Huntington departs from political "realism," the dominant strain of political science in whose spirit he had done much of his previous work in international relations, "strategic studies," and the advising of US Departments of State (all under Democratic presidents). The realist orientation focuses Eurocentrically on the modern international system of states, which it assumes can be predicted to act only in gross self-interest, according to their relative power within the system. As such, realists, typified by Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski, discount culture and ideology as motivating factors and generally dedicate policy to safeguarding the status quo against shocks or upheaval. But in his new narrative, Huntington promotes culture as the force that will shape the new international scene: "In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural" (*Clash* 21). This cultural turn explains the appeal of the formerly realist Huntington to social conservatives like Kurtz and links him to neoconservatives like Fukuyama, despite the differences in their predicted outcomes for their various culture wars.

Thus Huntington's narrative "hypothesis" is that, rather than struggles between nation-states for economic supremacy or over ideology, beginning in the late twentieth century "[c]onflict between civilizations will be the latest phase of the evolution of conflict in the modern world" ("Clash" 22). Boundaries of civilizations--massive, even primordial identity groups based on traditional culture, kinship, and religion--emerge as "fault lines" in the new political order, replacing the tripartite Cold War divisions, now "no longer relevant" (25, 23). An attempt to write into being the character of a new age and predict the longer-term political implications of globalization, Huntington's "clash of

civilizations" posits that differences between cultural groups are "fundamental," as these groups are irreducible "civilizations" (25). In 2001, an argument for the emerging salience and intractability of cultural differences offered an explanation for terrorist violence by making it seem inevitable, based on ancient history or even basic essences, and detached from any narrative that could be told about the US and its foreign policy.

A corollary rarely acknowledged in citations of Huntington but more relevant to my argument is his suggestion that the new scenario must mean "declining" relative power for the West, now just one of the world's "seven or eight major civilizations" (*Clash* 20, 21). The echo here of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1922) is not casual: though Huntington contextualizes his theorizing of the "civilization" concept with a vast number of references, he lists these in a prodigious footnote that begins with a quotation from Spengler (324-25). Even more than McLuhan's figure of warning, Toynbee, Spengler is the twentieth century's main exemplar of the historical prophet of doom. He based his grand work on a Darwinian theory of societies as organic entities which inevitably follow a process of growth, apotheosis, and decay. Writing in Germany between the world wars, he contested the West's progress narrative by suggesting that "the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, hitherto looked on as the highest point of an ascending straight line of world-history, are in reality a stage of life which may be observed in every Culture that has ripened to its limit" (12). Spengler's terms oppose "Culture" to "Civilization": the latter is the ultimately overdeveloped phase of the former, so that in Europe's case, "[t]he 'Decline of the West' comprises nothing less than the problem of *Civilization*" (9, emphasis original). Huntington uses this language but upends Spengler's romanticism--his bias toward the organic--by arguing for the terms' continuity

and for civilization's ontological superiority from the historian's perspective: "a civilization is a culture writ large" (*Clash* 41). In fact, for Huntington, it is the aggravated assertions of cultural differences in the post-Cold War world that threaten civilizations' stability.

To Huntington, the groups newly asserting themselves are multiple and essentially dissimilar, so that "[i]nstead of 'East and West,' it is more appropriate to speak of 'the West and the rest'" (*Clash* 33). With lines like this, he disperses the dimensions of conflict in many and new directions, adopting a defensive, embattled stance toward the outside world on the assumption that groups of people relate by antagonism: "We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against" (21). The implications of this posture are best captured in a 2004 letter by Patrick Buchanan, conservative pundit and onetime campaigner for the US Republican presidential nomination on an isolationist, anti-immigrant program. Responding to "The Hispanic Challenge," an essay Huntington published in his journal *Foreign Policy*, Buchanan closes, "Welcome to the Alamo, professor." Huntington elaborates this position in *Who Are We?* (2004), a question which in *The Clash of Civilizations* he calls "the most basic question humans can face," one motivating the culturally inflected global politics of the day (21).

Huntington warns that America and Europe should recognize their liberal democratic political ideas as particular, historical developments of Western culture and therefore abandon "universalist pretensions" (*Clash* 20). Predictions for world integration as in Fukuyama are typical of postwar euphoria, Huntington says (32), but the age that follows is never so bright. Instead, the civilization is newly, gravely imperiled, such that

the very "survival of the West depends on Americans reaffirming their Western identity and Westerners accepting their civilization as unique not universal and uniting to renew and preserve it against challenges from non-Western societies" (20-21). The passage's strangely passionate call for diminishment and retrenchment suggests Huntington's affinity with Toynbee, the other key twentieth-century prophet of civilizational decline, who over the 12 volumes of *A Study of History* (1934-61), so improved his appraisal of Western Christian civilization as to ultimately promote it as a bulwark against the decline his theory of history otherwise predicts.² Huntington, however, stops short of making such an exception for the fate of the West. Though its role in the modernization process since 1500 has given the West an unprecedentedly global impact, this fact should not lead to illusions of immortality: "The evidence of history and the judgments of the scholars of the comparative history of civilizations suggest otherwise" (*Clash* 302). At issue for Huntington is the civilization's survival, not a bid for permanence, even of its ideas.

What Huntington describes is the disintegration of a world and the dispersal of power. Conceptually, this phenomenon is in an important sense a historical retrogression. Whereas Cold War politics played out across a "bipolar" axis, that arrangement has "collapsed" and fragmented into a "multipolar, multicivilizational world" (*Clash* 21). From his embattled perspective, this shift entails a multiplication of dangers and an increase in risk. Yet it is also in a sense a return to normalcy. In contrast with the globalization narrative's boosters, for Huntington it was the bipolar Cold War that represented a historically new development, in that its scope of conflict was "truly global" (32). Previously, power struggles had been "a game played out within Western civilization," within the modern international system and by extension through the

2 For historians' appraisals of Toynbee's work, see McNeill 12-13 and Pollard 167-77.

colonizing enterprise ("Clash" 48). Before then, intercivilizational "encounters" were limited and sporadic (*Clash* 48). The breakup of the Cold War blocs then partially restores an earlier state of affairs, and in this way Huntington's vision is atavistic: his "seven or eight" civilizations are ostensibly based on ancient groupings. But making the difference now is modernization, whose communication technologies ensure that civilizations will remain in contact in the new age. And Huntington is sure that contact will be friction.

It is as important, however, to see Huntington's disintegrative vision from the other side: it has limits. That is, in his view the power blocs of the Cold War have fragmented, and the orderly assumptions of international relations are now challenged by the forces of seemingly irrational cultural politics, but this dispersal of power only goes so far. The world as he sees it is settling into new power blocs which demonstrate a logic as they form by cultural affinity. Huntington's thesis is as much about the "emerging order" and the "reconfiguration" of power as it is about disordering and fragmentation (*Clash* 125). Huntington agrees that the end of the Cold War means significant changes for geopolitics, and unlike Fukuyama's orderly process of culmination, his vision has the world passing through a profoundly unsettled period. Likewise but from an opposing political perspective, Immanuel Wallerstein foresees an imminent "time of trouble," as well as a precipitous decline in US power and influence, leading to a new world system whose dimensions are entirely unknown. With more certainty, Huntington predicts that the next phase, even once fully evolved, will be more violent and unstable than the last. But after a period of shifting and settling, this describable order will emerge, a more complex world but one resembling earlier eras. In this way, though he does not subscribe

to it, Huntington fits a "neomedievalist" paradigm, as evoked by Barber and McLuhan. According to political scientists such as Philip G. Cerny, neomedievalism emphasizes states' diminished sovereignty under globalization and the fracturing of the Westphalian international system ("New Security Dilemma"). By describing a retrogression to something like a historical Dark Age, Huntington is on the side of disintegration and dispersal, but far from the limit. He affirms the eventual emergence of order even as he narrates the current order's disintegration.

To this point, Huntington explicitly quarrels with the notion of absolute disorder, yet expresses a certain attraction to it. He raises "the chaos paradigm" as one of the "world pictures" he means his thesis to excel. In their favor, Huntington admits, promoters of "sheer chaos" grasp what is new about the post-Cold War world:

the breakdown of governmental authority; the breakup of states; the intensification of tribal, ethnic, and religious conflict; the emergence of international criminal mafias; refugees multiplying into the tens of millions; the proliferation of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction; the spread of terrorism; the prevalence of massacres and ethnic cleansing. (*Clash* 35)

The problem, oddly, is that this terrifying model is "too close to reality" (35). With this comment, Huntington evokes an almost Lacanian sense of the real as incomprehensible streams of phenomena, a sense he then confirms with a crucial statement of his aim: "The world may be chaos but it is not totally without order" (35).

The matter of audience determines Huntington's perspective: as popular as his book became after September 11, as a political scientist he casts it toward "developing guidelines for government policy makers" (35). It would seem that Huntington the philosopher can hold that "[t]he world is indeed anarchical, rife with tribal and nationality conflicts," but Huntington the professional must undertake the job for "understanding the world, for ordering events and evaluating their importance, for predicting trends in the

anarchy, [and] for distinguishing among types of chaos and their possibly different causes and consequences" (35). A full critical evaluation of Huntington's thought would pursue the ethical question of why then he has chosen this profession, why he has put these particular disciplinary constraints on such a sweeping vision. For unlike Fukuyama, who writes unsympathetically about those laggards in the world "still in history," or Friedman, who conceives of his task in terms similar to Huntington's but explicitly tailored to and by the world of finance capital, Huntington sees the West's present comforts as contingent and gotten through real battles rather than contests of ideas. Aware how fragile is the status quo, he nonetheless seeks strategies for preserving it against the wants and needs of others. Thus for the purpose of strategy, he largely avoids the language of anarchy and chaos in favor of outlining dimensions of conflict amid a degree of order.

The Impasse of Anarchy: Robert D. Kaplan

If the discourse of international relations structures Huntington's narrative of severe but limited disintegration, that discourse does not then harness his narrative's potential affinities with others that more fully embrace the tropes of dispersal and fragmentation. Huntington's thesis and mood directly inform Robert Kaplan's essay, "The Coming Anarchy," first published in 1994, but the text carries the disintegrationist narrative mode to a significantly further extent. Where Huntington describes a certain retrogression, falling back from the conceptually simple, "bipolar" Cold War system of worldwide power blocs to a more fractured and regional geopolitical scene resembling that of pre-globalization "dark ages," Kaplan imagines a complex, novel mechanism, one he calls "postmodern," for generating unending chaos across multiple levels of social

organization. In his writing, the disintegrating world finds no settled state at which to rest, proceeding toward an atomized, borderless realm. Putatively historical conflicts are revived, such as between the Hutus and Tsutsis in Rwanda, but these take place at much more local levels than Huntington's "civilizational" conflicts, deep within societies rather than at their borders. And these revenant conflicts are continually amplified and transformed by economic and cultural globalization. Meanwhile no consensus emerges for social practice or political life, and entire regions return to Hobbes's "war of all against all." Huntington envisions deep and lasting disruption of the present geopolitical order, but Kaplan has no disciplinary constraints, and he conjures a future that would qualify as apocalyptic, if only the author expected relief to arrive at the end of the trajectory he narrates; he does not.

Kaplan is not an expert but a journalist who in his most provocative writing calls on scholars such as Huntington as theoretical gurus from a variety of disciplines, whose ideas he then synthesizes with his reportage and his reading, mainly of the classics. Thus at the height of his fame, a *New York Times* reviewer applauds his ability to merge "literature and analysis, storytelling and philosophy, observation and history in a way that few writers even dare nowadays" (Garfinkle). Not timid, Kaplan states his aim in "The Coming Anarchy": "to remap the political earth the way it will be a few decades hence" (7). Though a popular author, Kaplan in fact wishes to address the same audience as does Huntington; thus he presents a collection of literary essays promoting the wisdom of ancient writers as "a useful guide for statesmen" on "leadership" (*Warrior Politics* 15).

But he embraces the prophetic calling that Huntington by comparison subdues. Many of his paragraphs begin with declarations about the future: "Future wars will be

those of communal survival, aggravated or, in many cases, caused by environmental scarcity" (*Coming Anarchy* 49). This voice seems calculated to invite disbelief at its limit, as when Kaplan casually claims that the processes of disintegration "will make the United States less of a nation that it is today, even as it gains territory following the peaceful dissolution of Canada" (56). But even this sentence illustrates how he writes with some style and much urgency, qualities which, again to cite *The New York Times*, made "The Coming Anarchy"'s republication as a book in 2000 "not only a literary event but also ... one bound to jostle the broad community of policy intellectuals as well" (Garfinkle). Indeed in a reversal of the migration by geopolitical theorists Huntington and Fukuyama into the broader cultural imaginary at the close of the Cold War with the "clash of civilizations" and "end of history" ideas, Kaplan's journalism may have had real impact on US foreign policy in the 1990s: according to David Lipsky, reading *Balkan Ghosts* (1993) convinced President Clinton not to send US armed forces into Bosnia.

Certainly Kaplan contributed to the building of a popular narrative and set of images with which to describe the kinds of conflicts that arose at the peripheries of the broken Cold War blocs. He and other journalists made a steady delivery of "coming anarchy" stories from various milieus, not only the Balkans but West Africa--where he claims is the "natural point of departure" for the narration of disorder (7)--and the Caucasus--"a flashpoint of cultural and racial war" (28-29), thereby supporting certain arguments by opponents of the globalization narrative that a Fukuyama-style political integration of the world was at best remote and therefore any "peace dividend" toward social welfare ought to be set aside. Kaplan's characters are warlords and crime bosses, and his themes are re-tribalization along (sometimes spurious) ethnic divisions, states'

loss of internal sovereignty, and unchecked population growth leading to environmental crisis. His vision foresees proliferating "small-scale violence" among and within "warrior societies operating at a time of unprecedented resource scarcity and planetary overcrowding" (48-49). His message is to maintain and even enhance Cold-War levels of US militarism and to reorient its energies toward "a new kind of war," whose distinction from crime blurs (43, 49).

Kaplan's writing thus aptly suits the ideological project which, as Masao Miyoshi explains, was a priority for the military-industrial-Congressional establishment after the end of the Cold War:

In the world after 1990, where the rationale of the security state system was reduced to a defense against a handful of ramshackle rogue states, direct subsidies to corporations of vast sums in the name of defense became difficult to justify. The new situation required a new narrative. Hence, the state insisted that there was actually no peace; that local, civil, and tribal wars were chaotic and unpredictable, and so even more hazardous to the United States than the cold war; that religious and cultural conflicts were bound to break out; that the United States and other industrial nations must remain rich and strong to defend civilization; and that corporate wealth best brings prosperity to the general population. (290)

Unlike ostensibly more liberal pundits like Friedman, Kaplan never champions global corporate capitalism, citing in *Warrior Politics* how through its inherently "unequal distribution" it produces a tiny, decadent elite alongside, "more ominously, the new subproletariat: the billions of working poor, recently arrived from the countryside, inhabiting the expanding squatters' settlements that surround big cities in Africa, Eurasia, and South America" (4-5). But the currency and reach of the militarist ideas he promotes can be marked by the wide publicity of the strategies for the "new kind of war" that, according to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the US was supposed to enter after September 11. Under this concept--the original, pre-Iraq vision announced for the "global

war on terror"--flexible intelligence units would complement a "fast and light" main force by engaging in small-scale acts of espionage and violence according to their study of local conflicts. And indeed, according to Lipsky, Kaplan was consulted earlier in 2001 by the inexperienced new US president, who after September 11 would demonstrate his learning by asserting, "It's a new kind of war. And I understand it's a new kind of war."

Thus like Huntington, Kaplan had a presence, if not a second "moment," in the discourse that attempted to define the post-Cold War world as "the age of terror" (see Talbott). In a significant departure from the themes of Kaplan's writing, however, the US despite its new strategy simultaneously rejected the interpretation of terrorist acts as crimes and insisted on linking terrorist groups to state governments. But the failure of the new military strategy in concept, execution, or both in Afghanistan, then Iraq may still account for how Kaplan's reputation has suffered in recent years: after *The New York Times* honored six of the author's books between 1993 and 2000, Lipsky attacks not only Kaplan's writing but his career motives in a 2004 review of *Imperial Grunts*. However, Kaplan notably did not recommend the invasion of Iraq. Characteristically, he has written little about current conflicts, instead raising the alarm about future ones, such as with China.

"The Coming Anarchy" contains Kaplan's most creative synthesis of concepts and narrative, and it is the most vivid instance of his disintegrationist vision.³ The "new map" Kaplan produces step-by-step in the essay is a dynamic, complex model of near total disorder. He interweaves examples from a very typology of disintegration in an attempt to represent the forms of social and political chaos that, in his view, are resulting from

3 For a sense of the essay's popular impact, see the blog "Coming Anarchy: Speak Victorian, Think Pagan" at <<http://www.cominganarchy.com/>>, whose contributors (in a disclaimer of copyright infringement) cite Kaplan (whom they call "The Man") as "a great influence on our political outlooks."

modernity's failures. More precisely, for Kaplan, this spreading chaos begins with the failure of governments in "much of the undeveloped world" to control their populations--in numbers and behavior--and so has brought on "the withering away of central governments, the rise of tribal and regional domains, the unchecked spread of disease, and the growing pervasiveness of war" and crime (9).

Kaplan shares Huntington's aim to serve as a corrective to overly optimistic narratives of global integration and order. His essay's subtitle reads: "Shattering the Dreams of the Post Cold War." As likely as "the coming anarchy" itself, the implied subject of this phrase is the author, who as the Cold War power blocs fracture, wants to take a hammer to ideas of quickly spreading prosperity or everlasting democracy. This pessimistic task challenges the popular narrative of "winning the Cold War" by the force of political will, as well as Fukuyama's ideological thesis, and to that extent it is salutary. But in a typical procedure, the more powerfully to evoke predicted cataclysms still looming, Kaplan makes a point of deemphasizing the events of 1989, dramatic changes which actually took place: "When the Berlin Wall was falling, in November 1989, I happened to be in Kosovo, covering a riot between Serbs and Albanians. The future was in Kosovo, I told myself that night, not in Berlin" (57). With a rhetorically "shattering" entry into the enterprise of geopolitical prophecy, Kaplan claims great authority as a seer of the next phase of crisis, for which he hopes to define the discourse pre-emptively. But in so doing, he forecloses hope for the present era still unfolding.

Early in the essay's anarchy tour, Kaplan's project is given the aid of a powerful image:

Think of a stretch limo in the potholed streets of New York City, where homeless beggars live. Inside the limo are the air-conditioned postindustrial regions of

North America, Europe, the emerging Pacific Rim, and a few other isolated places, with their trade summitry and computer-information highways. Outside is the rest of mankind, going in a completely different direction. (24)

The bluntly articulated metaphor of the "stretch limo" comes from the environmental theorist Thomas Fraser Homer-Dixon, like Huntington one of Kaplan's guru-prophets, and one he authenticates as "an unlikely Jeremiah." As evinced in this passage, Homer-Dixon broadcasts a remarkably myopic brand of elitist anti-cosmopolitanism; his stereotyping leads one to wonder if he has ever been to the New York City he maligns. Kaplan's hymnlike description of the young scholar growing up "amid the sylvan majesty of Vancouver Island, attending private day schools ... an only child whose playground was a virtually untouched wilderness and seacoast" only confirms this impression (23). But Homer-Dixon's metaphor provides a useful figure for Kaplan's preliminary argument: that in the wake of globalization "a bifurcated world" arrives, essentially split between the few haves, who by capitalizing technology can protect themselves from their environment as they degrade it, and the majority of have-nots, who lack any resources to leverage against population-driven "natural disasters." Kaplan then by allusion to Hegel and Fukuyama allegorizes these groups as "Last Man" and "First Man."

The affinities between Kaplan, whose analysis here describes a perpetual war based on economic class, and Fukuyama, whose globalization narrative predicts the peaceful universalization of Western politics and economics, may seem obscure, but they illuminate the conservative assumptions behind Kaplan's sometimes innovative synthesis of ideas. Fukuyama is the first reader Kaplan thanks in the acknowledgments to *Warrior Politics*. The two writers project opposite futures for the world, guaranteed harmony versus total anarchy. Fukuyama expresses a mostly laissez-faire attitude toward social behaviors under the liberal capitalist umbrella, so long as those behaviors do not harm the

society's ability to turn profits, and he is confident that the tide of negative behaviors in the late twentieth century--which he traces to the 1960s--will naturally wane. Meanwhile Kaplan enjoins the learning of "pagan" virtues and "warrior" ethics in order to survive and command a world where "crime" becomes ubiquitous.

But both writers in fact share Huntington's emphasis on "culture" as the key problem area for future societies. For example, Kaplan in "The Coming Anarchy" finds a domestic parallel for the agents of Balkanization he witnesses in conflict zones across the globe: American "Afrocentrists," whom he criticizes for their "sensitivity factor," which threatens US cultural integrity, and for their irresponsible insistence that the US help solve crises in Africa (*Coming Anarchy* 55-57). Likewise, Fukuyama demonstrates what Kerwin Lee Klein calls "the double plot of universal history" common to postmodern thinkers such as Stephen Greenblatt and James Clifford, in that he "sees both an increasing assimilation of peoples into the spirit of liberal democracy contingently allied with capitalism and a growing diversity of local traditions" (296). But from Fukuyama's subsequent writings, it becomes clear that he values local traditions only to the point that they do not create obstacles to the process of integration around which a society has agreed to form its "higher values and aspirations," which according to him, for modern societies is ultimately always economic growth, in the Protestant tradition which he valorizes above all others (*Trust* 306). It is possible to be too diverse, as in the case of multilingualism: "Diversity can have clear benefits for a society, but is better taken in small sips than in large gulps" (306). And particular manifestations of diversity are themselves "roadblocks," where an "honest multiculturalism would recognize that some cultural traits are not helpful in the sustenance of a healthy democratic political system

and capitalist economy" (318). Particularly unhelpful cultural traits mentioned in *Trust* include those of African, Irish, and Italian Americans, as well as those of more recent identity-based demographics, interested in expanding the sphere of private rights at the cost of social coherence. In a sense, then, Fukuyama and Kaplan see the same problems through different-colored glasses, and the same forces of disintegration that Fukuyama dismisses as historical aberrations Kaplan holds to be primary drivers.

The radical degree of Kaplan's conservatism can also be measured by the evidence of his philosophical lineage. Adam Garfinkle puts this point in anodyne terms when he writes in his review of *The Coming Anarchy* that Kaplan, like Leo Strauss, who along with Allan Bloom was a mentor in neoconservative philosophy to Fukuyama and many other contemporary US policy intellectuals, "believes that there is an accumulated wisdom of the ages, and that an effort to tap that wisdom is well worth the effort." This tendency makes Kaplan, "informally at least, a Straussian realist," according to Garfinkle. Indeed like many provocateurs, Kaplan claims to be a "realist": in this context, one who has the fortitude to address "issues, often extremely unpleasant to discuss, that will soon confront our civilization" (*Coming Anarchy* 7). And as a reader well-versed in the ancient historians, he amply shares Strauss and Bloom's reverence for classical virtues, though how this value can be sensibly joined with "realism" needs explaining. Yet here Kaplan and Fukuyama lie again at revealingly converse positions, in that the Straussian idealist Fukuyama in each of his books works backward, using modern social science research to validate ancient Greek conceptions of human nature and therefore endorse the status quo, while Kaplan proposes that reading Livy "helps us [or, presumably, our 'statesmen,' to whom the book is addressed] understand our own" times (*Warrior Politics* 29). Reading

the classics can certainly be recommended on many grounds, but for Kaplan the matter goes deeper. He predicts that as "future crises arrive in steep waves, our leaders will realize that the world is not 'modern' or 'postmodern,' but only a continuation of the 'ancient': a world that, despite its technologies, the best Chinese, Greek, and Roman philosophers might have been able to cope with" (*Warrior Politics* 15). The only elements of the modernization process to endure the coming anarchy will be the technological ones, which themselves still are contingent.

Kaplan thus goes beyond the neomedievalism suggested by Huntington's retrogressive map of civilizations to see the restoration of a harsh, premodern landscape, as illustrated in the next section of "The Coming Anarchy," where he sets Homer-Dixon's xenophobic image into motion:

Outside the stretch limo would be a rundown, crowded planet of skinhead Cossacks and *juju* warriors, influenced by the worst refuse of Western pop culture and ancient tribal hatreds, and battling over scraps of overused earth in guerrilla conflicts that ripple across continents and intersect in no discernible pattern--meaning there's no easy-to-define threat. (29-30)

To enhance the environmental theorist's simple opposition of resource capabilities, Kaplan shades the stark scenario with overlapping layers of "cultural conflict," in the manner of Huntington (26). The figures of "skinhead Cossacks and *juju* warriors" represent what for Kaplan are the absurd bricolage effects inspired by globalization's unevenness. Having already branded contemporary African versions of traditional religious practices "superficial," Kaplan here equates these and like uses of the past with ephemeral and, in this context, meaningless artifacts of "Western pop culture," even when the hostilities they revive are, he believes, truly "ancient."

These contested borders then proliferate according to inherent motivating principles, so that ultimately, despite his announced intentions, the scheme Kaplan calls

forth is in fact unmappable: approaching true chaos, the conflicts move in waves with "no discernible pattern." Against this totalizing projection of anarchy, Kaplan's many specific geopolitical predictions in the rest of the essay, such as the dissolution of Canada, begin to seem negligible. He acknowledges this by evoking unnamed major events he promises "yet to come": "The crack-up of the Soviet empire and the coming end of Arab-Israeli military confrontation are merely prologues to the really big changes that lie ahead" (30). Kaplan quotes a "long-range thinker for the U.S. Navy," who from his mysterious expertise observes, "We are not in charge of the environment and the world is not following us. It is going in many directions. Do not assume that democratic capitalism is the last word in human social evolution" (30). Likewise, in the final section of the essay, when Kaplan goes to revise his scheme of the world's conflicts according to the scenes he has traversed, he finds he needs "three dimensions, as if in a hologram" (50). He announces, "Henceforward the map of the world will never be static. This future map--in a sense, the 'Last Map'--will be an ever-mutating representation of chaos" (50-51). Having dismissed pre-globalization political maps as "lies" for being Eurocentric and two-dimensional, thereby clearing space for his own "remapping," Kaplan wants to bring his revision of cartography finally closer to theoretical physics. But instead he reaches a conceptual impasse described in modern philosophy by Ludwig Wittgenstein: "in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought)" (qtd. in Berger 13). Kaplan's attempt to map the kind of chaos that Huntington abjures still ends in compromise, for even the most extreme account of disintegration relies on techniques of representation.

Perhaps for this reason, Kaplan's passage on the undeveloped world's "skinhead Cossacks and *juju* warriors" is not deaf to the vibrant energy that chaos connotes, even if he disparages the projects undertaken there as issueless noise. Kaplan premises that one's response to disorder is fear, and throughout the essay he makes claims for his vision's "terrifying" power. But when, for example, with respect to the modern international system, he defines postmodernism as "an epoch of themeless juxtapositions, in which the classificatory grid of nation-states is going to be replaced by a jagged-glass pattern of city-states, shanty-states, nebulous and anarchic regionalisms" (43-44), it becomes unclear whether Kaplan abhors or admires the disintegration he calls forth. His language evokes the spectacular appeal of disaster, which recalls Jean-François Lyotard's "postmodern sublime" and may drive him to intensify his envisioning of change and disorder.

Yet a conflicted attitude toward scenarios born of pessimistic outlook may also represent a nascent ethic of adaptation. To this end, Kaplan shows self-consciousness only in one section of the essay, where the possibility of adjusting one's perspective briefly enters as a theme. And again this opening is framed in the language of aesthetics. When Kaplan turns to describing what communities he finds successfully managing life outside the stretch limo, a basis for relativistic coexistence begins to emerge, as he declares,

To see the twenty-first century truly, one's eyes must learn a different set of aesthetics. One must reject the overly stylized images of travel magazines, with their inviting photographs of exotic villages and glamorous downtowns. There are far too many millions whose dreams are more vulgar, more real--whose raw energies and desires will overwhelm the visions of the elites, remaking the future into something frighteningly new. (31)

In part, to be sure, this passage takes issue with generic expectations of travel writing and participates in the author's "branding" of himself. And its anti-elitism is not populism: there are "far too many" of these millions, and their dreams, like so much in the essay, are "frightening." Yet counterposed to the irrelevant desires of "the elites," the have-nots' vulgarity and reality assume a more positive value and, to take "aesthetics" at face value, even beauty. Perhaps here is the logical implication of the essay's persistent interest in figuration: to the extent that Kaplan's prophecy relies on visionary representation, it implies "a different set of aesthetics," which entail a range or scale of beauty, and which can be learned.

This instability in Kaplan's descriptive procedure as applied to cultural others recalls Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's analysis that "the *exclusion* necessary to the formation of social identity at one level is simultaneously a *production* at the level of the Imaginary, and a production, what is more, of a complex hybrid fantasy emerging out of the very attempt to demarcate boundaries" (193, emphasis original). Still, granted a fantastic inclination, Kaplan hardly dives in headfirst, flatly stating, "in Turkey I learned that shantytowns are not all bad" (31). And what makes him see potential redemption in these slums is the survival of what he sees vanishing on a massive scale everywhere else: "order." Order for Kaplan signifies "dignity," clean interiors, and low rates of substance abuse and crime. Unusually, it is he, not the reader, who is scared: "Slum quarters in Abidjan terrify and repel the outsider. In Turkey it is the opposite. The closer I got to Golden Mountain the better it looked, and the safer I felt" (31). This slum he finds "rather wholesome, crime-free," but it turns out to have relatively rare preconditions: "development and urbanization [that] have been more gradual" than in Iran and the Arab

nations, because of a lack of any coveted resources, as well as a history of nationalist feeling, which nonetheless is fading (32). Sounding like Huntington, Kaplan finds this process where "resurgent Islam and Turkic cultural identity" temper one another to have "produced a civilization with natural muscle tone" (32).

Against this almost eugenicist conclusion, Kaplan's open, even vulnerable admission of the virtues of a hybrid culture demonstrates how a narrative of disintegration turns back even upon itself when pushed so aggressively toward its limit. That Kaplan can trace the genealogy of this virtuous slum's demographics argues against the utter "themelessness" he claims to find in the post-Cold War political scene's juxtapositions or migration patterns. Kaplan's apparent desire to shatter the modern world and live as a sage among barbarous warlords almost acknowledges its defeat in the Turkish slum by the indelibility of history and, as Huntington would argue, the irreducibility of some level of order.

Disintegration by Design: Mike Davis

In September 2007, Mike Davis published a collection whose title, *In Praise of Barbarians: Essays Against Empire*, aptly suggests how his ideological point of view contrasts with that of Kaplan, who offers a conservative critique of empire as folly while from the left, Davis condemns it as exploitation. Kaplan shares the anti-cosmopolitanism of his gurus Homer-Dixon and Huntington, while Davis praises the spontaneous energies and "magical urbanist" practices of Latino immigrant communities in California. More deeply anti-elitist than Kaplan and unfailingly populist, Davis is often led by his Marxist orientation to sanctify episodes from the Progressive era early in the twentieth century,

asking "what if?" of the tantalizing facts of major socialist gains in that period. Yet aside from his monumentalizations of those years, Davis through an astonishing variety of topical researches tells a thickly detailed story of a world always on the brink of several disasters and somehow still getting closer to the edge. Across his texts, Davis writes a massive critical history of social disintegration under capitalism. In his narrative, the processes of disintegration are less randomly dispersed, more consciously organized than Kaplan's, and therefore more nefarious. Yet for Davis the world is falling apart nonetheless surely. The final, apocalyptic consequences he foresees for ruling class brutality and profit-driven economies have yet to materialize, but especially in his recent work "Planet of Slums" (2004), he describes the future as anyway beyond repair.

Popularly regarded as "Jeremiah among the palms" and "L.A.'s dark prophet" (MacAdams), Davis particularly in his earlier writings enters the apocalyptic tradition which for Huntington and Kaplan came through mainly as a general mood. The apocalyptic aspects of Marxist thought, on the other hand, are near the surface. One need not push its historical teleology too far to present it as a secularization of the apocalyptic narrative, with the revolution as a replacement for the Second Coming. Davis never sketches out the path to the realm of freedom, but his Marxism is not simply a method of analysis. Perhaps because the prospects for social upheaval since the end of the Cold War have seemed so remote, Marxism informs his preference to see sudden disaster or cataclysm as the primary vehicle for historical change, even for subjects normally outside the purview of dialectical materialism. For example, *Ecology of Fear* (1998), his second study of Los Angeles, finds a host of urgent ecological tipping points hitherto hidden by the city's masters from public knowledge.

But the most remarkable illustration of this tendency of Davis's thought is a text whose title, intending to provoke, recalls the influential "think pieces" by policy intellectuals Fukuyama and Huntington: "Cosmic Dancers on History's Stage?" In this prodigiously detailed essay, Davis finds a parallel for his disaster-oriented thinking in a scientific debate among astronomers. He reports but also champions a paradigm shift still in process, moving away from a Newtonian model of "the Earth as a closed system" where changes happen only gradually and according to the inherent logic of its constituent variables, toward a "nonlinear" model of the Earth as significantly affected by unpredictable events from outside itself, even outside the solar system--all of which mainly means reinterpreting the importance of meteorite crashes on the Earth throughout the ages. This new, "'bottom-up' narrative" privileges "a kind of deterministic chaos" as a major factor in the Earth's geology, climate, and other fundamental conditions (*Dead Cities* 330). The new model, which has convinced the layman Davis, though he quarrels with a few details, "is radically historical--which is to say, chaotic--and impact cratering is its existential moment ... [This] conception of the solar system as *bricolage*, however, prescribes innumerable possible evolutionary paths out of the same initial conditions," which contingencies are set most often by unpredicted cataclysms like meteoric explosions (331). This is "coherent catastrophism," raising catastrophe, over and against gradual Darwinian progress, to an operating principle of the cosmos, indeed "arguing a scientific case for cosmic intervention in human history" (338). This account of what Davis calls "the Earth's strange waltz with apocalyptic comets" is itself an apocalyptic narrative, in that "life on a planetary scale is periodically renewed by extraterrestrial cataclysm" (336-37). More important for him, however, is the new paradigm's

astronomical equivalent for the Marxist-Hegelian dialectical process of history: this theory holds that "Nature usually proceeds by leaps" (321). So Davis rejects predetermined historical stages in favor of outbreaks of chaos which determine history's course. But he reconciles this idea with Marxian dialectics by figuring these outbreaks as instances of "the leap" required for the dialectic to advance to the next phase--in this case, whatever that may be. He then reveals his purpose to be openly allegorical, concluding that cataclysmic meteorite "impacts are the functional equivalent for wars and revolutions in human history" (346). Thus Davis roves the interdisciplinary landscape in search of corroboration for his Marx-inspired, disaster-driven vision of history.

