American Disillusionment: Reading Authenticity and Artificiality in Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction

Westley Malcolm Barnes

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
University of East Anglia,
Faculty of Arts and Humanities
School of Art, Media and American Studies

31/03/2023

Acknowledgments

This thesis is dedicated to my partner Eileen, who has been with me through the dazzling heights, long midweeks, and dark trails this adventure had led us down. Thank you for being there and for showing such patience and love. All of my affective emotions I reserve for you.

To my supervisors, Dr. Sarah Garland and Dr. Hilary Emmett, to say this thesis wouldn't have been completed is an understatement. Thank you for all your suggestions, useful interjections and kindness. Here it is!

And finally, I would like to thank my family, for their continued support, and for the good humour they grant my obsession with strange, harrowing literature.

Acknowledgements	**Page ii**
Contents	**Page 1**
Abstract	**Page 3**
Introduction: Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction	**Page 5**
The Equivocal Historicity of Postmodernism; Chabon in American Literary Context	**Page 9**
Irony	**Page 12**
Seeing High and Low: Reclaiming Popular Forms in Beaty, Chabon and *Maus*	**Page 16**
Utopia	**Page 19**
Historicizing Late Postmodernism: Chabon and Frederic Jameson	**Page 21**
From Innocence to Artificiality: The Jewish Bildungsroman and The Twenty-First Century	**Page 24**
Chabon Goes West	**Page 34**
Chapter Outlines	**Page 36**
Chapter 1: The Un-Naming of Postmodernism: The Affective Turn and the New Sincerity Rush	**Page 39**
Symptomatic Minds, Warm Bodies	**Page 48**
Melancholy in Chabon, Dread in DeLillo	**Page 54**
Materialism and Denial: Trappings of Adopted Familial Connections in *Wonder Boys*	**Page 62**
Grady's Authority: Artifice as Intentionality in *Wonder Boys*	**Page 66**
Grady's Long, Strange Trip: Melancholy, Mistresses and Misadventure	**Page 70**
Constant Readers: 1990s Author-Reader Dependencies in *Wonder Boys* and *Misery.* Breaking Up with Observer Hero Narratives	**Page 73**
Conclusion	**Page 79**
Chapter 2: Intrusive Narrative: Reading Artificiality and Authenticity in Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction	**Page 81**
"Newly Minted American Names" Currencies of Assimilation, Identity and Escape in Chabon	**Page 95**
Dislocations of Identity: The Shifting Forms of Origin Myths in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*	**Page 102**
The Church of Vinyl: Seeing the Potentials of Community in *Telegraph Avenue*	**Page 106**
Conclusion	**Page 112**
Chapter 3: Having once more fallen silent as God himself…" The Broken Voice of Affiliative Holocaust Narratives in Michael Chabon	**Page 114**

Aesthetics and Trauma: Registries of Authorial Conceits in Chabon's Holocaust Narratives **Page 118**

Speaking of a Land of Ghosts: Chabon's Yiddish Experiments **Page 121**

Of What Use Then, Irony? Identity, and Authenticity in Chabon's post-1945 Fiction **Page 124**

Holocaust Imagery as Aesthetic Turn: Difficulties of History Encountered **Page 131**

Songs of Snow and Flame: Spectres of Sound and Haunted Environments in Chabon's Millennial Fiction **Page 137**

Conclusion : Remembering The Dead and Fostering Community **Page 143**

Chapter 4: "Sampling as Revenge": Affect, Restoration and Rebuilding out of Postmodern Solipsism **Page 144**

Souvenirs, Collections, Gimmicks - The Difficulties of Escaping Modernity's Ghosts **Page145**

Benjamin's Kaiserpanorama **Page 158**

Benjamin's Camera Eye and Chabon's Urban Cityscape Panorama **Page 163**

Fisher, Gothic Materialism and The Golem, Cyberpunk and the Flatline: The Waning of the Human **Page 168**

Conclusion **Page 174**

Chapter 5: The Postmodern Family, The Post-Postmodern Community: Performativity, Surrogacy and Affect in Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction **Page 175**

The Event **Page 184**

Chabon's Postmodern Family: Surrogacy and the Break with the Modern **Page 196**

Conclusion **Page 203**

Chapter 6: Conclusion **Page 204**

Bibliography **Page 207**

Abstract

***American Disillusionment:* Reading Authenticity & Artificiality in Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction**

This thesis examines how American fiction at the turn of the twenty-first century can be read as holding together the opposing influences of postmodern aesthetics and a resurgent interest in the ethics of realist fiction. By locating a materialist critique of the reification of popular culture in Michael Chabon's late Twentieth century and early Twenty first century fiction, starting with the writing Chabon begins to produce with the publication of his novel *Wonder Boys* (1995), my research posits a resurgent interest in reading authenticity. Considering authenticity in Chabon's writing allows me to explore the stylistic developments in Chabon's work against a context of broader developments in what I describe as millennial fiction.

By detailing, beginning with Chabon, an American literary fiction that embraces hybrid forms of genre writing, this thesis will analyze how authenticity, described by Lionel Trilling as "sincerity's darker brother"(Trilling, 1973), is articulated through material objects with politically ascribed properties. In Chabon's millennial fiction popular culture artifacts such as comic books, vinyl records and even genre forms such as the detective novel and Blaxploitation film are given the type of "auratic" qualities which allude to personal and political ambitions. In giving a comparative reading of Walter Benjamin's concept of aura (Benjamin, 1924) and juxtaposing Fredric Jameson's conception of the "waning of affect" in postmodern fiction, my methodology will chart the interest in a literary turn towards historicizing affect in Chabon's fiction, a turn that is nevertheless, to borrow a further phrase from Jameson, "couched in the narrative" of postmodern influences.

I will explore how the darker themes at work in Chabon's novels from this period offer a commentary on the experience of feeling both inside and distanced from major historical events, and how this acts as a key narrative device in millennial fiction. A reading of Chabon's recurring narrative of discovering the Holocaust as an affiliative family member of survivors occurs throughout this thesis; it runs through all the texts of Chabon's I consider. This recurring story of the discovery of the Holocaust disrupts any easy interpretation of Chabon's fiction as entertainment alone, whilst the Holocaust is an event which in general interrupts much of reductive misinterpretations of postmodern philosophy.

This argument is my departure point for an examination of why authenticity becomes such a significant consideration for writers of Chabon's generation. The resurgence of a stylistic interest in the authentic allows for a contextualization of what critics have called an "affective turn" (Clough, 2010) in the American humanities. I will look specifically at an affective turn

in Chabon's millennial fiction by considering the importance of, alongside popular culture: the tonal registry of spoken dialogue, outbursts of violence as politicized acts, and the importance of maintaining a space for family unity and the social community in Chabon. These themes often circle back to the significance of beginning and maintaining a collection of objects. In this millennial fiction objects now register feeling, whereas before they had the kind of mere referentiality which at one time frustrated such an astute interpreter of postmodern poetics as Jameson.

In focusing on an analysis of the literary project of Michael Chabon, I will address my constellations of aesthetic and philosophical readings to reflect Chabon's own dialectic situation of being both "a Jew and a teller of Jewish stories" and a writer who wishes to contribute to literary heritage "as a lover of genre fiction." (Chabon, 2004) History, community and sincerity – often given to us as romantic surrendering to narrative inclinations -- are features of Chabon's work I investigate against the backdrop of a developing poetics of materialism and feeling in contemporary American fiction and postmodern theory. In focusing on an analysis of the literary project of Michael Chabon, I will address my constellations of aesthetic and philosophical readings to reflect Chabon's own dialectic situation of being both "a Jew and a teller of Jewish stories" and a writer who wishes to contribute to literary heritage "as a lover of genre fiction." (Chabon, 2004) History, community and sincerity – often given to us as romantic surrendering to narrative inclinations -- are features of Chabon's work I investigate against the backdrop of the developing poetics of materialism and feeling in contemporary American fiction and postmodern theory.

Introduction

Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction

This thesis examines representations of authenticity, artificiality, and heterogeneity in what I refer to as Michael Chabon's millennial fiction. By using Chabon's fiction as an example of historiography is discussed American fiction after postmodernism, this thesis approaches a contextualization of the influence of affect theory and popular culture on literary works emerging in the millennium's early years. Through a reading of the way emotive and rhetorical perceptiveness is often detailed through the description of tangible objects and reproduced images in these novels, I show that the tension between what is authentic and what is artificial is a central and recurring concern in Chabon's fiction published from the beginning of the twenty-first century onwards. This thesis also argues that a stylistic turn away from formal representations of postmodernist poetics is evident in Chabon's writing from the publication of *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000) onwards; alongside this novel the thesis also concentrates on readings of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (2007) and *Telegraph Avenue* (2012) while looking back to *Wonder Boys* (1995) to demonstrate that this turn is not a radical departure but is evidence of the development of Chabon's thinking and aesthetic approach. The important shift in terms of narrative voice in Chabon's millennial fiction demonstrates a move from the ironic authorial metafiction of postmodernism's heyday to the construction of sincere narratives that emphasize the historiographic.

Defined by Miriam Webster as "the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources",[1] histography is foregrounded in this thesis as a means of assessing the methodology of what Chabon attempts by using past historical settings (in the case of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union,* an imagined alternative history) to discuss ideas of trauma, identity, and community. A further point of interest emerges from Webster's online citation, that historiography involves the selection of "particulars from the authentic materials"[2] the process examines, which is useful to my analyses of Chabon's fiction during this era as a recurring emphasis on the authentic properties of mass-produced objects, such as comic books and vinyl records, inhabit his writing with a sense of reading politicized ideals in what are often antiquated commodities. Further to this, the thesis examines the "graphic" properties of the historiographic in Chabon, reading the visual descriptors of objects and

[1] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "historiography," accessed March 27, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/historiography.
[2] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Ibid.

artefacts in the cinematic sense, viewing the potentialities Chabon conveys in objects as spectacles in themselves, which represent a reading of history personal narrative for his characters. In this way, the millennial turn in Chabon features emphasis on representations of authenticity as a subjective means of exhibiting character's personal and political moral incentives. This turn also represents a re-turn to tackling issues informed by a renewed sense of humanist realism in Chabon's fiction that counters the solipsism of postmodernist fiction. My research is thus particularly concerned to investigate how history and repressed personal trauma impact characters' political attitudes in Chabon's millennial fiction. Moreover, in identifying a narrative shift in the novels Chabon published after the year 2000, I map what I argue is a change of thematic concerns that mark a gradual turn towards revaluations of history, innocence, and realism in his fiction. This development indicates a reaction against what Chabon had by the early 2000s conveyed in his fiction and essays as the formal and depoliticized essentialisms of American postmodernist fiction — a genre that in its 1960s heyday had railed against the representations of such essentialisms.

The gradual development of themes that interlink representations of innocence and narrative sincerity with depictions of a heterogeneous American society informs my own tracing of this turn in Chabon's poetics. By placing a specific focus on the fiction that Chabon published from the turn of the last millennium, I detect by means of close analysis of this period of Chabon's writing not only an aesthetic influence of the postmodern fiction of writers such as Thomas Pynchon and Robert Coover, but also narratives that share thematic concerns with American realist fiction. This turn in Chabon's fiction is comparable with developments in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in American fiction by writers such as David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers, that saw the emergence of what Nicoline Timmer describes as texts that "perform a complicit and complicated critique on certain aspects of postmodern subjectivity, especially on the perceived solipsistic quality of the postmodern experience world".[3]Timmer emphasises a turn against postmodern solipsism in post-postmodernist fiction and instead enthuses over a return to narratives that focus on the emotive and experiential perspective of protagonists. Timmer stresses that this move represents more than just a hybrid development of influence, but instead "envision[s] certain reconfigurations of subjectivity which can no longer be framed...as postmodern"; for Timmer this work is an attempt at a complete stylistic break from postmodern aesthetics. The cultural context of the developments which Timmer

[3] Nicoline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too? The Post-Postmodernism Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium* (New York & Amsterdam, Rodophi) 2010, 13.

describes takes place at the beginning of the turn of the current millennium, when, after the uncertain literary divisions between experimental postmodernism and dirty realism which dominated critical debates surrounding American fiction during the late '80s and 1990s, a disparate movement of young writers, including, Chabon brought representations of sincerity and neo-realism into works that were indebted to some of the developments of postmodernism.

While my critical perspective takes a less extreme position on the influence of postmodernism on post-postmodernist writers, particularly in relation to my research on Chabon, this thesis suggests that Chabon did not begin writing with the intent of burying the postmodernist project as Timmer argues. Although I concur that a turn away from irony towards investigations of sincerity is an overarching narrative feature in the millennial American fiction I examine, particularly in relation to the social and political issues that inform Chabon's texts, I am eager to direct my close reading to passages in the texts that problematize the insistence within the criticism exploring "New Sincerity" fiction that Chabon's work in this era represents a complete break from the influences of postmodernism. In placing narrative sincerity at the core of his literary discourse, I argue that Chabon presented a bridge between American postmodernism and the literary movements that began to succeed it in the years approaching the 21st century. By locating in Chabon's millennial fiction an overarching stylistic concern to present sincere representations of the impact of history on characters' political and ethical perspectives, my research displays how Chabon uses experimental techniques synonymous with postmodernism when approaching a particularly post-millennial discourse of neo-realism.

Postmodernism, as culturally aware and radical as its emergence was in the 1960s, influenced changes in the academy. Nevertheless, it has seen a significant number of critical detractors in recent years, a development which is in dialogue with the emergence of post-postmodern neo-realism. While critics such as Sue J. Kim have accused Thomas Pynchon of portraying ethnic essentialism in his fiction,[4] my research posits the influence of Pynchon as a considerable influence on the thematic trajectory of Chabon's millennial fiction. Pynchon's Vineland first signaled a move towards a hopeful hybrid of social and political ideals in the form of family and community, and the same argument has existed in the form of surrogate or non-traditional family units occurring in Chabon's fiction from *Wonder Boys* (1995).

[4] Sue J. Kim, *Critiquing Postmodernism in Contemporary Discourses of Race* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan) 2009.

However, although it has been argued that Chabon is a "post-Pynchon" writer[5], I believe there is a serious attempt to address the historiographic and political afterlife of imagery in Chabon's millennial fiction that carries a significant influence of Pynchon's post-1960s fiction.

The importance of family is a central focus of both a sincere attempt at social stability and a means of overcoming personal trauma in the work Chabon produced after his debut, *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh* (1988). This novel saw critics associate Chabon with the "Blank Generation"[6]fiction emerging out of the downtown New York literary scene—a group that combined postmodern solipsism and ironic dread with a deft appreciation for the effects popular culture had on the experiences of young people born after the 1960s. Writing a review of Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013) for the *New York Review of Books* Chabon goes one step further in asserting a distinctly post-postmodernist reading of Pynchon's novel. Chabon highlights the way Pynchon's novel focuses on the family as a communal means of facing up to and overcoming the trauma associated with the 9/11 attacks on Manhattan[7], an allusion that itself could describe the family motif prerogative which treads through Chabon's novels since *Kavalier and Clay*.

What is particularly valuable in light of my research into Chabon's poetics is that this review focuses on what he reads as an apparent de-ironizing process in Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, a casting off of the ironic edge that detractors of Pynchon argue epitomizes his fiction, and the replacement of irony with sincerity in the form of the political safeguard of the family unit. When considering what he reads as the way Pynchon prioritizes a narrative of innocence and sincerity in *Bleeding Edge*, Chabon notes: "When innocence, irony's eternal patsy, needs to be protected, the postmodern deflector shields buckle."[8] This assessment of Pynchon, in its interpretation of postmodernism's literary defense mechanisms as being vulnerable in the face of stabilising, single-entendre thematic concerns, Chabon addresses an agenda that has existed in Pynchon's fiction since Chabon himself began to challenge the literary parameters of postmodernist solipsism.

Chabon's millennial fiction bridges a gap between the aesthetic tendencies of postmodernism and the poetic ideals of realism: the unavoidable comparative referents of Chabon's fiction

---

[5] Joseph Dewey, *Understanding Michael Chabon*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press) 2014, 4.
[6] My discussion of Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney's assessment of "Blank Generation" writers in *Shopping In Space : Essays on Blank Generation Fiction* (London and New York, Serpent's Tail, 1992) will open up that term and apply it to my analysis of developments in Chabon's fiction.
[7] Chabon, "The Crying of Lot 9/11"in *The New York Review of Books*, November 7th, 21013 Issue https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/07/thomas-pynchon-crying-september-11/.
[8] Chabon, "The Crying of Lot 9/11" In *New York Review of Books* November 7, 2013.

are not the anxiety of postmodern influence but instead offer a reaffirmation of the literary ambitions of the Great American Novel. In the light of Lawrence Buell's statement that the "history of political chatter about the Great American Novel often feels by contrast like a history of repeated disenchantment"[9] , Chabon's reassessment of the novel as an elegiac form of analysing a specifically American loss of social innocence gives weight to the purposeful delay taken before the of writing *Telegraph Avenue*. A novel dealing with a multi-ethnic community in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, its publication ten years after its setting, furthers mirrors Buell's interpretation of the Great American Novel as a form that belies a tendency of each generation of American writers as "seeing the last as more gullible than itself."[10] In writing of a society that had undergone significant social developments after the period of its setting, Chabon distances himself from the immediacy of the problems presenting in his novel. By choosing to encounter this period through the narrative trope of innocence and in reflecting Buell's theory of the Great American Novel as being a form that is inherently critical of its predecessors, Chabon unbinds his writing from the theoretical hermeneutics of postmodernism to compose a novel that is both nostalgic and yet free from the associations of a genre outside of which it aims to be assessed: the American postmodernist novel.

The Equivocal Historicity of Postmodernism: Chabon in American Literary Context

My use of the term postmodernism throughout this thesis refers to an American literary postmodernism that approaches genre and memory in ways that have a referentiality to historical forms that are substantive, not merely ironical. My purpose in describing the work of a writer like Chabon—who emerges after the influence of American Literary postmodernist writers such as Phillip Roth, Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo and who gained prominence on both bestsellers lists and within academic criticism—is to argue that American fiction in the postwar era affected a kind literary postmodernism which refutes Jameson's opinion that the postmodern bears the symptom of a "historical deafness."[11] The identifiers of the postmodern literary movements defined by Jameson as borrowing tropes of postmodernism in practices such as architecture and contemporary art, above all, track the postmodern's obsession with the present. I propose that this definition is one more easily

[9] Lawrence Buell, *The Dream of the Great American Novel* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014, 3.
[10] Buell, *ibid*.
[11] Jameson, 1991, xi.

argued for in the case of European writers who epitomize the insistence of mapping a contemporary literary zeitgeist, such as France's Alain Robbe-Grillet or Britain's Martin Amis. The work of these authors, for whom breaking the conventions of literary narratives, a recurring detail towards noting the structural executions of a text and, most perceptively in Amis's case, a particularized tendency to interpret literary history with a singularly satirical playfulness, marks a style which mirrors Jameson's diagnosis of postmodernism as the formal interpretation of "the consumption of sheer commodification as a process."[12] Jameson sees an obsession with the present as a factor of regression, signaling an acute tension for theorists and practitioners of the postmodern, where attempts to "take the temperature of an age without instruments" result in multivariant and often purposefully ambiguous narratives which place the historical as decentered.[13]

In place of a theorized zone of national sites of memory, postmodernism emerges with a historical space where Jameson insists critics are "not even sure there is a coherent thing age, or a zeitgeist" remaining.[14] The "instruments" of literary-critical texts usually linked to modernism (and to modern literary studies in general)—such as those of "high art" project or the grand narratives that wedded the novel with social historic memory (I'm thinking here of the themes of Irish identity and of idea of a Jewish state circa 1904 existing as counter-narratives in James Joyce's *Ulyssess*) and informed theory of the contextualization of literary and social developments from the advent of romanticism to Marxist calls for proletariat revolution—influenced the degree to which critics assessed how these movements shaped narrative in the novel form. Jameson's understanding of this fall-out of assured critical readings of the modernist form is in light of a sense of cross-cultural and decentered postmodern texts which emerge as "empirical, chaotic and heterogenous" styles such as American Pop art and French New Wave cinema. Such texts instill a subjectivity that embrace an often desensitizing combination of referential information and sensory overload,

[12] Jameson, x. For an example of commodity consumption as symptom in a postmodern rendering of the historical present, the character of John Self in Amis's *Money: A Suicide Note (*London: Jonathan Cape*,* 1984) offers the epitome of what Jameson refers to as the Ur 1980's postmodern cultural identifier. Someone who by his own admission is "addicted to the twentieth century" (Amis, 1984, 101.) Self is a director of advertising commercials turned filmmaker who consumes culture in the same spirit as he consumes alcohol, drugs and sex with a rapidity that seems perfunctory to the high-speed velocity of life lived travelling in airplanes and working on commercial shoots. For more on the depiction of speed and inebriation in American postmodern literature see Katryn Hume's *Aggressive Fictions: Reading the Contemporary American Novel* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2012.)

[13] Jameson, 1991, xi.

[14] Jameson, ibid.

which in turn influences the literary style of writers like Thomas Pynchon, who equally exhibits ideas steeped in American mythology and a strong sense of his literary forbears.[15] As skeptical of the over-stimulated provocations evidenced in postmodern writing and theory as Jameson is, he allows a reserved admiration for the genre-splicing occurring in postmodern fiction, citing how a fascination with the "degraded schlock and kitsch" of popular genre forms results in a unique literary recontextualization of the popular in seriously assessed mediums, which result, in turn, in the superseding of the device of merely quoting a text "like a Joyce or a Mahler might have done before them".[16] Instead, Jameson considers postmodernism's strength in how it collapses these genre boundaries in the effecting of works that "incorporate into their very substance" the idioms of the popular or the heretofore critically assumed "degraded" genre forms. In this way, Jameson assesses that postmodernism succeeds in what a high modernist critic such as Theodor Adorno, who in forever defending the closed, elite tradition of art against the technological advances considered by his friend Walter Bejamin, failed to grasp: that the popular has often received more citations of fascination than the historically defined "difficult" generic tropes of high modernism.

In this thesis I take up this assertion of Jameson's and argue that by incorporating formally degraded genre forms, American literary postmodernism exerted considerable influence on Michael Chabon, a writer who embraces the popular in ways that demonstrate his engagement with his immediate literary predecessors, the American literary postmodernists, but who produces through his enthusiasm for genre fiction a shared affinity with a generation of his contemporaries for a literature that sought to locate authenticity and all of its associated problems in a landscape that evokes the contemporary as an experience of hopefulness as well as disenchantment, of escape as well as a frank confrontation with the real, and of defending memory and meaning.[17] In doing so, he relates his back catalogue of writing about "golems and the Jewish roots of American superhero comic books, Sherlock Holmes and the Holocaust" to his acute sense of his Jewishness within the wider landscape of American history and of his love of escapist adventure genres. The inherent paradox in Chabon's

[15] A distant relative of canonical early American author Nathaniel Hawthorne, the history and mythology of the United States serves as an influence most distinctly in Pynchon's writing in ways that signal him out amongst his postmodern peers. The origin narrative satire Mason & Dixon is Pynchon's strongest example of this.
[16] Jameson, 1991, 3.
[17] Chabon, "Imaginary Homelands" in *Maps & Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands* (London, 4th Estate, 2010) 158.

citation of the kinds of popular culture which he admires as a means of finding his voice as a Jewish writer of serious fiction is that he finds such inspiration in texts usually beloved of non-high art endorsing adolescents and often, in the case of Chabon's much admired and referenced H.P. Lovecraft and Edgar Rice Burroughs, written by racists with a specialized interest in antisemitism. By reflecting on and centering the themes of his literary body of work, along with the contradictory influences of a literary style that is not only highly attuned to the refining of language to evoke feeling and to demonstrate authorial command of composition but also able to capture forms of entertainment usually accredited to the "merely" popular genre forms, I seek to map out Chabon's "world to call [his] own",[18] in both the literary and geographical senses, where he can be both aesthete and entertainer, diasporic Jew and American citizen.

It is in this kind of heterogeneity, then, that I locate my terminological starting point whence I describe Chabon's place in the American Postmodern literary canon. It is insufficient to say that Chabon, like his contempories Wallace, Franzen and Eggers, attempts to "abandon" the poetics of postmodernism. In turning to heterogeneity, history and escapism, Chabon embraces the postmodernist trinity that Jameson accredits to that movement, and his novels are certainly not, as I will describe, merely examples of the deference to historicity and narcissistic narrative that Linda Hutcheon describes as being singular to late twentieth century postmodernism. Rather, alongside the kinds of narrative negotiations Hutcheon finds in postmodern irony Chabon is arguably the strongest case for a practitioner of postmodern literary aesthetics writing in the area of millennial fiction, or what I deem developments particular the American novel at the turn of the twentieth century. With this in mind, Chabon is also the foremost champion of the genre form amongst his peer group, and his project to intermingle popular genre forms with a serious intent, as opposed to with an overarching sense of the satirical, as practiced by American literary postmodernists such as Pynchon and Robert Coover, single out Chabon as a serious literary writer whose work endorses a sensibility of literary sentimentality: one that is self-consciously problematized by Chabon's own narrative voice, but one that is not compromised by the safeguards of modernist literary "taste." The fetishization of the commodity in Chabon, I argue, is problematized, but not ridiculed. This embracing of commodity obsession and commodity nostalgia in turn separates Chabon from both his immediate predecessors of American literary postmodernism and the

[18] Chabon, ibid.

younger generation of his contempories, whom Adam Kelly has described as belonging to the "New Sincerity" movement of American authors. By focusing on the emergence of affect studies as a signifier of millennial fiction (and taking my cue from the Sianne Ngai's writings on identifying emotions and authenticity in American literature and art) I seek to tease out Chabon's relationship to this generation of authors, who often appear troubled by the literary residue of postmodern theory in how they set out on describing notions of authenticity.

Irony

The feature that distinguishes the poetics of Chabon's millennium fiction from that of the more directly postmodernist fiction of his early career is the handling of irony as a narrative trope. In his millennial fiction, Chabon uses irony as a device that asserts the authorial voice, a feature that is often synonymous with nineteenth-century literature. Describing the use of irony in cultural practices, Linda Hutcheon attests that it is primarily a social act, an act which depends on an audience to seek the interpretation of an ironist, an audience whom Hutcheon separates into those who "get" and those who don't "get" the irony."[19] Fictions associated with developments in experimental and postmodernist European and American fiction of the post-second world era exemplify a turn toward irony as a narrative feature but always through the voice of first-person narrators. The use of irony through first-person narration asserts that all negotiations as to what is described in ironic terms emerge from the character's viewpoint, to be read not necessarily as an author's interpretation of a literary setting but instead as a means of identifying the social perception and world view of characters within the framework of a plot's development. In this development of the use of irony in postmodernist fiction, readers are essentially playing a game to decipher the intentions, or even the appearance, of the ironic as a narrative feature in a way that challenges both the reader's interpretation of characters' motives and the motives of the author. For Hutcheon, this feature of postmodernist writing indicates what she interprets as a problematic ironic 'edge' with regards to authorial interpretations of irony -- the notion that "there is no guarantee that the interpreter will get the irony in the same way as it was intended."[20]Such an example of intended irony in cultural practice can itself be dived into three modes "which can be distinguished one from the other by the stand on the question of their function of

[19] Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge : The Theory and Politics of Irony (*London: Routledge*)* 1994. 10.
[20] Hutcheon, Ibid.

intention" that Hutcheon names as "psycho-aesthetic, Semantic or ethical."[21] In a way that mirrors a nineteenth-century approach to omniscient authorial narrative, Chabon introduces all three modes of irony for the reader's interpretation, but does so often without impinging on the sincere intentions and perspectives of his characters. In this sense, Chabon introduces ironic interpretations as existing out of the observations of plot and setting (space) in a way that allows for the sincere and the ethical to exist unabashed by ironic subtext. In writing irony as an identifier that exits essentially outside of the central personal political dilemmas of the characters that populate his millennial fiction, Chabon offers a counter to Hutcheon's analysis that irony "can and does function tactically in the service of a wide range of political positions, legitimating or undercutting a wide variety of interests."[22] In presenting a practice of irony that exists only outside of the character's understanding of their circumstances, Chabon presents irony as having a more innocent function, which can be likened more to the social irony of Jane Austen's social satire than it does the overtly self-aware irony at play in a postmodern novel such as Don Delillo's *White Noise*.[23]

In her contribution to Neil Campbell's influential collection, *American Youth Cultures*, Elizabeth Young describes the "blank generation" group of writers who emerged from East Coast college programs in the 1980s as being influenced by the popular-culture-inspired, consumerist imagery of 1960's postmodernism but also exhibiting "an obvious distaste for the tired experimental strategies and resulting stasis of late, high postmodernist writing."[24] Although my research contends that Chabon's fiction marked a turn away from the overtly ironized and politically disengaged style of fiction associated with blank generation writers, Young expresses a similarity between the use of affect in both Chabon and Blank generation writers' fiction. Bret Easton Ellis is a pertinent representative of the Blank Generation group with whom to make a comparison with Chabon in his use of popular-culture-influenced imagery and affect. Chabon and Ellis both deplore the overt stylistic experimentation of "late" postmodernism and preference narrative voice and episodic realism in their debut novels; both also affect a serious attitude towards the place of popular culture as a means of providing an aesthetic understanding of a chaotically consumerist United States—a seriousness which often permits itself to negotiate an understanding of ethics through popular culture influences. A relation of blank generation poetics that chimed with Chabon was the

[21] Hutcheon, *ibid.*
[22] Hutcheon, 10.
[23] Picador, 2004.
[24] *Shopping In Space : Essays on American "Blank Generation" Fiction* Ed. Elizabeth Young and Graham Caveney (New York: Serpent's Tail, 1992) 13.

sense of a particularised enthusiasm for popular culture that is represented in the respective debuts of both authors, and which is representative of the seriousness with which Chabon allows popular cultural influences throughout his fiction. Young comments that reverence for forms of popular culture are apparent in blank generation fiction which belie the social disenchantment the fiction otherwise contemplates. Young states that "in much postmodernist fiction the use of irony is commonly understood to be the way in which the distance between high art and contemporary mass culture is demolished"[25] but that this demolishing of a boundary between "high" and "low" culture need not exist in blank generation fiction. As a generation emerging after postmodernism, these boundaries needn't exist for Chabon and Ellis. What Young refers to as the "Disneyfication"[26] of consumerist American culture that high postmodernism mocks had no reason to be derided; in fact, it is rather subversively enthused over in the fiction emerging from young authors beginning to publish in the 1980s. The difficulty determining what is ironic and what is sincere in terms of Chabon's poetics proclaims an influence from the atmosphere of the fiction that he and his contemporaries were producing in the 1980s, although ultimately it was the literary debates of the 1990s, a decade that determined realism should return to serious fiction, that brought about a shift in Chabon's own re-evaluation of narrative sincerity.

Chabon's use of authorial dramatic irony is one that does not transfer to the character's own interpretations of their situation. In the case of police detective Meyer Landsman in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, who faces operating in a state for which "effective resolution" of their governance in the United States resembles the painful end of his marriage, such resolution does not extend to his most recent homicide investigation. The ensuing insolvability of the suspicious death of a chess-obsessed loner using the pseudonym Emmanuel Lasker conjures up a series of traumatic memories for Landsman, whose attempts to establish the death as more than a suicide reflects more on Landsman's inability to find stability in his marriage or a sense of personal resolution with the traumatic suicide of his father. Authorial irony in Chabon's millennial fiction always surrounds the character's attempts to establish a traditional unit under unusual circumstances. The irony apparent in Joe Kavalier's abandonment of his nuclear family with Rosa and their infant son after failing to

[25] Young, 14.
[26] Young, *ibid.*

ensure his family's safe passage from Prague is met with a fully realised irony when Sam agrees to act as a surrogate father to the child. As a gay man shielding his sexual identity in a politically conformist United States, Sam takes on the role of parent in a traditional family setting after being haunted by the loss of a close relationship with his own father, a relationship which had, up to the point of his agreeing to step in for Joe, marked his perspective on personal relationships. The dual threats of traumatic past experiences and failure are common threads in Chabon's millennial fiction that often lead to the search for a stabilised family or for surrogate family figures to represent the stability of a family unit. The shift towards the security of the family unit for characters who had previously experienced a troubled family past is a gradual development in Chabon, one that denotes the shift of the ironic voice from the character narrator to an omniscient authorial voice. Whereas in *Wonder Boys*, the attachment that Grady Tripp has towards his troubled student James Leer is one ultimately of a mentor beset by an ironic detachment (Tripp, expecting a child as a result of an affair, has never wanted children), however, in the 1940's set *Kavalier and Clay* the familial situation of Sam Clay and Rosa Saks represents surrogacy in the form of a family who stay together as a means of outwardly showing social conventions in order to allow Thomas to experience a version of a childhood that is normalized by following the mores of this era. In *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, Landsman's role as uncle is a constant reminder of the failure of his family unit and the death of his infant son Django, but the irony of his situation is implied not by his feeling of detached surrogacy as a member in his cousin Berko Schemet's family but in the paternalistic attachment he feels to the dead man known as Emmanuel Lasker, whose death resembles the circumstances of Landsman's emotionally detached father's own demise. Landsman sets out to determine the facts surrounding Lasker's death, oblivious to the idea that what he may be looking for are clues to the reasoning behind his father's suicide. The family dynamics in *Telegraph Avenue* present family and surrogacy as psychologically intertwined into the social relations of the Stalling and Jaffe families. The irony that Archy doesn't realise that Titus is his illegitimate son contrasts with his concerns as to the validity of himself as a father. The fact that Archy's own absentee father Luther Stallings is clandestinely failing to scupper the plans of Goode's Dogpile. Archy's disavowal of Luther to mourn the loss of his surrogate father Cochise Jones is a lost cause itself lost an Archy until the novel's conclusion. Misplaced mourning also steers the personal and political consciousness of Nat Jaffe, who reveals that his love of 1970's soul and funk records, an obsession that has framed his entire adult life, came about as an association with his mother's death. Unable to cogently mourn his mother's passing at the time of her death, Nat instead

mourns by inadvertently? building a shrine to his mother's remembrance via an accumulation of soul records well into his years as a parent. The separation of attempts at family stability and the disruptive conjectures of authorial irony can be analogized to a distancing between the sacred and the profane in Chabon's millennial fiction.

Seeing High and Low: Reclaiming Popular Forms in Beaty, Chabon and *Maus*

At the heart of the "high" vs. "low" cultural divide that postmodernism attempted to challenge are attitudes debating referentiality, which cross styles of genre. As Bart Beaty investigates in his *Comics Versus Art*, the once simplified distinction between comics and "high" art is now debated in terms of their mutual categorisation and overlap. By accrediting how comic books and scripts "were mined for inspiration" by literary authors and visual artists, Beaty address 1960's postmodernism's collapse of distinction between high and low art.[27] However, Beaty asserts that comics were still dismissed as the throwaway clutter of unserious readers, not "considered legitimate art objects" but as the ephemera defined by art critic Thomas Lawson as belonging the "recherche styles, texts and images pungently redolent of the historical dustbin."[28] This relegation to historical irrelevance that Lawson prescribes for the influence of pop culture forms in art practices is an annihilating one, and it appears to verify Beaty's assertion that "the worlds of comics and art continue to occupy vastly different social spaces".[29] Such spaces are those in which any practitioners claiming to produce "serious" art works were expected to use pop culture references to ironically, not to interpret sincerely. Continuing even into an era of 1960's genre experimentalism to which a breakdown of the "seriousness" of forms is accredited, the derisive attitudes which critics held towards the comic form resulted in the pushing the comic away from the centre of critical observation in this time period. Works that were at one time identifiable by the indices of Modernism's programme of the art project as offering a kind of spiritually refined subjugator of taste, by the 1960's were beset by an intrusion of humorous and heterogenous stylistic turns of the vibrant Pop culture forms appearing on the shelves and television screens of America's adolescents—and, even through the Pop Art sensibilities of artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, bohemian America's galleries. The gains in cultural relevance for Pop Art, elevated to the kind of culture written about in *The New York Times*—those culturally celebrated works of literary fiction and visual arts— was, as Beaty argues, not

[27] Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art* (University of Toronto Press) 2012, xi.
[28] Beaty, 4.
[29] Beaty, xii.

experienced nearly to the same level by the continually marginalized genre of comics. Beaty furthermore assesses that "memory, allegory, and judgement have been keen factors in the ongoing symbolic exclusion from the domain of consecrated art" which he ascribes to as an inherently "Modernist legacy" on contemporary art culture, an historicized bias whose stranglehold once again results in the separation of praxis and historical condition, that "persists even in these postmodern times."[30] By way of Beaty's positioning of cross-cultural reference as a historical factor of postmodernism's aesthetic plurality, my own thinking here considers the rapid "comic panel" style of narrative of Thomas Pynchon's *V.*, whose visual inferences bring to mind Roy Lichtenstein's *Whaam!* (1963) series of Pop Art canvases. The sphere of referentiality in both these literary and visual works addresses appropriations of popular culture genre tropes and demonstrates Huyssen's analysis of the postmodernist collapsing of high and low aesthetics.[31]

While representing a move beyond the more provacative and iconoclastic modes of Pynchon or Lichtenstein, the relevance of visual art as a form of narratology performing the difficult descriptive labour of making accessible emotions or ideas to a reader is pivotal to Chabon's "serious" literary work in the timeframe I discuss. Making a contemporary case for the powerful effect an image from a fictionalised comic, such as that depicted in *Kavalier & Clay* (the cover of *Amazing Midget Radio Comics #1)* where Hitler is punched by a character whose values epitomize American patriotism, I argue that Chabon's use of comics imagery here aims to evoke a specific affect. In this case, we might analogise Chabon's evocation of feeling to the impact of seeing a protester punch self-identified American fascist Richard Spencer on January 17th, 2017. Readers of *Kavalier & Clay* are placed in a position similar to members of the disadvantaged communities targeted by the racist rhetoric synonymous with Spencer's public appearances.[32] Chabon's interest in the genre of comics can thus be considered in terms of the narrative directness the genre affords as much as comics' history as an important cultural medium of the Jewish diaspora. Any "serious" reader of Jewish -

---

[30] Beaty, 6.

[31] Roy Lichenstein Whaam! Art & Acrylic on Canvas, 1963. https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lichtenstein-whaam-t00897
That both texts mentioned here were both completed in 1963 offers insight into the kinds of literary and artistic semblances in the nascent years of emerging postmodern aesthetics as described by Huyssen.

[32] Tariq Moosa, "The punch a Nazi" meme : What are the ethics of punching Nazis?" in *The Guardian*, Jan. 31st, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2017/jan/31/the-punch-a-nazi-meme-what-are-the-ethics-of-punching-nazis

American fiction would be suspicious of any claims to a depletion of literary seriousness or dearth of effective narrative conviction in Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*—a graphic novel in which the format of comic book panel style and the familiar tropes of American animation depict experiential and familial Holocaust trauma[33], *Maus* represents not only an example of American literary postmodernism's tendency towards using pop culture motifs to discuss difficult historical experiences (such as addressing a Jewish American reaction to the threat of fascism in *Kavalier & Clay* or the intense experience of warfare on the public imagination in Lichtenstein's canvases), *Maus* also includes acutely commentary on narratology and its limitations in the face of discussing trauma. A particularly compelling example of Spiegelman's utilizing of genre tropes to discuss the difficulties of narratology occurs when Art discusses his idea for a book about his parent's experiences in Auschwitz with his father Vladek. Art confesses that he feels writing the book convincingly will be a nearly impossible task, because he cannot visualise how the realities of living in Auschwitz could be depicted in either graphic or literary form.[34] Vladek attempts to help, or disturb, Art's attempt at visualizing Auschwitz by shouting "Boo!" which affects a comically timed jump scare in Art , adding in broken English "It felt a little like that, but always."[35]

A series of postmodernist tropes thus occur in the text, combining a sophisticated argument about the limitations of creative representation and the language (both in figurative and practical terms) of a trauma survivor, with a commitment to comic book "funnies" style humour in a method that evokes readers' familiarity with a standardized popular culture trope. As a survivor of Auschwitz, Art Spiegelman's father faced the real possibility of finding his cultural heritage dumped into "the dustbin of history." Had he not lived to represent his experiences after the Holocaust, his narrative would have met the same outcome as Lawson's asserted fate for what he saw as the pop culture ephemera once referenced by "serious" artists. In Chabon and Spiegelman's utilization of comics to effect both the power and liminality of images as narratology, depicting the struggles under fascism for a generation of American Jews has the Benjaminian effect of rescuing the experiences of a society out of the ashes of history, whereby arguments as to the closed gap on the hierarchy

[33] Art Spiegelman *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*.(New York: Pantheon Books, 1997) Published first in strip form, *Maus* was then published in a series of two editions : 1. *My Father Bleeds History* (1985), 2: *And Here My Troubles Begin* (1987) before being first compiled in 1991, as opposed to traditional since novel format.
[34] Spigelman, 1997, 35.
[35] Siegelman, ibid.

of acceptable “serious” artistic genres shuts out the representation of what pop culture can attest, even bear witness to.

Utopia

While reactions to a lack of social realist and narratively sincere fiction during the popular vogue for postmodernism during the 1980s helped shape an aesthetic turn towards realism in the fiction of writers emerging in the 1990s, Chabon's millennial fiction displays at the centre of its thematic concerns the loss of utopian political ideals. Chabon's millennial fiction recurrently features characters influenced by ideals that were represented by a nostalgia for the social and political progressive nature of 1960s liberalism.[36] In the essay "Maps and Legends", first published in 2004, Chabon describes his coming of age in what is essentially an "imagined" community —imagined in the sense that it was the ambitious project of a liberal, socially conscious property developer named James Rouse.[37] Chabon asserts that to understand the United States of America as a self-governing state which self-identifies its own cultures is also to admit to its "imagined" state of being, a landscape that came to be defined anew with every passing generation since its original authors signed the Declaration of Independence. This position tells of Chabon’s belief that an imaginative sense of the creation of social space as an inherent American characteristic did not end with the pioneers and explorers that designated the United States found in high school history books. Instead, Chabon looks to his parents' generation, the people who populated the mixed-race social experiment that was Columbia, Maryland in the 1960s. “Columbia is now the second largest city in the state, I am told, but at the time we moved there, it was home to no more than a few thousand people -- "pioneers," they called themselves. They were colonists of a dream, immigrants to a new land that as of yet existed-mostly on paper”.[38] These "colonists to a dream" are the same individuals that populate Chabon's millennial fiction, evoking a space which is not static but is a malleable state of shifting identities. How Chabon describes the current-day city of Columbia, not as a centred geographical urban landscape, but as "an ongoing act of the imagination" is a telling synopsis of his own attitudes to the parameters of literary fiction.

---

[36] Michael Chabon, *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing along the Borderlines.* London: 4th Estate, 2008, 2010.
[37] Chabon, 2010. 16
[38] Chabon, 2010, 15.

My research is careful to point out that, in opposition to what Timmer argues is an almost iconoclastic view of postmodernism's detracting from aesthetics of postmodernism for a turn towards neo-realism, is a respect for postmodern aesthetics in Chabon's millennial fiction which effectively mourns the loss of a bygone era when postmodernism was still an innovative form of narrative fiction. In an introduction to *The Mourning After Attending the Wake of Postmodernism*, Brooks and Toth describe how the effect of over-familiarity with postmodern texts resulted in creating a critical malaise for writers emerging during the height of postmodernism's influence: "an aesthetic that aimed to dismantle binary distinctions, that attempted (more specifically) to destabilize the Opposition between high and low culture, becomes (itself) a vacuous and ineffectual aesthetic of the elite."[39]

Within Chabon's aesthetic deployment of postmodernist techniques, there is a considerable attempt to avoid accusations of elitist tendencies, particularly where accessibility of narrative form is concerned. Chabon's insistence here mirrors the analysis of Brooks and Toth, particularly in how all three authors contest that elitism is postmodernism's most glaring failure. Contesting that in critically admonishing the failure of postmodernism to inspire a continuity with literary engagements suggests a form of mourning: "As a result of postmodernism's pervasiveness --or rather, as a result of its hegemony--we see a type of mourning, which is also (and of course) a type of resistance."[40] A malaise brought on by the elitist tendencies of postmodernism is still a symptom of the postmodern, a position that I argue Chabon grapples with throughout the gradual turn in his millennial fiction towards being a writer who wishes to expand the parameters of the postmodern experience to include aspects of realist poetics. Brooks and Toth identify tendencies in emerging postmodernist writers at the turn of the millennium who "move beyond the parameters of the postmodern project" to the point where many of their works seem unabashedly "nostalgic and realistic" if not also openly "logocentric, humanistic and/or onto-theological."[41] This description echoes my analysis of Chabon, reflecting a turn in his work that links literary tradition with progressive endeavor.

---

[39] Neil Brooks and Josh Toth, *The Mourning After: Attending The Wake of Postmodernism* (Amsterdam, New York : Rodopi, 2007.) 7.
[40] Brooks and Toth, 8.
[41] Brooks and Toth, Ibid.

Historicizing Late Postmodernism: Chabon and Fredric Jameson

Considering Michael Chabon's relationship with postmodernism, an influence that is often conflicted even if it is integral to understanding crucial developments in his fiction, presents a task that seems rife with contradictions. Chabon's interest in presenting the moral quandaries of his protagonists as sincere and ethical rather than absurd or pathetic, alongside his investigations of the psychological effects history places on individuals and urban space, as well as his interest in tackling thematic concerns associated with the Great American Novel, places his work outside of what is critically assessed as "high" postmodernist fiction. For critics such as Irmtraud Huber (2014)[42] and Joseph Dewey (2015)[43] Chabon's work is representative of the post-postmodern, or "literature after postmodernism" turn in contemporary American fiction. Describing this term, Timmer considers how writers who were born typically in the 1960s/1970s who were "still in their diapers or not even born yet when the founding fathers of postmodernism [were] writing and theorizing"[44] began writing fiction in the 1990s that carried the literary influence of postmodernism. However, these writers' fictions would turn away from the experimental destabilising of human character appropriated by postmodernist fiction. Timmer states that in the fiction that would come to define this post-postmodernist turn readers can "detect an incentive to move beyond what is perceived as a debilitating way of framing what it means to be human: the postmodern perspective on subjectivity."[45]Timmer's analysis insists upon the premise that the experiential features of character developments, particularly those of ethics, had been largely absent from "high" postmodernist fiction, and that writers associated with the post-postmodernist turn such as David Foster Wallace began to re-examine the subject of humanism, or in Wallace's terms "what it means to be a fucking human" in the years leading up to the turn of the millennium. Chabon, as an author whose work emerges out of the "blank fiction" generation whose work is so exhaustively indebted to the destabilising postmodern human subject, produced fictions that from 2000 onwards are emblematic of a return to a re-examining of social realist humanism representative of the post-postmodern turn in millennial American fiction.

My methodology takes into account the way in which, despite the conflicting views on what the postmodern can represent within fiction held by Chabon and Frederick Jameson,

---

[42] Irmtraub Huber, *Literature After Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) 2014

[43] Joseph Dewey, *Understanding Michael Chabon* (University of South Carolina Press) 2015

[44] Timmer, 13.

[45] Timmer, Ibid.

postmodernism's preeminent literary theorist in the United States, there are simultaneous thematic concerns which cross over both authors who are writing at roughly similar periods. In comparing the comic book imagery associated with the Jewish-American experience during World War Two in Chabon's *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and discussing Jameson's ideas on image fiction and nostalgia films in *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, a dialogue emerges between the authors in terms of facing the limitation of postmodernist writing to address the experiential demands of historical fiction. Jameson discusses how nostalgia works in exhibiting a postmodernist reading of the past as a cultural referent when he observes: "More interesting, and more problematic, are the ultimate attempts, through this new discourse, to lay siege either to our own present and immediate past or to a more distant history that escapes individual existentialist memory…faced with these ultimate objects --our social, historical and existential present, and the past as "referent"-- the incompatibility of a postmodernist "nostalgia" art language with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent."[46]

This mirroring of thematic concerns in the writing of both authors works as a direct way of establishing the antagonisms Chabon's work has with postmodernist praxis. This asks us to compare what is arguably the thematic narrative centrepiece working throughout Chabon's millennial fiction—that of the individual's fascination with and political idealisation of nostalgic readings of history—with what Jameson asserts is the narrative centrepiece of postmodernist fiction and art. Writing in the introduction to *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Jameson asserts that "It is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten to think historically in the first place"(22).[47] Comparing this statement with Chabon's assessment that "For a long time now I've been busy, in my life and my work, with a pair of ongoing, overarching investigations" into his heritage as both a Jewish storyteller and a lover of genre fiction[48] one is struck by how the opposing attitudes towards the historical as subject matter could immediately separate these two authors in terms of their area of concern. Yet it is the very negotiations of history that link Chabon and Jameson's understandings and rejections of what can be considered "Postmodern". Jameson states that postmodernism's interpolation or willful ignorance towards the historical either "expresses" some deeper irrepressible historical

[46] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham : Duke University Press)
[47] *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Duke University Press) 1991, Ix.
[48] Michael Chabon, "Imaginary Homelands" In *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along The American Borderlands* (London, 4th Estate) 2010.

impulse (in however distorted a fashion) or effectively "represses" and diverts it, depending on the ambiguity you happen to favour."[49] Taking the example of what Chabon has to say regarding his own negotiation of the personal, historical and novelty, the "overarching investigations" of his life's work, an impulse to express an historicity emerges. However, this return to historicity is one that is also "repressed" by the stipulations of genre Chabon himself exerts on the kinds of work he is interested in constructing with his fiction, the polarity of which amuses Chabon as an arc distinct enough from postmodernism to actively pursue. In this sense, genre fiction anticipates for Chabon a discipline that is not shaped by a backdrop of social realism, but of utopia, the enlightenment ideal that gave birth to modern science fiction, a concept that is assumed to be the antonym of decentred, dystopian postmodernism. My interpretation of the comparable ideas of Chabon and Jameson, two authors who share similar views on both the literary praxis and restrictions of postmodernism, stems from the assessment of imagery and heterogeneity as discussed in the respective authors' work. If considering a revitalised interest in writing historiography and re-interpreting social realism amount to, as Jameson states, "merely more images"[50] in an era overloaded with postmodernist fiction's obsessiveness with imagery overload, does Jameson's statement essentially negate any attempts at creating a discourse of narrative sincerity in Chabon's fiction, pointing to instances of moral coding in Chabon's fiction? Can the decentred, moral and political solipsism that Jameson associates with postmodernism be applied to Chabon's millennial fiction, or have developments in literature and culture simply "emptied out" Jameson's critique of relevance, much in the same way that Jameson accused postmodernism of trying to do with its modernist forbearer? Chabon negotiates a turn away from the same parameters that Jameson accuses postmodernism of having contradictory relations to. Most prominently, Chabon's examination of historiographic metanarratives addresses both the contradictory ahistoricity that postmodernism represents for Jameson. This venture into the historiographic also enables Chabon to escape from the main antagonism of postmodernism, which is represented by what Jameson considers the postmodern desire to discredit narrative form while availing of this discourse through narrative.[51]

A secondary point of argument between Chabon and Jameson's conception of the parameters of postmodernism can be seen in Jameson's surprising vitriol towards the concept of

---

[49] Jameson, Ibid.
[50] Jameson, 1991, ix.
[51] "Owing to the contradiction whereby perception of everything significant about the disappearance of master narratives has itself to be couched in narrative form." Jameson, 1991, *ibid*.

heterogeneity in postmodernism. In locating the postmodern as a postcolonial movement emerging specifically in the post-industrialised wealthy west, or countries where Jameson asserts the existence of "late modern capitalism", Jameson limits the existence of postmodern art existence as being possible only in countries where an end of the modernisation process had historically occurred. For postmodernism to exist, in Jameson's terms, it must be located in cultures which have experienced vast economic wealth, so that culture itself will have been commodified.[52] Discussing this elitist centring of historically decentred postmodernist culture, Jameson argues that for postmodernism to exist it must occur under the aegis of a capitalist cultural dominant: "If we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity", arguing that cultural difference is no substitute for an oddly modernistic reading of cultural unification theory. Where "a coexistence of a host of distinct forces" converge for Jameson, "effectivity is undecidable." Arguably, if postmodernism represents the breakdowns of systems of essentialisms, of parameters, then Jameson here is instead stressing that they exist to form a sense of social cohesion that the very discipline argues against.[53]

From Innocence to Artificiality: The Jewish Bildungsroman and The Twenty-First Century

The Jewish-American Bildungsroman of the 1960s, demonstrated by the fiction of Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and Phillip Roth, is an important stylistic referent for developments in Chabon's millennial fiction. In representing the Jewish male youth as the embodiment of second-generation American emigre innocence and social naivety, the 1960s fiction of Bellow[54] and Roth[55] created distinctly comedic meditations on the emergence of Jewish-Americans entering the middle classes in cities where they had been a ghettoised minority. The figure of the Shamus, the ostracised Jewish social observant, is the feature of much of Malamud's 1960s output, particularly in the wrongfully imprisoned protagonist of Malamud's 1966 Pulitzer Prize-winning historical morality tale *The Fixer*. A striking relation to Chabon's American fiction is further identifiable in the style in which Malamud indirectly

[52] Jameson, 1991, x.
[53] Heterogeneity being a key issue in Chabon's fiction, his opposition to Jameson's last point emerges clearly, but my research posits that heterogeneity in the forms Chabon applies in his fiction itself represents a break from the essentialism postmodernism began to exhibit by the 1990s.
[54] Bellow's earlier novel *The Adventures of Augie March* (1955) was an inspirational forerunner for much of Jewish-American fiction in the 1960s, particularly concerning the emergence of a socially naive, yet ambitious Jewish ingenue protagonist in American fiction.
[55] Roth published the novella collection *Goodbye, Columbus* in 1963, providing an influential coming-of-age narrative with the title story for a generation of college-attending, middle-class Jewish Americans.

comments on trauma and the Jewish experience, most pertinently with regard to the Jewish experience of the holocaust. As Michael Brown describes it, while addressing "the meaning of Jewishness and of the Holocaust, then he does so indirectly, as these are connected with other events and issues".[56] As two Jewish authors who had no experience of the Holocaust, the decision to attempt to universalise the experience of the aftereffect of the Holocaust on the Jewish psyche by indirectly placing the traumatic subject amidst narratives detailing personal reactions to social injustice reflects an attempt in both Malamud and Chabon to track a loss of Jewish social naivety during the course of the twentieth century. While representing a sense of innocence when tackling experiences of Jewish-American social assimilation is a significant thematic concern in Chabon's millennial fiction, it is the representation of the Shamus as the Jewish social investigator, representative of world-weariness, that marks the stylistic shifts in terms of Chabon's approach to post-postmodernist fiction. An incisive question to consider regarding the matter of Chabon's relation to his Jewish-American predecessors is one related to the definition of American innocence, a term at the centre of a literary discourse that gained momentum in the mid-twentieth century and which, like the American Academy of its context, excluded Jews from its scholarship. Furthermore, R.W.S. Lewis's dictum that without the illusion of a (white protestant) American influence, we are "conscious, no longer of tradition, but, simply and coldly, of the burden of history"[57] would seem to link the writing of 1960s Malamud too closely to history to perform any kind of radical progress, a claim that could also be made towards Chabon's historically centred fiction. If the case of Malamud's *The Fixer* is to prove an inherent Jewish social innocence despite the historic pitfalls that are the supposed ironic birthright of Jewish identity, if, according to Malamud's eponymous Shamus "being born a Jew meant being vulnerable to history, including its worst errors",[58] then Malamud's concern to prove Jewish innocence existed despite the horrors of history is equally a concern the defiantly registers throughout Chabon's millennial fiction. Thus, I argue that despite the desensitizing effects of postmodernist fiction and its influence on Chabon's style, this search for the proof of innocence which pervaded much of 1960s Jewish American fiction still registers through Chabon's millennial fiction. Considering how Kevin C. Moore interprets the formal

[56] Michael Brown, "Metaphor for Holocaust and Holocaust as Metaphor: The Assistant and The Fixer of Bernard Malamud Reexamined." *Judaism* 29, no. 4 (Fall80 1980):479- 490 Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed September 21, 2016). 488.
[57] R.W.S Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in The Nineteenth Century,* (University of Chicago Press) 1955, 9.
[58] Bernard Malamud, *The Fixer* (London: Atlantic Books) 2014, 127.

achievement of *The Fixer* as a stylistic feat where Malamud "carries the reader across the threshold of modernist formal experiment and questions the limits of stable literary representation",[59] the obvious influences of Malamud's brand of ironic Jewish identity fiction on Chabon remain altogether too obvious. However, what appears of greater interest is the formal conceit that *The Fixer* conveys; the shifting appropriation of various narrative styles in order to either convince the reader of the abundance of forms a single story can plough through in the course of its telling, is an idea that Chabon considers with greater emphasis during the development of his fiction. If the Holocaust is used with a metaphorical emphasis in the work of both Malamud and Chabon, it is done so to reflect a turn in their relating of the Jewish experience of the twentieth century that represented a move from narratives of innocence to experience. If this insistence of a detectable narrative of pre-Holocaust innocence in terms of the twentieth century defines the clearest link between Malamud and Chabon, then what is presented in their fiction in this sense is the opposite of what Matthew Boswell describes as "Holocaust Impiety". Identifying a tendency in postmodernist fiction, music and film to depict a morally ambiguous representation of Holocaust experience, Boswell argues that works that can be labelled with the term Holocaust Impiety "reject redemptory interpretations of genocide and the claims of historical ineffability"[60] which, like works that highlight a narrative of innocence under crisis when representing the Holocaust similarly "engineer a sense of crisis in readers, viewers or listeners by attacking the cognitive and cultural mechanisms that keep our understanding of the Holocaust at a safe distance from our understanding of ourselves."[61] Here Boswell indicates a sense of crises of interpretation that is provocatively engineered by writers of Holocaust narratives, whether they be narratives highlighting the inherent innocence of Holocaust victims or a sense of moral ambiguity. Horrible fates can occur to horrible people and the innocent are themselves capable of immoral deeds, as well as the reverse. By discussing this notion of a renowned emphasis on culpability that postmodernist Holocaust fiction exerts in Boswell's study on Holocaust impiety, what becomes clearer in Chabon's indirect treatment of Holocaust subjects in his millennial fiction is that there is a position of reflecting on a Holocaust

[59] Kevin C. Moore. "Parting at the Windmills: Malamud's The Fixer as Historical Metafiction." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 69, no. 1 (2013): 91-118. https://muse.jhu.edu/ (accessed September 21, 2016). 92.
[60]Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety In Literature, Popular Music and Film* (New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) 2012, 3.
[61] Boswell, *ibid.*

narrative that favors innocence above moral ambiguity, in a mode which follows on from the 1960s interpretation of Malamud.

