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The Wikipedic Novel:
Reading & Writing in The Open-Source Era

by

Alexander Catchings

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Dorothy Hale, Chair
Professor Scott Saul
Professor Tom McEnaney
Professor Sonnet Retman

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The Wikipedic Novel:
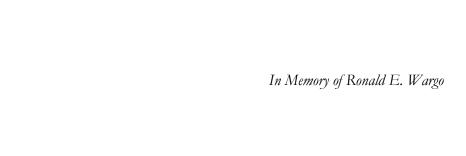Reading & Writing in The Open-Source Era

by Alexander Catchings

ABSTRACT

The Wikipedic Novel:
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by
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In *The Wikipedic Novel*, I taxonomize a new novelistic subgenre that is distinguished by the self-conscious way it bears within its form information from the Open-Source Internet. I argue that these novels, laden with semi-reliable narrators, embed "clickable" material that creates in readers a compulsion to draw away from these texts to the Internet to verify ideas. This compulsion, which I call "clickability," is incited by specific narrative features, some of which include seemingly polymathic first-person narrators who use the Internet, the visual rhetoric of proper nouns and the embellishment of summary, and accounts of art and historical events mediated through television and the Internet. In using these elements, the novelists under study—Tom McCarthy, Teju Cole, and Ishmael Reed—rework the genres of the Novel of Ideas and the Encyclopedic Novel. Across interviews, these three authors unashamedly admit to using Wikipedia in drafting their novels, and this study investigates how the resonances of this cribbing (encouraged by the Open-Source Internet's inventors) affect plot, character, and ethics in these works. My theorization of the Wikipedic Novel thus aims to contribute to the understanding of how the novel as a "cannibal art" thrives through its innovative incorporation of heterogeneous social discourses. And more generally, my dissertation explores the ways novels call attention to their status as printed books, autonomous objects and artistic totalities whose unified expression is, in these novels, symbolized by their material wholeness—an attribute that is deployed as the sign of "the literary."

My introductory chapter describes the history of Open-Source logic, drawn primarily from Wikipedia's architects' belief that the collective knowledge of an Internet plurality should be openly available and reusable without repercussion. I account for how this ideology opens a terrain for novelistic craft to shift to accommodate the Open-Source's knowledge, even despite its own freight of potential unreliability. In chapter 2, I read Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2015) to expand the term called "visual rhetoric": the way book pages and textual marking from quotations to proper nouns create presuppositions of knowledge. These help readers affiliate with the protagonist, a British anthropologist named "U.," who has a confidence-crisis as the Internet opens the terrain for the greater plurality, "you," to cannibalize his skills. Chapter 3 analyzes Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011) and mobilizes the terms of clickability through a novel whose thematics are explicitly not technological. The narrative representation of ideas in this chapter dramatizes Walter Benjamin's critique of "information" as a turn away from the social bonds and ethical responsibilities of lived community. Cole's novel deliberately diverts readers from the unreliable narrator's action in the story world to the extratextual corroboration of his ideas as he himself "later looks up" facts in the novel or admits to having "once read" esoteric, masterful ideas that break from the novel's general style and imply a subtle digital banality guiding information's inclusion in the novel. This extradiegetic invitation helps to characterize the protagonist primarily through his obsessive connoisseurship, which on the level of plot performs his attempt to escape responsibility for the harm he has done to others. Chapter 4

discusses the figure of the "digital griot" in Ishmael Reed's *JUICE!* (2011). The novel is narrated by a political cartoonist retrospectively describing his obsession with the O.J. Simpson "trial of the century." I argue that the novelistic representation of a live media event opens a range of clickable, viewable ephemera to supplement the narrator's accounting. This turn on historical fiction reanimates the role of the narrator due to the irrecoverable lacunae of minor moments in the Open-Source—radio callers, local periodicals, and particular descriptions of court scenes otherwise unavailable in digital archives. The blur between fact, fiction, and verifiability affiliates the narrator and, by extension, author, with the figure of the "digital griot," or wizened storyteller of live events made "dead" and irrecoverable for a newer generation.