Though Davis recalls the apocalyptic dimensions of the Marxist historical narrative, he may also be placed within the ancient tradition of prophecy. He justifies the title of "Jeremiah among the palms" if we understand the prophet's role as, like Jeremiah, to excoriate his community for perceived backsliding and to warn of divine penalties, for which a range of "cosmic interventions" would understandably pass. However, Jeremiah's sense that his community had promised to meet high obligations and therefore showed higher promise is usually absent from Davis's writing; perhaps referring to the Progressive heroes of the past fulfills this convention, but again, the method for connecting their historical moment to the present remains obscure, particularly when Davis depicts that present as so critically dire.

Instead, Davis fits a subcategory within the "divided apocalypse" identified by Michael Barkun, who proposes that in the twentieth century a tradition of scientific apocalypse gained new prominence alongside the older and broader religious one. In the scientific apocalyptic strain, prominent in the ecological criticism of the 1960s and 1970s

by such authors as Barry Commoner and Jonathan Schell, there is an "undercurrent of anxiety about the unintended consequences of dominating nature and brutally revealing her secrets" (Jay 86). So in *Ecology of Fear*, Davis heightens and publicizes this anxiety by illuminating ecological problems most readers will have not suspected, such as the underreported threats to Los Angeles by tornadoes, on one hand (149-94), and diseased squirrels, on the other (249-60). The text invokes the specter of religious apocalypse as it describes a "virtually biblical conjugation of disaster" in the 1990s and muses whether "this vicious circle of disaster is coincidental or eschatological" (8). But it turns to scientific apocalypse to argue that the local cataclysms are symptoms of a sinful, secret plot against nature:

Paranoia about nature, of course, distracts attention from the obvious fact that Los Angeles has deliberately put itself in harm's way. For generations, market-driven urbanization has transgressed environmental common sense. ... As a result, Southern California has reaped flood, fire, and earthquake tragedies that were as avoidable, as unnatural, as the beating of Rodney King and the ensuing explosion in the streets. ... But the social construction of 'natural disaster' is largely hidden from view ... in the service of rampant greed. (9)

The conspiratorial architects of disaster, here unnamed and generalized, are the city's corporate and political class, who along with other economic elites continually externalize the costs of shoring up the world as they build defenses against its unstoppable disintegration, which they have caused.

Importantly, then, Davis's version of scientific apocalypse is more properly what I will call, adjusting Barkun's categories, "social apocalypse." For these narratives of impending political and social disaster, he retains the characters of religious apocalypse, demonic leaders and heroic sufferers, while he again uses allegory to link ecological and social cataclysm. The passage above cites the riots in Los Angeles in 1992, "the ensuing explosion" after four white LAPD officers who viciously beat an unarmed black man

were acquitted by a mostly white jury. This event, coming after Davis published *City of Quartz* (1990), his first work of social apocalypse, was what seemed to many, especially on the left, evidence for the author's power as a prophet, the inverse equivalent of September 11 for Huntington. In a critical essay, Adam Shatz details the riots' positive effect for the author's career, but elsewhere Davis generously disavows special prophetic insight: "This event was foretold by millions--every homeboy in the street, every cop, probably every teacher in the high school knew what was coming. It's only the pundits and the academics and the news media who ultimately were surprised. This is a city in which it's been in some sense too easy to predict the future" (Frommer).

This somewhat cynical debate around exploiting catastrophe in fact exemplifies how each of the authors studied in this chapter, as nonfiction writers, must depend more or less heavily on real events from which to project their narratives of world ordering and disordering. The events' significance, real or especially perceived, plays no small role in the authority the writers can claim, as does the ease by which their narratives can seem to be applied. *City of Quartz* entered the immediate post-Cold War moment with a compelling account of a century's exploitation, unchecked urbanization, and accompanying systemic economic inequality in Los Angeles, poised where Davis calls "not ... the gates of Socialism's New Jerusalem, but at the hard edge of the developers' millennium ... Is this the world-historic victory of Capitalism that everyone is talking about?" (11-12). City planners and boosters across the decades led current residents to "Fortress L.A.," the militarized redoubt of the city's haves, and to the tense, hostile atmosphere given witness by the subsequent riots, which captured international attention. Superficially concerned with a different subject, Davis with this narrative already

demonstrates the inadequacy of globalization narratives, such as Fukuyama's or Friedman's, that give low priority to problems internal to capitalist societies. Whatever popular recognition Davis earned by his prescience, his anti-globalization narrative remained a minoritarian voice through the 1990s globalization boom, even as conspiracy theory became a prominent element of millennial subcultures.⁴

However, *Ecology of Fear* as the second in a planned trilogy seems to strain after material when it announces that the "California ground squirrel is one of the earth's most important biological reservoirs for the bubonic plague, the Black Death" (250). Here Davis follows his usual procedure of deflating a threat hyped by official sources--here mountain lions, elsewhere gangs--in order to point to the real dangers created by leaders' negligence or criminality. This convention echoes Kaplan's technique of reporting away from the obvious crisis areas in order to forecast ostensibly more important conflicts. But both prophets can misapply their energies. The third volume in Davis's trilogy has not yet appeared. (The author did, however, broadcast a full-throated warning about the bird flu, in *The Monster at Our Door: The Global Threat of Avian Flu* (2005).)

Instead, he vastly broadened the dimensions of his disintegrationist narrative with "Planet of Slums" (2004), an essay, subsequently republished in book form, which translates the rhetorical techniques from Davis's urban studies directly into the discourse on globalization, where the problems he addresses take on a stunning scale. Significantly, at this limit for his narrative of disintegration-by-malicious-design, his work begins to resemble Kaplan's, arriving at many similar points, but from an opposing perspective. This convergence speaks to the severity of the political and social failures the writers describe, while also marking the limits of the imagination's ability to envision truly

4 For insight into the sociology of such groups, see Walliss.

massive disorder. For writers as ideologically antagonistic as Kaplan and Davis to find common ground, if never common cause, testifies to the challenges of trying to understand the real, adverse conditions in much of the contemporary world.

"Planet of Slums" begins with a fact that Kaplan also notes (in *Warrior Politics*), that in the twenty-first century, "[f]or the first time the urban population of the world will outnumber the rural" (5). For Davis, champion of workers' urban communities in the US, this phenomenon is not an inherent evil nor a sign of one, but his analysis of demographic reports reveals another level of complexity. By far the greater part of the urban spread has occurred in "second-tier cities and smaller urban areas: places where, as UN researchers emphasize, 'there is little or no planning to accommodate these people or provide them with services'" (7). Rather than only concentrating in established urban centers or pushing beyond them from within--as *City of Quartz* shows is and always was the case in Los Angeles--the new "Third World urbanization" in and around cities like Abidjan, Curitiba, and Jakarta, "cities of the south," has produced a near-universal urban environment without the social virtues of urbanism. This territory, new in Davis's writing, we recognize from Kaplan's. Davis calls the phenomenon "millennial urbanization" (10).

The dynamics of this runaway phenomenon suit Davis's catastrophic vision of history. Despite massively supporting his narrative with social science research, he stresses how empirical models have failed to predict or even explain this spread of low-level urbanization. Marx and Weber theorized the development of "great cities of the future" in a "classical trajectory," and "the classic slum" was toured by Dickens and Engels alike (10, 14). But "the new urban poverty [has emerged through] a non-linear historical process ... punctuated by storms of poverty and sudden explosions of slum-

building" (17). Moreover, "[t]he global growth of a vast informal proletariat ... is a wholly original structural development unforeseen by either classical Marxism or modernization pundits" (27). Thus Davis again leaves behind the specific projections of left and liberal theory but retains the Marxian trope of catastrophic force.

But Davis's claim that no models are capable of handling this incredible "'perverse' urban boom ... urbanization without growth" (9) distances him from the methodological philosophy of the traditional left, which insists with Marx that once a problem can be perceived, its solution is near at hand. Faced with a planet of slums, Davis's posture instead recalls the left's postmodernist nemesis, Jean Baudrillard, who writes,

Marx states that 'mankind only poses problems that it can solve ... We notice that a problem arises when the material conditions of its solution already exist or, at least, when they are about to exist.' But it is not like this anymore. Our jump into the virtual world unsettles all the material conditions that Marx was talking about, and deprives historical conditions of any dialectical solution.

The crushing conditions Davis analyzes have nothing to do with the virtuality theorized by Baudrillard, but their rapidly increasing ubiquity leave him at a similarly paralyzed juncture, calling "[t]wo billion slum dwellers by 2030 or 2040 ... a monstrous, almost incomprehensible prospect" (17).

Evoking postmodernist aesthetics introduces another point of contact with Kaplan. Despite questioning the usefulness of the past for constructing an account for the present, Davis calls forth images from an earlier era in an attempt to describe contemporary conditions: "Much of the urban world, as a result [of the World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programs], is rushing backwards to the age of Dickens" (11). Like the meteoric catastrophes that are "condensations of temporal process ... a literal cascade of events," this form of social catastrophe strikes Davis as carrying several simultaneous

temporalities (*Dead Cities* 346). This view resembles Kaplan's version of postmodernism, an "epoch of themeless juxtapositions" of ancient and modern elements. Both ideas seem influenced by Frederic Jameson's notion of postmodernist pastiche, which, as a measure of an age bereft of original forms, "randomly and without principle but with gusto cannibalizes all the ... styles of the past and combines them in overstimulating ensembles" (*Postmodernism* 19). In that light, both authors seem to confirm Jameson's suggestion that, in the example of architecture, "[w]e do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace" (38). The residual utopianism in Jameson's "yet" is absent from Davis as well as Kaplan, who together describe the turn of the twenty-first century as simultaneously neo-pagan, neo-medieval, and neo-Victorian.

To the extent that the dynamics of the new urban poverty can be analyzed, Davis differs from Kaplan in finding a source to blame: "the debt crisis of the late 1970s and subsequent IMF-led restructuring of Third World economies in the 1980s" (9). Thus the narrative of disintegration by hidden design, when "silicon capitalism" relies on informal labor at the lowest wage. As well, where Kaplan sees only internal political weaknesses as a cause of social failure, Davis agrees with many globalization theories' analysis of the "retreat of the state," the "diminution of state capacity" demanded by international creditors in favor of privatizing economies, and letting the gaps be filled by nongovernmental organizations (19). The roots of this massive breakdown are clear to Davis: "The 1980s, when the IMF and World Bank used the leverage of debt to restructure the economies of most of the Third World, are the years when slums became an implacable future ... the equivalent of a great natural catastrophe" (18). But the awed

hopelessness with which Davis frames his narrative raises questions about the value of laying blame, an odd turn when the stakes are so high; and the narrative argues that they could hardly be higher. The IMF and World Bank, paired indiscriminately as villains in so many left accounts of global misery, remain fairly shadowy organizations even here, whereas books like *City of Quartz* name names with no restraint.⁵

Indeed in this essay Davis delivers perhaps his least angry writing. For that, its evocation of the runaway consequences of disintegration by design is no less arresting. In fact, in his detailed accounts of selected urban areas, he converges with Kaplan's visit to the Turkish slums. One paragraph's language recalls Whitman in its urban enthusiasm:

An even larger slum population crowds the urbanizing littoral of West Africa, while other huge conurbations of poverty sprawl across Anatolia and the Ethiopian highlands; hug the base of the Andes and the Himalayas; explode outward from the skyscraper cores of Mexico, Jo-burg, Manila and Sao Paulo; and, of course, line the banks of the rivers Amazon, Niger, Congo, Nile, Tigris, Ganges, Irrawaddy and Mekong. The building blocks of this slum planet, paradoxically, are both utterly interchangeable and spontaneously unique: including the *bustees* of Kolkata, the *chawls* and *zopadpattis* of Mumbai, the *katchi abadis* of Karachi ... (14)

It goes on. Drawing on the humanist aspects of Marxism, which enjoins the domination of nature no less than does neoliberal capitalism,⁶ Davis will not condemn or even criticize the growth of communities, even on this scale. And surely this impulse is correct in principle: even Kaplan can respect a vibrant slum. But when the essay undertakes to narrate an urbanization explosion it calls more "Malthusian" than the Club of Rome's notably apocalyptic 1972 report on overpopulation, *Limits to Growth* (5), it suggests a question not from Marx, but Lenin: "What is to be done?"

5 Shatz reveals that Davis contracted and wrote but decided not to publish an account of the 1992 riots after growing uncomfortable with his position as a white radical historian of the subject. The 1992 Frommer interview shows how comprehensive was his grasp of the events' details.

6 See Gottlieb xiii-xiv.

Davis, like everyone else, has no answer, but what "survival strategies" do exist for the "surplus humanity" of "the global informal working class" turn out for Davis to be not dissimilar to those Kaplan sees (24). Where Kaplan approved of the mutual influence of nationalism and Islam in Turkish slum culture, Davis finds that "populist Islam and Pentecostal Christianity (and in Bombay, the cult of Shivaji) occupy a social space analogous to that of early twentieth-century socialism and anarchism" (30). Given the left's tradition of secularism, this argument is a major departure. To an extent, Davis means to indict the left's attenuation during the twentieth century, for he writes that "the Left [is] still largely missing from the slum" (34). To Davis as to Kaplan, left academics are too safe inside Homer-Dixon's "stretch limo," or as he puts it, "the fortified enclaves of the urban rich [encircled by] a shanty-town world" (27). This criticism becomes crude when it shades into anti-academic anti-elitism--and it opens Professor Davis to ad hominem rejoinders--but he has a positive argument as well. He highlights Pentecostal Christianity's modern, urban origins, its allowance of "a larger role to women than other Christian churches" and "its reputation for being colour-blind" (32). Like the Islam Kaplan observes, Pentecostalism "efficiently correlates itself to the survival needs of the informal working class," providing psychological, spiritual, economic, and quasi-medical resources (33). His admiration for this religious movement, whose Progressive-era origins he relates in an essay in *Dead Cities*, is clear, as the movement provides the rare example of a democratic apocalyptic narrative, one which would use the energies released by earthly catastrophes to remake society in a more just image.

But when Davis cites Pentecostalism's "ultimate premise ... that the urban world is corrupt, unjust and unreformable," it becomes apparent that his subjects think they are living nowhere else than at the end of history (33). Thus we come around again, from another side, to the limits of apocalyptic thinking, which, as a way to capture adequately the state of contemporary societies' near-apocalyptic challenges, stumbles when applied to conditions that in places have eclipsed even the turbulence of the Revelation narrative, or even more, when set against the untold depredations by these societies of their natural world. Davis's Pentecostals offer survival strategies for daily living, but see the state of the post-Cold War world order as settled no less than does a globalization champion such as Fukuyama, the millennialist seer of integration and prophet of stasis. From the other side of the same analysis, the embattled narrative of defensive struggle against chaotic forces outside and within, found in Huntington and Kaplan, urges the strong to maintain and capitalize their historical advantages, looking ahead to and even relishing a darker, more difficult time. Those seeking a narrative that, after the dismantlement of the Cold War political system and its accompanying social institutions, leads through a time of breakdown to arrive at tolerable conditions for all unfortunately confront, in these most powerful writers on the subject, a consensus toward further disintegration and failure.

Chapter Two

"Muddle Will Be the Keynote": Doris Lessing as Prophet of Global Crisis

Lessing Recognized and Reenvisioned

The startling award of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Doris Lessing in 2007 provides fresh perspective for reflecting on and amending Lessing's critical stature, in conjunction with the most common but outdated notions of her authorial identity. Scholars probably rightly do not consider the Nobel Prize a reliable marker of literary importance, and as Lessing demonstrated by her candid reaction to the news of the honor, muttering "Oh, Christ!" to the reporters gathered outside her London home, neither do its recipients necessarily treat the award with reverence. But laureates preceding Lessing in recent years include J. M. Coetzee, V. S. Naipaul, and Toni Morrison, authors very much prominent in the study of contemporary fiction. And veterans of the culture wars ought to feel sympathy for the Nobel Committee for Literature when its selections, whether Morrison, Orhan Pamuk, or Harold Pinter, are attacked, for different reasons and by different ideological constituencies, for being "politically motivated."

Thus if not every critic will find every Nobel Prize winner equally worthy, nonetheless the Swedish Academy appears at least nowadays to share certain values with academic professionals in the humanities, evidenced both by the figures it chooses to promote and by the theoretical stance it implicitly endorses when, for example, Per Wästberg in his presentation speech for Lessing suggests, "we may use her works as textbooks in 20th-century behavioural patterns, not least to discover the way many thought--or thought wrongly--during one of history's most turbulent periods as war

succeeded war, colonialism was unmasked and communism in Europe conquered."

Behind such praise lies the claim that writing, as an art with inherent, discoverable connections to political concepts, is to be encouraged not only as a mode of expression but also as unfettered participation in public discourse. Accordingly, Lessing has now been recognized for a massive body of work which ranges across a challenging variety of styles and genres, consistently manifesting a trenchant and prescient critical view of contemporary Western society.

The most important of several authorial roles she has animated with this perspective has been that of a prophet, inveterately rebuking her society for its disastrous misdirections while also exploring its potential avenues for restorative change. Wästberg calls attention to this prophetic ability in a seemingly ingenuous expression of wonder: "She makes us exclaim: 'How could she know?' since she was often first to speak about what no one else did." In a recent essay about *The Golden Notebook* (1962), Sarah Henstra puts it in similar terms: "What society cannot see is exactly what the prophet-narrator in Lessing's novel feels compelled to tell" (3). Such ought to be today's response, I will argue here, to Lessing's novels of the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, where she presents a global future that not only strikingly resembles actual worldwide economic, political, and social developments since, but also is perhaps the earliest incarnation of a significant turn in the vital and increasingly mainstream field of narratives similarly preoccupied with the foreshadowing of disaster and cataclysm. For these novels, Lessing draws on fantastical elements found in popular genres in order to exploit such fiction's option for alternative historicities, its enhanced capacity to leap ahead of the present day and the modest horizon of temporality enforced by realist fictional conventions. Equipped

also with a well developed analytic framework, she thereby boldly outstrips the predictive power of nonfiction writers now recognized as experts on geopolitics and globalization. However, by forecasting a future world rippling with strife, where even humans acting collectively have at best a limited scope for agency against an overwhelming tide of variable catastrophes, Lessing leaves unanswered the questions her work raises about prophecy's eventual utility, as she ultimately suggests that subjective growth, based on the individual development of consciousness, will be in the coming era the only supplement available to brute survival.

The change in doom-oriented narratives that Lessing anticipates is a move away from the model, made familiar during the Cold War, of instantaneous world destruction, toward instead a landscape of spreading chaos, unchecked violence, and open-ended insecurity, suiting the "global disorder" that the historian Eric Hobsbawm argues was the tenor of the twentieth century's final phase, a secular crisis "whose nature was unclear, and without an obvious mechanism for either ending it or keeping it under control" (*Age of Extremes* 562). The long dominant, paralyzing fear that human civilization will bring about its own annihilation, a fear based on the actual distribution of global power after the Second World War into superstates who made it a matter of policy to threaten nuclear holocaust, has been replaced by a vexing sense of quickening decline and disorder spreading endlessly by way of smaller-scale but endemic violence. This epochal change of vision happened comparatively suddenly, spurred by the rushing globalization of liberal capitalism in the wake of its declared victory in the Cold War and the attendant withdrawal of social institutions in many countries from their public functions, whether

by failure or design.¹ But Lessing foresaw with remarkable clarity the shift in cultural narrative which these events would ratify, and she presents it in vivid fictional shape in the sequence of her works from *The Four-Gated City* (1969) to *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974).

Thus as a "prophet of globalization" in her postmodernist novels of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Lessing ran far ahead of a turn that has since taken wider place in the cultural imaginary of geopolitics and the global future. The brutally anarchic or neomedieval landscape imagined for the "post-Cold War" era by writers as generically and ideologically various as bestselling political scientist Samuel Huntington, scholarly journalists Mike Davis and Robert Kaplan, popular fiction "master" Cormac McCarthy and the late science fiction "genius" Octavia Butler is set down decades in advance by Lessing's fictional novelist Mark Coldridge, a main character in *The Four-Gated City*. As his obsessive independent research into global trends in weapons production, environmental damage, and social unrest convinces him that Britain is approaching a new era of deep crisis unprepared, he drafts a directive for the future, successively adding items of detail as his thinking clarifies. This document reads:

it will be the responsibility of individuals to forecast, plan, make provision for contingencies whose outlines are already visible.

1. We are all hypnotised by the idea of Armageddon, the flash brighter than a million suns, the apocalyptic convulsion, the two-minute war, instant death. Populace more than government, but government as well. Everyone is stunned by an approaching annihilation like an animal dazzled by an approaching car.

2. This prevents preparation, psychological and physical, for what is likely. Which will be local catastrophic occurrences--the poisoning of a country, or of an area; the death of part of the world; the contamination of an area for a certain period of time. These events will be the development of

3. What is already happening. ... *What will happen is a development of what is*

1 Globalization's history varies in course and length depending upon perspective, but Samir Amin argues that "it has undeniably taken a qualitative step forward in the most recent period," deepening and intensifying the ongoing polarization of wealth (91). For the sense that the Cold War epoch had an "imaginary topology" that was felt to disappear abruptly, see Buck-Morss's preface (xi).

already happening and what has been accelerating, out of control, since 1914 and the green light for mass extermination. (524-25, italics in original)

The difference Coldridge urges, emphasizing limited and local but ongoing and runaway crisis, the proliferation of small-scale catastrophes over the single world-ending event, essentially defines the change to follow in the ancient but mutable genre of pessimistic narratives of the future. From "outlines ... already visible," Coldridge predicts the survivalist ethos that would be urged by writers such as those named above, who as seen in Chapter One bear witness to the fading of the "apocalyptic convulsion" as the ultimate species of fear and its replacement by the open-ended sense of dread inspired by a potential tide of "local catastrophic occurrences." Writing as the Cold War began a phase of détente and both First and Second Worlds were shortly to enter long periods of economic stagnation and retrenchment, Lessing in this passage looks beyond the pressing nuclear issue in order to begin to depict a wider field of threats, implying a global analysis of modern history and perceiving a nexus of problems rooted in the fundamental operations of society.

This is the prophetic vision she would explore in the sequence of novels following *The Four-Gated City*. Beginning at the level of politics, where in her view derelict leaders pursue their own interests, fail to respond to their communities' needs, and thereby consign the future to "the responsibility of individuals," she also suggests that treasured myths of modern culture, such as guaranteed progress and technological utopianism, contribute to the crisis and must be discarded. Yet more controversially, she also delineates a scenario of tenuous survival amid the chaos, even in scenarios of nearly the worst case, a possibility denied by more alarmist, totalizing tracts soon to be published, such as Richard Falk's *This Endangered Planet* (1971) and *The Club of*

Rome's *Limits to Growth* (1972), whose detailed, internationalist agendas call for vast reductions in human activity in order to avert a truly apocalyptic, "rather sudden and uncontrollable decline in both population and industrial capacity" which, they nevertheless admit, is "[t]he most probable result" (*Limits* 23).

When scholarly attention to Lessing was peaking in the late 1970s, her late '60s-early '70s books were often read as intending to enact a transition to the "space fiction" she was then beginning to publish and which would soon remove her from critical consideration. As a result, *The Four-Gated City* usually has struck critics as a major Lessing work but today is rarely studied. *Memoirs*, a structurally controlled and teachable text, has become one of Lessing's more widely known novels, even inspiring a 1988 British film version (little seen, despite the felicitous casting of Julie Christie), but this work too has now largely vanished from major venues of literary criticism, along with its author.

But from the vantage of the present, these are the Lessing texts that speak most urgently to current conditions, as they presage an ongoing development in imaginative projections, whether in fiction or theory, of a dark futurity based on the widely shared perception of rampant global crisis. They enter into productive dialogue with prominent contemporary historical and theoretical accounts of societies at the edge of failure, as in Hobsbawm, or sunk into it, as in Achille Mbembe's close readings of the intimate scale of political violence--"the coercion to which people are subjected, and the sufferings inflicted on the human body by war, scarcity, and destitution," which indicate "a whole cluster of re-orderings of society, culture, and identity, and a series of recent changes in the way power is exercised and rationalized" (*Postcolony* 66). And these novels answer

to current academic interest in theorizing "planetarity," as well as Masao Miyoshi's similar call for a "turn to the planet": the realization of "total commonality ... [in] our common bonds to the planet" and the siting of these bonds in "the future of the global environment" (295). Following Molly Hite's analysis that the "tendency of [Lessing's] books following *The Four-Gated City* was to place specifically human issues in a more and more cosmic context" ("Ideology, Coherence, and Possibility" 26), to focus on this dilation of concern at its midpoint, between her early works of realist, autobiographical fiction and her late-'70s series of "space fiction," therefore is to catch Lessing's *global phase*. Whatever its motivation then, the Nobel Committee's seemingly arbitrary gesture to highlight Lessing in 2007 in fact could not have been more timely for prompting reconsideration of these novels, which prophesy the worst downsides of globalization.

In the Wilderness of Experimental Fiction

But Lessing differs from her new Nobel peers in that her award comes long after she not only achieved but then to a significant extent lost prominence among contemporary writers. Two main factors made this Lessing's fate when she adopted a more overtly visionary, nonrealistic narrative mode for her global phase. One factor involves the relative status of different literary genres and the assumption by critics that authors should conform to this hierarchy, an issue to which Wästberg alludes only as a way to dismiss it: "We stroll through the great library of her work, where all sections are unmarked and all genre classification pointless. There is life and movement behind the broad or narrow spines of the books, resisting categorisation and the imposition of order." These remarks endorse a holistic approach to the author's work, one that would rightly

avoid rehashing old debates. But regardless of critical ideology, genre distinctions can hardly be called "pointless," even in an encomium. It is a fact of Lessing's reception that in changing styles, she embraced elements of fiction typical of genres popular in mass culture. This new aspect of her work perplexed left-leaning critics who shared the Marxist-derived view of the novel that Lessing herself championed in her early essay "The Small Personal Voice" (1957). There she declares the style of the nineteenth-century masters of fiction "the highest form of prose writing," superior to "any other ism" (4), especially modernism, whose contemporary culture heroes Camus, Sartre, Genet, and Beckett she excoriates for engaging in what she calls, echoing Georg Lukács, "the pleasurable luxury of despair" (11). While the relative ideological merits of realistic description versus linguistic experimentation could be thus vigorously debated, mid-century literary opinion unanimously omitted popular genres from consideration, instead distinguishing them as products of mass culture.

But Lessing does not hedge when shifting toward popular genres and rather performs a dramatic break with the proleptic "Appendix" to *The Four-Gated City*, a section that serves as an epilogue to an epic, five-novel series. Introducing a new generic style into this text is all the more jarring a decision as the series, titled "Children of Violence," is hitherto an essentially autobiographical account narrating a southern African young woman's development through the mid-twentieth century, including her participation in Communism, her two failed marriages, and her migration to England. Since first seeing publication in 1952, the story of Martha Quest had been told as a mainly realistic, linear narrative of consecutive episodes, with isolated if significant passages of symbolism. But for a conclusion, Lessing does not leave off at the present,

instead leaping forward to envision, in the compressed final 50 pages that are the "Appendix," severely declining worldwide life conditions in the coming decades, in just the forms Mark Coldridge has anticipated. The economic and social crisis culminates in a major "Catastrophe" whose exact nature the main narrator of this section, Coldridge's son Francis, leaves vague, but which kills many millions, so that the years 1968 to 2000 are called by its survivors the "Epoch of Destruction" (563). The ensuing political landscape is unrecognizable--Britain no longer exists, its people scattered in "National Areas" across the globe, and Mongolia, Brazil, and Kenya are "the new ruling points of the world" (563)--and characters now bear such names as "X30" and "X32." Such tropes of dehumanization, as well as the plotting of an alternative future history, are typical features of the dystopian fantasy genre, a mode quite apart from the realism for which the Martha Quest series and its author had been admired.

Nonetheless this fantastically transformed world is where Lessing would place her next three novels, through *The Memoirs of a Survivor*.² Recently, critics have tended to read *Memoirs* with greater respect for Lessing's suggestion on the book's jacket that it is "an attempt at autobiography," particularly since actual volumes of her autobiography began appearing in the 1990s. Indeed in her passages through the walls of her flat into areas of "inner space," the unnamed narrator of *Memoirs* witnesses claustrophobic domestic scenarios, seemingly drawn from psychoanalytic master narratives but in fact strongly resembling Lessing's recollections of her own girlhood in *Under My Skin* (1994). And the arrangement of these zones into "an interior symbolic landscape" has mystic resonances that Nancy Topping Bazin and others have detailed (Cederstrom 116).

2 As Bazin demonstrates, *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and *The Summer Before the Dark* (1973) also share this setting of "serious social crisis" for a backdrop, but as their narratives almost exclusively foreground "the exploration of 'inner space'" rather than the external conditions making such exploration necessary, they are less pertinent to my argument in this dissertation (38).

But if these interior realms mark the novel as a nonrealistic, "inner space" narrative, the contrasting zone of outer "reality" is contiguous with the world Francis Coldridge describes, a post-"Catastrophe" Britain redolent with motifs from the popular-culture genre of social apocalypse. News reports "about the mass deaths of hundreds, thousands, or even millions of people" have come to seem routine, and "hordes" of orphans terrorize the remaining communities, "leaving a corpse on the pavement across the street ... smashed windows, looted shops, the remains of bonfires" (19, 20). Read with a mind toward David Harvey's account of postmodernity, by which the "sharp recession of 1973" inaugurates "a period of economic restructuring and social and political readjustment" amid "all this flux and uncertainty" (145), such lurid passages evoke actual conditions, only amplified, as Western capitalism at this very time reaches the limits of its postwar expansion under Fordist-Keynesian principles and begins its downturn. Thus Lessing's "survivor" recounts:

We knew that all public services had stopped to the south and to the east, and that this state of affairs was spreading our way. We knew that everyone had left those parts of the country except for bands of people, mostly youngsters, who lived on what they could find: crops ungathered in the fields, animals that had escaped slaughter before everything had broken down. (9-10)

Thus the text registers and traces the contemporary global crisis then underway, but sets this analysis within a nonrealistic narrative genre, indeed an utterly fantastical one, for through her flat the narrator ultimately finds a way past the claustrophobic scenes of "banality, ... tedium, ... smallness, [and] restriction,"--representing the bourgeois individualist subject formation typical of modernity--toward a powerfully expanded consciousness, which allows her at the novel's conclusion to lead a small group of children into a once-hidden utopian dimension (149, 136).

Contemporary critics such as Frederick Karl were disturbed by the generic turn Lessing begins with *The Four-Gated City*'s wild figuration of human society's "descent into hell" (90). Karl wonders if, for all the layers of meaning his interpretation is able to draw from the novel's rich deployment of archetypes, Lessing were not just "another novelist ... succumbing to apocalyptic visions as a way of settling personal problems" (93). This sentiment can perhaps be traced to Frank Kermode's influential, modernist reading, in 1967's *Sense of an Ending*, of the apocalyptic as a universal personal reflex against the absurdity of individual existence, a cruder mode of emplotment, consonant with "our more naive requirements of fiction" (7). Karl's mixture of a disapproving tone with an interested formal analysis illustrates how Lessing has long frustrated readymade critical categories. Explaining the resistance Lessing's first academic proponents faced from entrenched New Critical scholars in the 1960s, Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose write that "early readers of Lessing criticism were unable to appreciate her importance because their expectations about 'serious' literature were so confiningly modernist. Looking for wit and wordplay, they found instead a surface of unself-conscious fiction written in a dated nineteenth-century realist mode" (8). Lessing eventually satisfied these biases with *The Golden Notebook*, a long text whose intriguingly complex structure supports a variety of interpretations. But by appending an excursion into dystopian fantasy to her next major novel, *The Four-Gated City*, she seemed to reject the prestige automatically ceded both to realist description and modernist depth, styles which the novel nevertheless also exhibits.

Today it should be clear that with these stylistic mutations, Lessing was participating, perhaps more self-consciously than most authors and with more concern for

experimentation than critics such as Harold Bloom are willing to grant, in the postmodernist movement in fiction. Composing a pastiche of different genres without reverence for their historical or cultural status typifies postmodernist style, according to Fredric Jameson's influential formulation. And by switching from free indirect discourse to a documentary mode for *The Four-Gated City's* "Appendix," Lessing updates the Martha Quest series by incorporating the postmodernist mode of "historiographic metafiction" described by Linda Hutcheon. But theoretical hindsight does not ensure that critical opinions will be revised, particularly when it involves so vexed an issue as the status and impact of postmodernism. So as Lessing continued to write in nonrealist styles after *The Four-Gated City*, publishing several books of what she called "inner space fiction" in the 1970s and following these finally with a series of outright "space fiction," her experiments in genre by the early 1980s largely alienated both the academic and especially the literary journalistic establishments. This fall from prominence seemed permanent, notwithstanding the further works of realist fiction and autobiography Lessing published later in the 1980s and 1990s, until the Nobel award. Susan Watkins has observed that "British literary culture does not admire those writers who question the sharp distinction that publishers, academics, and booksellers draw between realism and its others; the unease that her work produces as a result of this is certainly a factor in the dip in her reputation" (247), and no less is true in the US. Although valuable scholarly work continued in specialist circles devoted to the author as well as in the nascent fields of science fiction and utopian studies, after she turned from realism to embrace popular genres, there grew the sense among non-specialists that Lessing was no longer to be taken so seriously.

The other factor in Lessing's loss of critical standing relates to this issue of genre, in that when Lessing departed from the realist mode with *The Four-Gated City*, she also definitively cast off the authorial personas she had created with her early novels and stories. Lessing was first noted for her antiracist, anticolonial posture in the UK when she began publishing there in 1950. Having emigrated from Southern Rhodesia, she struck British critics as a "natural writer," but "preoccupied with the racial problem" (Sprague and Tiger 173, 171). But she became more well known to US readers for her groundbreaking representation of the female perspective in the 1960s, just as the the feminist movement began to coalesce, thereby influencing members of a wave of young scholars who would soon enter and transform the academy. As a result, *The Golden Notebook*, the novel that demonstrates Lessing's strengths in realist social portraiture and cultural criticism while also delivering these in a sufficiently demanding formal package, took hold in critical accounts as the essential centerpiece of Lessing's work, and it has remained so. However, the "feminist" persona readers intuited from *The Golden Notebook* existed in tension with the actual Lessing, who battered her mainly young fans' preconceptions and projections in contentious public appearances and interviews. This posture signified that at the moment of its creation, the feminist Lessing was already on the way to displacement by a new but ultimately no more authentic authorial self.