This stylistic turn which Malamud's *The Fixer* takes, the way of opening a door into an abundance of narrative possibilities, links the ironic realist Jewish American fiction of the 1960s with its WASPish cousin, 1960s American postmodernism. If the burden of ethnic identity is the threadbare theme that categorizes together the fiction of Bellow, Malamud, and Roth, then it is the burden of privileged historical identity that 1960's American postmodernism wishes to disengage from: at its core, the movement is reflective of a counterculture that attempts to steer clear of any attachments to an empire its authors are nevertheless obsessive over. It is this representative irony that, to use a stock phrase of postmodernism-sceptic Tom Wolfe, stalks the billion-footed beast that is American postmodernism. Writing on postmodernist poetics in the 1980s, Linda Hutcheon identified a narrative turn in Western humanities which incorporated readings of history as preeminent understandings of the growing discipline of semiotics, particularly within criticism that focused on fiction: "Historiography has had its impact on literary studies...even in semiotics-where history had once been formally banished"[62] The idea that considerations of historiography within fictional grand narratives, or metanarrative, as being denied grounds for serious literary debate seems surprising at first, given the relationship between the Modernists' obsessiveness towards both the representation and of the reoccurrence of history. In understanding Hutcheon's argument of an American postmodernist reconstruction of historiography as a development, even a reaction, against an ahistorical Modernist principle, what needs to be addressed is that Hutcheon is writing on fiction that is itself reacting against postmodernism, particularly the "New Novel" (*nouveau roman*) represented by the fiction of Alain Robbe-Grillet and other European postmodernists. Although equally influenced by semiotics and other ideas postulated by postmodernist philosophy, the European *nouveau roman* exhibited a distaste for the narrative conventions of the novel not wholly shared by their American counterparts. The integral difference between the European and American postmodernists emerging in the 1960s is an interest in historiographic metafiction. American writers for at least the duration of the Sixties maintained an interest in reconstructing the historical for narrative purposes as opposed to writing texts that existed outside the framework of historical context, as seen in the European new novel and subsequent later postmodernist fiction (notably John Barth's *Chimera*, the first "serious" American

[62] Linda Hutcheon *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge) 1988, 2004. 100

postmodernist Alternative History novel). What signifies American postmodernist fiction is the reconstruction of history as a literary device. As Hutcheon explains: "Just as history, to a semiotician, is not a phenomenological event, but "an entity producing meaning"[63] then what can be described as the postmodernist search for what Hutcheon terms the "reception of meaning" can only be possibly experienced in a historical context.[64] When Hutcheon describes the search for the "reception of meaning" as encountered in writings on historiography as reconstructions of factual evidence, this accounts for the postmodernist tendency towards cognitive mapping of the information data which determines historical chronology. The idea of literary narration as a cognitive mapping of the memory of human time is responsible for what Hutcheon argues is the problematic argument behind American postmodernism's "process of cross-fertilisation."'[65] What Hutcheon intends by this is that this fusion of the literary with the historical co-opts an all too literal mixing of fact and the imagination to serve one purpose, leading to a purposeful distortion of shared memory conveyed out of a "reshaping of our experience of time through plot reconfigurations."[66] The inherent contradiction in postmodernist fiction's requirement in experimenting with mimetic perceptions of time as having to develop within the creatively staid literary device of the plot-dependent novel form, is an irony elsewhere decried by Jameson's complaint that however radical postmodernist fiction claims itself as a form that breaks away from convention it must do so "couched in narrative",[67] that most obvious means of literary expression. This contradiction presents the key antagonism that alerts Hutcheon's critique of American postmodernist fiction, which leads to a binary separation in Hutcheon's synopsis of American historiographic metafiction, summed up by the assertion that hallmarked the initial decades of American postmodernism: "the formalist and the historicist live side by side, but there is no dialectic."[68] This inherent sense of a lack of a referent dialectic, the means to which fiction can purposefully engage with the past's relationship with present concerns, amounts to a primary concern in Chabon's millennial fiction. In context, the characterizing thematic link of Chabon's generation, termed post-postmodernists,[69] is one of a stylistic reaction that looked to the past rather than continuing an outmoded, self-consciously Avant Garde present. As recipients of university educations wherein postmodernist theory was at the forefront of

[63] Hutcheon, *ibid.*
[64] Hutcheon, *ibid.*
[65] Hutcheon, *ibid.*
[66] Hutcheon, *ibid.*
[67] Jameson, 1991, ix.
[68] Hutcheon, 101.
[69] See Timmer, Dewey, Kelly, Funk.

classroom critical debates, post-postmodernists rejected what they saw as the overtly experimental excesses afforded the academically respected producers of late postmodernism in favour of a reconstruction of historiographic metafiction. This return to socially conscious literature was not a reductive stylisation that merely attempted impersonations of canonical American authors, such as Herman Melville, Mark Twain and Edith Wharton, but instead produced texts that investigated the effects that living in a consciously postmodernist society had on Americans coming of age in the era of medial saturation. The defining factor of the post-postmodernists, and in particular Chabon's formal turn from the Sixties postmodernists who inspired his early fiction, is how they deal with postmodernism as a historiographic narrative. What Chabon as a post-postmodernist ended up taking from Sixties postmodernism and what his millennial fiction reacted against in their re-appropriation of historiographic narratives forms the theoretical basis of my argument regarding Chabon's fictional praxis. While my previous discussion concerned a distancing from postmodernist irony as a narrative trope in Chabon's millennial fiction, the literary influence signified by this same body of work also allows a distinct irony to surface. The crucial irony inherent in the development of Chabon's millennial fiction is that it has a historiographic emphasis in that it shifted towards paying homage to the legacy of the sixties. In breaking down the distinction between high and low culture, Sixties postmodernism not only challenged the aesthetic conventions of the realist well-made plot but also of Modernism's classification of literature as the vanguard of high art, introducing the influence of popular culture as bearing as much of an ethical influence as Modernism attributed to the study of literature. Hutcheon quotes Russian formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin who believed irony "the equivocal language of modern times" which Bakhtin found evident in every form of modernist fiction and advertising "from the minimal and imperceptible, to the loud, which borders on laughter."[70] This binary division of irony's affect, between the subtle and overt intentions of ironic statements, can be applied to the gradual development of the use of irony in Chabon's fiction as a deployment that shifts from the farcical and physical to the omniscient and historiographic. In *Wonder Boys*, irony occurs as a result of direct responses to characters' actions. Irony is an overt narrative interplay between protagonist Grady Tripp and his friends and lovers, who as teachers and students of literature are hyperaware of the linguistic weight that irony places on their understanding of the world. This nuanced appreciation of irony as existing in everyday

[70] Mikhail Bakhtin in Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge 1994) 44.

life exists at the centre of what Bakhtin refers to as the "loud" implications of irony as a development of contemporary society. Grady Tripp and his colleagues are constantly bordering on laughter with their ironic statements and gestures because they use irony as either social point scoring or as a defense mechanism against the moral judgements of their peers. Irony in *Wonder Boys* is a skill of narratology that in essentially making a joke out of every situation lends a kind of therapeutic closure to the emotional fallout which could arise out of situations of social embarrassment or failure. A major shift in terms of the use of irony occurs in Chabon's fiction by the time of the publication of *Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, wherein the intent of irony's target is shifted from the characters to the reader's own sense of the dramatic irony inherent in their understanding of the effects that history, particularly in the case of the cousins of Kavalier and Clay, will have on their intended future actions. Chabon's re-negotiating of irony's affect in his fiction anticipated what Nicoline Timmer asserts is a key proponent of the post-postmodernist movement. Following David Foster Wallace's cue, post-postmodernist writers in the 1990s began to feel that "when an ironic stance towards the world, the self and others becomes a social convention, it completely loses its function."[71] The re-shifting of the function of irony in Chabon's work is an attempt to sincerely reflect a culture drained of its patience with ironic representation, in a sense that mirrors the direction of sixties postmodernists.

When attributing the influence of sixties postmodernism, a secondary consideration of Chabon's millennial fiction is the hybrid narrative fusion of historical metafiction and formal adventures. However, while the aforementioned are both stylistic archetypes of sixties postmodernism's experimental tendencies, alongside the playfully ironic language that was appearing in the language of popular culture and advertising, Hutcheon argues that the historical and the formal are often contesting subcategories of postmodernist writing. Representing members from both of the distinctive aesthetic subcategories of American high postmodernism, the postmodernist authors my research establishes as the most significant postmodern influences on Chabon's writing after the 1990s are Thomas Pynchon and Robert Coover.

The crucial line of inquiry presented by my research into the millennial fiction of Michael Chabon is how the literary turn from formal realism to experimental postmodernism in American fiction is mirrored but also reversed in this fiction in the way it also reverses the progression from realism to postmodernism. From Chabon's setting of *The Amazing*

[71] Nicoline Timmer, 32.

Adventures of Kavalier and Clay (2000) as being understood as a reconstruction of the American mid-century written for a "post-Pynchon" (i.e. post-postmodern) literary landscape, to the overtly postmodernist alternative historical setting of the homage to crime noir fiction *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (2007), to the contemporary realist novel *Telegraph Avenue (*2012), Chabon's millennial fiction, while exerting an overwhelming primary influence of the influence of Sixties fiction, politics and culture, could even be considered to exhibit a Derridean spectral "haunting" by the Sixties.

The strongest literary influence of Sixties postmodernist fiction on Chabon's millennial fiction can be traced to the development of Thomas Pynchon's post-1970s fiction. After the publication of 1973's *Gravity's Rainbow*, often cited as the archetypal American postmodernist novel, Pynchon retreated into obscurity before surprising critics with 1990's *Vineland*, a politically charged novel investigating the role of the US government's social repression in California during the era spanning what is arguably the peak of postmodernism's academic influence: the mid-1960s to 1984, the year of Reagan's re-election and the novel's setting. While both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Vineland* can be described as historiographic metafictions, there is a definite turn towards addressing issues of social realism in *Vineland* to such an extent that this narrative turn separates both novels in turns of style and objective. Although *Vineland* exhibits similar tones of popular culture influence, cartoonish farce and bleak, political irony which characterized *Gravity's Rainbow*, the same technocentric and chaotic ambience of the latter novel does not take central focus in *Vineland*. By bringing the novel's focus towards representing the impact that political history can exert on a single family, Pynchon in *Vineland* turns from the purposeful "schizophrenia"[72] which Jameson claimed to be a hallmark of postmodernist fiction into a form of novel which influenced Chabon's millennial fiction. The novel's central struggle between a divided mother and daughter, kept apart by state political suppression under the guise of the witness protection program, charts the development in Pynchon's metafiction from the incredulity of American 20th-century history to that history's impact on the present. N. Katherine Hayles describes this narrative device as seeking to reason with the obsession of a younger generation, represented by political insubordinate Frenesi Gates's estranged daughter Prairie, of a past they never experienced:" The vector of Prairie's journey points from the present into the past" while in seeking a means of escaping the living of this past's

[72] Jameson, 1991, xi.

memories, Frenesi moves with her creator " from the past into the present"[73] by hoping to escape the unknowable nightmare of the past's often illogical narrative progression. Pynchon describes Frenesi's interpretation of her past as the personification of her demon, an albatross that will follow her indefinitely: "for Frenesi the past was on her case forever, the zombie at her back, the enemy no one wanted to see, a mouth wide and open as the grave.[74] History for Frenesi offers no personal sanctuary, and even if the present is uncertain it is full of the opportunity to ignore inertia rather than be plagued by the pitfalls of unprecedented progress. Novels which reflected the struggle for an individual to find ethical purpose in socially diverse urban landscapes, where political adherences often lead to personal compromise and salvation is to be found only in the formation of an alternative family unit; the three novels Chabon published after 2000 thus show a definite homage to "post-Pynchon" poetics. If Pynchon's work can be seen as emerging in two stages, his work up to *Gravity's Rainbow* and his work from *Vineland* onward, Chabon's own literary development can be argued as undergoing a similar narrative shift after *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay.*
The more formally experimental influence of Sixties postmodernism on Chabon's American fiction is that of the novels and short fiction of Robert Coover. Coover's parody of the bildungsroman (*The Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop*., 1968) the political fable (*The Public Burning*, 1976) the children's fairytale (*Pinocchio in Venice*, 1990) and detective pulp fiction (*Noir*, 2004) all exhibit his formal inventiveness and highlight the seductive power in reconstructing stories to fit current cultural trends. An important influence Coover has exerted on Chabon is not merely his tireless inversion of form but also what his works have to say about the psychological effects of form on the individual. Ambition, repetition and unconscious desire play as much a part in Coover's unpacking of literary cliche as the genre of the work themselves occupy. Everson states how "as a metafictionalist, Coover has been more capable than most literary postmodernists in making his game playing and self-reflexivity seem relevant to the human condition."[75] Chabon's formal reconstruction of comic book fiction in *Kavalier and Clay*, the detective noir in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* and the Blaxploitation film in *Telegraph Avenue* which demonstrates how the narratives inherent in popular cultural forms influence individual narratives owes a significant debt to Coover's explorations of form.

---

[73] From N. Katherine Hayles, Who Was saved? Families, Snitches and Recuperation in Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel* (Ed.) Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffrey (Normal: Illinois, Dalkey Archive Press) 1994, 15
[74] Thomas Pynchon, *Vineland* (London, Minerva, 1990) 71.
[75] Brian Everton, *Understanding Robert Coover* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2003. 22

However, although the novels I engage in a heuristic homage to Sixties literary postmodernism, my attention turns to how, through their inherent longing for social tolerance, they anticipate an American literary landscape that relies on postmodernist poetics. As a member of what Nicholas Dames has termed "The Theory Generation",[76] a geographically various group of writers who emerged from creative writing degrees from the Academy during the `80s and early `90s, Chabon in terms of his literary praxis has been acutely aware of the critical weight the writing of a text has in the wake of the postmodernism's romancing of the academy. Representing an era of American authors who used the influence of theory via more sincere means that their contempories the Dirty Realists, the development of writers associated with Dames' title existed in a bubble that was effectively created by the schism in American letters that had been created by the momentous radical drive of 1960s politics : the political rupture in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-war movement which reacted against the escalating war in Vietnam, the political assassinations and, in terms of direct literary influence, the student demonstrations in Paris in 1968 and the ensuing radicalisation of the European academy. The political upheaval experienced in the European academy resulted in a similarly effective shift of poetic championing in the American academy, one which in turn gradually replaced the influence of a previous literary generation literary manifesto: a crucial turning point concerning poetics in American fiction, realism.

However, while aware of how readings of his novels would be affected by European critical theory, Chabon determined that his fiction would not be singularly experimental but would strive to use that most basic device of literary narrative storytelling—to investigate individual experiences of American life which are beset but not determined by a postmodernist relationship to the present. By exhibiting in his essay work the sense that "alarmed by the dead-end implication or re/deconstructing books into language experiments"[77] that by the 1980s had signified the frustrated essentialist postmodern poetics to Chabon's generation, postmodernists sought to "restore narrative to a balance"[78]. This restoration process, one that incorporated the production of serous fiction but would not alienate audiences but would instead invite readers back to fiction with a promise of conventional narrative storytelling. Chabon's essay "The Recipe For Life" all but spells out this conceit: here he notes that while

[76] Nicholas Dames, "The Theory Generation" *N+1* Issue 14: The Awkward Age, November 2012 https://nplusonemag.com/issue-14/reviews/the-theory-generation/
[77] Dames, Ibid
[78] Dames, Ibid.

writing *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*: "I discovered that its plot would require the famous Golem of Prague to play a small but crucial role."[79] In placing a symbolic creature of history as a major figure of interest in a novel as imbued by postmodern understandings of popular culture as a novel like *Kavalier and Clay* is, immediately lent the project a relation to a past undaunted by the narrative travails of limited literary experimentation. The novel's key thematic concern of escape thus became an almost symbolic escape out of the parameters of postmodernism. Asserting that the main theoretical objective required in writing his fiction is a journey towards enchantment, Chabon credits the postmodernist techniques of his novel with the ability to work towards captivating, not disorienting the reader. Comparing enchantment to the "work of language, of spell and spiel" Chabon insists that the narrative drive inherent in his fiction is engineered by a technique that exists to encompass a narrative cause. When he states "A golem is brought to life by magic formulas, one word at a time",[80]such an announcement that signifies a move to create in his fiction what Hutcheon claimed was lacking in high postmodernism—a dialectic between the experimental fissure of the present with the serious concerns of historical memory.

Chabon Goes West

Beginning his literary career as a writer associated with a particularized East Coast sensibility, Chabon's fiction has nevertheless been fostered and subject to a warm reception, and I argue, rejuvenation by two significant moves to California. Moving to his Mother's house in Oakland, California in the mid-1980's, Chabon began witing *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh,* his literary debut which played with autobiography themes depicting his life as an undergraduate student at an East Coast University campus, before enrolling as a student in the Creative Writing MA at the University of Irvine, a location the young writer considered as yet unknowable wondering of the possibility that Southern California "would ever feel less strange"[81] to him as opposed the familiar Pittsburgh environs he had left behind, a region where might become "less of a where people I would never led lives I couldn't imagine", [82] to a place where he might find surrogate or simultaneous inspiration to fit the contexts of his fictions.

[79] Chabon, "The Recipe for Life" in *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlands* (London, 4th Estate, 2008) 151.
[80] Chabon, i*bid.*
[81] Chabon, "My Back Pages" in *Maps & Legends,* 2010, 134.
[82] Chabon, ibid.

By the time of the second millennium's early years concerns that Chabon had considered regarding a struggle of finding a place among Californian literary networks appeared to be assuaged, as Chabon's association with the group of young authors identified with the *McSweeney's* magazine brand emerged in the wake of *Kavalier & Clay*'s publication. After making his second move the move to the west coast, Chabon becomes an influential guest contributor to *McSweeney's*, where he publishes the truncated intro of Chabon's abandoned attempt at a sophomore novel *Fountain City*, however more important to Chabon's literary development is not the unique anesthetisation and high pastiche of the humour-centric *McSweeney's* but rather his association with *The Believer* Magazine. The periodical twin sister publication of the *McSweeney's* group, *The Believer* emerged as more focused on novel writing and long reads which pioneered a more author-centric focus in features that described greater considerations of writing as seeking authenticity and sincerity in an era still coming to terms with postmodern sensory overload and ironic detachment, and how these often discussed tropes affected the role of the novelist in the early years of the 21st century.

Reporting on the emergence of *The Believer* and *N+1* in the early 200's A.O. Scott detected within the modest production figures of both magazines features that indicated "something nonetheless stirring immodest",[83] in the approach the editors took in expanding the definitions of an alternative literary press. Remarking on an emphatic foregrounding of the work young and emerging authors alongside the featuring of more cerebral pieces by more established authors, Scott quotes e.e cummings when he reads "something authentic and delirious" in how the hubris and scope of a small magazine edited by recent college graduates and first-time authors is nevertheless gaining submissions and a serious level of active consideration from established voices in contemporary fiction. Scott also points out a unique particularity of *The Believer imprint* by mentioning that the magazine publishes long pieces by established authors on their interests in the kinds of genre fiction that they have typically not been associated with, namely "the scandalous" Michel Houellebecq's book-length study on the horror fiction of H.P. Lovecraft

Whereas *Mcsweeney's* revelled in a direct ironing of the aesthetics and form of the "serious" magazine archetype exemplified by the explosion of the modernist literary journals of early

[83] A. O. Scott "Among The Believers" *New York Times Magazine* 154, no. 53334 (September 11, 2005): 38–43, 39.

modernism, *The Believer's* insistent collapse of high and low cultural forms armed at enticing an audience to consider the earnestness of its editorial approach beyond the gagline. Reflecting on his literary output in 2010, Chabon identifies a tension in his often fabulist, postmodern work, literature, "like magic", according to Chabon, has always been about the handling of secrets",[84] -whether tinged with a darker reason for withholding knowledge or keeping to oneself the sanctuary of pleasant experience, being truthful to a reader "when truth maters most is almost always a frightening prospect."[85] Here again Chabon spells out concerns and fears regarding a hope to be present in experiencing the present of a place, or of finding entry into the lives of a localised readership, reflect a move towards an earnestness for belonging. As I will discuss in a later chapter on *Telegraph Avenue,* California in the early years of the 20th century acts as a mood board for Chabon's idealisation of place and of the language of belonging to a community, ideals that reflect the kinds of literary topes espoused in the pages of *The Believer* magazine during this time period. By redefining his take on postmodern writing to include the senses of finding authenticity in n increasingly defamiliarized contemporary world, Chabon connected with a group of younger writers whose work undertook an earnestness to reflect a contemporary present in the millennium's early years.

Chapter Outlines

Chapter 1:The Un-Naming of Postmodernism: The Affective Turn and the New Sincerity Rush

This chapter continues the discussion on the affective turn in Chabon's millennial fiction by discussing the idea of Chabon's work as fitting critical definitions of "the new sincerity" or "post-postmodern" moment in early 21st American fiction. My arguments here will be that unlike his literary contempories, Chabon never fully divorced his work from the influence of postmodernism.

Chapter 2 Intrusive Narrative: Reading Artificiality and Authenticity in Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction. This chapter examines how characters in Chabon's millennial fiction perceive objects as possessing authentic properties, despite/regardless of their

[84] Chabon, 2010, 155.
[85] Chabon, ibid.

artificial status. My analyses here emphasise how Chabon as the postmodern authorial figure intrudes on the narrative of his own text through the use of footnotes to create a distance between a sincere engagement with storytelling presented in the novels. In this way I introduce the turn that occurs in Chabon's novels from 2000.

Chapter 3 "Having once more fallen silent as God himself…"
The Broken Voice of Affiliative Holocaust Narratives in Michael Chabon

My discussion on the theme of affiliative Holocaust memory in Chabon's millennial fiction is discussed in this chapter. This chapter considers historiography with a discussion on the Holocaust, though viewed from a geographical or generational distance, becomes a major theme for Chabon.

Chapter 4 "Sampling as Revenge": Affect, Restoration and Rebuilding Out of Postmodern Solipsism

This chapter considers the literary use of sampling in Chabon's millennial fiction. My methodology here will involve a Benjaminian interpretation on the use of Chabon for aesthetic and narrative purposes in Chabon's writing.

Chapter 5: The Postmodern Family, The Post-Postmodern Community: Performativity, Surrogacy and Affect in Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction

This chapter, alongside chapter 5, will involve a reading of affect theory in positioning the registry of emotion as making a case for the place of community in Chabon's millennial fiction. The focus of this family will be the role of community and family.

Conclusion

My conclusion will consider how this turn towards the depicting of authenticity through often artificial objects and surrogate familial spaces opens up ways to read affect in Chabon's work, tracking his trajectory from postmodern ironist to an important figure in 21st Century American fiction whose work can be seen as being associated with younger "New Sincerity" authors in evocative ways. A replenishment of the appeal of story, nostalgia and genre align Chabon with a popular readership, this however should not distract readers from articulating the layered influences of postmodern experimentalism that feature heavily in Chabon's fiction from the turn of the millennium.

Chapter 1

The Un-Naming of Postmodernism: The Affective Turn and the New Sincerity Rush

This chapter reads an elegiac narrative shift in tone in *Wonder Boys* in order to examine the means by which postmodernism and idealizations of authenticity in objects and emotions co-exist in Michael Chabon's pre-millennial fiction. Part of this chapter contains a comparative reading of *Wonder Boys* and Don DeLillo's archetypically postmodern campus novel *White Noise* (1984), where I consider how differing approaches in describing symptoms of emotion and human vulnerability are dealt with in each of these era-specific texts, thereby setting the scene for how critical undertakings on the influence of postmodernism saw changes from the decade spanning the publication of these two novels. I argue that *Wonder Boys* is a liminal text in Chabon's fiction, one that is positioned at a point in the author's career when themes such as nostalgia community first emerge as major themes, but when a turn towards a break the ironic as a foremost narrative concern had yet to be identified. A novel describing a novelist's failure to complete the writing of a novel, it emerged shortly after Chabon had written himself into many dead ends when preparing the plot outline for his unfinished attempt at an American literary epic, *Fountain City.*[86] A novel describing a novelist's failure to complete the writing of a novel, it emerged shortly after Chabon had written himself into many dead ends when preparing the plot outline for his unfinished attempt at an American literary epic, *Fountain City.*[87] By examining the role melancholy plays in the author-narrator worldview of Grady Tripp in *Wonder Boys*, I look to access how the appearances of emotional descriptions prefigure the discussions on affect that I look toward in the later Chabon novels considered in this thesis. In this way I argue that *Wonder Boys*, while although a novel which may still be associated with an atypically 1990's era style of postmodern humor, is the first of Chabon's longer works to open up a discussion of affect and authenticity,

I first look to how the affective turn in American multimedia practices influenced the erasure of the naming of postmodernist poetics in American fiction at the turn of the millennium. Then, turning to *Wonder Boys,* a 1990's novel which sees Michael Chabon take a turn towards investigation of memory and affect and a style that critics asserted is

[86] A truncated, unfinished version of *Fountain City*, with an introduction by Chabon that essentially disowns the text, appeared several years after the project's abandonment as "Fountain City, a Novel, Wrecked by Michael Chabon" in *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* No. 26 , Ed, Dave Eggers (McSweeney's, San Francisco) 2010.

characteristically 1990's, I interpret how augmented areas of feeling determine signs of stylistic rupture that constitute *Wonder Boys* as a postmodernism-inspired text, but one in which the rupture is provided by the kinds of emotion that David Foster Wallace insisted had been disposed of by postmodernism. Literary mediations and imaginative acts of describing without naming recur throughout the novels that Chabon writes from the mid-1990s.
What has since happened with the un-naming of the styles and literary process that Chabon writes from offers a way of discussing an understanding of how definitions of emotions and bodily feelings in Affect theory have come to define readings of millennial American fiction with the same fervor that the lexical definition of what postmodernism looked like or represented had engaged critics and readers a generation previous to the 1990s' affective turn. By examining the role melancholy plays in the author-narrator worldview of Grady Tripp in *Wonder Boys*, I look to access how the appearances of emotional descriptions prefigure the discussions on affect that I look toward in the later Chabon novels considered in this thesis. In this way I argue that *Wonder Boys,* while although a novel which may still be associated with an atypically 1990's era style of postmodern humor, is the first of Chabon's longer works to open up a discussion of affect and authenticity.

As it has increasingly become the critical standard to present what may be considered late postmodernist fiction88 as apocalyptic in tone, almost to the point of cliché89, the tendency

---

88 I defer here again to Fredric Jameson, who categorized the ideas of Adorno and other Frankfurt School-era philosophers departing from Marx's key concepts but maintaining a significant debt to Marx's methodological approach in *Late Marxism* (London & New York, Verso, 1996). The interim period of mid-Twentieth Century continental philosophy, wherein a tendency to use Marxist critique of capitalism while shying away from the call to arms of outright revolutionary action, creates for Jameson a problematic condition of diagnoses. Jameson's irks at the "waning of Realpolitik Marxism" much in the way the "waning of affect" to be found in postmodernist literature makes his initial stance on postmodernism; however incisive a cataloguing of the movement's aims Jameson achieves; it does not inspire an early advocacy. As Jameson eases his position in later works such as *Valences of the Dialectic* (London & New York: Verso, 2010) and *The Ancients and The Postmoderns* (London, Verso, 2017) after interpreting a Utopian basis within experimental postmodernism which answers to a socialist hope for political change, and in the case of the latter text emitting an outright acceptance as the contemporary moment as being inherently a postmodern moment.
In Considering this gradual change of Jameson's perspective on theoretical departures from his symptomatic discursions on the turn in *Postmodernism* to his tone of stubborn vanguardism of Marxist modernity in *Late Marxism*, to the less rigid appreciations of postmodernist aesthetics in *The Ancients & The Postmoderns*, my intention in using "Late Modernism" is to denote a similarly stubborn insistence of critics to overlook the postmodernist moment, the break in aesthetic form the delineating a departure from High Modernism in American writing from the 1960s. This may be a naive or idealist hope for the suasion of a long critical impasse, but after Jameson's turn towards a positive analytic encountering of postmodern aesthetics American criticism has featured the admittance of postmodernism as an existent literary movement.

89 A recent search has indexed a vast catalogue of book length studies and journal entries which in their titles focus on the apocalyptic tendencies of postmodernist fiction at the turn of the millennial century. A single study, Irmtraud Huber's *Literature after Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan,

for developments in fiction influenced by postmodern aesthetics in the post-1990s era which navigate the potential of connectivity with readership, or the reinvest in emotions offered by works of hybrid postmodernist fiction tend to be critically undervalued.

A re-evaluation with emotion in Millennial era fiction , the acknowledging of symptomatic gesture towards a break occurring in postmodern poetics was borne out of a kind of manifesto in a 1993 edition of the *Review of Contemporary Fiction* in which the seminal essay "E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction" in which David Foster Wallace announced that "Fiction's about what it is to be a fucking human being".90 By setting aside the importance of formal experimentation for an approach towards a sense of the authentic, Wallace approached the question of fiction's limits in opposition towards of postmodernist disregard with traditional narrative outlines, in a way that had not been argued in a theoretical manner with such transparency since the publication of Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 1972.)[91] Wallace's essay provided significant inspiration for a new generation of novelists who felt uncomfortable, or in the least overwhelmed, by postmodernism's sheer expanse of theory and the resulting decentered nature of the narrative subject under the glare of totalizing postmodernist poetics. In 'Postmodernism, then', Jason Gladstone and Daniel Worden affirm the significance of Wallace's essay as positing a shift away from the postmodernist irony of authors "synonymous with the movement's edgy narrative decentering", "towards a literature of sincerity"92 that would above all be meaningful as narrative practice for a generation of writers "raised with television."93 Gladstone and Worden, writing from the fully sincere vantage point of 2011, propose that Wallace enthused a generation of writers to produce work that so fully negated the symptoms of a postmodernist influence that a turn towards sincerity can be located in "a shift away from

---

2014) as indicated by its title aligns with Burn's perspective that fiction inspired by postmodernism offers a rejuvenation in narrative drive and thematic meditations on 21st century life. Huber's perspective, particularly her analysis of Chabon's *Kavalier & Clay*, differs significantly from my own as her reading of Chabon's novel infers an authorial "escape" from postmodernist aesthetics, which I will debate later in the project.

90 David Foster Wallace, Larry McCaffery "A conversation with David Foster Wallace" in "The Review of Contemporary Fiction," Summer 1993, Vol. 13.2. https://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-david-foster-wallace-by-larry-mccaffery/

91 Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 1972.)

92 Jason Gladstone and Daniel Worden "Introduction: Postmodernism, Then" in Twentieth Century Literature: Special Issue, Postmodernism Then" Volume 57, Number 3 & 4, Fall/Winter 2011 Ed. Jason Gladstone and Daniel Worden, 291-309. 291.

93 Gladstone, Worden, 2011, *ibid.*

"ironic watching" towards Wallace's vaulted "single entendre principles" in publications ranging in tone from *McSweeney's Quarterly Concern*'s "emo sincerity" to *N+1's* enthusiastic recuperation of "high" cultural critique.94 Gladstone and Worden thus postulate an ironic rebuttal to what they perceive as the genre-baiting tone of post-postmodern/late modernist twenty-first-century American journals—the indie-music-deriding charge of "emo sincerity" standing for a critical moment when the journal's founder, Dave Eggers, was seen as the Conor Oberst of sincere (if whimsical) American metafiction.95 Gladstone and Worden's perception of the contributors to *N+1* as taking seriousness back into American criticism is pithy, and, for the sake of my argument, usefully so.

If in 1993 this categorizing of fiction was chiefly a utopian literary idealism for Wallace of the inverted commas "young American Fiction writers"96 who had yet to find prominence in publication , Gladstone and Worden reach two important summaries regarding a discussion of Chabon's shift towards sincerity and cultural critique. By naming Chabon's "heartfelt embrace of genre fiction"97 in a piece of scholarly writing where the only other named example of a singular author's style in a list of six facets of the vogue for millennial sincerity in America is "Jonathan Franzen's social realism", Gladstone and Worden identify Chabon's earnest sampling of genre signifiers as a leading example of a turn towards sincerity in millennial American fiction. The "heartfelt embrace" of Chabon's referential style sits as a distinctive feature of this shift alongside Franzen's return to realism in the novel as Gladstone and Worden set foundations for studying Chabon as a "*post*-postmodernist" (my italics). Chabon's style, captured in a single fragmentary paragraph alongside the description of Franzen's return to the non-experimental novel, offers a persuasive framing of the contrast between the aesthetic aims of Chabon and Franzen without necessarily meaning to do so. Naming Wallace's insistence on the next generation American fiction writers as hopefully forming as some kind of weird bunch of anti-rebels — born oglers who dare to back away

---

94 Gladstone, Worden, 2011, *ibid.*

95 Conor Oberst, the Nebraskan folk-punk laureate of 2000's Emo sincerity, has a pivotal cameo in a concert scene described in Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010) cementing his relatability to the authors of millennial American fiction in a way that isn't dismissal to the looming figure of Bob Dylan as cultural inspiration in the 1960's for writers like Pynchon and Coover.

96 In this singular case, the scare quotes are my own, not Wallace's.

97 Gladstone & Worden, 2011, 291

from “ironic watching”98— or purists of grand old narrative form emerging pre-armed with nothing more voguish than an earnest will to treat “old untrendy human troubles and emotions in U.S. life with reverence and conviction”99, Gladstone and Worden name what readers may well seek out in reading Franzen’s novels. However, they present only one side of the double-edged sword that Chabon’s fiction presents to the reader.

Gladstone and Worden offer a synopsis of the legacy of postmodernist literary theory at the dawning of the twentieth century: the term “postmodern” effectively disappeared as an academic priority. In attempting to historicize a postmodernist era of American literary fiction Gladstone and Worden, assert that even resounding “declarations and redeclarations” of the ends of postmodernism were by 2011 “eclipsed”100 by accounts which categorise differing eras and aesthetic approaches in postwar US fiction . Distinctions between postmodern style, with an emphasis on the contemporary in both temporal and aesthetic terms, versus those of continuations of/returns to modernisms present separate distinctions that Gladstone and Worden not only “abjure the employment of postmodern critical modes”101, but also offer a valid critique of postmodernism’s project of ironizing subjectivity. The resulting influence on millennial literature and cultural practices threaten to “abandon” postmodernism altogether as either “a periodizing concept or theoretical coordinate.”102 Serious literary criticism of American fiction at the turn of the most recent century had no stock in discussing the dreaded interdisciplinary nomenclature suggested by postmodernism, and Gladstone and Worden see the clearest example of this erasure of the movement’s legacy in Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler’s *Keywords for American Cultural Studies* (New York University Press, 2007). This glossary of terms manages to “dislocate the contemporary through terms the definition of such as globalization”103which the authors selected to define what had been previously associated with postmodernism, or at least

---

98 Wallace, E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction” *in A Supposedly Fun thing I’ll Never Do Again* London: Abacus Books, 1993, 1997, 2007. 69.

99 Wallace, ibid.

100 Gladstone and Worden, 2011, 292.

101 Gladstone and Worden, *ibid.*102 Gladstone and Worden, *ibid.*

102 Gladstone and Worden, *ibid.*

81 Gladstone and Worden, *ibid*

Jamesonian late capitalism, in light of the term's larger historical contexts.104

The emerging trend in millennial debates of contemporary aesthetics regarding a shift away from using the term "postmodernist", suggests that this is the critical framework that authors and critics whose came work defines the contemporary in 21st fiction and aesthetics. A critic whose work is as synonymous with the intricate detailing of contemporary categorizing in literary and cultural studies as Sianne Ngai debate that the categories that she describes "cut across"105modernist and postmodernist aesthetics as described in the essays that form her collection "*Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Harvard University Press, 2012). Ngai's introduction to the collection begins with the statement that her three titular categories (which point, "for all their marginality…to aesthetic theory and to genealogies of postmodernism"[106]) offer the most suitable current cultural lexicon to discuss the "hypercommodified"107 nature of human behavior as presented in contemporary literature and visual practices. Gladstone and Worden find in Ngai an example of one of the new approaches to post-1945 literary and visual analysis "which often find[s] continuity where advocates of postmodernism find rupture."108 What I find interesting here is the academic compromise postulated by Ngai and to which Gladstone and Worden bring attention. Pre-2011, Ngai describes the concerns raised by her work as "cutting across" both the Modernist and Postmodern turn, insisting on a contingency that both movements either sought to radicalize or disrupt. Ngai's case for this overlap of aesthetic practice is grounded in her reading of Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener" in 2005's *Ugly Feelings,* the performative negation of Melville's protagonist is the framework for Ngai's discussion of bodies under a politicized set of categorizations that sets forward the template to discuss literature after the affective turn of the 1990s. Ngai wishes to create a discussion which allows for the "genealogies of postmodernism" to be briefly considered and set aside for her discussion of aesthetics of the contemporary, or to historize. in putting forward for my own argument, the stylistic breaks with postmodern irony as seen in the millennial, is crucial to the

---

104 One might ask, in this context, "what was Colonialism, then?"

105 Ngai, in Godstone, Worden, 295.

106 Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* Harvard University Press, 2012, 1.

107 Ngai: 2012, 1.

108 Gladstone and Worden, *ibid.*

understanding of how artworks like Chabon's fiction were contextualized by critics during this period. The vogue for postmodernism which had erupted in American letters and visual arts in the 1980s was being overlooked in American aesthetics at the turn of 21st century in favor of ideas that unironically preferred the Ur modernist category, the contemporary. Looking to history in contemporary novels furthermore offered "genealogies of postmodernism" meaning a contextualizing of aesthetic influences. By the time of Ngai's writing in 2012, U.S. narrative forms were seen *as* historicizing not only the eras of American life these fictions examine, but also historicizes style, in the sampling and re-evaluating of modes of writing, which sincerely undertake genres made flippant by postmodern pastiche. In considering Gladstone and Worden's critique of a lack of admission to postmodernism's influence on the contemporary, Ngai's almost compromising repositioning in her 2012 introduction to *Our Aesthetic Categories* as addressing postmodernism as a recent globalized aesthetic movement asks little of readers to consider any real legacy of postmodernism on contemporary US cultural practices. Postmodernism's reassessment of emotions and bodily affects, even if playing into the aesthetic form of decentralizing the reading experience, constitutes a politicized consideration of affect that is without a simultaneous precedent in modernist literature. Gladstone and Worden read Ngai's reluctance, her performative, politicized disinterest in naming the affective turn as one that is shaped out of postmodernism's disruptive insistence on the decentralizing experience of bodily resonances, as conditioned by the style of symptomatic reading of the modernist/postmodernist divide dating back to criticism of Jameson's work before the affective turn when he established "a renewed in interest in the dialectic."109

Because one of the aims of this project is to investigate a renewed interest in discursive dialectics which appear in the millennial fiction of Michael Chabon, here I refer back to Gladstone and Worden's process of reading David Foster Wallace in 1993 to account for an understanding of why a critic like Ngai might overlook the influence of postmodernist aesthetics in a writer such as Chabon whose fiction particularly exemplifies an embrace of the affective turn in US fiction. Taking a cue from Wallace, who, in relegating a half-century of technologically and lexically inspired multimedia practices with the summation that by the mid-1990s "the best T.V. of the last five years has been about ironic self-reference like no

109 Gladstone and Worden, 2011, 297.

previous species of postmodern art could ever have dreamed of",110 demonstrates a willingness to banish certain efforts of postmodernist literary productions to the forgotten annals of specialist departments, I highlight here some of the variant paradoxes that permeate through reading the critical objectives of authors framed as "the new sincerity", and reflect on how reading these authors closely often raises the question of why suggesting that there are contingent postmodern influences on these texts has become an critical perspective within the American academy.

Wallace provides an escape route for aspiring authors away from postmodernism's ironizing of human emotions, but he also provides a caveat to his critique with the un-naming of postmodernism after the 1990s. The curious case of a change in critical vogue111 at the millennium appears to take precedence over the actual close reading of texts and of subsequent statements of authors that their work has not yet abandoned the experimental horizons of not-yet-too-realist realism.112 What appears as an odd type of anti-deconstructionist deconstructionist reading, or perhaps the literary logic of late postmodernist/modernist neocapitalist thought, pervades critical examinations where symbiotic readings in the style of Jameson take the tone of making postmodernism an almost forbidden term. The apocalyptic tone inherent in what Brinkema attributes to an emphasis on the psychological readings of texts at the expense of the emotional reaction's texts induce or

---

110 Wallace, 1993, 1997, 2007. 33.

111 Or in the example of a writer like Jonathan Franzen, the logical outcome of an authorial project which banks on the re-discovery of social realism. See Burn's *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism* (London & New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2008.)

112 An amusing, and startlingly evocative, example of the authorial insistence against the critically heralded death of postmodernism takes place as early as 1990, before many readers outside of academic circles were likely to have become familiar with the tenets of postmodern fiction. A seminar series entitled "The End of Postmodernism" is noted by Burn as being held in Stuttgart in July of that year, where eminent (and self-described) postmodernist writers such as John Barth and William Gass were invited to assumedly discuss the end of their specifically career-defining genre, or at least what would precede their works in future American writing. Staging a protest in finely metafictional style : Barth's presentation consisted of a short story titled "The End: An Introduction" which Burn identifies as "a diagnoses [of] the impetus behind the conference" (Burn, 2008, 222) signaled by Barth describing his surroundings as a "millennial fascination with the end of this and that" (Barth, in Burn, i*bid*.) This anecdote brings to mind Frank Kermode's *The Sense of An Ending: Studies in The Theory of Fiction (*Oxford University Press, 1967) which although provides an engaging guide to the origins of the apocalyptic critique in classical literature, stops short at detailing why the apocalyptic registered as a particularly era-defining mode of the 1960s, which appears as one of the objectives in Kermode's introduction. Critical announcers of the ending of movements in contemporary fiction like the organisers of the Stuttgart conference, Kermode and even later Martin Amis, who despite making a compelling case for a quintessentially English variant of the affective turn in his fiction managed to make a celebrated mid-career trajectory of the apocalyptic in his 1980s novels and journalism, tend to get excited in seeking the unique demarcations of decline in literary movements that exhibit no singular evidences of reaching a nadir.

infer, appears in American literary criticism at a time with coincides with the affective turn in philosophy, film, social studies and in the journals which stress intersectionality at the peripheries of American writing. Aestheticization, and experimentation, long term influential corners of the American academy, becoming less important than had been in the 1960s: realism and rationalization were in.

Here, a rupture within the criticism of millennial American fiction emerges. Taking into consideration an element of this rupture besides that of Wallace's call to emotive realism in fiction, Ngai's perspective on contemporary aesthetics as developing prior to and alongside those of postmodernism's deconstructionist narratives is one step further than a means of abandoning postmodern influences as guidelines to depicting the present. Charging postmodernism with registering less of an impact on the fields of contemporary literature, cultural studies and affect theory exaggerates the claim of a kind of naturalized sense of the contemporary that could have exacted important influences on American fiction at any stage since American authors began to publish. Although Ngai's reading of Melville offers illuminating commentary on ideas relative to contemporary ideations of emotional states and their depiction within contemporary literature, it is nevertheless a uniquely challenging prospect to try to convincingly divorce postmodern theories from any citation of the contemporary moment in cultural practices.

One place where the influence of postmodern theory within examinations of the affective turn is succinctly examined is Patricia Clough's locating of affect within Brian Massumi's theorizing of the virtual.113 Beginning her argument by looking back to how critics writing in the 1990s welcomed a return to affect and emotion as a response to what they argued were the "limitations of poststructuralism and deconstruction", she turns to Rei Terada's statement that the lexical tone of deconstruction was "truly glacial" in the movement's insistencies of the death of the subject, a symbiosis which meant deconstructions had "little to do with affect and emotion."114 Clough determines a specific categorization in Terada and other scholars associated with the affective turn of the themes of subjectivity, identity and bodies that began

113 Patricia Clough "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia, and Bodies" in *The Affect Reader*, Ed. Melissa Greg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press) 2010, 206-225)

114 Clough, 2010, 206.

in previous movements of critical theory and which were simultaneous with the trend towards aesthetics which removed the importance of experiences associated with physical subjectivity.115 For Clough, the dehumanization of aesthetics under poststructuralism is too insistent on evidence of a binary divide given by a symbiotic reading of poststructuralist/deconstructive methods, as "affect and emotion point just as signifiers established as "glacial" or cold in terms of their relations to bodily responses in post-1945 critical theory. As such, readings of affect and emotion for Clough display an equanimity of importance in terms of how deconstructionism points to manifest, distinctly conditional, renditions of human experience in literature. Clough suggests that the key indicator of the affective turn in poststructuralist/deconstructionist criticism points also to interpretations of a self-reflexive discontinuity of "the subject's conscious experience with the non-intentionality of emotion and affect."116 Clough here locates a key paradox of postmodernity highlighted by the affective turn; that a sense of the subject's discontinuity with representation as process allows for the non-intentionally disruptive emotions and affect locates a disruption of self-presentation: warm emotions seep into or overload a sense of the sense's glacial social and interior presentation. If it is all too human to consider the commonality encountered in human experience as evidence that human subjectivity is no longer a relevant indicator of experiencing the contemporary moment, then likewise it is similarly humane to consider a heightened sensitivity to emotions in texts mirrors a sense of greater importance due to bodily relations towards categorizing contemporary experiences.

Symptomatic Minds, Warm Bodies

In considering the shifting perspectives of American postmodernist fiction as the twentieth century drew to a close, questions of tonal changes, narrative absorption of popular cultural references and reader building relationships abound. The appointment of such fracturing and re-establishing shifts occurs as often in academic studies as do simultaneous author-practitioner debates which debate the irrelevance of the novel in the face of popular culture, or, more specifically, the cultural dominance of non-literary forms. Approaching *Wonder Boys*, I turn to a helpful assertion of Stephen J. Burn's on the critical condition of postmodernism written at the time others claim to be the movements, or perhaps more

115 Clough, ibid.

116 Clough, ibid.

precisely, the moment's, twilight years, that a "fascination with the new beginnings to be found in endings seems always to be deeply etched into the core of postmodernism."[117]

In attempting to mark this turn towards historiography with implied melancholia in twenty-first century American literature with any precision, it is helpful to place the trend, this "melancholy Bildungsroman" subgenre, as first occurring in the 1990s. *Wonder Boys,* first published in the United States in 1995, appeared in the era which included Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Virgin Suicides* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993) and Michael Cunningham's novel *A Home at the End of the World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993.) Both are debut novels written in the immediate literary moment of postmodernism's influence on major American authors and the literary academy, written by New York-based authors emerging, like Chabon had, out of the postgraduate creative writing seminar and into the spotlight of New York publishing: in Cunningham and Eugenides's case, even sharing the same publisher. The timeline of all three authors, accepting Chabon *Wonder Boys* is a sophomore novel, might suggest that these works should fit into the overly postmodernist tone of Brett Easton Ellis and Jay McInerny's "image fiction" or Raymond Carver-style "Dirty Realism", given the age demographic of the authors.[118] However, far from arguing that any of the three novels either wholly resemble or wholly depart from the more greatly defined postmodernist tropes of the image fiction novel or the 'dirty realist' mode of shorter novels and stories, I want to discuss how what takes place in these significantly suburban based novels plays with the already-shifting forms of the postmodern influenced American literary forms of the 1980s in producing the popular-culture-saturated yet ("wait for It", as a Pynchon narrator might interject) emotionally invested meditations on all-too-human and "untrendy" resonances of affection, touch, and thinking, and the bodily aware investigations of the ethical demands of burgeoning adulthood. In *Wonder Boys,* Chabon's Pittsburgh shares the descriptively elegiac suburbanite tone of the specifically non-New York environs encountered in Cunningham and Eugenides. The tonal excursions in these novels amount to a

[117] Stephen J. Burn, "The end of postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium" in *American Fiction of the 1990s: Reflections of history and culture,* ed. Jay Prosser (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 220-235, 224.

[118] Chabon, Cunningham and Eugenides were all under the age of thirty-five at the time of the publication of their respective novels, which in terms of how the parameters of youth for "Young American Authors" are often expanded into mid-career publishing figures infers a sprightly early period.

dive into the wreck of the familiar and the hauntingly changed. In the 1990s, the shift from the deconstructed, dangerous promises involved in the urban cityscape are traded for the play spaces of youth, identity, transience, and transition. These themes in Chabon reveal at times the birth of a satisfied adulthood, at others a resounding stasis of contemporary disappointment and the repletion of adolescent desires.

In *Wonder Boys* Chabon historicizes a contemporary nostalgia in a reading of elusive past memories that plays with the modalities of the authorial, the authentic and the artificial, themes which recur in contemporary U.S. narratives. In the scene where Grady Tripp reminisces about August Van Zorn, the pseudonym of "the first real writer"119 he had known, established but blocked author Grady Tripp offers a kind of anti-nostalgia which serves as a kind of career manifesto both theorizing "The Midnight Disease" and the compulsive act of writing itself.[120] Born Albert Vetch, the ersatz Van Zorn, resided at the McClelland Hotel, where Tripp spent his youth as an adoptee of his grandmother, the hotel's proprietor, after his parents passed away. Vetch's signature profession was literary professor; he was a Blake scholar who wrote hundreds of horror stories, "some of which were eventually published121 in the pulp periodicals that had begun to wane in popularity by the turn of the 1960s. Like much of Chabon's materialist categorization of pop culture, the type of periodicals that August Van Zorn is said to have published in are named by Tripp (*Weird Tales*, *The Black Tower)* as the same publications for which Van Zorn's own literary model, H.P. Lovecraft, wrote. The Pennsylvania setting of Van Zorn's stories and Tripp's early life have real-life counterparts in Lovecraft and Chabon, who both spent a large part of their adolescence and early adult life in the state. The memory of adolescent obsessions (pulp Horror magazines) and the unfortunate demise of significant figures of the genre (Lovecraft was to die of intestinal cancer in near bankruptcy, and outside of critical favour or commercial success)122 create an elegiac tone of disappointment, haunting, bodily harm and

119 Chabon, 1995, 3.
120 Chabon, ibid.
121 Chabon, *ibid.*
122 August Van Zorn is a composite of another pulp writer, Robert E. Howard, author of the *Conan The Barbarian* series, who shot himself upon learning that his mother who does not survive a coma, and whose death greatly affected Lovecraft, who maintained a long correspondence with Howard, essentially his mentor.

emotional grievance all of which are associated with the task of writing.123 Tripp remembers Van Zorn's working habits as portraying the interior life of a particularly melancholic individual:

He worked at night, using a fountain pen, in a bentwood rocking chair, with a Hudson Bay blanket draped across his lap with a bottle of bourbon on the table before him. When his work was going well, he could be heard in every corner of the sleeping hotel, rocking and madly rocking while he subjected his heroes to the gruesome rewards of their passions for unnamable things.

Here, psychological inferences combine with a stated registry of bodily presence: Van Zorn's melancholic nature and his writing of gruesome horror stories at night with a bottle of hard liquor at his disposal. On Van Zorn's lap lies a souvenir blanket reminiscent of a past vacation. Hudson Bay, a fabric company named after a site of colonial legacy, also a popular tourist destination for the genteel classes, suggestive of an idealization of the leisure afforded by industrious work and financial success.

Van Zorn's drink of choice, bourbon, suggests another link to an American historical moment that Van Zorn, or Albert Vetch, seems to remember the dying embers of. A style of whiskey associated with the Antebellum south, bourbon suggests the financial success of a past that in the 1990s has been made synonymous with colonial secrets and collective shame, an era that had become, even before Van Zorn/Vetch's adolescence, associated with demise. This holding on to comfort signifiers — the Hudson Bay blanket, the bottle of bourbon, the long obsolete functionality but vintage feel of the fountain pen — is symptomatic of the aspirations of a man attached to outdated signifiers of an imagistic Americanized cult of progress. These commodity signifiers which Tripp has Van Zorn use habitually, signifiers by which he is permeated, would suggest the kind of symptomatic, psychological state that for Clough signifies the "glacial" characteristics of postmodern aesthetics.

123 Lovecraft, although not a pseudonym, could engender a helpful literary pun here. The author's love of his writing is the one permanent of a career beset by commercial and critical pressures alongside the pressures of emotional life and self-doubt.

A reading of Brinkema would suggest that Chabon here is too engaged with the psychological aspects of Van Zorn's characterization to offer a reading of affect that might "cut across" the memory Tripp provides. However, the description of bodily energy, of Grady's affective bodily labor, mirrors what Ngai discusses in her analysis of the zany: an energetically and repeatedly distinct performative indication of productivity. When Van Zorn's work is going well, Grady tells us, he can be heard "in every corner of the sleepy hotel", the somber habitat of his sheltered but morose life, "rocking and madly rocking." His rocking, to use Ngai's analysis of the singularly postmodern, "cuts across" interpretations of the psychological in reading bodily movement.,. This repeated rocking suggests a zaniness of performed labour that is synonymous with fictional characters that predate postmodernism, but which see a recurrence of the fiction which has investigated the contemporary since the emergence of postmodern American literature. The repetitiveness of Van Zorn's rocking also suggests a ritualistic verve: he is pleased with the progress of his work, the subjecting of his heroes to their gruesome fate, and although a psychosomatic redolence of the enthusiastic receptivity to progress this also suggests a non-intentionality, something that comes from individual labor yet is strangely suggestive of what Clough discusses as the "pre-individual" bodily matter that appears in critical debates of the public site of affect. Van Zorn's rocking is arguably emotional, yet it is also matter of bodily non-intentionality.