In Memory of Ronald E. Wargo

Acknowledgments

I believe it is correct to call the time it has taken to pen this text anything but *normative*. Nonetheless, it has been the truest honor to tarry and tread on this energetic campus in this eclectic town. Capping my formal education at the 25th grade has been a treat, for it has given me extra years with my advisor and Chair, Dorothy Hale, who has fundamentally altered my understanding of what it means to show up. She has taught me that the crux of ideas can be drawn out with rigorous fidelity *and* an easy smile. I cannot imagine how she could have done more for me or any of her advisees—mentorship is insufficient to describe the range of presence, investment, belief, and grace she has afforded us all. Nobody is more incisive, and nobody navigates thought's thickets with more deftness and lucidity. To have been shaped and trained by Dori has been one of my life's greatest distinctions.

So too am I grateful for the generous and timely insights of the polymathic Tom McEnaney and the abiding intellectual and personal presence of Scott Saul. Berkeley would never have happened without Sonnet Retman's mentorship—eleven years and counting. She passed our academic family's maxim to me, and I treat it with reverence: "risk clarity."

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I have also been supported by a robust network of people outside of the campus. The opportunity to nourish my friendship with Goh Nakamura was a significant factor in why I chose Cal. I never would have thought we would grow to be like annexed brothers—thank you for your pure artfulness, in music and in friendship. Michael Paz taught me how to mentor and hold proper office hours. I'm honored to have solved so many problems and helped so many people with the virtuosity of Michael Tao. From Seattle, Abeal Laine has been my best friend and stabilized both time and temperament, reminding me where I've come from while always supporting the manic

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I | SITUATING THE WIKIPEDIC NOVEL

What is an Internet Novel, and What is a Wikipedic Novel?

The Wikipedic Novel contributes to an emergent field that we might call Internet Novel studies. I say emergent because its thinkers and authors constitute a cluttered field with surprisingly wide gaps of social distance, as they are all preoccupied with two central objects—the Internet and literature—but are far apart on the answer to one question: What is an Internet novel? There has been a slew of attempts to identify this elusive quasi-genre, whose spectrality makes it feel as though it *might* be there after a quarter century of societal Internet usage. Before an overview of this discourse, it should be clarified that this study does not take into consideration the original conception of digital literature in "hypertext novels," which have been championed into the 21st century by Katherine Hayles after much critical attention in the late Eighties and Nineties.[1] These computer-based novels are exempted from this study precisely because they reside solely on computers. The expanding Internet Novel discourse to which I refer and contribute maintains an interest in the ways the *print book* and novelistic fiction accommodate the Internet. The three novels this dissertation identifies as "Wikipedic Novels" include Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2015), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), and Ishmael Reed's *JUICE!* (2011).

As with all beta versions, the "Internet Novel" and its archetypes are unstable. Twitterature continuously expands the boundary of "born-digital" literature online and represents "born-digital" fiction, like hypertext.[2] Jennifer Egan's 2012 mystery story "Black Box"—serialized on *The New Yorker's* Twitter account—exemplifies Twitter-bound fiction. "Black Box" resides solely online, Tweeted in a fittingly second-person blend of aphorism and imperative that seems to directly address the Twitter/Internet user ("Determine whether your Designated Mate seeks physical intimacy; if not, feign the wish for a nap. // Your pretense of sleep will allow him to feel that he is alone"). In their replication on *The New Yorker's* webpage, the tweets are partitioned into numbered sections and spaced with line breaks that can only be described as end-stopped poetics, hence my use of slashes in the above quotation.[3] It is precisely this narrow textual transposition that qualifies "Black Box" for mention in this study: because the story was born-digital and matured into print form via *The New Yorker* magazine, it shows the compositional complexity of bringing Internet literature in to paper form.[4] Although "Black Box" is not a novel, Twitterature as a genre continuously spills into paperbound books at more novelistic lengths, as with John Roderick's *Electric Aphorisms* (2010), 365 daily tweets that were ultimately compiled into a physical manuscript and deleted from Twitter upon publication. Though not conceived on Twitter, Megan Boyle's *Liveblog* (2013) is an unedited, unabridged print edition accounting for seven months of her dated and timestamped posts on the Liveblog platform, now fashioned into a 707-page tome. It is advertised as a novel.

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[1] For a benchmark study in hypertext theory, see N. Katherine Hayles, "The Transformation of Narrative and the Materiality of Hypertext," *Narrative* 9, no. 1 (2001), 21-39.