This third "Lessing," crystallized in *The Four-Gated City* but in fact already available in emergent form in *The Golden Notebook*, troubled admirers of the previous two personas not only by writing in a superficially less realistic and therefore less serious mode, but also by appearing to be immersed in a number of contemporary, anti-Western intellectual trends. When these alternative enthusiasms surfaced in her fiction, such as in

Martha Quest's development of an intersubjective psychic capacity in *The Four-Gated City*, or in the symbols that furnish the structure of meaning in *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, a new, more challenging authorial self was confirmed: Lessing as "poet of madness." This persona was under the sway of the anti-psychiatry developed by R. D. Laing, who analyzed the author personally in the early 1960s, and the Sufism promulgated by Idries Shah, with whom Lessing had a more longstanding but perhaps less well-known connection. Despite how typical of postmodernist intellectual enterprises are the teachings of Laing and Shah, Lessing's incorporation of their quickly dated and eccentric theoretical idioms as elements of her fiction after *The Golden Notebook* surely contributed to these works' hasty dismissal, much as her experiments in genre eventually cast her entire output into doubt.³ And her appearance as "poet of madness" divided her from those readers who had been her most devoted audience, participants in the women's movement and their fellow travelers. Watkins argues that Lessing's critical reputation has been inextricably tied to "the fortunes of feminism in the academy" (245), therefore suffering as the affiliation that first sponsored her entry into the canon saw its strength decline in the academy and, I would add, as an organized force in the culture at large. While this reversal was ironic, since Lessing notably did not consider herself a feminist, meanwhile the belief systems she did in fact patronize remained marginal and have therefore supplied her with no institutional supporters.

3 For an illuminating analysis of Laing's prominence in the 1960s and his representative, early postmodernism, see DeKoven 200-209.

"A Horizontal, Almost Nationless Organisation": Lessing's Maps of Globalization

At any rate, the critical energy spent, for plausible reasons, toward delineating and assessing the impact of these gurus on Lessing in what seemed to be her new persona as "poet of madness," as well as toward the obligatory structural and formal analysis of her texts, entailed comparative neglect for the ultimately more significant innovation in her work as she ushered in its new phase in *The Four-Gated City*. This was her development of a virtually *avant le lettre* analysis of globalization, which she evokes as a synthesis of economic, political, and social forces that dynamically increase the concentration of wealth in the hands of a leadership whose strategy is, as according to Samir Amin, "intended to manage the crisis rather than look for ways to resolve it" (38). In *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, citizens call the bureaucratic arm of this elite "the Talkers": "the administering class ... those people above us who spent their lives in their eternal and interminable conferences, talking about what was happening, what should happen, what they fondly hoped they could make happen--but of course never did" and who have "access to sources of food, goods, clothes, transport, denied to most," presumably secured by their patrons in commerce (48-49, 56). These "Talkers" prefigure current members of neoliberal think tanks and NGOs (and their celebrity figureheads) who circulate among global elites, proposing schemes for massive private investment as remedies for social crises around the world. In *The Four-Gated City*, Francis Coldridge narrates how "[i]n 1969 and 1970 there was a worsening of the economic crisis, masked (as by then had become the norm) by large loans from international bodies whose insistence on 'stability' led to the national government of the early seventies" (567). Here Lessing acerbically imagines the actual, typical development policies of monetary control organizations such

as the IMF and World Bank applied to the UK, as if it were soon to be rendered a Third World country and a target for development, receiving "continuous handouts from international funds (really American) in return for being an obedient part of the American military machine" (568). In the novel, however, the nationalization of society does not lead to the expansion or even the efficient administering of essential public services, for instead, "Anything that conduced to the expansion of business and 'the recovery of the nation' was good; everything that did not, was bad ... It was a logical development in a society where the needs of industry came before anything else" (567). Lessing perceives the coming intersection between the conservative movement to fuse government principles with corporate interests, overseen by Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, and the so-called "Third Way" that leading advocates of economic globalization, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, would make into a popular consensus in the 1990s.

Ultimately, writes Francis in a passage of striking visionary clarity, "[t]his government was more than usually in the dark about its own actions, partly because after all it was only a deputy or servant of the international banking system ... For already was established that stratification which is the principle of the world we live in now: a horizontal, almost nationless organisation" (579). The "horizontal" nature of Francis's world signifies its interconnectedness for the "strata" who have access to global channels of resources and information and who are therefore untrammelled by the notional strictures of nations, where communities are subsisting in increasing isolation from any government and rapidly losing what remains of security and welfare. Nonetheless, leaders of countries seize opportunities to manipulate "feverish and virulent nationalisms"

(579), an aspect of globalization's dialectic that we have seen later darkly stressed by such writers as Huntington and Kaplan.

The "horizontal, almost nationless organisation" that assumes global status is perceived and given vivid graphic form previously in the novel by Mark Coldridge. Third of four sons in a prominent but now splintered family, Coldridge emerges disaffected from a belated Communist phase in 1956 and turns the study of his Bloomsbury home, the center for much of the novel's action, into a base for research into "what was really happening--you know, *really* happening" (282). First "without, or so it seemed, knowing what he was going to do with them," he installs "two enormous maps of the world" on the study's walls (282). One plots with colored flags the known factories for bombs, biological and chemical weapons, and neuropharmaceuticals alongside areas of environmental contamination, thus beginning to make visible the linkages between "these various techniques"--about which, Coldridge finds to his distress, "very little indeed was known by the men who used" them--and their collateral damage (283). Lessing suggests with this figure the limits to any analysis of global crisis offered by simple conspiracy theory; the deleterious effects on world populations and their environment by war and industry proceed at least as much by blind ignorance and accident as by design.

The other map has "an almost metaphysical or medieval aspect," with "markers denoting War, Famine, Riots, Poverty, Prisons": perennial social blights which "steadily multipl[y]" like the factors marked on the first map (283). Their tandem growth charts an ecology of doom, again suggesting the connection of causes, a system, where environmental science or even social theory would typically begin with and pursue only isolated phenomena. Coldridge's archetypal labels for present instances of timeless

tribulations, "War, Famine," and so on, evoke the immutable counterparts of the innovative modern terrors tracked on the first map. Together they represent a dialectic of pressure on contemporary life. And the labels' "medieval aspect" of allegory, as well as the overall trope of boldly remapping and regrouping nations into looser entities affiliated by alternative logics, connect the global analysis Coldridge begins to form here with a neomedievalist strain in political theory that would become increasingly prominent over the following two-and-a-half decades.⁴ The most notable example of this vogue is again the work of Huntington, who in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996) predicts that the dismantling of the "bipolar" model of the Cold War era will lead not to a perfect global order, as many pundits suggested, nor to total, undescrivable anarchy, but to a chaotic but qualified disordering, a disintegration universal in scope but ultimately limited in degree.

From these deeply insightful fictional episodes, it should be evident that Lessing's investment in various irrationalisms, however important they may be for her biography, were for her writing merely vehicles for establishing a perspective on what is in her view the vastly more consequential irrationality of dominant Western orientations. As an evolving postmodern thinker, finished with modern systems that dictated a collective approach to societal transformation, or what her narrator calls "stale social patterns" in *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (133), Lessing in her search for a new avenue of critique gravitated toward what Marianne DeKoven describes as a "politics the self," a relocation under emergent '60s postmodernity of the primary stage for such critical endeavors, from the social itself into "the realm of subjectivity" (191). Arriving at the conviction that

4 For a penetrating study of neomedievalism's double existence in recent political theory and neoconservative public policy, see Holsinger.

consciousness needs to come first in the project to comprehend and resolve the grave and worsening problems of her society, Lessing selectively affiliated with belief systems that she then employed in a partial manner, veiled in the fiction, by way of creating and inhabiting a new authorial role, that of a prophet speaking as a critical outsider to her culture. That is, if in *The Golden Notebook* Lessing thematizes madness in order to narrate the contemporary struggle to form an effective and coherent subjective politics out of the fragmentation of modern utopian projects, from *The Four-Gated City's* "Appendix" through *The Memoirs of a Survivor* she looks ahead, adopting a prophet's role, to portray dire versions of the globalization scenario and its potentially devastating impact on social function, public health, and cultural vitality. As Bazin writes, "in the novels published between 1971 and 1974, and in the preceding novel ... the focus shifts significantly from survival of the self for its own sake to survival of the self for the sake of the survival of the species ... Lessing demonstrates repeatedly that the prevailing forces work very actively and effectively for destruction rather than the realization of wholeness in the individual or in society" (37). Contrary to the anguished complaints of her former admirers, these works do not dive so deeply into mysticism of any stripe as to submerge Lessing's critical insight, and the visionary inclinations of the styles of thought Lessing favored may well have helped propel her toward the new authorial self she can be seen to assume, "prophet of globalization."

Prophecy without Progress

Probably inevitably, invoking the role of "prophet" first calls on the naive sense of the term, the ability to predict the future. And as demonstrated, in these texts Lessing

surely displays remarkable prescience about the trajectory bringing the worldwide ecological depredation and vast immiseration of human communities reported by Mike Davis in 2004 in "Planet of Slums." She sees as well the corresponding profit grabbing by elites which would follow from the economic stagnation of the 1970s, and the resulting backlash against postwar social agreements--"the marriage between economic liberalism and social democracy"--that were successfully reneged upon by conservative movements in many countries (Hobsbawm 270). But prophets have also traditionally fulfilled the function of social criticism, without respect to prediction as such. According to Michael Walzer, even when residing in the promised land, Hebrew prophets such as Jeremiah typically castigated their backsliding communities in order to "recall the original moment of deliverance," urging them "to recapture and prolong it" by acting with more virtue and justice in the eyes of their lord (116). Likewise, Cornel West defines the modern prophetic mode as a combination of rhetoric and action, as "protracted and principled struggles against forms of personal despair, intellectual dogmatism, and socioeconomic oppression that foster communities of hope" (38).

Scholars of religion generally distinguish this strand of prophetic discourse from apocalyptic prophecy, which they analyze as a later development.⁵ In the apocalyptic genre, with which Lessing's texts beginning with *The Four-Gated City* are often compared, the seer writes from a position of near despair to scattered, oppressed comrades, counseling patient endurance through what is sure to be increasing suffering, until history will be interrupted and transcended by the arrival of a messiah. As Walzer explains and amply illustrates, political thought on the left has often relied for rhetorical

5 John J. Collins offers the most useful account of the apocalyptic genre's emergence from the prophetic tradition and of its literary hallmarks.

support on discourse that is prophetic, even messianic, but tends to abjure the apocalyptic, which in its pure form calls for the suspension of struggle in this world in favor of deliverance by a supernatural power from the next. For Walzer, prophetic discourse heroically exemplifies "tough realism," whereas the fantastical desires of apocalyptic texts represent a less disciplined intellectual stage, and between the two strains "the lines are generally clear" (121). But while it is true that right-wing political groups often exploit apocalyptic rhetoric's boundless capacity to demonize others as a strategy for defusing substantive demands and rendering potential dissenters quiescent, the left has also found the apocalyptic register useful at times of great oppression, for both strains of discourse enable the urgent description of intolerable conditions and stoke a sense of dissatisfaction with the prevailing order.

As with the boundaries between literary genres, Lessing freshly defies the traditional distinction between prophecy and apocalyptic. Her prolific stream of contentious texts, as well as the vociferous opinions she airs outside her fiction, surely qualify her as a modern prophetic voice resembling the type West describes. Indeed her public persona has grown increasingly cranky since the 1960s and seems to have been crafted to attract this label, making her Nobel ascension all the more surprising. But in *The Four-Gated City* and *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, she clearly rejects the linear historicity that according to Walzer was the "crucial alternative" introduced by Hebrew literature, in particular by the Exodus narrative, which allowed a progressive historical vision to emerge against "all mythic notions of eternal recurrence" (12). Thus a jeremiad reminds its audience of divine expectations and blessed futures ahead, which are however contingent on the people's righteousness.

Millennialist discourse in this vein has long been a feature of, for example, mainstream American culture, as detailed by Sacvan Bercovitch in a well known study. Therefore despite the progressive narrative it services, prophetic discourse generally carries conservative implications, for it traditionally refers to a prior state and invokes a extant body of prescriptions to which the prophet wants the community to revert. When progress depends on a strictly conceived set of behaviors, prophecy invoking it doubles as a social control. As Lessing illustrates in earlier volumes of the "Children of Violence" series, where she recreates the competition and disagreements among factions on the left in impressive detail, the path to progress can vary according to differently narrow definitions. To address this problem, West refers to a "principled prophetism ... that incorporates the best of modernity and secularity (tolerance, fallibilism, criticism), yet brings prophetic critique to bear upon the idols of modernity and secularity (science, technology, and wealth)" (x). In determining her visionary style, Lessing then adopts apocalyptic narrative's register of extremity as well as prophecy's mantle of scathing social critique without insisting on a necessarily moralistically straitened course for future action.

Indeed unlike the prophets in West's tradition, Lessing declines even to suggest that progress must follow. She has no teleology in mind but instead envisions a desultory alternation between periods of "bad times" and relative "Golden Ages," these latter recognizable only in retrospect or by comparison in memory. Characteristic of postmodern indeterminacy, the quality of each era is open to a judgment that depends on the observer's position, and the next phase's arrival can never be predicted, only marked later. This murky sense of history, which Francis Coldridge will also elaborate after "the

Catastrophe," is adumbrated previously, in the realistic portions of *The Four-Gated City*, when the omniscient narrator describes the early phases of the Cold War--filled with betrayals, surveillance, and paranoia--as a typical "bad time."

A bad time is announced by an event. A woman gasses herself because her will to survive is exhausted. This event is no different in quality from previous events. It is surprising. But it should not have been surprising. It could have been foreseen. One's imagination had been working at half-pressure. . . . Martha had been here before.

When a bad time starts, it is as if on a smooth green lawn a toad appears; as if a clear river suddenly floats down a corpse. Before the appearance of the toad, the corpse, one could not imagine the lawn as anything but delightful, the river as fresh. But lawns can always admit toads, and rivers corpses. . . . Martha had been here before. (149, ellipses in original)

The passage represents the stirrings of Martha Quest's extrasensory perception, a process she accelerates late in the novel by successfully experimenting on her psyche in Laingian fashion. It indicates an early stage of Martha's frustration with her mundane denseness, foreshadowing her eventual transcendence of this limitation. And it also hints at the ultimate extension of the "bad time" such as the Cold War atmosphere produces, by associating it with ecological damage via the image of a river suddenly poisoned as it "floats down a corpse," an event, the reader will come to imagine, that transpires many times over during "the Catastrophe."

But the passage also illustrates the problem of making real power from prophetic ability, of connecting that ability with action, especially when the signs of the times indicate a shifting paradigm and the prophet therefore lacks a concrete program of divinely endorsed behaviors to recommend for the new age.⁶ The *Memoirs* "survivor" opens her text with a similar reflection "on the way we--everyone--will look back over a

⁶ It may also inhere in the role of prophets, particularly those marginalized, to fail to communicate with society at large, regardless of their centrality to the Hebrew tradition according to Walzer. Hence, outside the Judeo-Christian orientation, the "Cassandra syndrome," where a prophet is always correct but never believed, a complex that Henstra somewhat oddly does not consider in her essay reading Lessing as a "nuclear Cassandra."

period in life, over a sequence of events, and find much more there than they did at the time. This is true even of events as dispiriting as the litter left on a common after a public holiday ... [T]he past ... seems steeped in a substance that had seemed foreign to it, was extraneous to the experiencing of it" (4). Like Martha Quest, the *Memoirs* narrator will grow more adept at perceiving the historical pattern inscribed in the detritus of her society, but seers in *The Four-Gated City* face significant challenges in applying their visions. This is due in part to the magnitude of the crisis--"Spitting into a hurricane," the *Memoirs* narrator calls the activities of citizen groups organized to restore small services and defend outdated morals (21)--and in part to the particularly ill-defined shape of the global future that is prophesied. When characters in both novels repeatedly liken brief stretches of contentment or comfort to "Golden Ages" or "idylls," they indicate a self-consciously confused historicity, which persists even as their situations worsen and they come to understand "that it was our periods of peace, of normality, and not the days of looting and fighting, which were going to be unusual now" (*Memoirs* 10). Thus even so systematic an observer as Mark Coldridge, who drawing on his self-education in Marxism insists that the "outlines" of the future are clear from the present, sums up the time to come as essentially disordered: "If there is one thing certain it is that everyone will be in a state of panic, as rumours, counter-rumours, denials by authority, multiply while catastrophes occur, nearly occur, half occur. Muddle will be the keynote" (550).

The forecast of a predominant "muddle" definitively distinguishes Mark Coldridge's historicity from the neatly closed conventions of apocalyptic narrative and reinforces the sense that a strong shift away from this tradition accompanies the globalization epoch's replacement of the Cold War era. Likewise, to view Lessing as a

purely apocalyptic writer misses this distinction. Rather, long concerned with apocalyptic themes, Lessing draws on apocalyptic narrative in these texts to make prophetic statements about reality with her fiction. In a sense, *Memoirs* qualifies as an apocalyptic narrative, an unusually complete one, in that the narrator witnesses, even effects, a successful supernatural interruption into history by forces representing an alternative ontology. But the narrator's psychic and spiritual progress through the novel promotes the active development of consciousness over the passive waiting for salvation that gives apocalyptic literature its suspect political valence. Even so Lessing was criticized for appearing with *Memoirs* to recommend a withdrawal from the political struggle her analysis of reality in the same text would seem to demand, for "counsel[ing] passivity" and attempting "to pacify [the reader] with visions of tranquility in peaceful gardens" (Draine 59). Such criticism chooses to deny postmodernism's election of consciousness or subjectivity as the foreground of political work, a shift made in light of the enormity of the crises at hand and rationalism's complicity in creating them. This is the position Lessing takes, however deflating it may be to read the narrator's coy description of the realm of freedom she finally reaches and the luminous, divine figure at its center: "No, I am not able to say clearly what she was like. ... all I can say is ... nothing at all" (213).

Mark Coldridge in *The Four-Gated City* also leaves an ambiguous record as a prophet. His stunningly accurate directive for the future, though written as if the nation were its audience, is in fact titled "Memorandum to Myself" and never published, read only by Martha Quest in the study where Coldridge maps the approaching global crisis. With the self-enclosure of this document, Lessing suggests the near impossibility of communicating such against-the-grain interventions by normal channels. Intriguingly,

Coldridge's vision slowly achieves recognition in a more indirect way: through his fiction. Over the years, since publishing a "cool, detached," allegorical novel about a utopian "city in the desert" in the early 1950s (175), he acquires a cult following, especially once the book is "taken up by the science fiction addicts" (284)--an ironic development, for Lessing describes the text as an exemplar of late modernism, or "ivory tower rubbish" to Coldridge during his Communist phase, when he nearly destroys the manuscript (174). His reputation established, he takes advantage of the resulting publicity to advertise his radical ideas about the future as if they were the plot for a prospective sequel to the novel, thinking, "Why not? It's a good enough screen while one makes enquiries and works things out" (550). It is through a response to this piece of literary gossip that Coldridge makes his first contact for what has become his life's work, a project to relocate human communities in habitable areas after the Catastrophe he has predicted. The interested American philanthropist who responds also reads *A City in the Desert* and is compelled--by the fiction--to fund the effort, though in consultation with Coldridge he learns he will "have to shed his visions of the city beautiful, since the future was not likely to include one" (552).

Though Coldridge's rescue operations turn out in the "muddle" that ensues to be only a partial success, with his clear-eyed son Francis never understanding their exact goals and with several disasters befalling the clients, Lessing's stress on the fictional means for delivering his prophecies in the novel is a telling metacommentary on her own work. That is because with her novels from *The Four-Gated City* to *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, she makes a penetrating, timely commentary on real problems in her society, while also selectively calling on the imaginative capacity of nonrealistic narrative styles

to project, as a warning, a far-reaching set of dire global conditions whose broad outlines have, unfortunately, come to pass. Because of the remarkably illuminating leap into the future this fiction performs, Lessing should be recognized now not only as a successful experimental novelist, but as a prophet of globalization.

Chapter Three

At the Hinge of an Age: Don DeLillo's Americans in the Unraveling World

Well into Don DeLillo's career as a leading contemporary novelist, it was common for critics in the US to interpret his fiction as being preoccupied with self-consciously American themes. His novels, even when deemed innovative for how they crossed genres or interpolated abstruse nonfictional material, were generally seen as lodging their concerns within the sphere of discourse that centers on the nation. In an often-cited interview from the summer of 1988, when DeLillo's literary fame was beginning to match his reputation among academic critics, the journalist Anthony DeCurtis suggests to him that "[f]rom a certain vantage point, your books can almost be taken as a systematic look at various aspects of American life: the Kennedy assassination; rock music in *Great Jones Street*; science and mathematics in *Ratner's Star*; football in *End Zone*" (57). Perhaps predictably, the author demurs. He insists that his novels have deeper themes not always congruent with the content announced on their surface: for example, "*End Zone* wasn't about football" but "extreme places and extreme states of mind" (57). And as an artist, he says that his work depends on spontaneous inspiration or vision, which an authorial program such as DeCurtis imagines would not allow: "I've never attempted to embark on a systematic exploration of American experience. I take the ideas as they come" (57). With this popular, Romantic idea of the author as an open-minded, unusually sensitive observer, DeLillo tries to preempt having his historical

fiction dismissed as cultural critique driven by a narrowly preconceived ideological agenda.¹

DeCurtis's tentative analysis could be discounted on other grounds--particularly as his list of "aspects of American life" displays a certain confusion at the level of categories--but his invocation of a "system" is either intuitively apt or well informed, for the groundbreaking early critical work on DeLillo, Tom LeClair's *In the Loop* (1987), had recently been published, and it read the novelist through systems theory, an interdisciplinary approach for studying the organization and interaction of large, complex systems, including human activity. This interpretation articulated DeLillo's sense of the natural and social worlds as controlled, even determined, by powerful, overlapping, yet often barely visible forces, which are in effect hidden in plain view. Or, as DeLillo says here, "It is just my sense that we live in a kind of circular or near-circular system and that there are an increasing number of rings which keep intersecting at some point, whether you're using a plastic card to draw money out of your account at an automatic teller machine or thinking about the movement of planetary bodies. I mean, these systems all seem to interact to me" (61).

But the conversation overlooks a significant assumption: that the parameters for this general thesis are marked by the conventional borders of "American life," which the "systems" so transforming the contemporary world somehow leave in place. DeLillo complies with this assumption when he remarks that "*Americana* is not about any one area of our experience" and that in his oeuvre more generally there recurs "a sense of

1 A theoretical fallacy perhaps, but a timely defense, as DeLillo just then entered the bestseller list with *Libra*, a fictional treatment of President Kennedy's assassination. Taking a major public event as a subject and finding popular success with it brought DeLillo attention from outside the literary world, including virulent attacks from committed ideologues such as George Will. See Lentricchia and Crowther.

secret patterns in our lives" (57). That is, while he resists the claims that as a writer he calculates his moves and has a long-term plan conceived into which each new novel will duly fit, he seems to aver that American life is "our" main concern and area of inquiry. It is true that DeLillo writes a great deal about the contemporary culture and recent history of the US, with books already mentioned like *Americana* (1971) and *Libra* (1988), as well as *White Noise* (1985)--the novel that comes foremost to mind when DeLillo says he writes about desperately violent acts "as a kind of sardonic response to the promise of consumer fulfillment in America" (57)--and *Underworld* (1997)--an epic historical fiction about the Cold War period. DeLillo may say, "I think I have an idea of what it's like to be an outsider in this society" (50), but he never renounces his membership in it or takes up exile, however much he likes to allude to the Joycean, modernist credo of "silence, exile, cunning, and so on" (qtd. in Keesey 2). The phrase "an outsider in this society" is in fact somewhat disingenuously used as the title for the DeCurtis interview, turning DeLillo's coy statement of an artist's detached sympathy for Lee Harvey Oswald into a self-styled existentialist epithet.² In fact the phrase, once putting aside its sensationalist association in this context with the figure of "the lone gunman," instead suggests precisely the double location I have so far been describing: DeLillo's positioning of himself as a novelist who is American but also in and of the wider world. His novels can be and have been interpreted productively with respect to such established rubrics in Americanist literary studies as naturalism, realism, modernism, and postmodernism, but they also sometimes seem written as if to fit cutting-edge critical concepts like systems theory.³ And

2 The paradoxical status of being an "outsider *in* somewhere" recalls Edward Said's notion of the exile in *Reflections on Exile* (2001).

3 To view DeLillo in a lineage of American naturalism, see the work of Paul Civello. David H. Evans reads *Underworld* as the culmination of a move away from postmodernist irony into an engagement with American realism and the real itself--precisely what Leonard Wilcox's Lacanian interpretation of the novel claims remains almost always inaccessible. Thomas Carmichael's essay on *Libra* exemplifies

increasingly over his career, they engage the set of contemporary theoretical interests headed under "the global."

For if DeLillo's basic orientation for his fiction is undeniably American, to imagine his field of vision as limited to only the American experience misses an important development in his work, one which had begun before this interview. While many of DeLillo's stylistic hallmarks and certain key episodes in his novels typify postmodern fiction, which Molly Hite accurately describes as "a phenomenon most often associated with the United States" ("Postmodern Fiction" 699), over his career DeLillo broadens his themes eventually to encompass a global view, if always from an American perspective. Much as Doris Lessing's expanding spheres of concern in the 1970s outran the more parochial literary categories that her critics often wanted to apply to her work, DeLillo's fiction evinces an interest in and an acute critique of globalization long before the concept became an academic buzzword in the 1990s. Moreover, DeLillo was particularly advanced, like Lessing, in forming a dissenting narrative of the economic, social, and cultural transformations named by the term globalization. Whereas in mainstream political discourse during and especially after the Cold War, these trends and processes were typically presented as an optimistic story of world integration, all harmony and opportunity, DeLillo instead saw everywhere the signs of disintegration, with the potential to lead into total chaos.

Not so restless nor as contrary as Lessing, DeLillo has been at least somewhat receptive to assessments of his relation to the canon of his national literature, as the

the ready application of key postmodern concepts to DeLillo's work, while Paul Maltby dissents, reading DeLillo's artistic sensibility as Romantic. The analysis in my first paragraph aside, I find Maltby's argument provocative but ahistorical, and agree instead with Duvall, who calls DeLillo's lofty "hope for the vocation of the contemporary artist and his or her attempt to forge the imagistic space of the novel as a counterforce to the image manipulation of capital ... almost modernist" (561).

DeCurtis interview illustrates. This ambivalence again suggests that he takes a self-consciously doubled position as an American preoccupied with his ever more urgent intersection with the global "ring" of the "circular or near-circular system" that defines his experience. It is DeLillo's approach to this point of intersection that I want to develop here, a tendency in his work that begins in the early 1980s and culminates in his writings around the turn of the century, when he converges with some of the most compelling contemporary pessimistic accounts of globalization in describing a twentieth-century world unraveled, with no clear way forward for the twenty-first. This is the set of narratives I described in Chapter One: the work of a minority of geopolitical theorists and journalists who in the 1990s construed the heavily promoted, accelerated globalization of the "post-Cold War world" not as a rush toward guaranteed peace and unbounded prosperity, but as a more or less chaotic slide into disorder and uncertainty. Instead of the arrival of universal "democratic capitalism," fueled by limitless technological growth, these writers saw increasing systemic inequality and the decay of social institutions.⁴ For one such observer, the historian Eric Hobsbawm, instability so characterizes life around the world at "the edge of the new century" that the future seems yet more dismal than the turbulent era just passing, which he has called "the Age of Extremes." Unable because of this uncertainty to make specific predictions for the twenty-first century, he observes simply that he cannot "look to the future with great optimism," because the socialist-inspired structures that fostered collective hope for decades have disappeared (*Edge* 167). In this analysis, if not this political point of view, Hobsbawm joins DeLillo who, as his writerly vision expands beyond a focus on the nation, carries his fiction to much the same

4 Benjamin Barber points out how the coining of the phrase "democratic capitalism" in the 1990s marks the desire by Western promoters of globalization, such as President Bill Clinton, to conflate its political and economic dimensions (14).

historical edge. DeLillo calls the transition a "hinge"--from an era in which America was anxious but dominant in a scheme of conflict with clearly defined borders and sharp conceptual parameters, into a time of seeming chaos when the nation's role is murky and its global power insecure.

The Names: Gathering Facts for the End of the World

It is with *The Names* (1982) that DeLillo begins to move his fiction decisively toward engagement with the broader context for what DeCurtis calls "American life," a context which is, in the late twentieth century's globalized milieu, nothing less than the rest of the world. The novel portrays a circle of Western professionals, mainly from the US but also from Canada and the UK, based in Athens and working in nearby cities of the Third World: "Istanbul, Ankara, Beirut, Karachi" goes one itinerary for the protagonist (33). James Axton is a "risk analyst," collecting information about violence and unrest in these regions for his company, which sells insurance against kidnapping and like threats to Western executives. His friends and associates wonder about the vague nature of his work and the mysterious identity of his employer until the end of the novel, when they learn, along with him, that the company is a front for the CIA, that Axton is thereby implicated in American attempts to control the level, course, and consequences of violence in the region. When an aggressive American banker is then shot and wounded nearby in the city, Axton must wonder if it is a case of mistaken identity, for he now knows that their roles cannot be so clearly distinguished. The narrative's setting and its registration of the impact by the American military-industrial-bureaucratic complex on what would have to be called "Third World life"--to modify DeCurtis's phrase with a

Cold War term then still in force--show DeLillo's concern to find and depict the wider, global implications of "American life," or the far-reaching political and economic measures sustaining and promoting the anxious comfort he satirizes in books like *White Noise*.

This development toward a greater comprehension of the world system of global capitalism is the project on which DeLillo actually embarked with his fiction, rather than an anatomy of national manners. *The Names* is the first novel DeLillo published after receiving a Guggenheim fellowship in 1979, which he used to tour Greece, the main setting for the narrative. His research efforts there seem to have been earnest. Previously he had published six novels in seven years; in contrast, he would publish only three novels in the 1980s, saying these "were more deeply motivated and required a stronger sense of commitment than some of the books I wrote earlier" (DeCurtis 65). Whereas DeLillo's previous two novels, *Players* (1977) and *Running Dog* (1978), have the world's unrest subverting and disturbing American settings, changing venues for *The Names* to the "Third World"--rendered through the specificity of locations in Greece and India, but also through a more generalized affect of globality, evoked by lists of cities and jaded commentary on their problems--definitively marks DeLillo's opening of his fictional world to global concerns. And whatever was the nature of the author's actual sojourn in Greece, for his fiction this opening means the entrance of rampant global crisis.⁵

5 The other main theme in *The Names*, reflections on the epistemological status and occult possibilities of language, has been the dominant focus of its critics until quite recently. Certainly, the novel's ideas about language are central to its structure of meaning, particularly as they inform the mystery driving the narrative: the identity and goals of the hermetic cult, called the Abecedarians or the Names, who are performing ritual murders in the area. But they are not my main concern here. Likewise, in a recent, valuable essay, Anne Longmuir elucidates the novel's setting before and during the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and faults earlier criticism for missing DeLillo's careful indications of this crucial historical context. I am sympathetic but would instead argue that like DeLillo, literary criticism has largely shifted its priorities to deemphasize such tropes as the linguistic puzzle that assumed the foreground in 1982.

For *The Names* offers a dire global narrative, one that shows Third World countries' economies tending violently toward breakdown, followed by their social institutions. The romance of internationalism that most of the Westerners in the novel aspire in some degree to live out is made ironic by the desperate and worsening local conditions DeLillo consistently indicates. It seems that, for DeLillo, to describe the violence and instability found in the Third World immediately, almost naturally, demands an apocalyptic register. This discourse is concretely invoked when Axton reports to his superior George Rowser, a pioneer in the risk analysis business whom Axton describes as having built the company singlehandedly with his data collection endeavors, back "in the days when he [Rowser] gathered facts for the end of the world" (48). Rowser's business has only flourished since, in line with the downward trajectory, or "time of troubles," that is an essential feature of traditional apocalyptic narrative. Indeed, the company's eventually disclosed connections to the CIA suggest that such a preoccupation with the signs of doom has gone mainstream, becoming an accredited, authoritative mode for understanding the world, rather than only the province of elements on the lunatic fringe, like the cult central to the novel's plot. Moreover, the "facts" are "for" the end of the world, rather than portending or simply about the event, which implies that the buyers of this valuable material seek to manage, profit from, and possibly urge on or advocate the disintegration it signifies. This motive would identify Rowser and Axton as agents for the type of global elite who since the worldwide economic downturn that occurred in the early 1970s have been, according to the social theorist Samir Amin, focused on short-term, profit-taking measures: concerned "to manage the crisis rather than look for ways to resolve it" (38).

In his analysis of the consequences of and prospects for globalization, Amin then writes, "if the system adopted to manage the crisis cannot survive in the long term, this is not due to the absurdity of its underlying economic and monetary policies, but to the aggravation of social and political conflicts which it cannot avoid" (39). Incidents in *The Names* likewise suggest that the global crisis must ultimately elude and defeat even so sophisticated an enterprise for controlling it as the fictional practice of risk analysis has developed. Now overwhelmed by information "from various control points around the Mediterranean, the Gulf and the Arabian Sea," Rowser employs writers such as Axton, "someone with intellectual range," to lend structure to the accumulated facts (48). But the report Axton produces in the novel is a stream of troubling data:

He wanted to know about Turkey. I had precise figures for nonperforming loans. I had classified telex traffic between bank branches in the region. I had foreign exchange factors, inflation rate, election possibilities, exports and imports. I had cars lined up for gasoline, daily power cuts, no water coming out of household taps, crowds of unemployed young men standing on corners, fifteen-year-old girls shot to death for politics. No coffee, no heating oil, no spare parts for combat aircraft. I had martial law, black markets, the International Monetary Fund, God is great. (50)

This stunning catalog of crisis overflows with the kind of detail that composes DeLillo's expanded, global vision. It deals in "precise figures" of concreteness in order to mark the stalled Westernization of a Third World economy (if a liminal one, in the case of Turkey) struggling through the hardships and instabilities created by far-ranging structural adjustment programs, or SAPs, as commonly instituted by the primary Western monetary control organizations--the IMF, named in the passage, and the World Bank. As captured in this micro-narrative of social failure, these policies tender "loans" to the masters of national governments, who in return convert their economies toward free markets, which expands opportunities for foreign investment and ownership by the advanced countries.