I turn now to the intentionality of the naming of August Van Zorn. Taking Tripp's description that Van Zorn subjected his heroes to "the gruesome rewards of their passions for unnamable things", I examine intentionality as a symptomatic exercise where Chabon cuts across the interpretation of the postmodern in an age where criticism struggled with the difficulty of trying to name what postmodernism is or was, a particularly post-1990s symptom in American fiction. "Van Zorn" is the pseudonym for Albert Vetch. Vetch is a widely distributed scrambling herbaceous plant of the pea family, cultivated as a silage or fodder crop. Vetch may also be a suitable name for a Lovecraftian Horror writer, as the plant is poisonous to humans. The Yiddish origin of *Kvetch*, however, cites a "detestable or unlikeable person, one who complains or criticizes a great deal."124 Creating a pseudonym of August Van Zorn infers an escape from the Kvetching reputation, as Albert Vetch is writing to pay his wife's medical bills, there is no time for him to Kvetch. Comparatively,

---

124"Kvetch, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/104615. Accessed 27th October 2020.

turning the attention back to Chabon's naming of Grady, who, as the humbly successful author of *The Land Downstairs*, itself a critically well-received if only noteworthy novel, "makes the grade", as a teacher of creative writing: he assigns the grades of his students, creating indices of whatever future success they may achieve. A scene which occurs early in the novel where Grady recalls the initial sparking of friendship with his editor Terry Crabtree typifies the combination of the kind of coincidental luck and the resultant self-mythologizing of Grady as someone who is destined for greatness amongst his peers. In this memory, Grady realises that his classmate Terry has plagiarized the same August Van Zorn story, *Sister of Darkness,* as he himself has, and that it is due to be read aloud by the course teacher during an afternoon's creative writing workshop. Grady's plagiarism is indictive of his guileless behavior, by his own admission he "set out to reassemble the story as well as I could", sampling entire contents of the story's plot, "turning down the whole nameless-Thing-from-beyond-time component into a weird psychosis on the part of my narrator", updating the implied raciness of the brother-sister dependence subtext by unsubtly detailing the pair's overt inclination towards interest by "adding more sex."125 What we see at play here is Chabon satirizing a particular trope of 1980s/1990s young and successful postmodernist American writer, a caricature Chabon would have known well at the time of publishing his debut novel, and one which perhaps he had worriedly assumed he himself was becoming—especially as a young author whose work characteristically owed to a debt to the influence of preceding literary giants (Fitzgerald, Bellow, Salinger).

A set of dual postmodern tropes to consider in Grady's melancholic reading of the past in *Wonder Boys* from what I have analysed here : the appropriation of familiar genre texts meshing with calculatingly transgressive and contemporaneous retellings of an earlier author's work, then the stripping away of the auratic qualities of the mysterious and the unknown quantities that the work of Vetch/Van Zorn encountered, lends Grady the antidote for his own underprepared lacking authorial finesse. Grady's "reassembling" effects a contemporary style so well versed in the deployment of critical theory in readings of the psychological that horror becomes a symptomatically explained, and all too human and familiar, exteriorizing of repression. Unlike the real-life alias of August Van Zorn, he does have time to kvetch, and kvetching is the recurrent tone of a narration where his career's modest successes effect a wellspring of hubris in terms of the psychological wealth his own

125 Chabon, 1995, 22.

proximity lends to the emotionally struggling social and romantic circles Grady straddles. I will now turn to a comparative reading of negotiations of psychological and emotional states in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, and how the poetics of DeLillo's archetypically postmodern text can be read as containing similar yet ultimately different aesthetic concerns to Chabon's *Wonder Boys*.

Melancholy in Chabon, Dread in Delillo

From the ironic metafiction of *Wonder Boys* to the hard-boiled speculative history of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, melancholy is the dominant philosophical mode of Chabon's characters as the political optimism of the Clinton administered 1990's is succeeded by the turbulent "terror" years of the Bush era 2000's. In understanding what differentiates Chabon from older, canonically identified, American postmodernist authors such as DeLillo, it is necessary to identify how melancholy co-exists alongside the recurrent dread permeating throughout themes explored by DeLillo in emblematic novels such as *White Noise*.126 One example of how melancholy in a text is distinguishable from dread is narrative style. The hybridity at work in American fiction from 1970's era of writers, who incorporated genres as disparate as satire and the contemporary political novel, may at times reflect tropes that are so reflective of Chabon's knowingly postmodern style as to make him appear anxiously indebted to the aesthetics of his immediate American literary predecessors Thomas Pynchon, Robert Coover and John Barth—novelists whose work engender playful literary experimentation with an examination of the social, political and technological developments of the latter 20th century. However, to highlight the stylistic developments in Chabon's millennial works which, as forms of literary hybridity ultimately see a departure from postmodern aesthetics, I offer a comparative reading of Chabon's *Wonder Boys* and Don Delillo's campus novel, *White Noise*. I argue that while the latter novel is framed as a satire of 1980's American consumerist and academic cultures, there are themes in the novel, particularly in Delillo's examination of the family unit in suburban USA which is the site of constant outsider threats and internalized existential maladies, which prefigure the threats to the family units, or the guise of alternative familial communities, that populate Chabon's millennial works. The distinction between melancholy in Chabon—often announced through narratives of nostalgia or of a hauntology populated by familiar figures buried with the past—

126 Don DeLillo *White Noise* (London, Picador) 1984, 2011.

is established in this chapter as an important stylistic difference from the sense of mounting dread and fear of personal annihilation associated with the unknowability of future events in DeLillo's novel.

First, it is helpful to consider an identifiable, if not entirely generational, stylistic gap between Chabon and DeLillo. This gap is most clearly apparent in the psychological and emotional registers used in exploring male consciousness in both works, and how these interpretations of male behavior are achieved in ways that each address in terms of post-1960s American literary aesthetics. Both Chabon and DeLillo are authors who deconstruct the speculative: images described within the texts are deciphered alongside their possible meanings or their relevance to contemporary issues are drawn out by characters via interior monologue. Slogans and other innovative tools of the language of popular media are incited as ways to understand what fascinates and frustrates male understandings of rapidly changing social environments. However, where Chabon deviates from DeLillo, and ultimately from his most obvious postmodernist literary influence Pynchon, is the way that his work portrays the emotions and registered physical sensations of his protagonists. Although the themes of lost innocence and awareness of human frailty exist in the work of both authors, presenting a binary reading of dread in DeLillo and melancholy in Chabon, often mediated through intellectualized analyses of popular culture, is useful in determining where the shift away from the hermeneutic essentialisms of postmodernism becomes evident in 1990s fiction.

A character like Grady Tripp in Chabon's *Wonder Boys* is melancholy and sweet (if bitter) and ironically triumphant (if filled with remorse). As a character, he presents in various ways as a literary avatar for a writer like Michael Chabon himself. Like Chabon, he is enthused by what 1990s life has to offer in terms of the cultural vibrancy and easy excesses provided by this most heartily ironizing and culturally referential decade of America's eventful late twentieth century. Melancholy in Chabon presents as a wistful sense of innocence lost, or a least of sense of who and what had been considered innocent, or thematically naïve and single dimensional, as fading in the heady years of 24-hour news and endlessly capitalized awareness of the consumption culture that permeated the Clinton years. Dread, DeLillo's own catching term which permeates *White Noise*, conveys a sense of immediate, violent decline that exhibited the particular concerns of the Reagan era: that the progress of sheltered Americans was built on the subversion of a host of rapidly deteriorating subaltern societies, a world where the logical conclusion would be the kind of violent demise that mediated dread,

in the guise of a foreshadowed an anxiety-filled corporate culture. While dread, mediating the unavoidable approach of apocalyptic decline and not by merely confirming awareness of human mortality, is arguably the signature theme pulsating throughout most of what qualifies as American postmodern fiction, its features wane into background considerations for younger writers emerging in the 1990s. Through the centering of melancholy as a recurrent theme, Chabon's fiction demonstrates a registering wistfulness that in a writer like DeLillo might simply read as a habitual feature of a character's distraction from the really worrisome serious of decline. A stated ambiguity towards considerations of ageing and personal failure shores up Chabon's pages where an assured registry of shock and terror are demonstrable in DeLillo's fiction.

In DeLillo's *White Noise,* Jack Gladney is a professor at the College on The Hill, an institution that resembles hundreds of universities in bucolic settings across the United States. The uniformity of experience at the College is evident in the vehicles easing in single file as they move towards the dormitories "around the I-beam structure"127, the yearly procession of station wagons arriving "at noon."128 Gladney's banal recitation as he describes the postmodern architecture the vehicles need to negotiate to reach the student dormitories here is an acrid indication of the site's exemplarity as a campus of its era. The faux western inference that follows symbolises a particularly middle- class pilgrimage of transition from adolescence to young adulthood. The performativity of the students and their parents on registration day, the ritualistic identifier of students greeting one another with "comic cries and gestures of sodden collapse",129 Gladney perceives as "a brilliant event, invariably."130 He pays particular attention to the station wagons' roofs, which are loaded down with rucksacks filled with comforting miscellany and their youth-defining symbols of hearty consumption: brought to the campus are technological hauls of "stereo sets, radios, personal computers"131 that would usually adorn the home bedrooms of college-age students of the 1980s. Gladney then shifts his attention to the more personal visible affects of the "controlled

---

127 DeLillo, 3.

128 Delillo, ibid.

129 Delillo, ibid.

130 Delillo, ibid.

131 Delillo, ibid.

substances”132 that he assumes lines the inner pockets of student rucksacks “the birth control pills and devices; the junk food still in shopping bags”—the practices of sex and snacking being libidinous practices of the same types of consumption for a post-war academic of his generation. Gladney, peering into the lives of his students with a menacingly voyeuristic delight, is assured how for them “summer has been bloated with criminal pleasures, as always.”133

What is striking about Gladney’s description of the silent hordes of students that arrive under his watchful glare is the sense of event, that postmodern obsession par excellence, that Delillo mediates through his descriptions. The technological personal effects and the eroticized “controlled substances” Gladney imparts as numbering among the amenities the students bring with them in their parents’ station wagons read like a news report historicizing in real time this 1980s moment of the transition into adulthood via station wagon alluded to by these teenagers’ cinematic embarking on campus life. Gladney’s seeming obsession with cataloguing the consumer goods of those 1980’s teenagers add a sociological bent to the narrative. When he reveals later in this that he is “the Chairman of the Department of Hitler Studies” at the college134, the comedy is realised in the form of ironized cliche: Gladney in his position as the University’s foremost expert in Hitler Studies cannot help but apply a strange kind of intellectualized menace to his descriptions of scenes of crowd behavior. In a later scene, Gladney attaches the mass hysteria in the aftermath of Hitler’s speeches as the crowds having arrived at Nazi rallies as an example of the crowd emerging to “form a shield against their own dying”.135 The result, according to Gladney, is that the social purpose of the social mass resorting to gatherings is to act primarily as a reversible, destructive barrier against annihilation. Made paranoid by years of academic reading on mass manipulation, Gladney reads human interactions as forms of politicized engineering, the role of the individual in breaking away from the enigmatic pull of the social event is to accept the defeat of the social by annihilation, “to face dying alone”. The end result of breaking away from the crowd is therefore the individual, as to opposed group, “drive to risk death.”136

---

132 Delillo, ibid.
133 Delillo, 4.
134 Delillo, ibid.
135 Delillo, 87.
136 Delillo, ibid.

The Western experience of 'pioneering' through foreign territory becomes for DeLillo a familiarization of the social destiny of the settled American success story of the 1980s: the suburbanite middle class. The experience of alienation for middle class suburbanites, by 1984 an already established thematical concern of American fiction, is presented in DeLillo with an ironic counter in the form of social organization: the organization of economically established parents meeting their mirrors images as they drop off their children at that beacon of privilege, the university. Gladney's students are pilgrims guided not by the sun's rays but by printed map routes, illuminated by the sight of an I-beam structure, the type of conciliatory if not particularly meaningful gesture of cultural refinement emblematic of the American university campus. The performativity of the students and their parents on registration day is embodied in the ritualistic identifier of students greeting one another with "comic cries and gestures of sodden collapse," a strangely emotion-free exchange of intensities, registered in the abandoned restraints in "cries" which dampen further towards a sense of mock extremity. The strangeness here of Gladney's descriptions of "comic cries" and performative exhaustion in the greeting exchanges of students and parents recalls the surrealistic impressions of silent movie comedies to contemporary audiences. Sheer performativity without the narrative impetus of a spoken soundtrack of human dialogue alienates viewers who exist in a world where the soundbite, conceived by advertising but mimicked in real life conversations, has become the performative identifier of everyday communication. Located within the mimicked "collapse," Gladney's descriptions insert into the playfulness of social interactions the vacated suggestiveness of unspoken sexual promise, attributing to the everyday performativity of his students an acknowledged postmodern self-reflectivity: the affectation of exhaustion. Regardless of any inherent critique of the studied artifice of these group behaviors, Gladney perceives these yearly performative exchanges as "a brilliant event," one that initiates a palpable excitement in a man whose intellect often sways him away from interpreting human encounters as other from natural acts of privatized notions of the real. Importantly, Gladney has identified the nature of the event in this opening day of station wagon orientation: one that he has witnessed "for 21 years"137: he denotes a feature of this otherwise banal arrival of students to campus as a "spectacle."138 This analysis of the spectacle, the visualized socio-historical event, is the first indication that

---

137 Delillo, 3.

138 DeLillo, ibid.

Gladney reads life as a means of opting out of direct experience. Whereas Grady Tripp can be accused of inserting literary aesthetics into everyday human interactions and memories, Gladney goes one step further in generalizing the details of human exchange. In a reflection of postmodern theory's essentialist negative dialectics, human behavior is categorized by Gladney as repetitive, but spectacular, eventful: as an anthropological, mechanized, ironized series of phenomena.

According to Gladney, the assembly of station wagons on September orientation days symbolizes to these self-recognizing tribes of professional class parents "more than anything else they might do in the course of the year"139 that they are part of a community of like-minded consumers, emerging to find each other delivering their children to centers of liberal education. Gladney intuits that the significance of this ritual as accounting for an instance of solidarity among this class of 1980s professionals is indicative of greater identifying simulation which represents "more than formal liturgies or laws140 a culturally binding referent or group social practice. This procession, the meeting of the station wagons on orientation day at the College on the Hill works on a level of subconscious validation, telling "the people they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin".141 These parents are not merely sharing in the individualized experience of 1980s economic comforts, but also relating to the kind of the self-mythologizing standards of American socio-economic exceptionalism, as Gladney asserts they see in the likeminded reflection of themselves the cultural contours of "a people, a nation."142

Gladney thus sees himself as a kind of Dantean figure at the edges of the lives of the students he educates, circling the areas of the unnamed town that acts as a preliminary to the university's aerial dominance, noting the houses "with turrets and two-Storey porches where people sit in the shade of ancient maples",143 mentioning also the "insane asylum with an elongated portico" whose austere if baroque appearance shades the "Greek revival and Gothic churches"144 in the immediate downtown area. Gladney continues this depiction of the

---

139 Delillo, 4.
140 Delillo, ibid.
141 Delillo, ibid.
142 Delillo, 4.
143 Delillo, ibid.
144 DeLillo, ibid.

ameliorative pastoral settings of the university town in the face of the encroaching effects of urban sprawl, describing the house where he and his wife reside with their blended family as being located at "the end of a quiet street in what was once a wooded area with a deep ravine"145 but where now the couple's nightly routine now consists of listening distractedly to a recently opened expressway "sparse traffic washes past."146 Domestic bliss is invaded as the tides of industry arrive to converge at the end of the Gladneys' road, emitting "a remote murmur around our sleep"147 that radiates a gothic confluence leaving a sense of the pastoral being invaded by the polluting side effects of progress.

The first section of *White Noise* is titled "Waves and Radiation", and senses of technological advances interrupting traditional personal space and the domain of the familiar reverberate throughout Gladney's narration. A founder of the discipline of "Hitler Studies" in American academia, Gladney presents an archetype of the paranoid postwar American intellectual, more conscious than most people of his generation of the effects than technology can asset on the masses.

Regarding the effects of medial saturation on his own personal life, Gladney can be both astute and surprisingly unaware of the complicity of his personal preferences to reflect mediated panic and desire. Consider the following intimate scene between the Gladneys with the intimate scenes between Grady and Sara in Chabon's *Wonder Boys*. Gladney's wife Babette is attempting to entice her husband to make time for romantic intimacy, Gladney responds by stating they should engage in their favorite activity of foreplay, reading aloud antiquated erotic literature:

> "I want you to choose. It's sexier that way.
> "One person chooses the other reads. Don't we want a balance, a sort of give- and take? Isn't that what makes it sexy?"
> "A tautness, a suspense. First-rate. I will choose."148

The overt intellectualising of intimacy is shown here as a particularly postmodern command

---

145 Delillo, ibid.
146 Delillo, ibid
147 Delillo, ibid.
148 DeLillo, 33.

of Thanatos over Eros. Here reading is emphasized, the suggestion of the erotic made textually focused rather than bodily: where Sara Gaskell makes a physical grab at Grady Tripp's heart, the analytical Gladneys insist on the sounding out of erotic literature to instigate pleasure. Note how the Gladneys discussion does not end in an agreement regarding the consensually pleasurable amelioration of pleasure. Instead, Jack's reasoning that a sort of "balance" or "give and take" is what make intimacy "sexy" is unintentionally paradoxical when the reality of this scene sees him insist on an intellectualising erotic that substitutes literary suggestion for the real, embodied physicality of romantic love. Echoing Jameson's analysis of the weaknesses of postmodern aesthetics, Jack's intellectualising of romantic love tends to be couched in the erotic cliches he ironically enjoys, a preference couched in the assumed truisms that occur in textual analysis rather than lived experience. To read Jameson's critique of postmodernism here alongside DeLillo's canonically postmodern writing, Jack is infusing his love of cliched erotic fiction into his own erotic life, but in doing so merely on encounters more images of the clichéd erotic, rather than creating new experiences of romantic love. Whereas Chabon has his protagonist literally grabbed by the heart, Delillo's Jack chases a "tautness, a suspense" through the denial of lived, embodied eroticized experience. The elegiac tone in Chabon serves to contemplate the difficult, unspoken lived emotions of authentic desire, the desire to write or to live a solitary, authorial life is described with a somewhat ironized if wholly fascinated reminiscence on the trappings of innocence lost. August Van Zorn's unexpected suicide, the suicide which unlike that of his father's Grady can bring himself to discuss anecdotally; was the first initial pang of melancholy in a life obsessed with the details of places and objects which sum up the kind of romanticizing hopelessness that permeates his affair with Sara Gaskell.

In contrast, DeLillo's sense of dread offers a kind of climatic reading of the very atmosphere of living in a postmodern era, beholden as much to a constant need to play out emotions, like Jack does with Babette in the intimate bedroom scene, as the threat of death or earthly annihilation is so pervasive that it likened to be as pervasive as the TV reports that Jack routinely comments on. In this sense Chabon's iteration of melancholy aligns with a traditional concern of, at most recent, the nineteenth century novel form. Melancholy in Chabon acts to describe or decipher of what life or what the hope of expectations of life were in past terms, through the remembrance of encounter with people, objects or ideas recaptured from lost times and missed opportunities, whereas DeLillo's sense of dread in *White Noise* reads the contemporary, technologically engrossed era of the present tense 1980's serves to

offer a different kind of narrative than nineteenth century melancholy. Where a romatiscised sadness exist recurringly between the farces of Chabon's humorous vignettes in *Wonder Boys*, any comedy in DeLillo's novel emerges from the neurotic excesses of Jack Gladney's perspectives on academic obfuscation and domestic insecurities set against a backdrop of 1980s media triggered excess. In Chabon's 1990s novel, family and popular culture influences are afforded a sentimentality that DeLillo does not always shy away from in his description of Gladney's recurrent. existential monologues. However, Chabon's understandings of melancholia are linked to pathos, often in Grady Tripp an awareness of the pathetic status he feels in light of personal shortcomings as a husband, lover, friend and writer. Gladney's sentimentality is distracted away from pathos, it is sentimentality ironized and made largely unimportant in the face of recurrent dread.

Materialism and Denial: Trappings of Adopted Familial Connections in *Wonder Boys*

Materialism as represented by heightened awareness of commodity fetishism and the recurrent awareness of Grady's perceptions of visceral emotive connectiveness intertwine frequently throughout *Wonder Boys*. The people Grady often absentmindedly adopts as his inner social circle as often the unwitting foils and errant bystanders of his style of sentimentalized urgency. An emotionally charged, if, on Grady's own narrative insistence, disarmingly self-deprecating, thread cuts across Grady's descriptions of the romantic and platonic relationships that surrounded him. These platonic tendencies often lie at the centre of encounters with his younger acquaintances. In the scene at the Gaskells' annual Wordfest Party, Grady spurs himself to relieve James Leer of the heavy emotional burden resulting after an apparent suicide attempt in the Gaskells' Garden by taking him upstairs to see the Marilyn Monroe wedding dress at the centre of Sara's husband's collection. Not stopping to think that is probably not the best time to engage in mischief with his clearly emotional distraught student, Grady risks infuriating his hosts, particularly Sara, the woman who has just confided to him that she is carrying their child, by such an ill-thought intrusion of the couple's private space. Grady's setting up of explanatory gestures to justify what could be argued to be the apparent routine normative gesture of taking James to see the dress are unnecessary, given he is a close friend of the Gaskells, but his own understandable paranoia betrays him: "I had switched on the overhead light and left the bedroom door wide open to suggest that here was no need for skulkery as I had every right to be here with him, but each

creaking of the house or last -minute clatter made my heart leap in my chest."[149] The sense of Grady's own awareness in the transgressive nature of his willed intrusion into the Gaskells' marital space is echoed in his choice of the words "skulkery, "creaking" and "clatter." These are notably 'horror' words, offering the kinds of literary tics that August Van Zorn would conjure up to induce his audience into a jumpy mood, eagerly setting then up for a fright. "Skulkery" seems most likely appropriated from "skullduggery", a word associated with the devious traits of Elizabethan pirates that serves as a fitting stand-in for the mischief and misadventure Grady finds himself ever drawn to, and into which he routinely lures others such as James Leer, is a young man otherwise seemingly devoid of transgressive tendencies, apart from his suicidal streak. What is interesting about the use of "skulkery", apart from the registering wit of the improvisational leap taken in the usage ("the funny bone", employed , here) is that the word summons the figure of a skull. The word in this sense not only serves to fit a synonym for misadventure, it also betrays a heightened sense of bodily horror, of the awareness of sin and thus awareness of a resultant fall from grace—misadventure with consequences. "Creaking", allows a sense of perpetrator's guilt as well as the intrusion of horror in Grady's being caught in the act of transgression, as it seems to borrow from the Gothic horror tradition exemplified by Poe in "The Tell Tale Heart". The remembered beating of the victim's heart as their body lay under creaking floorboards is sampled in this scene to fit the sound of a entire house as suggesting the audible register of a door Grady knows it is best not for him to enter. The "last-minute" clatter of dishes downstairs, or in the simple entering and returning into the house through glass-framed doors, provokes an almost physical sense of attack on Grady's conscience. This clatter may also sound the shattering of his public persona and professional reputation; who is to say that if he is not found out for entering the Gaskells' private space to spy on Walter Gaskell's prized Monroe dress that his other discretions won't be also looked into? Grady's heart "leaps in his chest", his own tell-tale heart at the mercy of his understandably guilty conscience.

Reading this scene as an interlinking, or crossing over, from public to private spaces, from the casually friendly interactions to overly familiar interjections, pits modernist and postmodern ideas against one another, namely within the spheres of the psychological, the performative and the emotional in narrative. Here we have the modernist trappings of stream-of-consciousness? narratives: what is going on in Grady's mind as everything else appears to be going on in the room in real time. However, there is also a breakdown of the performative

[149] Chabon, 1995, 60.

duality of the moment: the dramatic irony of Grady's awareness of his own guilt, known only to the reader, and the comedic? labor Grady performs in concocting this zany distraction to keep James away from his equally performative suicide. Then there is the register of emotions, expressed through language, that evidences Grady own shock at his actions, and his own terror at being found out for his actions in and outside of this moment of transgression—a crossing over into mere compulsion. The layered acts of the realisation of intrusion as emotionally felt, visceral disrupters to consciousness reflects Clough's diagnosis of the affective emotion turn in narrative in the 1990's. The performed zaniness of Grady's attempt to cheer and distract James assumes the signifiers of Ngai's aesthetic zaniness, a feature in culture that dates back to the mid-century but had only begun to be taken seriously as an interpretive diagnostic of works (and, more generally, of working life) as the 20th century drew to a close. Authorial invention, a recurrent feature in Chabon that both rewards and curses his creatives, depicts Grady himself in this context of socially induced terror as the jumpy one, as himself a stand-in for the audience being emotionally setting up for fright. Although his public sense infers an air of detached and friendly aloofness, by paying attention to the language deployed in Grady's setting up of the scene, we are invited before the fact into a crime scene of Grady's own design. The evidence of Grady's knowing transgression appears in his switching on of the overhead light and his leaving of the bedroom door opens just enough to either detract from or spotlight a scene of disturbance. Grady has a preternatural, almost predatory, ability to intrude on and disturb domestic space, most obviously in his work as an author; he is of the "born oogler" variety of writer that Wallace has stalking every subway train and struggling marriage for raw data. This method of intrusion for the purpose of disruption is also evident in his personal life; he disrupts the relationships between those he cares about as often as he works to improve their harmony. This layering of modernist/postmodern theoretical concerns in *Wonder Boys* crosses over into the scene directly following Grady's setting up of his conscious crime of emotional transgression. When Grady confirms to James Leer that he is "friends" with the chancellor, alias his mistress Sara Gaskell, Grady is quick to dissuade any ambiguity by quickly adding "I'm friends with Dr Gaskell too."[150] James, with deft logic and remarkable comic timing, asserts to Grady that this must be the case, seeing that he knows the combination to Dr Gaskell's private locker in the bedroom he shares with his wife, a friendship built on trust to the extent that the Gaskells would see nothing strange about allowing Grady to pry open the

[150] Chabon, ibid.

closet in their bedroom in order to show James the prized collection within. Grady confirms a composed "Right", to answer James's question before the awareness of his own shaky explanation to James regarding the normality of this boundary crossing exercise relays in him the familiar taint of restrained paranoia. Grady stands watching James "for signs that he was fucking with me. A door slammed, somewhere downstairs, and both of us started, then grinned at each other. I wondered if the smile on my face looked as false and easy as his."[151] The overt knowingness of something left unsaid, something amiss in the rationality of this this situation, makes for comedic physicality and dramatic tension layered with a sense of denial on Grady's part that verges on the sociopathic. Writing with Lauren Berlant, Ngai stresses this tendency towards the sociopathic as an aesthetic feature of intentionally humorous media in the essay "Comedy Has Issues."[152] The pleasurable aspects in comedic performance for Berlant and Ngai emerge "in part from its ability to dispel anxiety." In the scene above, Grady manages just about to convince James of his own conviction that entering the Gaskell's bedroom is morally sound because of his friendship with Sara. He then almost spills the beans on his anxiety by over-confirming his friendship with Walter Gaskell and instead of alleviating the confusion in the situation, he places himself as the perpetrator of a crime. Grady's doubtfulness of James's good-humored innocence, his inability to read James as an open book who merely states what he thinks, allows Grady a foot back into his paranoiac interior; he tries to see if James is fucking with him by widening his grin after a door slams down the hallway, making the pair jump. The hilarity of the scene is inherent in its almost sketch-like physicality, and yet the timing of the door slamming mimicking Grady's personal jumpiness and clattering consciousness, leaves a discerning afterthought: why is he continuing with this overly comical, but mainly problematic misadventure? Berlant and Ngai argue that comedy does not simply perform the single entendre principle of dispelling anxiety. Instead, comedy has an inherent duality as "both an aesthetic mode and a form of life", a duality which "just as likely produces anxiety".[153] Comedy is a state of emotive interruption on normative states that in "risking transgression, flirting with displeasure" confuses the normative in manners "that both intensifies and impedes" the very states of pleasure it provokes. The duality of Grady's smile, his enjoyment of the shared comic moment on the threshold of his lover's interior conjugal space *and* his own awareness

[151] Chabon, 62.
[152] Berlant, Lauren, and Sianne Ngai. 2017. "Comedy Has Issues." *Critical Inquiry* 43 (2): 233–49. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.26547687&authtype=sso&custid=s8993828&site=eds-live&scope=site.
[153] Berlant and Ngai, 2017, 233.

of his insincerity, threw his student's performative faking of that same shared enjoyment, leaving the moment suspended in a doubt that is an uncomfortable space for a creator of narrative meaning like Grady. It is a moment which risks transgression by carrying its own false narrative, it's all too easy fiction of familiarity, which flirts with displeasure in a way that foreshows the sense of doubt and lack of substantial meaning that exists at the centre of the misadventures—the unchecked escapism, that create labyrinths of distraction from the real issues that surround Chabon's later central characters.

Grady's Authority: Artifice as Intentionality in *Wonder Boys*

The "reassembling" of Grady's plagiarized "Sister of Darkness" evidences a contemporary style which references, in a sense more of a sampling of/homage to rather than of pastiche, the psychological subtexts of horror fiction. How, this overly psychoanalytical interpretation of the horror genre, the identifying of tropes alluding to the visceral and fantastical horror story, becomes a symptomatically explained, and all too human and familiar, intellectualizing of Grady's delayed emotional immaturity. Tripp's version of horror here, in the story he negatively compares to his friend's word-for-word lifting of Van Zorn's story as a "garbled and badly Faulknerized rehash of an obscure gothic horror story by an unknown writer",[154] attempts to alleviate the obscurity apparent in the original "Sister of Darkness" by obscuring the story's intentionally two-dimensional tones of the terrifying and the unexplained. By setting the tone of the story via the transgressive, hypersexualized incest taboo, the story's focal driving narrative becomes familiar and ironically entertaining to a "knowing" contemporary audience. Grady's awareness of the kitsch nature of his contemporary updating, under pressure, of Van Zorn's story is given additional comedic layering by the fact that Grady's plagiarism remains unrecognized by the creative writing tutor who reads it aloud, directly after delivering the source story as handed in by Crabtree only minutes before. Grady ponders:

I've never been able to decide if it was his tedious way of reading, or the turgid unpunctuated labyrinthine sentences of Mocknapatawpha prose with which he was forced to contend, or the total over-the-top incomprehensibility of my demystified, hot—hot sexy finale, composed in the minutes after forty-six hours without sleep, but, in the end, nobody noticed that it was still the same story as Crabtree's. The professor finished and looked at me with an expression both sad and benedictory, as though he was envisaging the fine career I was to have as a

[154] Chabon, 1995, 22.

wire-and-cable salesman. Those who had fallen asleep roused themselves, and a brief, spirited discussion followed, during which the director allowed that my writing showed "undeniable Energy."[155]

For the older Grady, the great mystery within this memory lies in how it combines the fantastical and the banal, the coincidental and the seemingly structuring, an almost destiny-shaping misfortune turned opportunity. This is the moment that Tripp the chancer, handing in a rushed, hackneyed plagiarism, cements his future career as a writer. That he was caught out by the classmate who becomes his future editor only adds a sense of postmodern jouissance to the story: Tripp makes important connections and is recognized for the "undeniable energy" in his fiction even when as he essentially shows that he has no ideas of his own. Grady himself is undecided that his not being found out as fraudulent occurs mainly because of an idiosyncratic fault of his tutor, whose "tedious" way of reading probably obscured all the details of the story itself in long, overstated drones. Grady's classmates are thus compelled to focus mainly on the language, however "garbled" and badly Faulknerian it appeared to its author. The fiery strike of the mystified creative process at work clearly displays the kind of showmanship these students hope appeared in their own submissions. The "turgid, unpunctuated labyrinthine sentences of Mocknapatawpha prose", the dizzying gloss which acts as a palimpsest over the plagiarized Van Zorn story, confounds the creative writing tutor, a man who is likely to have emerged as a writer himself in the years after Van Zorn's demise and is himself a product of a more realist, non-hybridized tone of meandering writing. The generation gap, the aporia between styles and even the ethics of fiction emerging in the decades immediately succeeding the Second World War, is made apparent in the literary dynamics employed by Chabon in this sentence's description. For all that "Labyrinthine" and "Mocknapatawpha" assumes a familiarity with Classical/classic American literature, their mocking usage here is unlikely to have appeared in the serious fiction which predates the 1960's work of American authors such as Thomas Pynchon and Robert Coover. Such writers imaginatively recreated the energy imbued by television and other media where language became the playground for a new experimentalism and irreverence, where "fun" became an emerging type of wit, where irreverence itself had become synonymous with "clever" and "interesting."

[155] Chabon, 1995, 23.

This “zany” use of labour implied by creative language has elsewhere been described by Ngai, particularly in relation to the novels of Pynchon that emerged from the mid-1960’s. If we consider how these usages wittingly complement each other outside of their origins, the Greek myth allusiveness of “labyrinthine” shouldering along the pun on Faulkner’s signature county, we can see how they steadily collide with each other to form the structure of a self-deprecating joke at the expense of Grady’s efforts at presenting a story for his class—the aim of which was to convince his peers of his literary talent. Writing in the voice of Grady, Chabon exhibits his grasp on his authorial subject; his mastery of comedic wit and thesaurus-quality literary vocabulary is virtuosic. At the expense of his reputation with his reader, Grady attempts a lexical trick of punning and mock referral to describe what is itself a highly self-conscious act of pretentiousness: stealing another author’s work and attempting to improve it. The resetting of the story in “Mocknapatawpha” is an attempt to aid his fellow student writers in inferring the relevance of the story, although familiarity with Faulkner again suggests more about Grady’s literary preferences and ambitions than the early 1970s setting of the story might design. The pun registers as a later critique of Grady’s youthfully exuberant self-belief, he considers the writing a mock-up of the kind of literary prowess he envisions for himself. The “garbled” performance of his nonsensical prose performs the perfect foil for the “over-the-top” pyrotechnics of his zany yet “demystified” plot, the kind of material that leaves a professor “envisaging the fine career I was to have as a wire-and-cable salesman”, the kind of life due to a pretender who has found himself ridiculously out of his depth when faced with the task of communicating writerly discipline. That the professor’s own “turgid” reading of the story, his banally droned audible performance of the “demystified, sexy-sexy finale”, permitted the remainder of the class to engage in a serious discussion of Grady’s purloined debasement of Vetch’s work completes the farce, allowing for utter bewilderment to make way for nuanced appreciation. The over-the-top recounting of Grady’s own insolent mis-triumph is signaled in equally bombastic terms: it is credited with framing his destiny as a writer. It is the origin story of where he found his future editor and partner in leisurely excess and literary underachievement, the man who Grady describes with the first evidence of unequivocal affection since the long posthumous and doomed of life Vetch/ August Van Zorn. Sitting across from Crabtree at the moment he realizes they have each attempted to pull off a cunning ruse of literary deception, pulling Vtech/Van Zorn from obscurity for their own advancement, Grady declares: “in the mist of my mortification, of the dread that stole over my heart as the professor slid each page of the manuscript under the last, I felt the first glow of the first flickering love I continue to bear for Terry

Crabtree."[156]

Mortifications seems a proper term to describe the literary career of Vtech/Van Zorn, whose tales of mortal terror were leant a poignant touch by the humdrum, violent, if not almost bureaucratic, nature of his demise by suicide. The dread that existed in the Van Stories is further lent a maudlin adaptation in Grady's sense that he might be found out as a plagiarist, each page of the manuscript of his classmate's similar plagiarism of the Van Zorn legacy of terror and demise threatening to end his ambitions as an author. Vetch, a writer of genre fiction, was held to the conventions of his modest trade; a pseudonym assured his anonymity to all but the residents of the McClelland hotel where the child Grady Tripp brought the letters bearing Vetch's cheques from magazines. That Grady's own father was also a suicide, having "made a mess of things"[157] in the ways the precisely ordered Vetch had not, alludes to a strange premise when it is considered that Vetch/Van Zorn is effectively, and in the case of Tripp's lifted "Sister of Darkness", performatively, his literary father figure.
What is stranger still is this awakening of amorous kinship, this registry of affected interior emotion, this "first glow of the first flickering love" that Tripp feels for Crabtree on finding him a of Tripp's first literary forbearer. Fathers and son relationships, or lack thereof, and suicide are interlinking components through Chabon's writing from the 1990s onwards. In thinking that these developments regarding the representations of creation, self-mythologizing and self-destruction, fatherhood and suicide, new beginnings and calculated endings occur in Chabon at a time at which criticism in American fiction moved towards the affective turn, entices me to pause to consider the developments of American fiction at a borderline, a crossroads, a strange new dawn in the twentieth century's final years. I want to consider here what this "first glow" of affection for a future co-conspirator, a glow born out of a sense of realized connection to a difficult past and of the fraught sense of dread at not being prepared to deal with the future might invoke in Chabon's fiction during this era. The first mention of an idealized representation of a familiar bodily organ, the heart, is mentioned at this particular moment in Grady's life, a moment of creative thrust, melancholy and utmost dread. It is a glow within the heart that is simultaneously relieving and overwhelming. In the 1980s Linda Hutcheon wrote of American literature taking a metafictional, "narcissistic" narrative turn. Around the same time, the psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva wrote of depression

[156] Chabon, *Ibid*.
[157] Chabon, 1995,

and melancholia as represented in the arts as demonstrating a narcissistic gaze. “Depression is the hidden face of narcissus”, writes Kristeva, “the face that is to bear him away into death”, the blackened, reappearing disguise of a creative if convoluted mind. The contradiction of the depressive’s state is often that this disguise is one “of which he is unaware while he admires himself in a mirage.”[158] Grady’s melancholia, his attachment to details which undermine his achievements in favour of his failures and near misses, and in his attachment to people who are themselves depressives and narcissists, hint at the masks he wears and the mirages in which he abandons his duties. Grady forms a habit of disappearing into misadventures and fecklessness when the threat of some real achievement — finishing an ambitious book or becoming a responsible partner and father — appears to overshadow his melancholic sense of perspective. Yet his is a narrative itself imbued with idealizations of romantic love, artistic creation and familial bonds, and through Grady, the contradictoriness inherent in Chabon’s diagnoses of literary style’s fractured entanglements of influence at the end of the twentieth century are materialized/made visible.

Grady’s Long, Strange Trip: Melancholy, Mistresses and Misadventure

A humorous, in the classical style of farcical wit as opposed irony, suggestiveness towards the naming of characters and their habitual conduct occurs throughout *Wonder Boys*, signaling an authorial intent towards a definition of character that is almost Dickensian in its appropriation. Grady’s second name, Tripp, easily reducible to Trip, echoes the long, strange trip that Grateful Dead lyrics attest to,[159] one that is perhaps less of a quest that even its narcissistically minded namesake might admit, but one that is at least filled with the romance and misadventure located in earlier Arthurian epics. Drug-addled, variably pregnant with meaning as it is teeming with passages which surmise an empty, wistful vacuum of uncertainty, Grady’s own variant of self-mythologizing biography and pseudo-analytical mansplaining purports the strange values of being a creator, lover and friend in the productivity obsessed 1990’s.

Grady meanders the social circles of an inner sanctum of a bi-coastal literary scene where storytelling has been replaced by status. That he has found his ideal reader in his own Mrs. Gaskell, Sara, who happens to be rather inconveniently married to Grady’s ultimate superior,

---

[158] Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York, Oxford: Columbia University Press) 1989, 5.

[159] “Sometimes the light is shining on me/other times I can barely see/ lately It occurs to me/ what a long, strange trip it’s been”-Jerry Garcia, Robert Hunter, The Grateful Dead, “Truckin’”, *American Beauty* (Warner Bros. Records, 1970)

the head of the university's English department, Dr. Walter Gaskell, bears typical signifiers of Grady's self-mythologizing personality. With regard to Sara, Grady considers this predicament of work-life social entanglements to be a more than adequate substitute for any sense of what a respectful distance between himself could be and his peers or readership. As his libidinous ego prefers: "She's even read my first book, long before she ever met me, and I liked to think she was the best reader I ever had. Every writer has an ideal reader, I thought, I was just lucky that mine wanted to sleep with me."[160]

Grady risks his career, and the career and happiness of Sara, before their affair provokes his sense of self-worth and promise as an author. That Sara had read his first book long before they met provokes a feeling of timelessness in Grady's ego; not just that he was a talented writer because he was being published, but because he was being read by attractive readers. This confession: that the affair was not so much born out of an unhappiness and dissatisfaction with their current spouses and present selves, but instead by some gifted relationship between an author and his ideal reader, is described by Grady as being a signifier of his personal good luck rather than a portent of depression. The sadness of Sara's infatuation with Grady, her need for his physical affection as a reprieve from her loveless marriage to the absent-minded, memorabilia-obsessed Walter, starkly contrasts the sighs of acceptance of the nature of their affair as encountered by Grady. The scene where Sara and Grady step out of the WORDFEST party held in the Gaskell's house to rendezvous in the guest bedroom is particularly telling of Grady's almost resigned attitude to the showcasing of Sara's affection. Again, the chest and idealized vital organ of Grady's heart is the site of conjecture, only this time it is Sara extolling her possessive attachment to this heart's ideals :

> She worked at the topmost button of my shirt, got a hand inside, and cupped my left breast.
> "This one's mine", she said.
> "That's right," I said. "All yours."[161]

That Grady would suggest his heart, the beating engine of his romantic drive towards literary creation and the often-delayed gestation of his latest, unfinished novel, would be in the co-

[160] Chabon, 1995, 40.

[161] Chabon, 1995, 41.

possession of another person suggests the tone here has delved into the ironic. The "glow" that Grady earlier asserted he felt towards the mischievous provocateur Crabtree is tellingly absent in this scene, although it is the most physically descriptive of the scenes of bodily interaction, more specifically of intimacy, in *Wonder Boys*. When Grady later in the scene expresses his uncertainty over how to approach Crabtree about his novel remaining unfinished, and as he is about to tell Sara that his wife, Emily, has left him, Sara manages to get in her news first: she is pregnant with Grady's child. Authorial creativity now mixes with genetic creation in Grady's mind, yet he can't help at the same time feeling self-pity, as if his worries about finishing a book and becoming a father outweigh Sara's decision to leave her marriage and prepare for motherhood alongside a less reliable paramour. Feeling Sara's physical weight physically crowd his arm, Grady implores her:

> "Sara, honey", I said, "I'm stuck."
> I gave my arm a gentle tug, trying to free it. "You're lying on my arm."[162]

That Grady is physically stuck can only be read as a sense of being stuck between two possible worlds and futures: the underachieving author and achieving partner, or the absentee partner and achieving author. In this scene, he still isn't sure which to choose. Grady feels elated Sara is carrying a "sparking pearl of protein lodged in the innermost pleats of her belly"[163], for him, a warm secret he was integral in creating. This "sparking pearl" shares the visual warmth that features in Grady's description of platonic love for the plagiarist editor Crabtree, but this warmth emerges after the fact that he effectively shoos Sara off during an intense moment of real emotional need. Sara's rejoinder that Grady will "half to chew" his arm off in order to release himself from her is comedically well timed and suggests that Grady will have to start using his mouth, or spoken declarations of good intent, rather than write about theoretically worthy values that have little interaction with his own lack of decisiveness in real terms.

[162] Chabon, 1995, 43.
[163] Chabon, 1995, 44.

Constant Readers: 1990s Author-Reader Dependencies in *Wonder Boys* and *Misery*. Breaking Up with Observer Hero Narratives.

The 1990s saw a breakdown of the descriptive binaries within American fiction. The popular vs. literary fiction binary (which had after the 1960s come to mirror what Andreas Huyssen describes as an example of "high modernist dogma"[164] within arts criticism that had prevented critics from "grasping current cultural phenomena",[165]) had by the 1990s seemed to arrive at an intersectional moment. Writers such as Phillip Roth and Thomas Pynchon, who embraced both postmodern experimentation and the popular had by the arrival of the 1990s seen their work feature on university courses and feature on bestsellers list. A sense of acceptance into the American literary vanguard, however, did not entirely allow for a representation within literary criticism in terms of the emergence of new ways of thinking about what the novel was supposed to do in the 1990s. Reflecting on this period in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the American novel of the 1990s is defined by Adam Kelly as a genre form at a period of transition. Kelly considers the literary device of the "observer-hero" as a narrative device where character relationships perform acts of dependency through how one (observer author figure) can represent for the other (Hero protagonist) a worldview which extends beyond the psychological desire to consider aesthetics of the postmodern during an era when postmodern aesthetics had begun to appear in manifold directions in American popular culture. A distinctive feature of the observer-hero narratives as Kelly understands it is the hybridity of genre forms that these texts convey. Typically placing a narrator with "skeptical modern impulses" against a "protagonist who is more mysterious and romantic in conception,"[166] creates a division which allows for a consideration of Trilling's distinctions between the sincere and the authentic in canonical literary narratives. Kelly asserts that at the centre of these texts is a willingness to "explore a clash of sensibilities", one that often reflects the kinds of binaries that we associate with the division between high modernism and the pop culture embracing synergies of the postmodern, which Kelly aligns to the "transition from one historical, intellectual, aesthetic epoch to another."[167] The epoch here that Kelly refers to stretches within the novels his work examines from anywhere from 1940s Harlem to the 1990s era of the Clinton-Lewinsky

---

[164] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986) ix
[165] Huyssen, ibid.
[166] Adam Kelly, *American Fiction in Transition: Observer -Hero Narrative, The 1990s and Postmodernism.* (London, New York, Bloomsbury) 2014, vii.)
[167] Kelly, 2013, ibid.

scandal in Phillip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000) to the 1960s radical campuses protests to a rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn in Paul Auster's *Leviathan* (1992). Borrowing the influential, but ultimately outsider, narrative figure familiar to readers of the 1920s novels of F Scott Fitzgerald, Kelly here invokes a canonical American literary style of author as observer, which historicizes an epoch, in Fitzgerald's case The Jazz Age, in Roth's and Auster's the socially turbulent post-war era.

This passing of the observer-hero baton is one that often examines encounters between an author figure (observer) and a politically transgressive protagonist (hero), where the narrator attempts to form a polemical observance of contemporary American society through the provocative actions or personal decline of the hero figure. Romanticism and mystery as a character trait in 1990s American fiction have therefore a distinctly political factor in the novels Kelly discuses.

Taking my cue from Kelly's assertion of the 1990's as a transitional period where the figure of the authorly observed protagonist reflects a hesitancy in depicting the contemporary, I will now discuss the figure of the reader in two 1990s novels. Kelly's description of the observer-hero narrative belies a desire to evade postmodern aesthetics from taking a firm grasp on narrative aesthetics in the novels he cites, whereas elsewhere in the long 1990s, in Chabon's *Wonder Boys* and Stephen King's *Misery* (1987), the figure of an ideal or constant reader reflects a concern in both texts that the authorial voice may alienate a key audience, and in doing so lose the kind of readership indicative of an author who makes a career out of writing challenging fiction. The explosion of multimedia platforms during the 1990s prompted a new sense of competitiveness which led to fears that neither the elite modernist, avant-garde provocateur or indeed, popular genre authors, had up to this point considered.

King's *Misery*, published in an era where both the bestseller and the postmodern literary fiction novel increasingly competed for attention, offers an intriguing example of a popular writing considering the risks associated with retaining an ideal readership. The novel sees Paul Sheldon, a writer of popular romance novels, fearing for his life as he recuperates in the home of Annie Wilkes, an obsessive medic who is prone to violent psychological and physical outburst, who also claims to be Paul's most dedicated reader. Annie repeatedly drugs Paul with painkillers, effectively holding his hostage rather than ferrying him to stable medical care. Annie may well be the catalyst for Paul's physical and mental demise. Much to Paul's chagrin, however, Annie turns out also to be his most intuitive reader. After almost murdering Paul in a violent rage upon reading *Misery's Child*, the book Paul intends to be the

last of his Misery Chastain novels, the series that made him a bestselling literary celebrity, Annie insists that Paul burn the only existing manuscript copy of *Fast Cars*, his attempt at writing literary fiction. Annie's complaints regarding the narrative experimental style of his new novel, concerning how the book is "hard to follow" as it "keeps jumping back and forth in time"[168] strike Paul as indicating a lack of sophistication in Annie's interpretation, her lack of understanding of the workings of literary technique. Annie goes on to critique the leanings towards dirty realism _which *Fast Cars* tends towards: Paul's prose is no longer an ornate facsimile of nineteenth-century gothic romances, but is profanity-laden, and psychologically fragmented, features that the deeply traditionalist Annie ridicules as "less interesting" qualities when compared Paul's Misery Chastain novels.[169] Aside from berating the use of profanity in *Fast Cars Annie later* so far as calling Paul a "Dirty bird"[170] for murdering off her most beloved character in *Misery's Child,* Paul's defection to Dirty Realism rendering him psychologically unclean. Upon reading and rejecting Misery's *Child*, the novel where Paul has the heroine die in childbirth, Annie insists that Paul write a sequel where the character somehow evades death. Fearing for his life and desperately in need of the pain medication on which he has become dependent, Paul agrees. When describing how he would require his concordance binder in order to competently structure the new novel with reference to the chronology of the rest of the series, Paul notices how Annie had shown "not the slightest interest in a trick of the trade that would have held a class of would-be writers spellbound".[171] The reason behind this, as Paul intuits, is not a disinterest in writing as a craft but instead relates to an adherence to a reified appreciation of story itself. Annie, for Paul, represents his idea of "the perfect audience", one who is "the embodiment of that Victorian archetype, Constant Reader",[172] who will forgive an author his mechanics so long as the story itself pleases their imaginations, or ticks the boxes on what they consider presents a solid narrative. This type of reader for Paul that Annie embodies "loves stories without having the slightest interest in the mechanics of making them."[173] This textual avarice, burgeoning on the fetishization of story, weaves Paul into a strangely delicate spider's web with Annie, a strange experience of dependence where Paul tries to write what he thinks Annie may want to read, but is in turn caught off guard by her critic. Later in *Misery* Paul falls for what he has

[168] Stephen King, *Misery* (Chatham, Kent: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987) 23.
[169] King, ibid.
[170] King, 37.
[171] King, 69.
[172] King, ibid. Capitals-: King's.
[173] King, ibid.

come to interpret as Annie's better judgement of his work. When showing her the first draft of *Misery's Return*, Annie considers the writing of the book beautiful but the plotting "a cheat"[174], insisting Paul change how he writes the character's surprise return from fatality. Annie is convinced that Paul is cheating his audience by returning tropes already used in previous novels and that his readership will catch him out as being repetitive and unconvincing. This initially casts doubt for Paul on Annie's status as Paul's constant reader. However, Paul eventually resorts to, as Annie describes, "playing fair" with the feasibilities of narratives.[175] Paul begins to read what Annie reads in his own self-maligned fiction: an authenticity in providing for the story a sense of belief and believability. Paul's Constant Reader, then is not Eliot's modernist "brother", one is both enemy and familial, strangely both antagonized and paramour, to whom he finds his own work increasingly indebted. That Annie is on the verge of actually wounding and/or ending Paul's life implies a new kind of threat to the author/reader relationship. Here in King's paranoia, not just careers, but lives, are thought to be on the line, as *Misery* provokes an assessment of self-reflexivity in the work of a writer not usually associated with postmodern narratology. By the late 1980's King was associated with a string of successful novels set in the fictional town of Derry, Maine and its suburbs, where the primary focus is of exploring an undercovering of the Gothic in pre-countercultural North America, the early 1960's of King's youth. A genre writer whose work and criticism evoke a considerable passion for and dedication to horror, King was up until the publication of *Misery* seemingly untroubled by his status as the world's bestselling horror writer. King can in this sense be understood as a type warmly satirized by Chabon in *Wonder Boys*, an August Van Zorn updated for the late twentieth century, a successful writer of the kind of Gothic tropes that his character Paul Sheldon describes grown unmoored. The first striking shift in *Misery* is a move towards a fear of the reader which then moves to an appraisal, then a dependency. This isn't the kind of observer-hero narrative of 1990s American fiction that Adam Kelly examines in terms of genre however, but of narrative direction. To discuss Kelly's view here is to discuss an author figure who reads the hero for the purposes of plot and thematic concern; in King's book what is of central concern is how Paul Sheldon first dismisses then reappraises Annie's concern for story over the dazzlement of writerly technique, and how he becomes dependent on Annie's reading to regain confidence in his work. Paul Sheldon is concerned with how he is being perceived as a writer

[174] King, 116.
[175] King, 118.

in ways that overshadow his dedication to or interest in his literary output. The Misery Chastain novels have made his fortune, but Paul Sheldon wants to be taken *seriously.* In doing so, by murdering his beloved literary heroine and replacing her with a complex, experimental literary novel, he risks losing a readership that he is dismissive towards, but whom he is also dependent on to feel validated, even accepted, as a writer worthy of an audience's attention. This narrative idea of where intention and power in narrative lies, essentially "breaking up" the idea of author as outside observer.[176] The author, in *Misery*, is observed physically, his writing mapping itself to the idea of what a captive, or in Annie Wilkes's a *captor*, audience expects. The seductive trappings of readerly acclaim suggested by King, at once both enemy and closest confidant, suggest there is a willingness to accept the image of a writer's role as entertainer here. *Misery* is chilling, but also strangely comforting in how the novel weds intent and expectation, the audience for King acting as a third presence in the text, outside of writer and of theme but always suggesting the ways in which a narrative is to be received.

The sense of an uneasy reflexivity is equally apparent in Chabon's *Wonder Boys.* Not only has Grady Tripp found in Sara Gaskell an ideal constant reader, but also a lover for whom Grady's writing made him a "manufacturer of her particular drug of choice."[177] Grady flatters himself with having an intoxicating hold over Sara, his "ideal reader" who read his first book "long before" they have met, and who through his own "good luck "also wants to sleep with him.[178] The language Grady uses to describe the woman who is closest to his affection and work, throwaway terms that sound like the boasts of an errant teenage buffoon, are but small tokens of defense against the real hold that Sara exacts on Grady's personal life and his professional career. The wife of the University Dean who has employed Grady throughout his meagre attempts to finish *Wonder Boys*, the novel he has been putting off in order to give fuller attention to his extramarital exploits, Sara is both muse for and potential executioner of Grady's literary standing. The language that Grady uses when speaking to Sara, all grandiloquent statements of enduring romance, stands in contrast to how he thinks of her as essentially a fan, as opposed to a benefactor. Here Grady and Paul Sheldon's contrasting dependencies on their readers works ironically alongside their dismissal of those same readers, all the while they nevertheless implore them to prolong their roles as constant, ideal

[176] Chabon, 1995, 39.
[177] Chabon, 1995, 39.
[178] Chabon, 1995, 40.

readers as a means to bolster trust in their own narrative intentions, but in other ways implore them to prolong their roles as constant, ideal readers as a means for themselves as authors to trust their own narrative intentions.

A crucial distinction in *Wonder Boys* is how Grady's idea of his literary legacy is also navigated through his libidinal desires. Not only is Sara Gaskell the model for his "ideal reader", but his student Hannah Green also comes into focus as the constant reader to stir his novel to completion during a period of estrangement from Sara. Hannah is a talented and attractive Gen X writer taking one of Grady's classes. She conflates her idea of Grady as mentor and friend by socializing after class with him and other college alumni, allowing him to buy her drinks as payment in kind for reading Grady's first draft of *Wonder Boys.* Grady's improper sexual intentions for Hannah become ludicrously disillusioned when she starts dating another student, cynically referred to by Grady as "the inevitable Jeff",[179] a handsome, jocular age-appropriate companion for Hannah. This thorny reference to Hannah's chosen romantic partner strikes a volley against Hannah's independence, the idea of losing Hannah as a romantic partner given almost tragic status by its "inevitability." Grady also loses Hannah as a reader, a double blow which throws Grady's sense of writerly superiority over his peers a significant blow. When answering Grady as to what she thought of the first draft of his novel, Hannah inquires as to Grady's recreational marijuana use. Grady's constant, if benign, drug habit is the only reason Hannah can account for the rapid narrative experimentation and scope of *Wonder Boys*, a novel where entire eras of history are described without any signifying of their importance to the plot which Hannah claims" doesn't have anything to do with your *characters."*[180] Grady's tendency to fill his novel's pages with epic Homeric descriptiveness while allowing chapters to go by where "*there are no characters at all"*[181] seems to Hannah an unforgivable betrayal of a writer's duty to story. Grady is crushed by this and reads the moment when Hannah hands the manuscript back to him as though she is "returning a ring."[182] The romantic commingling of author and ideal reader is here dashed, owing to what Hannah sees as a betrayal of trust, and what Grady interprets as a cruelty to his vision for the novel. What hurts Grady most is that he now knows that Hannah will not succumb to his physical romantic intentions as he has lost her psychological admiration for

[179] Chabon, 1995, 299.
[180] Chabon, 1995, 302. Italics: Chabon.
[181] Chabon, ibid.
[182] Chabon, 1995, 303.

his work. That Hannah never reciprocated Grady's attraction to her does not register with Grady, the bond between besotted author and reader paramour has been broken with Hannah's critique of *Wonder Boys.*

Hannah's adherence to the authorly fidelity to story and character proves a key insertion in *Wonder Boys*. Chabon appears to ask here if readership, particularly the readership offered by university-attending readers in the 1990s as represented by Hannah Green, given up on postmodern poetics? Chabon's later adherence to story and character, as well as his rendering of historical moments and, indeed, postmodern experimentation, appears to be cast into doubt by one of his own characters in *Wonder Boys*. Chabon here senses the kind of aesthetic disillusionment that mirrors the way Sam feels about comic books and the politics of postwar American life in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay.* Aesthetics and politics for Chabon seem to let the individual down at various times in Chabon's turn of the millennium novels, dependencies are often cast off. If Kelly's definition of an observer narrator hinges on the hero, Chabon hinges, through a re-engagement with story as *being* the aesthetic, a new contract with the reader, a once sworn off relationship in modernist or postmodernist poetics is one returned to dutifully, as if the fear of losing a readership appears as damning as the fear of losing the means to a craft.