[2] A strong contemporary account of the born-digital generation, which is now alternatively referred to as "Gen Z," can be found in John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives* (New York: BasicBooks 2010), esp. 14-19.

[3] Jennifer Egan, "Black Box," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2012. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/06/04/black-box.

[4] —unlike hypertext fiction (which necessitates the interactivity of the computer screen and the ability to navigate literal hyperlink across pages).

Twitterature and its tangential offshoots represent one facet of the Internet Novel discussion, whereas Meg Cabot and Sinclair Smith's *The Boy Next Door* (2002) and Matt Beaumont's *e: a novel* (2000) are on the front end of a subgenre that represent, in the words of Mark McGurl, "the epistolary tradition reborn as a long e-mail chain."[5] The so-called email novel is an upcycle of one of the novel form's earliest outfits, yet it includes correspondence that features subtle new paratexts (subject lines in lieu of chapter headings, or email domains insinuating work affiliations against personal Gmail or Hotmail designations) while still maintaining the "experiences/fantasies of presence, intimacy and disembodiment" Esther Milne sees in the epistolary novel.[6] Although there are small addendums to both Twitterature and the email novel, both can still be seen as mere requisitions of standard literary devices and plot elements. Their experimental merit is certainly undeniable, but through repetition and adaptation they also risk verging on gimmickry because of how they achieve their intended effects through "excessively laborious but also strangely too easy" ways in Sianne Ngai's view—by "doing too much and yet also not enough work."[7] Nevertheless, these email novels provide a useful case for the doubleness of contemporary life—one of avatars and usernames that supplement those of birth certificates. As time continues to progress, these simple paragraphs begin to feel more like insightful missives as the brief text message and, as just mentioned, the tweet, infiltrate the lexical orientation of everyday conversation. This is not to mention forms of diegetic space and dialogue in the novel.[8]

The third and more obvious type of Internet Novel is less bound by platform or page layout: simply put, these are novels whose *thematic* valences explicitly account for the effects of digital life in a social world. Barbara Browning's *I'm Trying to Reach You* (2012) follows an NYU performance arts postdoctoral scholar who becomes fixated on an eccentric ballerina's YouTube channel and her videos' consistent comment peanut gallery. The time-consuming digital dalliances of today's virtual labor (what we might simply call 21st century *time theft*) is thematized at length in Alexandra Chang's *Days of Distraction* (2020), whose burgeoning tech writer protagonist in San Francisco constantly refreshes webpages to express anxiety and also meditates on how her stories' millions of clicks represented in data visualizations "do not capture how many of those millions scroll down past the first paragraph, or even the headline and photo."[9] These novels and their ilk are 21st century offshoots of the technostress that has featured in Thomas Pynchon's larger archive (and in fact, his 2013 *Bleeding Edge* further refurbishes these themes). Mark McGurl—drawing on Lauren Berlant— has suggested that the Internet as a cultural experience is a type of public feeling: "the affective substance of political life, the very thing, even more than political ideas, to which online citizenship has become attuned and by which it is increasingly deranged."[10] This self-awareness of such public feelings (after all, social media is generated by its very discursivity) creates one of the Internet's "signature speech genres . . . the *rant*, the hyped-up rhetorical expression of mockingly

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[5] Mark McGurl, "Feeling Like the Internet," *Public Books*, 2017.

[6] Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1.

[7] Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form*, (Harvard University Press, 2020), 56.

[8] To this list I might also add the pervasive use of the emoji, but Namwali Serpell makes a compelling case for "stacking," or the capacity of these pictograms' "reduplication" and "piling up of emoji in a tumbling grid down the screen" creating "ontological oscillations (between the word and the image, the specific and the general) [to] yield semantic instability." The emoji, of course, is not a semantic container quite like the email or the tweet, but it deserves mention, as it too has begun to creep into literary texts. See Namwali Serpell, "Word of the Year." *Post45* Issue 2, "How to be Now" (2019).

[9] Alexandra Chang, *Days of Distraction: A Novel,* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020), 12.