Often accompanying these loans are conditions dictating broad austerity measures, which weaken public services--"power cuts, no water"--and enforce such shortages as DeLillo cites. These instances of capitalism's practice of creative destruction therefore also naturally inspire "black market" trading as a strategy for circumventing the austerity regimes. As the brutal image of executed "fifteen-year-old girls" suggests, the inequalities exacerbated by structural adjustment arrangements tend to deepen preexisting stratifications and conflicts in the targeted societies, typically already beset by postcolonial problems, and these conditions have been blamed for eventually fomenting, in the Muslim world, a surge of fundamentalist reaction. Thus the passage closes ominously by articulating the two gods who compete for worship in the region, Mammon and Allah.

Yet the passage simultaneously makes clear that the quasi-scientific techniques of data collection it exemplifies ultimately fail as a method for apprehending the evolving global disorder. Axton's display of his empirical approach demonstrates its own limits by performing a loss of control, as the controlling phrase "I had" is nearly submerged by increasingly abstract and massive objects, from "precise figures" to "God is great." In comparison, Robert Kaplan's grasping attempt in *The Coming Anarchy* to imagine an apocalyptic, "Last Map" of the world, a hologram which would "never be static" but resemble "an ever-mutating representation of chaos" (51), may veer toward absurdity, but it aims at the correct pitch of figuration for conceiving such sweeping upheavals holistically. Likewise, the inability of Axton's expertise to contain his "precise figures" within a meaningful framework suggests the spreading dangers this vision of the Third World means to conjure. However, if DeLillo troublingly depicts the Third World in this

novel as the source for a disorder deepening at an almost indescribable pace, his narrative here is also an indictment, if somewhat veiled, that links these chaotic conditions to global finance regimes originating in the West.

Similarly, the threatening "crowds of unemployed young men standing on corners" are on one level an undeniably charged sign of potential violence--and an accurate sociological diagnosis, in the view of some commentators on terrorism--but the context of the passage crucially suggests that they are unemployed due to the same SAPs that have cut their utilities and limited their options. Starting here, such crowds become one of DeLillo's regular metaphors for the looming chaos he envisions to accompany the global crisis he narrates, but as cited in this passage, they are less a figure for an essential irrationality than they will seem to be in *Mao II* (1991), where "the future belongs to crowds," and *Underworld*, which I will discuss next, but rather a key element in a cogent narrative of weakening social coherence.

The Names illustrates how the trajectory of crisis in the Third World increasingly outpaces the empirical methods Western bureaucrats and operatives such as Axton apply to control it. The descriptive power of his facts, many of them "given [to him] by our control for Turkey," persuades Axton that "[t]he streets of Istanbul were data in their own right, the raw force, the unraveling" (50). The "unraveling" of the social world in Turkey, Axton implies, must be sensed firsthand as a subjective feature of daily experience to be comprehended in its totality. Nonetheless, he adduces these details to tell a somewhat different story to his boss, for the "risk insurance" on which his work sets a price necessarily argues that the unraveling is partial or can be controlled, or at least capitalized. As Dennis A. Foster observes, "Axton doesn't see and is not meant to see that

insurance companies, banks, and the CIA do little to diminish the violence and chaos that blow through the nations they take under their management, and indeed contribute to violence in an international arena--thereby increasing the risk" (162). Profits from risk insurance after all depend on promoting fears greater than any actual risk. Yet meanwhile the unraveling really proceeds in all its "raw force," unrefined by analysis.

DeLillo's suggestion of the inadequacy of empirical data collection techniques foretells the similar analysis, however nonfictional, made over two decades later by Mike Davis, whose ongoing researches into ruling-class mismanagement and abuse, discussed in Chapter One, project an apocalyptic vision of contemporary social conditions even more thoroughgoing than DeLillo's. In "Planet of Slums," Davis reports on the vast, rapid growth in the world's urban population, primarily taking place in "second-tier cities and smaller urban areas" (7). Recall his lists of examples: Abidjan, Curitiba, Jakarta, and so on. These resemble *The Names's* Third World itineraries, and so does his analysis of the prime mover for these devastating trends--"the debt crisis of the late 1970s and subsequent IMF-led restructuring of Third World economies in the 1980s"--converge with the novel's (9). These "slums" are "places where, as UN researchers emphasize, 'there is little or no planning to accommodate these people or provide them with services'" (7), just the problems illustrated so vividly in Axton's report on Turkey. Calling this phenomenon "millennial urbanization" (10), Davis argues that "the new urban poverty [has emerged through] a non-linear historical process ... punctuated by storms of poverty and sudden explosions of slum-building ... a wholly original structural development unforeseen by either classical Marxism or modernization pundits" (17, 27).

Thus DeLillo's novel sees accurately that the pace and depth of global urban transformation will continue to defy empirical models.

Aside from the early date at which DeLillo developed his insight into globalization, however, what distinguishes his perspective from later writers on the subject is his refusal to employ tropes from previous eras for evoking the current crisis. Where both Kaplan and Davis often make their descriptions legible through Victorian analogies--"Much of the urban world ... is rushing back to the age of Dickens" (Davis 11)--DeLillo, as in the passage on Turkey, insists on the concreteness of the present moment for detailing his innovative vision.

"Unraveling," which DeLillo suggests as term for the disassembly of the crucial elements once woven to form an essential background for the practice of life, emerges as the key metaphor in *The Names*'s narrative of breakdown. It reappears near the end of the novel, when Axton confronts the true nature of his work. His friend, a diplomat, tells him over drinks of a report in a professional journal which reveals "that the Northeast Group, an American firm selling political risk insurance, has maintained a connection with the US Central Intelligence Agency since its inception. Diplomatic sources et cetera" (315). Implied is that the firm has been outed, and Axton is out of a job. He will realize Rowser tried to convey this tip in their last conversation, but now he is stunned. His savvier friend says, "Of course you were aware in advance of this unraveling. You knew it was blown" (315). In fact Axton was ignorant of how his working life intertwined with his country's drive for world domination, only understanding his position once these narratives have come apart.

Elsewhere in the novel, DeLillo applies a similar language of geopolitical or social "unraveling" to other spheres of his characters' lives, threading the narrative of world disordering as a figure through their more mundane personal struggles. For example, Axton describes his early illusions about marriage with a striking metaphor, as he recognizes, perhaps unconsciously, the capacity for his concerns to shift and mutate beyond prediction: "Wedlock was the last thing Kathryn and I thought we'd entered. We hadn't entered a state at all. If anything, we'd broken out of states and nations and firm designs" (39). He thus articulates an idea of domestic arrangement, which through a pun on "domesticity" easily stands in for the nation, to the emerging geopolitical reality of globalization, where the modern nation-state system, the political arena for Eurocentrically-defined international relations for almost 350 years, is challenged and subverted by economic and cultural transformations of wider scope. The likeness Axton draws, however, is ironic, for he has come to realize that the looser, improvisatory model of "statelessness" to which he and his wife at first subscribed was insufficiently defined: "I thought if you didn't want anything, your marriage was bound to work" (39). They instead find that under this desultory practice, "with no huge self-seeking visions" (39), their bond succumbs to the pulls of outside forces, finding, as they "break out" of firm order, not utopic freedom but a destructive degree of entropy, a chaotic, enervated "state" of disintegration that limits their happiness and agency and mirrors the disabled Third World social settings they have chosen to inhabit and exploit.

This sense of unraveling as the irreversible fraying of a preexisting, agreed-upon, seeming order runs through the ample domestic--that is, marital and parental--narratives DeLillo includes in *The Names*. And once recognized, it adds substance to the author's

comments in an interview publicizing the novel in 1982: "I do try to confront realities. ... But people would rather read about their own marriages and separations and trips to Tanglewood. There's an entire school of American fiction which might be called around-the-house-and-in-the-yard. And I think people like to read this kind of work because it adds a certain luster, a certain significance to their own lives" (Harris). This claim to be depicting a truer "reality" than writers like John Cheever or John Updike is somewhat puzzling if the ample depictions of domesticity in *The Names* are taken at face value. But I suggest that DeLillo uses his protagonist Axton's preoccupation with the domestic scene in order to mimic a typically clouded, American awareness of global politics. Anne Longmuir writes, "*The Names* ... not only demonstrates DeLillo's determination to engage with geopolitical reality but also demonstrates his determination to engage with a non-American reality" (107). To enter into this engagement, DeLillo starts from and goes through a kind of fictional reality more homely to American readers. *The Names* is then not so much a take on "international fiction," the tenuous genre to which Douglas Keesey assigns it, with Henry James as the model (116-17), but a hybrid that merges mid-twentieth-century American domestic realism into a penetrating late-twentieth-century fictional examination of American imperialism and geopolitics. Indeed DeLillo's importance in the field of American fiction may be measured in terms of how quaint the typical subjects of domestic realists Cheever and Updike now seem, even among the literary journalistic establishment, while in 1982 their reputations were very high.⁶

The novel's depiction of an American's developing sense of his functional imbrication in "rings" or networks of both American and larger, global "realities"

⁶ Moreover, in 2006 Updike published a novel on the kind of subject that had clearly interested DeLillo for decades, simply titled *Terrorist*. No doubt events outside the literary world have had much greater impact on the priorities of readers and writers than have DeLillo's productions, but his reputation as a "prescient" author is remarkably well deserved.

confirms DeLillo as a "systems novelist." But it is important to note how the systems he evokes remain out of view, incomprehensible from any one terrestrial perspective.

Fredric Jameson reviewed *The Names* in one of the ancillary writings in his theorization of postmodernism in the early 1980s, and he notes there how DeLillo engages with "the formal dilemma" of "the increasing incompatibility--or incommensurability--between individual experience, existential experience, as we go on looking for it in our individual biological bodies, and structural meaning, which now can ultimately derive only from the world system of multinational capitalism" (116). If DeLillo across his work portrays "a totalized world finally unavailable for perception" (116), beginning with *The Names*, he shows also how these systems operate concretely at a global level and, as they are conceptual but at the same time actual, manmade, and historical, are subject to and in the late twentieth century in fact underwent profound unraveling. DeLillo gives this theme its most thorough treatment in *Underworld*.

Us and Them

Underworld is by far DeLillo's most epic novel, at over 800 pages and with dozens of characters, including figures drawn from contemporary American history, and it is also his most well-known work in literary circles, for its publishers gave it a ubiquitous profile via an aggressive advertising campaign, in which the customarily reticent author participated. The novel's success is the more remarkable when one considers that it advances a narrative of globalization--with, as in *The Names*, a predominantly American frame--that runs against the main stream of such narratives in the 1990s. That is, DeLillo staked his claim as a major American writer of the turn of the

century with a novel that associates the previous decade's geopolitical trends not with world integration and economic opportunity, as did the bestselling pundits Thomas Friedman and Francis Fukuyama, but with a doomstruck sense of quickening disintegration. With this alternative, darker vision, DeLillo endorses the minoritarian perspective on globalization I discussed in Chapter One, the strains of pessimism developed variously by Davis, Kaplan, and Samuel Huntington. In fact, by using an image of the Twin Towers shrouded in gloom for its cover, *Underworld* would seem terribly prescient, if inexpressibly so, four years after it was published, much as the terrorist attacks struck many Americans as a vindication of Huntington's xenophobic prophecies and made the aftermath of September 11 the dark, reeling period some pundits considered "Samuel Huntington's moment" (Kurtz). However, the ultimate extremity of DeLillo's vision of chaos in this text aligns him less with the political scientist Huntington, who cautions against exaggerating trends toward chaos when measures of order can be discerned, than with the more unrestrained travel writer Kaplan, who throughout the 1990s warned of "the coming anarchy" bound to spread from the failed societies of Africa and Eastern Europe to the West. For DeLillo, this deep disordering takes place both at a discursive, conceptual level, as the Cold War world abruptly falls apart, and in the reality he depicts in such devastated venues as post-Soviet Russia and inner-city America.

First, DeLillo animates *Underworld's* characters with the discourse of the era's dominant conceptual world in order to portray that realm's unraveling. The primary conceptual system of world politics in the mid-twentieth century is well known: the relentless antagonism of opposing "Worlds"--US-dominated capitalist democracies

versus a "bloc" of USSR-controlled Communist regimes--in a "Cold War," with each side displacing its aggression onto sites located on their margins or in a "Third World" of mostly poorer countries. Possessing massive and advanced nuclear arsenals defined the opponents' "superpower" status, creating a patently absurd scenario in which each side had the capability to destroy the world many times over but continued to build up arms according to the principles of "brinkmanship" and "mutually assured destruction." Although from 1945 to 1949 Winston Churchill repeatedly urged extending the war, or beginning a new, nuclear one, in order to destroy the Soviet Union,⁷ a US policy of "containment" (rather than "rollback") ensued in 1947, wherein the other side's existence was accepted for the long term and an essentially traditional "spheres of influence" model of foreign affairs took hold. For this reason--that each side essentially pursued its interests without heed to official state philosophy--ideology became primary in marking the difference between the two "Worlds" in imaginary terms.⁸

The stark quality of the new conceptual scheme for global politics suited powerful, resonant narratives, spun by elites but also circulating widely in the popular imaginary. The appropriate basic story may seem to have been readymade. As John McClure explains in *Late Imperial Romance*, "In Western propaganda the socialist bloc was represented as a godless and malevolent antagonist in need of 'containment' or eradication. ... In the Eastern counter-construction, the West became the enemy of

⁷ See Carlton 135-61 and 200-21.

⁸ In *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, William Appleman Williams counters the famous essay by George F. Kennan that outlined the containment policy, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" (1946). Williams writes that instead, his "review of Russian experience suggests that the sources of Soviet conduct are the drives to conquer poverty and achieve basic security in the world of nation states" (283). In Hobsbawm's view, "'containment' was everyone's policy; the destruction of communism was not." Rather, "the apocalyptic *tone* of the Cold War ... came from America" and was driven by domestic politics, since for Kennan, the USSR's Marxism was not a necessary component of their imperial ambitions (*Age of Extremes* 236-37).

freedom-loving people all over the world, and the East at once the locus of all hope and their 'knight' or defender" (141). At the same time, however obvious the binary of good versus evil seems in hindsight--it was "Us and Them," in the shared vocabulary of *Underworld's* main voices of Cold War narrative, J. Edgar Hoover (51) and Marvin Lundy (312)--it was a conceptual apparatus that nonetheless needed intellectual activity in order to be built, shaped, and maintained. Writing about *Underworld*, Peter Knight refers to "the rigidifying, bipolar logic of the Cold War and its accompanying Manichean anxieties" that inform almost every character's discourse and relations with other characters in the novel (819). The core of truth in the narrative--that the world's two most powerful countries were indeed committed enemies with the capacity to destroy most life on the planet--supported but did not exhaust the depth and complexity of these fears.

It is a familiar history but one whose intensity is if anything underestimated in popular accounts. The ideological component of the "Worlds" dualism should in no way mean that this configuration of power existed in the imaginary only. That is, however much propaganda determined the distorted narratives and images each side maintained of the other, this propaganda was effective to the extent that the dualistic scheme became an inevitable, undeniable social fact, deeply imprinting culture on both sides with intended and unintended effects.⁹ Catherine Lutz details how the National Security Act in 1945 created, for the first time, secret areas of the US government--including the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and expanded powers for the president. By this law, elite policymakers advanced "new plans for covert warfare and nuclear deterrence," which included enlisting psychological experts for a multifaceted project to engineer "a new self, a self not so much explicitly disciplined as suspicious of

9 See Nadel, *Containment Culture* and Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More* 115-290.

itself" and to develop methods for inculcating attendant techniques of this self among the general population (136). This initiative began a long campaign of what was essentially psychological warfare against citizens of a democracy by their own public servants, with the aim to produce vigilant, militarized subjects, alert to potential subversion or internal division, using a public discourse newly inflected by a thematics of the mind. President Dwight Eisenhower announced in 1952, "Our aim in the 'cold war' is not conquering of territory or subjugation by force. Our aim is more subtle, more persuasive, more complete. We are trying to get the world, by peaceful means, to believe the truth ... The means we shall employ to spread this truth are often called 'psychological'" (qtd. in Lutz 139). The effort led to a shared sense that the borders between one's own public and secret thoughts needed to be policed and "that those who go beneath 'the surface' of American life were legitimately an object of public concern," while a guise of transparent innocence joined with even ignorance about rightly "expert" matters stood as virtues (Lutz 149).

"Ideologies of Massive Uniformity": DeLillo's Structuring of the Cold War Concept-World

"Beneath the surface of American life" can be added to the cluster of meanings, subtexts, and allusions made by DeLillo's title, *Underworld*. Tom LeClair adroitly provides the master list in one of the first reviews of the epic-scaled novel: "Dante, the Mafia, hollowed earth, humankind's sediment, ghetto life, underground politics, the subconscious, and linguistic roots," as well as DeLillo's invention of a "lost" Sergei Eisenstein film, *Unterwelt*, itself an allusion to a classic 1927 gangster movie (LeClair,

"Underhistory"). The novel portrays the Cold War not simply as a threatening cloud of dread overhanging the age but also as a conceptual system running under and through it, structuring characters' senses of themselves and their worlds, particularly, as I will show, as they retrospectively try to understand them. The Cold War system's language inevitably informs the novel's representation of other events, which then indelibly seem to contain or reproduce aspects of the Cold War mentality. This is not to say that the Cold War provided a particularly enabling set of mental practices--Knight refers to "the constrictions of the containment culture of the 1950s" (816) and Lutz vividly describes the unprecedented extent of postwar American culture's militarism--but the novel suggests the great power its worldview assumed in the imaginary of the time, as well its extraordinary capacity to generate signs. As James and Kathryn Axton belatedly conclude about their failed marriage in *The Names*, any ordered structure may be appealing when the alternative is not freedom but chaos, which, I will demonstrate, is the case DeLillo presents in *Underworld*.

No episode in the novel exemplifies this power over American subjectivity more vividly than the set piece that makes up its extended prologue. The prologue recreates a famous baseball game won by "The Shot Heard 'Round the World," a dramatic, bottom-of-the-ninth-inning home run for the New York Giants that defeated their rivals, the Brooklyn Dodgers, and sent the Giants to the 1951 World Series (where, the story is rarely continued to say, they were roundly beaten by the Yankees).¹⁰ A 1991 feature in

10 Adding to the dramatic import of the hit was how it culminated a long comeback by the Giants. Brooklyn led the National League with the Giants far behind for most of the regular part of the season, which however ended with the two teams tied. An ad hoc playoff series was called, and the home run won the decisive game, which the Dodgers also were leading until this final moment. It was later revealed that the Giants developed an elaborate system for decoding and transmitting the Dodgers' on-field hand signals ("stealing signs"), which adds yet another sinister layer to the event and attests to DeLillo's uncanny judgment for selecting rich historical texts to explore. But see Stephenson for a statistical analysis of the Giants' performance that suggests espionage was not a factor in their surge.

The New York Times showed how the paper placed the story of "The Shot" on its front page alongside a report that the Soviet Union had successfully tested its second atomic bomb, and this inspired DeLillo to likewise pair the two events in *Underworld's* prologue. The setting for one of the national pastime's most glorious moments is here rendered ominous, "grave and threatened, rain-hurried" (19). It is after all October and the end of a season for the losers of the game, but there is, in addition, "the unseen something that haunts the day" (11). The Giants' home stadium, the Polo Grounds--fated to be abandoned by the team in seven years for California and torn down in 1964--is already decrepit: "this old rust-hulk of a structure ... this metropolis of steel and concrete and flaky paint ..." (11). Physical bulk becomes one of the novel's main signifiers of the Cold War--fitting then, that the Giants should win the game over the sprightly Dodgers. This motif appears here in a synecdoche, the stadium, but later is crystallized in the discourse of the novel's sole Russian character, who refers to "ideologies of massive uniformity" (786). In Peter Knight's terms, the Cold War in the novel connotes "solidity": "an inflexible and monolithic belief structure ... [which] takes on a comforting solidity ... [and becomes] a source of stability" (816-17). Characters such as Marvin Lundy and Klara Sax verify this condition later in the novel. But this connection does not emerge at the outset, and instead the portentous atmosphere, to follow LeClair, alludes to Dante and also Eliot, establishing an unsettlingly minor key for a moment hallowed in nostalgic popular histories.

Introducing the Soviet atomic blast into the scene inserts the Cold War's narrative along with its historical content, defining a setting already shaped as darkly foreboding in general literary terms. News of the event is delivered to J. Edgar Hoover--who, DeLillo

has claimed, in fact attended the game, in the surprising company of Jackie Gleason, Frank Sinatra, and Toots Shor, all then appearing in the scene as well--leading Hoover to reflect as he looks over the stands, "All these people formed by language and climate and popular songs and breakfast foods and the jokes they tell and the cars they drive have never had in common so much as this, that they are sitting in the furrow of destruction" (28). Hoover here glances at the manifestations of "space-age" or "atomic-age" popular culture--much of which DeLillo will represent in Part 5 of the novel, "Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry"--and names the ultimate signifier he finds connecting them. While his discourse is shaded by a perhaps improbably Lacanian view of the individual subject as fundamentally shaped by preexisting and external symbolic codes, DeLillo's Hoover also registers the Cold War's structure of conflict as the culture's primary ideological frame. He demonstrates that even as his domestic surveillance program works to posit and enforce what Lutz calls "the once and ideally unitary American mind" (159), the reigning geopolitical narrative calls forth antagonism everywhere in order to be completed: "But there is some bitter condition he has never been able to name and when he encounters a threat from outside, from the moral wane that is everywhere in effect, he finds it is a balance to this state, a restoring force ... there is that side of him, that part of him that depends on the strength of the enemy" (28). Here we see evidence for Knight's claim that Cold War paranoia was both "a source of stability," that is, a strategy for obtaining coherent identity by projecting a Manichean worldview against "the enemy," and also as a psychic disturbance of the state, which seeks enemies endlessly (817).

This element of disturbance might lead to the objection that Hoover is not a reliable voice to select from a richly drawn scene as an apt representative of the novel's version of the Cold War worldview. Indeed, Hoover's reappearance in sadomasochism gear in the 1960s section of the novel makes unsubtle comic hay of his well-known psychopathologies. He is also doubled by name and character traits by another character, Sister Edgar, whose anti-Communism, germophobia, and incongruous celebrity-mania are an even more obviously delusional mix. But in this important prologue, DeLillo gives few of the other characters such extended interior monologues as he does to Hoover, and what other important single figures there are also evoke the Cold War, if more tenuously than Hoover.

Of the two other focalizers in this section, one is a boy who comes away with the home run ball that becomes a key linking device in the narrative. His discourse is plausibly less rich than Hoover's, but as he prepares to jump the turnstile with a group of other boys in a vibrant stunt reminiscent of Tom Sawyer, he is, jarringly, "trying not to feel doom-struck" (12). The boy, Cotter Martin, seems affected by the generalized gloom of the setting, for which it is left to Hoover to provide specific content.

The scene's other focalizer is Russ Hodges, the announcer whose unrestrained radio call of the climactic home run, "The Giants win the pennant!" shouted four times, has become inextricably linked to images from the game. We as readers are with Hodges as he prepares to narrate the game, and his co-worker speculates on the unexpectedly small crowd at the stadium--another detail DeLillo captured in research--saying that the Giants' fans must be demoralized from their loss to the Dodgers the day before: "It's like they're dying in the tens of thousands" (15). Then Hodges reflects on the name of the

stadium, the Polo Grounds, "a name he loves, a precious echo of things and times before the century went to war. He thinks everybody who's here ought to feel lucky because something big's in the works, something's building" (15). These characters' unprompted allusions to the episodes of massive violence just behind them and the rest of the crowd in history recall as well the ongoing, "building" threat of nuclear holocaust. Hodges's premonition is notably vague and neutral in tone, allowing for drama, catastrophe, or both. Meanwhile the "echo" he hears in the antique name of the stadium is a trace that only underlines that while he may remember, barely, the era of peace and gentility--although the memory he adduces is a bloody boxing match he was brought to by his father--it is gone, leaving him as "a carrier of some solemn scrap of history" of debatable value (16).

Neither of these voices competes in the prologue with Hoover's for visionary authority, and there are only Hoover's repugnant politics and personal traits to hold against the powerful images of the Cold War worldview he conjures. DeLillo gives Hoover a grand vision to express, inspired by Peter Bruegel's horrifying painting, *The Triumph of Death* (c. 1562)--also the prologue's title--which, torn from a Life magazine reproduction and flung from the stands, strikes him in the face and prompts yet more florid illuminations (41). Timothy L. Parrish finds a double sense in Hoover's title at the Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Director," and links it to DeLillo's metafictional play with the great film director Eisenstein, arguing that DeLillo "siphon[s] the techniques that Hoover and these other rival artists employ" in order to represent the fragmentation of historical consciousness in postmodernity (700). For Parrish, this claim ties into a larger interrogation of DeLillo's complicity in the fragmentation his novelistic technique

represents, an issue to which I want to return later. For now, let me say that although Parrish seems to me to overstate DeLillo's formal innovation in this novel--perhaps his most accessible precisely for its engagement with popular historical content--and the Hoover character's role in its design, it is the Hoover character who in the prologue establishes as important for the novel the dominant conceptual scheme of the Cold War world and who demonstrates its stark power as a narrative and register of images for the middle and late twentieth century.

Signs of a Great Unraveling

To the extent that *Underworld* is an epic-scaled novel covering the second half of the twentieth century, it then describes the unraveling of that Cold War world. After the tour-de-force prologue, the narrative flashes forward to 1992 and from there essentially travels backward through the decades defined by the Cold War. The novel in part dramatizes the aftereffects of a conceptual world's dismantlement. The psychological apparatuses that were constructed to produce a nation of vigilant, militarized subjects, as described above, could not be removed without leaving what Parrish argues was created with its disappearance, an "ideological vacuum" (712). About the stunningly abrupt end of the Cold War, Susan Buck-Morss writes that "the profound significance of this event ... was not so much its political effects--the replacement of 'really existing' (state) socialism by 'really existing' (capitalist) democracy--as the fact that this fundamental shift in the historical map shattered an entire conception of the world, on both sides. In a real sense, it marked the end of the twentieth century" (x). The context for Buck-Morss's claim is her contention that democracy has historically always been a collective or mass

concern and hence shares a wide common ground with socialism, a kinship the ideological hostility of the Cold War obscured. Thus her observation is less about the loss of checks to liberal capitalism's drive to cover the globe since the socialist bloc's collapse than it is about the broad, devastating, psychological effects of a heavily invested conceptual scheme's unanticipated dismantlement.

The novel corresponds to this claim, insofar as DeLillo gives insight on a par with Hoover's to another character, the woebegone conspiracy theorist Marvin Lundy. To visitors to the unofficial baseball museum in the basement of his home in New Jersey--where for a time he possesses the lost home run ball of the prologue--Lundy speaks impressively if not quite eloquently of the mainly latent psychological damage the major shift from the Cold War worldview inflicts. He tells one of these visitors, a somewhat feckless younger man,

"You see the cold war winding down. This makes it hard for you to breathe. ... 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. All the power and intimidation of the state will seep out of your personal bloodstream. You will no longer be the main ... [p]oint of reference. Because other forces will come rushing in, demanding and challenging. The cold war is your friend. You need it to stay on top. ... You don't know the whole thing is geared to your dominance in the world?" (170-71)

Note that Lundy does not gainsay the terror that played an integral role in the Cold War psychic regime. He acknowledges that this model brought on terror from the "state," which seems a term chosen carefully to encompass concerted aspects of the national culture, not simply the government. But he finds an "honest, dependable" solidity in that rigid arrangement of power, preferring it to the energies he sees unloosed by its world's disintegration. His figure of entropy, power seeping out of the bloodstream, suggests an idea of organic links to the state severed and devolving into undirected, fruitless

aggression, reminiscent of Kaplan's narrative of endemic crime, but it also evokes a frittering of energy, so that US "dominance in the world" is no longer a "constant thing." Lundy forecasts anarchy, a free-for-all of competing interests replacing a neat, evenly matched "rivalry," citing as an example massive anti-nuclear protests in England--signs of the major European Green movement in the mid-1980s, when this scene takes place--led by thousands of women but including, to Lundy's distress, "men in dresses ... Buddhists beating drums" (171). Here the proto-fascist dimension of the Cold War militarized subjectivity emerges, where popular demands for peace and noninterference connote a threat to a stable order itself based on fear. Lundy's strong capacity for denial prevents him from seeing in the "No Nukes" tactics a repetition of late 1960s-early 1970s protests in America against the Vietnam War--which would suggest an earlier date for the ending of US dominance. Reflecting the influence of President Ronald Reagan's amnesiac renovation of Cold War themes, his bewilderment at dissent only underlines the durability of the Cold War worldview and the narratives it generated, even as it promoted paranoia and defensiveness.

As in the prologue, where Hoover's more lyrical reflections on the Cold War's stabilizing configuration of antagonism frames the scene more aptly than any other character's discourse, no substantial dialogue or resistance counters Lundy's paranoid speech. According to the scene, his level of delusion might be accepted as an endemic side effect of duly absorbing Cold War propaganda. His visitor, Brian Glassic, exemplifies the contemporary American male characters adrift in DeLillo's novels.¹¹ In his denial, he refuses even to enter into dialogue with Lundy's rambling but not unrehearsed theorization: "Cold war? I don't see the cold war winding down. And if I did,

¹¹ See Kucich 337 and McClure, *Late Imperial Romance* 122-23.

good. I'd be happy about it. ... I thought we were going to talk baseball" (170-71). Lundy replies, "We're talking baseball. ... You see the clock ... [s]topped at three fifty-eight. Why? Is it because that's when Thomson hit the homer off Branca? ... Or because that's the day we found out the Russians exploded an atom bomb" (171). These superficially lunatic comments in fact show Lundy to be a deft reader of the novel in which he exists as a representative and seer of his world's unraveling.

Lundy's discourse presents chaos as the only alternative to a rigidly maintained power regime, and again here he aptly represents the novel's inventory of Cold War possibilities, which pairs ideas of order and chaos from the outset. His figure for the collapse of the Cold War conceptual scheme--power seeping from the individual's bloodstream--recalls the figures of entropy from the novel's prologue, where the crowd at the Polo Grounds showers the field in an intensifying torrent of paper waste. Beginning with "some" fans "tossing paper over the edge, torn-up scorecards and bits of matchbook covers ... crushed paper cups, little waxy napkins they got with their hot dogs" (16), the paper becomes a deluge as the game nears its climax. "[T]he contagion of paper" sweeping through the crowd becomes "a second force that runs parallel to the game" (38). Similarly, the prologue continually tracks the level of crowd noise in the stadium, providing another index for the game's building drama, but also a threatening figure of entropy and chaos.¹² First a blank undertone of "ambient noise like random dugout buzz" (26), the crowd noise erupts into a signifier of frenzy as the game continues, when a Giants hit "obliterates the beat of the crowd's rhythmic clapping," transforming it into "an open roar, making a noise that keeps enlarging itself in breadth and range" (37). More

12 "Crowd noise" also neatly compresses central tropes from DeLillo's previous novels, noise from *White Noise* and crowds from *Mao II*, where, again, "the future belongs to crowds." Here and elsewhere DeLillo seems to use *Underworld* to recapitulate and echo his work's main themes.

generally, the crowd of people itself joins the cluster of elements modeling entropy: "In the booth Russ sees the crowd begin to lose its coherence, people sitting scattered on the hard steps, a priest with a passel of boys filing up the aisle, paper rolling and skittering in the wind. ... you sense a helpless scattering, it is tastable in the air, audible in the lone-wolf calls from high in the stands" (33-34). So at the very moment Hoover forms a strategy to "maintain control" of publicity for the escalating Cold War through manipulation of the media (28), the crowd around him loses its formal structure and bathes the arena in waste.

This duality--the "parallel forces" of the ordered game and the disordered audience--suggests the existence of chaos as a persistent shadow to any ordering scheme a society can conceive and enact. In this exemplary case, the disorder eventually overwhelms the order, as the ecstatic crowd spills onto the field at the end of the game, putting the players to flight. Ironically, it is the crowd's chaotic behavior that provides the very occasion for Hoover to frame the Cold War grandly, for it is at this moment that Bruegel's painting reaches him, on pages ripped from *Life* magazine and cast into the wind by a delirious spectator. Thus at a key early moment of the Cold War regime's formulation,¹³ that regime is simultaneously threatened with subversion in microcosm by the forces it would control. Consistent with his depictions of crowds in *Mao II*, DeLillo represents the stadium audience occasionally as a harmonious collective but more often as a mob: we know the boy Cotter Martin has succeeded in getting into the game without a ticket when we "lose him in the crowd" (14). The crowd consumes individuals, feeding on the celebrity auras of Frank Sinatra and Jackie Gleason, and the threat of this force

13 In Phillip Wegner's view, *Underworld* presents this moment as the true start of the Cold War, as the second Russian atomic blast confirms Žižek's psychoanalytically inflected notion that an event does not really occur until it is repeated. I would instead suggest that the second test initiates a new phase of the Cold War and the birth of its most absurd element, the nuclear arms race.

together with the lack of an alternative vision of community confirms that Hoover's rigid vision is a stabilizing if also frightening idea.

From a Golden Age to a Global Fog: The Case for Chaos

Narratives of order and images of chaos maintain a copresence in DeLillo's work. Knight observes that "[a]s much as *Libra*'s vision of the Kennedy assassination is shaped by conspiracy, secret histories, and a sense of hidden order behind the visible, it is also framed in terms of randomness, disorder, chaos, and coincidence" (813). In fact, most critics hold *Libra* to endorse the "chaos theory of history" over inadequate attempts at authoritative explanation in "official" narratives like the Warren Report.¹⁴ What changes in *Underworld* is that authoritative accounts of the world, even when they are repellent or distressing, make their appeal visible against the only alternatives of chaos and rampant disorder, which the novel suggests are all that remain after the Cold War world unravels, a possibility the prologue shows to be a process latent all along, underneath the dominant narrative.