Conclusion

Exulting in metafictional playfulness and ironic wit, *Wonder Boys* is a liminal text in Chabon's fiction. However, the melancholy approach to reading failure and the keepsakes of history, of how the novel presents memory as storing hopes and curiosities that persist from youthful innocence to cynical adulthood presents the first real inclination towards reading historiographic narrative in Chabon. *Wonder Boys* emerges at a time when critical considerations of American fiction started to anticipate the waning of influence postmodernism's highly style, evident in the ethics of Delillo. A move towards affect in narrative works as the 1990's drew to a close, an idea arriving out of American art and film criticism before it developed an influence in literary studies, was instrumental in the un-naming of postmodern tropes in this era. The gradual erasure of postmodern identifiers in the works of critics like Ngai and Brinkema, who nevertheless insist that registries of emotive labour and hybrid genre influence coincide in the texts they discuss in ways that can be seen as fitting postmodernism's heterogenous experimentalism, exhibits a turn towards an increasing depiction of visceral feelings and stimulation as opposed psychological overstimulation. The balance of the emotive and the cerebral coincides in *Wonder Boys,* a

novel which stands out amongst the cannon of American campus novels appearing since the 1960s in that the novel hosts a hybridity of style which sees it sit between two generations : the postmodern writers of DeLillo's 1960s generation and the increasingly traditionalist literary views demonstrated by a 1990s generation who came of age reading fiction in the age of postmodernism's critical influence. With the approach of a new millennium emerged senses of ending and of beginnings in American fiction, either example cutting a divide across the generations of postwar American authors on where American fiction would turn next : towards dystopia or renewal.

My next chapter turns towards a reading of intrusive narrative as a key concept in Chabon's millennial fiction, one which demonstrates the increased utilizing of postmodern aesthetics in Chabon's writing appearing after *Wonder Boys.*

Chapter 2

Intrusive Narrative: Reading Artificiality and Authenticity in Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction.

This chapter examines how in three key Michael Chabon novels published in the first decade of the 21st century the themes of artificiality and authenticity become indicative of a turn towards a realist or sincere style of postmodern fiction. A tendency to ascribe what in this thesis I refer to "millennial fiction", within the context of approaching a literary sincerity by critics and writers who had grown unattracted to/distracted from the prioritizing of aesthetics over ethics in postmodernist fiction has appeared as the dominant discourse in works by authors deemed "post-postmodern." Essentially fiction published in the at the turn of the millennium whose primary concerns are a reading of history and the present from viewpoints that are contemporary of the era of the work's publication dates, concerning texts that focus towards demonstrating literary sincerity more overtly located in the non-fiction of David Foster Wallace than in the novels of Wallace or other major author who became associated in the early 2000's with exploring literary sincerity in their work. To divorce the literary fiction of Michael Chabon entirely from postmodernism, from the experimental and humor filled literary pastiches of Chabon's influences such as Thomas Pynchon and Robert Coover, would be an all too reductive academic analysis of the complex literary and cultural themes that drive Chabon's writing. The themes of history and the family unit as first evidenced in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000), which continue through to the psychologically harrowing and mournful reconsideration of the noir detective novel and of the affiliative Holocaust memory text that is *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*. This era of Chabon's fiction, culminating in the ambitious social novel of ideas *Telegraph Avenue,* sees the appearance of fiction which demonstrates the recurring schemata that has Chabon progress from a novelist associated with entertaining attempts on writing the postmodern campus novel to an author who negotiates wider themes concerning the literary and the social in a postmodern, increasing heterogenous United States millennial context. In terms of literary form, in this chapter I argue that these thematic concerns which Chabon undertakes in his writing from the 2000 publication of *Kavalier & Clay* are signified by the intrusion of literary narration, which functions in these texts as a marker of a calculated attempt at interjecting what are on the surface narratives that are concerned with more traditional plot devices of realist fiction with an experimental, postmodern recontextualization of narrative purpose. By inserting a secondary, omniscient narrative which often ironizes the central storytelling aspects of these texts, Chabon questions ideas of the nature of the authentic when

expressed in writings that inherently are the basis of an authorial agenda, in ways that encumber difficulties in reading these texts as straightforward expressions of the sincere. This chapter argues that the emergence of consciously defined sites of authenticity through artificial spectacle, combined with a defiance of direct literary categorisation in Chabon's fiction from 2000 challenges the assumed "boundary lines"[i] [183]which stop literary realism and other imaginative genres of fiction from co-existing on the shelves of contemporary bookstores. The emergence of this shift in Chabon's fiction towards subjectivity reflects a mood in 21st-century American writing that witnessed a conscious return to omniscient narrative. What separates Chabon's fiction from American writers whose work has also seen a return to omniscience is the recurring insistence that renditions of authenticity and artificiality, of the realist and the imaginative, are more closely bound together in narratives of contemporary life to an extent that problematizes any return to a wholly realistic, "authentic" narrative perspectives.

The use of omniscient narration in Chabon ‘s post-2000 fiction[184]offers a conspicuous treatment of literary dualism which challenges critical assumptions relating to metafictional realist prose. The treatment of ideas of authenticity and the role irony plays in undermining authentic idealization is a central focus of Chabon's texts of this era. Authenticity[185] is displayed in Chabon's work through characters who show determinably politicised identities via their attitudes towards popular culture: its production and reification and their judgements about it—skepticism or adoption. Authenticity in this sense mirrors David Boyle's conception of a renewed interest in the Real as denoted by the "authentic" properties of products and lifestyle choices representing a demand for what appears to be "natural, human and decaying"[186] in contemporary life and culture. Boyle identifies this insistence on authenticity particularly in choices made by consumers who have come of age with modern conveniences and the increased globalizing influence of large corporations. In Chabon's post-2000 fiction, characters' appropriation of authenticity through these kinds of associations leads to the power of comic books, vinyl records and films/television shows to validate the myth that these are unselfconscious, sincere, and ephemeral ideals. The contradiction in manifesting

[183] Chabon, Trickster in a Suit of Lights: Thoughts on the Modern Short Story" in *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing* (London, Forth Estate, 2010) 10.
[184] Michael Chabon, *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (New York: Random House 2000, 2012) *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (London, 4th Estate, 2007, 2010) and *Telegraph Avenue* (London, 4th Estate: 2012, 2013)
[185] [185] See entry for "Authenticity", defined as the "condition of significant, emotionally appropriate living” *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* 2nd Edition, Ed. Simon Blackburn. (Oxford University Press, 2008)
[186] David Boyle, *Authenticity*: *Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life* (London: Flamingo) 2003, 287.

these ideals and sentiments mediated through these fictitious and artificial means of production undermines the validity of these attitudes. However, rather than insisting on representations of artificiality as means of critiquing culture, Chabon insists on representing the real in what he terms the "postmodern world"[187] navigated in his fiction as a means of discussing attitudes of politized resistance. The settings of these texts investigate readings of authenticity in eras that see the real threats of genocide and globalization affect the stability of communities. By insisting on a renewal of interest in accessing or representing the real through his character's observation of popular culture, Chabon's post-2000 fiction reflects Boyle's identification of "the power of overlooked details"[188] as the crucial recurring motif in representations of authenticity in culture and advertising since the turn of the millennium. The power in what is interrupted by the artificial in Chabon is, like the advertising campaigns detailed in Boyle's study, often allowed the credence of authenticity to highlight a lack of or desire for the real in the politically fractious societies that provide the novels' settings. The New York of pre-American intervention in *Kavalier and Clay*, the politically endangered Jewish republic of Sitka in the alternative history universe of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* and a racially diverse Oakland of the Bush II era all feature characters who exhibit political resistance by embracing not only what is "real, worn and human" in the retro culture they seek out and consume but also "what is somehow deformed or outcast"—be this failing political causes, the plight of the victims of totalitarian regimes, queer characters and characters on the margins of society, or ideals of a racially harmonious society which are deemed antiquated in the age of postmodernism.

The insistence on retro popular culture as the platform for which ideals of authenticity are discussed in Chabon's fiction requires the reader to view the postmodern world as one identified by a simultaneity where contradicting developments, political challenges and social ethics coexist. As Chabon stated in an interview with *The Guardian's* John Mullan in January 2017: "the world is large enough to contain both Batman and Auschwitz, and in my work I want to reflect this contradiction."[189] Inherent Chabon's desire to represent the contradiction in the popularity of modern superhero myths existing alongside the historical realities of politically motivated violence in his work is a subsequent desire to blur understandings of the

---

[187] Chabon, in Joseph Dewey *Understanding Michael Chabon* (Lexington, University of South Carolina Press: 2014)

[188] Boyle, *ibid.*

[189] Chabon, Interview with John Mullan, *The Guardian Books Podcast*, 10/1/2017, Broadcast 10/02/17 https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2017/feb/10/michael-chabon-on-the-amazing-adventures-of-kavalier-and-clay-books-podcast

authentic and the artificial in ways that disrupt a direct reading of the fiction as either entirely realist or fantastical.

Exemplified by discussions of the place of authenticity in concepts or creations of artificial means, the fiction I discuss in this chapter is suffused with attempts to disrupt direct literary classification. This tendency is representative of an intrusive omniscient narrative voice in Chabon that regularly distracts the reader from considering the texts to be solely works of fiction. Often prescribing an element of historiography or biographical writing which interprets a nostalgic yet authoritative version of past events, memory and identity in Chabon's novels from 2000 are subjects rendered in a style which reflects Walter Benjamin's concept of the "redemptive powers"[190] apparent in historical writing. Chabon's narrator post-2000 is metafictional and ironic, but this narrator essentially exists outside of the text. In this sense, the use of the appearance of an omniscient narrator to both ironize and historicize the emotional impact of the novel's events represents a shift in Chabon's writing which reflects the "radical break" in subjectivity that Jameson[ii] considers the main characteristic of postmodern writing. However, it is the examination of the redemptive qualities inherent in forms of protest and resistance, best exemplified by the reification of pop-culture texts in the fiction Chabon publishes after the turn of the millennium, that problematizes the "crisis of representation"[191] that Jameson ascribes to postmodern fiction. By experimenting with the direct categorization of narrative style, Chabon problematizes the roles of direct authorial intervention into narrative, effecting a reading of his fiction as arguably postmodernist in tone while letting characters travel amid territories of thematic concern and emotional relationships which otherwise exemplify the style of a realist approach.

This recurring juxtaposition of artificiality and authenticity posits a desire in the fiction Chabon produces from the turn of the twenty-first century for a re-engagement with social concerns and emotional connectivity. The various strategies of omniscience Chabon uses to juxtapose ideas of artificiality and authenticity first make an appearance in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay.* Through the use of footnotes which intrude on the otherwise straightforward examples of literary narrative, Chabon uses an omniscient authorial voice to introduce philosophical meditations on ephemeral products: the first edition of *Amazing Midget Radio Comics #1*, which sees the debut of the duo's most popular character,

---

[190] Fredric Jameson, Introduction to Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge Trans.* Geoff Bennington, Brian Massumi (Manchester University Press) 1984, vii.
[191] Jameson, in Lyotard: 1984, x.

"The Escapist." The novel is divided into six parts, an audacity of literary structure which more closely resembles a science fiction novel or the standard five acts of classic great tragedy than a realist novel, which alludes to Chabon's attempt at creating a space in literary fiction that is sufficiently experimental that it appears to "derive equivalent power and capacity" to delight from flouting, mocking, inverting" and from ultimately breaking or ignoring the rules."[192] The omniscient narrator, whose presence indicates an author writing in the contemporary present tense who, in turn, by interrupting a scene written in the present tense of the character, historicises it. This omniscient narrator describes New York in a footnote that records the future popularity of the comic book the character Joe Kavalier has just finished in the description of the scene. This footnote thus interrupts the temporality and authenticity of the scene's present-tense narration. Describing the New York in which Joe completed the first edition of "The Escapist" character, as "that brutal and innocent city"[193], the omniscient narrator can be seen to fall into clichés of historical writing that tends to both romanticize and exaggerate the past for simultaneously positive and negative effects. The result is one not an authentic rendition of the realities of life in the past, but an artificial language that is pieced together for effect alone, like the newly designed façade of reproductions of buildings that claim to represent classic architectural styles.

What is "brutal and innocent" about the city of New York in 1940 exists in the nostalgic memory that the omniscient author-narrator attributes to the creation story of "The Escapist". The description emerges not from the mouth of Josef Kavalier, but from this omniscient narrative voice which reports from outside the lived events of the history this voice mythologises. By mimicking the upbeat verve of Sam Clay's comic book prose, the artificiality of the assumption that New York City in 1940 represented an "innocent" era in the city's history is made transparent by the inclusion of this description in the form of a footnote. Lacking a direct quotation from any of the characters involved in The Escapist's creation, the footnote describes how the New York branch of Sotheby's "offered a rare copy of *Amazing Midget Comics* #1[194]in very good condition, "three generations removed from that jittery year" of 1940, in "that brutal yet innocent city".[195]Disclosing that this first edition copy sold at auction for $42,200, this description of New York essentially becomes another bullet point in a sales pitch, reifying the object's origins by asserting its economic value.

---

[192] Chabon: 2010, 11
[193] Chabon, 2000, 168.
[194] Chabon: 2000, 169.
[195] Chabon, *ibid.*

What the footnote is selling, by way of the omniscient, documentarian author researching the history of the Kavalier and Clay partnership, is the 'aura' or essence of this rare first edition. This reification, this foregrounding of the essence of what *Amazing Midget Comics* #1 conveys according to the comic historian whose omniscient narration is compounded by the use of the footnote, reflects Benjamin's analysis of the essence or "aura" that is applicable to an original work of art. In *Kavalier and Clay,* and recurrent in examples in Chabon's later fiction, the application of Benjamin's analysis of the 'aura' of an artwork is the guiding theorem which informs the familiar recognition of the ideology and personal challenges made figurative in a piece of visual representation. An understanding of how ideas of aura, authenticity and artificiality are negotiated in Benjamin is useful in considering similar ideas alluding to the imagery of popular culture referents and what these mean to characters in Chabon. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," a commentary on the history of art criticism in which Benjamin asserts that in "even the most perfect reproduction"[196] of an artwork there is a definable lacking element—its presence "in time and space"[197]—the essay presents the historiographic narrative as the epicentre of debates of authenticity. Where and when an original is produced, and the presence of an original in the state where it was intended to be shown, is for Benjamin "the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity"[198]. While it is difficult not to put aside the epistemological reasoning at the centre of the analysis provided by Benjamin, lending aura to the descriptive purposes of defining objects which alludes to origin narratives that are almost theological, thinking on this point leads me back to how Benjamin's description of aura vs. reproduction in artworks can read in terms of the cover of *Amazing Midget Radio Comics #1*. Chabon's intrusive narrator in this scene provides the footnote lending the historical context for the auratic qualities if this first edition. The fact that the edition procured such an excessive figure at an auction house as synonymous with art in the public imagination as the New York branch of Sotheby's. Fifty years after the edition first appeared, the cover is presented by the authenticating comics historian in a way that makes it synonymous with what was expressed by the private thoughts of Joe Kavalier before the publication process occurred.

A simultaneous avowal of an image of popular culture from both its creator and of a fanbase unlikely to have been alive at the time of the creation of *Amazing Midget Radio #1* calls into question the appropriation of trans-temporal epistemological ideas onto ephemeral products.

---

[196] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*:1992, 214.
[197] Benjamin, *Ibid.*
[198] Benjamin: 1992, 215.

Because the ideas and images put forward by the comic are made so readily available via advances in technological printing and at a low economic cost since the time of their publication, it is not difficult to understand the trans-generational durability of their respective influence. The constructions of the classic novel's and mid-century comic's plot are not outside the parameters of mutual exchange; each echoes the other in terms of how the centrality of the hero as moral arbiter is viewed in the space of the work's historical setting. The terms of these concurrent relations to the hero's presence in each are featured via a.) the comic's superheroes overcoming the constraining obstacles of physics to thwart evil and effect great change in society or b.) the novel of the realistic hero who attempts to overcome the constraints of time and technical disadvantage to muster an entertaining narrative and effect more conservative societal change. In? the place of aura, however, Benjamin accords a loss that is more prevalent in one of the forms. If one assumes "the eliminated element in the term 'aura'" assumes a work of art that incorporates more wholly the image as opposed to the text, then, as disparate in terms of formal appliance yet relatable in terms of epistemological concerns that works of art ranging from the painting to the novel are, it is the image-based artwork that "withers"[199]through the process of mechanical reproduction that. That is, it in effect loses the aura that at the time of its creation made it memorable and relatable. Acknowledging that the withering of aura in symbolic artworks is created by the availability of mechanical reproductions, Benjamin asses that an ironic situation has arisen out of the examples of "the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly," [200]resulting in the demand for images of symbolic referentiality. This desire for "classic" artworks that define epochal moments and generational sentiments is thus the very reason for the withering of these images as they lose their symbolic value.

Benjamin's discussion of aura as a defining property appears to Nick Peim to "refer to the excess of meaning that attaches to any symbolic entity"[201]one which necessarily points "beyond itself" towards historical contexts out of which it has emerged, as symbols are bound to do.[202] For Benjamin, the special status attributed to an object which bears the signature implied by its aura, of a historical significance epitomized by the spectator's recognition of its being an image whose presence alludes to its reproducibility, stands for what is not only its

[199] Benjamin: 1992, 217.
[200] Benjamin, ibid.
[201] Nick Peim, "Walter Benjamin in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Aura in Education: A Rereading of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 41.3, (Oxford: Blackwell) 2007, 364-369. 365.
[202] [202] Peim, *ibid.*

passing durability to the inexpert eye buts intuits its "testimony to the history which it has experienced".[203]In the Empire novelties scene Chabon plays with the reader's grasp of chronology and knowledge of the ensuing "classic" status of this first edition: the footnote implies that the comic was an epoch-defining success, yet suspense is nevertheless created by how the central narrative ends on a cliffhanger, a point of ominous suspense itself an outmoded device of stalling/disrupting narrative closure. In playing with these shifting chronological contexts relating to the reception of the comic, Chabon traces the task of durability that Benjamin ascribes to the authentic artwork. This trial of an artwork's aura is defined as the shaping the "authenticity of a thing" which is the "essence of all that is transmittable from its beginning."[204] This reading of Benjamin would ascribe a similar registry of ideational representation with the image between generations. In this sense, comic fans reading about the high price the edition fetched at auction, felt toward the cover as Joe did himself, affected by the political and personal implications behind the creation of his artwork. By storming out of the offices of Empire novelties without a definitive answer as to whether the firm will print the edition, Sam and Joe perform a suspense that doesn't need to take place. The ironic moment instead is produced by the reader's understanding of how the scene will impose no obvious disruption of the cousin's progress into the comic industry. Any pause for thought on the part of the reader will ascertain that the existence of the comic book throughout the war years has been determined in the novel's opening pages, and that a cliffhanger acts as a mere stopgap to next week's episode on popular television shows, which takes an overused cliché in visual culture and places it in a novel published in 2000. The effect this ironic moment has, occurring in this narrative setting via the footnote and the cliffhanger, is instigated by Chabon's intrusion, inserting the idea of the significant, defining aura retrospectively placed on a work that is the result of a mass-manufactured process. In this sense, Chabon addresses how, when, and why an original piece of art took shape before being released into the world and describes its historicization in the form of a footnote. The definitive nature of both approaches, the significance of meaning attached to an original work of the creative imagination, and the process of the withering of aura that occurs according to Benjamin during mechanical reproduction, seem at first contradictory. On closer inspection, both instances insist that even amid artificial means of the reproduction of an idea, the authentic aura of its original conception at least, ephemerally, existed.

[203] Benjamin: 1992, 215.
[204] Benjamin, ibid.

The alienating loss of meaning in technological reproductions of artworks, alerted in Benjamin's 1927 essay, is made brutally apparent for Joe when, after briefly celebrating what he considers to be the success of *Amazing Radio #1*, overhears a radio news report on the forced deportations of Jews in Europe to labour camps in Germany. Attesting that the "surge of triumph when he finished a story was always fleeting", the omniscient narrator tells us that rather than showing Americans sympathetic to the plight of Jews in Europe that an American attack on Hitler could be effective by means of a comic book cover, Joe's creation. “The Escapist” character exerts Tom Mayflower exerts no real indication of heroic revolt against political suppression. His comic-book hero is instead "an impossible champion, ludicrous and above all, *imaginary."*[205] By concluding that his protest against Nazi aggression via the creation of a comic book is practically insufficient, "ludicrous" even. However, as a means of engaging with the conceptions of the authentic according to Boyle, the production of *The Escapist* allows for a reading of "the power of the overlooked".[206] It is not Joe's fault that the United States has of the moment described in the scene decided not to intervene in ridding Europe of the threat of Nazi domination, The overlooked detail of an engaged response to Hitler, as violent and direct as it an authentic emotive response to Nazi violence, cements the power of the image, indicative of an era when comics aficionados, like Joe, are leaving their adolescence and making the transition towards adult concerns.

The essence of original art presents the comic as an artefact of an innocent era, innocent in terms that it exists as a signifier of an era that only fleeting memory recalls. No evidence suggests that Joe, worried about his family's fate in Europe under the control of Nazi occupiers, frustrated at a lack of American empathy towards the plight of European Jews, considered the period of his illustrating the first edition featuring The Escapist an innocent chapter of his life. The footnote is an example of metafictional duplicity, contrived by an identifiably authorial voice whom the reader can assume is an ironic representation of Chabon as the author at work within the text. The image on the cover of *The Escapist's* first edition, however, serves to hark back to Joe's life as a trainee magician in Prague. Benjamin places in his essay a reminder that before artworks were hailed as pieces of art in prehistoric communities, they took the narrative of creations of magic.[207] The origin story of Joe Kavalier as an artist of epoch-referencing images then, began from more of a perspective of

[205] Chabon: 2000, 168.
[206] Boyle, ibid.
[207] Benjamin, *ibid.*

the practical use of creative abilities to effect social change (prehistoric art as magic) than as merely a means of escapism (the latter-day charge towards modern art/non-realist fiction). In objectifying the first edition of *Amazing Midget Radio Comics* as representing a cultural reconstruction of New York in 1940 as a "brutal yet innocent city", this authorial voice itself constructs a New York of the imagination. The actual work of art in question, the comic book written by a newly arrived émigré unfamiliar with many of the city's realities, is championed as a representation of reality as 'innocent'. The omniscient, documentarian author, is barely familiar with the chronology of the subject's lived experiences, but nevertheless contextualizes these experiences through what are the workaday souvenirs, the economic labour, represented by the production of ideas in a specified time period. The essence of the comic book as a work of art is responsible for the omniscient narrator's interpretation of its given historical era. Any interpretation of the sincere testimony of the artist responsible for the discussed work only provides an appendage for how the work itself is attributed with an historical significance. Here Chabon intentionally transgresses the line between history and interpretation, demonstrating within this footnote a layering of narration. This omniscient intrusion into the origin of Joe's artwork sees Chabon create a palimpsest, prompting the reader to consider whose voice makes the judgment of how memories are formed. Omniscient narration, a technique more readily associated with late 18th Century realism than experimental postmodernist fiction, is indicative of a shift towards historicity in Chabon. Paul Dawson's analysis of why a return in omniscience fiction saw a significant resurgence in American fiction in the early 2000s considers a reaction to the widespread first-person narratives that had dominated American fiction during the 1990s. By the 1990s, this style of narrative voice had become synonymous with the ultra-contemporary, highly ironic fiction of writers like Bret Easton Ellis, who, in novels such as *American Psycho*, displays a particularly postmodern sensibility towards metafictional first-person narration through an obsessive detail that examines the shallow surface of the consumer-driven present. Ellis's Bateman is a successful Wall Street investment banker who spends his evenings murdering the socially downtrodden and his colleagues for sheer pleasure, a social vampire who intuits that morality and authenticity are cultural irrelevancies in 1980s Manhattan. However, the novel problematizes the validity of the narrator's version of events throughout the novel; the protagonist Patrick Bateman is often mistaken for another person who works at his firm, provoking the reader to infer that either Bateman is less significant than he thinks or the narrative itself is work of fiction.

Novels of a particularly postmodern bent such as *American Psycho* exhibit what Dawson considers to be the low regard in which author-narration is held, in an era of American fiction where the postmodernist mantra that "claims to authority are suspect"[208] and metafictional perspectives are the dominant forms of fiction. Such forms have rendered the omniscient narrator "an anachronism when he is found in the works of the past and scorned when he appears in contemporary work."[209] This two-fold dismissal of omniscience that Dawson finds recurrent in the postmodern American fiction of the 1980s and 1990s, and in the authors of this period's constant rejection of past literature and outmoded, parochial authors, suggests that the re-emergence of a comparatively more conservative approach to omniscient narration is itself a rebuttal to what had by the turn of the millennium had become essentialisms of a postmodernist kind. Dawson asks how readers and critics of contemporary fiction will approach this return to omniscience, to narratives that "employ an ostensibly redundant twentieth century form in the twenty-first century" prompting a question as to whether these texts are "conservative or nostalgic by virtue of their form?"[210] A categorization of omniscient narrative as necessarily conservative seems overly reductive, particularly when applied to contemporary fiction that explores the historical attitudes of a period. This line of thinking from Dawson suggests a demarcation of the division between realist and postmodernist fiction (and the subsequent revival of realism) as emblematic of the project of postmodernism. The revival of omniscience in American fiction at the turn of the millennium represents "a further development and refinement" of what Dawson sees as "the technical experiments of postmodernism."[211] On Dawson's analysis of the revival of omniscience, the nostalgic idealisations by the intruding authorial voice in Chabon's *Kavalier and Clay*, dreaming up a "brutal, yet innocent" New York City he never lived to experience, is a conscious attempt to register the experience of this particularly postmodernist interpretation of reading the past. All readings of the past for those who have lived outside of its timeframe are by nature readings that historicize rather than consider the experiences of others, attempt to interpret what is formed by reading other people's memories and incorporating this kind of authentic description ("brutal, yet innocent") is a fault of the experience of living in a postmodern age, a trope that renders as much of a decentred subjectivity as does an intense A suspicion towards historically centred concepts in metafictional writing.

---

[208] Paul Dawson: "The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction", *Narrative*, 17, 2 (May. 2009) 143-161; 143
[209] Dawson, *ibid*.
[210] Dawson, *ibid*.
[211] Dawson, ibid.

The idea that nostalgia such as that evidenced in the footnote of Chabon's authorial narrator in *Kavalier and Clay* reflects a Benjaminian irony relating to a desire of consumers in the age of mass medial reproduction to bring themselves together "spatially and humanly" by proclaiming the valuable aura to be found in a piece of reproduced art. Yet it is the desire of the footnote to somehow ascertain an authentic vision of the past. By attempting to replicate a narrative that may have been the "real" perspective of the characters at the time of the artwork's creation, Chabon strives here to make a historically nuanced point in describing a sense of purpose behind an otherwise seemingly trivial, seemingly non-political novelty object. The first edition of the comic book, sold at Sotheby's at such an inflated valuation, demonstratesthe genuine feeling of worth attached to the mass-produced object; if its inherent value has "withered" this is a question of personal preference rather than established critique. The historicization of the comic, through its museum-like display and auction, historicizes its era and its production, and although historicization may be a narrative of interest to writers of postmodern metafiction, historicization is the tool used by Chabon's narrator to leverage an argument as to what makes a comic book culturally important. This kind of retrospective argumentation lends *Amazing Midget Radio Comics #1* an aura of authenticity in the way that items of retro popular culture are attested to represent achievements of the past generally. Specifically, in Michael Chabon's post-2000 fiction this reification of popular culture items, and the arguments that emerge out of what are the potential benefits and the possible harm done by cultural reification, are the objects of inquiry into an understanding of what is left that is authentic in a postmodern world whose details are mired in artificiality. To use Boyle's interpretation, the comic is of course "worn", its lack of a crisp, damage-free, aesthetically pleasing façade the opposite of items synonymous with a postmodern age of self-conscious artificiality, yet it is the very "natural" evidence of its "decaying" that associate it with a more "human" need for the stamp of authenticity in what is chosen, historically, to be valued. That the comic book itself presents an artificial, non-realist means to a political reaction based in 1940, entirely on Josef's *feelings* towards the Nazis rather than as evidence as yet of any real harm done to his family, contributes to the novelty factor associated with comic books. The position taken by the punching Escapist on the comic's cover is one not to be taken seriously by a mature audience. The contradictions inherent in this hindsight reading of the omniscient narrator figure contributes to the novel's recurrent themes of simultaneity, and of feeling the capability for having dual perspectives on issues such as identity. These contradictions also generate a nostalgic feeling that the past represents a narrative that is missing in the present age: is it possible to read an authenticity inherent in visual and fictive

pop culture of the past, now that the effects of postmodernism are omnipresent in contemporary American culture? The questions posed by this kind of thinking are reflected in the blurring of genres in the novels of Chabon's post-2000 fiction: the Bildungsroman represented by the immigration narrative of Joe Kavalier meets the biographical study of the narrator that occurs simultaneously throughout *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*. This genre-crossing problematizes the categorization of the text along the lines of genre, and even purpose. Chabon's desire to "mock and invert" the rules of genre thus derives a powerful commentary on what happens when the "boundary lines" drawn to demarcate genres, genres that proscribe realist, fabulist or dystopian narratives, become blurred, and reflect the state of simultaneity in American fiction in the 2000s—an era when omniscient narration became no longer an embarrassing, outmoded technique, but where the influence of postmodernism had not entirely given sway to the "New Realists" seeking authenticity as articulate by Boyle's interpretation of the early 2000s marketplace. This combination of styles, inherent in Chabon's rejection of easily demarcated boundaries between realist and speculative (and spectacular) modes of narrative, results in a synthesis between identifiably historical and contemporary interpretations. This synthesis of styles itself acts as a commentary on the power of narrative to reflect the transitory, ephemeral, and overlooked details that comprise the human experience.

When writing of the influence of Benjamin's writing on his work in 2005,[212] Chabon discusses the differing types of narrative style discussed in "The Storyteller", Benjamin's 1935 essay.[213] Attempting to "employ the distinction" Benjamin makes "between the 'trading seaman, the storyteller who fetches his miracle tales, legends and tale stories from abroad"—a character whose adventurous narrative style is anecdotal. A writer like Chabon, who displays an interest in a postmodern literature whose dominant influence arrives out of European critical theory, and the realism of the "resident tiller of the soil", who "homely lore" attaches to itself a stamp of authenticity which serves as "the useful stories of a community." The realism of the "resident tiller of the soil" is not given an authenticating seal or precedence by Chabon. Instead, Chabon co-opts Benjamin's opinion that "the greatest storytellers are those who possess aspects, to some extent, of both characters."[214] The root of this conflation with Benjamin's analysis of the variant narrative authorial styles, and a concurring judgement

[212] The essay "Trickster in a Suit of Light: Thoughts on the Modern Short Story" first appeared as the introduction to *Best American Short Stories 2005* ed. Chabon (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2005)
[213] Benjamin "The Storyteller: Observations on the Work of Nikolai Leskov" in *Illuminations*, 1992, 143-166.
[214] Chabon, *ibid.*

on how the most interesting narrators offer readers a synthesis of styles, might seem contradictory in terms of how both writers approach the tension between representing the authentic and the artificial in their work. The contrast stretches from Benjamin's almost theological "prerequisite of authenticity" to Chabon's postmodern narrative disruptions. However, Chabon's articulation of Benjamin's assessment of the synthesis of narrative styles indicates a declarative preference for the blurring of genre forms in both his own work and Benjamin's, and points to why this shift towards assessment of the real and the authentic occurs in Chabon's work at this point. A point of transition is notable in Chabon through an interest in writing fiction that deals with the transformative effects of culture on identity, at a time that saw a re-interest in historicity and omniscient narrative emerge in American fiction. In Chabon's case, this can be linked to an interest in how Benjamin describes the transformation of visual and narrative culture in the 20th century.

What Chabon manages to reflect throughout the various interior and exterior character struggles in *Kavalier and Clay* is the execution of a synthesis of prose styles which have dominated American fiction since the post-war years. In *American Fiction Since 1940* Tony Hilfer maps the development of American post-war fiction as one that features a shift of thematic concerns in the novel from "social protest to solipsism",[215] a literary era that demonstrates a tendency for politically engaged novels to be superseded in popularity by novels which showed a greater emphasis on existential themes and experimental praxis. This shift towards political solipsism is synonymous, Hilfer claims, with the characterisation of "the postmodernist self", a protagonist who acts not as a politically engaged moral agent but who is "merely the sum of its roles"[216], lacking a political understanding or regard for the position their lives take in a society bereft of any aspirations beyond the impulses of the present. The work of writers such as John Steinbeck, Ralph Ellison and Mary McCarthy evokes what Hilfer describes as a "traditional" realist approach, where their novels aimed to embody the plight of ordinary citizens and socially repressed sections of American society (migrant workers, African Americans, women) to argue a case for greater American social unity. In focusing on the lives of characters facing socially restrictive attitudes, the fiction of traditionally realist American authors expressed a general desire for liberal attitudes to replace Eisenhower-era attitudes of conformity. A novel set in 1940, when conformity was not the dirty word it was for post-war American authors, represents the challenges of making

[215] Tony Hilfer, *American Fiction Since 1940* (New York and London: Longman) 1992, 14.

[216] Hilfer, 1992, 11.

the co-opting of identity synonymous with cultural assimilation, an idea that provides endless promise, but acts also as a process of equally enduring compromise for Chabon's characters.

“Newly Minted American Names” Currencies of Assimilation, Idenity & Escape in Chabon

When an exhausted Joe finishes drawing another labour-intensive edition of *Amazing Radio Midget Comics*, he momentarily forgets his location while staring out the window of Empire Novelties' small studio overlooking the Hudson River. Turning to his cousin to determine his whereabouts, he is reminded that New York City is his current locale, his new sanctuary from Nazi-controlled, old-world Europe. The cousins exchange greetings of mild concern, each adding the new Americanisation of their names as a subtle reminder of where each of them has travelled from to their current, respectable New York City commercial lives.
Transformation of identity, concurrent with changes in home and work locations, is a significant thematic issue throughout *Kavalier and Clay.* Associated throughout the novel with developments in personal progress and financial change, location and assimilation are two concerns that affect characters' views on the opportunities America must offer those who wish to assimilate an American identity. A sense of arriving at a location where history and identity are secondary concerns, where the ability to create an identity synonymous with financial success is a paramount ambition, presents a main objective and a serious frustration for the comic writing cousins. Sam's mother's boarding house in the working-class Jewish borough of Brooklyn is a symbolic point of departure, from poverty, obscurity, and in Joe's case, an escape from the life-threatening Jewish ghetto of Prague. Sam's humble life as a newspaper delivery boy takes a dramatic turn when he finalises a deal to publish the comic, he creates with his cousin Joe. After realising his boyhood dream of becoming a comics author, Joe also adopts an Anglicisation of his name to suit the business surroundings, an Americanisation that his new workplace in midtown Manhattan affords him. At the sound of his newly assumed moniker, the former Samuel Klayman smiles :
Once again, as when he had first enclosed the pair of newly minted American names in a neat inked rectangle of partnership on page 1 of the Escapist's debut, Sammy's belly suffused with an uncomfortable warmth, and he felt his cheeks colour. It was not merely the brush of pride, nor of the unacknowledged delight he too in thus emblematizing his growing attachment to

Joe; he was also moved by a grief, half affectionate, half ashamed, for the loss of Professor von Clay that he had never allowed himself to feel.[217]

This friendly private gesture is the cousins reminding themselves of the new identities each has assumed. To repress the history of personal struggle relating to their experiences of assimilation, with something as direct as a name change, Chabon demonstrates an example of nominative determinism in the way he changes the already comic book-like Klayman ("man of Clay") with its suggestively Jewish etymology, into a name that suggests malleability. Chabon here uses a literary device as old as the novel form, a character's name which mirrors the social perceptions of a character is most obviously identifiable with the title character of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847). In the naming of Bronte's heroine can be seen an opposing personification, one that forces readers to question perceptions in favour of reality --Bronte's Jane is not at all "light", and the anonymous sounding signature (compounded throughout Bronte's novel by the character's sense of abstraction at seeing her name written or in print) is hardly representative of a character as strong-willed and self-conscious as Jane. In the purposeful naming of a character which prompts an association with malleability, the making recognizable to the reader a fluctuating identity commonly associated with cultural assimilation, Chabon presents a conscious authorial intervention into the forward trajectory of his characters through the literary signage of naming. In assisting Joe's foray into American comics culture Sam is effectively Joe's American Golem, his "man of clay" who like the mythic avatar whose coffin Joe snuck out of Prague in, actually loos after Joe for a time and protects his best interest, nominally protecting him from Nazis in Europe by providing for him with a home in Brooklyn, and a career that leads him into meeting Rosa's, who offers for him a period of domestic stability. That Sam, man of clay, can only cease Joe from provoking the Aryan American Brotherhood for so long is one of the ways his name also highlights the malleability or ephemerality of Clay; it is not a permanent feature solidity cannot exist permanently, which is what Joe earlier discovered about the doomed Jewish wards of the Golem of Prague.

The self-determined Americanization of the former Josef to Joe Kavalier entices the reader to look beyond the more obvious literary assumption that Chabon attributes his character's association with another of Prague's synonymous literary characters, Franz Kafka's Josef K. The knowing inner joy of Sam's recognition of the cousins' "newly minted American names "which appear in "a neat, inked rectangle of partnership", on the opening page of the duo's

[217] Chabon: 2000, 148

debut comic, is significant as an emotive response to what is a figurative estimation of success: the duo's new identities forged on the cover of what they assume is their ticket to success is no real evidence of success itself. Still tied to an increasingly tenuous contract with Empire novelties owners Sheldon Anapol and publisher Jack Ashkenazy, the "uncomfortable warmth" Sam feels "suffusing"[218]] his body is not the lighted match of confidence and integrity of purpose but instead, the faint glow of self-mythologizing, let down by an almost instantaneous awareness of the self-limitations on mythology's impact on reality. By acknowledging that blushing at the sound of the self-created restructuring of his name as signifying "not merely the blush of pride"[219], the imaginative spin on his name is important to Sam as it finds resonance with not only his cousin but also with readers of the mass-produced comic for whom it is the sole representative of his identity.

The speaking of his Americanized, professional names is a source of delight for Joe also because it acts as verbal evidence of his cousin's growing attachment to himself and the cause of the duo's comic book endeavor: the name "Sam Clay" is "emblematizing" of the ethos that success and status can be created in America, emblematic of a business model and a sense of community that was molded from modest, unsophisticated beginnings. The complexity of emotions examined in this paragraph is given a third dimension by the final evocative idea suggested by Sam hearing his new moniker: the harsh realization of loss. Sam's feelings of pride for what he has helped create with *The Escapist*, move to affection for his cousin and excitement relating to their future creative prospects, and finally to grief, realizing that his newly realized sense of security was effected through assimilation. Assimilation represents to Sam hope for a successful future, one far from the Brooklyn slum in which he grew up, but also one that is even further removed from the world and memory of his father, Alter Klayman the man who granted him his original identity and initiated his love of strongman mythology. Sam's mournful accounting of the memory of his father is beset with emotions that are "half affectionate, half ashamed"[220] because all memories of his father, a man absent for the majority of Joe's youth and adolescence, are only half-formed. Furthermore, the memory of his father has been repressed until Sam's acknowledgement in this scene that he had "never before allowed himself to feel"[221] a sense of loss at his father's passing, a disruption of the grieving process which at this moment in the novel has removed feelings of

[218] Chabon, Ibid.
[219] Chabon, Ibid.
[220] Chabon, Ibid.
[221] Chabon, Ibid.

pride and a communal sense of belonging regarding his success as a creator. A cruel irony for Sam, given the success his assimilation has afforded him, appears at the end of this scene in the emergence of a sense of shame over a loss of identity and connection with his past this success has made him refute. Sam's realization of his own loss of innocence arrives at a moment that has seen his work become not a failure like the imagined acts of his father but a success.

The emerging sense of authenticity in working life as a s failure of purpose occurs for Joe Kavalier through his experience of assimilation. An experience which initially strikes up emotions for Joe which relate feelings of gratitude for the assumed Americanized identity he ascribes to himself, assimilation also has Joe question his place in America while his family remain in peril in Europe. Joe's acceptance of the contradictory nature of his life as a comics artist in America is set about gradually, as his initial frustration with the inauthenticity of his life in America softens considering the resulting benefits afforded by his American reinvention. Upon meeting Rosa Saks, a woman who had captured his imagination after he expectantly happened upon her naked one morning in the Empire's makeshift studio in his friend Jerry Glovsky's apartment, Joe surprises himself. After deciding upon his arrival in New York that he would never permit himself "to speak to a woman for pleasure" as a means to address what was not "an articulated feeling", nevertheless Joe admits that speaking to Rosa incurs a feeling he feels is enough powerful to set him to "justify his own liberty to the degree that he employed it to earn the freedom of the family he left behind."[222]This layering of identity that Chabon presents Joe as having to negotiate to justify the seeking of pleasure informs the reader of the psychological struggles that impact Joe throughout his experience of living in New York.

The simultaneous contradictions of identity that command Joe's understanding of his life, although not registering as a conscientious doubling or "an articulated feeling," one that has been debated and confronted by Joe on an intellectual level, affect his views on his relationship with American society. The split between Josef the émigré working to afford his family's safe passage to America, and Joe the successful young comics artist whose access to money and the bohemian centre of New York City means he can allow himself to pursue the pleasures and social advantages his new success offers, is one that is prey to self-mythologizing and downplaying social reality. In the way that Joe feels his need to "justify his own liberty" by reminding himself of the tragic circumstances that resulted in his escape

[222] Chabon, 2000. 244

from Prague and his emigration, he effectively makes himself a martyr to his own cause. By insisting that the self-awareness provoked by the development of his permitting himself "to speak to a woman for pleasure" emerges out of a respect for the difficult situation faced by his family in Prague, Joe effectively flips his mask of identity, like that of the mask representing the god Janus in Roman culture from "comedic " to "tragic." The theatrical nature of such a reversible attitude towards identity, especially one that is so internally considered, registers the confusing reality of the situation where Joe experiences the social opportunities of life in New York City but is emotionally restricted by the memory of his life in Prague, and the feelings of authenticity he has towards earning his family's freedom versus the artificiality he ascribes to the pursuit of success and pleasure.

Joe further denies himself any semblance of the honest struggle of the émigré to pursue an assimilation into American society as he considers his life in America "a conditional thing"[223], a life whose conditions are shackled to the tragic self-martyrdom Joe convinces himself of. Commenting on this idea of identity as conditional, as in effect a kind of mask worn by Joe and other Jewish comic book creators and characters in a 2006 interview with Simon Wimcha, Chabon relates the pursuit of a dual identity by way of "changing your name and wearing a mask" acts as a means of "assimilating and reinventing yourself."[224]Through this pursuit of reinvention of identity Chabon forges an explicit link between identity and the immigrant experience in the United States, a narrative that becomes "allegorical"[225]when discussed in the context of the history of American comic books. The role of the comic book superhero, whose dual identity acts as a literal mask for relating the experiences of assimilation, is rendered via an image-centred art form where the names of characters suggest imaginative riffs on ethnicity. This subtext in the naming of characters and how assimilated names provide a metanarrative on ethnicity (often personified by the "origin" stories of many comic characters, i.e., Superman's origin story detailing his early life as a native of the planet Krypton) offers for Chabon a commentary on the effects of the specifically Jewish immigrant experience. Allegories of the assimilation process, and of the experience of the doubling or shifting of identity, in the work of Jewish comic book creators present a reading of the form's history that for Chabon are "impossible not to see."[226] By offering this account of the effects of dual identities, as experienced by the children of immigrants who assimilate as Americans,

---

[223] Chabon, Ibid.
[224] Chabon, in Simcha Weinstein *Up, Up and Oy Vey! How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped The Comic Book Superhero* (Baltimore, Maryland: Leviathan Press) 2006. 51.
[225] Weinstein, Ibid.
[226] Weinstein, Ibid.

American comic book creators tackle the "*transformation*"[227]that Sam discusses in the opening lines of *Kavalier and Clay.* Reinvention acts as a kind of escape act for the cousins throughout the novel. The "sloughing off of old skin towards a new youth " that D.H. Lawrence found was the basis of "the myth of America"[228] is likened to the Harry Houdini act *Metamorphosis* by Sam, who describes the experiences of Jewish comic book creators as a process where the participants were "never the same" people leaving the assimilated world of pop-culture success as when they "they went in."[229] The American dream, which generations of new arrivals sought since the opening of Ellis Island in 1892, and which his family back in Prague allowed him to pursue, is not claimed by Joe as a means of creating a new identity to suit his surroundings, but is instead an act of ephemeral, intermediary escape. This conditional acceptance of Joe's assimilated identity, one which downplays the heavy burden that he left behind with his escape from Prague, simulates an appearance of confidence and vitality. This acceptance of a transformed identity, albeit one that is conditioned by what Joe feels are intermediary circumstances of compromise, indicates a reflection of Joe's acceptance of the cultural and economic emergence of America as a world superpower. Earlier when Joe considers the contradictory circumstances which surround his burgeoning success as a comic book artist in America, the omniscient author-narrator insists that despite his new-found sense of contentment in his working life, the idea that Joe "felt at home in America" [230]is an insincere notion. A sense of stability in America is "something he would never have allowed himself to feel,"[231] here it is reiterated how an emotive connection with his new homeland is disrupted by Joe himself. As much as Joe understands his experience of assimilation into American life, in that Joe is "grateful to his headquarters in exile"[232], a land where his true identity remains incognito, this identity is nevertheless framed as a coded artifice made possible by the printed sign of his new identity on the contents pages of the comic book which houses "The Escapist." This link between Joe's awareness of his Americanised name in print, and of the featuring of his all-American comic character who fights Hitler and continually escapes from his clutches, offers a metaphor for the conceit of the avatar. The avatar, in being created by an author, is set up to deceive : in being so complete a figment of imagination that it also reflects the ideals, and often the subconscious

[227] Chabon, 2000, 3. Italics: Chabon.
[228] D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Exeter, Shearsmen Books) 2011, 60.
[229] Chabon, Ibid.
[230] Chabon, 2000, 167.
[231] Chabon, Ibid.
[232] Chabon, Ibid.

desires, of its creator. Joe, like his Escapist avatar, wants to fight Hitler, yet he also wishes to continually escape the settings and circumstances which made Hitler's rise to power possible. That America alerted Joe to "his calling"[233], the endlessly daring business of creating the "great, mad new American art form"[234]of comics, a subconscious acceptance of the realities of his new life as an American subject begins to form. Joe's denial in this paragraph is amusing to the omniscient narrator, who finds wit in the cavalier attitude (pun intended) to which Joe ascribes his double life as a European in New York. However, the inauthentic nature of Joe's attitude in this paragraph exhibits a clear indication of the deceptive nature of the optimistic spirit in this age of expanding American world influence, a clear rendering of self-deceptive attitudes which reoccur throughout the novel. This simulation of American identity, of a removal of a European idea of selfhood, represents an approach to shifts in ideology reflected in Foucault's announcement that to live in the mid-twentieth century was to live in "the epoch of simultaneity."[iii] [235]Foucault identified history as "the great obsession of the twentieth century", synonymous with themes of "development and suspense"[236] and the awe and frustration faced by the nineteenth-century subject. The task of history was also to conceptualise "an ever accumulating past", an era identifiable by the sheer "juxtaposition"[237] of world cultures as old-world regimes stood in contrast with the modern capitalist ideologies represented by the United States: the nation which featured and diluted all examples of Indigenous cultures which were being replaced by a vibrant, energised America as the centre of world influence. In *Kavalier and Clay*, the desire for agency forms a kind of pathetic fallacy, the conscious hold this desire has on the novel's central characters frames episodes of what are histories of political suppression and personal failure.

What is represented in terms of Joe's escape from the turbulent historical events of the Holocaust is an inversion of what is for Chabon a foray into historical narrative. Detailing a process where Chabon's fiction can be seen as evading the essentialist confines of contemporary realist fiction, the matter of escape from these confines into narratives alert to "a parallel awareness" of the novel's "history and conventions"[iv][238] lead to the unknowing limits of literary experiment and the imagination. A prioritising of imaginative responses to

---

[233] Chabon, Ibid.
[234] Chabon, Ibid.
[235] Michel Foucault "Of Other Spaces." *Trans.* Jay Miskoviec *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22. doi:10.2307/464648.
[236] Foucault, Ibid.
[237] Foucault, Ibid.
[238] Irmtraud Huber, *Literature After Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) 2014, 171

serious historical situations, exhibited in Irmtraud Huber's contention that "the novel's "defense of escapism has to be seen in light of its continual distinctions" evidenced in Chabon's blurring of fabulist fantasy and realist narrative,[239] offer only a partial understanding of the effects of escapism on Joe's psyche. Escapism, in the physical form of his exit from Nazi Europe, and in the artistic rendering of escapism prioritised by his work as a comics artist, acts as a form of liberation for Joe, while at the same time condemning him to an inauthentic struggle against Nazism and, ultimately, the struggle against his assimilation into American culture. If the prioritising of the liberating deliverance of historical and psychological traumas.

Dislocations of Idenity: The Shifting Forms of Origin Myths in *The Yiddish Policeman Union*

Origin myths are similarly represented as artificial dilutions of historical narrative in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union.* An alternative history novel, where any resemblance to present-day historical or geographical realities are distorted, the novel's plot focuses on an imagined present where Alaska, rather than Israel, is the world's sole Jewish-governed republic. Chabon's scenario sees the Israeli war of independence go awry for the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, which results in the United States government offering temporary exile for the Jews in an untamed territory of Alaska. The immigrant Jews make the city of Sitka their capital and recreate a kind of early-twentieth-century network of shtetl-like villages in the countryside, but by the time of the novel's setting it resembles most closely the Los Angeles of the 1940s that featured in the works of the novel's most obvious influence, crime fiction writer Raymond Chandler. When Meyer Landsman, a Yiddish speaking version of Chandler's Philip Marlowe, investigates the apparent suicide of one of the guests of the Hotel Einstein, his suspicion is aroused by an unfinished game of chess at the scene of the death. Noticing that the guest had signed in with the assumed name Emmanuel Lasker, the great German Jewish chess champion who escaped the Holocaust, Landsman suspects the suicide is a cover-up. However, his motives for thinking so are somewhat compromised by the fact that his father idolised Lasker,[240] and to this effect Landsman taking on the case as an investigation into a homicide is an attempt for Landsman to resolve his feelings surrounding

[239] Huber, Ibid.
[240] Emmanuel Lasker, like many secondary characters in Chabon's post-2000 fiction (Salvador Dali in *Kavalier and Clay*, Barack Obama in *Telegraph Avenue*) was an actual individual, a 27-time World Chess Champion (1894-1921) acknowledged as the first modern genius of chess.

his father's unexplained death. On visiting his Cousin's Berko Shemets' house, the morning after his initial investigation of the scene of Lasker's death, Landsman notices his nephew Goldy "wearing his polar bear jammies, the height of retrospective chic for an Alaskan Jewish kid."[241] This humorous, "cute" appropriation of Alaskan wildlife as children's clothing reminds Landsman of the typical attire of his own childhood, clothes and childhood mementoes that featured "the northern imagery that was so ubiquitous when Landsman was a boy".[242] This landscape seemed closer to home in Landsman's youth because this was the age when the Sitka Jews were actively living the pioneer lifestyle upon their arrival on Alaskan shores. Landsman is struck, however, by what is suggested by the knowing cuteness of Goldy's polar bear pajamas. What allows for this harmless reference to the harshness of the Alaskan climate and landscape, worn and designed for children like Goldie, is that they live so far away, safe. This kind of revival of retro Alaskan pajama wear has returned, but "this time it seems ironically."[243] This unwillingness to embrace the ironic return of this kind of retrograde fashion and nostalgic sentiment demonstrates Landsman's wariness to accept that the difficulties the Alaskan Jews faced in the past have become such a shared part of communal memory that they are now the topic of kitsch, ironic children's clothing. The genuine struggle for the founding of a homeland that his father's generation faced is now the basis for shared forms of visual humor amongst the children and grandchildren of the present-day, sanitized Sitka. What was once a narrative of sacrifice, the exodus of Jews to an eventual, unexplored, not exactly promising promised land, has become the subject of spectacle, of a means of showing children the clichés of inherited history while simultaneously laughing these signals of identity away.

Landsman's feeling of the impropriety, the inauthenticity, of being a Jew in such a snowbound setting, informs his sense of defeat when the question of the US government's reversion of the Sitka state is raised. This threat to self-governance for the Jewish population of Alaska sees Landman react in ways that highlight not only a sense of the failure of the Sitka settlement for Landsman but also a sense of guilt for the unnatural effect the arrival of the Jews has had on Sitka's landscape and the local Indigenous population. We see this reaction in his consideration of the presence of snowflakes in the children's television shows he watches. A natural feature of an arctic climate, snowflakes denote innocence and a sense of calm, particularly when associated with the attire and playthings of children. Snowflakes

[241] Chabon, 2007, 2010, 38.
[242] Chabon, Ibid.
[243] Chabon, Ibid.

for Landsman, however, are associated with the messy historical meanderings of his ancestors into unknown territory, and of the Sitka Jews' carbon footprint. "Snowflakes, yes, the Jews found them here,", Landsman considers, "though, thanks to greenhouse gases, there are measurably fewer than in the old days."[244] This moment, tinged with nostalgia, is equally tinged with regret and his awareness of how the industrialisation of a previously natural landscape, virginal in its white expanse and bounteous snowfall, has deteriorated tenfold due to the "greenhouse gases" leaked into its atmosphere by the artificial mechanisations of the invading pilgrim Jewish population. Lawrence's "sloughing off of old skin" has merely rid the land of its natural ability to replenish, its hibernation interrupted by the arrival of a nation of "second skin" conquerors whose self-mythologizing results only in regret and nostalgia for what was. For Landsman, the exotic, authentic characteristics of the Alaskan wilderness have disappeared, leaving "no polar bears", No igloos" and "No reindeer."[245] That each of these descriptions of naturalistic features appears as separate single sentences, denoted by the capitalized "No" and the full stops following the inventory of "polar bears.", "igloos." and "reindeers." suggest the definiteness of this resulting culling of natural species, the remnants of which are only to be found in the costumes and media that entertain Sitka's Jewish children. All that is left for the elder generations to contend with, Landsman concludes, is: Just a lot of angry Indians, fog, and rain, and half a century of a sense of mistakenness so keen, worked so deep in the system of the Jews, it works everywhere, even on the children's pajamas.[246]

The "fog" and "rain" that have replaced the snowflakes are indicative of the effects of this forced westernisation on the Alaskan landscape: the rain represents both the effects of the greenhouse gases and the effects of the sullen European traditions. The rain also denotes a reluctance to venture outside synonymous with the results of convenient modern European lifestyles and with the lack of a real need to engage with nature. "Fog", like the fog associated with distant memories, is a representation of the haziness alluded to regarding the sense of purpose of the Sitka settlement—a geographical setting chosen only for its propensity for survival, a refugee camp that exists in a kind of world in-between, a reinvention of manifest destiny. The Indigenous people, terrorized out of their natural habitats by Jews still bearing the scars of genocide, are angered by their subsequent dispossession. I will now consider here an analysis of historian Lorenzo Veracini when he describes expulsions of Palestinians from

[244] Chabon, Ibid.
[245] Chabon, Ibid.
[246] Chabon, Ibid.