[10] McGurl, "Feeling," 2017.

contemptuous dismay" (Ibid). In this way, we can see novels coopt McGurl's subgenre, "the novel as rant," in their self-aware metacommentary on the evolving cultural moment.[11]

The non-genre of the Internet novel can also be approached from a compositional stance. Take the cases of novels like Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* (2017) or Matthew McIntosh's *TheMystery.Doc* (2017)—Rooney's novel unfurls extensive dialogue through block quoted, imitatively digital sans-serif text messages, and McIntosh ups the ante to the email novel by parlaying more stylistics to his representation of the messages—carrots > that denote forwarded messages alongside promotional material for MSN and Yahoo in the e-mail footers. In addition, McIntosh replicates literal corrupted data in nonsensical blocks and characters as his 1,660-page novel unfolds. These moments of screen subsumption are part of what Zara Dinnen calls *the digital banal*: a "condition by which we don't notice the affective novelty of becoming with media" that constitutes in a nearly unconscious way characters who are unwittingly "digital subjects."[12] Even further, Dinnen identifies the new-yet-quotidian digital *actions* of characters as part of this "becoming" archived in contemporary novels: Googling, the use of digitally mediated social platforms, or—as Chang's protagonist models—the incessant refreshing of webpages. These types of actions line the works of authors across a range of genres: Ellen Ullman in *The Bug* (2003); Gary Shteyngart in *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010); Colson Whitehead in *Zone One* (2011); Jennifer Egan in *A Visit from the Good Squad* (2011); and Jenny Offill in *Weather* (2020).

One final thread surrounding the Internet Novel is actually more of a split thread: perhaps, as Alexander Manshel argues, there is a lag between the emergence of new forms of technology and the open-mindedness with which authors of "prestige fiction" are willing to adopt it. In the case of authors who include the Internet in their novels, Manshel notes that "unlike their modernist and Postmodernist forebears, who embraced new machines and their attendant new perspectives, many celebrated novelists since the 1980s have been making it new by making it old," and further suggests that the "Internet and the mobile devices now most often used to access it still seem uncannily rare in the pages of prestigious novels"—he finds it "hard to imagine a laptop popping up in a novel by Toni Morrison, let alone in one by Hilary Mantel."[13] In Manshel's study, best-selling and popular fiction is disproportionately set in the present, tending to explore and confront the state of living alongside technology much more persistently. This is clear from Patricia Cornwell's bestseller *Unnatural Exposure*, whose 1997 ascension on the best sellers list coincided with the soaring number of users on America Online. While this *Publisher's Weekly* hit was "a fascinating document of early Internet consciousness and the representational strategies popular fiction used to render it," Manshel draws a surprising contrast in the simultaneously sold *Underworld* from Don DeLillo—a novel that "depicts the Internet with a kind of willful mystification" only *after* drawing a fairly encyclopedic account of life following the atomic bomb.[14] The Internet only features around the 700th of 832 pages. This novel—a Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award nominee—stands as one of the more audacious incorporations of contemporary technology by a prestigious author, even in spite of the Internet's more nebulous "mystification" as a grace note to the novel rather than a

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[11] McGurl, 2017.

[12] Zara Dinnen, *The Digital Banal: New Media in American Literature and Culture*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 1, 166.

[13] Though this is not bullet-proof: Morrison does indeed feature the Internet in her final work, *God Help the Child*. In an early scene, the protagonist comforts a friend by playing the dozens on a nurse. She says, "Hey, girlfriend, no pity party. Let's get out of this dump. They don't even have private rooms and that nurse had lettuce in her teeth and I doubt she's washed her hands since graduating from that online nursing course she took" (Morrison 26). See Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 26; also, see Alexander Manshel, "The Lag: Technology and Fiction in the Twentieth Century," *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 135, no. 1 (2020), 53.

[14] Manshel, "The Lag," 53.

structuring motif. Put plainly, in Manshel's view, "the lag" represents a "serious" author's trepidation in inviting nascent technology into novelistic space.