This view, along with DeLillo's closely detailed descriptions of 1950s life in the Bronx in later sections, not to mention the novel's deep engagement with baseball, contribute to a perhaps surprisingly nostalgic tone for an author of canonical postmodern fiction. Even as DeLillo brings out unsettling dimensions of a famous baseball game, he devotes pages in later sections of the novel to such clichés as images of Marilyn Monroe and tailfins on American cars. But a certain retrospection is intrinsic to the notion of an unraveling world: there must at some time in the past have been a coherent worldview to

¹⁴ See Radford, who however finds DeLillo's attraction to chaos irresponsible in that it opposes a more scientific approach that would stand more ready to benefit collectivities.

come undone. For example, the historian Allen J. Matusow's *The Unraveling of America* (1985) describes the dynamics of a postwar mainstream liberal consensus on domestic politics that crested with the civil rights movement but frayed into competing interests and degenerated into extremism by the late 1960s. For another, the economist Paul R. Krugman in a collection of columns mainly attacking the policies of George W. Bush argues that 2000 to 2003 were "the years when it all went wrong, again--when the heady optimism of the late 1990s gave way to renewed gloom" (xvi). As Krugman's narrative takes us from boom to bust in less than 10 years, his title *The Great Unraveling* (2003) may seem overstated, but it nonetheless is an apt example of how the metaphor of unraveling necessarily projects greater order onto the past and therefore imprints conservative overtones on the narratives that employ it. In *Underworld*, the artist Klara Sax says about her project of painting over retired B-52 long-range bombers, "The past brings out our patriotism, you know? We want to feel an allegiance. It's the one undivided allegiance, to all these people and things" (73). The vagueness of her comment, which seems to allude to the Pledge of Allegiance, itself a text that underwent a Cold War ideological revision,¹⁵ underlines nostalgia's status as a perhaps unwanted but persistent byproduct of retrospection. Or as Knight observes, "In *Underworld* the division between a before and an after is not something that is immediately recognizable by the characters at the time, but is strategically projected backwards through the lens of nostalgia" (815). When unraveling occurs on the massive scale of DeLillo's project in *Underworld*, which narrates the disintegration of an all-encompassing geopolitical

15 In 1954, Congress added the phrase "under God" to the original 1924 version of the Pledge, to stress the US's commitment to anti-Communism. The addition has sporadically caused controversy, most recently in the early 2000s.

worldview whose constrictions formed a bulwark against chaos, a sense of nostalgia arises inevitably from the text.

But this nostalgia emerges especially because no comparable idea of structure arrives to take the Cold War model's place. Marvin Lundy is not the novel's only character who feels cut adrift, apprehensive toward the next phase of world politics. In a television interview, after conveying the ambivalent view of the past quoted above, Klara Sax moves on to say of the future,

"Now that power is in shatters or tatters and now that those Soviet borders don't even exist in the same way, I think we understand, we look back, we see ourselves more clearly, and them as well. Power meant something thirty, forty years ago. It was stable, it was focused, it was a tangible thing. It was greatness, danger, terror, all those things. And it held us together, the Soviets and us. Maybe it held the world together. You could measure things. You could measure hope and you could measure destruction. Not that I want to bring it back. It's gone, good riddance. But the fact is."

And she seemed to lose her line of argument here. (74)

This virtual thesis statement of the novel's vision of geopolitical change tellingly ends in a fragment, as Klara Sax's historical narrative falters. While power once undeniably joined itself to nuclear terror, it was a constructive force, measurable, "tangible," clear. But now it is dispersed and fragmented beyond borders, so that a coherent narrative of world order becomes impossible.

The account of a world's unraveling DeLillo that gives here through his artist figure Klara Sax concurs with the accounts of several world historians and theorists of globalization. Hobsbawm, like Klara Sax, considers the disintegration of the "Second World" a turning point into unsettling obscurity, and he writes: "The collapse of the communist regimes ... not only produced an enormous zone of political uncertainty, instability, chaos and civil war, but also destroyed the international system that had stabilized international relations for some forty years" (*Extremes* 10). Going further,

Hobsbawm posits a postwar "Golden Age" for both the First and Second Worlds, marked by peaceful relations and vigorous economic growth on both sides, which however ended with the economic slackening of the 1970s. And according to Samir Amin, a broad postwar consensus emerged, featuring overall stability in international affairs and, in the West, a compromise on labor relations which harmonized domestic politics and raised standards of living. The severe economic crisis of the 1970s led elites on both sides to abdicate their leadership of society, instead managing the crisis to their profit while they still could. As a result, "the Short Twentieth Century [1914-91] ended in problems for which nobody had, or even claimed to have, solutions. As the citizens of the fin-de-siecle tapped their way through the global fog that surrounded them, into the third millennium, all they knew for certain was that an era of history had ended. They knew very little else" (Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes* 558). One of *Underworld's* most articulate characters, Klara Sax represents this type of "citizen," struggling in the aftermath of an unraveled world.

Hobsbawm closes the era when the only systematic alternative to capitalism collapses, and DeLillo does much the same. Covering 1951 to 1992, *Underworld* could be called the Short Half-Twentieth Century. In "The Power of History," a 1997 essay for *The New York Times Book Review*, DeLillo discusses the motivation for his new novel. He tries to explain his attraction to artifacts such as recordings of the famous baseball game that he felt compelled to recreate in fiction: "I found a curious antiquity in news, film and audiotapes recorded less than 50 years ago, at the hinge of the atomic age." Here DeLillo brackets the Cold War era on both sides, implying both that the immediate postwar years comprised a transitional period which inherently contained multiple

possibilities, and that the late 1990s are another such "hinge." Several important social theorists see a similar crux in this moment. Also writing in 1997, Immanuel Wallerstein forecasts the demise of his own major historical concept, the capitalist world-system, within fifty years, but what is to follow it is unknowable (*End of the World* 1). All that can be counted on through this period is turbulence and declining life conditions, making this "age of transition" also a "time of troubles", which he evokes in stark terms: "As the world-economy enters a new period of expansion, it will thereby exacerbate the very conditions that have led it into a terminal crisis. ... At the same time, we may expect the degree of collective and individual security to decrease, perhaps vertiginously... This will be frightening to most people, as well it should be" (*Decline of American Power* 67).

Conversely, for Wallerstein in this "hinge" of time is an opportunity for vast change, because at such moments, "small inputs have large outputs. ... it is precisely in periods of transition from one historical system to another one (whose nature we cannot know in advance) that human struggle takes on the most meaning" (*End of the World* 1, 3). Wallerstein's belief, based on physical science models, in the disproportionate impact small "inputs" may have at crucial moments finds an echo in Eugene Ivakhnenko's theory of "threshold periods" in intellectual history, when "small factors may cause large and far-reaching consequences" at times of "ideological chaos," when strategies for domination are "reshuffled" along with new ideas (601). Such confusion also describes the "hinge" created by the Cold War system's dismantlement in DeLillo's account. Ivakhnenko likewise perceives such a "threshold"--and its attendant discursive chaos--in the post-Cold War years in Russia. In contrast to these analyses which describe crucial moments of great turmoil and risk as also potential opportunities and openings, there

seems only in *Underworld* to be a closing down, the dissipation into, as Part 3's title has it, "The Cloud of Unknowing," the unraveling of one concept-world, leaving its "citizens" unsettled and disoriented toward the new one, yet to take a shape that is comprehensible, let alone promising.

A Millennial Interlude or an Age of Disorder?: Revelation in Reverse

Thus DeLillo's second "hinge" turns the US out of the Cold War into--what? An uncertain blankness, occupied by nostalgia and "das Kapital," to take the title of *Underworld*'s epilogue, set in the mid-1990s. "The Power of History" illustrates DeLillo's sense of the present's inability to be named: he refers to the time as "a period of empty millennial frenzy," dominated by media-driven simulation processes. With this remark, DeLillo invokes the apocalyptic while appearing to forswear it. His novels consistently express an interest in apocalyptic themes while avoiding the sort of passionate commitment to them that, for example, the social thinkers quoted above seem to demonstrate quite seriously.¹⁶ *Underworld* stays true to this pattern by voicing apocalyptic discourse through disturbed if brilliant characters such as Lundy, Hoover, and the "sick comic" Lenny Bruce, for whom DeLillo invents spot-on "bits" about the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁷ The novel's structure, however, indicates a deeper engagement with apocalyptic literature, in that it narrates a catastrophic passage from one world into another. However, DeLillo's narrative reverses the traditional apocalyptic pattern by casting the Cold War era and its "constricted culture" as the more ordered time, while

16 *White Noise* is typical in that the protagonist, Jack Gladney, listens to another character powerfully interpret the "airborne toxic event" in apocalyptic terms. As in *Libra*, any one narrative is contained among a number of other possibilities. *Underworld* differs from these in having an overarching apocalyptic narrative structure, passing from one age to the next.

17 See Rosen, who terms Lundy and Bruce "DeLillo's apocalyptists" but does not consider why they are marginalized characters in the narrative.

what a controversially vague 1990s political slogan promised as "the New World Order" emerges as a time of chaos. By contrast, in Revelation, the earthly realm of pain and confusion passes away after a staggering decline into tribulation and is replaced by the perfectly ordered heavenly city, which descends abruptly from heaven. In this light, DeLillo's dismissal of the moment's interest in apocalyptic themes as "empty millennial frenzy" rings hollow, for his timely novel undoubtedly engages with the topic and in fact reworks it into a narrative apposite for his era.

His critical characterization of the millennial period, however, aligns his view with Jean Baudrillard's treatment of the subject. Baudrillard, ironic but not dismissive, postulates that postmodernity has trapped itself in what DeLillo might call a "hinge" to nowhere as it approaches the millennium, because its nostalgic desire to erase its historical memory has caught it in suspension:

We are already in the anticipated void of the Year 2000, in its shadow, as if it were an approaching asteroid. Just as any electoral deadline freezes political life a year ahead of time, so does the shadow of the millennium which creates an empty vortex that swallows the entire century. ... We dig in the archives. We settle old accounts. We revive memories (including the memory of the Year 2000 in anticipation, as if it had already taken place). We launder and purify to desperately try to end the century with a politically correct balance sheet. ("Shadow of the Millennium")

This simultaneous fixation on and denial of the century's passing, which DeLillo's remark typifies, ensures that "the Year 2000 will not take place," creating what Baudrillard calls elsewhere "the illusion of the end." Thus it is appropriate for DeLillo's end-of-the-century novel to concern itself with retrospection and nostalgia and to narrate a transition into no-time, an era of uncertainty and instability that should give way to a new order but cannot find the way there.

On the other hand, this political narrative may in fact be the novel's most apocalyptic aspect. Bruegel's "Triumph of Death," Hoover's grand framing device for the Cold War era, can of course support multiple interpretations, but the *Life* magazine feature Hoover views describes the painting colorfully as an illustration of a passage from Revelation: "[t]he final conquest of humanity by death," featuring "the pale rider on the pale horse, who drives the living into a chamber of doom" (qtd. in Gardner). More precisely, this juncture in Revelation's apocalyptic narrative is one of a type that anthropologist Filip De Boeck calls "the apocalyptic interlude," or an interval between heavenly judgments, "in which Satan reigns" (22). Writing about contemporary urban culture in Kinshasa, the capital of a state verging on collapse and a site of spiraling mortality rates, De Boeck describes crushing material conditions which in popular belief have led to "the rapid demonization of everyday life in Congo" (22). According to De Boeck, Kinshasans translate everyday experience into terms drawn from the Biblical text, which they freshly interpret, perceiving themselves living in "an intermediate space [where] the complex chronology between the various phases announced in the Book of Revelation ... has collapsed into a confusing present in which all of these moments somehow come together in what is often a swirling conceptual and existential imbroglio ..." (23). According to my reading of the biblical text, Revelation's "complex" narrative is already "confusing," reflecting a strategy of mystification which invites but baffles definitive glossing. Hence its appeal for Bruegel and DeLillo's Hoover (and DeLillo) as a text easily adapted for artistic representations of intense scenarios of conflict. Death is so common in urban Congolese life, De Boeck reports, that "religious zombification" has taken hold of the popular imaginary, which sees the many dead

walking the streets, as in Bruegel's early modern masterwork (25). Baudrillard's notion of a suspended countdown toward the new age, however, suggests that De Boeck's terrifying "apocalyptic interlude" may acquire permanent status in global postmodernity, supporting the retrospective historical narrative in *Underworld*, set at a "hinge" to nowhere.

How to Live in an Unraveled World

For DeLillo's novel does not ignore the actual, historical processes of societal unraveling that observers like De Boeck have presented as prominent narratives of economic globalization. Readers of *Underworld* must be attentive to these themes, however, because their representation often is occluded, as in *The Names*, by the angst experienced by comfortable American characters as their conceptual world collapses, which is the novel's main narrative. When DeLillo devotes attention to scenes of social failure, the results are as disturbing as Bruegel's or De Boeck's images of walking death. What Elizabeth Rosen calls the novel's "apocalyptic undercurrent" rather seems to be a consistent, linear background narrative, the slipping of greater and greater parts of the world into chaotic poverty and near-impossible material conditions (97).¹⁸ But this story must be glimpsed through the spaces of the main characters' struggle with anomie and the changing conceptual registers of American culture. For example, in the epilogue, on the

¹⁸ Peter Knight argues that the Cold War world's collapse reveals to the characters that its conceptual system of antagonism was a "red herring" (824) for the more important historical narrative of the converging globalization of power throughout the entire period: "[t]he real secret history in *Underworld*, then, is not the simple story of the replacement of bomb-induced fears by newer anxieties resulting from the fragmentation of those former geopolitical certainties. It is instead an underground current of increasing awareness and consternation that slowly everything is becoming connected" (825). As valuable as Knight's essay has obviously been to my analysis, I do not see how one of these stories is simpler than the other. Also, as James Annesley points out, the concept of globalization is itself complex, containing several narratives at once, capable of disintegrating some areas of experience and integrating others; Annesley, however, faults the novel for itself simplifying the story.

way to a trial explosion for demonstrating nuclear waste disposal techniques at the Kazakh Test Site--the same place where the Soviets exploded the bomb reported in the prologue--the novel's main protagonist, corporate executive Nick Shay, is distracted from his Russian guide's discourse on "every kind of changeover a society can bear": Nick conducts an internal monologue on how to confront a subordinate about his adultery with Nick's wife. While for this ambitious novel, DeLillo has added the requisite sophistication and scale to his analysis of global affairs, his narrative style, as in *The Names*, elects to include a double track of American domestic realism--thus Nick himself beds several women over the course of the narrative, before and after he is married.

As a result, mainly successful American characters stay at the center of *Underworld's* narrative focus. Falling into poverty happens to others, such as radiation-stricken Russians and Kazakhs in the 1990s. For these abject victims, the novel has an American parallel in a mid-1980s gallery of drug addicts, prostitutes, and AIDS victims in the South Bronx, but the protagonist's family and friends hold out against the encroaching disorder, this despite the case that Nick has a history of violence and that his wife takes up smoking heroin during her own trysts.¹⁹

One passage opens up an ambivalent attitude toward the unraveling social world. In the mid-1980s Nick visits his mother, who still lives in the Bronx after her sons have left for Phoenix and Boston. Out the window, there is the incongruous sight of people sitting in lawn chairs on a roof. "He knew it was evidence of brisk improvisation, people extracting pleasure from the grudging streets, but it made him nervous, it was a breach, another opening, another local sign of instability and risk" (196). Clearly, to Nick these

19 See McClure, *Late Imperial Romance* 145-49 on a similar pattern of making the other strange in *Mao II*.

"people" threaten to create a "breach" and to destroy the walls between his personal narrative of success and the social narrative of his times. His language of embattlement recalls the Cold War visionary Hoover's, who imagines "a lonely tower standing on the Kazakh Test Site, the tower armed with the bomb," while in the throes of his Bruegel-inspired rapture (50). Thus much as does "unraveling" in *The Names*, the Cold War ideology of security penetrates intimate dimensions of characters' lives, so that Nick transports the idea of "Us and Them" into his boyhood home.

The "financial crisis" of 1970s New York has become an enduring element in the city's public mythology.²⁰ The signs of decline in the novel--some remarkably subtle, as when Rosemary Shay's air conditioner seems to her son "to be running at half strength" (218)--can be fitted however into the larger history of economic slackening and world crisis beginning in the 1970s told by Hobsbawm and Amin. The postwar consensus for a moderate welfare state amid general economic growth has collapsed, leaving these "people" on the roof to "improvise" tactics for basic comfort, or to repurpose neglected buildings. Achille Mbembe explains such responses to "times of crisis" as "the routinization of a *register of improvisations* lived as such by people" ("Figures of the Subject" 326, emphasis in original). He points out that in extreme circumstances "[o]ne approaches the crisis not as a system, but as a prosaic ... an ensemble of ways of living" (326, 324). These terms provide a language for articulating the sympathetic resonance of Nick's ambivalent response to what he witnesses. However, Mbembe's acidic statement that he is "*not interested* primarily in the *problematiques* of resistance, emancipation, or autonomy" (325), but rather in simply seeing clearly what adjustments people make when

20 For example, it is the background narrative for Jonathan Mahler's *Ladies and Gentlemen, The Bronx Is Burning* (2005), a popular nonfiction attempt to weave *Underworld*'s main subjects, social history and baseball. For a critique of the notion of "the fiscal crisis," however, see Bender 191-92

set with untold levels of duress, suggests that his concepts will probably not contribute to constructing a narrative capable of imagining the transition from the present state of collapse, the "hinge" from which *Underworld* is narrated, to a more enabling social or economic order. These raw conditions remain safely outside the protagonist and his circle, always at a distance.

First-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism: A National Allegory of Disintegration

As well this matter of perspective seems to affect DeLillo's handling of his ambitious project, in that his panoramic historical mode implies a nearly omniscient author with a bird's-eye view on the processes of historical change. *Underworld* clearly aspires to be the classic novel of the unraveling world it proposes to survey, taking pains to register dozens of historical events and icons in each decade it covers. Critics of postmodern fiction such as Tony Tanner and James Wood (that is, old-school, or, in Wood's case, simply old-fashioned) see this approach as a failure because it strains to connect too many elements without devoting enough attention to character and narrative richness. Coming to a similar conclusion from a different approach is the scholar James Annesley, who finds DeLillo's version of a globalized world too reductive, "with no room for interrogation of this vision, nor any sense that the novel can do more than offer a homological reflection of these material conditions" (89). This version of an artistic flaw can only be taken so far: Annesley goes on to criticize DeLillo for not having worked out his theory of globalization as well as social theorists like Roland Robertson have done. If the conception of the novelist's cultural role this criticism demands is unreasonably

stringent, it is not so far off from the level of sophistication implied by *Underworld's* evident ambition.²¹

But the author's situation is described more sensitively by Parrish, who agrees that DeLillo's vision of the future is more murky than his version of the past--as delivered by his Hoover character--but argues that, "writing in the era after the Cold War, DeLillo's narrative task is in a sense more difficult than Hoover's because the paranoia of the Cold War no longer provides a structure to his narrative interventions" (707). The Cold War narrative spun by Hoover shows its appeal to DeLillo, looking back from an equivalent "hinge" moment that however lacks a comparable conceptual frame. Dipesh Chakrabarty provides another, more historically precise way to express the problem of narrating an unraveled world when he hypothesizes that "it is possible that 'history' has died in the advanced capitalist countries. ... Societies running in the fast forward mode cannot any longer be studied ... for even the evidence, the memory of change, is destroyed in the process" (49). If true, this hypothesis would answer one of Tanner's complaints, that in *Underworld* DeLillo relies on "the news" for narrative material and is unable meaningfully to connect the arbitrary pieces of information he amasses through any means other than unjustified paranoia. DeLillo's pastiches of Cold War culture in this novel then represent an attempt to restore or preserve historical consciousness for a "society in the fast forward mode," and his reconstruction of the past, as it stretches for coherence, even to the extent that it longs for constrictions, is written from a moment when such an activity faces severe challenges.

Chakrabarty concludes that the modern roles of "citizen" and "consumer" exist in

21 As well this criticism restates a familiar critique of postmodernism, that it offers no solution to the dire state it proposes, and that in leveling all totalizing narratives as oppressive, it thereby immediately creates its own such narrative. See McGowan 21-30.

conflict, with the former rapidly becoming a relic of a bygone age. Therefore "history" as registered in national culture represents at least a temporary counterforce to the globalization of capitalism, or what is called in *Underworld's* epilogue, "the convergence of consumer desire" (785). In that light, to locate his historical epic squarely in an American perspective, indeed even in the American literary tradition--within which he seems to identify himself as a modernist²²--becomes a necessary measure for DeLillo, although doing so limits his possibilities for representing the global dynamics that inform the overall historical vision he has developed. If the fiction's broad canvas fails to cohere into a linear narrative, it is because he writes with the retrospective awareness that the rigidly defined geopolitical worldview that kept the American imagination in shackles, but out of chaos, has collapsed, and no compelling, workable narrative has arrived to replace it. *Underworld* delivers an unraveled version of the American past, fulfilling the attenuated historical narrative capability of "societies in the fast forward mode." If it offers no compelling narrative with which to enter the global future with confidence, a novel, no matter how ambitious, should not be expected to accomplish what our world's leaders can or have not.

Coda: *Cosmopolis*; or, Inside the Stretch Limo

Since publishing *Underworld*, DeLillo has produced comparatively slender works, three short novels and several dramas. *Cosmopolis* (2003) is the one among these recent texts that shares *Underworld's* context most directly. In fact, according to an interview with the author, the novel occupies the very "hinge" at which *Underworld*

22 "When people say *White Noise* is post-modern, I don't really complain. I don't say it myself. But I don't see *Underworld* as post-modern. Maybe it's the last modernist gasp. I don't know" (Williams).

arrives, which can now be specified as "[b]etween the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Age of Terror" (Ulin). If *Underworld* represents a grand, retrospective vision of social unraveling, *Cosmopolis* treats this theme microcosmically and from within the resultant disorder--though from an eerily calm, because privileged, perspective on the surrounding fast-forwarded society. As if in reaction to *Underworld's* expansiveness, the text features spare phrasing and clusters of compressed images which strike the veteran DeLillo reader as shorthand notation for familiar topoi in his fiction. But what chiefly signals the microcosmic approach is the main narrative's focalization through a single character, Eric Packer, a young, fantastically talented and successful currency trader and asset manager. Packer's quest to cross midtown Manhattan by limousine--on "a day in April" at the zenith of the Internet boom in 2000 (1)--places the reader behind the wheel of economic globalization, whose ensuing turmoil breaks upon the narrative only as it reaches the perceptions of the fatally detached Packer. In other words, in this novel DeLillo extends the strategy he used in *The Names* and *Underworld*, of indicating but occluding the deteriorating world conditions outside the comfort zones of American protagonists. Indeed, the gap between these zones furnishes the text's drama, as Packer's vehicle is assaulted by anarchist demonstrators in Times Square, and he is later assassinated by a disgruntled former employee. Most of the narrative, however, transmits only Packer's impressions, those of what we might call an apocalyptic narcissist, who impulsively murders his chief of security because he has come to represent "a threat to his self-regard" (147), and who believes that "[w]hen he died he would not end," but "[t]he world would end" (6).

It is unprecedented for DeLillo to focus in this way on a single figure of exceptional power, whose reckless speculation not only ruins his and his wife's fortunes, but causes "storms of disorder" in the world markets (116), a prophecy *ex eventu* of the dot-com bubble's crash in 2000 and 2001. Still, this experiment in narrative agency was probably not sufficient to satisfy critics of the author's more usual practice, typical of his strand of literary postmodernism, to employ characters primarily as discursive constructs rather than as imitations of human beings. For much as focalizing the narrative through Packer may obstruct the reader's comprehension of its backdrop--"a system that's out of control," as Packer is told by his guru of critical theory as they watch the riotous demonstration unfold (85)--the reader's inclination toward pathos is equally disabled by Packer's absurdities.

Yet while Packer's wealth is so exaggerated as to be satirical, the character may be distinguished from the "lineage" of Babbitts in American literature, where Joseph Conte places him (188), and from Tom Wolfe's Wall Street "Masters of the Universe" in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), as many reviews had it. That is because for all of his ruthlessness in business strategy and his indulgence in luxury items, Packer exhibits surprising spiritual aspirations. His impatience with the materiality of ATMs, phones, and offices--often, even the words for these--is not only evidence for how the character would incarnate the virtualizing discourses of globalization, as in his opinion of New York's unrationalized diamond district: "The street was an offense to the truth of the future" (65). It also expresses his wish for transcendence, which Conte contextualizes as the postmodern "technological sublime" (186), but which may be assimilated to more

traditional literary explorations of the division between the ideal and the real.²³ As relentless as is Packer's drive for acquisition, he wishes ultimately for his matter to be spiritualized, and he finds a corresponding presence in the streams of information that it is his genius to find patterns in. It is therefore hard not to find some profundity in reflections such as this:

He understood how much it meant to him, the roll and flip of data on a screen. He studied the figural diagrams that brought organic patterns into play, birdwing and chambered shell. It was shallow thinking to maintain that numbers and charts were the cold compression of unruly human energies, every sort of yearning and midnight sweat reduced to liquid units in the financial markets. In fact data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere. Our bodies and oceans were here, knowable and whole. (24)

Regardless of the motives and endpoint for such an extreme vision of irrational rationalism, its lyricism prompts serious consideration and dampens critique. This latter will arrive in the narrative only through various forms of protest from outside, such as the brilliantly executed but genuinely violent anarchist demonstration, which uses rats as a motif and appropriates a Times Square ticker to broadcast a revision of the *Communist Manifesto*, and the pie-throwing antics of "the pastry assassin," André Petrescu (142).

Thus *Cosmopolis*, while set in precisely the world unraveled by globalization that is forecasted in DeLillo's earlier work, pursues a project somewhat different and more experimental than to critique this situation prophetically in 2003. DeLillo renders the erupting conflict dispassionately, such that Packer, the meditating capitalist, can admire the rioters who attack his limousine as "adepts of sheer rampage" (88). DeLillo's lyrical elaborations of the psyche behind a virtual economy's drive to great heights, then ruin,

²³ See Maltby, "Romantic Metaphysics," for the argument that a "(conspicuously unpostmodern) metaphysical impulse" is evident in DeLillo's earlier writings (260).

create depth where, he has suggested elsewhere, little was likely to be found.²⁴ In an interview, he explains, "there was this period, essentially one decade, the 1990s, and in it, there was one theme, and the name of the theme was money. People spent days and nights looking at their computer screens to watch their money growing, increasing, developing character" (Ulin). The novel then stands apart from the more scathing view that DeLillo adopts outside of his fiction, as in his post-September 11 essay, "In the Ruins of the Future," written after *Cosmopolis*'s first draft and published in 2001:

In the past decade the surge of capital markets has dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness. Multinational corporations have come to seem more vital and influential than governments. The dramatic climb of the Dow and the speed of the Internet summoned us all to live permanently in the future, in the utopian glow of cyber-capital, because there is no memory there and this is where markets are uncontrolled and investment potential has no limit.

But for the apologetic "us"--and while the individual reader may have abstained, this was the period when stock ownership reached an all-time high in the US--DeLillo's summary of the 1990s would fit seamlessly alongside my analysis of the optimistic nonfiction narratives of globalization in the first section of Chapter One, above.

Also strikingly convergent with the narrative of this dissertation is DeLillo's choice of the limousine as the text's vehicle of techno-domination. Recall Robert Kaplan's nightmarish metaphor for globalization, "the stretch limo," which before he transports it to his version of a "postmodern" landscape, where "skinhead Cossacks and *juju* warriors" use contemporary culture as a means of reviving their ancient hatreds, first trawls "the potholed streets of New York City" (29, 24). According to Kaplan's source for this idea, Thomas Fraser Homer-Dixon, New York is the symbolic location not only for potholes, but for "homeless beggars," who figurally beset the "air-conditioned postindustrial

²⁴ Alison Shonkwiler likewise sees DeLillo's project as more experimental than a depiction of finance capitalism's villainy, or a critique of its current stage; rather, it is "a fable of financialization, in which capitalism is imagined as ... liberating itself from the real world altogether" (5).

regions of North America, Europe, [and] the emerging Pacific Rim," inside the stretch limo (24). Beyond air conditioning, Eric Packer's limo is outfitted with an array of devices, visual displays, furniture, and luxurious accoutrements so fantastical as to challenge notions of physical space. Typically, Packer expresses reverence for the limousine's formal potential: "He liked the fact that the cars were indistinguishable from each other. He wanted such a car because he thought it was a platonic replica, weightless for all its size, less an object than an idea" (10). Yet the other side of the dualism emerges when Packer immediately admits, "he knew this wasn't true. ... He wanted the car because it was not only oversized but aggressively and contemptuously so, metastasizingly so, a tremendous mutant thing that stood astride every argument against it" (10). Since the novel, as suggested, is hardly directed toward exposing the main character's hypocrisy, as if he represented an actual business leader that one might challenge, but rather is an elaboration of a hypothetically shared psyche that he stands for at an extreme, articulating the "stretch limo" metaphor--Packer's to Kaplan's--helps to form the larger picture of global violence that the narrative's perspective mainly occludes. Still, given the extremity of Kaplan's vision--he is, as discussed above, as much a seer of chaos as DeLillo, if in more reductive terms--this connection still does not enable a counternarrative to ongoing disorder.

Finally, it is consistent with this analysis that the novel's most potent figure of resistance, Packer's assassin, Richard Sheets, is an only intermittently coherent, pitiable outcast, a type well-worn from *Libra* and a forgettable subnarrative of *Underworld*. For all the novel's engagement with globalization, with the argument that "[t]he more visionary the idea, the more people it leaves behind" worldwide (90), DeLillo chooses to

localize the conflict and have the ultimate rejoinder to "cyber-capital" come from a resentful American white-collar worker. The most intriguing aspect of Sheets's character is his pseudonym, Benno Levin. As noted so far only in one journalist's review, this name "conflates those of the last two Yale University presidents, Benno Schmidt and Richard Levin" (Kipen).²⁵ Why DeLillo should have chosen university presidents rather than, say, corporate executives or heads of global finance institutions as the sources for his killer's pseudonym is hard to guess. But these particular presidents resonate meaningfully with the narrative context. Benno Schmidt was Yale's president in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Fairly young and possessed of a putatively charismatic personality, which however did not prevent conflict with the faculty, where he proposed major cuts, he fled the position suddenly in favor of chairing the Edison Project, a venture of the Whittle Communications Corporation. Its goals and methods: "to create a nationwide system of for-profit schools ... to reduce the educational bureaucracy, use a lot of educational technology and fewer teachers, employ students to clean up, ask for volunteers, and rely on economies of scale" (Orr 36). In other words, this "project" was a business arm for the school voucher movement that has been a second-tier political priority for social conservatives in the US since the 1980s. A better example could not be imagined for the trend in Western societies since the early 1970s of privatizing public functions. Introducing the profit motive to education and substituting teachers with technology is radical enough, but particularly creative is the replacement of blue-collar workers with students and government funding with private charity, or "volunteers." Typical of the precariousness that is forced upon an economy that depends on the magnanimity of the

25 In one of the first-published scholarly essays on *Cosmopolis*, Jerry A. Varsava confesses that the meaning of the name "is unclear to me" and briefly pursues an allusion to a series of Swedish novels from the 1930s (107). After reading his essay with interest in 2005, I offered the more likely references to Varsava in an e-mail message; he has not yet replied.

rich--such as that promoted in celebrity-led campaigns for ameliorating globalization's harshness--Edison has struggled for financing throughout its existence, due in no small measure, Schmidt has implied, to the perception among potential funders that Christopher Whittle's business practices are reckless ("Interview"). By the time DeLillo was writing *Cosmopolis*, the project was operating at a scale much reduced from its original ambitions.

By contrast with Schmidt, Richard Levin has been since 1993 a colorless institutional manager, a former economics professor who has with little controversy directed the renovation and expansion of Yale's facilities--with priority, of course, on the sciences--and built the university's international presence, but who has also vastly broadened its financial aid policy for undergraduates and, for the present, harmonized relations with its labor force. Yale has also experienced a period of fairly warm "town-gown" relations, though the proceeding gentrification of downtown New Haven, with associated turnover in its population, is doubtless linked to this shift. By conflating the names of these two relatively obscure figures, DeLillo might simply be assailing what he sees as higher education's growing resemblance to the corporate organization. Alternatively, the gesture might be said to invoke twin faces of managerial capitalism: charismatic and administrative. If Eric Packer more strongly resembles the former, the egocentric, Icarian tendency toward creative destruction and risk, as emanated by the likes of Schmidt and Whittle, then DeLillo would seem to imply, by alluding to Yale's transition to the staid but responsible Levin, a passage, after the Internet boom, to a more stable period for the global economy and the societies bound by its vicissitudes. But as of 2009, DeLillo would surely concur, this has not been the case.

Chapter Four

Thomas Pynchon and the Disintegrationist Turn:

From Under Gravity's Rainbow, *Against the Day's* Catastrophic Sequence

The Apocalyptic Pynchon?

Like DeLillo's novels, Thomas Pynchon's fiction readily inspires an apocalyptic interpretation, the impression that his work is about or even endorses predictions or analyses of a cataclysmic end to modern society, humanity, or some large portion of these. And as with DeLillo, this effect surely stems not only from the writer's regular allusions to the topic and to previous literary treatments of it, but from his evident, abiding interest in such themes as marginalized social movements, pursuits of esoteric knowledge (although literary critics probably tend to overestimate the obscurity of the scientific principles in which Pynchon often deals), mystical apprehensions of alternative, even plural ontologies, and "paranoid" readings of history--that is, intimations of meaningful connections between separate historical signs. These are in fact ancillary features of apocalyptic discourse; they connote "apocalyptic" mainly by association. But in practical terms they are inseparable from the concept in modern cultural usage, where apocalypticism is generally played out in an ambiance of conspiracy and insurgency such as that typically found in Pynchon's fictional worlds.¹

1 The disclosure of a hidden reality, aided by a supernatural mystic guide, is in fact constitutive of the apocalyptic genre according to John J. Collins (no known relation to the present author), whose authoritative definition gives equal attention to the species of apocalyptic texts more concerned with spatial journeys through hidden areas of the cosmos than with temporal revelations of a preordained plan for human history. However, Collins focuses on the original body of apocalyptic texts in Hebrew and early Christian literature, and while *The Divine Comedy*, for example, shows the importance and endurance of this spatial stream of apocalyptic writings, modern revisions of the genre, including those addressed in this study, start with the temporal narrative as exfoliated in Revelation.

But from his earliest to his latest writings, Pynchon has also regularly invoked the central event of the classical apocalyptic narrative, the end of the world, and has appeared to bruit several likely causes which might take effect during his readers' lifetimes.

Loosely then, Pynchon deserves to be construed as an apocalyptic writer, and that such a preeminent contemporary author--perhaps the preeminent American author in literary journalistic and especially academic circles since publishing *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1973²--should wear this label speaks to the central relevance of this theme in the period's literature.

This claim about Pynchon should not be controversial but does need argument, especially as he appears to disavow apocalypticism in his introduction to *Slow Learner*, a 1984 collection of short fiction that was his first book after *Gravity's Rainbow*. There the author performs a facetiously brutal self-assessment of these stories written mainly in the early 1960s, before his debut novel. He claims that these "apprentice" pieces make evident his "pre-adult" fixation on "the idea of mass destruction or decline" (13) and particularly on World War I as an avatar of "that attractive nuisance so dear to adolescent minds, the apocalyptic showdown" (18). These phrases articulate the view, discussed in Chapter Two, developed by the influential modernist critic Frank Kermode, for whom apocalypticism is a universal but regressive stage of thinking, aimed at staving off recognition of human mortality and individual insignificance, or compensating for these. Likewise, Norman Cohn in his widely read 1957 thesis on apocalyptic social movements, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, consigns the ideology he studies so comprehensively to

2 In *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers*, Michael Bérubé has demonstrated that Pynchon's image as an outsider does not match his place at the core of critical attention ever since publishing his first novel.