Israeli territories as a means of addressing the difficult scenario Chabon poses between Sitka's diasporic Jewish citizens and the in the indigenous singlet population. Linking Veracini's interpretation that expulsion practices under the guise of maintaining dominant Zionist majorities in disputed territories are framed by denying that Zionists are colonists. As returning members of the Jewish diaspora to lands historically significant to Judaism, the argument that Jews cannot be colonizer of their own historical sites is debunked by Veracini when he incites the expulsions of Palestinians by Jews, from lands where they equally claim an historical legacy spanning centuries. Referring to the violent method of removing Palestinians from lands they know as homelands, locates the examples for Veracini of how Zionism is in effect a continuation of colonialism.[247] Expulsions for Veracini are not the historical means of winning disputed lands for Jews, but they are "the present and the future" methods by which Zionists violently continue the settler agendas of colonialism.[248]
Furthermore, Veracini does not see in the continual practices of the expulsions of Palestinians evidence that Zionism is a "latecomer" to capitalist strategies of settler displacement, but acts as a "precursor"[249] to something more insidious, the planned cultural genocide of Palestinian people and traditions. In Chabon, the anger registers a disgust at the industrialisation brought by the Jews, poisoning the atmosphere for the sake of simulating a European ambience in the arctic. These diasporic people have brought to Sitka the entrapments of industrialism, a hangover from their experiences in Europe, which threatens the Tlingit way of life, and which has forced the indigenous people out of the cultural centres of Sitka. Landsman confronts his feelings of displacement in a way that conflates them with a larger Sitka narrative, attesting that the conditioning of the Alaskan environment by the settler Jews has widely resulted in "half a century of a sense of mistakenness so keen" that it is deep-rooted in the Sitka Jewish character and reflected only in the ironised group laughter associated with a national myth that is now printed in joke form on children's pajamas.
Landesman's reading of an ironising of the Jewish experience in Sitka, alluded by an interpretation of the past illuminated by the sight of a child in humorous pajamas reflects Josh Cohen's analysis of the allegorical spectacle in postmodern American writing. Cohen's argument that conceptions of the spectacle in postmodern theory tend to render the spectacle as the opposite in narratives of historical experience overlooks the evidence that "vision

[247] Lorenzo Veracini, "Israel-Palestine Through a Settler-Colonial Studies Lens." *INTERVENTIONS-INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES* 21, no. 4 (January 1, 2019): 568–81. doi:10.1080/1369801X.2018.1547213
[248] Veracini, Ibid.
[249] Veracini, Ibid.

belongs to lived private and public experience"[250] in much American postmodern fiction. To "understand the experience of *seeing*"[251] in American postmodern fiction, it is also necessary to consider the “most pivotal, social, economic and cultural struggles"[252]inherent in the contemporary American life such writing investigates. American visual culture is dominated by the spectacle, and in this sense, it is "characterised by an opacity and an indeterminacy" which is rendered as much as a study of the visual as it is of psychological interiority, reflective of an "allegorical impulse"[253]in American narrative. The politics of seeing that Cohen attests to allow a contemporary reading of visual culture in postmodern American fiction where the spectacle is *representative* of experience rather than the *inverse* of experience that the more continental understanding of postmodernism entails.[254] By seeing a spectacular, if tongue-in-cheek, representation of Jewish experience in Alaska via a child's polar bear outfit, Landsman's reaction is characteristic of the allegorical impulse to read pivotal historical detail in the ironic and the banal interpretations of a past not experienced by the designers or wearers of retro culture.

The Church of Vinyl : Seeing the Potentials of Community in *Telegraph Avenue*

Artificial manifestations of identity, contrasted with an idealised authenticity of community appear as the central thrust of narrative concerns in *Telegraph Avenue* (2012). Detailing an aversion to the globalizing effects of capitalism in Chabon's post-2000 fiction that is never entirely addressed in *Kavalier and Clay,* the novel offers a commentary on the effects of popular cultural influence on male arrested development as well as simultaneously signaling a reinvestment in communal solidarity. Black popular culture, in particular an interest in the musical stylings of the West coast soul-Jazz movement in music and the Blaxploitation movement in film,[v] is given the same emphasis in the novel for its "redemptive powers", as what Benjamin has discussed as the basis for the reiteration and reproduction of historical narratives. The "aura" which Benjamin identified as the defining features of an historical text or artefact's claim to cultural reification appears in *Telegraph Avenue* through a retrospective channeling of respect for vinyl records of the 1970s and the signifying images and heroic ethos of Blaxploitation films, works which also featured soundtracks by the artists of the

[250] Josh Cohen, *Spectacular Allegories: Postmodern American Writing and the Politics of Seeing* (London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press) 1998. 1.
[251] Cohen, Ibid. (Italics, Cohen.)
[252] Cohen, 1998, 5.
[253] Cohen, Ibid.
[254] Italics in this sentence my own emphasis.

soul-Jazz and funk movements.[255] These influences are described with similar symbolic properties in terms of how they represent idealisations of political engagement through cultural productions as comic books are in *Kavalier and Clay.* However, the representations of identity inherent in these productions, namely the cultural rendering of postwar black experiences and youth movements alluded to by these records and films, offer not immediate portrayals of the history of minority experience in the United States but instead a specifically 1970's idealisation of a socially integrated African American generation, one which never saw the benefits of assimilation in the way that the émigré Jews in *Kavalier and Clay* were to experience. In comparison with Weinstein's study on how the success of the comic book industry was an instance of Jewish cultural assimilation[256], what the black music and film music of the 1970s represent for characters in *Telegraph Avenue* are the missed opportunities for a black cultural and economic presence in a post-Civil rights utopia that never appeared out of the intense racial divisions of Oakland in the 1970s. When Archy Stallings, the African-American co-owner of Brokeland Records, considers the impact that watching in his youth television footage of the boxing match where the former Cassius Clay (Muhammed Ali) defeated Sonny Liston, Archy recalls that that the building where he saw the fight was a black-owned barbershop named Spencer's, located in the same building that now houses Brokeland Records. Archy "wished intensely that his gathering could be that gathering"[257]: a confluence of young black men and children meeting to watch the view at the venue as it was then, a communal space for black social interaction. The purpose of Archy's wishes is to swap out his current reality to return to an age that history hadn't forsaken as merely idealistic, to exist in a time when African-American men had "the years of ferment and

[255] Blaxploitation has been critically tainted as a movement, given the input of White producers as financiers for films such as *Superfly* (Gordon Parks, J.R., 1972) and *The Mack* (Michael Campus, 1973) which portrayed Black heroes as respectively, a drug dealer and a pimp. According to Novotny Lawrence in *Blaxploitation Films of the 1970s: Blackness and Genre* (New York: Routledge 2008), the backlash against Blaxploitation film by the California chapter of the NAACP led to violent protest, one incident included the torching of white producer Richard Zimbert's car by a black militant group. "Due to the immense controversy surrounding Blaxploitation films" Lawrence states, "major studios by 1974 shied away from producing the (Blaxploitation) films" (Lawrence: 2008, 96.) The conflict that resulted between black interest groups and black filmmakers working as the employees of white film producers shows the danger that culture can represent within a race relations context. The question of who finances and who benefits from the production and presentation and race-centric culture is evident in *Telegraph Avenue.*

[255] See Cutis Mayfield, *Superfly OST* (Curtom, Buddha 1972) and James Brown *Black Caesar* OST (Polydor, 1973) James Brown is not to be confused with Jim Brown, former NFL star and actor in Blaxploitation films such as *Shaft*, who is a credible composite influence for the characters Luther Stallings and Gibson Goode in *Telegraph Avenue.*

[256] See my earlier analysis of Simcha Weinstein's assessment of the importance of the immigrant experience in Jewish American comics authors in *Up, Up and Oy Vey!* (London and New York: Leviathan Press) 2006.

[257] Chabon, 2012, 273.

innovation in the music and the life of black America ahead of them."[258] This assessment of present moment that is lacking authenticity, represented by the building that is at the moment of Archy's consideration his place of work, suggests that the "ferment" and "innovation" associated with the countercultural renaissance of west coast black culture after the 1960s is itself a product of an artificial creation. Archy's thought on what living in that era *could* have been like reflects the past presented in the children's cartoon Meyer Landsman views in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*: an historicized appreciation of an unrealistic past, a version of events made simplistic to children and disappointed adults of the present day. As obvious as it is that the innovation of West Coast Black Culture is to Archy is a product of a modernized, post-industrial society where a minority group can develop a counterculture, the political realities of the Black experience of the 1960s are glossed over. In much the same way as the creators of a Yiddish children's cartoon in present-day Sitka or Joe in pre-intervention New York gloss over the political realities of their respective pasts or presents, Archy associates with the 1960s a ferment of ideas that lead to an idealised output of creative works and social reform. What is conveniently absent for Archy in terms of this idealised version of Oakland life is that this flourishing of cultural activity immediately brings to mind another image, that of the eruption of flames as a result of the rioting that ruptured through inner-city Oakland during this period; that is, the violent eruption of racial tensions. Even the rise of Muhammed Ali as a politicized Black athlete leaves aside the troubled reality of Ali's career.

Chabon marks the distinctiveness of Ali as a trailblazing Black American in Archy's mind as he registers the politicized shift of "the former Clay"[259] to "Ali" thus bringing the idea of the malleability of identity associated with the name "clay" back into focus but does not give narrative space to the suspension from the international Boxing association which Ali faced as a result of his radical protest against the Vietnam war, and of his advocacy of the Nation of Islam. Amir Saeed refers to the stripping in of Ali's boxing titles in 1966 as the beginning of a period "where the press were more interested in Ali's political and religious viewpoints that they were in his fighting ability."[260] Saaed cites a *New York Times* article which claimed that "Clay could have been the most popular of all champions but he attached himself to a hate organisation."[261] The authenticity of Ali's talents, and of the historically significant effort made in changing the surname he inherited from an enslaver to one that reflected his Muslim

[258] Chabon, Ibid.
[259] Chabon, Ibid.
[260] Amir Saaed, "'Worthy of all praises': Muhammad Ali and the politics of identity." *Soundings (13626620)* no. 47: Spring 2011, 123-129. EBSCO*host* (accessed February 5, 2018, 125.)
[261] Saaed, Ibid.

identity, was overlooked by commentators who claimed his beliefs were anti-American. The unquestioned idolatry of Americans who considered Ali's success under the Clay surname represents the beginnings of Black assimilation into popular American culture. The irony inherent in Archy's nostalgic perspective on the era of the "rise of the former Cassius Clay", again is suggested not in the words or thoughts of Archy but instead in the form of omniscient narration, which foreshadows the trouble that Archy encounters as an individual who practices a heterogeneous attitude in his everyday life, as the business partner of the white Nat Jaffe. As a Black man, he is skeptical towards the practice of African-American exclusivity that is personified by Dogpile INC.'s move into his district, seeing it as a result of the reification of black culture and of nostalgia for an era he wasn't alive to experience.
The district of the real Telegraph Avenue offers a metaphor for the disrupted development of Urban Black Oakland, a road that begins in the historic downtown district, at the time of the novel's setting in 2004 a socially disenfranchised area, the district continues to the gentrified, wealth-infused campus at the University of Berkeley. Although the black and white communities in North Oakland share postal codes, and, in the case of Chabon's characters Archy Stallings and Nat Jaffe, are partners literally sharing economic interests, divides along the racial line prove problematic for anything other than a communal sharing of geographic and cultural affiliations. What ultimately separates and divides characters across racial lines in the novel is this very adherence to cultural interests: the questions "who is culture for" and "how is the ownership of culture negotiated" reverberate throughout the novel. When Archy is pressured by local Chan Flowers to accept the arrival of Dogpile INC. and to apply for a job there to further support his growing family, Archy responds:

Councilman, you made realize, thank you, but me, Mr Jones and Nat Jaffe and our own kind of people, we already got a church of our own…and that Church, is the Church of vinyl.[262]

The theological reification which Archy intuits towards this "Church of vinyl", the result of years of independent hard work and dedication that Archy and his business partners have put into developing, represents for him a beacon of authenticity in an America obsessed with an artificial culture that is synonymous with the totalising influence of corporate capitalism and the quick fix of instant gratification.
The interaction of Brokeland Records co-owner Archy Stallings with Dogpile INC.'s Goode

[262] Chabon, 2012,284.

presents an adversarial set-up which is effective as a mirroring or doubling of characters who exhibit superficially opposing ideologies. By considering the titles and practicing operations of their respective businesses, the surface-level division in ideology and motivation between both store owners is made apparent. Goode is particularly concerned with representing economic success as an alternative or *escape* from economic disenfranchisement. A Black entrepreneur who, after a career as a successful American football player, further chases his ambitions for economic success and social gravitas by developing a chain of media malls aimed at the urban black population, by using his celebrity to accrue a kind of authentic guise, Goode is essentially reselling Black culture back to African American people. Archy's critical reaction to Goode's inviting him onto his blimp and offering him a job is symptomatic of Archy's stubborn refusal to engage with lifestyle choices that he considers to be outside of his understanding of authenticity.

The root of Archy's disillusionment with contemporary American culture, attested by his suspicion towards Gibson Goode's all-black mega-corporation, can be traced to the disappointments of Archy's life in the previous decade. His service in the US military and undergoing a tour of Iraq during the first Gulf War provided mere practice for the sense of inauthenticity and political disillusionment that surrounded George W. Bush's time in office. Archy's disillusionment with millennium-era culture and domestic politics becomes acutely earnest in the wake of the news regarding Dogpile's planned move into his local neighborhood. Archy's adherence to leading an authentic lifestyle, and his combative attitude to individuals and corporations which he considers to be inauthentic, reflects an inherently combative attitude that Boyle attributes to the emergence of authenticity as a consumer response to globalization in the millennium's early years. Boyle describes a renewed demand for authenticity in the marketplace as simultaneously "fighting it out with the virtual real, fake real and the downright fraudulent"[263]in culture, society, religion, and politics. In asserting that the emergence of authenticity saw the "question of what is real"[264] become increasingly central to consumers, which resulted in turn in a reconsideration of medial culture and postmodern society in general, Boyle in many ways anticipates the cult of "the Church of Vinyl" that Archy, signifying his dissatisfaction with artificiality and a culture of convenience that a generation who came of age in the era of virtual reality, prophesizes. The time of the novel's setting in 2004 and Archy's place as the person of interest who claims the

[263] Boyle, 2003, 263.
[264] Boyle, Ibid.

largest amount of the omniscient narrator's focus presents a subtle but important emphasis on the political climate of the era. Archy's experience of disillusionment with American culture and society in the early-2000's as a veteran of the first Gulf War represents a particularly close sense of the power of overlooked details that Boyle accredits to an authentic reaction to present-day discontents. He is a former soldier who is "tired"[265] of further reports of war and the military expansion of America's world police in the middle east. Thinking further, Archy's attitude of ennui infers that the postmodern take of Baudrillard's on the sense of artificiality of the first Gulf War was mere practice for the sense of disillusionment that emerged from watching the conflict's sequel unfolding in real time thirteen years later. The interpretation of social and political disengagement, cynicism and repetition of "grudges"[266] that Archy associates with American political endeavors in the millennium's early years provoke his insistence on Black musical culture of the 1960s. The social and political ethos represented in what Archy interprets, arguably with a sense of false nostalgia, as the background to the achievements of the Black musical culture he reifies is embellished with both the suspect "redemptive powers" of historicized narrative that Benjamin discusses, and partiality towards the "natural, human and decaying" elements of retro cultural consumption that Boyle ascertains as the symptoms of the search for authenticity. Vinyl records are the site of this authenticity for Archy. Thus, he starts his business and founds his "church of Vinyl" on products of mass consumer culture that, due to their physicality, have the properties of aura due to their reflection of the "desire to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly" within mass culture. They need to exist in one space on the record deck, their transmission via the stylus of a moment in time is much like the effect of seeing an art object displayed in a museum transmitting its sense data in situ. The 1960s Soul-Jazz records that Archy collects represent a getting together of people, both in terms of their initial function as dance music and in their secondary purpose of inspiring a sense of Black community. These functions determine both their aura and the "prerequisite" Benjamin affixes to aura: the importance of when and where it is produced. In Archy's case, his Brokeland record store is situated in the historical locale synonymous with the origin of many Soul-Jazz artists, and his store in this sense brings people interested in this cultural genre closer together spatially and humanly in a location that bears what is in Benjaminian terms, the "stamp of authenticity" designated by the spatial significance of aura to an artwork. Although these records are mass-produced, and

[265] Chabon, 2012, 147.
[266] Chabon, Ibid.

the space that Brokeland Records situates was the local barbershop to which Archy attributes so much historical authenticity, what Archy considers the "natural" place in Black history has been replaced by a commercial outlet, which, as a museum of Black history, makes the concept of a community of Soul-Jazz an artificiality by historicizing it.

However, the idea that Archy's interest in the "decaying" medium of vinyl records is representative of ideals of socially progressive black culture of the 1960s, itself adheres to Boyle's analysis of what is identifiably "authentic" to present-day consumers. Vinyl is decaying both in the sense that interest in the genre is an ephemeral fad and in the way that the decaying physical nature of the record results in objects of mass production with ephemeral audial life spans. Vinyl thus embodies through its artwork and means of production an antiquated version of cultural ideals. This is, of course, exactly the accreditation of the "real, worn and human" nature of a vinyl record. Like the antique furniture that Boyle uses for his discussion on consumer objects that denote authenticity, a vinyl record shows not only its age but leaves detailed traces of its creation. The music on the vinyl records of the Soul-Jazz genre is often evocative of the memory of love, disappointment, or other elevated emotion, examples of the musical expression of sentiments that are often the subjects of poetry or other "serious" art forms. Jon Hendricks and Art Blakely's Jazz Messengers' "Moanin'" is a prime example of these Soul-Jazz traits.[267]The mode of production and the ephemeral time-lengths of Soul-Jazz sides reflect ephemerality, both in terms of how the vinyl records mass produced during the 1960s were designed to disintegrate if not obsessively maintained, and by the way in which by definition the pre-determined ephemerality of these records anticipates them as passing novelties. It is these very tendencies—the eventual "wornness" anticipated by the record's mode of production and the "human" element to the emphasis of fleeting sentimentally of the song's titles and lyrics—that combine to effect a "real" stamp of authenticity for Archy.

Conclusion

The early 2000s marks a stylistic turn in Michael Chabon's work that problematizes postmodernism but does not entirely disavow its means of analysis. Cohen's account of postmodern fiction's politics of seeing is still crucial to how Chabon demonstrates the effects of popular culture on contemporary American narrative in his post-2000 fiction. In this sense,

[267] Art Blakely and The Jazz Messengers with Jon Hendricks "Moanin", *Buhaina* (Prestige, 1973) 5:31 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0flRMW_opD8

Chabon's fiction of the period is an extension of the postmodern project, symptomatic of the technical experimentation at work in what Dawson identifies as the return of omniscient narrative to contemporary American fiction. Omniscience and "seeing", appear to be naturally aligned as tools to investigate contemporary interpretations of the mythological artifices of historical narrative. In an era where omniscience was considered integral to a renewed interest in realism, Chabon problematizes the attributes of realism to omniscience by detailing the difficulties of a search for authenticity in a world so influenced by the artificiality of the spectacle. Political isolation, demonstrably associated in Chabon's fiction with the search for authenticity, bears the markings of an existential crisis that has its origins in the myths of redemption that historicity offers, but like all fiction, ultimately fails to assist with anything other than imagined alternatives.

Chapter 3

"Having once more fallen silent as God himself…" The Broken Voice of Affiliative Holocaust Narratives in Michael Chabon

At the beginning of their 2017 essay "Comedy Has Issues", Laurent Berlant and Sianne Ngai accept that "comedy's pleasure comes in part from its ability to dispel anxiety…but it doesn't simply do that."[268] This chapter considers the relationship between humour, trauma and history and aims to show how the hybrid literary style at work in Chabon's millennial fiction utilizing postmodern techniques to examine experiential situations that challenge the relationship between memory and reality. At the beginning of Chabon's 2004 novel *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* there is a joke typical of the genre of the idiosyncratically twentieth-century Jewish joke that both parodies the trope of inserted humour, and, deploying a more classical literal conceit, somewhat riskily creates a joke out of the contemporary reception of Holocaust fiction within the serious confines of Holocaust studies. The observing Jewish state of Sitka, Alaska, still coming to terms with a long history of trauma after the same genocidal destruction of their communities which affected their non-fictional counterparts after the Second World War, "swore that in the shimmer of the aurora borealis, for two nights running, they observed the outlines of a human face, with beard and sidelocks."[269] On the eve of their homeland's political dissolution by a totalitarian United States government, Sitka's citizens break out into violent arguments about what they are witnessing. Is the outline of the Messiah, come to shine protection on the Sitka, or a celestial golem of Prague looking out for this far-flung enclave of Ashkenazi North Americans in their darkest hour, smiling? Their arguments debate the real significance of the apparition and the possible interpretations of "the weird manifestation."[270] Amid the panic surrounding the spiritual *ex machina,* the omniscient narrator describes how later "amid the panic and feathers of a kosher slaughterhouse on Zhitlovsky avenue" a chicken arose from turning on the butcher's Hassidic rotisserie to announce "the imminent advent of Messiah".[271] Upon hearing this story, local detective Meyer Landsman, Chabon's Jewish Philip Marlowe, a local man of the law who is often too clever to assuage his own conscience, considers a rational outcome:

---

[268] Lauren Berlant and Sianne Ngai *Critical Inquiry* 43:2 (2017): 233–249.
[269] Chabon, *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (London: Fourth Estate, 2007), 13.
[270] Chabon, ibid.
[271] Chabon, ibid.

the miraculous chicken offered a number of startling predictions, though it neglected to mention the soup in which, having once more fallen silent as God himself, it afterward featured." Even the most casual study of the record, Landman thinks, would show that strange times to be a Jew almost always have been, as well, strange times to be a chicken.[272]

Beginning a chapter on a postmodern style of fiction that indirectly considers the effects of the Holocaust and Holocaust memory by analysing one of the few humorous episodes in an otherwise serious novel may stretch the limits of academic seriousness, but my reading here acts as a response to the many troubling, if provocatively inventive, questions posed by Chabon's fiction. In using a description of the Messiah to a Jewish population under threat as the set-up for the kind of comedic payoff usually associated with the Catskills-resort-honed humour of Jewish comedians such as Rodney Dangerfield, Chabon plays with the expectations associated with the tropes of Jewish-centred narratives which appeared after the Second World War. The wistful hopes of overcoming adversity and a seriousness evoking religious fervency in depicting trauma are here underscored by a humdrum comedic episode in that all-too-familiar yet utterly distant "Zhitlovsky street." Chabon's take on the familiarised obscurity of Yiddish is here centred on a neighborhood butchers; by butchering Yiddish appropriations back into English we can here interpret the literary humour: "Zhitlovsky" sounds at least familiarly Yiddish to the non-Yiddish speakers who enjoy Jewish American humour, "Zhit" here working like the surname "Lipschittz" as evoking someone who is facetious and comedically untrustworthy when it sounded aloud in for anglophone speakers.

The love of shit, which can be analysed here as a fondness for the type of generic lowbrow humour the joke plays upon, works alongside the types of urban truism that register when placed in descriptions of sentences that evoke Jewish city life descriptions themselves which are often not spared from parody or that are not without unintentionally humorous attributes.[273] The achingly innocent pathetic fallacy alluded to by the hope of the stargazers "who swore" under the light of celestial phenomena that they had witnessed a spectral

[272] Chabon, ibid.

[273] I'm thinking here of the unintentional geographically related humour apparent in Tommy Wiseau's notoriously awful cult film *The Room.* In the scene where the character Greg describes an unfortunate story of a female friend whose nefarious behavior resulted in her ending up in "a hospital on Guerrero Street", the absurdly humorous sentiment arising here out of the question that if you are the victim of violence or other misfortunes than why would "a hospital" on Guerrero Street be any worse of a place to end up as opposed destitute or dead? See *The Room*, Dir. Tommy Wiseau (Wiseau-Films, USA, 2003)

saviour owing to their historical misfortune, is often not just a pithy retort to the magical thinking sometimes ascribed to the story of survivors of trauma, but also serves to set up the theme of apparitions or misinterpretations of the Messiah in the Novel as spectral occurrences.

These apparitions are essentially the ghostly afterthoughts of a religious mythology that does much to mystify the very real difficulties of interpreting Judaism after the Holocaust. An historical episode whose foremost archivists describe as being so unrepresentative of the lives of ordinary people in modern historical memory as to be incomprehensible to anyone living outside the Jewish *Shoah*, interprets the Holocaust for Jewish writers living after the events of the *Shoah* as a compellingly nuanced history of both serious engagement and a reprieve from seriousness, often found in the guise of comedic distraction.[274] The chicken operating in the joke as they are are the suspension of unwavering faith is put into doubt by the ironic observation that despite all this chicken messiah's prescience, it "neglected to witness the soup" that would ultimately seal its own fate, "having once more fallen silent as God himself."

The binary modes of the audible and the silent, as well as the comic, the ironic and the devastatingly sincere, are dynamics which Chabon uses to mediate the harrowing emotional registries connected with Holocaust memory. The chicken in this scene may well represent the postmodern author, playful with genre conventions and humorous conceit, who in attempting to tell the story of the inherited task of examining the Holocaust's memory for those who lived in an era outside this trauma, discovers language's liminal opacity. This chapter thus considers tonal registries of narrative language in discoveries of Holocaust memory in Chabon. Sound and silence play an integral part in the shaping of this imagery, which is weighted by the distancing effect of uncovering recently discovered or previously unknown familial Holocaust trauma. In this way I show how the introduction of Holocaust

[274] My emphasis on the Jewish experience of Nazi genocidal programs during WWII does not rest on an essentialist interpretation of Jews being the singular victims of institutionalised murder in Hitler's Germany; an awareness of the plight of the Romany, State dissidents, the disabled and Homosexuals is integral to forming any serious foundational knowledge of the genocide. However, my emphases on the experience of a systematic Jewish genocide during 1933-1945 rests on the primacy of annihilation as devised by the Nazis towards in particular German Ashkenazi peoples as an integral politicized mandate of Nazi ideology, and the resulting emphasizing in the works of Jewish author of the place the Shoah has in Jewish cultural/intellectual thought. For more information on the historical records of the victims of Nazi genocidal programs during WWII, see https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documenting-numbers-of-victims-of-the-holocaust-and-nazi-persecution

themes and imagery represent a seriousness of tone which is not identifiable in the fiction Chabon produces before 2000.

The post-war reaction to the Holocaust has inspired the work of both Jewish and non-Jewish writers in engaging the moral quandaries and indirect outcomes of considering trauma in inventive, and indeed humorous, ways. The critic Matthew Boswell has described a virtual subgenre of writing he refers to as invoking "Holocaust laughter." In countering the overtly serious tone of much Holocaust scholarship, Boswell notes the impious tone which many of the first wave of authors who considered the Nazi-perpetrated genocide as a theme worthy of creative fiction when he points out that the first published collection of stories ever to be set amid the horrors of Auschwitz was camp survivor Tadeusz Borowski's darkly satirical *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (1946). That humoristic accounts set amid the violence and dehumanisation of camp life were the most immediate depictions of the Holocaust in printed media alludes to the idea that Holocaust piety and the non-identification of Holocaust experience can be argued as a contemporary, and emotively moralistic, academic phenomenon. Moreover, Borowski's collection was published long before works such as Martin Amis's *Time Arrow, or The Nature of the Offense* (1991) and Jonathan Little's *The Kindly Ones* (2006) faced accusations of upholding the worst kinds of postmodern literary experimentation and Holocaust impiety by daring to include subversively comedic narrative tropes.[275] For Boswell, Holocaust laughter "takes a number of different forms", cutting across different media forms from literature to film, art and modern music and ranges from "relatively benign and traditional humour that is not radically altered by the use of the Holocaust and which tends to be redemptive in purpose" to "more challenging forms of black comedy" that are shaped by the "embittered world views" that are the socialised result of "the genocide they so readily reference."[276] This conception of comedy as existing within fictional representations of the Holocaust for Boswell align as much to the experience of modernity after in the years following the Second World War as they do the more particularised experience of responding to Jewish trauma. Moreover, this assertion of comedy's relation to interpretations of Holocaust experience aligns with the analysis of the psychological transgressions that comedy establishes for Berlant and Ngai, whose understanding of the

[275] See Sue Vice's analysis of Amis's novel in *Holocaust Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000) and James Lasdun's review of *The Kindly Ones*, "The Exoticism of Evil" in *The Guardian https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/feb/28/kindly-ones-review*.
[276] Matthew Boswell. *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Music and Film*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan) 2012, 23.

anxieties that comedy explores hinges on its investigation into the social uncovering of often private narrative considerations. They assert: "one worry comedy engages is formal or technical in a way that leads to the social."[277] The set-up, the familiarised conceit, the call back to the event: all that takes place in the telling of a joke can be characterised also in the telling of history, in testimony itself. Why must fiction not be allowed these very parameters? Chabon's "miraculous chicken" gag in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, with its defamiliarized familiar setting of "Zhitlovsky Street", its openness to the consideration of the pastiche-adoring literary audience, the excitement implicit in the callback to the magically realist fantasy that risks running afoul of moral arbitrariness, posits what Berlant and Ngai find in comedy. That is, "the problem of figuring out distinctions between things, including people, whose relation is mutually disruptive of definition."[278] Or, as Landsman considers after the effective silence of God himself on the fate of the Jews through the de-resurrected chicken's silence, "would show that strange times to be a Jew almost always have been, as well, strange times to be a chicken."[279] The strange but all too familiar experience of living through traumatic history is, unfortunately for us all, a universally interpretable, felt strangeness.

Aesthetics and Trauma: Registries of Authorial Conceits in Chabon's Holocaust Narratives

Arguments detailing comprehension in literature, particularly the comprehension of traumatic events as argued through the generic tropes of fictional prose, often lean heavily on the production of meaning through literary language. Meaning in this sense is often a synonym for intent, which, whether authorial or interpretive, has often provided the somewhat spectral foil in discussing what works or doesn't work in frames of storytelling. Robert Eaglestone, whose work on the Holocaust has been grounded in a deep fascination with why so many post-war literary authors have been compelled to write on the Jewish *Shoah*, calls to attention the question Holocaust survivor and author Imre Kertész asked during his 2003 Nobel speech: "what writer today is not a writer of the Holocaust?"[280] Eaglestone's rebuttal moves similarly towards the difficult posturing of intent behind perhaps more honorable linguistic

[277] Berlant, Ngai ibid
[278] Berlant, Ngai, ibid.
[279] Chabon, ibid.
[280]Imre Kertész, in Robert Eaglestone *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

tropes: "meaning is not straightforward, nor is its relationship to literature."[281] Eaglestone had foregrounded his interest in the difficulties of comprehension presented in literature on the Holocaust in an earlier study, identifying that the historical event of the Nazi genocide resulted in a cross-disciplinary crisis of confidence in Western thought, a crisis ultimately resulting in a reviewing of postmodernist anxieties towards the priority of meaning, or the interpretation of meaning, as an ethically robust pedagogical discursive. Eaglestone argues here that the emergence of postmodernism in the Western academy "begins with thinking about the Holocaust", and that postmodernism, with its emphasis on considering the world philosophically after the foundational basis for a centralised understanding of the world, has been irreducibly corrupted by historical realities so that it acts as a "response to the Holocaust."[282]

Eaglestone's interpretation of a defining postmodern academic response to the Holocaust takes its lead from the quantifying position of ascribing narratives which problematize understanding that Jean-Francoise Lyotard encountered in his 1988 book *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Lyotard, whose earlier work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* utilised a surveillance of postmodern aesthetic in language that mimicked a scientific study of factually forecasted information, accredited "a great seismic force" in how Holocaust experience shaped the testimony of survivors, one that "destroys not only lives, buildings, objects but the instruments used" to measure and analyse any emotive responses to trauma.[283] Eaglestone considers how Lyotard's "instruments", the objectified paraphernalia of linguistic measurements that give the bent of Lyotard's descriptiveness an almost self-parodic pseudoscientific assertiveness, have often been taken as the stuff that has embedded in contemporary thinking about the Holocaust an austere tendency towards silence as being the only morally relative way of responding to it. Eaglestone suggests that this interpretation of a silence that suggests morality as imbued in the dramatic descriptiveness of Lyotard's almost cinematic prose alienates our attempt at reaching towards an understanding of the Holocaust as an historic event. Meaning, for Lyotard, has outdone the modes of metonymic understanding. In reading Holocaust testimony sympathy can be assessed, but empathy, the intention of so many of the literary and non-fictional works that traverse testimony (without

[281] Eaglestone, 2017, ibid.
[282] Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and The Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 2.
[283] Jean-Francoise Lyotard *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Der Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988) and Jean-François, trans. Geoffrey Bennington, Brian Massumi *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

ever claiming to possess the historical significance attached to the archiving of testimony) is best left unexamined by those uninitiated into traumatic experiences. The seismic forces that trouble those directly affected meaning for those outside the dark passages of historical testimony mean "that we cannot know about the Holocaust and must remain silent."[284] The term "differend" for Lyotard means a break in the understanding of historical narrative, a shattering event that moves the phase of an episteme into a new era of investigation, a shift into the present as unknown. The difference here is a difference of meaning, therefore a difference in comprehending what comes long before and what exists out of understanding.

To posit a contrasting perspective on understanding literary attempts at writing narratives that approach Holocaust experience, Eaglestone approaches Geoffrey Hartmann's proposition of how the very faculties assessed in detailing testimony are themselves "born of trauma". Therefore "the impossibility of quantitatively measuring" the emotional ruptures of Holocaust experience which is for Lyotard "an impossibility", but one that "does not prohibit…but rather inspires" survivors to recount difficult memories into narratives, underlies the discursive linearity invoked by the rationality, or the uniform prescriptiveness of contemporary society. However, this rationality, born of the trauma that Hartmann counters as a discursive means of coming to terms with historical trauma signals an approach that is often stigmatised into silence. This rationality of silence as a reaction to the traumatic is a recurring trope in postmodern fiction—silences that ascribe thinking and description, in ways that mirror and respond to the postmodern philosophical investigations of Lyotard's generation of theorists. Silence is a characteristic of Holocaust testimony as what Kertész describes as "the broken voice that has dominated modern art for decades" is a statement representative of the work of the generation of fiction writers that have lived in the shadow of Holocaust experience.[285] Voices broken by their awareness of testimony, and the plundering of silences for the hope of attaining understanding, resound throughout Michael Chabon's millennial fiction. The tangibility of objects that evoke memories of discovering trauma, or that evoke the once-reoccurring routines of the dead, are McGuffins in the case of disappearing identifications with the past.

[284] Eaglestone, ibid.
[285] Eaglestone, 2017, ibid.

Speaking of a Land of Ghosts: Chabon's Yiddish Experiments

Analysing Chabon's speculative writing on issues affecting Jewish male identity — the effects of history, trauma and memory — shows that, by keeping personal experiences of the Shoah at a generational or geographical distance for the characters of his fiction, Chabon mediates questions of narrative authenticity. Posing such questions of authenticity alongside processes of problematized identification, or problem-solving, often leads to a disruption of cognitive resolution in these texts. Beginning with *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000) history and memory are linked particularly to the effects of Holocaust representation, either first-hand or inherited, on individuals who inhabit what Chabon himself identifies as a "postmodern world."[286] History, and the placement of characters as either prisoners or liberators of its narrative framework, provides a basis in Chabon's fiction for mediations on individual ambition and failure in the millennial United States, rather than an attempt to draw logical conclusions out of lived experience.

Chabon's fiction during this era calls to attention the sense of psychological trauma, identified by Marianne Hirsh as "postmemory", which can spread to generations of affected communities.[287] Hirsch posits in a 1996 essay this effect of postmemory on Holocaust witnesses as powerfully relevant to the present conditions of the second generation "precisely because its relation to its object or source" does not come about being a subject of mediated discourse through actual lived experience but instead "through imaginative investment and creation."[288] The allure of creation is one of the foundations on which a Jewish American writer like Chabon builds his modes of representation; an historical enormity such as the Holocaust is an understandable source of consideration for a writer with historical but not experiential links to such a documented yet consistently ambiguous topic.[289] Engagement with the sentiment that emerges from post-trauma, which follows from a psychological form of suffering after or outside of an event, is represented by Chabon as a non-ironic negotiation of melancholy as a sincere response to past trauma. Beginning with a discourse on how characters' motives, dialogue and interior narration began with a shift from an emphasis on

[286] Michael Chabon, in Joseph Dewey, *Understanding Michael Chabon* (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press: 2014), 6.
[287] Marianne Hirsch "Past Lives: Postmemory in Exiles" in *Poetics Today* 17:4 (Winter, 1996), pp. 659-68, 539.
[288] Hirsch, "Past Lives",ibid.
[289] With this in mind, the intention of developing ethical discussions on traumatic history and the relation of this history to a third generation of Jewish Americans is a subject not unique to Chabon, it is also a theme that looms large in the fiction of his contemporaries such as Nicole Krauss, whose novel *The History of Love* (2005) explores similar themes of Holocaust postmemory.

comedic irony to melancholic sincerity in Chabon's fiction, I propose that a significant stylistic departure happens after Chabon's fiction begins to deal with a discourse of irony in the public sphere and sincerity in the private sphere. This development details a reconsideration of a dialectical approach in Chabon's writing, and alongside showcasing a development towards a broader sense of literary experimentation, an ethical approach to examining psychological affect in literature by examining personal interpretations of history. Sincerity amidst the artificiality of pop culture referents is of crucial significance to this understanding of the negotiation of the ethical impact of the historiographic in Chabon.

For characters in Chabon's millennial fiction, such as the émigré protagonist Josef "Joe" Kavalier who attempts to earn financial success and assimilation in the United States while attacking Nazism through comic books, history is presented as a concept from which characters feel they must either escape or become hostage to. Awareness of, or disclosure of, Holocaust memory is a unifying theme within Chabon's millennial fiction. Traumatic historiographic memory acts as a device which disrupts narratives of personal development and social relationships in fiction. Changes in literary tone and stylistic range in the fiction and essays Chabon produced in the decade that saw the publication of the essay "Guidebook to a Land of Ghosts" (1997)[290] to the appearance of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (2007) reflect an emerging consideration in Chabon's writing of the effects past historical trauma has on third generation male Jewish Americans. Chabon first meditated on the effects the Holocaust had on late twentieth-century Jewish identity in a 1997 essay, "Guidebook to a Land of Ghosts", which describes a chance discovery of the 1958 edition of *Say It in Yiddish*, a guidebook for tourists on a language, which, given that the book's publication occurs a decade after the genocide which claimed the lives of the majority of the Yiddish speaking population, "condemning it to watch the last of its native speakers die one by one in a headlong race for extinction with the twentieth century itself"[291] The hyperbole Chabon exacts in the analogy of finding the guidebook — an apocalyptic interpretation of locating this otherwise mundane cultural artefact as foreshadowing a personal sense of loss over the causalities of a genocide — can be thought of as the ignition of a poetical charge in Chabon's

[290] Chabon "Guidebook to a Land of Ghosts" in *Civilisation* (June/July Issue, 1997), reprinted as "The Language of Lost History" in *Harper's Magazine* (October Issue, 1997) pp. 52-54. The article was published under its original title as an afterword in the British paperback edition of *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* (London: 4th Estate, 2007,2010) and significantly expanded as long-form essay under the title "Imaginary Homelands" in Chabon's 2008 collection *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing along the Borderlands* (London: 4th Estate, 2008, 2010) pp. 157-181.
[291] Chabon, 2008, 165.

writing. On learning that Yiddish was in fact seeing a resurgence in Jewish communities internationally, Chabon's reaction was to exploit the possibilities of the Yiddish revival to discuss the historical state policies which threatened it most. Speaking to Patricia Cohen in *The New York Times* in 2007, Chabon discussed how his re-imaging of an updated Yiddish dialect gives voice to a generation of an American Yiddish population that never existed, instead charting the evolution of slang, abbreviated and metaphorical language that may have developed in the Yiddish of the northernmost reaches of the United States had it not effectively died out alongside the majority Yiddish speakers who perished by the hands of racist Nazi aggressors.[292] The appropriation of Yiddish terms such as Sholem for pistol (Sholem means "Peace" and "piece" is urban American slang for firearm) Shofar for mobile phone (from the horn blown to announce the Jewish religious holiday of atonement Yom Kippur) Shtetl and, most directly, Yid, has the effect of reclaiming the Yiddish language.[293] On a surface level as a means of utilizing an entertaining appropriation of slang to mirror the jazzy dynamism of the language spoken by Chandler's Phillip Marlow in his Noir detective fiction. On a more subtle level Chabon is here reinvigorating a lost language significant to his European ancestors, if only as a mean of signposting the violent history of disappearance experienced in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Chabon's appropriation of Yiddish in the Novel also tackles negative assessments of feigned authenticity in those appropriating twentieth century European Jewish culture in this fictionalized Sitka. European Shtetl for the liminal, ghettoized district of Verbov Island, home to the "authentic" Hassidic Jews of Sitka who adhere to the visible expression of ethnic traditions in Landman's description, is "a Disney Shtetl" which lends the area a particularly Baudrillardian strain of simulacra.[294] The "cobbled platz" home of Zimbalist, the boundary maven—who is effectively the geographical authority surveying the division between secular Sitka and Verbov Island's ethnically distinctive Shetyl quarter—stands, according to Landsman, narrow upon entry before the lane "broadens out like the nose of a cartoon Jew."[295] The dismissive tone of ironic description used by Landsman here indicates a

[292] Patricia Cohen, "The Frozen Chosen" *The New York Times,* Sunday 29th April 2007. Reprinted in Chabon, 2010.
[293] Yid is used in the Novel in a potentially controversial, if not intentionally provocative sense. Mirroring the reclamation in African American slang of racially charged derivatives to indicate a fraternal or communal descriptor, "Yid" here functions to showcase an awareness of the dismantling effect of re-appropriated language.
[294] Chabon, 2007, 106.
[295] Chabon, Ibid.

judgement on the artifice of the Shtetl's architecture. The symbolic reasoning behind this almost museum-like appropriation of a "real" Jewish living space is, however, devised through or couched in the narrative of an appropriated, artificial rendering of Yiddish slang. The parodic naming of Zimbalist, the appointed designator of the topographical spaces between the "authentic" Verbov cultural district and the more cosmopolitan city of Sitka, the Zionist symbolist who sets the boundary between these groups who share essentially the same spatial region, can be read here as a satirical rendering of Zionist policies which divide secular land in the disputed territories of Israel/Palestine from the holy areas of Jerusalem. Here is the first rendering of Chabon's critique of the theme of Jewish exceptionalism in the novel: in a wider sense it presents the first obvious commentary on the idea of Jews owning the narratives of persecution and redemption associated with the Holocaust. Later in the novel, the seemingly harmless occupants of the Verbov Island Shetyl commit atrocities as terrorists attacking disputed land in Jerusalem in the name of Holocaust redemption, a movement that has its origins in the very storefront which Landman's dismisses for its naïve appropriation of cultural significance, its artificial homages to an inaccessible Jewish history "bright and clean as a freshly forged birth certificate."[296] Like the newly minted names of Joe Kavalier nd aSam Clay in Chabon's earlier ovel, the ironised bright and clean artifice of Zimbalist's storefront Shtetl storefront masks darker considerations of twentieth century Jewish identity.

Of What Use Then, Irony? Identity, and Authenticity in Chabon's post-1945 Fiction

The centrality of the Holocaust as taking place outside of lived experience but nevertheless dominating Jewish male consciousness after 1945 is the foremost identifiable underlying thematic concern in the fiction Chabon publishes after 2000. Replete with considerations of how the emergence of knowledge of Holocaust trauma affects a loss of innocence and a shattering of confidence for male Jewish characters, the fiction that Chabon published from the turn of the twenty-first century exhibits a remarkable unity in the way it demonstrates a counter to a postwar literary demotion of sincerity as an inferior means of narratology to authenticity. This claim developed significant theoretical credence when first argued by Lionel Trilling during an era when New Criticism enjoyed a prominent influence in American academies. Trilling's identification of an overriding sense that authenticity had replaced sincerity as the singular narrative concern in twentieth-century fiction had

[296] Chabon, Ibid.

undergone a significant revival during the 1990s when there was an emerging trend by American writers to downplay the overwhelming influence of postmodernist theory on American arts and humanities. Although historical and personal situations in Chabon are often described in ironic terms, the sentiment attached to these situations and the efforts to resolve them is imbued with sincerity. The central argument of Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972) was subject to an ironic inversion of influence, rather than antiquate sincerity as a reductive ideal of pre-modernist sentimentalism, Trilling's book seemed to re-invigorate an enthusiasm for sincerity as a means of creating a distinctive narratology for a generation of writers frustrated with the dominant literary predecessor of authenticity: postmodern irony.

Because Chabon works at both a temporal and geographic distance from the Holocaust trauma which permeates his work, his means of referencing trauma is premised almost entirely on visual and popular cultural referents; that is, on objects which often signal both irony and sincerity in everyday discourse. Sincerity's place in Chabon's millennial fiction is a poetical means of conveying affect, of registering how emotional and psychological responses to trauma negotiate the reactions and the awareness of difficult familial histories. There is also, in the imaginative pyrotechnics of language—which act as a poetical rendering of the visual excitement of comic books illustration and language in *Kavalier and Clay* and the reimagining of updated, slang-heavy Yiddish—a desire to reconstruct an interest in the potentiality of literary language. Emphasis on the potentialities and representability of language in literature is often a commanding feature of American literary movements throughout the twentieth century. However, by the 1990s significant authors such as William H. Gass showed such conviction in their work to assuage the influence of European postmodernist criticism on their work and the criticism that language in their fiction had become merely the stuff of satire — another example of a cultural referent whose objectivity had become decentred in the wake of serious world conflict and political oppressiveness. [297]

Any discussion of what is represented by sincerity and authenticity and how they are challenged or idealistically oppositional to irony can be assessed by the usage of literary language, and how this usage of language is impacted by aesthetic or historicist

[297] See Gass's Novel *The Tunnel* (Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1999) an epic postmodern satire which uses humour to convey the pointlessness of gaining understanding from a historical perspective the Nazi's perpetrators reasoning for planning and Holocaust crimes.

interpretation. In Trilling's text, the word 'sincerity' itself is conditioned by historicist representations of overly aesthetic literature that predate the ethical complexities inherent in contemporary society. By designating sincerity as a literary development which exerted a particular hold on the aesthetics and aspirations of pre-twentieth-century writers, Trilling asserts that the usage of sincerity in literature represented an attempt to "observe the moral life" by attributing to literature "some mode of conduct of feeling which hitherto it had not regarded as essential to virtue."[298]

This outlining of a hybridization of aesthetic form and ethical consciousness by Trilling posits what can be ascribed to sincerity as a result of an Enlightenment ideal of art as affecting aestheticism to create a dialectic. As an attempt to insert a humanist turn in literature that would set the precedent for literature as a device to investigate the self and to represent a pre-psychoanalytic search for the "truth" about an individual's place in society, emotive ideals inhabit a politicized sphere as literature with a particularized philosophical content. A further emphasis Trilling insists on is relation "affect"—on the prioritising of how sincerity is represented in a text is reflected when Trilling explains how the way he understands the word as referring " primarily to a congruence between avowal and actual feeling."[299] By positing this attempt to engage readers with this bridging of the ideal and the relatable, intellectualism and affectation, sincerity in works of literature for Trilling referred to a literary praxis that borrowed from philosophy and asceticism that predated theory. Trilling shows the relationship between the literary usage of sincerity and the literary praxis of theory when he discusses Polonius's speech from Hamlet ("To thine own self, be true…").[300] He argues that any contemporary understanding of 'sincerity' must apply a two-fold knowledge of the word's literary significance and its historical antiquity to "take into its purview not only the birth and ascendancy of the concept but also of its eventual decline" but to effectively demote the term and its applicable relationship to a large corpus of western literature since Shakespeare, to "the sharp diminution of the authority it once exercised."[301] The sense of sincerity as attaining what amounts to an aura of humiliation in Trilling's perhaps overstated analysis encounters a telling intersection with sincerity's oppositional predecessor in literary mode. Describing how sincerity had by the 1970s lost much of the

[298] Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 2.

[300] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* in Trilling, 1972, 2-5.
[301] Trilling, 1972, 6.

dignified assertion it once claimed as a signature referent in literature, Trilling gives the example of how by the 1970s to speak the word 'sincerity' aloud would result in the speaker likely doing so "with either discomfort or irony."[302] This sense of ironic detachment in the mention of 'sincerity' during an era where literature had embraced irony as an epistemological response to history acts as an oppositional synopsis of the term, and so Trilling claims critics of an ironic age "are impelled to use" 'authenticity' in lieu of its antiquated other. For Trilling 'authenticity' denotes the nature" of moralistic literature which "accounts for the high value we put upon it."[303]

This shift towards the valuation of authenticity over the perceived naivety of a term such as sincerity occurred according to Trilling as authenticity represented "a considerable moral authority" by defining a space in literary language for the detailing of subjects rarely examined in fiction claimed by sincerity, in Trilling's example "disorder, violence, unreason."[304] While hardly mutually exclusive terms in much of Chabon's fiction, the juxtaposition of what is described by the sincere as opposed to the authentic is useful in creating a distinction in Chabon for what divides public and private irony in his rendering of historiographic narrative. If the authentic, in Trilling's terminology, represents the shocking testimony of Holocaust victims, with all the unsparing violence implied in this testimony, then sincerity represents the sentiment which is left in coming to terms with the postmemory of excruciating Holocaust memory.

The afterimage of Holocaust memory in Chabon's fiction attempts a sincerity relating to an investigation of the private self which Trilling affords what he considers was by the 1970s an antiquated metre of ethical investigation in literature. In terms of identifiable strands of unifying themes in Chabon's fiction after 2000, the themes of searching for traces of sincerity within cultural artifice/entertainment and a sense of being displaced without directly suffering as a result of displacement occupy Sam Clay, Josef/Joe Kavalier, Meyer Landesman and the Michael Chabon presented to readers in the author's essays. In "Trickster in A Suit of Light" Chabon writes of how he understands the original sense of the word entertainment as one that promotes hybrids of form which offer "a mutual support through intertwining, like a pair of

[302] Trilling, ibid.
[303] Trilling, 93.
[304] Trilling, 11.

trees…each sustain and bearing up the other".[305] Here Chabon effectively prompts his reader to consider the attempted formal hybridity at play in his fiction. The idea of entertainment as being a device which is naturally subscribed to a work of literary fiction is offered by Chabon in this analogy as being a standard component to a work of imaginative art, the idea that before a reader should seriously consider what a piece of fiction *means*, to first consider how a piece of fiction affects the way a person *feels.*

The idea of bridging formal literary devices, of closing in the gap between what can be considered "High" art which speaks to intellectualism and the continued progression of a culturally lauded discipline and "Low" popular entertainment, stigmatized by the limitations of merely representing an ephemeral genre, is for Chabon a way of offering "contact across a void, like the tangling of cable and steel across two lonely bridgeheads."[306] If these bridgeheads represent the separation of "High" and "Low" art which separate two forms of literary engagement from the other, the engagement of aestheticism versus the engagement of entertainment, then the void Chabon describes is a void which can be filled by a language of affectation. This attempt to imbue literary form with narrations which consider a double-edged consideration of sincerity, as one which exists when the formal application of language, plot and characterization, which carries over into any psychological and critical analysis of a work of fiction, marks a significant transition in Chabon's poetical approach.

This approach has been identified as representing a "post-postmodernist syndrome" in contemporary American writing. Nicoline Timmer has described the emergence of an interest in affect and sentiment in American writing at the turn of the twentieth century as a "post-postmodernist syndrome." The idea that writers such as David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers reacted against the decentering or deadening of sentiment typified by the postmodernist American writing of the 1980s (Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis) presents a rather transparent engagement with post-postmodern writers.[307] Although examples of authorial intent are applicable in the essay writing and interviews conducted by these authors, it is a particularly premature judgement on Chabon's writing to insist he attempts to wholly break away from a postmodernist engagement with the complexities of human character.

---

[305] Chabon, 2008, 3.
[306] Chabon, ibid.
[307] Clare Hayes-Brady dedicates much of her study *The Unspeakable Failures of David Foster Wallace* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016) arguing that Wallace's fiction never quite achieved the "single-entendre" non-ironic tenets of sentiment he set out in "E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction in Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (London: Abacus, 1997; 2004.)

Timmer describes texts by post-postmodernist authors such as David Foster Wallace and Dave Eggers that "perform a complicit and complicated critique on certain aspects of postmodern subjectivity, especially on the perceived solipsistic quality of the postmodern experience world"[308]. Here Timmer emphasises a turn against postmodern solipsism in post-postmodernist fiction and instead enthuses about a return to narratives that focus on the emotive and experiential perspective of protagonists. Timmer stresses that this move represents more than just a hybrid development of influence, but instead "envision certain reconfigurations of subjectivity which can no longer be framed … as postmodern",[309] suggesting for Timmer an attempt at a complete stylistic break from postmodern aesthetics. In contrast, Richard Rorty's idea of "liberal irony" presents a version of the humanist shift in literature that places irony as a positive attribute of postmodernist ethics and which challenges the post-postmodernist idea that irony offers a disingenuous assessment of the private sphere. Rorty argues that literary authors writing after Hegel (post-enlightenment philosophy, post-Romantic poetry) have attempted to shed the idea of a metaphysically separated binary of the community versus the individual. Rorty instead postulates the strategy of writers from the late nineteenth century as reflecting an insistence that "socialization, and thus historicism, goes all the way down— that there is nothing "beneath" socialization or prior to history which is definitory of the human."[310] Having rejected both totalities of this binary—that there is neither a quantifiable justification for a libidinal "human nature" nor an aesthetically defined "deepest level of the self"—Rorty identifies the concern of authors who rejected the idealization of the self or the social as two distinct ethical choices.

The reconsideration of how history contributes to and distorts the idea of individualism within post-enlightenment society represents for Rorty a change that would prove irremediable in terms of the breaking down of subjectivity within the literature of the last one hundred and fifty years before the millennium. The amalgamation of the self and society in terms of what was considered ethical choices in literary representation witnessed the shift within a discipline which, according to Rorty, had been founded on asking the basic question "What is it to be a human being?", to questions like "What is it to inhabit a rich twentieth-century democratic society?" Rorty further inverts the pre-enlightenment binary of the self

[308] Nicoline Timmer, *Do You Feel It Too? The Post-Postmodernism Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium* (New York and Amsterdam: Rodophi, 2010) 13.
[309] Timmer, 2010, 18.
[310] Rorty, 1989, xiii.

and the social by suggesting that the writer after the historical turn would logically move on to a further question: "How can an inhabitant of such a society be more than the enactor of a role in a previously written script?"[311] This rebuttal of pre-historicist interpretations of literature prompts Rorty to meditate on the virtues of postmodernist decentering in literature. If postmodernism attenuates the process of trying, in Jameson's understanding, to historicize contemporary society which technology has prevented from signifying a historic precedent,[312] then Rorty appraises postmodernist historicism in its looking to the past as an explanation for the present, as liberation in literary terms.

Rorty speaks of the historicist approach to literature as helping to free contemporary society "from the temptation to look for an escape from time and chance", when both metaphysics and theology appeared to offer decreasing relevancies in an age identifiable with historical conflicts.[313] Rorty suggests the perspective of the postmodern historicist, identifiable in the works of the writer who "reminds us of the failure of our institutions and practices to live up to the convictions to which we are already committed to the public, shared vocabulary we use in everyday life" reflect an ideological form of postmodern poetics Rorty terms "liberal irony."[314] In developing this theory of writers identifiable by a 'liberal irony' in their work, Rorty claims the distinctive ethical viewpoint of an individual, which he divides into separate essentialist definitions such as the 'metaphysician' and the 'ironist', which can be examined by analysing the individual's "final vocabulary."[315] Positive and negative formulations of the difference between the attitudes towards friends, and enemies, long-term projects, hopes and fears can be assessed as delineating the moral contingency of the individual private persona in a public setting.[316] The emergence of irony as a means of referring to a dialectic for Rorty sees the emergence of a movement which rejected the rhetorical liminality of metaphysical approaches to philosophy. The ironist is identifiable to Rorty as an individual who impressed by other final vocabularies "she has encountered through books or other people" begins to exert a "radical doubt about the final vocabulary she currently uses."[317]

[311] Rorty, ibid.
[312] Jameson, 1991, 7.
[313] Rorty, ibid.
[314] Rorty, ibid.
[315] Rorty, 1989, 73.
[316] Analysis of the argument is my own, but can be found in Rorty's terms, ibid.
[317] Rorty, 189.