"the minds of the unprivileged, the oppressed, ... and the unbalanced," or in short, "the disoriented poor" (30).

However, unlike some Pynchon critics, I hesitate to take the introduction to *Slow Learner*, with its various dismissals, at face value. My resistance here may be an effect of my training, as it is baffling to encounter the paragon of postmodernist fiction castigating his early work for such banal flaws as underdeveloped characters and "overwriting" (15). Likewise, the major writers he chooses to present as a comparative context for his work, for example, Eliot and Hemingway, are surprisingly conventional. But I find significance in the introduction's frequent citation of the Beats, who represent a countercultural milieu of timely interest for the maturing Pynchon and whose deep apocalypticism John Lardas has detailed in a recent study.³ More objectively, the example of Pynchon's latest novel, *Against the Day* (2006), a text of over 1,000 pages whose narrative centers once again on World War I and is filled with catastrophes that connote, to many of its characters, something like "the end of the world," speaks against the author's sincerity in 1984, or at least his capacity for effective self-criticism. Finally, Pynchon proceeds in *Slow Learner's* introduction immediately to qualify his comments on apocalypticism. He cites the undeniable reality of "[o]ur common nightmare The Bomb," which "was bad enough in '59 and is much worse now," and he describes the "slow escalation of our helplessness and terror" which follows from the negligence of "that succession of the criminally insane who have enjoyed power since 1945, including the power to do something about it" (18-19). So Pynchon brackets a reading of the apocalyptic narrative as a regrettable faculty of

3 Specifically, Lardas analyzes the Beats' reading of Oswald Spengler, whose historical theories I summarized in Chapter One and whose influence on Pynchon is argued for by Dalsgard.

mind, best suppressed, with the unique contemporary historical facts of the Cold War which, as I showed in Chapter Three, virtually demanded an apocalyptic interpretation.

Thus *Against the Day* should confirm Pynchon as an author of apocalyptically inflected narratives, as much as it clarifies his conception of the twentieth century as an unremittingly catastrophic age. In a 1992 essay on *Gravity's Rainbow*, Joseph Tabbi wished that studies of Pynchon now "might begin to move away from the large, apocalyptic ... readings that would equate Pynchon's meaning with the determinative mechanics of his technique"--that is, with "his structuring metaphors" and paranoid plotting (170). That wish, expressed during the optimistic early days of the post-Cold War period, seems now to have been premature, or at least out of step with Pynchon's plans. In fairness, no single reading of Pynchon's main texts is likely to do them justice, as one of the marks of his outsized ambitions and talents has been his novels' accomplishment of several narratives each. This means that they may represent an array of what Tabbi calls different "particular historical circumstance[s]" (170)--and his example of "the working lives of scientists and engineers" is only one among many life paths Pynchon sympathetically renders in *Gravity's Rainbow* and elsewhere (166)--while they work to inscribe a "larger" social and historical narrative.

Given my subject in the present study, it is this latter dimension that interests me here, as much as it clearly interests the author, who has continued to apply his catastrophic imagination to the ripe materials of twentieth-century history. And the secondary literature has followed suit: as Thomas Schaub has recently summarized, critics of Pynchon's early novels "sorted [them] into the new categories of black humor, fabulation, and metafiction" (ix). But as evidence of his social and political convictions

has mounted,⁴ readers have come primarily to see "his work as a prolonged meditation on the politics of modern social history" with "special relevance to our time," for as Schaub argues, it presages "by many years the emergence of postcolonial studies and the postnational perspective" (ix). In this way, Pynchon criticism has turned increasingly on political themes since the 1990s.⁵ Indeed, Shawn Smith has written that Pynchon's "thematic focus" corresponds to Georg Lukács's influential prescription for the historical novel, which is to narrate and describe the "great social transformations of modern times" (1). It should be clear from his novels that among these transformations, Pynchon assigns priority to the historical trajectories of global capitalism and, specifically, the social catastrophes this process has engendered.

Reevaluating "Systems of Control": Wouldn't It Be Nice?

But if this preeminent author's enduring preoccupation with modernity's disasters and upheavals offers evidence for the apocalyptic as a key thematic in postwar narrative, then how Pynchon adjusts his techniques for deploying his historical narrative across his major fictions supplies the most compelling example of my central argument in this study. For as I will show in this chapter, while Pynchon's fiction has persistently suggested that modern history's direction makes an apocalyptic outcome possible, the function and shape of this narrative shifts across his work in a manner consistent with the model for post-Cold War globalization narratives that I described in Chapter One.

4 In addition to the novels, whose political content, Kathryn Hume rightly observes, emerges more sharply with each new text, three pungent works of nonfiction help give shape to Pynchon's views: two essays for *The New York Times*, "A Journey Into the Mind of Watts" (1966) and "Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?" (1984), and a preface to a 2003 edition of George Orwell's *1984*. Hume suggests that most critics, including herself, have underestimated the ideological extremity Pynchon wants to communicate.

5 See, for example, Maltby, *Dissident Postmodernists*; Booker; and Thomas.

Specifically, in *Gravity's Rainbow* the apocalyptic valence of the narrative attaches to its portrayal of the untrammelled *integration* of the state and the corporation, exemplified by such conceits as the "Rocket-state" (566), the "corporate City-state" (578), and the "giant factory-state" (674)--an entire "Rocket state-cosmology" (726)--and to the novel's central image of an ascending and inevitably descending missile. The rocket stands as the highest, most vaunted product of this military-industrial-bureaucratic integration and as a stark allusion to the contemporary arms race with its clear and credible apocalyptic implications. Thus for all its remarkable innovations in narrative technique and the complexity of its ethical vision, *Gravity's Rainbow* exemplifies the psychic regime of its era, the Vietnam phase of the Cold War, in that the primary object of the narrative's political critique is the apocalyptic threat of massively agglomerated power and technology exerted toward world domination. This is so even as the text presents many other images and counternarratives to challenge the central metaphor's exclusive implication of an "apocalyptic showdown" between hypertrophied superstates. To be sure, the text does not guarantee, let alone endorse, the apocalyptic trajectory its title describes, instead urging the search for and practice of alternative ontological frameworks, but by structuring and labeling the narrative according to this vision, Pynchon created irony by in effect promoting his nemesis.

In seeming response to the advance of globalization and the resultant withering of the state's function in many countries since the mid-1970s collapse--described by Hobsbawm, Amin, and others--of the "Golden Age" model for postwar society, Pynchon omits from *Against the Day*, his latest novel and the one most comparable in scope, style, and subject to *Gravity's Rainbow*, a comparable central metaphor. Instead of an icon of

doom poised at "the last delta-t" before the world's destruction (*GR* 760), *Against the Day* renders, in assorted fictional styles, a series of catastrophes, all horrific but of less-than-world-ending magnitude, and dispersed over the globe. Having depicted in *Gravity's Rainbow* the assembly of a massive bureaucracy whose irrational extremes in pursuing unlimited rationalization threatens not only the freedom of its subjects but the very existence of humanity, Pynchon in *Against the Day* conceives a narrative of *disintegration*, set at the turn of the twentieth century in order to portray a field of open war by and against capitalism in one of its most unrestrained phases, a hopeless struggle whose foreknown outcomes are defeat for the labor movement, at least in what will become the First World, and global increases in violence, suffering, and insecurity. While the narrative contains suggestions of a transcendent force of history impelling the world toward a "general European war" (518), the text disperses this element across essentially dissimilar catastrophic episodes that may be linked only through a framework of globalization in its early-twentieth-century stage. In another ironic effect, the narrative leaves off as the global networks destroyed in the war are beginning their reconfiguration in the early 1920s, an effort of financialization which succeeded only to the extent of occasioning soon enough a yet more severe crisis and an even more terrible war.⁶

As I will describe, the shift in the context of meaning for Pynchon's narratives of historical transformation has been mainly brought about by the advance of economic globalization and the attendant collapse of social wellbeing in many areas of the world. One aspect of this context is critical reception, where the difference may be vividly illustrated by reviewing an influential analysis of *Gravity's Rainbow* from the Cold War era. In her important 1983 study, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*, Molly

6 On this last point, see the recent *Lords of Finance*, by Liaquat Ahamed.

Hite argues for Pynchon as an "ultimately comic" writer whose novels "entertain the polarized theses that the world is either a rigid, preordained order or else a concatenation of random, unrelated details" only with the aim of negating both of these options, so as to dramatize "the vacuity of conceiving experience as plotted and of meaning as resulting only from a culminating synthesis" (45, 20). By this analysis, the rocket of *Gravity's Rainbow* appears to be a controlling metaphor but is really a "convenient handle" that "dupliciously invites readers to seize on an apocalyptic reading and in this way to confirm that humanity is eager to collaborate in its own betrayal" (131). Indeed, for Hite "a reading [of the novel] guided by the structural metaphor passes over far too much, and in particular it passes over most of the humor [that] arises from violations of an apparent order" (131). In Hite's sympathetic reading of Pynchon, modern systems of control are ultimately and inevitably trumped by the disorder of actual experience, by Gödel's theorem and Murphy's law. Gödel's theorem postulates the incompleteness of any logical system, that there will "always exist, within the rules of the system, the possibility of a sentence or proposition the validity of which could not be decided by the rules themselves" (Weisenburger 172). Advanced science's version of the proverbial fly in the ointment, this is the mathematical equivalent of the more demotic Murphy's law: the engineer's creed, familiar to Pynchon from his undergraduate training, that anything that can go wrong will go wrong, and at the worst possible time. Subject to these reality tests, modernity's attempts at totalizations are destined to remain incomplete projects, Hite suggests, and "comedy results from the fact that things do not fit" bureaucracy's best-laid schemes (157). Hite's reading is persuasive, and it was particularly salutary in a critical context more focused on Pynchon's seeming antisocial paranoia and his putative

antihumanism, which was what his fiction's allusions to cybernetics and other modern scientific discourses, representations of dissolving subjectivity, and descriptions of powerful systems of control suggested to some critics, particularly those campaigning against postmodernism. For as I have already noted, the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* actually serves as an ironic center of a novel that actually wants to perform narrative decentering--what Hite calls, after an episode in the text, "Holy-Center-Approaching." And, like James Joyce, Pynchon devotes much space in his epic narratives to warm, knowing depictions of human imperfection, as best exemplified in the antics of his protagonists, all *shlemiels*, a type of anti-hero.

But today, even such a champion of literary postmodernism as Hite would surely agree that modernity's failures are no longer surprising, nor amusing. While the existential absurdity of the Cold War arms race provided a potent source of black humor as a language of dissent in the 1960s, the negligence, incapability, and error that characterize governments' answers to recent natural disasters and economic shortfalls show that an irresponsible disorganization of power and privatization of function can construct a scenario as potentially dire as their unaccountable, centralized amassing. Consider that during the Cold War, leaders of the superpowers, when speaking publicly, dismissed concerns that Murphy's law was sufficient reason to abandon the pursuit of nuclear supremacy. Now much to the contrary, under economic globalization, the nominal stewards of many nations' welfare *adduce* Murphy's law as a cause for a supposedly unpredicted "meltdown" in the "financial system." This excuse accompanies proposed measures for allowing the same systems, or lack of them, to remain in place, for such widespread failure can only happen "once in a hundred years." In a sense,

unjustifiable faith in imaginary trajectories is at the root of these new crises just as it underlay the late-modernist visions that drove the nuclear arms race. But given the degree of real damage that ensues when major problems slip from contemporary governments' control, and given the unprecedented interdependency of societies under technological and economic globalization, decentralization as a narrative strategy for representing alternatives to the oppressive integrationist mode dominant during the Cold War no longer seems like a comic solution. Nor is the inevitable proliferation of error a comforting outcome when, given the paucity of governance it has witnessed in the face of severe crisis, recent history has resembled the trajectory that in *Against the Day* Pynchon describes as "a locomotive running without lights or signals" (845), a machine, the result of human activity, whose operation has escaped human supervision.

From the post-Cold War era, an equally telling critical perspective is provided by Deborah L. Madsen, who, writing about *Gravity's Rainbow* in 1997, rightly suggests that aspects of the novel's "paranoid vision of a global conspiracy mounted by the military-industrial complex against the interests of the individual" have become outdated (144). Although Pynchon depicts contingency as inevitably thwarting such modernist "strategies of control" (152), he nonetheless locks his narrative into an "oppositional structure" of "control or chaos," where "the vision of the cartelized state controlled absolutely by global corporate capitalism prescribes the responses of characters, narrator and reader" (146). From the vantage point of the present, powerful evidence for the economic globalization narrative's dominance in this period lies in Madsen's next assertion, that "in the nineties, this image of multinational cartels working toward global destruction is both so real as to be passé and, at the same time, inauthentic" (144). That is, Pynchon

brilliantly anticipated the "shift to process-based information economies," or "the postmodern economy" (149, 155), in such episodes as the anarchist Squalidozzi's utopian description of "the openness of the Zone" in postwar Germany (*GR* 265). But in his overriding conviction that the corporate state would ascend to wield ever more control over the lives of working citizens, Pynchon failed, according to Madsen, to prophesy "[r]ecent developments in management theory and public-sector initiatives like Al Gore's National Performance Review," which "indicate a trend toward decentralization, worker empowerment, and diversification or 'organized anarchy' in late capitalism" (144). For Madsen, critiquing the novel's image of centralized power turns out to mean advocating President Bill Clinton's New Economy and celebrating the fact that "[g]lobal organization does not necessarily mean global control" (151). Madsen displays the economically slanted optimism of her era by seeing its "period of intense change and profound uncertainty in the market" as only "a period of economic gloom for the global multinationals that have persisted with outmoded (broadly modernist) strategies of totalization" (155). Everyone else--all, apparently, job seekers in the information sector--should feel at home in the uncertainty and learn to seize its advantages. For like "the concept of war," which in *Gravity's Rainbow* gives Pynchon "the opportunity to explore the shift from modernism to postmodernism as a transformation of markets" (147), the advance of globalization and the structural upheavals it engenders are, Madsen suggests, best understood as examples of capitalism's vaunted creative destruction.

To be sure, this analysis distorts the actual rather than "conceptual" status of the war that created an urgent need for the black-market zone Pynchon represents in *Gravity's Rainbow*. But equally it declines to consider that "organized anarchy" in the

economy may, from another perspective, be called "disorganized capitalism"--a frequent synonym in the literature on globalization for "post-Fordism," or simply for globalization itself. "Organized capitalism" names precisely the economic mode for which Pynchon projects an apotheosis in *Gravity's Rainbow*: according to political sociologist Claus Offe, it sees "the competitive market interaction between individual economic actors ... in the process of being superseded by formally organized collectivities of economic action (corporate firms, cartels) and interest representation (trade unions, business associations)" (6). "Disorganized capitalism," then, is Offe's term for the state of affairs where these "procedures, patterns of organization, and institutional mechanisms that supposedly mediate and maintain a dynamic balance between social power and political authority ... actually *fail* to perform this function" (6, Offe's emphasis)--the crisis manifested after 1973 and inhabited by *Against the Day*, no less than the other globalization narratives I have discussed.⁷

Disorganized capitalism's potential links to catastrophic violence emerge more strongly from Arif Dirlik's use of the concept to describe, at once, "unprecedented unity globally and unprecedented fragmentation that is systemic" (317). That is, in this formation, which Dirlik argues has been dominant since the 1980s, national governments are "under attack from the outside (transnational organizations) and the inside (subnational economic regions and localities)," leaving them less able "to answer to their constituencies" and leading to "the resurfacing of dormant conflicts contained earlier" (318). With this last phrase, Dirlik alludes to Samuel Huntington's theory of civilizational clash, which as I noted in Chapter One would gain a second wave of attention--deepened

7 As Offe explains, Rudolf Hilferding theorized "organized capitalism" in 1910, and Scott Lash and John Urry coined "disorganized capitalism" at roughly the same time as did Offe, working independently. Lash and Urry's book on the subject is *The End of Organized Capitalism* (1987).

notoriety in the academy, but popular vindication in journalistic circles and policy "think tanks"--shortly after Dirlik published his essay in 2001. Today, one need not ratify Huntington's essentialist conceptions in order to accept, with Dirlik, the articulation of "disorganized capitalism" with ubiquitous economic insecurity and disorder, over Madsen's preferred "organized anarchy," a managerial gloss on the type of global upheavals that Pynchon narrates in *Against the Day*.⁸

Refugees From Your Future: Pynchon's Catastrophic Globalization Narrative

Thus as Pynchon revises his historical narrative to emphasize the withdrawal of government in the face of globalizing capitalism, this narrative comes into stronger kinship with those discussed in my previous chapters. Indeed, my central theme should be clarified by the disappearance from *Against the Day* of the all-powerful bureaucratic state as main antagonist and its replacement by what Pynchon evokes as a competitive but collusionary network of remorseless, predatory capitalists and government operatives with no true national feeling, a set of lesser demons who ultimately may be just as destructive. The connection may be indexed by a telling passage from the novel, narrating a middle term in what I will call its *catastrophic sequence*. The setting is a Midwestern university town circa 1904, where a band of adventurers pursues evidence that a working time machine is being developed on campus.⁹ One of these "Chums of

8 I do not wish to discount the usefulness of Madsen's essay, particularly her historicization, citing Frederic Jameson, of *Gravity's Rainbow* and capitalism's contemporary modes. The insight of her preliminary analysis only makes the earnestness of her turn to the discourse of "management theory" as an explanatory framework the more surprising.

9 Pynchon gives historical referents for some but not all of the incidents in his novel. A "Pynchon Wiki" for *Against the Day* bravely attempts an exhaustive hypertext annotation of the text's very many historical allusions, but so far lacks a timeline in which to place these. Kirsten Silva Gruesz's "Plot Grid" is therefore a more useful guide to the narrative's structure, though its chronology is perhaps overly linear.

Chance," Chick Counterfly, visits a house on the town's outskirts to meet with a reportedly otherworldly being who, his agent has suggested, controls knowledge of and access to the technology. "Mr. Ace" emerges from the darkness of the squalid house and, "[d]ispensing with phatic chitchat," tells the story of "his 'people'":

"We are here among you as seekers of refuge from our present--your future--a time of worldwide famine, exhausted fuel supplies, terminal poverty--the end of the capitalistic experiment. Once we came to understand the simple thermodynamic truth that Earth's resources were limited, in fact soon to run out, the whole capitalistic illusion fell to pieces. Those of us who spoke this truth aloud were denounced as heretics, as enemies of the prevailing economic faith. Like religious Dissenters of an earlier day, we were forced to migrate, with little choice but to set forth upon that dark fourth-dimensional Atlantic known as Time." (415)

Mr. Ace's narrative exemplifies the direct, pointed political critique found in many passages in this novel. In light of my analysis of how a shifting historical context has altered the potential valence of comic narrative approaches to the subject of global capitalism's stumbles, it is significant that the narrator observes about this figure, "When he smiled, or attempted to, it was not reassuring" (415). By this troubling note and from such language as Mr. Ace uses, it is hard to disagree with Kathryn Hume's suggestion, in what is by far the most valuable essay yet written on the novel, that *Against the Day* seems to speak to a new despair in Pynchon about world historical conditions under global capitalism, or at least a new level of desperation and urgency. Despite the number of metafictional frames through which the reader receives this condensed discourse, or perhaps because of them, Pynchon employs language and commentary that suggest the analysis embedded in this narrative is meant seriously.

Indeed, the dry, flat rhetoric of this micro-narrative of endemic crisis and resource scarcity could nearly be pulled from the "Appendix" to Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*, which I discussed in Chapter Two. It presents a similar narrative of runaway decline in

life conditions, and it invokes the social role of the prophet as insurgent critic of a dominant, dangerous ideology. A notable difference is that in 1969 Lessing wrote quite literally as a prophet in the naive sense, as a seer into the future, using the style of science fiction to set her narrative forward into an alternative history so as to criticize present tendencies and to extrapolate their potentially dire consequences. Pynchon on the other hand inserts his commentary on the present into a historical narrative set in the past, and at least in this way more closely resembles the writers of early Christian apocalyptic texts, who assumed the names of ancient authorities as pseudonyms and retrofitted their prophecies the better to apply to present conditions, a strategy known as prophecy *ex eventu*. For this reason, the narrative leaves unspecified the precise "future" from which the visitor has been forced to migrate, allowing for and, I would suggest, indicating that such passages describing global crisis in the novel are to be read as allegories of our present. And the trope of retrospection by which the narrative incorporates this analysis leads to the sense that Pynchon means to adjust the historical narrative his previous texts have laid forth, in order to reflect rather than predict shifts in historical development.

But while Pynchon here adopts traditional aspects of apocalyptic writing, another passage in the episode reinforces the sense that however dire is the crisis to be told, the classical apocalyptic narrative cannot describe its trajectory. When arranging this meeting between Mr. Ace and Chick Counterfly, Mr. Ace's agent intimates that his people, who are called "Trespassers" for their intrusion into the main stream of time, are capable of offering some form of release from death, or "[t]he most extraordinary offer of

Deliverance to be tendered us since--that other Promise made so long ago. . . ." (413).¹⁰

Before responding, Chick experiences:

a momentary vision of a ship's passageway somewhere, perhaps inside a giant airship of the future, crowded with resurrected bodies of all ages, dazed smiles and tangled bare limbs, a throng of visitors newly arrived from all periods of the past two millennia, who must somehow be fed, clothed, sheltered, and explained to, not to mention away--an administrative nightmare largely fallen on him to resolve. He had a kind of newfangled speaking trumpet in his hand. 'Has it come to this?' His voice sounded unfamiliar to him. He could think of nothing further to say. They were all watching him, expecting something. (413)

Chick imagines that if the Christian apocalyptic narrative unfolds, it will devolve upon the Chums of Chance to minister to the resurrected saints of Revelation. In this scenario, the higher levels of the Chums' management have abdicated responsibility, as have, I suggested above, the leaders of the contemporary political sphere under economic globalization. The "speaking trumpet" in Chick's hand figures him as an angel of a millennial bureaucracy, a field official who experiences not joy but apprehension at the "administrative nightmare" the bodily needs of these supposedly blessed souls present. In a sense these surprisingly importunate saints are not so different from those in the biblical text, who unceasingly cry out "How long, Lord?" as they await retribution from their temporary position under an altar in Heaven. But in this version, the apocalypse brings no end nor release from waiting, just a new set of refugees looking for better times, and so Chick goes to meet Mr. Ace in hopes of conquering Death by other means.

As this passage suggests, the Chums of Chance are the actants in the strand of the novel most germane to the text's definition as a globalization narrative. The titles of their other serialized adventures, occasionally cross-referenced by the narrator in a facetious metafictional gesture, illustrate the global scattering of their assignments: for example,

¹⁰ Because Pynchon makes frequent use of ellipses, when quoting from his texts I will mark my ellipses with brackets. In general, I will quote liberally from *Against the Day*, recognizing that my readers may be less familiar with this recent work than with *Gravity's Rainbow*.

"*The Chums of Chance at Krakatoa, The Chums of Chance Search for Atlantis*" (6). The group enters this novel at its start, which narrates the lift-off of their hydrogen-powered "skyship," *Inconvenience*: "Up we go!" (3). Their destination is the 1893 celebration of "commerce and industry" at the World's Columbian Exposition, where the "White City" is one of the main attractions (3). This reference directly recalls the "crystal palace" which the narrator of *Gravity's Rainbow* visualizes in its opening paragraphs (3). Like the White City, the Crystal Palace in London was a spectacular model of modern architectural techniques, though on an even larger scale. The opening passages' repetition of near-kin objects--and their common element of air--links readings of the two texts immediately. Their initial directions are, however, notably reversed, for in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the "screaming" that "comes across the sky" is an inbound rocket plummeting to earth and threatening to smash the overhead glass and girders that in the narrator's dream resemble the Crystal Palace (3). Here, the action moves "up" into the "sky blue," beginning with the removal of "lines" from the massive ship (3), a disconnection and deterritorialization that strikingly contrast with the gravitational force dramatized in the earlier novel.

The Chums' buoyant confidence and superficial good cheer evoke the contemporary genre of boys' adventure tales, but they also reflect the soaring fortunes of globalization in this era. Great increases in international trade, finance, and communication in the latter decades of the nineteenth century have led several writers on the period, including Niall Ferguson, to consider the years from 1870 to 1914 "the first age of globalization" (64).¹¹ More ambitiously, Brian Blouet describes an ongoing

¹¹ Ferguson has written several texts on the theme of the decline of the West since this period, including *The War of the World*, published, like *Against the Day*, in 2006. More coarsely, Thomas Friedman calls the era "Globalization Round I" (xiv-xv). Also see Ahamed 7.

"interplay" throughout the twentieth century between the forces of globalization, on the one hand, and on the other, policies of geopolitics, or the pursuit of "national or imperial control over space and the resources, routeways, industrial capacity and population the territory contains" (13, 7). According to Blouet, globalization as "a product of the maritime world"--a sphere of activity based on trade and emphasized in the Dutch and British modes of colonization--makes a promise of peaceful competition that fades in times of struggle over resources and presumed strategic advantages based on geography (12). Furthermore, the relationship between geopolitics and globalization seems dialectical, in that the globalization concept can be seen to flow from the project to map and navigate the seas, and in that advances on one side of the "interplay" tend historically, as Blouet's narrative shows, to provoke strong reactions from the other, at the level of theoretical discourse but also of policy and practice.

Sure enough, within a few pages of being airborne, the Chums make their descent upon Chicago, under the sign not of the fair and its splendor, but the slaughterhouse:

As they came in low over the Stockyards, the smell found them, the smell and the uproar of flesh learning its mortality [...] Somewhere down there was the White City promised in the Columbian Exposition brochures, somewhere among the tall smokestacks increasingly vomiting black grease-smoke, the effluvia of butchery unremitting, into which the buildings of the leagues of city lying downwind retreated, like children into sleep which bringeth not reprieve from the day. (10)

As a plutonian view of Chicago's meatpacking industry at the turn of the century, Pynchon's scene inevitably alludes to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906), but his emphasis on the polluted air and urban sprawl which obscure the site of the fair more closely recalls a current vision of uncontrolled urbanization, Mike Davis's "Planet of Slums," discussed in Chapter One. The sudden shift into poetic diction at the end of the quotation perhaps evokes pathos for children who, as their mention suggests, may be

among the laboring population (although these appear only as figures that are compared to the city's buildings), while it also flags an early appearance of the novel's titular theme, on which more below.

This bit of incongruously elevated language aside, the attached scene of reterrestrialization associates coming to earth with violence and death, as in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and troubles the high spirits of the text's opening lines, which now seem high-flown pretensions. Thus the shift in mood corresponds to Blouet's account of the First World War--and foreshadows the novel's subsequent treatment of that event--as a momentous detour from the previous decades' advances in globalization. That is, the war as a strategic endeavor saw an active endorsement of geopolitical ideas that, although in wide circulation, had not been materialized as a basis for policy while economic globalization progressed. Well-known examples of this genre include US Navy Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan's thesis on sea power in 1890 and Frederick Jackson Turner's lecture on the closing of the American frontier, a text delivered to the American Historical Association at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago and so mentioned in *Against the Day* (52), adding to the cluster of unsettlingly elegiac notes in this opening section of the novel.

But the high-water mark for geopolitical theory in its founding phase was the idea of a "Heartland" region proposed in 1904 by British geographer Halford Mackinder. This was Mackinder's conception of the vast, fertile, but as yet undeveloped basin located on the "Geographical Pivot" between Europe and Asia, east of the Ural Mountains, fed by five rivers, and secure from incursion by sea. Control of this Heartland would mean strategic influence over the globe, according to a mantric formula Mackinder created:

"Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island [the European continent]: Who rules the World-Island commands the World" (Blouet 51).¹² Whether or not Pynchon knows Mackinder, his familiarity with this geopolitical discourse becomes apparent later in *Against the Day* with his introduction of "Inner Asia," the reputed location of a legendary city, Shambhala. Object of a scramble by the major powers, for all its mystical import, Shambhala turns out to be elusive, essentially a macguffin, or a weak example of Hite's "Holy-Center-Approaching." Its ultimate inconsequentiality in the narrative can be explained, I would suggest, by using for a frame Blouet's account of the First World War as largely the result of geopolitical aims that were out of step with the prevailing direction of modern history toward economic globalization. "Many believed that there was nothing concrete for Germany and Britain to fight over," for example (32-33), because each prospered by mutual investment and trade, yet each feared the other's geopolitical machinations, while harboring its own geographical ambitions. Moreover, the war's beginning may be interpreted as a fight between Germany and Russia precisely over Mackinder's Heartland (also the arena for the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War against Germany less than 30 years later).

European strategists' anachronistic emphasis on a politics of territory finds a parallel in the history of banking policy in the period, where, Liaquat Ahamed has argued, to their countries' detriment, instead of allowing currency to float freely of a tangible index, as it does now, postwar central bankers attempted to restore the gold standard, with disastrous results for their economies (422-50). Thus consistent with the notion of a "cultural lag" that follows the structural transformation of societies, early-

¹² On Mackinder's theories, also see Parker 15-31.

twentieth-century European leaders responded to crises in both diplomacy and finance with disastrously outmoded notions, unprepared to recognize the larger narrative being inscribed by globalization. Likewise, in *Against the Day* Pynchon has his global adventurers quickly submit to the downward pull of geopolitics, before sending them on a wild geopolitical goose chase into the mythical Heartland.

As the Chums fly over Chicago, their relation to the squalor they observe is ambiguous: the smell of death that emanates from the slaughterhouses strikes them luridly, "like the dark conjugate of some daylight fiction they had flown here, as appeared increasingly likely, to promote" (10). "Conjugate" seems here to mean, as in mathematics, the inverse double of the superficially optimistic narrative that the patriotic Chums typically endorse with their actions. This dark alternative is growing more visible even as the narrative begins: "Cheerfulness," we learn, was "once taken as a condition of life on the *Inconvenience*," but while they are in Chicago, it is "progressively revealed to the boys as a precious commodity" (54). Likewise the reader, but perhaps not the Chums, sees that "workers coming off shift, overwhelmingly of the Roman faith, able to detach from earth and blood for a few precious seconds, looked up at the airship in wonder, imagining a detachment of not necessarily helpful angels" (10). The Chums' heavenly perspective, a burden later lamented by Chick Counterfly, is here unveiled as a location of power, felt as a potential threat by humble workers, mired in their territory. Indeed, in Chicago the Chums are tasked with monitoring "the inexorably rising tide of World Anarchism [...] a sinister affliction" (6), and for this purpose they take on board an operative for "White City Investigations," a fictional equivalent of the Pinkerton Agency. As much as the Chums' seeming guilelessness charms readers (for most reviews of the

novel focus on their story, though they are largely absent from the text's second half), they are clearly aligned with the anti-labor forces that represent nothing less than evil in the novel.

This is not to say that the Chums themselves are conscious of their position; often they do not seem even to grasp the stakes involved in the conflicts they enter. From the outset, they evince a discontent with the terms of their employment, in particular the stressful opacity by which they receive their orders and crazy itineraries, and this grows into a self-questioning of their role. The process is slow but, as they suspect on arrival in Chicago the "increasingly likely" case that they are corporate stooges, it has begun even before the outset of the text. But they never complete this process, either. As members of a rarefied, international network of similar clubs, the Chums represent a cosmopolitan potentiality, as they are linked in a low-intensity rivalry with French and Russian equivalents. In fact, the examples of these latter groups should darken readers' sense of the Chums' heroism. On their first evening in Chicago, they are visited by a group of female counterparts, the Bindlestiffs of the Blue, who tell the Chums of "those Garçons de '71," to whom "it became clear [...] during the Sieges of Paris [...] how much the modern State depended for its survival on maintaining a condition of *permanent siege*--through the systematic encirclement of populations, the starvation of bodies and spirits, the relentless degradation of civility until every citizen was turned against citizen" (19, Pynchon's emphasis). Following this dystopian insight, "these balloonists chose to fly on, free now of the political delusions that reigned more than ever on the ground, pledged solemnly to one another, proceeding as if under a world-wide never-ending state of siege" (19). Now they "fly wherever they're needed, far above fortress walls and national

boundaries, running blockades, feeding the hungry, sheltering the sick and persecuted" (20). Again the earth is the setting for embodied suffering and for the state's geographical expressions of its power, but now the air provides transit for members of a global fraternity to circumvent ideological conflicts in service of the needy, rather than in surveillance. Near the end of the text, the Chums distantly recall the Garçons as avatars of "the supranational idea [...] literally to transcend the old political space, the map-space of two dimensions, by climbing into the third" (1083). Thus they represent a utopian cosmopolitanism of which Chums consistently fall short.

Likewise, the Chums are doubled throughout the narrative by a Russian team, the Tovarishchi Slutchainyi, who reliably appear on the scene of each of the Chums' missions. Initial suspicion turns to careful respect, until finally the tables of sympathy are turned on the reader, without the Chums' evident notice. The Chums attend for a time to the influenza epidemic in postwar Europe, where they observe citizens assisting trainloads of refugees as if "their country was the scene of a great experiment in the possibilities of compassion in the depths of war" (1026). Like the Garçons' calling, this work is "supranational," for rapidly "the missions expanded across the borders" (1026). Wanting to leave this theater for "well-remunerated work in California," the Chums' leader, Randolph St. Cosmo, apologizes to Captain Igor Padzhitnoff for what feels like a desertion: "he waved his hand a little desperately, as if to include all the waiting populations of unconnected souls adrift, orphans and cripples, unsheltered, sick, starving, incarcerated, insane, who must yet be helped to safety" (1029). The now-Soviet commander replies, "My crew have had four years, a University education, in learning to manage famine, disease, broken cities, all that now must follow what has happened.

Horror, pointlessness--but we did get educated. [...] Your own obligations may be to different consequences" (1029). When his counterpart agrees that they are obliged to "American consequences," Padzhitnoff replies, "I cannot--would rather not--imagine" and pats him on the arm in pity (1029). Thus the Chums are caught out as ethically inferior examples of their elite class. When they finally break with their mysterious agency over budgets and vote to "disaffiliate," it is to become in essence a mercenary franchise: "The boys were all free to define their own missions and negotiate their own fees" now that "the organization had been drifting into a loose collection of independent operators, with only the 'Chums of Chance' name and insignia in common" (1018).

To the extent that the vision glimpsed here of Europe in tatters after the First World War resembles the forecast for humanity in the narrative of Mr. Ace, that is the measure of the novel's comment on globalization's potential impact on the contemporary world. In Pynchon's treatment, both moments witness the massive impoverishment of populations and precipitous declines in their health and safety while select exceptions--or "Elect," in classically Pynchonian terms--with access to power and global networks of communication skirt and manage the crisis or, at their best, render assistance as the spirit moves them. What Pynchon suggests is a particularly "American obligation"--the determination to know nothing--emerges as a characteristic blindness when compared to the principled interventions made by like-enabled, cosmopolitan-minded groups. As much as the text aligns geopolitics with an atavistic violence of "earth and blood," it accuses its dialectical partner, globalization, of a criminal, perhaps sinful level of detachment, promoting inequity and producing "pointless" suffering.¹³

13 See Hume for the interpretation that *Against the Day* features a thematics of sin and penance that is a new emphasis in Pynchon's "religious vision."

Entropy and Its Ambiguities

Given the dire scenario the novel projects as an endpoint for capitalism, and in light of its suggestion that parallels for the contemporary crisis may be found in the early twentieth century's "first age of globalization," the question arises of how these states may be connected. What is Pynchon's current model of collapse and decline? To begin an answer, we look again at the Trespasser's report from the future, quoted above. While Mr. Ace's narrative of economic, then social breakdown strongly recalls Lessing, his reference to "thermodynamic" inevitability marks Pynchon as the author. The second law of thermodynamics, proposing entropy, or the necessary, progressive loss of available energy in a system, has long been familiar to Pynchon readers. Indeed, it is a critical touchstone of such importance as to draw a response even from the author: in his introduction to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon comments bemusedly that "people think I know more about the subject of entropy than I really do" (12)--before going on to summarize his research into its etymology, definition, and history. His findings testify to thermodynamic entropy's status, alongside gravity, as a fundamental yet still essentially mysterious physical law. But as with apocalypticism, Pynchon's forswearing of special interest in the idea of entropy contrasts with his frequent citation of it throughout his fiction, beginning with a story in the same collection, titled "Entropy." This short text uses the concept not merely as a central metaphor but as a structuring device, with the term's various senses--from cybernetics as well as physics--separated into discrete strands of the narrative, as David Seed has elucidated (110-11). Entropy also features as a major theme in Pynchon's first novel, *V.* (1963), where a secondary narrator, Fausto Maijstral, describes history as a process of "slow apocalypse," associating this tendency with the

fin-de-siècle trope of cultural decadence, and thus indicating entropy's status as a key twentieth-century variant of the apocalyptic narrative. This connection is made concrete by textual allusions to such precedents as Henry Adams and, less directly, Spengler.

And entropy enters several discussions in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Against the Day*, though mainly in neutral contexts, that is, as instances of local meaning in a subnarrative or passage of dialogue, or as a model proposed, as in *V.*, by a figural narrator rather than by Pynchon as implied author. These kinds of citations suggest that the concept becomes a secondary priority for Pynchon, who perhaps includes such references in his texts only to demonstrate its demotion in his more mature thinking. Accordingly, in a recent study--one written, however, too early to address *Against the Day* substantively--Samuel Thomas complains that prior Pynchon critics were "investing far too heavily in Pynchon's early interest in thermodynamics and information theory" and overlooking the "gross inadequacy" of scientific models such as entropy "when it comes to examining the processes of social, cultural and political change" (11). But this criticism seems overstated, for as Pynchon makes continued reference to the concept, even if his effect is often to question or parody the reductive style of analysis that piques Thomas, readers ought to be forgiven for likewise returning to it and interrogating the nature of the author's interest. In this light, we should recall that a hallmark of Pynchon's work across a number of topics, especially when considered over the long term, is its surfacing of a set of ideas and strategies, related but not altogether compatible, which the author declines ever fully to endorse or, on the other hand, finally to put down. Entropy is one of the models for history's trajectory that Pynchon repeatedly entertains as a possibility,

alongside other, more traditionally literary conceptions of ordering or disordering over time, such as the apocalyptic.

And entropy stands not only as a recurrent, sometimes favored idea in Pynchon's fiction but as a useful metaphor for conceiving--initially--the new kind of quasi-apocalyptic narrative that is my subject throughout this study: modern revisions to the apocalyptic in light of globalization's advance. When loosely defined as, for example, "the measure of disorder" (Pearce 6), entropy succeeds at describing the drift away from the anticipation of a scripted finale to human history, one of either destructive redemption, as in the classical narrative, or, as modernity's narrative of secularization had already submitted, of culminating perfection, a millennium in this world, at the end of history.¹⁴ Less committed to fulfillment than either of these older alternatives, more of a process than a narrative, entropy is a name for the modern "whimper" that T. S. Eliot opposed to the classical "bang," in a pair of terms that has framed many discussions of the distinguishing elements of modern narratives of endings. In this light, entropy seems at minimum to be a near-kin to the narratives of encroaching disorder I have detailed in each chapter, if not a family name for the group as a whole.

However, as the modernist affiliations I have cited would suggest, variations exist within entropy's lineage, and the differences that have evolved over the years are significant. Beyond the problematic implications Thomas notes of using any scientific concept to model a trend in culture or society, there is the fundamental ambiguity of this particular concept, the incompatibility of the models that its various definitions imply. Discrepancies emerge among entropy's literary instances, depending on which scientific

¹⁴ See Pollard on the history of the "progress" concept and Brummett on its ongoing deployment as a feature of millennialist rhetoric.

definition is pertinent and how precisely it has been applied. Does entropy describe an eventual plunge into utter chaos, or a gradual dissipation, a frittering of energy? Rudolf Arnheim articulated the dualism clearly in 1971: "the increase of entropy is due to two quite different kinds of effect; on the one hand, a striving toward simplicity, which will promote orderliness ... and, on the other hand, disorderly destruction" (52). Entropy as a single term cannot decide between two visions, one where disorder leads to chaos, and one where it leads to homeostasis. Certainly, the disintegrationist globalization narratives I have discussed, including Pynchon's, fulfill a general tendency toward disorder. But increasing disorder in, for example, the nonfiction narratives of Huntington, Davis, and Robert Kaplan hardly leads to less energy being available for violence; on the contrary, increasing disorder means more conflict, crime, and disruption. Although Davis's model of a "planet of slums" may at one level imply demographic homogeneity, at the macro- and micro-levels--which are those of the overall process of urbanization, and of daily experience within this--it rather conveys increasing turbulence. And Huntington and Kaplan foresee, to varying degrees, the ongoing collision and recombination of essentialisms, rather than their absorption into an ultimately self-identical mass.

Thus Pynchon's project has been not only revising the classical apocalyptic narrative, especially in its deployment as a Cold War scenario, but also the related task of clarifying and contextualizing the apocalyptic's dominant twentieth-century variant, entropy. For as an artifact of modernism, entropy in literature has more often described a passive sense of waning vitality, of decay, than the rising violence and insecurity that, like the other writers I have discussed, Pynchon evokes, particularly in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Against the Day*. David Cowart began to discern the difference in

Pynchon's approach to the concept when he pointed to such earlier writers as Gustave Flaubert and H. G. Wells, who also "saw literary possibilities in entropy": "Pynchon differs from these writers in that, less interested in the running down of the world or the universe than in the running down of the civilization into which he was born, he uses entropy as a paradigm of the snowballing deterioration of the West" (2). Rather than a metaphor for cultural exhaustion, as the modernists or Spengler would use it, entropy serves Pynchon's early fiction as a "snowballing" model of increasing disorder. Thomas cites Cowart's passage, written in 1980, as the would-be last words on entropy, meant to have put the subject to bed. Yet Pynchon would invoke entropy again in *Slow Learner* and in three subsequent novels, confirming it as one of the models of reality he cannot seem either to commit to or disown. Still, the very continuity of the idea as a topos in Pynchon's writing, alongside its internal inconsistency, means that it is an insufficient model for marking any adjustments Pynchon may have made to his historical analysis in later writings. And its deeply modernist lineage, its ownership by a prior literary movement, conflicts with the project of mapping his up-to-date narrative of disorder.

The Coming Scarcity

To continue that work, I want to return once more to the report from the disastrous future in *Against the Day*. As noted, Mr. Ace's allusion there to a "simple thermodynamic truth" will first put entropy in the minds of veteran Pynchon readers. But when read carefully, his narrative seems more likely to refer, not to the second, but to the first law of thermodynamics, which states the conservation of energy, the fact that energy cannot be created nor destroyed. It may be transformed many times over, even

theoretically into matter, according to a relation known thanks to Einstein, but it seems that fresh energy (or matter) simply cannot be added to the universe. This surely means problems for any society, such as is found in the modern, developed world, that has been built upon the short-term consumption of its energy resources but which lacks the ability, as nomadic groups once enjoyed, to rotate its abuse among several environments. Making this connection, Mr. Ace speaks of "exhausted fuel supplies" and relates that "[o]nce we came to understand the simple thermodynamic truth that Earth's resources were limited, in fact soon to run out, the whole capitalistic illusion fell to pieces." Again, the narrative is pointedly vague, in the prophetic style, but its description of the collapse of a capitalist system which depended entirely on finite fuel supplies to maintain its ideological strength implies that in Mr. Ace's time, "the last ton of fossilized coal"--to cite Max Weber's phrase--has finally been extracted and burned. Weber's thesis that the West has grown economically powerful but spiritually constrained by its tendency toward routinization is as or more important than entropy a context for Pynchon's work.¹⁵ After laying out this argument in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-05), Weber ends his text with a cryptically specific but strikingly prescient remark, writing that "the modern economic order" (181), a system which has rationalized the continual seeking of profit--a task rooted, however, in the irrational cultural practice of religion--will remain in force only until it depletes the earth of fossil fuels. Thus he implies that capitalism's recently achieved global supremacy will have a necessarily ironic outcome as it comes up against the universe's thermodynamic limitations. Mr. Ace's narrative of breakdown describes a crisis of simple scarcity, rather than entropy, leading to a break where, as in DeLillo's

15 For an analysis of Pynchon's "indebtedness" to Weber, see McClure, *Partial Faiths* 29-32.

Underworld, "ideological chaos" and basic physical insecurity emerge from the removal of a culturally enforced veil (Ivakhnenko 601).

The text's suggestion of Weber's *Protestant Ethic* gains resonance when, in relating his encounter with Mr. Ace to the other Chums of Chance, Chick Counterfly uses an analogy that imagines the Trespassers, the migrants from the future, as "the Pilgrims" of American historical lore, the settlers of New England whom Weber uses as exemplars of Puritan thought. Chick offers this analogy in summarizing the Trespassers' proposal, albeit diffidently: "So this is supposed to be like Squanto and the Pilgrims [...] We help them through their first winter, sort of thing" (416). Randolph St. Cosmo develops Chick's skepticism through an inversion of his analogy, which however only underlines, through irony, the New World's tragic role in the success of "the modern economic order": he says, with poignant naivete, "Suppose they're not pilgrims but raiders, and there's some particular resource here, that they've run out of and want to seize from us, and take back with them?" (416). It is only at this point that entropy enters the discussion, as an alternative explanation, linked to but distinct from the narrative the Chums are evaluating: Chick speculates that the Trespassers' true motive might be to take advantage of the world's "[l]ower entropy" here in 1904, for "[a]s a simple function of Time, their entropy level would be higher. Like rich folks taking mineral waters at some likely 'spa.'" (416). By this account, the Trespassers are not supplicant migrants from a future whose devastation they sought to avert, but proleptic avatars of the exploitative "plutes," *Against the Day*'s antagonists. Having nearly run through the resources of their own age, the Trespassers would exhaust those supplies in an effort to gain access to other times' plenitude, in essence, to cannibalize their past. In this proposed narrative, the scientific

miracle of time travel solves the postmodern dilemma of "time-space compression" outlined by David Harvey (284-307), as capitalism finds no limit, even temporal, to its self-destructive consumption, which continues even beyond the existence of "the last ton of fossilized coal."

It's Not "the End of the World," Again

In what we have seen to be a typical gesture, Pynchon does not ultimately authorize either interpretation of the group's motives. The Trespassers cannot even be called major characters in this novel, although as I will discuss below, they return later to communicate to the Chums another, more specific prophetic vision, one whose accuracy and sincerity should enhance Mr. Ace's credibility here. But Pynchon's handling of these interpretive possibilities--what David Seed describes as his strategy of forcing "a relativistic viewpoint on the reader, which acts against a final resolving certainty, or one definite moral direction" (127)--resembles his approach to the concepts of thermodynamics and their implications for narrative structures of disorder. By setting two different principles into play within his narrative discourse, Pynchon encourages reflection on each of these as metaphors, but suggests their probable inadequacy as overarching descriptive labels for any particular historical sequence. Instead, he leads readers to assess the sense of historical patterning active in the novel--to weigh the apocalyptic import of its plot and themes--by attending to the specific episodes of the narrative, its internal discourses, its structure, and the historical context it calls on.

Rather than incommensurable, insufficient models from the physical sciences, what Pynchon presents for a historical trajectory and accompanying narrative structure in

Against the Day is inspired by a mathematical idea, and it takes the form of what I will call a "catastrophic sequence." In mathematics, sequences are "ordered set[s] of mathematical objects" (Weisstein, "Sequence"); they vary widely in their internal logics, and they may or may not tend toward determinate points in a determinable pattern. Likewise, *Against the Day* is sequentially organized around several prominent scenes of terrible destruction. Each of these catastrophes exists finally in no definitive relation to the others or to the sequence as a whole, and each contains its own internal clusters of meaningful associations. But taken as a unit, these moments align the narrative around a thematics of spectacular disaster and ensuing large-scale suffering and struggle in the aftermath. These episodes and sometime references recur with such frequency that they must constitute the central narrative line of the novel, a core around which wrap its several subnarratives--of adventure, espionage, revenge, academic debate and subversive research in math and physics, anarchist organization and activity, and several varieties of spiritual questing--and they carry the weight of Pynchon's analysis of historical trends toward globalization.

Readers of *Against the Day* might object to my passing over of much of these subnarratives, which after all fill the majority of the text. But a full accounting of this epic novel is beyond my concern here, which is to bring out the distinctive nature of Pynchon's quasi-apocalyptic narrative interest in globalization, and this lies precisely in the sequence of catastrophes I have identified. Besides, any reader of the novel will surely take note of its many apocalyptic allusions. But an interpretation that neglects to consider the relation of these to each other, and to the historical context behind them, may lead to the overly simplified conclusion that Pynchon has written a thoroughly,

perhaps straightforwardly apocalyptic text, when in fact it is in this more open structure--the sequence of catastrophes that converges upon but does not necessitate a massive, global, but not world-ending conflict--that Pynchon makes his definitive revision to the classical apocalyptic narrative.

For many of the novel's overt references to the central event of the apocalyptic narrative turn out to be ironic diversions, much as entropy's localized appearances here and throughout Pynchon's later fiction have the general effect of signaling its contemporary lack of credibility and relevance. To take one measure of the novel's diffidence toward the apocalyptic as such: the phrase "the end of the world" occurs in approximately ten different places in the text, but almost exclusively to denote events very much not on such a scale, often appearing in decidedly humble contexts and even mocking the very notion of an ending. Put another way, the reader learns to recognize that whenever a character in this novel alludes to "the end of the world," it is not the end of the world.

Examining some of these instances is important for demonstrating Pynchon's mixed attitude toward millennialism, his determination to shift the interpretation of historical catastrophe away from apocalyptic inclinations, while still to insist on historical catastrophe as his main subject. The first appearance of "the end of the world" comes very early in the novel, and it is significant for establishing the myopia that, Pynchon suggests, inevitably accompanies the phrase in any secular context--other than the unique, modern threat of nuclear holocaust--and for assigning this flaw to the novel's most depraved character. This is the arch-capitalist, Scarsdale Vibe, who tells Professor

Heino Vanderjuice, a Yale physicist and associate of the Chums, about Nikola Tesla's research into:

"something he calls a 'World-System,' for producing huge amounts of electrical power that anyone can tap in to for free, anywhere in the world, because it uses the planet as an element in a gigantic resonant circuit. [...] If such a thing is ever produced, [...] it will mean the end of the world, not just 'as we know it' but as anyone knows it. It is a weapon, Professor, surely you see that--the most terrible weapon the world has seen, designed to destroy not armies or matériel, but the very nature of exchange, our Economy's long struggle to evolve up out of the fish-market anarchy of all battling all to the rational systems of control whose blessing we enjoy at present." (33-34)

Vibe's citation and too hasty dismissal of "the end of the world"'s usual idiomatic qualifier, "as we know it," hints that the passage is playing on the normally warped perspectives behind such discourse. This metacommentary takes place despite Vibe's apparent gravity (if not sincerity, for he is attempting to best J. P. Morgan and corner the market on "World-System" devices by hiring Vanderjuice to create the System's antithesis, while also secretly funding Tesla).¹⁶

The irony of Vibe's apocalyptic pronouncement emerges from his patent ideological antipathy to the values implied in the remainder of the novel, whose most sympathetic characters, such as Frank Traverse, view the lawless, predatory world Vibe symbolizes as "an economic order they might someday destroy" (640), in another echo of Weber. Indeed, Vibe's assassination is the goal of one major subnarrative. His role is comparable to J. Edgar Hoover's in DeLillo's *Underworld*, in that the texts employ these figures as passionate articulators of not only an apocalyptic but a pernicious politics that, at least in Pynchon, has the virtue of constituting a known enemy. Vibe's ludicrous pomposity--raising the "Economy" to a metaphysical principle and bludgeoning

¹⁶ The grandiose utopianism of Tesla's vision is not Pynchon's fantasy. A *New York Times* story describes the project's Long Island site, Wardencllyffe--where Pynchon sets a cameo appearance by the inventor later in *Against the Day*--as currently under threat, predictably, from real estate development, while an alliance of quixotic Tesla cultists has taken up the mantle of preservationism. See Broad's report.

Darwinist, Hobbesian, and Weberian phrases into a single image--should in fact highlight the ambivalence contained in the more compelling monologues DeLillo writes for Hoover in *Underworld's* prologue, which expound the relative advantages DeLillo sees in the now obsolete Cold War psychic regime. Compare those passages, cited in Chapter Three, to the speech Vibe delivers near the end of the novel to the Industrial Defense Alliance in 1914: sensing "no need for euphemism" before this audience, he baldly declares,

"We take what we can while we may. Look at them [miners on strike before the Ludlow massacre]--they carry the mark of their absurd fate in plain sight. Their foolish music is about to stop, and it is they who will be caught out, awkwardly, most of them tone-deaf and never to be fully aware, few if any with the sense to leave the game early and seek refuge before it is too late. Perhaps there will not, even by then, *be* refuge.

"We will buy it all up, [...] all this country. Money speaks, the land listens, where the Anarchist skulked, where the horse-thief plied his trade, we fishers of Americans will cast our nets of perfect ten-acre mesh, leveled and varmint-proofed, ready to build on. [...] Anarchism will pass, its race will degenerate into silence, but money will beget money, grow like the bluebells in the meadows, spread and brighten and gather force, and bring low all before it. It is simple. It is inevitable. It has begun." (1000)

Whereas Hoover has a romantic-cum-fascistic vision of the early Cold War as an elite national mission toward Armageddon, Vibe expresses an outrageously gigantic individualism. Here he perverts the religious tropes of the calling--Jesus offers to make his disciples "fishers of men" (Mark 1:17)--and "cities of refuge"--sites of asylum in the biblical world--to serve a spiritually bereft mission of plunder and depredation. Vibe's choice to see human endeavor as "the game" epitomizes the tragically short-term, zero-sum orientation that for Pynchon marks the modern West's dominant worldview, an amoral framework for worldly success that afflicts contemporary American society no less than Vibe's. Elsewhere, the novel aptly contextualizes the historical transition that the excessive proportions of Vibe's laissez-faire doctrine imply: as the twentieth century

would see the captains of industry such as Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, and the fictional Vibe give way to a more anonymously corporate mode of capitalism, so a character alludes to the Supreme Court's landmark 1886 decision, in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad Company*, to recognize the "legal personhood" of corporations (147). Thus, the connection suggests, the privilege which mainstream US ideology historically accords the individual was freed to be translated onto the corporate organization.

Still, Vibe's clumsy speech exhibits some visionary ability, activated by Pynchon's interest in crafting retrofitted prophecy as pointed commentary on the present. So alongside his prefiguring of the corporation-as-person's supercession of the robber baron, Vibe forecasts a parallel epochal transition, from industrial to finance capitalism--"money will beget money"--a crucial basis for economic globalization. And in conferring with the nascent defense industry specifically in the Rockies--"at at resort near the continental divide"--and by treating the enclosure of the American West as a heroic national project--even mimicking local color for the purpose, referring to "varmints," much in the style of a far less candid corporate ideologue, Mitt Romney, during the 2008 US presidential campaign--Vibe discloses the complex of factors that allows the American frontier to function paradoxically as a symbolic site where individual liberty can flourish, at the expense of community, and where unrestrained corporatism could mesh with nationalistic militarism: in the person, for example, of Wyoming's Dick Cheney.

I unpack all of these associations in order to attach specifics to what is otherwise a caricature of villainy, as a way of clarifying the critique implied by Vibe's prominent

instancings of the "end of the world" idea, in its first appearance in the novel. At the same time, the fantastical nature of the "World-System" Tesla pursues also suggests a critical view of such post-McLuhan, technological-utopian theories as those I sketched in Chapter One. In his pitch to Professor Vanderjuice, Vibe adds of Tesla, "It has escaped his mighty intellect that no one can make any money off an invention like that. To put up money for research into a system of free power would be to throw it away, and violate--hell, betray--the essence of everything modern history is supposed to be" (33). While Pynchon is likely acquainted with Immanuel Wallerstein's important concept of "the world-system" as a way to frame transnational European history through the development of capitalism, what this pun on Tesla's research probably alludes to is the World Wide Web, which was originally developed by US military researchers, released in the early 1990s to become the site of millennial fantasies, but then swiftly if incompletely commercialized along the lines Vibe indicates. Thus as Pynchon wastes little time in aligning apocalyptic thinking with the naked class interests of his most despicable character, he also mocks the easy varieties of utopianism that globalization recently inspired.

From there, the instances of the phrase "the end of the world" mainly grow yet more ironic, even absurd, suggesting the concept's drift into inapplicability. For example, Roswell Bounce, an amateur participant at a university science conference in 1893, mocks true believers' reaction to the failure of a major experiment to prove the existence of the luminiferous aether:

"It's like these cults who believe the world will end on such and such a day [...] they get rid of all their earthly possessions and head off in a group for some mountaintop and wait, and the end of the world doesn't happen. The world keeps going on. What a disappointment! Everybody has to troop back down the

mountain with their spiritual tails dragging, except for one or two incurably grinning idiots who see it as a chance to start a new life, fresh, without encumbrance, to be reborn, in fact." (62)

Though his description of disappointed followers of apocalyptic prophets does not lack sympathy or complexity, the reader has little reason not to accept Roswell Bounce's otherwise critical perspective on millennialism.¹⁷ As a jocular, itinerant dabbler in the mystical side of the applied sciences, Roswell resembles one of Pynchon's favored character types. In fact, as this is a Pynchon text, it is precisely the generosity in Roswell's consideration of apocalyptic belief's wrongheadedness that suggests his judgment ought to be reliable.

Another telling use of the phrase comes when Webb Traverse and Veikko Rautavaara blow up a railroad bridge on the Fourth of July. Observing the blast, Webb is uncharacteristically laconic: "Seen worse." (96). His partner exclaims, "Was beautiful! what do you want, end of the world?" Webb shrugs, accepts a celebratory shot of vodka, and allows that their work has been "[s]ufficient unto the day." The chapter ends with this citation of the Sermon on the Mount--specifically, Jesus's instruction, in Matthew 6, to be like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and, in light of the promise of a heavenly kingdom, not to worry about more than day-to-day survival while on earth (and possibly not even that).¹⁸ But the terse exchange succeeds in invoking a recurrent opposition in formulations of political strategy, with some version of realism set against any desire for the apocalyptic sublime. Veikko's remark resembles the argument of Michael Walzer, who, as cited in Chapter Two, derides what he sees as the scant intellectual merits of

¹⁷ Roswell alludes to the actual experience of the Millerites, who in New York State in 1843 and again in 1844 did just as he describes. Miller's career is an example of Kermode's claim that apocalyptic prophecy, for its adherents, "can be disconfirmed without being discredited" (8). The Millerites have heirs in the current Seventh Day Adventists.

¹⁸ For this reading of the biblical passage, I am indebted to Kurt Spellmeyer.

apocalypticism and for a model of progressive politics recommends the "tough realism" of the Exodus narrative (121)--itself a tale of retributive violence, it should not be forgotten. Still, deciding how to read this scene demands evaluating the wisdom of Veikko on a minimum of evidence. The reader knows only that after campaigning against imperial Russia at home in Finland, he has taken up the banner of anarchism in the US and is now a veteran of labor struggles in Cripple Creek and Coeur d'Alene. (It also requires, as Hume suggests, evaluating Pynchon's apparently serious endorsement of political violence--what might be called terrorism--against the forces of capitalism.) While Veikko argues for a practical attitude toward the work of revolution, Webb's response bespeaks the disappointment of the true believer, resignation at the necessarily diminished scale of the capacity for action. The text offers some basis for Webb's dissatisfaction: 100 pages later, he is murdered by mining company goons. At any rate, the scene's political discourse pushes the apocalyptic into the area of fantasy, or at least irony, as the phrase "the end of the world" is precisely not what Webb and Veikko's expertise accomplishes.

Subsequent appearances of "the end of the world" in the text finally begin more closely to resemble the promised event, for they serve as shorthand descriptions of major disasters that enter into the novel's catastrophic sequence. Still, the denoted events fall short of finality, and their labeling as such suggests potted phrasemaking. Thus in a flashback halfway through the novel, Erlays Rideout recalls a witness describing a natural disaster: "This ship's cook I run with briefly, Shorty, he was there--well, a couple hundred miles downwind, not that it mattered, said it was like the end of the world" (506-07). And Frank Traverse, while in Mexico smuggling arms to anarchists, gets wind of an

impending financial crisis "on the other side," in the US: "revelers were heard to say [...] 'we're all just hostages here down below the border line, up north they're borrowing like it's the end of the world, half of it with stocks for collateral, anything goes wrong up there with the trusts, and it won't matter how much oil's in the ground, it'll be adios *chingamadre*, so to speak'" (639). These citations from the second half of the novel gain credibility, as they refer to actual historical events, the volcanic eruption on Krakatoa in 1883 and the Bankers' Panic of 1907. These incidents join the 1900 Galveston hurricane, the 1902 collapse of the Campanile di San Marco in Venice, and the 1908 explosion over Tunguska, Siberia as elements in the novel's metafictional historiography of early twentieth-century disasters. And particularly as they come later in the text, these narrative events contribute to the sense in which the novel affirms an overarching trajectory, what in another context we have seen Cowart term a "snowballing," toward world-historical catastrophe. Still, the discursive distance by which they are related--through the quotation of unseen or unnamed speakers--and the ultimately limited nature of their impact--perceived only in the light of later, more massive disasters which themselves, ironically, may inspire more false annunciations--mitigate their status as potential components of a truly apocalyptic narrative, or even as useful omens of any coming disaster.

Weakly Converging Toward Flanders Fields

Nonetheless, the very recurrence of catastrophes such as these creates an undeniable pattern in the narrative, in fact the main pattern, especially as many of the events follow on portents developed in earlier scenes: for example, a tarot reading predicts "[s]ome kind of fall" for the Campanile (253). And as the above sketch of events

should indicate, the pattern is defined by an increasing pace and magnitude of disaster. In contrast to the fleeting reference to Krakatoa, the explosion over Tunguska, now believed to have been a meteorite crashing through the atmosphere, is described at length and from the perspectives of several characters, as if to capture the event in all its devastation.

Pynchon also imaginatively explores the cultural impact of the explosion on Russians at large, who call it "the Event" and load it with apocalyptic significance (779). Among other wonders:

For a while after the Event, crazed Raskol'niki ran around in the woods, flagellating themselves and occasional onlookers who got too close, raving about Tchernobyl, the destroying star known as Wormwood in the book of Revelation. [...] Clocks and watches ran backward. Although it was summer, there were brief snowfalls in the devastated taiga, and heat in general tended to flow unpredictably for a while. Siberian wolves walked into churches in the middle of services, quoted passages from Scriptures in fluent Old Slavonic, and walked out peaceably again. They were reported to be especially fond of Matthew 7:15, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Aspects of the landscape of Tierra del Fuego, directly opposite the Stony Tunguska on the globe, began to show up in Siberia. (784)

This selection from the chapter's extended play on the apocalyptic trope of the "world turned upside down" demonstrates the significance Pynchon bestows upon the episode. (His riffing includes, in the remark about heat flow, another tweak of those readers still convinced that entropy is the key metaphor in Pynchon's cosmos.) The reasons for the "Event"'s privileged place in the narrative may be said to lie in the unique enormity of this particular catastrophe, and in the way the "heavenwide blast of light" serves to iterate one of the novel's major motifs, light as a vital but ambiguous and dangerous force (779). But when considered in terms of the pattern of the catastrophic sequence, its significance also stems from the placement of the event toward the end of the narrative, which sets the explosion as a penultimate sign of the "European crisis" and then war to come in 1914 (871). That is, the constituents of the catastrophic sequence generally accrue narrative

meanings as the sequence moves forward and effectively gains momentum. Shortly after these passages describing the impact of the Tunguska event, a British intelligence officer attempting to manage the Annexation Crisis of 1913 reports that "throughout the diplomatic community [...] There are European Apocalypse pools among the workers at the bureaux concerned, as to the date of a general mobilization. This year, next year, soon. It is now inescapably on its way" (809).

Thus even as the text militates against an apocalyptic hermeneutic in the ways shown above, the narrative often seems bent on ushering in the First World War as a climactic, summarizing catastrophe. Signs abound that the war will eventually figure in the plot. Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire--whose assassination by a Serbian nationalist is usually cited as the spark for the war--appears as a silly, spoiled aristocrat running amok in 1893 in Chicago, where he jokes about killing Hungarian anarchists for sport (46). Later, the postmodernist fictional technique of ontological plurality allows Kit Traverse briefly to see action, approximately ten years before "the future European war [...] which everyone was confident would come," on an Austrian battleship that "at some point in [its] construction schedule" had "*merged*" with the passenger liner that he boarded for Göttingen, Germany (515).

Incidents such as these suggest that the Great War may be as much the object of the text's frequent, ominous glances toward the future as is the ascendancy of the corporation, an outcome which arguably bears more directly on the current issues in global politics that concern the author.

But the main indicators of the war's significance for the novel's catastrophic theme and structure are the several prophetic visions of Armageddon-like conflict

received by the Chums of Chance. The first of these comes at the beginning of the subplot that eventually leads to the meeting with Mr. Ace: while the Chums are on ground leave in New York City, a messenger boy drops unsolicited hints that nearby can be found a working time machine. Intrigued, Chick Counterfly and Darby Suckling pursue this tip to the hidden laboratory of Dr. Zoot, which is located somewhere under lower Manhattan, beyond "a memorial arch, gray and time-corroded, seeming to date from some ancient catastrophe, far older than the city" (401). Thus besides indicating some kind of ontological or spiritual passage, the arch is a testament to the deep roots of catastrophic history. And it is inscribed with a classic text of the underworld: "I AM THE WAY INTO THE DOLEFUL CITY -- DANTE" (401). Along with this forbidding citation of the *Inferno*, the rest of the setting, too, strongly recalls T. S. Eliot's early poems as intertexts, particularly their grimy mise-en-scène, as "[p]assing beneath the colossal arch, they continued to grope along over fog-slick cobblestones, among decaying animals, piles of refuse, and the smoldering fires of homeless denizens of the quarter" (401). Here, as if to complicate further the setting's prismatic collage of temporal associations--"ancient," medieval, and modernist--Pynchon anachronistically updates Eliot's images with a late-twentieth-century language of urban poverty.

The grandly dark setting is, however, only a prelude to the vision that the two Chums experience through Dr. Zoot's machine, which, it turns out, he purchased secondhand and does not know how to operate correctly. So instead of traveling to a specific destination in time, inside the machine Chick and Darby

seemed to be in the midst of some great storm in whose low illumination, presently, they could make out, in unremitting sweep across the field of vision, inclined at the same angle as the rain, if rain it was--some material descent, gray and wind-stressed--undoubted human identities, masses of souls, mounted,

pillioned, on foot, ranging along together by the millions over the landscape accompanied by a comparably unmeasurable herd of horses. The multitude extended farther than they could see--a spectral cavalry, faces disquietingly wanting in detail, eyes little more than blurred sockets, the draping of garments constantly changing in an invisible flow which perhaps was only wind. Bright arrays of metallic points hung and drifted in three dimensions and perhaps more, like stars blown through by the shockwaves of the Creation. Were those voices crying out in pain? sometimes it almost sounded like singing. Sometimes a word or two, in a language almost recognizable, came through. Thus, galloping in unceasing flow ever ahead, denied any further control over their fate, the disconsolate company were borne terribly over the edge of the visible world. . . . (403-04)

Such a dreadful scene corresponds precisely to the images in an inventory made by Robert Hamerton-Kelly, who writes that in current usage, we often find "an apocalypse is a bleak and ravaged place, where death reigns; an after-the-battle scene of cold corpses, dead horses, and splintered guns ..." (3). Thus Pynchon's evocation of a nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century battlefield, while appropriate to his story's setting, employs a more general apocalyptic trope, the "icy steppe" that according to Hamerton-Kelly is the arena for "catastrophic historical action" (3-4). This imagery makes another point of contact with the militant visions of DeLillo's Hoover in *Underworld*. The trappings of the device the Chums are sitting in then appear to fall away, and

the boys found themselves [...] in a space unbounded in all directions. There became audible a continuous roar as of the ocean--but it was not the ocean--and soon cries as of beasts in open country, ferally purring stridencies passing overhead, sometimes too close for the lads to be altogether comfortable with--but they were not beasts. Everywhere rose the smell of excrement and dead tissue. (404)

As is often the case in Pynchon's writing, the tone of this spectacular passage is difficult to judge: does he invert the syntax of certain phrases, like "if rain it was," in order to mock melodramatic treatments of apocalyptic themes, or simply to mimic them and borrow from their urgency? For, to cite another of Hamerton-Kelly's working definitions of the term, "apocalypse is an attitude of paranoid grandiosity" (3). While the heavy style

of the passage clashes with the text around it, considered structurally it displays a standard technique, for the novel as a whole traffics in the materials of popular subgenres and the styles of various kinds of romance. And beginning with Richard Poirier, comics have long been adduced as an important source for Pynchon's voice as a narrator as well as the abrupt transitions that often mark his narrative structures. But noting this tendency does not explain it: what is the reader to think when Chick and Darby are removed from this appalling scene by the type of "hook" used in Looney Tunes and other animated shorts to terminate poor vaudeville performances (404)? Is this merely an example of purple prose, spurred by an attempt to engage with what the writer perceives as surpassingly serious content? Some of the moments of formally "bad writing," such as the unhelpful description of "three dimensions and perhaps more," may be explained as references to other themes in the novel, for travel through the fourth dimension, time, is just one of its ongoing plays on the notion of ontological stability.