The suggestion by Rorty that the ironist seeks out and expands a vocabulary beyond the limitations of their public self to fulfil private curiosities is one which mirrors the urging for the developments of private language to carry over to public spheres in Trilling and Steiner. This drive within the ironist for a public language/final vocabulary expanding to intuit the private self is reflected in Chabon's utilizing of Yiddish to examine Holocaust memory, which in turn confirms the author as ascribing to Rorty's ideals as private liberal ironist.

This definition of the liberal ironist as those who seek to expand a final vocabulary of the public self is odd in the way it relates irony so intrinsically to humanism. On the surface, Rorty's definition of the liberal ironist deflates the notion of Trilling's understanding of "to thine own self be true"; if malleability of identity is the ironist's claim to furthering their "final vocabulary", the irony inherent in this seeking of inspiration from sources beyond the self would remain ironic, as opposed to authentic or sincere. This in turn categorises Chabon's attempts to analyse sincerity in examinations of artifice in his fiction as liberal irony. Steiner's desire for a "literary humanism" would in turn be rejected by Rorty's liberal ironist, who, as an historicist, "thinks nothing has an intrinsic nature or a real essence."[318] This devaluation of intrinsic nature, which Steiner conflates with human psychology would suggest an interpretation of literature as dealing "essentially and continually with the image of man, with the shape and motive of human conduct."[319] As a secondary concern to how Rorty's interpretation of liberal irony concerns the role of developed vocabulary, language experimentation is the central relation to the questions asked of/by the liberal humanist. However, a particular assertion of Rorty's description of the liberal ironist, who sees themselves as "particularly rapid in changing their self-image, in re-creating themselves"[320] would result in quite a problematic reading of the malleability of identity in *Kavalier and Clay.*

Holocaust Imagery as Aesthetic Turn: Difficulties of History Encountered

While my own critical perspective takes a less extreme position on the influence of postmodernism on post-postmodernist writers, particularly in relation to my research on Chabon, I concur with Timmer that a turn away from irony towards investigations of sincerity is an overarching narrative feature in the fiction Chabon published after the turn of

[318] Rorty, 1989, 74.
[319] Steiner, 1963, 1987, 22.
[320] Rorty, 1989, 78.

the millennium, particularly in relation to the social and political issues that inform Chabon's texts. In placing narrative sincerity at the core of his literary discourse, my position asserts how Chabon presented a bridge between American postmodernism and the literary movements that began to succeed its influence in the years approaching the twenty-first century. The important shift in terms of narrative voice in Chabon's millennial demonstrates a move from ironic authorial metafiction to that of attempts at constructing sincere narratives that emphasize the historiographic.

This shift speaks of a turn in the period's poetics which affected significant changes in how a writer like Chabon reconsiders major themes in his work, specifically through the style of language he utilizes. Although this example of a stylistic turn away or break from ironic poetics is hardly unique in light of the multitude of literary breaks in established traditions in the American fiction of the twentieth century, with examples of comparable stylistic turns from modernist (the psychological stream of consciousness of Eliot, Fitzgerald, Faulkner) to realist (the self-consciously authentic fiction of Dreiser, Yeats, Updike) to postmodern (the increasing tendency to embrace artifice and historicity in Pynchon, DeLillo, Auster), the breaks in established American literary traditions with sincerity have received increased attention from literary critics after 1945. The turn towards linguistic sincerity in postwar American fiction, even if that meant representing a silence or deadening of language as a response to a growing awareness of political and personal trauma in the aftermath of World War two, was given particular attention by critics such as Steiner. Insisting that the uncovering of the Holocaust in Europe had a profound influence on postwar literature, Steiner assessed the profligacy of literary criticism which signaled for developments in American poetics a desire that reflected a turn toward psychological realism evident in early modernist fiction. This, Steiner hoped, would reflect upon an influence of European writers (Joyce, Mallarmé, Beckett) who "have made of their instrument, which is language, the deliberate theme, the visible object of their art."[321] Steiner insists that this focus on literary language as an identifiable creative signature of a break from what has gone before represents both a sincerity of formal intention and a means to reflect on/generate a response to the seismic psychologic effects felt within public and private life after the Holocaust. Writing in 2008, Chabon asserts an awareness of this private and public dichotomy which mediates

[321] George Steiner, *Language and Silence*: *Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1967), 1985, 13.

between his life as an American Jewish man who writes imaginatively about Jewish Holocaust trauma as a career. "For a long time now I've been busy in my life and in my work, with a pair of ongoing investigations: into my heritage-rights and privileges, duties and burdens— as a Jew and as a teller of Jewish stories; and into my heritage as a lover of genre fiction", he writes.[322] Here his love of genre fiction is prioritized, seizing its place in a sentence which otherwise sums up a straightforward approach of Chabon the Jewish writer. The signaling of Jewish history and identity in Chabon's fiction thus suggests a desire to represent the sincere as a methodology. This is despite the lack of literary authenticity which admitting a penchant for genre fiction might lend to Chabon's self-evaluation. Chabon describes the "years spent writing novels and stories about Golems and the Jewish roots of American superhero comic books, Sherlock Holmes and the Holocaust" as in reality being representative of a single investigation in his fiction, a search with a sole objective: "a home, a world to call my own."[323] This sense of the struggle of Chabon to find a psychological 'home' in his fiction by writing fiction that finds inspiration in a the fusing of a hybridity of different genre styles can be seen as reflecting a prioritization of language experiments as a reaction to Jewish Holocaust trauma and a desire for a Jewish homeland. This enthusiasm for language intersecting with an enthusiasm to combine fantastical storytelling devices in his fiction mirrors a similar desire in Steiner to see a transition towards a rejuvenation of literary language to overcome the "political bestiality" of the Holocaust era in manifesting hope for future generations of storytellers.[324]

Chabon's use of the speculative in the form of popular culture — or fictional referents to actual lived trauma — therefore strives to forge an understanding of the difficulties inherent in the "post-postmodernist syndrome." The issues faced by American writers whose cultural referents were formed by an awareness of postmodern narratology often resulted in fiction which were inspired by the aesthetic forms associated with pre-postmodern literature. While it has been argued that Chabon's peers David Foster Wallace and Jonathan attempt to mirror Trilling's analysis of sincerity as "the making of an effort that was of supreme value to the moral life", their means of stripping away any evidence of postmodernist artifice from their prose seems dishonest in an era still so alerted to postmodern theory.[325] Situated as it is in the

[322] Chabon, 2008, 159.
[323] Chabon, ibid.
[324] Steiner, ibid.
[325] Trilling, 6.

aftermath of post-9/11 cultural ennui and technological overstimulation, Chabon's fiction during this era displays alongside the hybrid influences of genre fiction a preoccupation with cultural artifice. I argue that with this in mind, Chabon's millennial fiction is reflective of Jean Baudrillard's argument that the search for representations of authenticity in contemporary society are compromised by the same technological advances which appeared to promise visualised replicas of reality.[326] In one respect, an emerging fidelity in Chabon's writing evident in his complaint that "there is a bias against any kind of narrative in which plot is foreground", seems to emphasise a sincere reproach to reinvigorating the traditional capacities of much of post-twentieth fiction, but the settings where Chabon imagines his fiction are often so encompassed with postmodernist sensibilities that plot structures themselves appear as examples of inherent literary referents.[327]

The insertion of post-Holocaust memory as a rendering of a sincere interaction with historiographic narrative occurs prominently in Chabon's texts as an interruption of the domestic and or/the mundane. A scene in *Kavalier and Clay* set after the cousins experience their first instance of financial success in the entertainment business unfolds when a music programme ends and Joe hears an announcement that the Nazi-occupied Vichy government of France have introduced "a series of statues, modelled after the Nuremburg laws"[328] that would limit the rights of France's Jewish population. Chabon describes how "in the newsreader's odd formula" these decrees would allow the French government to "superintend" the Jewish population, as if further policing were needed to curb resistance or stamp out a Jewish problem amongst the Jews of France. The reference creates an allusion to the infamous "Final Solution to the Jewish Problem" ministerial meeting of the Third Reich. That this intimation of a growing social control of Jews in Europe almost out of happenstance, whilst Joe is winding down from a day's drawing to listen to Jazz and stare out and ponder on New York City, is an example of the cognitive mapping which Chabon figures in his works as leitmotifs to remind readers of the significance of the historiographic in the everyday. Banal, commonplace activities such as relaxing while listening to a radio programme act as a means of triggering memories of historical and psychological importance. Chabon interjects the Nazi threat to Joe while he is far away from the danger this

[326] Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*: *Simulacra and Simulation: The Body in Theory*, trans. Shelia Faria Glazer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), 1994.
[327] Chabon, in Cohen, 2007.
[328] Chabon, 2000, 167.

threat implies, reminding him of the potential victimhood of the Jewish life he left behind in Prague as Josef Kavalier, where he would have been incriminated by this identity. The radio announcer goes on to describe how some French Jews, "communists mostly," had been rounded up and transported to "labour camps in Germany."[329] The obvious assumption being framed in the mind of the reader presents another insertion of historiography. What alerts readers to the device of foreshadowing in this scene, which is relative to a post-1945 understanding of Jewish history, is an understanding that events which took place during 1940 in America had their effects on a Jewish diaspora anxious yet unaware of simultaneous Jewish suppression in Europe.

Although none of the novels of Chabon's I discuss can be categorised as children's literature, the figure of a child who undergoes a loss of innocence attributable either to Holocaust experience or affiliative knowledge presents a pivotal recurrence of characterisation throughout all three texts. In the novel's opening scene, a retired police detective living under the alias Mr. Shane encounters a refugee child walking along the train tracks near his cottage, the parrot perched on Linus Steinman's shoulder speaks in German numbers: "*Zwei eins sieben sieben <u>fünf</u> sieben drei*, and after a pause *siben drei vier acht vier nuen eins eins sieben"*[330], (italics author's own) signifying 2 1 1 7 7 5 7 3 and 4 7 3 4 8 4 9 1 1 7 in English. What appears obvious to the contemporary reader aware of the signification of such a list of individualised numbers is that these numbers relate the identity of the boy to the Holocaust, whereas the older character assumes he has merely lost his way in Britain more as a matter of accident than design. The image of the numbers has for the contemporary reader an association with the tattoos forcibly etched on the arms of camp inmates, an act often associated with the designating of an identity other than those claimed before imprisonment.

The reduction of an identity to numbers, as opposed to the letters which denote a personable claim to citizenship and individuality, emerges as a foreshadowing of information surrounding Linus's personal history. The signs of the atrocities of the camps are already noted before the old man could learn from an interlocutor, the parrot, what are the individual characteristics of the boy's basic individualism: his name. More than any other piece of fiction by Chabon, this scene in *The Final Solution* features a character synonymous with the

[329] Chabon, ibid.
[330] Chabon, 2005,11.

lived experience of the Holocaust, but in a still yet identifiable omniscient mode of speculative narrative, this crucial aspect of Holocaust representation is left outside of the cognitive grasp of the unaffected protagonist. Chabon again uses dark irony in the form of the first words Mr Shane speaks to Linus. Referring to the dangers of standing too close to an electric fence, Mr. Shane warns the wandering boy: "Why, do you imagine, is there a *fence*?.....for pity's sake, you'll be fried like a smelt….one can only imagine the *stench".* [331] Unaware of the nature of the circumstances wherein Linus last found himself near an electric fence, Chabon utilizes again speculative dramatic irony to embellish the unknowable effects of Holocaust trauma, in this case not only represented by a figure unprepared to face up to trauma but who also as a mute child lacks the basic means of communication to express these required sentiments. The "*Stench"* which Mr. Shane threatens to imagine was a reality of life in the camp for Linus, who knew all too well the scent of death and illness were for him and his family an everyday reality. The reason why there is a fence in the English countryside is to keep bulls out of residential areas, the reason why there was a fence in the camp was to keep Jews inside. This first exchange between Linus and Mr. Shane exemplifies the miscommunication and sheer inaccessibility that exist between the two characters: Linus likely couldn't explain the traumatic implications of his experiences even if he could speak to Mr. Shane, a man of considerable life experience who has no comparative example to understand the trauma Linus underwent prior to adolescence.

Mr. Shane's reaction to Linus's appearance and the numbers his parrot announces highlights the inappropriate application of prior knowledge to any understanding of the Holocaust. Chabon has Shane consider meeting this boy to be an opportunistic stroke of personal luck "To encounter a solitary German, on the South Downs, and a German boy at that—here was a puzzle to kindle old appetites and energies as if the detective's duty was not solely to seek the guilty in the aftermath of a crime but to instinctually find an adventure out of the curiosity of otherness, or of the not immediately explainable.[332] Here Chabon structures the argument which lies at the core of *The Final Solution.* A misconception in postwar approaches to the investigation and teaching of Holocaust history is that it is a topic that is understandable as a matter of evidential chronology. Over this history's later effects, Chabon suggests that the trauma incurred by Holocaust victims is not accessible to contemporary readers but instead is

[331] Chabon, 2005, 10.
[332] Chabon, *The Final Solution,*

a puzzle to be solved. The mystery of suffering is given a particularly logical turn, demonstrating an influence of enlightenment thought. Chabon here uses the idiosyncratic outlook of the Sherlock Holmes character, the famous detective of Scotland Yard, as a means of contrasting Holmes's sense of logical determinism with the psychological crises in contemporary thought after the discovery of the Holocaust.

Songs of Snow and Flame: Spectres of Sound and Haunted Environments in Chabon's Millennial Fiction

Apparitions of deceased family members, through memory and imaginary apparitions that verge on the supernatural, feature throughout Chabon's post-2000 fiction. Ghostly apparitions disrupt the realistically described ambitions of Chabon characters. Dreamlike descriptions of these memories or mnemonic phenomena (memory triggers evoked by music, vividly rendered distractions) often coincide with politically engaged awakenings or a resurgence in socially immersive acts. A hauntological reading of the figure of spectral apparitions highlights Chabon's interest in reading memory, particularly the memory of family members lost to violence, and how approach to intrusive memory affects readings of literary hauntology. Similarly, accounts of those who perished in the Holocaust, of persons both familiar and never known, permeate those fictions of Chabon's which deal with descriptions of Holocaust memory. Reminiscences of mourned family members are often the result of intrusive memories triggered by unanticipated coincidences. Popular songs, often the mimetic evocations which trigger childhood memories for adults, act as recurrent interruptions of holocaust imagery, which are particularly evocative for those with no lived experience of the Jewish Shoah.

When Landsman considers the snowy terrain of the Yiddish migration to Sitka through remembering "Nokh Amol", a song that "Landsman and every other Alaskan Jew of his generation learned in grade school", his contemplation of the lyrics range from wry nostalgia to a considered awareness of the plight encountered by the generation of Yiddish speakers who first popularized the song.[333] Landsman accredits a knowing kitsch to the tune—its sentiments allude to how the "smell of the wind from the Gulf fills a Jewish nose with a sense of promise, opportunity and the will to start again."[2] The arctic zones that lay in the upper reaches of the gulf stream, being no natural homeland for Yiddish speaking Jews, was given

[333] Chabon, 2007, 4.

the artificial sheen of a song of promise for a generation of refugees, who, unlike migrants who sought the promise of new prosperities in the pre-World War Two United States, did not set out seeking the opportunity this song alludes to. Landesman reminds himself that the song is a significant indicator of the period; "Nokh Amol" dates from the Polar Bear days, the early forties,"[334], where the frontier Sitka Jews, whose exodus from Europe has become memorialized mainly by what Landesman later sees as the retro reproduction of the cartoon polar bear which features as his nephew's pajamas. An unmediated understanding of the song's intention would suggest without remit to the ethics of testimony to provide the children of holocaust survivors. Many of these survivors, the majority of them orphans, would be left with traumatizing memories of what they had encountered as Jewish children persecuted by Nazis. Landman's tone changes further when considering the adult subtext of the song, how the teaching of "Nokh Amol" to his generation of children who had not experienced the Shoah had an ulterior motive to invoke a messianic sense of a Yiddish promised land: "it's supposed to be an expression of gratitude for another miraculous deliverance: Once Again."[335] With the threat of the Sitka reversal imminent, this sense of the song capturing for the children of Holocaust survivors an escape from the difficult memories of working with trauma evoke as a sense for that Landsman that his contemporary "Jews of the Sitka District tend to hear the ironic edge that was there all along."[336] The irony inherent in the frustrated ends to the quoted sentence here "Once again", coupled with the "all along" declaration which impacts how the sentence reads as both witty and unnerving, offering a distillation of what Hutcheon describes as the double receptive at play in irony. Irony's edge is here reached by Landsman's assessment of the place of "Nokh Amol" as the inserted statements of ironized disappointments incurred by ordinary people at the mercy of a mythologized fate.

Indeed, there is a double irony at play in Chabon's use of "Nokh Amol" because the original intent of the song was for a Yiddish musical. Its theme is a simple request for a marriage proposal. According to the *Milken Archive of Jewish Music "*Zog es mir nokh Amol" (Tell Me Again) first appeared in 1931 at the public theatre in Ellstein and Israel Rosenberg's

[334] Chabon, ibid.
[335] Chabon, ibid.
[336] Chabon, ibid.

operetta *Der berditchever khosn* (*The Bridegroom from Berditchever).*[337] Set in Ukraine during the first world war, the operetta is a Yiddish nostalgia piece about the encroaching of secular customs that follow the assimilation of urbanized Jews into cosmopolitan lifestyles. The motive behind Chabon's choice of including the song in his novel is ironic, yet also deeply affecting. The song creates humour out of traditional Jewish anxieties towards assimilation, and the refrain of "tell me again" fits the frustrated sense of history repeating itself to Sitka's Jews, those told to optimistically await an unlikely return to Eden.

That Chabon has children living in exile from both the land of their immediate European relations and the defined Jewish holy lands of origin, children likely singing unaccompanied without the lively operatic backing of the Rosenburg opera, can be read comparatively with use Steven Spielberg soundtracking the scene of the massacring of Jews in his film *Schindler's List.*[338] Spielberg's film depicts the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto in March 1943, viewed at a distance by the film's protagonist, factory owner and war profiteer Oskar Schindler, portrayed in the film by Liam Neeson. The use of a children's choir singing a Polish folk song "Ofyn Pripetshik*"* (On the Cooking Stove) while Jewish families are rounded up to be deported or shot marks a turning point for Schindler.[339] This particularly postmodern technique of using music to envelop an emotional response works similarly to the way music is used as part of the American nostalgia film which Jameson discusses, in that the music used provokes a certain atmosphere synonymous with a bygone era. What is interesting about the use of both "Nokh Amol" and "Ofyn Pripetshik*"* is the distancing effect demonstrated by both songs in their respective texts. "Nokh Amol" in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* uses the historical distance which Meyer Landsman feels when he considers the émigré Holocaust survivors represented by his parents. Landsman is "outside" of this experience of traumatic persecution and cultural dislocation, noting that the only significant memories of hearing "Nokh Amol" can be equated to an ironised recollection of learning the song long after the events alluded to in the events occurred. Spielberg's Schindler views the liquidation of the Ghetto from the safe distance of a hillside, the scene's sense of historical distance is taken a step further by "Ofyn Pripetshik" being played on the

[337] Entry on "Zog es mir nokh Amol" on *Milken Archive of Jewish Music* website https://www.milkenarchive.org/music/volumes/view/great-songs-of-the-american-yiddish-stage/work/zog-es-mir-nokh-amol/

[338] Steven Spielberg, *Schindler's List* (Amblin Entertainment, Universal Pictures) 1993. 195 minutes. https://www.netflix.com/ch-en/title/60036359

[339]John Williams, "Ofyn Pripetshik/Nacht Aktion" *Schindler's List OST* (Los Angeles, MCA Records, 1993.) http://www.soundtrackinfo.com/tracks/schindlerslist/

film's soundtrack, as incidental music which is not depicted as being performed in the film's present re-enactment of the event. Both these depictions of Jewish trauma are depicted in the works of two Jewish authors who lived outside of the occurrence of the events they depict, Chabon more so than Spielberg in that the world of second-generation Sitka Jews is entirely fictional. The placing these songs in these works, however, are undeniably evocative of the emotional symptoms of trauma. Their artificial settings nevertheless inhibit a sincere means of depicting emotional impact in historical settings. The audible potential to provoke emotion, particularly into evoking the memory of those lost in the holocaust in Chabon's fiction, is further demonstrated in a scene in *Kavalier and Clay* with Joe hearing the unmistakable sound of his grandfather singing Schubert's "Der Erkloning" in Theresienstadt as part of a radio broadcast on a German station which Joe picks up when stationed in Antarctica, an interviewer sent to capture the voices of inmates at the camp for propaganda purposes. After a flurry of banal discussion on the mundanities of camp life Joe hears, "to his horror and delight" a clear capturing of the "rich and disembodied tenor" of his maternal grandfather.[340] Deciphering the familiar tone of his grandfather's voice performing Schubert's quintessential German melancholic ballad, he begins to consider what he perceives as the false tone of the program. Becoming convinced that "the pasteboard cheeriness and vocational training" of the presenters has been uncovered as malicious by the disruption of his own grandfather's sad singing, Joe experiences the closest proximity to experiencing Holocaust trauma alongside his family members. For Joe, the reality of the camp is not the safe haven for displaced Jews that the broadcast would lead a naïve listener to believe but is instead the mechanization of "a witch's house made of candy and gingerbread to lure children and fatten them for the table."[341]

The use of identifiably German genres, of Schubert's ballad as sung by Joe's grandfather, and of the Hansel and Gretel style fairytale further the uncanny nature in the broadcast: Joe here experiences the terrible in the an all too familiar European setting. Home for Joe, the sophisticated central Europe of his youth, is rendered strange by the realisation that his family have prisoners of an anti-Semitic German state, and his uncle's sentimental admiration for music synonymous with the German enlightenment has become an association betrayed by the barbarism suggested by his treatment at the hands of these German invaders. Suggestion

[340] Chabon, 2000, 442.
[341] Chabon, ibid.

is all the radio broadcast can offer for Joe in this moment, however, as he has no real way of knowing the full extent of the horrors of the *Shoah* as he is thousands of miles away, still an American subject living in a society kept shielded from knowledge of Jewish suffering. For all Joe knows his mind may be playing tricks on him, the Theresienstadt broadcast may not feature his uncle at all, but the memory of his uncle's singing is evocative enough to stir his convictions. In this scene, auditory triggers assert memory, but as memories are often unreliable sources, the hearing of Schubert's ballad persuades Joe into irrevocably emotional territory. Later during his wartime service, after he completes his reckless mission to murder the German Geologist Klaus Mecklenburg as a means of avenging the Nazi persecution of his family, having "aligned himself with the Ice, with the interminable white topography" which for Joe embodies the "sawteeth and crevasses of death"[342] Joe realises that the snowbound geography has made him emotionally disturbed to the point of inhumane cruelty. In attempting an arrest of his emotions to prepare himself for the pursuit of a man whom he wishes to murder because of his German nationality, Joe also risks the life of his only surviving colleague, John Wesley Shannenhouse, in what is essentially a suicide mission, as Joe has no real idea of the potential number of Germans he will encounter upon arrival at Mecklenburg's base. The remainder of his unit at Lupe Valquez station, in a grim foreshadowing allusion to the fate of Joe's family in the camps, are killed by carbon monoxide poising, the result of a faulty gas stove in the bunker they had ironically referred to as the Waldorf.[343] Meeting the evidently pure chance of his surviving certain death, Joe's imagines he sees his old magic teacher approaching him, "carrying the bright glowing camp brazier" that Joe and his brother Thomas had once borrowed for a mountaineering expedition in his Czech homeland.[344] This apparition of Kornblum treading to Joe the indomitable Antarctic snow, bringing the gift of a "bright glowing camp" safety appendence while in reality he is by now imprisoned if not already perished in one of Hitler's death camp, is poignant in that even its surreal, dreamlike fashion, clearly the hallucinations of a man in shock, it alludes to the kind of bombastic heroism at work in the pages of Joe's comic creations.

Moreover, the "burning, glowing" colour of the appendage itself suggest the word Holocaust, from the Hebrew interpretation of the Greek term for burnt offering (holokaustos.) This

[342] Chabon, 200, 465.
[343] Chabon, 200, 430.
[344] Chabon, ibid.

Hebraic interpretation attributed as he term for the genocide of Jews in Europe during World War Two is notable not only for its root definition (sacrifice), but also for its allusion to burning, to the engulfing destructiveness of entire European Jewish communities.[345] This apparition of Kornblum, unbeknownst to Joe, brings an optical figuration of his family's fate in Europe. Joe, now aligned with this reminder of his escapist fallacy by sensing in Kornblum's supernatural visitation, sets out to celebrate his survival by murdering the nearest German. Joe, made indominable by his capacity within Antarctica, having been faced with the "sawteeth crevasses of death" becomes as barbaric as his sworn Nazi enemies. With Shannenhouse's death during the flight to the island where Mecklenburg resides, Joe has effectively lost the last trace of community in his Antarctic base, all in the name of the senseless killing of a peaceful man. Images of indominable snow and burning fire have sensed in Joe a need for revenge, at the expense of his last remaining friend and of his humanity.

The kind of harrowing endeavour which Meyer Landsman senses his father faced as an Jewish orphan in snowbound Europe, the generation who made the snow evoking melody "Nokh Amol" their own, haunt Joe in his present tense war experience by way of a faulty gas leak, albeit one at a distance removed from the tragic fate of his family in Europe. That Joe is himself traumatised by the experience of carrying Mecklenburg's slain corpse through Antarctic snow, he feels "the reproach of something beautiful and inestimable, like innocence, which he had been lured into the ice into betraying."[346] The ice of the Antarctic presents the atmospheric setting of the loss of Joe's innocence, the topographical setting of his betrayal of self , is allusiveness to the snowbound emergence of Sitka Jews, put also to the wintering demise of Jewish communities sent to their deaths in wartime Europe. The mass of the Antarctic's silent snowy endlessness conveys a sense of a deadening of emotion, as the fierce desolation, of the human frontier as conquered. Unlike the lily associated with death, as a poignant communal memory of an individual life in the proffering of a transient flower, this expanse of silent ice represents for Joe his loss of innocence, of a fracturing of his identity, of a betrayal of his community. Similarly, when Joe burns Rosa's letters and photographs before he sets out on his mission to kill Mecklenburg, he symbolically desolates any chance of continuing a community in New York. Although he is far from the Holocaust extremes of

[345] I am here indebted to a reading of the term Holocaust and the term's association with the destruction of Jewish communities in Miller's *The Conflagration of Community*, see Miller 22-23.
[346] Chabon, 2000, 465.

communities ravaged in ice and fire, these elements come to haunt him, muting his own sense of the malleable, socially dynamic American escapist he had created.

Conclusion : Remembering The Dead and Fostering Community

Even as the family unit, whether a traditional, surrogate or ironic assimilation of the traditional family unit, is credited both as a social idealisation and the means in which to escape from the effect of traumatic memory in Chabon's work, the foreshadowing of Holocaust images and of emotional triggers such as songs associated with harrowing experiences threaten the security offered by community in these novels. These audible examples refer to desolated communities abroad or confined to an inaccessible past. The historiography of the Holocaust in Chabon's texts often alludes to a disturbing, decentred unknowable set of images, which alert emotive reactions in Chabon's characters but which do not offer a means of closure or resolution. These emotionally charged renditions, however, situate a purposefulness for community, perhaps especially in their considerations of community's absence. Thus, they help to foster the idea of community as a resurgent theme in Chabon's writing. Elegy is the antidote for solipsism in *Kavalier and Clay* and *The Yiddish Policemen's Union,* the plight of a child Holocaust survivor presents an odd but fitting return for the detective Holmes in *The Final Solution.* Unresolved intrusions of memory in the episodes described in this chapter mark a seriousness in Chabon's fiction which re-engages with the difficulties of representation which earlier postmodern writers identified within the liminal speres of literary tropes In this way, Chabon presents the discovery of and foreshadowing of Holocaust knowledge as with identifiably postmodern aesthetics, which I interpret as challenging his status as writer who turns away from the influences of postmodernism.

My next chapter will take a Benjaminian methodological approach to discussing the use of sampling in Chabon's millennial fiction.

Chapter 4

"Sampling as Revenge": Affect, Restoration and Rebuilding Out of Postmodern Solipsism

Eros and Thanatos, the opposing ideas of love and fatality, rebirth and death, chart are origin stories which begin with the collecting of mythology. American literature in the twenty-first century may suggest an unlikely area for the discussion of mythological metaphors, however, the fiction of Michael Chabon an author described by Matt Kavanaugh as a "connoisseur of nostalgia"[347], evokes a hybridity of contradictory themes of displacement and community, loss and fulfilment, of hope abandoned and realized anew in the years following the domination of uniformly bleak narratives emerging out of the influence of postmodern theory in North America.

My aim in this chapter is to effect a methodology similar to the style of Walter Benjamin's modernist hybrid writings, in the mode he used for his monumental work of cultural criticism *The Arcades Project*.[348] In doing show, I will demonstrate the use of postmodern literary tropes at play within Chabon's work, in particular the fascination with referencing the past through a cataloguing of objects associated with the memory of outmoded cultural movements, usually within the framework of popular culture artworks or mementoes. By engaging with how the practicing of literary experimentation in Chabon's fiction reflects practices of sampling with late-century music and other multimedia forms, I examine what sampling in Chabon's work does with the sensory data of often antiquated, yet venerated objects. How these objects work alongside the provoking or enlisting emotional responses of characters in Chabon's texts highlights how through sampling descriptions of information is accessed and analysed through character's personal interpretations of life or art. References to objects in Chabon's work, effecting Benjaminian mannerisms of reading history through signifiers of mass consumer culture, will acts as my grounds to explore the idea that memory is triggered through the familiar, close, yet ultimately outmoded in the contemporary age signifiers of a past now inaccessible or outside of the world now inhabited by Chabon's characters. This chapter will show how the postmodern mindset, the narration of the

---

[347] Matt Kavanaugh, "Hope Unfulfilled, Not Yet Betrayed": Michael Chabon's Nostalgia for the Future" in Jesse Kavadlo, and Bob Batchelor. *Michael Chabon's America: Magical Words, Secret Worlds and* Sacred Spaces Rowman & Littlefield Publishers 2014.235. *EBSCOhost*, search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=839079&site=ehost-live

[348] Walter Benjamin, T*he Arcades Project*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999.

contemporary present, in Chabon's fiction seeks to ascertain the memory of a faded, or obliterated, modernist past.

This has elsewhere prompted Ingbar Kaminsky to access that Chabon's detectives attempt to "do more than solve the case they are assigned"[349], instead discovering Jewish themes of "exile, antisemitism and annihilation" as the backgrounds to their investigations. The microcosm of a specifically Jewish twentieth-century trauma in discovering the Shoah, and the further implications of assessing attempts at the annihilation of an ethnicity within a modernized society (Adorno's "fully bureaucratized" society) alludes to larger developments in Chabon's texts towards a reading of history as a detection of vanishing people. In this sense Josef Kavalier's need to exit everyday visibility leaves behind them traces of existence, the objects encountered, created, and adorned that were left behind. This chapter interprets what it means for characters in Chabon's texts to comment on, obsess and again reference these objects. This line of thinking, which reads Chabon's works as providing microcosm of a society that invests in the totems of memory as a means to access narratives of history, inevitably leads me to consider Walter Benjamin's method for discussing shifts in historical thinking through the referencing of objects that signify the debris of forgotten or changed social space.

Souvenirs, Collections, Gimmicks - The Difficulties of Escaping Modernity's Ghosts

Before discussing Benjamin I will turn to contemporary scholarly investigations of objects within the modernist era and how they provoke memory. Considering the souvenir's function to "envelop the present in the past"[350], Susan Stewart assesses the potential of metamorphosis that occurs when considering the souvenir, an artefact which, in the very attachment to the personal rather than the general, "is destined to be forgotten."[351] Scott describes the Souvenir's tragedy as one that "lies in the death of memory"[352;] having an effect ultimately opposite to that of a memory trigger in situ, the souvenir leaves far more to be explained. Apart from being a stamp of authority, a verifiably authentic source for the owner or

[349] Ingbar Kaminsky, Solving the Jewish Case: Metaphorical Detection in Michael Chabon's The Final Solution and The Yiddish Policemen's Union." In *Michael Chabon's America: Magical Words, Secret Worlds, and Sacred Spaces*, edited by Jesse Kavadlo and Bob Batchelor, 159–72. Contemporary American Literature (Lanham, MD). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. 159.
[350] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* Duke University Press, 1993, 151.
[351] Stewart, ibid.
[352] Stewart, ibid.

inheritor, the souvenir offers instead "the simultaneous erasure of the autograph."[353] The souvenir, in Stewart's perspective, being an object that samples memory, cannot offer what the collection can. The collection according to Stewart is a kind of memory museum, curated by a single individual or a small group which visually narrates an example of historical understanding within an ahistorical or hermetic space. In this way, Stewart sees the collection offering "metaphor rather than metonymy.[354]Stewart's fascinating distinction between the souvenir, representative of a single, or singularly encountered, memento, and the Collection centres on how these concepts negotiate authenticity and artifice. Stewart describes how "the souvenir lends authenticity to the past",[355]— citing an elsewhere place where the past occurred, "where memory leads[356]", whereas a space where memory is lead *to,* and where an archive is formed because of discussions of the meaningfulness of specifically antiquated objects. Stewart isolates a sense of classification inherent in the collection which effects an ahistorising narrative of self-enclosure. This changes the understanding for Stewart of what a collection does in terms of its ordering of temporality; history is represented by the collections but exists as alien to it, whereas the souvenir is transformative. In the sense that it challenges temporality by its appearance, its allusion to not the museum, with its stand-by of explanatory notes and chronologies, but to the often-unspoken realities of a life. Reading Stewart on these distinctions in categories of keepsakes and archives, a striking binary distinction between controlled centres of memory and of a more haunted aspect of suppressed memory emerges out of a longing to maintain a closeness to cherished or catalogued objects.

Sianne Ngai's work on the gimmick focuses on the form's contradictory facets. The gimmick is irritating yet "strangely attractive"[357], an interpretation which for Ngai offers an "aesthetic judgement of capitalist form", and a general critique of capitalism's insistence on producing labour-saving, spuriously useful devices which "improve" everyday life for increasingly brief periods until an updated version is presented. Gimmicks tend to be inherently mockable, their humour often deriving from the misunderstandings around intent, a theme which Ngai has written about elsewhere.[358] Ngai contends that the gimmick is a unique aesthetic construct because it invokes a narrative which allows for labour and time-saving use value while at the

[353] Stewart, ibid.
[354] Stewart, ibid.
[355] Stewart, ibid.
[356] Stewart, ibid.
[357] Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick : Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* . The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2020
[358] See my previous discussion of Berlant, Ngai "Comedy has Issues."

same time being redolent of ephemerality. Gimmicks, unlike souvenirs and collections, are quickly abandoned for the next version in line and wilfully forgotten. Where Ngai's interest ultimately lies in analysing the gimmick is that, like the objective analysis of much comedy, it is useful for presenting "a unique set of collectively generated abstractions" (*what* is it? *Why* is it?) and because gimmicks tend to present "peculiarly asocial kinds of sociality." If we consider, for example, debates around the suitability of motorised scooters being acceptable modes of transport or just a technological fad that has gotten out of hand, the discussion here centres around the gimmick's tendency to make the technologically abstract an unexpectedly social concern. In this way, the gimmick differs from the personal or archival tendencies which Stewart discussed as appearing the souvenir and the collection. However, the gimmick has a tendency like three categories to expand beyond its ephemerality; a distinction all three share is that they are modernist categories which permeate critical imaginations in the postmodern or contemporary era.

Considering the expressly technological or comedic undertones of the gimmick in modernist fiction, the utopian or humorous ideas associated as gimmicks in these readings offer readings of the performative elements that Austin attributes to speech acts. Subsequent analysis of Chabon's work encountering the gimmick casts a particularly nostalgic light on commodity fetishism and the literary tropes used to encounter the debates around authenticity and artificiality which Stewart sees as permeating through and which dives her interpretation of the souvenir and the collection.

These encounters with reification via the gimmick in Chabon's work offer readings of melancholy and longing. The circulating discussion of history and emotions in the texts of Chabon that I focus on here use melancholy as a concept in terms of its application as a literary trope, often mediated at decisive moments as attempts at speaking emotion through discussing objects (or, artefacts), which result ultimately throughout these texts as a failure to discuss emotions without relying on artifice, at times in a failure to discuss emotion directly while maintaining the illusion of or an allusion to performance. This is evident in the setlist beginning "The Wanderings of a Handkerchief" which Joe prepares for what is to be his final performance as The Amazing Cavalieri on the evening of April 12th, 1947. Continuing the lists of cataloguing that Chabon conducts throughout *Kavalier and Clay*, reproductions of the setlist become a collector's item years later, Joe himself having printed copies using an Empire Novelties Genuine Junior Printer Press which he had salvaged from the company

stockroom."[359]

The Empire Novelties Genuine Junior Printer Press is a commercially underperforming piece of equipment which because of its savvy but failed status captures the essence of the kind of object Ngai refers to as Gimmicks. The time-saving tool and the setlist register as the apt accoutrements for the performer of a trick such as "The Wanderings of a Handkerchief" a real or linguistic prowess or argumentative conviction. The omniscient Chabon narrator notes Joe's self-consciousness about his English, and how" a suspicion of patter" he inherited from the inspirational magic teacher Kornblum "kept his performance swift and wordless."[360]" Joe is increasingly a performer who excels in finding his gifts in the visual sphere, what he doesn't utter aloud is often easier for himself and his small inner circle to deal with or take on. His apparent vacuousness in performance as The Great Cavaleri, his refusal to smile or take any apparent pleasure in the marvellous feats he performed, strikes Rosa as being the performance of a self-agonized by the separateness of his existence: magician and emigre, maverick of the present and prisoner of the past.

A sense of lost historical opportunities permeates through Chabon's work of the early twenty-first century, not least a sense of the author's own regret at having failed to complete ambitious literary projects. Chabon recalls in the essay "Diving Into The Wreck," first published in his 2008 essay collection *Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along The Borderlands*, the moment when he first laid eyes on the piece of historic architectural memorabilia which sparked the idea for his ultimately abandoned second novel *Fountain City.*

The scene depicted was a reproduction of an aerial painting of Washington D.C. by Léon Kier, described by Chabon as "an architectural visionary."[361] Chabon positions the scene as occurring in 1987, around the time he was finalizing for publication the drafts of his debut novel *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh*, a time when the ending of one literary project presented Chabon with fresh opportunities to pursue future inspiration. Instead of triumphant creative opportunism, this break between projects resulted in Chabon discovering "a little picture that nearly ruined my life."[362] The picture stirred an immediate and uncanny reaction. Chabon

[359] Chabon, 334.
[360] Chabon, 339.
[361] Chabon, "Diving Into The Wreck" in *Maps & Legends: Reading and Writing Along The Borderlands* (London: Fourth Estate) 2008, 2010. 145.
[362] Chabon, *Ibid.*

recalls an atavistic fascination when alerted to the scene: "my heart began to pound, the hair on the back of my neck stood up"[363], but what followed was not the excitement usually synonymous with discovery or epiphanic artistic breakthrough. Instead Chabon felt

a sadness come over me, a powerful sense of loss, which I began at once to probe and develop, thinking that in an attempt to explain the inexplicable ache this little picture caused in my chest, there might lie the matter of a second novel." [364]

This immediate sense of a fleeting subjectivity, of an emptying out of experience mixed with the prospect of literary creation, this "powerful sense of loss" Chabon accredits here to the semiotic trigger to the imagination suggested by this memorial sketch is confounding not just for its contrariness of suggested possibility, of the juxtaposed markers of meaning that coincide in this scene of aesthetic inspiration and felt despair, but also within the cinematic sweep, both romantic and somewhat nihilistic, prosaic, and cynical. Chabon's explanation of the importance of this moment for the gestation of a future piece of fiction, his "thinking in an attempt to explain" which lies at the root of taking "the ache this little picture caused" turn this emotive strife into the foundations of a second novel. Concern regarding the ineluctability of where this simultaneous sense of loss is leading his reader's awareness in how to interpret the significance of what Chabon is trying to say he *feels* about seeing the painting there is a marked emotive reach. The description asserting an almost instantaneous embellishment of nostalgia, if not that of an early instantaneous awareness of the failure to grasp the emotional severity of the moment. This little picture, which in another writer's recollection may have been cited as the initiative which gave birth to a fertile period of production, in Chabon's rendering presents instead a pendant of near doom. Even an American poet like Sylvia Plath, whose dark imagery sometimes, unfortunately, transfers to her biographical legacy in the popular imagination, accredited the omen of her "Black Rook in Rainy Weather" to one source of inspiration that "offered a brief respite from fear"[365], one that aspired to effect "a total neutrality" of emotions for Plath once its presence became the stuff of compositional foregrounding. Given the fact that Chabon failed to complete *Fountain City,* the aspirational novel project that these pictures inspired, one can assume a sense of

[363] Chabon, *Ibid.*
[364] Chabon, *Ibid.*
[365] Sylvia Plath, "Black Rook in Rainy Weather" in *The Collected Poems* Ed. Ted Hughes(New York: Harper Perennial Classics) 2008, 56.

disappointment on the novelist's behalf. However, estimating a sense of loss, even that of a psychosomatic fear or irrational neurotic surge that the memory inspires, is the more difficult an angle for readership familiar with Chabon's whimsical, urbane fantasias. Without the inferring of a convoluted overstatement, the hyperbolic self-mythologizing, or sense of doomed sense of doomed, blocked author figure, is hard not to unpack as ironic given, to allow Jameson's point on the parameters of postmodern experimentation some thought here, it is one "couched in narrative," to be read as kind of cautionary tale of the travails of a temperamental creative imagination.

While asserting that over the course of Chabon's career, his "treatment of nostalgia has evolved"[366], Kavanagh makes a distinction between two distinct periods in Chabon's fiction. This periodizing of Chabon's output creates fixed points between "the lyrical invocations typical of his early work"--from the campus Bildungsroman narrative of *The Mysteries of Pittsburgh and* the stories published in *The New Yorker* that would comprise the collection *A Model World* (1991)--and the longer novels which emerged in the early twenty-first century which Kavanagh argues detail Chabon's fixation with the psychological associations of nostalgia with "much more critical interrogation of the concept."[367] Chabon's second novel *Wonder Boys* (1995) treats the subjects of nostalgia and commodity fetishism as more humorously complex and less melancholy than the aesthetically charged, knowing naivety apparent in his earlier fiction. While showing a bridging point in Chabon's oeuvre, *Wonder Boys* is a curious exception to both Kavanagh's argument and my own; the novel's heightened sense of postmodern irony lends the novel an absurdist, even a more solipsistic edge than either the earlier works or the later historiographic novels. Kavanaugh here suggests that what is of greater significance in relation to Chabon's maturation as the American nostalgia author par excellence is how as a writer, he has addressed his own senses of failure and loss unsparingly within his fiction and in the commentary surrounding his work. The development of Chabon's multi-faceted approaches to exhibiting the role of nostalgia within the contemporary, affective, or post-postmodernist turn in American fiction according to Kavanagh is itself a "response to a specific crisis"[368] in Chabon's own writing, "the difficult and ultimately unsuccessful gestation of *Fountain City."* According to Chabon himself, the

[366] Kavanaugh, *Ibid.*
[367] Kavanaugh, *Ibid.*
[368] Kavanaugh, *Ibid.*

abandoned project represents "a novel which is itself about loss,"[369] its various themes and subplots centring around people, lifestyles and urban spaces that are themselves replaced by "the concomitant dream of restoration and rebuilding."

Historical endings, golden ages, and cultural rebirths appear as the epiphanic themes which emerge out of Chabon's mid-career transition from a writer of bittersweet bildungsroman to the more critical thinker novelist of hybrid works that begin to appear as the 1990's draw to a close. After a long decade of career failure with the experience of abandoning *Fountain City* and the critical platitudes that followed *Wonder Boys* (and the critical success of Curtis Hansen's 2000 film adaptation of the text), Chabon has stated that his "project as a writer has consisted of seeking objective correlatives[370]", a rerouting of Thanatos back to Eros, of fatalism, restoration and rebirth. Emerging out of his writing's casting a role for Chabon as "a custodian of a vast repository" of feelings that Sianne Ngai would elsewhere determine as "ugly"[371], the "loss, abandonment, and failure" that Chabon feels appears to sample the bittersweet sentiments of the popular love song. The spaces Chabon's characters find themselves in are failed states, declining heteotopias that have run out of/exist outside of golden ages. Chabon's novels often begin informer Utopian space that been lost, abandoned, the site of an ultimate failure of a sentimental jurisdiction. In Chabon's neighbourhoods, economic and social realities that add up to more than can be understood to represent settled ideas of the typified American suburban home. Yet emotions of loss, abandonment and failure are utilized in furthering the creative means for ideas and hopes and calling for a reinterpretation of what communities are in North America. Emotions are effectively sampled by Chabon as a means to redefine space.

The means by which Chabon samples literary and cinematic tropes to utilize emotions as a means to think through ineluctable personal and social predicaments is performed often through literary praxis that has in multimedia art forms become identifiable as techniques of sampling. The *OED Online* defines sampling in one of the word's many subcategories as

To record (sound) digitally for subsequent electronic processing; to store (an excerpt of

[369] Chabon, 2008, 2010, 147.
[370] Chabon,"Fountain City" in *McSweeney's Quarterly* 36, 1-96, 2010. Quoted in Kavanaugh, 235.
[371] See Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 2005.

recorded sound) in digital form, esp. in order to reuse it, often modified, in a subsequent recording or performance.[372]

The recording and storing of various multimedia influences, particularly in the language of comic book fiction in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* and of the semiotic use of the literary tropes of pulp detective fiction and of science fiction utopias in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* in order to be reused and modified as Chabon fictions are some obvious instances of sampling, but what of the language of cinematic feeling that exerts throughout *Telegraph Avenue?* Performative and often excessive outpourings of emotive sentiments, the kind of "old, untrendy human emotions" that David Foster Wallace writing in the 1990s had hoped would succeed postmodern nihilism, are given exemplary prominence over the simple transparency, of conversational exchanges in *Telegraph Avenue.* Here, I argue, the direct cataloguing of sampled sources of cinematic inspiration points towards the turn towards a cinematic interpretation, or sampling of, a cinema which investigates the correlatives of inspiration and emotions in the text.

For example, on remembering where he first met his paramour/antagonist Titus Joyner, Julie recalls the specific programme details of the introductory screening of a summer evening course for "the enrichment program of the city of Berkeley'[373]."The course title was [374]Sampling as Revenge: Source and Allusion in *Kill Bill*." Julie had signed up for the course scheduled to meet every Monday, in the same "beige multipurpose room" where in the past he had "sculpture and ikebana."[375] Julie is "always the youngest in the room by centuries, half decades", and "is [376]

The familiarised setting of "enrichment program" classes at Berkeley's Southside Centre for a fourteen-year-old suggests not so much an interest in crafts but an unspoken cataloguing of loneliness. The childlike notions of puppet-making classes and clay sculpture among people that have "half-centuries" on him, yet whom he is happier around than people his own age, has a striking resemblance to the attitude Julie has towards his own retro-obsessed, self-

[372] sample, v." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2020, www.oed.com/view/Entry/170415. Accessed 07 September 2020.
[373] Chabon, 2012, 2013, 125.
[374] Chabon, *Ibid.*
[375] Chabon, *Ibid*
[376] Chabon, *ibid.*

isolating father Nat. The angsty declaration of "so-called peers" infers an elitist, strangely bohemian outlook in a social outcast of Julie's variety. There is an exceptionalism to Julie's happiness, he is lonely but he does not feel the impacts of this loneliness because his routine of taking classes at the centre among Berkeley's elderly means that he remains as yet untouched by adolescent experience.

The course he is about to begin in the above scene replaces harmless crafts with vengeful depictions of violence, the revenge sub-genre in world cinema. Centring around the influences of Quentin Tarantino's 2003 balletic Kung-Fu double feature *Kill Bill* (Miramax, USA), the "Source and Allusion" of the sub- header is a wry set-up for the epiphanic, and distressing, romantic journey that Julie is about to undertake. Noting how the class's seminar leader, the local film critic Peter Van Eder, is not "this one pudgy bald man with aviator glasses" that Julie had imagined from his film reviews in the local Berkeley newspaper, but is in fact "a big bony young guy not far past college age", Julie is becoming aware that the class is becoming a transitory movement in his social development at the senior centre. The passing of the gauntlet, from old to young instructor, from hobbycraft to provocative cinema, marks a moment of excitement and confusion for Julie. Neatly folding the syllabus given to study the programme's proposed films of discussion, Julie encounters an imitable Chabonesque cataloguing of cultural reference points:

Lady Snowblood (1973) d Toshiya Fujita
The Doll Squad (1973) d Ted V. Mikels
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (1966) d Sergio Leone
Female Convict Scorpion: Jailhouse 41 (1972) Shunya Ito
Ghetto Hitman (1974) d Larry Cohen
The Tale of Zatoichi (1962) d Kenji Misumi
The Band Wagon (1953) d Vincente Minnelli
A Clockwork Orange (1971) d Stanley Kubrick
36th Chamber of Shaolin (1978) Gordon Liu
Coffy (1973) d Jack Hill [377]

Quentin Tarantino's method of constantly referencing other films to the point where his films

[377] Chabon, 2012,2013, 125. (Italics and Citation Style, Chabon's own.)

generally become commentaries on the cognitive experiences of film culture has by 2012 made an impressionable influence on Chabon's own methodology. This visual citing of the programme's films, this sampling of the kind of liner notes that performers must provide under copyright law, offer as much an authorial need to show the research at work, the praxis of intended cinematic sampling for literary purposes, as much as a simultaneous authorial responsibility to give proper citation of influences. The farcically academic title "Sampling as Revenge" offers a moment of knowing comedic reprieve; alongside charting the awareness of how academic film criticism announces its theoretical approaches to describe the techniques of filmmaking, there is here a confounding question: by announcing his use of sampling, to whom or what is Chabon via Tarantino announcing his revenge?

In the introduction to the 2014 *Sampling Media* David Laderman and Laurel Westrup describe how *"s*ampling is, at heart a hybrid cultural practice."[378] The inherently multi-faceted presentation of sample-based media "often blur the boundaries between art forms"[379], providing a distinctly correlative or mashed experimental output of new texts which "confound distinctions"[380] between what is being sampled and what is the authentic original output of a performer who samples. Laderman and Westrup here give an example of how "both dub artists and hip-hop DJs' gave their own spin to the live performances of other performers"[381], which lends another layer of externality to the performance, thereby "creating something new"[382] which begs for a fresh interpretation of the source material and of its remixed intent. For Laurel and Westrup, the study of sampling insists that an audience must "mix and remix critical frameworks."[383] Looking at how Chabon lays out the sources of what or how he assumes Tarantino utilises the films that influenced his work "mix and remix" the critical frameworks of understanding Chabon's own work, this cataloguing adds up to more than comedic pyrotechnics or postmodernist authorial irony. This confounding sense of appropriateness of the tonal or referential basing of sampling as something that addresses authorial intent is approached late in the scene when Julie first hears Titus Joyner speak the words that seem to offer for Julie, at last, a spiritual kinship with someone of his own age:

[378] David Laderman and Laurel Westrup (Ed.) *Sampling Media* (Oxford University Press) 2014, 2-3.
[379] Laderman and Westrup, 3.
[380] Laderman and Westrup, *Ibid.*
[381] Laderman and Westrup, *Ibid.*
[382] Laderman and Westrup, *Ibid.*
[383] Laderman and Westrup, *Ibid.*

Van Eder passed a syllabus to Titus Joyner, who thanked him softly, with an automatic "sir." Then the kid's eyes locked on the syllabus, scanned it. He frowned. Something written on the page dismayed him, filled him with outrage and confusion. He squirmed with it, deep in the armchair, until he was obliged to speak up.
"*The Band Wagon?",* he said.[384]
Earlier, Julie had "found himself dizzied by his ignorance of Van Eder's choices, only two of which, the Sergio Leone and *The Band Wagon*, he had seen."[385] Mirroring Titus' interpretable sense of building "outrage and confusion" of setting a Fred Astaire holiday musical as a textual source for a Kung-Fu film module, Julie assured and narrow-minded sense of knowing better than his elder instructor Van Eder, to the point where Julie's bewilderment seems relative to Titus's squirming, eventually, silence-breaking performative criticism.

The new friend's fraternal sense of excessively unequivocal refusal to encounter the correlative logic of the adult world becomes more complicated when they begin their sexual exploration. The intensity of Julie's emotional attachment to Titus is detailed again in how he considers his life before meeting Titus. Another pastime activity, the writing of a horror novel inspired by H.P. Lovecraft, took the central focus of Julie's downtime before he began sneaking Titus into his house. Titled *Confessions of a Secret Master of the Multiverse,* Titus began writing in an attempt to "produce an epic monument to his loneliness and to the appalling tedium he induced in himself."[386] Again, the wry authorial inflections that Chabon embellishes to underscore the pretentiousness of his teenage character are characterised through an excess of emotive strata, "the epic monument" to Julie's humdrum teenage loneliness and the self-disgust he lingers through in order to create presenting the emotive languages of a psychologically perplexed teenager. The opening page of Julie's horror story is a farcical attempt at Lovecraftian menace:

This record of sorrow is being penned in human blood on parchment made from the hides of drowned sailors…Thus shorn of liberty and burdened with the doubtful gift of time do I propose to ease the leaden hours in setting down this faithful record, the memoir of a king in

[384] Chabon, 2012, 2013, 130.
[385] Chabon, 127.
[386] Chabon, 2012, 2013, 115.

ruins.[387]

The literary accoutrements of Lovecraft's horror prose are all here to be seen, but the "something new" that is created out of Julie's "record of sorrow", as painfully wrenched from the souls of the eternal damned as the text purports to be, emerges not as the labours of Eros and Thanatos but of the pathetic need of a child to record their emotion and catalogue their juvenilia. However, in his "setting down" of a sincerely intended tale of woe, this "memoir of a king in ruins", is Julie's intent any less that than of his own creator, himself the self-reflective and self-recording failed author of *Fountain City?* Sampling, even for comedic, is about blurring the distinctions between art and the authors of artworks, it would it benefit a reading of Julie's account of isolation and self-disgust as the attempts of real emotive reflexivity, as an attempt to encounter affect through sampling.

In *The Forms of The Affect,* Eugenie Brinkema explores how the depiction of emotion in contemporary cinema, and thus relatedly in how the influence of affect studies in American film scholarship, has situated the discussion of theory so fully in an "Episteme of the Affect"[388] that Brinkema considers: "must one even begin an argument anymore by refuting Frederic Jameson's infamous depiction of the 'waning of affect' in postmodernity?"[389] The idea that referring to a key theoretical predecessor's notion that art had emptied out of emotional considerations as seemingly outdated claim for Brinkema assures that "the newest turn in the Humanities would seem to be a meta-turn"[390], one that considers formally archaic theoretical and aesthetic modes identifiable within the depiction of emotions. The critical end of a transitional turn for Brinkema is one that itself turns towards the study of emotions in texts, "toward the turning toward affect itself"[391], a description that puts in mind a camera turning toward an actor performing a highly emotive scene.

What is at play here in Brinkema's situating of the current age of theory is not a straightforward introduction to the ideas surrounding a transition in critical thinking. It offers instead a disruption, a break in the linear trajectory of how critical thinking works. Brinkema suggests this breaking of linear descriptions is symptomatic of the concept of affect:

---

[387] Chabon, *Ibid.* Italics Chabon.
[388] Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press) 2014, xi.
[389] Brinkema, 2014, xi.
[390] Brinkema, *Ibid.*
[391] Brinkema, *Ibid.*

Affect, as turned to, is said to disrupt, interrupt, reinsert demand, provoke, insist on, remind of…what unsettles, that thing I cannot name, what remains insistent, far away (haunting, and ever so beautiful): indefinable. [392]

Brinkema here insists on a turn towards affect as disrupting, provoking the pertinence of reading emotions in texts, rather than emphasising the theoretical constructs that have defined criticism in the twentieth century, in particular, an overtly psychoanalytical interpretation of narrative art forms. This is in essence for Brinkema a turning away from the *naming* of psychological and social constructing and instead focusing on their emotive physiognomies, that which cannot be named, the far away and haunting spectre in the individual experience rather than that included in descriptions of the epistemic whole. This "emptying out" of meaning, this almost anti-interpretation of emotive effects is powerful in its very catgegorisation as indefinable. We can only guess why Titus squirms with discomfort upon seeing *The Band Wagon* suggested in a class on Tarantino films, but what is more difficult to do is to try and define to define why it is so affecting.

This positioning of the indefinable as a symptom of a turn towards a turn to affect in contemporary film studies is the "principled signalling of a rejection" of many of the structural concepts that postmodernist theory held firm on. Affect theory instead negates against structures of theoretical thinking in favour of emotive correlatives, of readings of sentimental phenomena that are "*not* semiosis, *not* meaning, *not* structure, *not* apparatus, but the felt visceral, immediate, sensed, embodied, excessive".[393] Julie's perplexed response to the structuring of the film programme, which itself lends its reasoning a*gainst* typified cataloguing by including an inessential viewing of *The Band Wagon* for its artistic staging, signals the uncomfortable reactions of characters in Chabon to programming, whether it be informational or intended to excite or amuse. Dogplie's programming of the Telegraph Avenue district has the hallmarks of inconsiderate gentrification: the plans do not report any findings on how the locals *feel* about Gibson Goode's expansion project. It neither embodies the same Church of Vinyl that Archy ascribes to or the sense of the unique local eccentricity embodied by Cochise Jones. The characters of Chabon's texts are excessive, but they are also visceral, living components of the experiential uniqueness [394]of life in Oakland in 2004. They

[392] Brinkema, xii
[393] Brinkema, xii.
[394] Brinkema, *Ibid.*

are unprogrammable, but they have a history of cataloguing their experiences.

Fountain City is perhaps a career anecdote regarding Chabon's consideration of a distinct difficulty in representing the present. This is a symptom or synecdoche which Chabon presents in his fiction which mirrors contemporary
his contemporaries who also began to publish in the wake of postmodernism. Jeffrey Eugenides in *The Virgin Suicides* (1993) and Michael Cunningham in *A Home at the End of The World* (1990) describe contemporary experiences of being haunted by history from within the surface safety of North American suburban life. The fascination with the recent past in these texts, much like the fascination which Chabon conceives in often older or more fantastic renditions of urban American spaces, exerts itself from the present-day vantage point of the writer narrator in urban landscapes during the 1990s. The drug counterculture of the 1960s/1970s in Eugenides and Cunningham's texts are aligned with the era's burgeoning sexual revolution to discuss ideas of both emotive breakthrough and societal losses of innocence, signifying a "lost idyll" of suburbia that Chabon signifies as belonging to the lost dream of urban escapism in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay.* Escapism as a form of investing into a visual panorama of the past, like much of historical fiction, may be assessed in Chabon's undergoing of a project that describes a more "innocent" era. Yet the Utopian ideas of a past is countered in Chabon with the very real crises undergoing in the United States of *Kavalier and Clay*. Oppression in Sammy's idealised New York comes in the guise of him never able to reveal his true self to a public that will be soon nostalgic of his comic writing, oppression for Joe in Prague meant almost certain death; in New York he feels the oppression of the editors who censor his illustrations and who only pay by the page
One example eading graphic interpretations of history as an escape from reality has a curious origin in pre-Second World War writing. I will now turn to a discussion of Walter Benjamin's description of the Kaiserpanorama to elucidate on similar ideas of nostalgia and the sampling of creative ideas which Chabon discusses in his millennial fiction.

Benjamin's Kaiserpanorama

To closely consider the imaginative palimpsest of various scenes describing ideas of historical narrative encountered in Benjamin's discussion of the Kaiserpanorama in his *Berlin Childhood around 1900* is to become immersed within a framework of dialectic thought. Taken as read, the scenes depicted within the Kaiserpanorama, a museum attraction which predated the cinema reel built and distributed chiefly between 1869 and 1873, directly

represent historical narratives in miniature, a technique which exhibited the kind of editing techniques or montage that later excited Benjamin in their transference to long-form film. This revolving visual display featured the depiction of everyday life as adapted into a historicizing context and had become in Benjamin's own adulthood a charming pastime of a bygone era. Functioning originally as the kind of ideal escapism for a precocious child living in the Wilhelmian capital to while away an hour of weekend leisure, the Kaiserpanorama becomes for readers of Benjamin's work the stuff of fondly remembered trivia usually encountered in a memoir as transparently nostalgic as Benjamin's. The descriptive language used in remembering the Kaiserpanorama is striking in that it considers a visual conceptualising that extends beyond nostalgia in terms of how it performs a reading of the potential of experimental narrative. An important feature of the Kaiserpanorama according to Benjamin was the oddly disjointed narrative it offered to its viewers, taken in by the visual peculiarities of the attraction as "each picture would pass through all the stations"[395] in a repetitive sequence. The shifting narrative familiarities of the Kaiserpanorama reflect an engaging narratological and performative capacity, particularly as regarding the chronology of sequences resisted familiar progressions of traditional, story-based narrative, because, according to Benjamin, "it did not matter where you began the cycle."[396] In this instance, the viewer had a certain autonomy in how they read the events as unfolding in the wide lenses of the Kaiserpanorama, and yet these visualised events, described in an eventually repeated fashion, where significant in that their very repetition assumed a familiarity of narrative focus.

The description of the Kaiserpanorama's novelty features, its technological uniqueness and the uncanny, illusory nature of the devices' iteration of sequential narrative allude to an anticipation of the transformative effects that repetition in the performative use of language and notation was to have in later modernist poetry and music. In offering a departure from the sequential familiarities associated with traditional historical or folk narrative in much the sense that Gertrude Stein's reverberating use of "making" in *The Making of Americans* embellishes Stein's early fiction[397,] or how each version of a silent piece of John Cage's

[395] Benjamin, *A Berlin Childhood around 1900* (Cambridge, Mass., Belknap Press, 2006.) 62. Quoted in Jeffries, 20.
[396] Benjamin, *Ibid.*
[397] Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans: Being the History of a Family's Progress* (Paris: Contact Press) 1925.

music becomes again with each performance[398] ideas and narrative parameters expand with repetition. The representation of ideas of historical narrative, and how they are interpreted and considered afresh by successive generations via this process of repetition, aligns with Howard Caygill's assertion that the critical reception of Benjamin's work had by the end twentieth century "vindicated his own insight into the ways in which the past is continually transformed through its interpretation by the present.[399] Caygill's argument here that successive generations of Benjamin's readers respond to the transformative ideas encountered in Benjamin's critical writing asserts how the repletion of experimental narrative has the capacity to describe epiphany or transformative moments through textual analysis. From Caygill's assertion of Benjamin, I take my departure into a reading of Benjamin and Chabon, wherein I assert how techniques of modernist narrative are useful tools to discuss the use of epiphany in historical narrative/historiography in Chabon's fiction. Considering Benjamin's account of the immersing effects of the disjunctive narrative offered by the Kaiserpanorama reflects Sam Clay's interpretation of the transformative effect Houdini's magic tricks had on his own interpretation of the historical context of *The Escapist*:

"To me Clark Kent in a phone booth and Houdini in a packing crate, they were one and the same thing," he would learnedly espouse at WonderCon or Angouleme or to the editor of *The Comics Journal.* "You weren't the same person you came out as you were going in."[400]

The certainty of the relationship between the repeated performance of Houdini's magic act and the repeated transformation from the domestic settings of Clark Kent to the extraordinary potentialities of Superhuman lucidly exhibit for Sam the shared ideas of escape and active resistance that permeate the myths of both Houdini and the comic book superhero. The site of Sam's announcement—at various comic book conventions—positions the repetition of what he interprets as the revolutionary ideas, the imaginative work of Jewish creators, as a particularly personal account of historical materialism moreover, it situates the idea that Jewish-American Immigrants and their sons postulating these comic book texts as totems of an empowering progression in the narrative of Jewish history. The idea of this illusion of change, where one conceit or shift in visual appearance occurs in a reconsideration of the potential of self-mythologizing and thus of the ideas of identity and of representation itself, reflect Benjamin's assertion of the narrative revolutions apparent in the Kaiserpanorama. The narrative assuredness of each picture passing through the stations in each viewing

[398] John Cage, *4'33.* First performance August 29, 1952, Maverick Concert Hall, Woodstock, New York.
[399] Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge) 1998, x.
[400] Chabon, 2000, 2008. 3.

underscores the more transformative thinking that occurs with the realisation that in viewing the presentation from different vantage points, the cycle repeats, because the knowledge the viewer acquire in viewing the narrative means they are unable to remember the narrative *not* playing through in their memory, regardless of any distortion caused by a later entry into the narrative. Sam Clay was not the same person he was after reading of Houdini and Superman; his perspective was determinedly changed by their conceit of changed identity as death-cheaters and supermen. For Sam, the realisation that a shift in perspective, a break away from the assumed certainties of the past into a new interiority of experimental interpretation, lies in his reading of Houdini's stunts and Clark Kent's metamorphosis: "It was never a question of just escape. It was also a question of *transformation."*[401]

Although the process of realisation for his cousin Josef Kavalier takes a more assimilatory tone, it is essentially the process of awareness of this larger aesthetic conceit of transformation found in visual and narrative representation which spurs their personal awakening as artists. The title of Houdini's act, *Metamorphosis*, ties Josef back to his assimilation out of Czech identity into the Americanised 'Joe,' but also back towards the city of Prague where his countryman Franz Kafka had written of the astonishingly haunting associations implied by transformation. Josef escapes, haunted by what he has left behind in Prague and the warning left to him by his mentor Bernhard Kornblum that he must reserve his anxiety for what "he is escaping *to*"[402]—the double comprises of assimilated and the haunting memories of the old life he is leaving behind. When considering what there is in New York for Sam to escape to, the obvious answer is out of the known confines of Jewish Brooklyn. However, like Houdini and the Jewish creators of Superman Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Sam ventures into the world of corporate Manhattan. The possibilities of escape that come as a result of Sam's imaginative investment in transformation instilled by his absorption of comic book narrative—something that Joe, in his more Europeanised learning of the feats of performed escapism has yet to encounter on a more interiorised level. Like Benjamin himself, Joe previously lived under the Nazi threat of persecution. His escape via the coffin of Prague's Golem which is bound for safe housing in the orient is a feat of Houdini-like patience that trumps the nervy spectacle he attempts to pull off in the Volga river—the ill-

[401] Chabon, *ibid.*
[402] Chabon, 2000, 2008, 37.

performed feat of escapist exhibitionism that convinces his father that his imagination might be of greater benefit to him in New York City.

Benjamin's decision to write his memoir of childhood in 1938 may initially appear [word missing?] to contemporary readers, given that this is an account by a middle-aged German Jewish male describing a life of sheltered privilege written at a time when the Nazi government had officially dehumanised his ethnic ethnicity. In reading revolutionary potential within historical narrative, the historical materialism assessed by Marx as the inevitable shifting paradigm of political power, Benjamin configures a uniquely Jewish iteration of an achievable utopia. Michael Lowy consolidated the overarching thematic concerns of Benjamin's later period as demonstrating a series of "elective affinities", disparate topics that offer discourses on the theological, aesthetic and political and focus on how these seemingly disparate categorizations of thought become dialectically intertwined in Benjamin's writing. Lowy categorizes Benjamin as a writer who is fundamentally influenced by three concepts, Romanticism, Messianism and Marxism.[403] The collective will of a society infused by the Messianic promises the self-determined revolution anticipated by Marx. However, Benjamin chooses not to rely on politicized rhetoric to imbue the transformative appeal of class warfare and social upheaval. Instead, he looks to the narrative experimentalism transfigured in the technological advances of the early twentieth century. By turning away from the lingering nostalgic romanticism of aesthetics and historical moments which have passed, Benjamin uses the departure point of the Kaiserpanorama to point to how technological advances afford the possibilities of providing the ideas of Romantic thought, Messianic belief in political progression that will lead to the viability of socialist Utopia. Multiplicities of meaning, augmented by interconnectivities that refer factual information to the philosophical ideas which accompany or relate to epistemic phrases or visual citations, are the working functions of the web-like associations that Benjamin refers to as "Constellations".

Intrusions of philosophical interjections into the archiving of memory data which characterise even the most banal forms of popular writing can be linked to the grander scale of an overarching project evident within even the miscellany of Benjamin's output. In *Grand Hotel Abyss*, his study of the intellectual luminaries of the Frankfurt School (known officially as The Institute for Social Research, Frankfurt) Stuart Jeffries writes that Benjamin's

[403] Michael Löwy *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's On The Concept of History* (London: Verso) 2016.

constellations, his narrative panoramas, present "a history of the losers, not just of defeated people, but of expendable things which didn't make sense within the official version of history"[404]. The Kaiserpanorama, a technological novelty soon made obsolete by the advent of cinema by the time of Benjamin's adolescence, nevertheless is given precedent as the original site of influence for the analysis of viewing history as inferred by the remainders of its technological and cultural output. History is thus not just as stories but also as the means by which stories have been disseminated and arranged in the age of technological advances. Jeffries' assertion that in rescuing the "abject and obsolete from historical oblivion" in order to waken humanity out of "the collective dream" of capitalism and its dominating theory of endless progress, Benjamin reads the story of the political in culturally transitory objects, is compelling. However, what Jeffries misses in determining Benjamin's writing of history, and thus, his theoretical conceptualising of narrative, is the crucial Benjaminian methodology that investigates how these same technological advances in which capitalist production offer aesthetics are interjected into narrative style in the twentieth century. I propose here that the transformative potential encountered in the philosophical ideas and aesthetic practices discussed by Benjamin is a means to analyse the "breaking into" or intrusion of interiority into political action which occurred as a result of revolutionary Marxist ideology claiming a place on historical consciousness and artistic practices at the advent of modernism.

Benjamin's Camera Eye and Chabon's Urban Cityscape Panorama

The methodological praxis utilised in Benjamin's writings offers montage-like arrays of ideas and images which cite linguistic, temporal and spatial developments in European society in the early decades of the twenty-first century. His work charted the historical, aesthetic, and technological advances of a rapidly modernising world economy, including the effects that political and technological advancement in the revolutionary USSR were having on creative and theoretical output in the West. Benjamin's enthusiasm for the filmmakers emerging out of Soviet Russia in "The Work of Art in The Age of Mechanical Reproduction" is an example of this. Benjamin centralises a discussion of such integrally Marxist, revolutionary praxis via an analysis of the editorial techniques having not only been made possible by advances in cinematic technology to discuss historical narrative in Russia, but as having been radically alerted by Marxist revolution. Describing how film technology has allowed for political idealism to feature within mimetic representations of reality, Benjamin affords

[404] Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School* (London, New York: Verso) 2016, 20.

properties to the camera which affect an interpretation of technology as mimicking narrative interiority: "it is a different nature that speaks to the camera than speaks to the eye; different above all in that, rather than a space permeated with consciousness, here is one permeated with unconsciousness."[405]

Immediately here a Freudian analysis is inferred by Benjamin as belonging to the automation of the lens. That the camera exhibits a level of interpretation that the human eye can analyse after the fact of the camera's recorded performance is important in how it situates the potential that technology has for directing to a certain extent the narrative performance of the distinctly human act of storytelling. The spatial realm of storytelling had been before Freud the known parameters of a localised reality, coloured by interiority but not beholden to any measure outside of that of lived experience. Here, Benjamin, with the optical recording facilities of the camera, nor only opens a discussion on how of storytelling narrative is performed and presented but also in how it is received and remembered. Distinguishing optical art from other forms of storytelling synonymous with the cultural advents of the early twentieth century such as theatre and painting, only photography with its techniques such as slow motion sequences and close-ups can exhibit for the modernist artist/critic what Benjamin asserts is the "optical unconscious", illuminated from the mind's interiority by advancements in theory and praxis by the modernist artist "just as it is? only through psychoanalysis" that they learn of unconscious, or socially repressed, compulsions.[406] As with his interpretation of psychoanalysis, Benjamin associates the technological advancements of film with a "deepening of apperception across the whole optical (and now also acoustic) segment of the sensory world."[407] The revolutionary potential offered by the technological advances of film is such that the broadening understanding offered by psychoanalysis in Freudian interpretations of interiority's intrusion into everyday speech with the examples of "the slip" was beginning to seem prosaic to Benjamin as he considered film's potential to reproduce visual architectures of interiority. What is crucial in terms of reading Benjamin's interpretation of film's radical mimetic modernization process is the way he writes his analysis of film's techniques not as philosophy or reportage, but distinctly as literary analysis: "It is simply the reverse side of this state of affairs that performances

[405] Benjamin, "Brief History of Photography *One Way Street and Other Writings"* Trans. J.A. Underwood (London, Penguin Modern Classics, 2009.) 176
[406] Benjamin, 2009, *ibid.*
[407] Benjamin, *ibid.*

presented in film more exactly from many more angles than can attainments portrayed in paint or on-stage."[408]

The "many more angles" that can be experienced in the viewing of a film, with the camera's multiplicity of angles being cinema's integral narrative device, offers for Benjamin optical perspectives which function at the expense of the auratic vantage point. The "illusory nature" of theatre, the idea that an audience cannot be convinced that what is happening on stage, or what has already happened on the artist's canvas, are authentic events happening in real-time, is not a phenomenon which crosses over to film. Film's "illusory nature", is performed not by actors, who emote and react in locations designed with more painstaking conviction than those offered by any theatre, but according to Benjamin is instead a performance of film editing cinema's unique technology which "acts as the blue flower [of Romanticism] in the land of technology."[409]

This narrative act of a flower which encompasses in its features epiphanies of thought in a landscape dominated by the effects of technological advance, of foundationally visual narrative experimentation, is the metaphor of Benjamin's montage. I use this work here to analyse the functioning of the "camera eye" in Chabon's use of cinematic processes in written acts of narrative. The following use of techniques that are evocative of cinematic techniques such as quick editing represented in the rapid cutting of temporality, location and visual centre alongside the juxtaposition of images in montage presentation begins to occur in Chabon's fiction from the time of *Kavalier and Clay* when narratives concerning past historical moments emerge.

The urban panorama of central Prague is visualised by Josef Kavalier on the night of the ill-fated feat of escapism as if his own narrative interiority has taken on the lens of a camera. In emerging from the freezing water of the River Volga, in a heightened state of consciousness, Josef appears as the cinematographer, pointing his interior camera to record the aesthetics of his own re-emergence: "The world seemed to pour in through his lungs: spidery trees, fog, the flickering lamps strung along the bridge, a light burning in Kepler's old tower in the Klementinum."[410] The gothic ambience of central Prague, the "spidery trees" and "flickering lamps" that seem to be taken from the frames of the horror film, frame the bridge where he

[408] Benjamin, *ibid.*
[409] Benjamin, 2009, 247. Parenthesis: Underwood.
[410] Chabon, 2000, 2008, 36.

has leapt into his new life as a daring entertainer, a calculated aesthete who performs and records his own spectacular optical narratives of transformation. Leaping into the water as someone who is confined by how society views them, the young man who has not yet made the leap from innocence into experience, the imaginative but restrained son of practical bourgeoisie parents, he is fired into his renewed being by the receptacle of history's light as reflected on him from "Kepler's old tower." Kepler, the mathematician of planetary revolutions, has called from history to alight the deed of his young pupil Josef, it seems. The panorama of Prague fills Josef with the physicality of the world entire as it "pours into his lungs". He sees as much as he feels, his perception deepened at last by the proliferation of angles fired by his newly cinematic imagination. Fittingly, the melodrama afforded to the cinematic imagination of the 1930s means his triumphant sense of security with the panorama is not procured for long. Making his way onto the Volga's muddy banks,

Shivering, he stood up, his clothes hanging heavy as chain mail, and saw Thomas in the shadow of the bridge, beneath the carved figure of Bruncvik, chopping clumsily at the water, paddling, gasping, drowning.[411]

The jump cut which jolts Josef out of his post-climatic stupor as he approaches the night's reality inserts his viewpoint into crisis, a shift which follows the conventions of the instantaneity of cinematic provocations of unconscious fears. Shocked out of his dream-like illusory state, Josef is cast back into reality by witnessing the very threat of his brother perishing from where he has emerged. Chabon positions the frame of this cut: darting immediately to the scene of danger yet detailing the visible ironies at play as Josef, the deluded victor of the night, his clothes now heavy as medieval chain mail, witnesses his brother "paddling, gasping, drowning" under the sight of the Quixotic Bruncvik, medieval knight protector of the vulnerable citizens of Prague. Joe launches back in to the river to attempt to save his brother, only the realities of the tidal pressure that had escaped Joe's romanticising of his own lucky escape do not return to him now that his cinematic consciousness has shattered. Although the brothers survive this misappropriation of Josef's imaginative self-making thanks to the appearance of Josef's mentor Kornblum, who emerges from the shadows after not deigning to reply to Josef's invitation to the spectacle, Josef's later attempts as the self-made American of means to rescue his brother from danger are not as successful as his mentor's. The radical interpretation of history as being the creative workshop of self-mythologies is often the framing narrative of redemption for those like

[411] Chabon, 2000, 2008, *ibid.*

Josef, whom Jeffries might count among Benjamin's "losers of history", who are privy to becoming over-reliant on.

The messianic appeal of utopia for characters like Josef/Joe reiterates in particularly cinematic forms. Chabon depicts the panorama of New York City for Joe as one of a revitalisation of autonomy and visuality. One year into his American odyssey, at the dawning of *The Escapist'*s success, an Americanised Joe is buoyed by the visual amelioration that New York provides him. "Each time he took a breath", Chabon's omniscient narrator interjects on Joe's behalf, "he could feel a hard little billiard of nicotine and phlegm rattling around in his lungs." His lungs now free to take in the balmy air of a New York autumn, spoiled if invigorated by the effects of his increasing smoking habit, Joe feels once again like the cinematic hero of his own directorial feature. "It was six o'clock in the morning in October 1940. He had just won the Second World War, and he was feeling pretty good about it."[412] The success of the comic strip he illustrates, within whose pages he is the effective aesthetic technician, has allowed Joe to re-envisage his personal optical recording of history. Like the slides on Benjamin's Kaiserpanorama, it has not mattered to Joe where he started to pay attention to his personal war against Nazism as fought out through the pages of a comic book that reproduces his interiority, as of October 1940 he has returned to the same narrative chronology again in his mind. The framing of the events through his own repeated analysis, one made affordable by his economic success in the United States, makes the possibility of utopia for Joe achievable. The ideas of his success just need to be repeatedly viewed before they are again put into practice, different in each viewing in terms of the progress of their aims, but familiar enough in their repetition to offer an assurance of their potential. The replenishing effects of water, and what the sight of water does to evoke Joe's panoramic interiority, is further expounded on by Chabon as:

A crew of a half-dozen workers in tan canvas overalls, with peak white caps perched atop their heads, used a water hose and long dishevelled brooms to sluice a grimy tide down the gutters towards the storm drains at the corner of Broadway.[413]

Light streaming on the caps and overalls worn by the urban replenishers as they "sluice a grimy tide down the gutters towards gutters" and into erasure on the wide streets of Broadway create for Joe a new chance at innocence, for now the strife and embarrassment of

[412] Chabon, 2000, 2008, 165.
[413] Chabon, 2000, 2008, *ibid*

his old Prague life is the stuff of washed away grime. Banished by the workers of New York City, almost angelic to Joe in how they reflect and disseminate light and water, the icy floes of the River Volga are replaced by the streamlined sanitation of the New York City Council. His anxieties for the moment washed aside, “Joe threw open the rattling sash of the window and poked his head out. It looked like it was going to be a fine day. The sky in the east was a bright Superman blue.”[414] The colours of Superman, both Joe’s inspiration and most recent competitor, are blazed on the panoramic sky outside his office window. For now, the potential of utopia and enduring reference of the optical imagination Joe possesses will suffice as his Romantic idealism and his invoking of a Jewish messiah in the form of his *Escapist* will steer his desire for redemption.

Fisher, Gothic Materialism & The Golem, Cyberpunk & the Flatline: The Waning of the Human

I will now consider how the auratic qualities represented in objects were written in a way where the object hunts the viewer in ways that induce dread in Mark Fisher, as a means to contrast the more enthusiastic and ultimately melancholic way Chabon’s characters interpret objects and the artificial. Beginning with an analysis of the seemingly naturalistic appearances of inorganic material that haunt Gustav Meyrink’s 1915 novel *The Golem*,[415] Fisher establishes his reading of how authentically assessed “living” properties within descriptions of mechanized, artificial objects are seen as disrupting the modernist rationale of cultural theory. These replicating qualities that the artificial depicts or inherits from the human are evidence of what Fisher describes as the "*inorganic continuum*" witnessed in literature and theory throughout the twentieth century. Works published amid the appearances of rapidly developing technologies, Fisher argues, involve narratives establishing thematic recurrences in philosophical thought that challenged or inferred a breakdown of classical "object/subject" binaries. Comparing Meyrinck's "Kabbalistic tale of the rabbi who animates lifeless clay" to Shelly Turkle's 1990s case studies of children who identified computers with interior properties akin to consciousness,[416] Fisher maps out the theoretical concerns of what

[414] Chabon, 2000, 2008, *ibid.*
[415] Original publication date of *The Golem* in novel form given erroneously as 1927 in Mark Fisher *Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction* (New York, Exmilitary Press) 1999, 2018, 1. Fisher is likely confused here with an English translation that appeared in 1928, as translated by Madge Pemberton (London: Victor Gollancz, 1928), but as he is using Mike Mitchell’s 1995 translation he does not reference the publication date of this translation. I hereby refer to the original publication date of Meyrink’s novel (1915) and Mitchell’s revised translation (2017) when citing *The Golem* myself.
[416] See Shelly Turkle, , *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (London: Phoenix, 1996) As cited in Fisher, 1.

he names “gothic materialism”. Focusing on a train of thought which aligns the disturbing features of inanimate objects having, in the reports of the children of Turkle's studies, "personalities”, Fisher's thesis challenges a trend within cyber-theory of a de-emphasis or underrepresentation of the inorganic capacities of machine life which had come to dominate life and culture at the approach of the millennium. Authors and theorists associated with the Cyberpunk movement, which had released simultaneously key work in fiction, film and theory were, by the dawn of the 1990s, recipients of increasing critical interest. This attention resulted from an emergent response in serious scholarship to the psychological questions Cyberpunk authors invoked regarding the state of Cartesian awareness of the self in the increasingly techno-dominated postwar years. Against the backdrop of the "information superhighway"—a term coined by Willian Gibson in his influential 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, to denote the increasing cultural influence cybernetics was developing—Cyberpunk hinted at the expansive psychological sprawl digitized information would take later take experiences of the human in the form of the internet, territory that has often been referred to in terms of a posthuman, or cyborg, era. Fisher takes an observation of Donna Haraway’s (one of the signature theorists of posthumanism) that "our machines are unnervingly lively, while we [humans] ourselves are frighteningly inert"[417] to begin his account of how the "theoretical failings" of many of the critics who originally contemplated cybernetics as a philosophical turn arise out of a resistance to pursuing cybernetics "to its limits"[418], invoking a charge of latent conservatism in the interpretation of cutting edge, postmodern productions. According to Fisher, Haraway's conception of the living features of the machine as opposed to the increasing automaton-like nature of human subjects is important in how it presents a "challenge to the oppositional thinking that sets up free will against determinism, vitalism against mechanism",[419] a charge that sees Fisher take the postmodern "shock of the new" to a logical reactionary consensus. By questioning the very nature of what it is to be human, Cyberpunk productions readdress a fundamental tenet of philosophy since Plato: that experience is a fundamentally human endeavour wherein choices can be made by individuals acting in their self-interest. Stressing a cultural movement calling awareness to representations of a reality which succeeds the planetary domination of human

[417] Donna Haraway, “The Cyborg Manifesto”, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Free Association Books, 1991) quoted in Mark Fisher, 2.
[418] Fisher, Ibid.
[419] Fisher, Ibid.

will, understandably sends waves of confusion, if not emotions relating to the traumatic, amongst a now decentralised critical community.

However, Fisher's thesis asserts that through his readings of cybernetic theorists such as Haraway and Baudrillard, the human has long been haunted by the non-subjectivity of the others it creates, allowing for the phenomenon of gothic materialism. Fisher states that the hybrid form implied by a "Gothic Materialism", a "conjoining" of two disparate literary understandings, comprising the supernatural and the artificial—the otherworldly that is beyond human interfacing and therefore consumption with the materials designed for the sale of the market—initiates "a change in the way the Gothic has been thought".[420] Fisher's reading of a section of Meyrink's *The Golem* where the narrator Pernath considers the strangely animated effects which forces of nature physically enact on the inanimate provides a foregrounding of his interest for this purposely jarring concept. Watching how newspapers blown by the wind through Prague's city streets incur a kind of animating life force, Pernath ponders "doesn't it look odd when things which usually just lie there lifeless suddenly start to move?".[421] Pernath's insight into the almost banal occurrences of the supernatural on city streets is allowed a register of strangeness, of the perceptibly odd even, in a feature of everyday reality in the urban cityscape. Pernath then signals a bizarre feature of this effect: the newspaper left behind by the wind's rushes seems to take on features of a distinct bodily struggle. The single remaining paper "lay on the cobbles, full of spite, gasping spasmodically"[422]: the struggle becomes anamorphic, no longer the residue of discarded printed material but that of a human being demonstrating the symptoms of a cardiac arrest. Despite the scene's familiarity, its reproduction, it is nevertheless the site of Pernath's discomfited concern. Pernath, with a sense of "ominous foreboding"[423], considers the possibility that "we living beings were nothing more than scraps of paper"[424], steered by forces beyond individual control, driven by the impact of a non-human determinism, yet in our "simplicity"[425], believe ourselves to be the agents of free will? The paranoia implicit in this reassessment of object/subject divisions is inherent in Pernath's "ominous foreboding"

[420] Fisher, ibid.
[421] Gustav Meyrinck, *The Golem*, Trans. Mike Mitchell (Riverside, Cambridgeshire: Dedalus/Ariadne Press) 1915, 1995, 54-55. Cited in Fisher, 1999, 2019, 1.
[422] Meyrink, in Fisher, ibid.
[423] Meyrinck, in Fisher, ibid.
[424] Meyrink, in Fisher, ibid.
[425] Meyrink, in Fisher, ibid.

that appears to detail a future breakdown in distinctions between flesh and other humanmade substances.

Pernath seems to raise the question of whether there "any more be a distinction between the human subject and the humanised object"? If both subject and object present equal characteristics determined in responses to the agency of greater controlling natural intervention (wind, ageing, the evidential lack of a deterministic free will) how can the human being remain exceptional, remain especially unique? This query prefigures terms that anticipate Haraway's later concern: technological advances, in both *The Golem*'s era of vast quantities of disposable printed material littering the urban cityscape and in Haraway and Turkle's time illuminate the symbolic exchanges taking place in an era where machines are personified as if they are replicas of an older generation of optimistic, "alert" human beings. The special, in other words, becomes increasingly spectral in twentieth-century literature and theory.

Fisher's invocation of his phrase sets out to deliberately dissociate the gothic from its previous position as the literary domain of the supernatural :everything, in Fisher's understanding, that suggests the "ethereal or otherworldly".[426] How Gothic Materialism achieves this is that it locates its subjects/objects as existing within a *Gothic Flatline*, a constructed form of the present comprising a "plane where it is no longer possible to differentiate the animate from the inanimate".[427] This present borrows from and heightens the concerns at the centre of Meyrinck's novel. Fisher borrows the secondary term for his reinterpretation (re-embodiment, to take Fisher's terminology to its thematic limit) of the gothic, ‘flatline’, from *Neuromancer*. Flatline, according to Fisher, delineates a neurological and emotional state which are "adrift from life and death", or less prosaically, "states of simulated life", which occur in characters throughout Gibson’s novel..

Fisher gives two key readings of Gothic Materialism in fiction-Meyrink's *The Golem* and William Gibson's *Neuromancer* -to establish his analysis of Gothic Materialism and the emotive state of the Flatline. First, *The Golem*. This piece of twentieth-century horror can be assessed as mirroring the "ghostly" complex of materiality that haunts later postmodern

[426] Fisher, 1999, 2019, 2.
[427] Fisher, ibid. Italics, Fisher.

fiction. Reading horror in this way, Fisher draws upon Giles Deleuze's detection of a "body-without-organs" replacing the death as the "model for schizophrenic catatonia"[428], or a machine or mechanized cyborg individual replacing the corpse as the entity of terror that the living human, through the cognitive liminalities inferred by human experience, cannot comprehend.

Reading horror in this way, Fisher suggests, creates an affinity between Cyberpunk and other postmodern fiction like that of Don DeLillo — fiction where dread supersedes an emotional reaction to events in the world — to the extent that the immediate experience of the world is a flatline construct "where to have agency is not necessarily to be alive". In approaching an awareness of Gothic Materialism in both Horror fiction (Meyrink's fantastical Golem) and the later postmodern fiction of Gibson and DeLillo, where "schizophrenic catatonia exists to replace the psychological vacuum Jameson inferred in postmodernism's "waning of affect", the role of Chabon's fiction in replacing the postmodern with a renewed sense of the fantastical (and/or Romantic) which *at the same time* addresses the concerns of an increasingly melancholic American present.

Pernath, Meyrink's narrator in *The Golem*, is a man haunted by both the limitations of his consciousness and the liminality of the urban space he inhabits in the Jewish ghetto of early twentieth-century Prague. He struggles to sleep at night and is convinced of only a single experiential certainty, "that my body is lying asleep in bed and my senses are detached and no longer tied to it".[429] Such is the distressed state of Pernath's mind, as he grows ever sceptical about the agency he asserts over his own life, that he begins to question to whom his own thought processes even refer: "Who is this "I" now?'.[430] The very insistence on the individuality of a self becomes ludicrous to him. In a world where the unnatural scene of the wind dispersing newspapers spark an unexpected emotive response in the narrator, leading to the novel's underlying provocation :what is the point of thinking the self, or individualizing the self? Pernath's reluctance or unwillingness to recognize in himself the characteristic features of the humanity he sees in animate objects (thinking, feeling, being forced to move by nature's intervention) seems to anticipate his acceptance of the supernatural as a means out

[428] Giles Deleuze, "The Nature of Flows, trans. Karen Isabel Ocana, cited in Fisher, 50.
[429] Gustav Meyrink *The Golem* Rev. Ed. Trans. Mike Mitchell (Sawtry, Cambridgeshire: Dedalus Press) 1915, 1995, 2017. 17.
[430] Meyrink, ibid.

of the confines of incomprehension relating to the self's psychological autonomy. Pernath has become immersed in a flatline, the spectral materiality of the printed materials he sees mimicking human emotions has superseded his need to rationalise his own human emotions. Pernath, while failing to sleep at night, remembers to himself: "I no longer possess an organ with which I can ask questions".[431] Pernath empathizes with the plight of the artificial, the material, and now he has succumbed to the machine, a "body-without-an-organ" willingly abandoning his sense of agency to aspire to the pre-determined unliving, unthinking nature of materials. Feeling himself "not necessarily alive", he is the prescient embodiment of the alarmingly inert individual of the cyberage as seen by Haraway.

Horror fiction and the Gothic have long had an alarmingly prescient foothold on theories that dominate later, "serious" critical writing. The terror of the other, the uncanny, the automaton and the cyborg have all featured in horror writers from Poe, and Horror's didactically anti-enlightenment assertion of the supernatural or fantastic as having aesthetic precedent over the logical exerts an antipathy towards the scientific that ultimately becomes a defeatist, almost sadistic allegiance to the scientific with the appearance of Meyrick's novel. In contrast to the phantom image of identity for Pernath, whose worldview is wrapped up in dichotomies of the inauthentic yet eerily vibrant urban space of Prague, Chabon's Meyer Landsman's interior narrative of Sitka, effectively fading like Joe Kavalier's faint longing memories for the lost Prague of his youth, sought out an authenticity to define the reasoning behind a community identity within the Sitka that his parents' generation imagined into being. The emigre state of Sitka in this sense is a counter-argument to how Stewart defines nostalgia in *On Longing.* Stewart determines the melancholy of nostalgia as representing "a sadness within a subject “with nostalgia the past takes on "an authenticity of being"[432] which ironically can only be manifested through the performative, flimsy convolution of narrative. As Jameson elucidates the problematic tendencies of postmodern writing to intuit a suspicion of the malleability of narrative while being ironically dependent on familiarized performative methods of narrative form, Stewart overtly emphasizes the present tense form of nostalgia as opposed to considering its source. In persuasively arguing that, like any form of narrative, nostalgia is, "always ideological", a perennially absent centrepiece of obsession, and the "past it seeks has never existed except as narrative", Stewart here insists that her readings of nostalgia make

[431] Meyrink, ibid.
[432] Stewart, *On Longing*, 23.

political synecdoche apparent in personalized interpretations of historical experience. Stewart thus parallels how Jameson describes the politically unconscious allusions inherent in the literary text; these texts describe the ideally personal in works that through genre indices are given the guise of performing omniscient storytelling. Stewart's charge of the inauthenticity inherent in the nostalgic narrative is one of a particular postmodernist rebuttal of grand narratives: nostalgia exudes the inauthentic for Stewart "because it does not take part in lived experience".[433]

Conclusion

The stylistics aesthetics of sampling in Chabon utilise references to written and visual texts in order to demonstrate a politicized means of thinking about authenticity when describing artificial forms or concepts. The personification of objects in the discussion of their auratic qualities affix a kind of narrative meaning to the mass produced in Chabon. Whereas a writer like Fisher seeks out he haunting elements of the unliving but strangely relevant cultural objects that instil personal or political ideas, Chabon sees products as an opportunity to discuss emotions and ideals. In this way Chabon is suggesting the inherent human way to think objects intellectual, whereas emotions and ideals remain often unspoken bodily realities. The use of referentiality to discuss the wavering contents of bodies and minds sees Chabon embrace a postmodern hybridity of form, which re-engages with postmodernism’s experimental bent without losing focus on the human.

My aim in the following chapter is to examine how in Chabon’s millennial fiction the burden of historical narrative is a concern relived by a reinterest in finding community and family.

[433] Stewart, *ibid.*

Chapter 5

The Postmodern Family, The Post-Postmodern Community: Performativity, Surrogacy and Affect in Michael Chabon's Millennial Fiction

This Chapter argues that familial relations are given the same auratic quality which, as I discussed, Benjamin attributed the artwork and Boyle the mass-produced object of wabi-sabi or retro significance. This interpretation of auratic quality in wabasabe or the retro as applied signifiers located in Chabon's fiction considers the framing of authenticity through a sense of representing shelter from socio-political demands (in the entertainment aspect of engaging with the retro), or of an immediately platform for discussing socio-political ideas in engaging with more traditionally performed ways of adopting the routines of everyday life (such as in wabi-sabi's praise of the imperfect features of old but enduring objects and furnishings.) Beginning with Sam Clay's adoption of the role of a family man in the event of his cousin Joe's disappearance into post-Holocaust Europe to find what remains of his Prague family, the responsibilities of "straight guy" family life itself a shelter from Sam coming to terms with his own sexuality and blanketing his outsider status in post war conformist USA, and then moving to Archy Stallings' "Church of Vinyl" reaffirmation of Brokeland Records culture in *Telegraph Avenue* as a means of finally accepting the familial duties his own father failed in any aspiration to maintain, the family sphere in Chabon's millennial fiction becomes not only auratic but therefore "reified." In an era where traces of religion, the theological structuring of a society's traditional ideology and activity, had been rapidly replaced by the teleological influence of medial appropriations via televisual and, increasingly, online representations of how the social structures of American life operate, the site of the family, genetic or invented, assumes for Chabon and his contemporaries an intensity of focus that authors of earlier American reserved for religious and other forms of spiritual metaphor. In thinking through this reification of the familial sphere in, for periodization's sake, "post-postmodernist fiction", Chabon is perhaps unique among even Jewish American authors of this era for his interpretation of the messianic trope in Judeo literature, a feature of his work which aligns him once again to the critical approaches of Walter Benjamin, who proactively stated in his "Theses On the Philosophy of History" (1940) that a creative historian necessarily "grasps the constellations which his own era has formed with a definitive earlier one" as a means to make meaningful connections with the legacy of past struggles. These constellations are made not in the service of "telling the sequence of events like the beads of

a rosary."[434] History is not the mere indices of a habit-forming routine of narrative but a dialectical investigation aimed towards the understanding of the current age, "a dialectic which "establishes a conception of the present as the "time of the now" which is shot through with the chips of Messianic time."[435] The makings of Golems and the coming of the Messiah are crucial recurring themes that resonate throughout the novels and essays which Chabon produces from the turn of the twenty-first century. This insistent need to fabricate a protective saviour figure acts a guard against the real and haunts Chabon's output in this era.

The focus of this chapter is the shift in Michael Chabon's millennial fiction that establishes a post-postmodern moment, one that turns its attention to concerns of twenty-first-century fiction. In defining this "moment" and the implications this shift has for Chabon's fiction, my research will analyse contemporary American literary and cultural criticism. Primarily, this chapter is an investigation of how performativity in Chabon's fiction after 2000 reflects tendencies in American popular culture to register affect, which can be understood as the direct attempt in fictive works to assert the role played by emotion within the narrative context of works of fiction. Rather than offer the critique of sentimentality that often follows when works seek to provoke emotive responses, my argument reads performativity in Chabon's fiction of this era to demonstrate how these texts offer a commentary on the status of everyday relationships in contemporary American fiction. Specifically, family and workday communities are central to Chabon's fiction of this era, a development which I argue is linked to a growing resistance to postmodern solipsism and to the attitude within cultural criticism that the present moment is uninterpretable for many analysts, because, to mirror Fredric Jameson's assertion, it has yet to be historicized.[436]

---

[434] Benjamin, "Theses On the Philosophy of History", *Illuminations*, 255.
[435] Benjamin, ibid.
[436] Fredric Jameson, 1991) ix.
Jameson's original statement that "it is safest to grasp the concept of the postmodern as an attempt to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten to think historically in the first place" created a tension for practitioners and critics of American fiction and media whose utilizing of postmodernist theory attempts to respond to the continental postmodern moment in writing and philosophy. Creative works which examined the historical significance of the present in the years after the critical turn towards the postmodern after the 1960's was reduced by a generation of Jamesonian style rhetoric of there being no way to historicize the present moment with the advent of mass media in the USA. The end of the cold war contributed to the insistence that the late twentieth century would eclipse historization. By the time the post-postmodernist moment occurs in the late 1990's/early 2000's, the notion of an impossibility of historicizing the present moment had become an accepted understanding of the failures of postmodernist fiction to exalt a defining historical character. The problematizing of the term "postmodern" for many literary critics had become such an issue that "post-postmodernism" was often dismissed before it was given any serious investigation.

In showing a concern for the place of family and community in a contemporary United States steeped in the processes of neoliberal globalization, Chabon attempts to locate a post-postmodern moment—one which analyses performativity as the means to register affect and the emotive relations of the everyday—and in doing so crosses the boundary of an insular, existential cynicism that some writers saw postmodern theory as inspiring in cultural criticism. In this way, post-postmodern theory essentially argues that literature should provide a platform to argue that (to cite the earlier example of Benjamin's claim that the technological advances during the early twentieth century reflected "the desire of the contemporary masses to bring things closer spatially and humanely",) the spaces of family, labour and communal gathering were the spaces where affect was identifiable in the twenty-first century.[437] Where mechanical reproductions in the form of films and recorded radio programs would provide a means of bringing people's knowledge of the world and of themselves in domestic proximity for the first time, it was this very domestic proximity which post-postmodern works would emphasise as centres of performativity, where affect was made tangible through lived experiences and the narrative of the humane made visible. If the image can be read as a spectacle in *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay,* and thereby not devoid of multi-layered complexities of representation and emotive symbolic charge, this chapter shows that a similar means of reading the place of the family and the space of community in Chabon's millennial fiction can be seen as performing the conditions of affect and of a distinctly post-postmodernist reconstruction of meaning through human affairs.

Performativity and the reification of familial relationships are both themes that highlight the shift towards writing about the contemporary moment in Chabon's fiction. The readings in this chapter address a fictional rendering of the "postmodern family", where families consisting of blood relatives, surrogate parental figures and adopted communities all represent characteristics similar to those of traditional familial community units in U.S. fiction. My readings of emotion in contemporary texts take into consideration the performativity of emotive language described in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003). My interest in Sedgwick's readings of language and affect as expressed in literature mirrors that which has become a recognizable

[437] Benjamin,1992, 217.

theme in textual criticism. In this book, Sedgwick affirms her reasoning for undertaking a study in the performative conditions of registering feelings in literary works, a discipline often shorthanded as affect studies, which emerged out of her interest in language philosopher J.L. Austin's 1955 Harvard lectures on performativity.[438] Sedgwick signals that a "queer" potential of performativity is "related to the tenuousness of its ontological grounds".[439] The concept of performativity is therefore a deliberately unclear one, the delicate sense of its transparency that Sedgwick claims is apparent in the fact that "it began its intellectual career all but repudiated in advance" by Austin himself. As the coiner and theorist of the concept, Austin's investigations of what performativity could actually mean signals the act of performativity as decentred, and this is where Sedgwick locates its use in describing the acts or utterances of queerness, a foundationally decentred category of human investigation. The indecision Austin felt over his attempt to introduce performativity as the visual representation of internal human emotion is highlighted by Sedgwick when she notes that Austin "introduced Performativity in the first of his Harvard lectures" only to disown or direct his ideas away from the term "somewhere around the eighth."[440]Sedgwick's interest in this seeming error of judgement in Austin's critical thinking reveals a vital symptom of affect studies: the difficulty of describing the real impact or comprehension of emotions intellectually often results in awkwardness in syntactical communication, a reluctance to illuminate the reasoning of ideas regarding feelings or a complete disavowal of understanding the processes at work in emotions. According to Sedgwick, Austin "disowns or dismantles "performativity"," which he names as the "distinct and bounded category of utterances that might be opposed to the merely "constative" or descriptive."[441] To give a direct example of how he critiques the notion of performativity in linguistics, the difference between the constative "this is how I feel" and the descriptive "that was the way I felt at the time" is non-existent, as, according to Austin, " every genuine speech act has both" present tense constative and descriptive properties.[442] "I feel this" therefore, also *describes* a feeling.

---

[438] Published in J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Language*, ed. J.O Urmson. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[439] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2003)3.

[440] Sedgwick, ibid.

[441] Sedgwick, ibid.

[442] Austin, 1970, 147 in Sedgwick, 2003, 4.

Sedgwick uses the example of deconstructivist theory's use of Austin's analysis of performativity because it "begins with the recognition of (performativity) as a property or aspect common to all utterances."[443] The paradoxical legacy of Austin's disavowal of performativity is evident in how "despite Austin's demurral", linguistic and analytic philosophy have remained interested in how Austin classifies "utterances as performative versus constative."[444] Considering this, and pushing further the linguistic boundaries of understanding the symptomatic distinctions of performativity in human speech, Sedgwick investigates several instances where performativity is explicit and centered in the syntax of the speech act (e.g. "I promise", "I apologize", "I dare you"). Sedgwick's interest in what she terms *explicit performative utterances* (italics: Sedgwick), in departing from Austin's conclusion that utterances should not be distinguished in terms of their registry or declarative impact, emerges out of analyses of the situation of emotion, of feeling cutting through the descriptive angle of utterances where the moment of affect *explicitly occurs.* To be effective in offering a real communicative display of emotion, the *explicit performative utterance* must blur or *queer* the understanding of a spoken utterance, there must be something *left out* or consciously omitted from the utterance ("I apologize", "I dare you",) that makes the statement obvious to the receiver as one that strives for an emotional impact. The performative aspect of emotive language, much like the edged delivery of irony, often constitutes a dialogue between speaker and receiver, which assumes a background knowledge of the topic of conversation to which the speaker relates emotion.

Sedgwick's moment of the *explicit performative utterance* takes particular inspiration from the use of narrative voice in literary analysis to establish its functioning as a register of personal involvement in speech utterances. Sedgwick lists the "syntactic and semantic features" her understanding of performative utterances have in common with Austin's. They are (1) made in the first-person singular, (2) present, (3) indicative and (4), active.[445] Sedgwick's categories for explicit performative speech acts imitate the structures of first-person narratives in contemporary fiction: the first-person narrator is often the guide through a lived experience where their reliability is left up to the reader; only the author is ever registered as maintain a divine sense of omniscience. Yet, readers are tasked with reading the

[443] Sedgwick, 4.

[444] Sedgwick, ibid.

[445] Sedgwick, ibid.

present, emotive or non-emotive reactions to lived experience or perspective that the first-person singular narrator provides, and how meaning is registered through the text must arrive at the discretion of the first-person singular narrative. Emotion, as an inverse to the intellectualized mode of thought or perspective in narrative voice, is made indicative at the level of an analysis of language, often in terms of what may be omitted or left out of syntactical declarations. Perhaps in terms of a rebuttal to Sedgwick's insistence on the explicit nature of performativity in declarative statements, a more nuanced approach would see a focus on the performative nature of *acts* in fiction, which I will apply alongside the considerations of dialogue and declarative statements in my analyses of Chabon's millennial fiction. However, the way in which Sedgwick states that declarative language is indicative of performativity is useful for my discussion on Chabon and for analyses of language in literature in general.

In terms of how the places of family and work find a central focus in post-postmodernist fiction, the means by which the loci of traditional associations of the importance of family and a re-emphasis on the value of community are arrived at emerge out of an awareness of absence rather than a positive accreditation of the present. Criticism of the post-postmodern moment, such as I will later discuss with my analysis of Nealon and Giroux, often emphasizes a fallout of approval toward neoliberal politics in fiction. A disillusionment with capitalism's continuing dominance in the aftermath of the global recession after 2008 is emblematic of post-postmodernism's earnest re-evaluation of affective language, and a sense of striving towards a reassessment of social awareness delineates the emergence of an interest in community in US fiction at the turn of the twenty-first century. However, I turn first to Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* (2005)[446] as a means of reading a comparative argument on the place of *negative* performative emotions, and in doing so attempt to arrive at an aesthetic reason, rather than simply a dialectical one, for why this moment of post-postmodernism occurred before the intensive political debacles of the late 2000s. Reading Ngai, and then Nealon and Giroux, nuanced argument emerges as to why post-postmodernism acted as a microcosm for American life before the crash. The historical argument of the seemingly endless persistence of neoliberalism saw a push back in the more utopian re-assessment of social relations in the fiction and literary criticism of this era, tendencies which can be actively examined via the turn of Chabon's fiction toward a post-postmodernist aesthetic in

[446] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005)

the 2000s.

In *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai sets out to examine "a series of studies in the aesthetics of negative thinking",[447] a premise that departs from Sedgwick's more generalised reading of emotions in utterances by considering how a discourse may be formed from emotions that express a negating will. At the centre of Ngai's work on negative emotions is the way that the psychological aspects of a negating will are shaped by often overlooked or misunderstood meanings, particularly in expressive discourse. Beginning with an analysis of Herman Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street"[448] Ngai locates expressions of negating will as a particularly contemporary phenomenon, signaling their recurrence in the age of technological advancement and its increasingly bureaucratic demands on public working life and effect on culture. Outlining how an aesthetics of negative thinking has produced "politically ambiguous work in a range of cultural artefacts",[449] Ngai examines how in turn these politically ambitious fictions have influenced the discourse of cultural criticism.[450] Linking the symbolic gestures made in fictitious accounts of contemporary life to the culturally symptomatic in what W.T. Adorno calls the "fully administrated world" of late modernity",[451] Ngai positions the tension between the aesthetic and its emphasis on emotive response on the one hand and the political and its insistence on the historicized logic of approaches to analysis on the other. In approaching aesthetic responses to the "fully administered world" of late modernity (which Adorno locates in cultural critiques of post-World War Western states) Ngai looks back to the 1850s, to the "world already depicted with startling clarity" by Melville in "Bartleby", specifically to the titular office worker's avowed

[447] Ngai, 2005, 1.

[448] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 31. In Ngai, 2005, 1.

[448] Herman Melville, "Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" in *The Complete Shorter Fiction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 29.

[448] Ngai,,2005, 1. Italics: Ngai.

[449] Ngai, ibid.

[450] Ngai, ibid.

[451] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory,* ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 31. In Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 1.

declaration:“ I prefer not to”[452] . When allocated the labour of doing beyond contractually what is required of him after a particularly intensive workload, Bartleby is effective in his disengagement with the task assigned him, while also just as powerfully not committing to the protest. Ngai describes “the interpretive problems posed by an American office worker’s *affective* equivocality,” that is, the character’s utterance purposefully omits its full meaning, one that is “pointedly directed at the *political* equivocality of his unnervingly passive form of dissent.”[453] This assessment of Bartleby’s declared preference to withhold his labour in the face of administrative sanctions alludes to the performativity Sedgwick asserts in the making obvious of the emotive in utterances: Bartleby is beholden by his employment status to perform when asked, but by stating that he “would prefer not” to here alludes to an obvious registry of negating personal will in response to his charge. Here is Sedgwick’s first-person singular declaration, indicative of an explicit performative utterance that is active in asserting the emotive act through its choice of constative gesture—the emotion *is in* the words. However, it is the full absence of meaning in Bartleby’s performative “preference”, what Ngai highlights as the equivocal properties of the declaration, that acts the means of crossing over from mere declarative statement which registers emotion to one that evidences a more nuanced, and decidedly more difficult, register of affect. The *absence* of key indicators in the statement, why Bartleby prefers not to commit to more work, is at complete odds with the *presence* of the kind of emotional declaration that Sedgwick insists is key to understanding linguistic performativity in *Touching Feeling.* The gaps, the borderlines that exist between the meaning of Bartleby’s preferred objection, and even the outright miscommunication or lack of understanding that might occur as a result of reading Melville’s story, are precisely what makes finding these ideas inherent in a single sentence of difficult expression compelling for Ngai. It is the difficulty, the undeclared analysis, the *ugliness* of such an awareness of emotive response that makes the expression worth revisiting.

Ngai registers this very absence within examples of negating will be examined in *Ugly Feelings* examines should “dwell on affective gaps and illegibilities,” the easily misunderstood intention of Bartleby’s ominous declaration, “dysphoric feelings.”[454] What drives Bartleby to make such a negating statement, as opposed a *positively* emotive outburst

[452] Herman Melville, “Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street” in *The Complete Shorter Fiction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987, 29.

[453] Ngai, 2005, 1. Italics: Ngai.

[454] Ngai, ibid.

of "real" feeling. Ngai locates this examination of the gaps, ineligibilities and dysphoric feelings encountered in Bartleby's statement alongside "other sites of emotional negativity in literature, film, and theoretical writing," to discuss similar expressions of omitted, in-between or decidedly difficult expressions in exploring "similarly ambivalent situations of suspended agency" that occur in contemporary fiction and Ngai's assessment of how ambivalent, dysmorphic and difficult emotions find their expression offers the closest understanding of affect's place in the post-postmodern moment. Alongside a Bartlebian reading of emotional equivocality in literature, Ngai takes as her point of departure two conflicting ideas from radically different eras of philosophy, which alludes to the tension between the real (political) and the metaphysical (a discipline closer to feeling or the sensually equivocal). Stating how the ideas considered in *Ugly Feelings* centre around
and draw together two seemingly disparate philosophical interpretations of the political and the metaphysical, Ngai negotiates: 1) Hannah Arendt's claim that "what makes a man a political being is his faculty of action"[455] and 2) Baruch Spinoza's description of emotions as "waverings of the mind"[456] that can either increase or diminish one's power to act-and attend to the aesthetics of the ugly feelings "that index these suspensions."[457]

Ngai here locates a tension between philosophical understandings of faculties of actions by assessing how quickly emotions, Spinoza's "waverings of the mind", can deactivate attempts at politically motivating will. If emotions can essentially decommission what Arendt claims are "the faculties of action" which determine man as a political being, the interference of difficult, negative, ugly responses to feeling can be interpreted as queering what Western society's idea of what agency, masculine or otherwise, should represent or aspire to Bartleby then represents an early representation of Arendt's politicised man. However, my argument here in way of reading Ngai posits made that Bartleby's wavering of emotion in the face of duty, of what is expected of him, the very thing that thwarts our understanding of his utterance of non-preference. Is his disquiet the very thing that cuts Bartleby off from our understanding because contemporary subjects above all fear the equivocal and the gaps in-between meaning? Ngai's insistence that her project essentially suspends the disbelief

[455] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969), 82.

[456] Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, as translated and cited by Cheshire Calhoun and Robert C. Solomon, eds., *What is an Emotion*? *: Classic Readings in Philosophical Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 57.