At any rate, several seeming references to contemporary critical topoi enhance the already complex intertextuality of the passage and attest to its seriousness. Walter Benjamin's catastrophic wind of history "flows" through the scene, suggesting, within this dimly "illuminated" revelation, the tragic or ironic limitations of human foresight. And the mention, perhaps after Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, of a "multitude" inhabiting a "boundless space" links the vision to Pynchon's critique of the dynamics of contemporary globalization. The metaphor works, because the context of the First World War, where the combination of traditional battlefield tactics and modern weapons led to the slaughter of great portions of Europe's officer class along with millions of young enlisted men, alters what normally would be the chivalric, aristocratic associations of the

fighting horsemen seen here. Thus the "spectral cavalry" become a surprising avatar of what William V. Spanos has called Pynchon's "spectral politics": his determination to represent the marginalized "Other" of modernity, the "Preterite" and passed over, through "not only ... the various 'ghosts' who visit the protagonists of Pynchon's novels ... [but also] the multitude of the dispossessed, the displaced, the wasted, the refugees that haunt the techno-capitalist world system that has ... rendered them homeless" (734). To view the "spectral cavalry" as sharing in the misfortunes of the urban "homeless" connects the various archetypal registers of the entire passage--from the journey beneath the city to the apocalyptic battleground--to what has been a great theme in Pynchon's writing, the plight of modern society's lost dissenters, and it should therefore indicate the gravity of the vision, however garishly it is rendered.

But the passage has a more intratextual prophetic valence in how it begins a sequence of amplifications in the novel's later evocations of the First World War and of the scenes of mass carnage which that conflict calls up in the popular imaginary. This sequentiality is demonstrated by the near repetition of the nightmarish vision to another of the Chums, Miles Blundell, who develops a capacity for clairvoyance. As the Chums travel into "Inner Asia"--literally, in that they travel beneath the surface of the Taklamakan Desert--in search of Shambhala, Miles goes "off on one of his extra-temporal excursions":

"Whatever is to happen," he reported on his return, "will begin out here, with an engagement of cavalry on a scale no one living has ever seen, and perhaps no one dead either, an inundation of horse, spanning these horizons, their flanks struck an unearthly green, stormlit, relentless, undwindling, arisen boiling from the very substance of desert and steppe. And all that incarnation and slaughter will transpire in silence, all across this great planetary killing-floor, absorbing wind, steel, hooves upon and against earth, massed clamor of horses, cries of men.

Millions of souls will arrive and depart. Perhaps news of it will take years to reach anyone who might understand what it meant. . . ." (443-44)

To ensure that the echoes are not lost on the reader, when Miles recounts this vision, Chick and Darby recall their "brief though unpleasant experience in the 'time-chamber' of Dr. Zoot" (444) and "that apocalyptic sweep of masses that still troubled their reverie" (409). Again, the vision has multiple referents: the vessel on which the Chums are traveling will shortly be destroyed in a massive, underground war. (In another narrow escape, the Chums will by then have been ejected from the ship for surreptitiously investigating whether their hosts are using the pursuit of Shambhala as a pretext for locating oil reserves in the region; they are.) But more important than this register of basic prophecy is the passage's repetition of several elements and its elevated tone, features which place it into the sequence of related catastrophic scenes, including Chick Counterfly's momentary vision of millions of revived souls passively waiting for ministration to their basic needs.

Whatever power has been blessing the Chums with these prophetic insights tries finally to spell out "what it meant" in one more vision. The recipient is again Miles Blundell, who since the aborted Shambhala mission has been "tormented by a prefiguration, almost insupportable in its clarity, of the holy City, separated by only a slice of Time, a thin screen extending everywhere across his attention, which grew ever more frail and transparent [...] while the others continued calmly about the chores of the day. How could they not know of that immeasurable Approach?" (550-51). When the Chums find themselves in Belgium, "translated [...] as if by evil agency, [to] a lowland fixed anciently under a destiny, if not quite a curse," Miles is disturbed by the apparent weakening of his clairvoyance. This is described as a darkening of vision, presaging very

bad fortune: "somehow, the earlier, the great, light had departed, the certitude become broken as ground-dwellers' promises--time regained its opacity" (551). And the setting takes on correlative aspects, for the Chums drift "earthward through a smell of coal smoke and flowers out of season, [...] down into seaside shadows stretching into the growing dark, [...] the pallid vastness of twilight [and] cryptic insinuation. What was about to emerge from the night just behind the curve of Earth?" (551).

In this locale redolent of "tempest and visitation, prophecy, madness . . ." (551), Miles encounters a Trespasser he recognizes from Candlebrow University, where Chick Counterfly met with Mr. Ace. Now, along one of the "mirror-still canals [...] on the road between Ypres and Menin" (551, 554), that is, on a site which will soon enough host three bloody battles, the Trespasser, Ryder Thorn, makes an impassioned entreaty to the Chums:

"Damn you, Blundell, damn you all. You have no idea what you're heading into. This world you take to be 'the' world will die, and descend into Hell, and all history after that will belong properly to the history of Hell. [...] Flanders will be the mass grave of History." (554)

Here is the obverse of the political pro-globalization narrative, outlined in Chapter One, that has the millennial "end of history" come gloriously into view with the fall of the socialist world. Instead, the refugee from a future wrung dry by capitalism brings the sobering news that history ended long before, in catastrophe, when the mechanization of death subsumed the practice of war as a style of policymaking in Western Europe. Thus historical specificity firmly attaches to what might otherwise, in light of the archetypes identified above, be construed as an exercise in allusion to literary apocalypses.

The text underlines how the scale of the Great War's destruction was hardly anticipated by its makers and participants and therefore truly apocalyptic in the revelatory sense, for Miles responds obtusely as Thorn continues:

"And that is not the most perverse part of it. They will all embrace death. Passionately."

"The Flemish."

"The world. On a scale that has never yet been imagined. Not some religious painting in a cathedral, not Bosch, or Breughel, but this, what you see, this great plain, turned over and harrowed, all that lies below brought to the surface--deliberately flooded [...] not a village wall will be left standing. League on league of filth, corpses by the uncounted thousands, the breath you took for granted become corrosive and death-giving. [...] Do you think we choose to come here, to this terrible place? Tourists of disaster, jump into some time machine, oh, how about Pompeii this weekend, Krakatoa perhaps [...] We have had no choice [...] No more than ghosts may choose what places they must haunt . . . you children drift in a dream, all is smooth, no interruptions, no discontinuities, but imagine the fabric of Time torn open, and yourselves swept through, with no way back, orphans and exiles who find you will do what you must, however shameful, to get from end to end of each corroded day [...] you are such simpletons at the fair, gawking at your Wonders of Science, expecting as your entitlement all the Blessings of Progress, it is your faith, your pathetic balloon-boy faith." (554-55)

Thorn probably intends his concluding image as a metaphor, but it also recasts the novel's opening scene, the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where the Chums arrived as higher beings, as a grand illusion epitomizing the modern era's misguided pursuit of the technological millennium. Moreover, Thorn mockingly suggests that he and his group are "tourists of disaster," darting whimsically across time to imbibe the sublimity of awful events such as Krakatoa. His remark argues for this setting on the Western Front as the eventual primary locus of meaning in a modern catastrophic history, and thus the internal reference to a previously mentioned element in the text's catastrophic sequence affirms the sequence's structuring role in the narrative.

Weak Convergence: "It Might Have Gone Differently"

Faced with the preponderance of evidence represented by these extensive quotations, one may wonder how a reader of *Against the Day* could draw any conclusion about its structure other than that it is a train of events leading toward the First World War as a fittingly apocalyptic climax. But this would be to forget the many instances elsewhere in the novel discrediting or mocking "the end of the world." And it should be recalled that these several, linked moments of catastrophic vision have been culled from a text containing many subnarratives, some at most tangentially related to this chain of disasters that nonetheless runs throughout. Furthermore, veteran Pynchon readers should know to expect their expectations to be thwarted, especially when it comes to narrative resolution. To be sure, the war finally breaks out in the last 150 pages of the novel, but after several false starts, such as Kit's magical sojourn aboard the Austrian battleship and the extended intrigue surrounding the 1913 Annexation Crisis, it is hard to say more precisely where in the text this happens. And none of the prophetic visions recounted here come to fruition in the narrative; the war itself is viewed obliquely for the most part, the main action being an exciting dash to safety that Reef Traverse, Yashmeen Halfcourt, and their newborn, Ljubica, make across the Balkan peninsula, where the political troubles that precipitated the war came to a head, but where relatively less combat took place.

Thus Pynchon's deconstructive--or disintegrative--narrative tendency ultimately resurfaces, significantly undermining whatever structuring effect the catastrophic sequence I have identified may exert. This is much the same technique that in *Gravity's Rainbow* famously disperses the apparent protagonist, Tyrone Slothrop, into fragments

well before the end of the novel. Despite the rhetorical virtuosity and allusive continuity of the quoted passages, the semantic coherence of the catastrophic sequence is limited: the episodes echo and amplify one another so as to form a recognizable unit which strongly thematizes disaster in the text, but this unit in itself falls short of providing a comprehensive gloss on the narrative's overarching trajectory, and it scarcely relates to many of its subplots. Even the life paths of the main characters defy any neat formal logic, for they are seen in the concluding pages to be working their separate ways through the version of history that, with the war's conclusion, resumes as "one damned thing after another" into the early 1920s. That is, what has grown to seem the war's climactic stature in the narrative is retrospectively diminished by how readily the characters skirt it and its aftermath, to the extent that it already seems to have receded in their memories, at least from the US perspective, by the closing section. As terrible as is the violence glimpsed in the text and the dislocations that, more extensively, the violence is seen to create, Armageddon has once again failed to appear.

It is this decidedly attenuated pattern--comprising the chain of catastrophic episodes that populate but do not predominate the novel--whose structure, I want to argue, resembles what in mathematics is called a "convergent sequence." About sequences, the salient points are these: they have an order, but the nature of their ordering may be obscure, and while they may extend infinitely, some sequences approach, or tend toward, an upper "limit," or one may be chosen arbitrarily. The property by which sequences approach a limit is called convergence; the converse, "divergence," is also a

possibility. Furthermore, convergence is a variable quality, and "weak convergence" describes sequences whose tendency toward a limit is less defined.¹⁹

This type of relation seems a strikingly apposite metaphor for the succession of twentieth-century catastrophes narrated in *Against the Day*, a span that certainly may be seen as converging on World War I, but which cannot be said to do so teleologically. Mindful of the flogging that the entropy concept has taken in Pynchon studies, I surely do not intend this mathematical idea to replace it as a would-be magic key for criticism. On the contrary, weak convergence's intrinsic looseness is its strength as a historical metaphor: it allows for instances of limited, local patterning--such as a sequence of political and natural events that portend a major war--without pretending to submit all events to a single formula or image, and without canceling the possibility that on a larger scale, history has a different pattern, including the possibility of a basic randomness. And even such patterns, once their existence is provisionally granted, may be missed, misread, or contested, in the event or in retrospect. In this way, "weak convergence" is a conceptual model especially well suited for thinking history or prophecy in the context of what John McClure has identified as Pynchon's "weak religiosity," his project to reanimate "weakened" forms of what have traditionally been authoritarian modes of spirituality, so that in Pynchon's writing, McClure argues, the religious framework is "weakened but retains a certain shaky power: it is taken out of its original context and

19 My explanation of the convergent sequence draws on several sources, namely *The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Mathematics*, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Mathematics*, and *Mathworld*, an online scholarly reference. But *Microsoft Encarta*'s entry on sequences and series offers perhaps the most useful definitions for the layman, as it incorporates some phrases from outside of the mathematical lexicon. So, a sequence is "an ordered succession of numbers or other quantities," and a series is "the indicated sum of such a succession." On convergence: "The number L is called the limit of a sequence, since even though individual terms of the sequence may be bigger or smaller than L , the terms eventually cluster closer and closer to L . When the sequence has a limit L , it is said to converge to L " ("Sequence and Series").

combined with alien elements, challenged and revised, but it continues to preoccupy characters and to correspond, up to a point" with the fictional text's narrative structure (*Partial Faiths* 41). Like Gianni Vattimo's concept of "weak religion," then, weak convergence in historical plots "avoids absolute assertions and totalizing schemes" (*Partial Faiths* 12).

Further evidence that *Against the Day's* narrative structure depends on the convergent sequence for its model is suggested by the novel's consistent and general foregrounding of mathematical content. For example, many scenes depict the protracted debate that transpired between two schools of analysis, Quaternionists and Vectorists (the latter of which prevailed by the end of the nineteenth century).²⁰ And one of the key protagonists, Kit Traverse, studies math: he is a budding Vectorist at Yale before being diverted from a planned independent study at Göttingen and immersed in the more underground, mystical, and anarchist associations of Quaternionism (the side of the debate that Pynchon, naturally, seems to prefer).

More significantly, in the second half of the novel, the term "convergence" itself appears with increasing frequency, usually to describe a trajectory of events that is coming to seem probable but not inevitable, similar to the pattern exhibited by the novel's larger narrative structure. It is used most often by Kit and by Yashmeen Halfcourt, the other attractive, young mathematics scholar among the novel's main characters. It is a flexible term, so the scope of its portents may be local, even scaled to the individual, as when Kit ponders the extent to which the burden of avenging his father's murder will determine his destiny. He senses that "[s]omeplace out ahead in the fog of futurity,

20 In his review of Daniel Cohen's *Equations from God*, Thomas Dechand gives a helpful summary of the issues that were at stake, by way of a brief discussion of Pynchon's novel.

between here and Venice, was Scarsdale Vibe. The convergence Kit had avoided even defining still waited its hour" (675). Compared with Miles Blundell's wondering what will "emerge from the night" in "that immeasurable Approach," the language here lacks apocalyptic grandiosity, because it is focalized through the irreverent Kit, but the images and concept are the same, evoking a tendency toward a likely but not assured future event which for now forebodes vaguely. Soon after, while preparing, with his brother Reef, an attempt on Vibe's life in Venice, Kit uses the metaphor again to describe the setting's disturbing complexity:

The town was supposed to've been built on trade, but the Basilica San Marco was too insanely everything that trade, in its strenuous irrelevance to dream, could never admit. The numbers of commerce were "rational"--ratios of profit to loss, rates of exchange--but among the set of real numbers, those that remained in the spaces between--the "irrationals"--outnumbered those simple quotients overwhelmingly. Something like that was going on here. [...] He felt like a person familiar only with real numbers watching a complex variable converge. . . . (732)

Because irrational numbers, such as the square root of 2, extend to an infinite number of places when written as decimals, they can only be approximated in this form, in a manner comparable to a weakly convergent sequence's approach toward its limit.

Another illuminating instance occurs in Yashmeen Halfcourt's letter to her (adoptive) father, an British intelligence officer stationed in the vicinity of Shambhala. Yashmeen lives as a fugitive and exile, if a glamorous one, pursued for a knowledge of occult mathematics that she may not actually possess. She writes, "I had the obvious thought once that all this wandering about must have an object--a natural convergence to you, and that you and I need only be reunited for all to come clear at last. But more and more lately, I find I cannot set aside your profession, the masters you serve, the interests which all this time out there in Inner Asia, however unconsciously, you have been furthering" (749). Here the convergence is more spatial than temporal, but the term

retains a usefully imprecise sense of prolepsis. For his own part, Colonel Halfcourt later speaks to an aide of "a convergence to the Mahomeddan" in his assigned region, made "that much more certain" by "all the meddling of the Powers," with the result that "[t]he future out here simply belongs to the Prophet. It might have gone differently" (758). Halfcourt's last sentence perfectly articulates a working definition of "convergence" as a description of historical provisionality. In this way, he paraphrases an analysis of the "contingency" and "volatility" that, according to William Connolly, inheres in the dangerous disposition of capitalism in the contemporary American moment. In view of "[d]ominant practices" promoting ecological mayhem, the amassing of debt, and irresponsible state violence, Connolly writes, "Yes, some concatenation of events could turn things around. The outcome is not foreordained by the gods" (142-44). Imagined but unguaranteed "contingencies could push things in a more positive direction," he concedes (144); nonetheless the "current trajectory courts disaster" (35), and an alternative framework for visualizing a more sustainable future must be conceived.

In a similarly "weak" way, in *Against the Day* Pynchon ultimately applies the convergence concept directly to the prehistory of the war, in a long stretch of narration detailing the "climate of annexation and crisis" in 1913 (824). Pynchon's narrator refers to the building tension around "the European Question" in the Balkans as

this bad daydream toward which all had been converging, murderous as a locomotive running without lights or signals, unsettling as points thrown at the last minute, awakened from because of some noise out in the larger world, some doorbell or discontented animal, that might remain forever unidentified. (845)

This unsettled group of metaphors evokes historical convergence as a violently unpredictable phenomenon, which may seem a strange condition for patterns that are mathematically expressible and which exist in the timeless world of concepts. But the

metaphor of the runaway train in the dark implies that although the track of history may be laid in advance--or it may not be, for this image is conjured by a "bad daydream"--history's human actors can never perceive it accurately, at least from an effective position. Pynchon's metaphor suggests that we have at best a sense of how quickly we are heading toward disaster, but no clue as to how to change tracks, and the mere knowledge of the pattern can never suffice to bring about a change in course.

Like Lessing then, Pynchon pursues an interest in prophecy but raises sharp problems for the consequentiality of prophetic knowledge. An epistemological quandary is built into the model of historical succession he proposes in *Against the Day*, the catastrophic sequence, so that even as its open-endedness allows for endings which have non-apocalyptic variations, it also guarantees that these will be unpredictable, and surely violent. When Miles Blundell tells of his first "extra-temporal excursion" to the vista of Flanders, Darby and Chick recognize the vision from Dr. Zoot's time machine, but "its meaning, even as simple prophecy, was as obscure to them now as then" (444). The Chums' inability to make use of their prophetic insight into the catastrophic tendency of history raises troubling implications about the possibility of historical agency, whether knowledge can even be applied to mitigate what chaos is inevitably created. And the problem of making historical patterns legible is raised in the very speech wherein Ryder Thorn simultaneously affirms the catastrophic sequence. When Thorn scoffs at the Chums for being like "children," adrift in a dream that sees history as clearly ordered, without "discontinuities," Miles understands him to mean that time is instead marked by "singularities"--points "at which an equation, surface, etc., blows up or becomes degenerate" (Weisstein, "Singularity")--and that an incident of these is the true cause of

the Trespassers' exile from the future. For Miles, the main import of this fact lies in how it suggests that the Trespassers do not after all command knowledge of time travel, as the Chums previously hoped, but "that the presence in this world of Thorn and his people had been owing only to some chance blundering upon a shortcut through unknown topographies of Time, enabled somehow by whatever was to happen here, in this part of West Flanders where they stood, by whatever terrible singularity in the smooth flow of Time had opened to them" (555). In this vague reckoning, a catastrophe on the scale of the Great War becomes a generative force in history, a function that produces enormously consequential ripples in time, including further catastrophes. But these aftereffects in turn pull events out of their normal contexts, so that the ensuing historical pattern becomes unpredictable. Therefore, to the extent that catastrophe may become an operating principle of historical or narrative structure, it paradoxically must also remain a disruptive force.

Dark Against Light: Every Day's Conflict

The opposing poles that Pynchon's catastrophic sequence implies--that history may be organized in determinable patterns, large and small, but that these patterns can rarely if ever be determined from a useful temporal perspective--resembles the field of possibilities for order that Hite and others have found across his fiction. So Dwight Eddins has described "the basic apparatus of Pynchon's vision" as "the world-historical conspiracy with its conspirators, its victims, its secret encodings, and its infinite regress of layers ... together with the dramatically subversive possibility that the vision is *mere* paranoia" (1, Eddins's emphasis). As Eddins notes, Pynchon "carefully refuses validation

to either extreme" (1), or to follow Hite, he "entertains" both possibilities only in order to negate them, even to satirize them (25). Yet these remain the parameters for knowledge in Pynchon's fictional worlds.

For even as he constructs, in *Against the Day*, what appears to be an overarching catastrophic sequence to shape the narrative, not only is this sequence eventually undermined by the indeterminacy of the novel's concluding chapters, it is shaded throughout by a very different ontological idea. In this alternative, history's various sequences, to the extent that they even exist, are subsumed under a static dispensation: a cosmic conflict which renders historical patterns tertiary at best and which is figured under the broad rubrics of light and dark. This is the element in Pynchon's worldview which Eddins identifies as akin to ancient Gnosticism: "the increasing suspicion ... that humanity is trapped in a history increasingly manipulated by antihuman forces ... [a] quasi-demonic conspiracy ... a universe infiltrated by insidious structures of Control" (4, 8). As much as the characters in *Against the Day* suspect that they are aboard "a locomotive running without lights or signals" toward an apocalyptic war at the site of a historical convergence, they also feel a more constant struggle to make their world hospitable in mundane settings. This effort continues not only against the remorseless machinations of the capitalist class--or the agents of what Eddins calls "cabalistic gnosticism"--but also against their spiritual opposite, a randomness and disorder toward which life naturally seems daily to drift--or the evidence of "existential gnosticism" (12).

The theme's importance and perhaps ultimate supremacy over the catastrophic sequence in terms of the text's meaning is signaled first by the novel's title. The phrase "against the day" refers not only to the campaign against existential drift, renewed daily,

perhaps fruitlessly, but simultaneously to the danger represented by light--not so much as in sunshine as in Enlightenment, as in knowledge, as in cabalistic gnosticism, "a conspiracy that seeks control over nature in general and humanity in particular" (Eddins 12). Indeed, light is the destructive agent that powers several secret weapons in the narrative. The double meaning of the title can be understood in this way: the coming of each day's troubles exhausts the more modest characters in the novel--its representatives of the the preterite--but it also grounds them, making them sympathetic with daily reality. In contrast, the villainous capitalists--or cabalists--display what for Pynchon are dangerously grandiose aspirations, for "alienated from nature, which was created by a hostile deity, the gnostic is driven to break natural laws, not to find harmony with them, to transcend them and liberate the inner spirit *pneuma*, which is capable of divinity" (Eddins 10).

This ambiguous valuation of light is then reinforced but complicated by the novel's epigraph, a statement Thelonious Monk made to a reporter in 1964: "It's always night, or we wouldn't need light."²¹ Monk's aptly cryptic remark shares in the dualism of Pynchon's gnostic idea. However, it assigns priority to darkness, suggesting a primordial chaos as the basic element of the cosmos, where light becomes the servant of man, as in many mythologies. This vision is not so much incongruous with the arrangement of light and dark forces I have just described as it is an alternative possibility within the same field. Most important to consider is the permanence of the condition Monk proposes; as a preestablished, static vision, it potentially counteracts the significance of any historical pattern, such as the catastrophic sequence, which becomes a mere surface manifestation of a timeless dynamic, or a local, temporary flareup.

21 For the source of this citation, I am indebted to Brent Edwards. See Farrell.

A pivotal scene toward the end of the narrative develops the context for Monk's statement and links the gnostic theme with the alternate idea of convergence. Cyprian Latewood is a character whom Pynchon promotes to a major figure in approximately the last third of the novel. Once a "feckless scion" who mooned around Cambridge, smitten with Yashmeen Halfcourt (489), he becomes an agent for British intelligence, and with Yashmeen, Reef, and their baby in the Balkans, happens upon the convent of an ancient Manichean sect. There they learn that the Bogomils insist on "the discipline [...] to remain acutely conscious, at every moment of the day, of the nearly unbearable conditions of cosmic struggle between darkness and light proceeding, inescapably, behind the presented world" (957). According to them, "In the Orphic story of the world's beginning, Night preceded the creation of the Universe, she was the daughter of Chaos" (959). These then are the textual representatives of the metaphorical forces Pynchon has set in play from the outset of the narrative. Their Manichean theology attracts Cyprian, who has been embroiled in the intrigue of the Annexation Crisis, and he decides to stay, to become a postulant and "betrothed" to Night (959). He explains his reasons to Yashmeen in terms he knows will be poignant to her as an exile and a mathematician: "It may be [...] that God doesn't always require us to wander about. It may be that sometimes there is a--would you say a 'convergence' to a kind of stillness, not merely in space but in Time as well?" (958). In his decision to drop out of the historical trajectory in which he was becoming a not inconsequential actor, Cyprian finds an alternative form of convergence, not to catastrophe but to quietude.

Yashmeen has been one of the text's main gnostic seekers, spurred by the "old need for some kind of transcendence--the fourth dimension, the Riemann problem,

complex analysis, all had presented themselves as routes of escape from a world whose terms she could not accept" (942). Yet as an orphan and exile from Russia, she bears an element of preterition that Pynchon finds sympathetic (and exotically attractive--he portrays her beauty and depicts her erotic exploits with great relish). Eddins explains that for Pynchon's preterite, who "have no cabalistic alternatives to pursue" or access to cabalistic power, "[t]he absence of a locus for the transcendental breeds a deep spiritual confusion" (12). Thus both Yashmeen and Reef--a sometime anarchist bomber in the mold of his late father, but lately a decadent roving gambler--are bewildered and hurt by Cyprian's abandoning. But they ultimately find their own version of convergence toward stillness, as with their daughter they reach the US after the war and settle into a family life near other members of the Traverse clan.

Through this stream of the narrative, Pynchon aligns attempts at shaping or even participating in the patterns of human history, such as the convergent sequence, with the grasping after power that is cabalistic gnosticism. The irony implied by this alignment is that when compared to the permanent, cosmic war between night and day stipulated by the narrative, such ambitions appear as the building of sand castles. The deluded myopia of elites' efforts to consolidate their domination of the visible world is only made the more tragic by the suggestion that in the twentieth century, these can produce catastrophes on the scale of global wars. In response, the text valorizes a monk's quiescence, acknowledging that this is an unlikely path for most and leaving the concomitant questions of agency, strategy, and even the basic fairness of this decision unsatisfied.

In the End, as in the Beginning, a Global Disordering

The shortsightedness marking theories of history's convergence toward single or local events extends in this novel all the way down to the act of perceiving such patterns, which Pynchon suggests is itself an act of power. That is, to propound a convergent sequence of historical events--as, elsewhere, the narrative itself does--is potentially to ignore the multitude of other simultaneous conflicts and happenings, each with their own significances. This view emerges in the text from Danilo Ashkil, a Sephardic Jew whom Cyprian Latewood extracts from Sarajevo shortly before the war. To Cyprian, Danilo complains,

"What North Europe thinks of as its history is actually quite provincial and of limited interest. Different sorts of Christian killing each other, and that's about it. The Northern powers are more like administrators, who manipulate other people's history but produce none of their own. They are the stock-jobbers of history, lives are their units of exchange. Lives as they are lived, deaths as they are died, all that is made of flesh, blood, semen, bone, fire, pain, shit, madness, intoxication, visions, everything that has been passing down here forever, is real history.

"Now, imagine a history referred not to London, Paris, Berlin or St. Petersburg but to Constantinople. The war between Turkey and Russia becomes the crucial war of the nineteenth century. It produces the Treaty of Berlin, which leads to this present crisis and who knows what deeper tragedies awaiting us." (828)

Danilo argues for an elemental view of "real history," indexed by his list of the physical and metaphysical quantities that are left out of bureaucratic administration, but also a globalized view. He insists that the European perspective be "provincialized"--as in Dipesh Chakrabarty's invaluable phrase--and proposes that representing the Muslim world among the roster of global cities would correct a distorted perception of history's recent trajectory. His assertion of the truths held by such elements as "blood" and "shit" recalls the opposition of these made by the stockyards of Chicago to the airborne Chums' ostensibly privileged perspective at the beginning of the novel. This suggests a somehow more authentic, informed brand of globalism than they aspire to, if one equally utopian,

because impossibly broad. Moreover, Danilo implies that for all their power, European countries' pretense of mastery over world history has had only "tragic" results, with more to come. He next puts this in explicitly gnostic terms, resonant with the struggle named in the novel's title:

"They come to town, these men so practical and full of daylight certainties, and all the while you can look at them and see how they have spent the night, they have felt something stir in the darkness, shapes and masses, as ancient nightmares resume, and once again the Muslim hordes move westward, unappeasable, to gather, again, before the gates of Vienna [...] here is their hour at hand, and in their panic, what is the first thing they think to do? they turn and swallow Bosnia. Yes, that will fix everything! Leaving us all now to wait, here in the winter twilight, for the first thunder of spring." (828)

While the mention of "ancient nightmares" in connection with the Balkans may first recall stereotypes frequently deployed by Western commentators on Eastern European politics--in Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts* (1993), for example--we may also note such language's association with the grandiose apocalyptic visions found in the text's main catastrophic episodes. In this case, however, the prophetic image of "shapes and masses" ready for battle not only looks forward to the coming war but also backward, to "ancient nightmares" of a timeless, primordial darkness. That is, it suggests that European leaders' cabalistic attempt to control the course of events, fed by specious "daylit certainties," only succeeds in causing a recrudescence and local intensification of a perennial, universal conflict. Danilo specifically refers to the long history of the Ottoman region, but his language invokes the cosmic war described above.

In this way, Danilo Ashkil's only speech in the novel exemplifies the double-tracked argument that this chapter has forwarded about *Against the Day's* complex narrative structure and its catastrophic historical vision. The passage urges that the ostensibly linear sequence that the narrative sets to converge on World War I in turn must

be bracketed by a perspective on globalization as a yet wider set of processes, still mainly destructive. And it suggests that even such patterns as may be weakly discerned from apparent randomness are undercut by a permanent--not to say perfect--arrangement of cosmic forces. Thus despite his having astutely revised the representation of historical and contemporary modes of capitalism--jettisoning the Vietnam-era apprehension of a cartelized state for a model of anarchic disorganization--the Pynchon who emerges from a reading of this text is not a wholly new figure. Rather, the author seems still committed to the gnostic vision as a compelling explanation for his society's ongoing unrest and injustice.

Indeed while, in the narrative, Cyprian's monastic turn arises, despite its quiescence, as perhaps the most honorable calling among a set of bad options, the gnostic framework simultaneously enables the fueling of an anger that might well be called apocalyptic. Consider that the Traverse brothers feel called to avenge their father's murder, and though Vibe's assistant and double, Foley Walker, intervenes to stymie their task's fulfillment at the last moment by shooting Vibe himself, point-blank, the mere existence of this subnarrative suggests that Pynchon still feels the "adolescent" need he forswore in *Slow Learner's* introduction, for a "showdown" with "that succession of the criminally insane" who have wrecked the world that, as in the novel, we were once promised, "so long ago." Whatever the merits of this desire in light of the current global crisis, to tell such a story presents aspects of what Connolly terms a "punitive orientation," typical of apocalyptic faiths (8). The religious valence of this criticism exists in tension with the secularizing tendency implied by the fiction's ongoing revision of the historical narrative toward greater disorder and disintegration.

Yet it cannot be denied that in this novel Pynchon places renewed emphasis on the disruptions and upheavals which, he suggests, increasingly characterize contemporary life conditions, in and out of wartime, and which, as I have shown, align his narrative with those others studied here. This direction comes across most clearly in one last catastrophe, which is in fact the first to be told at length and the only one to depart entirely from the narrative's historical context. The disaster is occasioned by the Chums of Chance's failure, in their second major mission in the text, to intercept a scientific mission to the North Pole. In a plot borrowed from horror stories, the Vibe-financed Vormance Expedition insists on unearthing an "object" containing a "Figure," buried in the ice, and bringing it back to civilization for unstated but clearly cabalistic motives. The result, easy to predict but hard to explain, is a "great city brought to sorrow and ruin" (147). The nature of the monster that rises is vague, though the language of the text suggests that it may personify globalization's insidious processes, for as "an embodiment of a newly discovered 'field' as yet only roughly calculated," it is "an unbounded part [...] *imperfectly contained*" and "*already at large*" (145, Pynchon's emphasis). More clearly significant are the passages depicting the urban chaos that accompanies this outbreak, as reported by Hunter Penhallow, an amateur painter who was an observer with the team before returning to the city:

the streets were in mad disorder. [...] Ladies, and in many cases gentlemen, screamed without ceasing, to no apparent effect. Street-vendors, the only ones to show any composure at all, ran about trying to sell restoratives alcoholic and ammoniac, ingenious respirator helmets to protect against inhalation of smoke, illustrated maps purporting to show secret tunnels, sub-basements and other arks of safety, as well as secure routes out of town. (145)

This episode recalls the brief running amok in London of the Adenoid monster, early in *Gravity's Rainbow* (14-16). But the approach in *Against the Day* is far less comic and

more consequential, for the bizarre episode establishes disaster as the stuff of the narrative. Yet it also crucially thematizes a disordering of the narrative principle, as this catastrophe is the first of many in the text yet does not fit--let alone initiate--any sense of historical sequence. The "great city" is unnamed; New York is implied, but later episodes set there make no reference to this one and display a contrastingly thick historical contextualization. Instead, this scene takes place out of time, so that the action Hunter describes takes on uncanny contemporary resonance:

Arrived at last at the depot, I joined a mass of citizens all trying to get aboard any outbound trains they could find. At the entrance the ungoverned mass of us was somehow spun into single-file, proceeding then with ominous slowness to thread the marble maze inside, its ultimate destination impossible to see. Non-uniformed monitors, street toughs in soiled work-clothes by the look of them, made sure none of us violated the rules, of which there seemed already too many. Outside, gunfire continued intermittently. (146)

Inevitably at once a Holocaust and a 9/11 scenario, this episode's intrusion of multiple temporal layers bespeaks a principle of sheer randomness which threatens to defeat the subsequent narrative's sequentiality before it starts, while also ensuring that the catastrophic narrative will be read under the sign of the present. The gesture seems preemptive, against the potential foothold of too much convergence in a disintegrationist plot.

But it is also abortive, in that the eventual narrative sequence does in fact attain a linearity, according to the parameters I describe above. Its weakness granted, the coherence of this convergent structure limits the novel's ability to map such present conflicts and struggles as are not ultimately explainable by the framework of warring cosmic entities. Therefore, more than Lessing, DeLillo, or the authors of nonfiction narratives of globalization included in this study, Pynchon remains in the end a writer deeply attracted to apocalypticism, even after the Cold War: brilliantly attuned to the new

social landscapes wrought by globalization's disordering, but substantially at odds with the intuitions that lead him often to portray these shattering scenes with such poetic sympathy.

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