[457] All three quotes are from Ngai, 2.

attested to by Arendt's claim, which is a particularly modernist philosophical claim as it comprehensibly arrives at a moment of knowable determined will, "the political man." Ngai interprets the awakening of reasoning that Arendt discusses as privileging "the circumscribed standpoint of the literary" to examine problems of cognitive emotive interference, or feeling, which Ngai is concerned "arguably lies beyond the sphere of the aesthetic per se."[458]

The Event

In comparing Ngai's preference for" the circumscribed standpoint of the literary" when discussing difficult emotions with Sedgwick's linguistically focused but methodically literary approach to understanding the symptoms of performativity in language, it is important to consider the foregrounding of literature in each case. As a platform to discuss the decidedly inexpressible or painfully expressed emotions, literature both alludes to a critical moment when the postmodern, a decidedly decentred, *unfeeling* movement of textual practice and analysis which featured a prominent insistent on psychological interiority, may be crossed over. The concept of *The Event* in postmodern theory presents a deceptively useful grounds for discussion in what has been described variously as a turn towards "post-postmodernist fiction",[459] and more specifically by Pieter Vermulen as literature which dramatizes the end of the novel form in contemporary fiction, a distinction that conveys an emergence of writing which "paradoxically uses the novel as a resource for figuring forms of life that cut across the distinction between individuals and communities."[460] The event as a profound rupture, as a signifier of irreversible change and the recontextualization of political socio-realities, is configured directly into the fabric of literature itself. Vermulen suggests that the structure of fiction is being used and readily dismantled by a generation of practitioners as a means of discussing social realities in a context which determines the decreasing relevance of the resourcefulness—indeed, the *power* of the novel structure—thus producing "imaginative work" by authors persistently aware of their affective labour's rescinding ability to shape progressive discussion around the topic of creation in an increasingly unpredictable and

[458] Ngai, ibid.

[459] Adam Kelly "The Death of the Author of the Birth of a Discipline", in Irmtraub Huber, *Literature after Postmodernism.*

[460] Pieter Vermeulen, *Contemporary Literature, and the End of the Novel: Literature, Affect, Form* (Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

structurally indefinable landscape.[461] The irony of the conceit duly noted (surely by attempting to explain a turn *away* from postmodernist poetics one should refrain from using postmodern symbolism) in the critical estimation postulated by Jean Baudrillard that the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the twin towers of New York's world Trade Center represented "the absolute event, the 'mother' of all events" presents a key concept in understanding the symbolic turn towards representations of apocalyptic millennialism, nostalgia and, perhaps most significantly, a turn away from consideration of the imaginative power of language and metaphor towards a return to depictions of the Real in American fiction.[462] This rising from out of the fire and debris of images that screened worldwide threatened the idea of the United States as representing the indominable and unwavering world superpower. For Baudrillard, the World Trade Center attacks are "pure event uniting within itself all the events that have never taken place,"[463] a violent act of *creation* and a symbolic structure towards a *unification* of ideas as much as they are shocking crimes of and aggression.

That Baudrillard uses the language of familial origin— "mother", the bringer of life, the "purity" of these attacks—suggest a means of *invention,* a release out of political suggestion and towards a unification of what were until September 2001 only strands of historical narrative: now, a rebirth of the metanarrative of history.[464] This kind of encompassing chronological *story* of civilization through the plot structure of world conflict had been summarised by Jean-Francois Lyotard as concluding by the late 1970s, and this sense of an ending of the relevance of historical metanarratives Lyotard determined as symptomatic of the "postmodern condition."[465] In an age of increasing technological advances amidst the waning of ideological rhetoric which conceived of stark divisions of desired communal needs from first world to third, televisual and other media outlets such as radio insisted on a universalising trend in consumer culture.

---

[461] Vermulen, "This imaginative work exercises a far weaker cultural power than the one the novel is assured to have had in the past", 2015, ibid. Vermeulen considers this change of the cultural influence suggested by the novel from the late nineteenth to have dissipated dramatically by the late 1990's.
[462] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner (Brooklyn, London: Verso, 2012), 3.
[463] Jean Baudrillard, 3.
[464] Baudrillard, 3.
[465] Jean-François Lyotard. 1979. *The Postmodern Condition : A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis, Minn. Univ. Of Minnesota Press.

For Postmodernist thinkers like Baudrillard and Lyotard, who had lived through the era where the concerns of Benjamin and Adorno regarding the increasing influence which technological media placed on the individual had taken place, the event, the aggressive symbolic return of historical narrative emerging in a symbolic act, represented the only means for political rhetoric in the era of the postmodern to overcome its stasis as mere simulation. The event in postmodern theory becomes the signifier which thrust postmodern sensibilities out of solipsistic, ironizing knowledge critiques into the grand theatre of historicizing rhetoric. In turn, this simultaneously lays grounds for and challenges Jameson's concern that the postmodern tendency to "look for breaks, for events" by identifying through the means of cultural production "shifts and irrevocable changes of representations of things and the way things change" represents not a true cultural turn but "just more images."[466] Postmodernism's critical turn towards the crucial political resonator, away from solipsism and towards an engagement towards the affect of the real, is with the event, with the rupture of the what was known towards what is now knowable, the historical resurgence of narrative which differentiates itself from previous narrative. The cultural turn or postmodern break represented in American literature after September 11th, as alluding to a potential rebirth of poetics *after* postmodernism, is reflected in *The Yiddish Policeman's Union* not with the sincere invective of the qualities attributed to realism in his essay "Trickster in a Suit of Light", but instead is treated with the same kind of "postmodern tongs" that Chabon uses to describe treatment of entertaining or imaginative stylizations which literary critics ascribe to genre fiction.[467] As Sitka police detective Meyer Landsman witness the unfolding of a terrorist attack on the Hill in Jerusalem, the sacred holy site that bears the origin story spanning Judeo-Christian and Islamic faiths, the realisation of the moment of the event awakens to his understanding:

On the television screen, Landman gets his first look at an image that will soon be splashed across the front page of every newspaper in the world…the hilltop in Jerusalem, crowded with alleys and houses. The broad empty mesa of paving stone. The jagged jawbone of burnt teeth. The magnificent plume of black smoke. And at the bottom the legend, in blue letters, AT LAST! These posters will sell at the stationers' for between ten dollars and $12.95.[468]

[466] Jameson, 1991, ix.

[467] Chabon, 2010, 358.
[468] Chabon, 2010, 358.

This event, which reverse September 11th of the alternative history novel *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, mirrors the now familiarized shocking event screen worldwide of the World Trade Center attacks, also challenges perceived notions of familiarity with historical movements of violent aggression. The event is witnessed through televised images and is itself narrated by language approaching a journalistic tone by an omniscient authorial voice. Landsman receiving his "first look at an image that will soon be splashed across the front page of every newspaper in the world" mimics the journalistic jargon that announces the importance of a world event by attaching its relevance to the medium it appears in, a synecdoche of signification that journalists practice to the point of pastiche. Echoing the tone of Wilfred Burchett's "The Atomic Plague" , Burchett's expose on Hiroshima whose headline announced "I write this as a warning to the world", Chabon presents Landman's awareness of the attack *as a news story* before describing the event proper.[469] The surreal, animalistic imagery of bomb scarred Jerusalem, a "jagged Jawbone of burnt teeth" mirrors the surreal imagery amidst the debris on September 11th in Manhattan, the once cosmopolitan utopian dream centre of Josef Kavalier and Sam Clay's immersion into the assimilation promised by this marketplace of the American Dream then screened live as a nightmare for the world to share together. Like Chabon's burning Jerusalem, Ground Zero was crowded yet strangely vacant, there seemed enough space between those running out amidst the "magnificent plume of black smoke" that encompassed the zoom lenses of cameras, just enough space to film the odd dreamlike ambience of the attack's aftermath.

Chabon's use of "magnificence" in describing the attacks reflects the strange aestheticizing of the attacks which Karlheinz Stockhausen attributed to the imagery of the twin tower's conflagration, that "the attacks on 9/11 were the greatest works of art imaginable to the cosmos" a statement which wrought international outrage at the opening of a festival dedicated to the composer in early 2002.[470] The question posed by Stockhausen's comments which emerge beyond the outraged sensibilities by those thinking of the hurt potentially caused to families and victims of the attacks by Richard Schechner is one that relates to an authentic realisation of violence as aesthetics posed by Stockhausen. What Schechner relates

[469] Wilfred Burchett, "The Atomic Plague" (1945), Accessed http://assets.cambridge.org/97805217/18264/excerpt/9780521718264_excerpt.pdf
[470] Karlheinz Stockhausen, in Richard Schechner. "9/11 As Avant-Garde Art?" *PMLA*, 124: 5 (2009), pp. 1820–1829.

as the objectifying of "the authenticity of what really happened" during the attacks, a historicizing documentation of the realities of the violence as having an ethical edge, is one that features an authenticity which holds a mirror to the state of "social morality during and after the first decade of the twenty-first century."[471] Could the positive critical assertion of a trauma producing act provoke a resurgence of a sense of authenticity in aesthetic criticism and aesthetic representation? Chabon's dreamlike "magnificent plume of black smoke" on a fictionalized mound of the rock in a fictionalized Palestinian state here could be argued as reflecting similar wishful anesthetization of violence purported by Stockhausen's assertion that the 9/11 attacks achieving through organised terrorism "something that we could not even dream about achieving in music, people practicing like mad for ten years, playing a concert, then dying"[472] Is the inherent denial of the emotions that Stockhausen's statements might provoke similar to the ignorance which Alan J. Berger accuses Chabon of after the publication of *The Final Solution* (2004), that his fictionalised "what if" scenario offered not a form of escapism but veered dangerously towards forgetting, and thus offered just another form of "Holocaust denial"?[473] Looking back towards the event as the defining moment in postmodern fiction, Chabon's aesthetic meditations on the aftermath of violence can be accused of reflect what Jameson interprets as Benjamin's analysis of the "anesthetization of reality."[474] Although he notes that Benjamin associated this term with the Italian Futurists and Fascism Jameson relates anesthetization of the real to "our representations of things tending to arouse an enthusiasm and a mood swing not necessarily inspired by the things themselves."[475] In Chabon then, are these "mood swings" of unexpected bathos or enthusiasm or of an enthusiasm towards the traumatic identified as necessary readings of the postmodern by Jameson via Benjamin the this shifting sense of an aestheticizing of reality which conforms to a kind of *longing for*, rather than *escaping out of*, a subject matter that triggers a traumatic responses from a reading of his fiction, however consciously unintended by the author? Can Meyer Landsman be unconscious of his own enthusiasm towards this violent sense of Jewish revenge, itself a playful rendition of a delayed form of a failure to accept the realities of lived historic trauma ascribed to by Chabon? Or can the event in postmodern theory be relied on as a turn towards a rejuvenation of responsible, historicized dialogue, and

[471] Schechner, ibid.
[472] Stockhausen, ibid.
[473] Berger, Alan L. "Michael Chabon's 'The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay': The Return of the Golem." *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, 29 (2010), pp. 80–89. 8.
[474] Jameson, 1991, x.
[475] Jameson, ibid.

does assuming this interpretation then merit a reading of the violent aggression of the leap into nostalgia of the Palestine attack, a turn away from escapism into an event that resurrects the consequences of the real in Chabon? Or is Chabon instead critiquing this sense of the Postmodern event, offering a repose against contemporary literary tendencies to tackle larger questions about the interiorities of the self and consciousness, as well as ideas of social responsibility, by simply historizing?

What I will examine in this chapter is the historical periodization of the experiment in poetics that frames what has been articulated as "post-postmodernism" or "literature after postmodernism" with a particular emphasis on how Chabon's fiction during this era best exemplified by inherently contradictory approaches to a "turn from postmodernism" in American writing in the early years of the twenty-first century.[476] Taking my point of theoretical investigation and departure from Fredric Jameson's recurrently quoted assertion that definitions of postmodernism infer the significant difficulty of attempts "to think the present historically in an age that has forgotten to think historically in the first place",[477] my methodology focuses on reading the historical, spatial and communal preoccupations in the fiction of an era dominated by the resurgence of a desire to reconsider and rethink history. Evident in, but, as I discuss, not particular to Chabon's fiction in this era is an emphasis on the reification of the communal sphere, fiction that offers a succinct re-examination of place of the family as a sanctuary and a return to the familial as a means of overcoming the exhaustive psychological effects of living in millennialism, or what Jameson refers to as the indicative cultural and economic indices that "taken together…perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism."[478] The seemingly cyclical nature of literary indicators that determine a move away from postmodern tropes (the ironic, the ideologically and socially decentred, the formally experimental) towards a poetics or prose style that suggests an aesthetic moment which emerges in postmodernism's wake, which can be contrastingly argued as involving characterisations of the sincere, the ideologically stable centres of community amidst the eternally wavering interpolations of emotion, conscious homages to

[476] In conversation with Larry McCaffery in 1993 Wallace set a trend for this description, which has taken on a paradigmatic if not unproblematic *offialese* in academic studies of contemporary US fiction. See L. McCaffery "Interview with David Foster Wallace" in McCaffery, Larry. "An Interview with David Foster Wallace." *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13, no. 2 (1993): 127–50.
[477] Jameson, 1.
[478] Jameson, ibid.

the formal disciple of "classic" fiction.

In considering a discourse on the emotionally expressive, if equivocal, literature emerging in the neoliberal wake of the 1990s, critical work on how language *shapes* rather than *imprisons* the real in the form of performative utterances and the linguistic expression of the equivocal allows for an illuminating discussion on the post-postmodern moment in American fiction. By thinking in terms of emotional registers through linguistic utterances in contemporary American fiction, an argument for the post-postmodern moment as an aesthetics which occurs when texts move beyond a discourse of postmodern solipsism becomes tangible. Critical approaches to language attempts to convey political gestures or act as a means of disrupting political agency take on a form of traditional literary analysis that may have escaped or seemed irrelevant to critics such as Jameson. In establishing a criticism that foregrounded postmodernism's primary difficulty as the sheer panorama of its decidedly heterogeneous nature, Jameson overlooks the potential for emotive impacts of highly experimental works. What is striking about Jameson's canonical critique of postmodernist dialectic[479] is that for all its insistence on the mirroring of late market capitalism in the humanities disciplines which Jameson navigates (literature, theory, art, architecture, film, television) there is not one example of an analysis of dialogue. Jameson does not close-read the linguistic utterances of characters, whereas he gives almost a chapter of painstaking analysis of Jon C. Portman's Bonaventura hotel in downtown Montreal as a key paradigm for understanding the dialectic influence of postmodernism in the social sphere.[480] The "look" of postmodernism in Jameson's text is given far more consideration than any declarations,

---

Jameson, 1991, xvii.

[480] "Architecture: Spatial Equivalents in The World System" in Jameson: 1991, 97-131. Jameson in this chapter divides his analysis of postmodern architecture between the Bonaventura Hotel and Frank Gehry's self-designed house in California. For a contrast, Jameson's chapter on the postmodern French novel (the *Nouveau Roman)* "Sentences: Reading and the Division of Labour" gives 11 pages less to the entire fictional oeuvre of Claude Simon and Alain Robbe-Grillet, two major novelists who, although given the distinction by Jameson of describing "the fundamental doubts as to the capacity of language itself to resolve the fundamental philosophical opposition between the universal and the particular"(Jameson:1991, 139) are the subject of a combined close reading of a non-spoken sentence each. Surely, a claim such as Jameson's would be subject to linguistic utterances rather than descriptive interior in an analysis of how postmodern language in the form of the Nouveau Roman? A movement, which, according to Jameson "represents a break between "representational, "textual" and "linguistic" works, between a style oriented around memory and expressive evocation and a neutral and combinational practice" of novel writing, surely must be anticipated by examples of the three breaks of style he describes, which includes the linguistic?

emotive or descriptive. A key example of surface aesthetics as having a prominent fixture in Jameson's critique is how he describes the experience of viewing what he terms the "nostalgia film", a movement in cinematic history which saw American filmmakers idealise the recent past, often as an example of missed opportunity or the space of an American Eden of lost innocence.[481] To discuss the prevalent theme in postwar US film of a loss of Edenic innocence, Jameson considers the presentation of 1950s American life in George Lucas's film *American Graffiti* as similar to "constructing a time capsule" for a "documentary-nostalgia view "of the 1950s[482]. Jameson's accreditation of the film's reconstructive cultural nostalgia solely serves to compliment the film's use of referential visual culture, before asking the probing question "did the period see itself this way?",[483] without probing so far as delineating the numerous hopes, thoughts, or other emotive expressions that reiterate throughout the film's spoken dialogue and act as an equally compelling social microcosm of the era.

Jameson's lack of attention to dialogue is perhaps a result of the arguments Jameson makes for the analysis of modernist fiction. The focus on the psychological aspects of modernist fiction in Jameson's book *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act,* fall within a specific materialist understanding of history, i.e. that "the historical origins of the things themselves", the objects by which we historicize (books, fashion, music, etc.) are qualified by the more "tangible historicity of the concepts and categories by which we attempt to understand the things" (governments, intellectual movements that influence the dialectic).[484] This particularly modernist obsession with "object, subject" materiality, while useful for an interpretation of inherently political perspectives in a given text of the modernist era. Through elucidating how commodity reification and usage is portrayed in fictive works, the emotive effects of lived experience or the equivocal relation of aesthetics to feeling is likely to be overlooked by the argument Jameson makes regarding how as readers we "never really directly confront a text immediately."[485] The historical context of any given texts for Jameson supersedes the aesthetic or linguistic dimensions of written statements of expression.

---

[481] Jameson, 1991, 279.
[482] Jameson, ibid.
[483] Jameson, 1991, ibid.

[484] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative As Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge Classics, 1983), 2002.

[485] James, 2002, ibid.

The Bartlebian moment for Jameson emerges not out of an appreciation of the equivocality of decidedly emotive language and what that might uncover in terms of strenuous labour's effect on *the individual*, as Sedgwick and Ngai might argue, instead it is a direct result of the political impetus in stating a non-preference towards labour, and what this kind of statement says *generally* about how we understand working conditions described in a particular historical context.

Jameson's style of argument has a significant legacy for a generation of critics who argue that we can only assess the post-postmodernist moment by historicizing it in the Jamesonian method. Jeffrey T. Nealon's book on post-postmodernism[486] reads a similar kind of materialist hangover to the theory that emerged before post-postmodernism gained attention as a significant movement in American fiction. Nealon delivers an incisive critique of the narrow textual analysis in Jameson's take on postmodernism. He reads the dizzying array of examples Jameson lists as "anything but restricted or restricted in a recognizable sense"[487] asserting that the sheer variety of Jameson's attempts to historicize the postmodern moment fails to perform the dialectical movement "from sense certainty, to unhappy consciousness, to the heights of knowledge"[488] that constitutes Jameson's avowed ideal of using the dialectic to present the totality of the political unconscious in texts. Nealon hinges his critique—that Jameson never truly convinces the reader that postmodernism[489] is somehow lacking a definable historicity (which is mandatory for locating a political reasoning for how these texts make their claims)—on the way Jameson attempts to define postmodernism by *performing* postmodernism. By subjecting the reader not to close textual analysis, but instead to "an analytical snapshot or critical dissection of postmodernism than a jump-cut laden video

[486] Jeffrey T. Nealon, P*ost-Postmodernism: Or The Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford, Calif : Stanford University Press, 2012).

[487] Nealon, 2012, 5.

[488] Nealon, ibid.

[489]What is the prime difficulty with asserting a clear understanding of how postmodernism functions according to Jameson is the sheer amounts of examples of postmodern*isms* across a variety of disciples Jameson employs for his argument. Nealon argues that the simplest approach is to list the things Jameson attempts to do in the essay: attempt "a new totalization", or "a negation of consumer culture", detail "a cognitive map" of postmodernism through its reification of nostalgia and memory, or simply "a return to this or that style of modernist subjectivity." (Nealon, ibid.*)* The problem with this approach, which mimics the various categorizing of approaches and styles that Jameson appears to find problematic in postmodernist texts, is how to locate how Jameson arrives at the conclusions he does without giving defined examples, as opposed the intoxicating whirlwind of identifiers Jameson lists.

starring it"[490] according to Nealon "we are presented with many, many modes of postmodern cultural production" "but hardly any sense of postmodernism's sublated 'meaning'." Essentially, Nealon has Jameson acting out the kind of performativity in linguistics that Sedgwick and Ngai consider to be indicative of deeper emotive responses to subjects or phenomena, but which nevertheless remain equivocal without a secondary analysis. Nealon's critique asks that Jameson should just say what he *means* to say about postmodernist texts by reading them, not listing them in the same way that a sentence in a 1960s Pynchon novel might list tropes of neurotic Californian entropy.

However, Nealon himself is guilty of coming under a certain theoretical sway by Jameson, in that he insists that the logic of capitalist production, rather than any emotionally registrable fallout from the attested *insanity* of the approaches of post-recession Neoliberal capitalism, is key to understanding why post-postmodernist texts use the performative tools of literary analysis to approach affect. Nealon suggests that a strange nostalgia for eighties culture, and thus, in the Jamesonian sense, capitalist cultural production—or that "maybe it's not so much that the '80s are back *culturally*, but that they never went anywhere *economically*"[491] — persists throughout American cultural production. The "Greed is Good" mentality of Oliver Stone's Gordon Gecko continued as a prevailing mood. As a film whose emphasis on the morally dubious activities of Machiavellian capitalist fortune-making might well have served as the basis for a postmodernist novel, *Wall Street* seems for Nealon a plausible assessment of an attitude which shapes cultural production in the early twenty-first century. Nealon considers the post-postmodern moment as one of increased nostalgia for the era when postmodernism, as Jameson attempted to define it, aligned with "Just-In-Time" capitalism, a slogan that itself points to a hangover from Reaganite politics. Nealon takes his catchphrase for the post-postmodern moment from a particularly postmodern incident: Regan's address to the nation on 30 October 1983 that the U.S. army's invasion of Grenada had resulted in the suppression of a Cuban communist agenda to invade the island in which he noted of the invasion's outcome "we got there, just in time."[492] A U.S. president announcing the covert invasion of an island synonymous with U.S. tourism on live television has a decidedly postmodern, even satirical edge, yet nevertheless, Nealon chooses this statement to describe

[490] Nealon, 2012, 6.

[491] Nealon, 2012, 4.

[492] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PkwNvjQ1Pfo

how the post-postmodern moment has arrived out of a distinct realisation that "the late capitalism" of the 1980s "has since intensified into the "just-in-time" (which is to say, all-the -time) capitalism of our neoliberal era."[493]. The argument that American culture is still haunted by the ghosts of capitalist meritocracy in a book whose methodological approach claims to "intensify, highlight, and redeploy certain strands within Jameson's analysis of postmodernism" alludes more to Nealon's desire for post-postmodern critics to be haunted by the spectre of Jameson's critique of postmodernism than it signals an attempt at investigation a turn or break away from postmodernist aesthetics in contemporary American fiction.

Nealon's methodology, particularly his means of arguing that no significant changes have been made since the 1980s on the way cultural production can be assessed in literary texts with the logic of "just-in-time" capitalism, is not particularly helpful in determining whether the post-postmodernism has been reached at all in contemporary American fiction. However, Nealon nevertheless signals hope in Jameson's critique of postmodernism. Concerning what might come after the heralding of the end of understanding implied by postmodernism's decentred texts, he reads in Jameson's critique a movement towards accepting that postmodernism's embrace of highly experimental and referential styles might strive to perform a connectivity to historical understandings of the present. In one section on *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Jameson concedes that the seemingly endless reference points that are a matter of experiencing a postmodernist text can provoke "a more positive conception of relationship" between references of texts.[494] Alluding to "a new mode of relationship through difference" which has the potential to achieve "new and original ways of thinking and perceiving", Jameson makes an argument for the possibility of a dialectical turn in the advancing cultural production of postmodern texts that could act to offer new avenues where people could discuss "spatially and humanly" these new cultural advances.[495] This echoing of Benjamin's description of the effect that the advances of advancing mechanical reproduction had on the experience of culture in the early twentieth century suggests, much like Benjamin's argument, that what may initially seem like negating or "withering" advances in new media may, in fact, bring in discussions of experiences, a "new relationship" from the cultural peripheries, newly informed by an

[493] Nealon, 2012, ix-x.

[494] Jameson,1991, 31, quoted in Nealon, 2012, 6.

[495] Jameson, ibid.

emerging dialectic. As Jameson hopes, this performative element of dialectic, this emergent "happening" moment of cultural advancements through discourse, can shape understandings of the post-postmodernist turn through tendencies in linguistic and literary analysis.

As Nealon describes it, this hope for a performative *affect* in postmodernism is unusual in Jameson's analysis in that it is singularly bereft of "nostalgia or mourning" for the modernist dialectic.[496] Nealon concludes that in meditating on the future possibilities of what the postmodern can achieve, Jameson can be charged with more than composing "a requiem" for the "somehow-still-centred mediating functions of modernist subjectivity". However, Nealon sees in Jameson's writing on the postmodern the strikes up of "a call for revolution" while investigating the "thing than no longer by its quaint, old-fashioned handle"—consciousness.[497]While not practicing what he preaches in terms of making his readers aware of the conscious irrelevancies of previous dialectical terms in his book on post-postmodernism, Nealon does find in Jameson a model for progressive thought in the example of consciousness. A shift or turn in dialectical understandings of how knowledge is to be applied in the present is surely evidence of a revolution of sorts in at least the language of an era. And consciousness, that hangover from modernism, and the thing that, according to Nealon, Jameson shows as no longer knowable in the postmodern context, is an important example of how the equivocal nature of language is often explored to show the changing nature of perception in literature. The post-postmodern turn, therefore, needs to be shown and understood by an analysis of spoken, performative equivocal sentences in post-postmodern texts.

Before I turn to such an analysis of the spoken or uttered performative sentence in Chabon's writing, I turn to Nealon and Ngai in order to look at the performative ugliness of the word "post-postmodern." Ngai's identification of the passivity inspired by ugly feelings, and the negative effects such feelings also provoke, can be "thought of as allegories for autonomous or bourgeois art's increasingly resigned and pessimistic attitude of its *own* relationship to political action." Ngai's interpretation works to concretely describe the type of relations a decentred understanding of why art *should* be political, unconscious or otherwise, in a way Jameson never quite cemented in his analysis of postmodernism. Ngai's resolve to

[496] Nealon, 7.

[497] Nealon, ibid.

understand the emotional disconnect illuminated in contemporary narratives contends with the thought of what might happen if means of political protest through art have been exhausted, a sentiment that finds prominence in the cultural production of American literature after *even postmodernism.* By analysing difficult or uncomfortable emotions addressed in art, the difficult or comfortable questions which emerge from thoughts on the relevancy of art after postmodernism threatens to end understanding is posed here by Ngai. In locating the difficulty of even *naming* post-postmodernism, Nealon describes the "ugliness" of the term, "not in the sense that swear words or racial slurs are ugly", it is for Nealon aesthetically ugly, "infelicitous, difficult both to read and say, as well as nonsensically redundant."[498] The offence the word may cause more sensitive readers of literature, alluded to by Nealon's use of" infelicitous", the way the word seems "un-true" in the sense of not meaning anything or even being grammatically correct, affirms the resistance *on sight* that many scholars have to the debate regarding whether there is anything locatable beyond the apocalypse of meaning that postmodernism threatened. However, the term provides a useful ugliness for Nealon, in that it works to describe the performative departure from what has already been discussed by Jameson in describing postmodernism, it is a statement of almost passive nature that nevertheless "marks an intensification and mutation within postmodernism"[499] which locates a dialectical turn towards the Bartlebian moment of the personal response to politically structured difficulties in a dialectical framework. In short, because of the negative response it often immediately provokes, the ugly term "post-postmodernism" attests to new difficulties arising from how the present is currently understood, as it shifts towards an ever-gradual historicization by the very medium where it first began to announce its emergence —written language.

Chabon's Postmodern Family: Surrogacy and the Break with the Modern

Attempted understandings of difficult situations, the miscommunication of human affection, the complexities of belonging and no longer belonging in society, and outright lies are the linguistic scenarios that bear the gifts of post-postmodern rhetoric in Chabon's millennial fiction. A key moment of Bartleby-style insistence occurs in *Kavalier and Clay* with the awkward Freudian slip in Joe's lying to Deasy. His inelegant, equally paranoid response to Deasy's paranoia, intimates that the denial of Joe's anti-Nazi activity is a confirmation of a

[498]Nealon, 1.
[499] Nealon, ibid.

deeper political response to his family being under threat in Prague. The difficult emotive response, through its barely there, farcical, utterance, affirms the performativity of Joe's intense concerns as much as his violence against random Germans does. I propose that the scene in which Joe lies for the first time about his involvement in his one-man anti-Nazi protest league in order to secure the future of his anti-Nazi comic book empire shows Chabon meditating on the equivocal nature of emotion as expressed through language. When asked by his publisher George Deasy to reassure him that the "suspicions of his involvement" regarding that afternoon's bomb scare in the offices of Empire Publishing in New York's Kramler building were unfounded, Joe replies:

"Completely", Joe said. "I don't even know the guy."
"What guy is that?
"What I said. I don't know him."
"I can smell it", Deasy said dubiously. "But I just can't figure it out."[500]

What Deasy can't figure out is Joe's complete obsession with humiliating Carl Ebling, founder of the American Aryan League (the AAL), and how this obsession with confronting the self-appointed representative of Adolf Hitler in the United States had almost led to the destruction of his hard fought for lifeline in pre-war industrialist America, not to mention the actual lives of thousands of innocent people. Joe's Freudian slip, his unconscious assertion of his not completely accidental part in the bomb plot, that "he doesn't even know" Carl Ebling, is in essence only a mere half-truth. He doesn't know Carl Ebling personally, but after learning all he could find out about him, he trashed his offices and left the signature of "The Escapist", the Hitler-punching superhero he created with his cousin Sam. Ebling, only a theoretical threat to Joe and Sam, two nice Jewish boys getting themselves into trouble in an office rented to an aspiring National Socialist, poses far more of an emotive offence against the aesthetically gifted but also artistically tempered Joe. As Joe is erstwhile making a not unreasonable amount of money as the artistic talent of a workforce -exploiting entertainment firm, Ebling has become somewhat of a pathetic fallacy for, the Aryan American white whale acting as bait for a young Jewish male out to pick a fight with "managed to run across at least one" of the few thousand Germans in New York whenever he entered the city.[501] The

[500] Chabon, 2000, 222.

[501] Chabon, 2000, 195.

equivocal nature of Joe's response to Deasy, "I don't know him" registers in two distinct senses: the victim of Joe's attack of vandalism has never had the chance to engage in a conversation with Joe, in the same way that the Germans "he runs across" for quick scraps of violence in the subways and streets of Manhattan only have the chance to receive the offensive move from Joe first. Joe doesn't see that as migrants, the men he targets on the street, unlike the obviously fascist-fancying Ebling, May themselves share the same objections to Hitler's racist policy as Joe does. Yet is the Bartlebian confirmation in the evidence of the lie that Joe "doesn't know", who planted the bomb in retaliation for Joe's attack that confirms the very thing that Deasy "can't sniff out", i.e. the existence of this political crusade that Joe won't admit to in order to prolong the company and determine the security of his surrogate family: the vagabond artists and conmen that make up *Empire Publications.* Joe is as much protecting Deasy's dignity, a capable writer forced by misfortune to write for the hack publications he dreams up and forces out at an intensive rate, as much as his own security in light of the bomb scare.

The idea of saving a sense of family, particularly when that sense of family emerges out of the surrogate or communal group to which an individual belongs, is a particular trope that is explored in postmodernist cultural commentary. The idea of family in the LGBT community, for example, is based on surrogacy, particularly in the light of the violence and discrimination that LGBT people experience in the culturally "straight" USA. Surrogacy for Sam means masking his queer identity, which soon becomes an everyday experience for Sam while living his closeted life in straight America. The performativity inherent in Sam's adoption of Joe's son (undisclosed to Tommy himself) and his marriage to Tommy's mother, Rosa, affirms Sam's negation of his feelings of attraction towards men, a preference restricted even in the world of imaginative comic book writers in Cold War America. On hearing of Joe's return to the United States after searching for the remaining members of his family in Europe and Antarctica after the Holocaust, Sam has a conversation about how to approach the subject of the surrogacy of their family situation to Tommy that is revelatory in Sam's equivocal choice of words:

"He knows that you adopted him", she said. "According to Joe." The pencil stopped. Rosa kept her face to the wall. "He knows that someone else is really his dad. He just doesn't know who."
"Joe never told him, then."

"Would he?"
"No, said Sammy. "I guess he wouldn't"[502]

The sheer performative transparency of the unwilling tone that Joe uses to negotiate Rosa's news and to refuse her request, and the confirmation that Sam himself assumes that Joe would not confirm his parenthood to his own son, illuminates the effect that a decade of escaping from directly discussing the fallout from political decisions has on the cousins. The palpable stopping of the pencil, this audible pause of labour for the equivocal performative utterance of *not committing* to letting Tommy know the reality of his familial situation, blurs the distinction between art and agenda that Ngai states are signatures of the difficulty of approaching affect though feeling in texts emerging after postmodernism. The post-postmodern moment occurs then, at the markings of affect: the scraping of the pencil, the assumed pause in Sam's reply, the syntactical choice of stressing only five words each time. This uncovering of the emotionally difficult potential assumed by the situation of revealing the secret of their surrogate family *addresses* this measure of affect. In response to Sam's performative equivocality towards such an issue of immense personal importance for Tommy and their future familial set-up, Rosa declares: "We have to tell him the truth, Sam." Rosa said. "The time has come, it's time."[503]

Emerging from a reasoning that Joe's return establishes the precise moment to make Tommy aware of the nature of his parents' relationship, and thus of his own identity, Rosa attempts to elicit a confirmation of the emotional complexity that the situation imparts to their family structure. The knowable "truth" must be confided to Tommy in order for their family set-up to secure stable relations, and for Tommy not to experience confusion over his origin in future years. Ever adept at evading the reality of present circumstances, the co-creator of *The Escapist* replies "I'm working now.", "I'm not going to talk about this anymore."[504]

This shutting off from giving a direct emotive response to an emotionally charged situation both evades and confirms Sam's sense of responsibility to the surrogate family unit. In his preference for continuing the decentred fiction of the nuclear family set-up he has engaged in

[502] Chabon, 2000, 567.

[503] Chabon, 2000, 567
[504] Chabon, ibid.

with Rosa in order to camouflage the uncomfortable experiences of his emotions of being a gay man in 1950s America—a desire to manufacture a sense of "family" like the majority of other aspects of Cold War American culture have been manufactured—Chabon creates a postmodern sense of artificiality approaching the authentic for Sam. This move beyond a reification of the knowable by refusing to even discuss at length the implications of an artificial set-up— that fiction is somehow determinably mutable in that it can be molded to change into something resembling fact— transcends the modernist insistence on psychological readings of the real. By showing the equivocal nature of Sam's closeted insistence on self, Chabon shows a resistance on Sam's part to fully engage in the accepted fiction of monocultural white America by playing, as a gay Jewish artist, the role of a straightlaced, assimilated white American businessman, who faithfully places family before *everything*, even identity. This evasion of identity itself, in surpassing the boundaries of psychological realism insisted on in modernist literary aesthetics, also curtails the postmodernist mantra that identity, malleable as it is, is all we have left after knowledge is decentred, that identity somehow still approaches the real when the real begins to dissipate.

The post-postmodern moment is broached in this scene by Sam's willful negation that the uncomfortable subject of his identity can be expressed comfortably even in a domestic setting. Suppressed notions of personal identity and familial surrogacy also recur throughout *Telegraph Avenue,* An example of the dramatically ironic as not interfering with or being a particularly relevant impetus to a character's motivations occurs in the dialogue directed around the sexual relationship between Titus Joyner and Julie Jaffe in *Telegraph Avenue*. Titus is essentially using the amorous advances of Julie as a way of gaining access to Archy Stallings, Julie's father's business partner and Titus's absentee father. Whenever Julie vocally alluded to his affection for Titus, he shuns or verbally mocks Julie, although it is made clear that the two are engaged in clandestine sexual activity:

> Julie thought about squeezing in next to Titus, between him and the wall of the stairwell. Put his arm around the boy, lay his head against his shoulder, hold his hand. If he were Titus's girlfriend, it would be the easiest thing in the world.
>
> "I wish I were your girlfriend," he said.
>
> "Shut up faggot," Titus said gently."[505] .

[505] Chabon, 2012, 143.

This scene offers a particularly potent example of the depiction of difficult emotions being omitted as they are spoken in Chabon's millennial fiction. Julie reaching out to express his romantic feelings to Archy, and the realisation that this clandestine fling between would be seen as more socially acceptable if Julie were a girl, is shot down by Titus who instead issues a homophobic slur in return. Yet Titus can be read as being as inauthentic here as Julie is sincere. In his dismissal of Julie as Julie's playful yet emotionally tender statement, announced with an air of solipsistic resignation, Julie all but admits through his tone that the pair have arrived at a more emotionally and situationally complex impasse that he would like to admit. This dismissal of Julie as a "faggot" shields Titus's feelings, both in terms of how he views his own identity and the identity of the only friend he's made in Oakland, which tellingly anticipates what Titus prematurely conceives as his father's disapproval. When the omniscient narration confirms that Julie in turn queers his self-image to placate Titus's concerns, he is met with verbal abuse, but abuse that is registered in a distinctly *passive* tone, one that abandons any impassioned rage that someone truly offended by the affection of an *othe*r might project. The performative abandonment of emotion in Titus's voice signals an equivocal means of alluding to the powerlessness he feels as an outsider, both in terms of Oakland and of straight, Black masculine conformity. The "easiest thing in the world", then, for Titus, would be to not feel the explorative urges that create an outsider status for him. Titus is overwhelmed with the social implications of his sexual activity with Julie, and how this behavior will ultimately affect Julie is omitted in his choice of words but not in the suggestive patterns of his speech. The way he "gently" admonishes Julie betrays his more troubled emotions about their pairing, and of his own identity. Words said allowed in Chabon often mask or try to escape through calculated omittance what a character actually is aware of, yet these statements are the misdirected artifice that shelter larger realisations.

As Archy's newly arrived, formerly secret son, Titus attempts to approach his father indirectly by being present in the vicinity of Archy's day-to-day working life while simultaneously registering a particularly allusive absence. While staying at Cochise Jones's house, who acted as Archy's own surrogate father when his actor father Luther abandoned his mother, Titus strikes up a friendship with Julie, the white son of Archy's business partner Nat. Engaging in an exploratory sexual relationship with Julie, Titus nevertheless diverts any accusation of his queerness by being passively, but cuttingly, dismissive of Julie's emotive affections. Titus's antagonism towards Julie is clouded in anxiety that he might be rejected by

his father, a man he knows nothing about who, after the death of Titus's mother, has a perceptible stake in his future. Following another afternoon of sexual abandon, Titus confides to Julie:

"What if he doesn't like me?" he said.[506]

This dismissal of Julie as a "faggot" shields Titus's feelings, both in terms of how he views his own identity and the identity of the only friend he's made in Oakland, which tellingly anticipates what Titus prematurely conceives as his father's disapproval. When the omniscient narration confirms that Julie in turn queers his self-image to placate Titus's concerns, he is met with verbal abuse, but abuse that is registered in a distinctly *passive* tone, one that abandons any impassioned rage that someone truly offended by the affection of an *othe*r might project. The performative abandonment of emotion in Titus's voice signals an equivocal means of alluding to the powerlessness he feels as an outsider, both in terms of Oakland and of straight, Black masculine conformity. The "easiest thing in the world", then, for Titus, would be to not feel the explorative urges that create an outsider status for him. This "easiest thing", Titus's concerns over his father's acceptance implies, is what would have happened had he been born into the modern American nuclear family, with a 'real' father to stand in for all the surrogates he instead negotiates through.

Titus's concerns over his father's acceptance implies, is what would have happened had he been born into the modern American nuclear family, with a 'real' father to stand in for all the surrogates he instead negotiates though Instead of registering offence, however, Julie is determined to protect their secretive surrogate romance by assuring Titus that he can get to his father via his own familial connection. Sitting beside Titus after the harsh slur his affections faced, "where there was room for him to share the stair without touching, Julie enthuses for Titus to "just do what I tell you."[507] Julie's switching of tone here, from the lovelorn submissive to a scheming leader, shows the extent of his loyalty to Titus. His is not the posing toughness of a self-conscious teenager in this moment, but instead the calming presence of an adult, assuming a sense of control and understanding in terms that a parent

[506] Chabon, ibid.
[507] Chabon, ibid.

would offer. It's going to be fine."[508] In effectively consenting to Titus that he can use him sexually and socially, Julie attempts to maintain the surrogate family he desires, only unlike Sam in *Kavalier and Clay* Julie is happy to loan out Titus to his eventual preference of acceptance by his father. By confirming to Titus that he can assist in making his hope a reality, Julie's unrealistic expectation as to where this clandestine relationship with Titus can lead is naturally beset by offering his paramour the dream, only it is the dream of a world whose physical closeness belies the emotional complexities at work in the Stallings household. Expecting a baby with his wife Gail, and unsure of his abilities in the role of fatherhood, Archy is simply not emotionally ready to welcome Titus to his care, and communicatively shuts down on hearing of his arrival in Oakland. As difficult an emotion as, romantic rejection is to live through, Julie is spared the benefit of parental fallout over his very being, a luxury not yet afforded Titus. Surrogacy, then, is always a transparent ideal in Chabon's millennial fiction, even when lived out in characters' lives, they are constantly reminded of its frailty, surrogacy is a hard case that must be always fought for, at the exclusion of other repressed urges.

Conclusion

The theme of community in Chabon, of a resurgence in particular of writing on versions of the family unit, display tendencies in his fiction to concentrate of the metaphoric and the unspoken rather than on reality and issues that are openly discussed. Periods of mourning often preclude a sense of renewed emphasis on the search for family for characters who are living in the aftermath of great social and personal change. From Joe's maddening search for his lost family in Europe to Julie's hoping for a real romance with Titus, a quest for domestic stability are often failed efforts. Surrogacy is the option for Chabon's characters who perform visual representations of family. The way language is omitted out of reaching authentic meaning aligns to a postmodern trope of the ineffectiveness of language, located in examples of affect effectiveness of a resurgence out of solipsism towards the reading and feeling of emotion distinguishes the two-fold nature of desolation and repair which are often in contention for the overarching narrative tone in Chabon's characters since 2000.

[508] Chabon, ibid.

Conclusion

Hybridity and Form: Chabon's Millennial Fiction in Retrospect

My initial aim in this project was to what I saw as a turn towards sincerity in the 2000's fiction of Michael Chabon. I had identified a difference in themes and style, considering these of particular interest in the context of discussing American literature in the early years of the millennium. I was to find that my initial ideas on the project, to engage with an analysis of how Chabon re-invigorates traditional narrative storytelling, needed to be significantly reassessed. The closer I read of Chabon's fiction and essay writing, the more I realised that postmodern tropes, familiar to myself from the theory discussed in undergraduate literature classes, has an uncanny way of being triggered in my memory when I read Chabon's descriptions of the reification of objects, communities, social spaces and even that of narrative itself. Furthermore, the theory I was reading myself on Affect, with new emphasis on the emotive overtones of texts and media, seemed increasingly engaged with discussing the limitation with form and language seemed to arrive at interpretations that highlighted the usefulness of reading postmodern theory in discussing the contemporary. Reading theories of Holocaust trauma for Chapter 3 was also a key turning point in my interpretation of memory in Chabon, and I am indebted to Robert Eaglestone and Matthew Boswell in their applications of postmodern theory to the reading of creative works concerning the Holocaust's legacy and the often divisive ideas of poetics which reference trauma. Ingbar Kaminsky's analysis that Hollywood in Chabon is a crime to be solved but not understood helped my own thinking on Chabon's approach to the subject.

Two other writers have guided my methodology in this process, Frederic Jameson and Walter Benjamin. Jameson, with his critical eye on postmodernism's contents and contexts, and for his avowed disregard of formal hybridity in his writing on Postmodernism in its 1980s heyday, was the Dante to my investigations into the analytic elements of what made Chabon's writing in the 2000s emblematic of a wider American literary context. Reading Walter Benjamin gave me the inspiration to attack referential literary with referential criticism, and my methodology, particularly in Chapter 4, gradually developed as the progress of this thesis matured into finding it's critical voice that voice is one that is a novice's attempt at a Benjaminian methodology.

In concluding the thesis my closing analysis will summarise the idea that in the postmodern

era, as metanarrative replaced the epic ambitions of earlier American authors, metanarrative did not dispel a desire for writers to pursue the dramatic expanse of human emotions. Michal Chabon's millennial project exhibits a desire to return to investigating the human capacity for epic storytelling, without surrendering the authorial self-awareness that is central to metanarrative. Nostalgia in Chabon's fiction becomes a target for contemplation and scrutiny, the effects of nostalgia are at the central of his project of re-invigoration, however, the trappings of escaping and forgetting in these works are constantly held to task.

By the time of Chabon's millennial shift towards the consideration of nostalgia as a psychic theme, metanarrative had replaced epic ambitions of examining *the* unreproachable task of examining American experience. For Stewart, nostalgia "remains before and behind the experience",[509] a nostalgia that is suited to Archy and Nat's exultant invocations in the popular culture of the 1970s through their *Brokeland Records* store and various musical projects in *Telegraph Avenue.* To say their nostalgia is without a subject and behind experience, and to go further with Meyer Landsman's *inherited* nostalgia, a type of longing which incurs with his discovery of his parent's experience as well as the loss of the only homeland and political state he has known, would be to discredit the work Chabon does in unpacking narratives of nostalgia through the description of physical cultural artefacts and products, and the memory of physical space triggered by the immersive localizing of experiences. As discussed in my analysis of *Empire Comics #1* alongside Benjamin's theory of reproduction, the mass-produced artwork as object cannot replicate an artistic aura of authenticity, but it can impress on the viewer as a convincing stand-in which alludes to what representations of authenticity can be intuited even in stock-piled imagery. Joe Kavalier's own experiences of living *alongside* the trauma of his victimized family assert the emotive impact of historical events as they happen in ways that would not be applicable to the interpretation of nostalgia exemplified by Stewart. In writing on the distance and temporality which an object assumes, in this case, a literary text, Stewart affirms that the "reader who arose from the mechanical reproduction of literature is acutely aware of the disjunction book as object and book as idea", this statement, which develops further into Stewart's assessment that solitude and the physical site of acts of reading within "a milieu of domestic space" incur the "creation of an interior text and an interior subject".[510] The explosion of divisions in

[509] Stewart, 1993, ibid.
[510] Stewart, *On Longing.*

metanarrative between a source text and the inherent ideas behind what texts infer, which perhaps push further than the sample's allusiveness of text, creates a space where the reader or viewer of art recognize agency or the potential revolutionary factors at the heart of art's emotive power.

In this way Chabon's work can be classified neither as overtly postmodern or emphatically sincere, they recur as connecting links to tones and stylistic interventions that make millennial fiction symptomatic of various eras of literary production. All the more relevant then, these narratives of Chabon's that depict a postmodern world.

Bibliography

Primary Texts

Chabon, Michael *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*, London: Harper Perennial, 2001, 2005.
- "The Crying of Lot 9/11"in *The New York Review of Books*, November 7th, 21013 Issue https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/07/thomas-pynchon-crying-september-11/.
-*The Final Solution* London, 4th Estate, 2004
-*Maps and Legends: Reading and Writing Along the Borderlines* New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.
- Interview with John Mullan, *The Guardian Books Podcast*, 10/1/2017, Broadcast 10/02/17 https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2017/feb/10/michael-chabon-on-the-amazing-adventures-of-kavalier-and-clay-books-podcast
- *Telegraph Avenue* London: Harper Perennial, 2012.
- *Wonder Boys* London: 4th Estate, 1995, 2015
- *The Yiddish Policeman's Union.* London: 4th Estate, 2007.

Secondary Criticism and Sources

Amis, Martin *Money: A Suicide Note* London: Jonathan Cape, 1984

Baudrillard, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*: *Simulacra and Simulation: The Body in Theory*, trans. Shelia Faria Glazer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982
-*The Spirit of Terrorism* London, Verso Books, 2012.

Beaty, Bart *Comics Versus Art* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012

Bellow, Saul *The Adventures of Augie March* London, Picador, 2006.

Benjamin, Walter and Tiedemann, Rolf *The Arcades Project* Cambridge, Mass. Belknap Press, *Illuminations* Trans. Harry Zohn New York: Fontana Press 1992.

Berlant, Lauren and Ngai, Sianne "Comedy Has Issues." *Critical Inquiry* 43 (2): 233–49. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.

26547687&authtype=sso&custid=s8993828&site=eds-live&scope=site.

Berger, Alan L. . “Michael Chabon’s ‘The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay’: The Return of the Golem.” *Studies in American Jewish Literature (1981-)* 29 (January 1, 2010): 80–89. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.41206134&authtype=sso&custid=s8993828&site=eds-live&scope=site.

Blackburn, Simon (Ed.) *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* 2nd Edition Oxford University Press 2008.

Blakely, Art & The Jazz Messengers with Jon Hendricks “Moanin”, *Buhaina* (Prestige) 1973.

Boswell, Matthew *Holocaust Impiety In Literature, Popular Music and Film* New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Boyle, David *Authenticity*: *Brands, Fakes, Spin and the Lust for Real Life* (London : Flamingo) 2003.

Brinkema, Eugenie *Forms of The Affect* Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1993.

Buell, James *The Dream of the Great American Novel* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2014

Brooks, Neil and Toth, Josh The *Mourning After: Attending The Wake of Postmodernism* Amsterdam, New York : Rodopi, 2007.

Brown, Michael "Metaphor for Holocaust and Holocaust as Metaphor: The Assistant and The Fixer of Bernard Malamud Reexamined." *Judaism* 29, no. 4 (Fall80 1980):479- 490 Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed September 21, 2016).

Burns, Stephen J. *Jonathan Franzen at the End of Postmodernism* London & New York, Bloomsbury Academic, 2008.
- “The end of postmodernism: American Fiction at the Millennium" in *American Fiction of*

the 1990s: Reflections of history and culture, ed. Jay Prosser (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), 220-235.

Clough, Patricia "The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedia, and Bodies" in *The Affect Reader*, Ed. Melissa Greg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press) 2010, 206-225).

Cohen, Josh *Spectacular Allegories: Postmodern American Writing and the Politics of Seeing* (London, Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press) 1998.

Dawson, Paul "The Return of Omniscience in Contemporary Fiction", *Narrative,* 17. 2 (May. 2009) 143-161 "The Theory Generation" *N+1* Issue 14: The Awkward Age, November 2012 https://nplusonemag.com/issue-14/reviews/the-theory-generation/

Dewey, Joseph *Understanding Michael Chabon* (Lexington, University of South Carolina Press) 2014.

Eaglestone, *The Broken Voice : Reading Post-Holocaust Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2017.) *The Holocaust and The Postmodern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Egan, Jennifer *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (London: Corsair) 2011.

Ellis, Bret Easton *American Psycho* (New York: Vintage) 1991.
Everton, Brian *Understanding Robert Coover* (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2003.

Gladstone, Jason and Worden, Daniel "Introduction: Postmodernism, Then" in Twentieth Century Literature: Special Issue, Postmodernism Then" Volume 57, Number 3 & 4, Fall/Winter 2011 Ed. Jason Gladstone and Daniel Worden, 291-309. 291

Fisher, Mark *Flatline Constructs: Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction* (New York, Exmilitary Press) 1999, 2018
Foucault, Michel "Of Other Spaces." *Trans.* Jay Miskoviec *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 1986.

Hayles, Kathlyn N. Who Was saved? Families, Snitches and Recuperation in Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland* in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel* (Ed.) Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffrey (Normal: Illinois, Dalkey Archive Press) 1994.

Hilfer, Tony *American Fiction Since 1940* New York & London: Longman,1992.
Kim, Sue J. *Critiquing Postmodernism in Contemporary Discourses of Race* (New York : Palgrave Macmillan).

Hirsh, Marianne "Past Lives: Postmemory in Exiles" in *Poetics Today* 17:4 (Winter, 1996), pp. 659-68.

Huber, Irmtraud *Literature After Postmodernism: Reconstructive Fantasies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan) 2014.

Hutcheon, Linda *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* London: Routledge 1988.
- *Irony's Edge : The Theory and Politics of Irony* London: Routledge 1994.

Jameson, Fredric
- *The Ancients and The Postmoderns* London, Verso, 2017
-*Late Marxism*, London & New York, Verso, 1996.
-*The Political Unconscious London & New York, Verso,* 1981.
-*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Duke University Press, 1991.

Huyssen, Andreas Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Jameson, Frederic Introduction to Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge Trans.* Geoff Bennington, Brian Massumi Manchester University Press, 1984.

Kaminsky, Igbar "Solving the Jewish Case: Metaphorical Detection in Michael Chabon's The Final Solution and The Yiddish Policemen's Union." In *Michael Chabon's America: Magical Words, Secret Worlds, and Sacred Spaces*, edited by Jesse Kavadlo and Bob

Batchelor, 159–72. Contemporary American Literature (Lanham, MD). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=mzh&AN=202121293280&authtype=sso&custid=s8993828&site=eds-live&scope=site.

Kelly, Adam *American Fiction in Transition : Observer-Hero Narrative, The 1990s and Postmodernism* London, New York, Bloomsbury, 2014.

-"David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction" in *Consider David Foster Wallace: Critical Essays*. Ed. David Hering. Austin, TX : Sideshow Media Group Press, 2010. pp. 131-46

Kermode, Frank *The .Sense of An Ending: Studies in The Theory of Fiction (*Oxford University Press, 1967

King, Stephen *Misery* Chatham, Kent, Hodder and Stoughton, 1987.

Kristeva, Julie *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* Trans. Leon S. Roudiez ,New York, Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1989,

Lawrence, D.H. *Studies in Classic American Literature* (Exeter, Shearsmen Books) 2011
Malamud, Bernard *The Fixer* (London: Atlantic Books) 2014

Larry McCaffery "A conversation with David Foster Wallace" in "The Review of Contemporary Fiction," Summer 1993, Vol. 13.2. https://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-david-foster-wallace-by-larry-mccaffery/

Lewis, W.R.S *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in The Nineteenth Century,* (University of Chicago Press) 1955

Moore, Kevin C, Parting at the Windmills: Malamud's The Fixer as Historical Metafiction." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 69, no. 1 (2013): 91-118. https://muse.jhu.edu/. Accessed September 21, 2016.

Moose, Tariq "The punch a Nazi" meme: What are the ethics of punching Nazis?" in *The Guardian*, Jan. 31st, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/science/brain-flapping/2017/jan/31/the-punch-a-nazi-meme-what-are-the-ethics-of-punching-nazis

Ngai, Sianne *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012
-Ugly Feelings Harvard University Press, 2005.

Peim, Nick "Walter Benjamin in the Age of Digital Reproduction: Aura in Education: A Rereading of 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 41.3,(Oxford: Blackwell) 2007, 364-369. 365.

Rorty, Richard Contingency, Irony and Solidarity Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Saaed, Amir "'Worthy of all praises': Muhammad Ali and the politics of identity." *Soundings (13626620)* no. 47: Spring 2011, 123-129

Scott, A.O. "Among The Believers" *New York Times Magazine* 154, no. 533334 ;38-439 September 11, 2005. 38-43.

Spielberg, Steven *Schindler's List* (Amblin Entertainment, Universal Pictures) 1993. 195 minutes. https://www.netflix.com/ch-en/title/60036359

Steiner, George *Language and Silence*: *Essays on Language, Literature and the Inhuman* (London, Boston: Faber and Faber, 1967.

Stewart, Susan *On Longing : Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1993.

Timmer, Nicoline *Do You Feel It Too? The Post-Postmodernism Syndrome in American Fiction at the Turn of the Millennium* New York & Amsterdam, Rodophi 2010

Trilling, Lionel *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 1972

Wallace, David Foster E Unibus Pluram: Television and US Fiction" *in A Supposedly Fun thing I'll Never Do Again* London: Abacus Books, 1993, 1997, 2007. 69.

Weinstein, Simcha *Up, Up and Oy Vey! : How Jewish History, Culture, and Values Shaped The Comic Book Superhero* (Baltimore, Maryland : Leviathan Press) 2006.

Young, Elizabeth and Caveney, Graham *Shopping In Space : Essays on Blank Generation Fiction* London and New York, Serpent's Tail, 1992.