These vantages on aspects of the contemporary novel draw attention to vitalizing aspects of its form, but they do not capture the full range of stakes represented by the Internet's multifaceted modes of existence and engagement. There has been no definitive inauguration of the Internet novel as an official genre. Born-digital texts like Twitterature obviously lack the duration of a novel (or novella, for that matter) and blogs-gone-paperback are, in the end, literal copy and paste publishing. There is no coherent characteristic binding born-digital literature as distinctively novelistic. Such works can certainly be understood as offshore avant-garde experimentations with *textuality*, but they hardly make the case for a firm affiliation with the novel. Likewise, the aforementioned novels that imitate the visual experience of computer and phone screens constitute a type of "interface" play, but the effects are broadly visual. These bear little weight on affecting what the novel form *does*. Defining the Internet Novel as any novel that concerns itself with the effects of the Internet on society is perhaps too narrow to be exalted with the status of a proper-nouned typology. In this case, we might begin identifying other genres like those scientists with powerful telescopes who name new "exoplanets" on the fringes of the galaxy—celestial masses *just* large enough to technically qualify as planets: Flannery O'Connor's Christless church from *Wise Blood* and William Faulkner's coffin slogging Bundrens would be among the diverse bearers of the Existential Novel; Hemingway's bull-fighting in *The Sun Also Rises*, Phillip Roth's washed-up baseball player in *The Great American Novel*, J.K. Rowling's broom-ball quidditch in *Harry Potter*, and Dickens' cricket-playing All Muggleton and Dingley Dell in *The Pickwick Papers* would help constitute the Sports Novel genre.

Clustering novels based on thematic ambition and "banal" inclusions risks narrowing attention to descriptive novelty over novelistic constitution. Manshel's wide study of popular and prestigious fiction precisely exemplifies the arbitrariness of a particular historical moment's "banal" details in a literary work. To prioritize such facets of a text is important for the work of a New Historicist, plumbing texts of bygone eras and ours of the present to excavate socioethical meaning. But for a contemporary work—whether it is set in the 21st century or penned in the 1980s for a "rememoried" 1873, as Toni Morrison has done—the question is simply one of a subset of preoccupations when an author considers what a novel's setting and cultural context will be, as Manshel suggests.[15] Whether or not this imputes any value on a genre is unclear.

These approaches' limitations stem from their relative disaffiliation from the novel's most reliquary features. For all of these thinkers, the Internet is a literary additive that arouses questions about evolving notions of reading publics and notions of material selfhood. Its digitality and the fact of its presence is inserted directly atop a plot or form that is intentionally constructed to accommodate this technopresence. Even Dinnen's more subtle understanding of the digital banal requires the narrative staging of technology's appearance in the novel, however much of a cameo it may be.

"Prestige authors," as Manshel has dubbed, ask about what technology means in their novels themselves. In an e-mail to Jonathan Lethem, David Gates poses a question: "So, you're Googling and YouTubing, if not Twizzling or Fnorgling, fair enough. But are your *characters* doing the same? Do you find it as difficult as I do to get this un-Brave, no-longer-that-New World onto the page in any credible way?"[16] Lethem responds, admitting, "I probably spend more time emailing and reading

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[15] For an excellent critical account of "rememory" and its influence see Richard Perez, "The Debt of Memory: Reparations, Imagination, and History in Toni Morrison's 'Beloved,'" *Women's Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1/2 (February 1, 2014), 190–98.
[16] Jeff Martin and C. Max Magee, *The Late American Novel: Writers on the Future of Books*, (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2011), 139.

online than I do having non-virtual human contact—and I bet I'm not that unusual. If my characters were like that, would their lives be eventful enough to write about? On the other hand, if I write about people for whom the Internet is—as far as the reader can see—peripheral or nonexistent, am I not essentially writing historical fiction?"[17]All of these intellectual and artistic inquiries are certainly valuable for their understanding of the novel's permeability—how it creates a relation to the Internet and also depicts social relations of the Internet. But the Wikipedic Novel has a different orientation around the Web.

What I propose here is a way of reading the novel's capacity for metabolizing Internet content *through* literary form. *The Wikipedic Novel* is not an outright dissent from McGurl, Dinnen, or Manshel's ideas—in fact, every novel in this study does, in fact, feature moments of the digital banal for its protagonists: *Satin Island*'s U. browses the Torino-Caselle airport's website in its first few pages; *Open City*'s Julius frequents an Internet café while on a European vacation; *JUICE!*'s Paul Blessings (who begins the novel blogging with several other senior citizens) goes on a diatribe about how online platforms have imperiled syndication opportunities for paper-based comic artists. While these details are of interest and certainly rich, I find a different, irrefragable wealth in how these novels enshroud verifiable, extratextual Internet content into their form. It is little more than an aesthetic decision for Lethem, Gates, or any novelist to manufacture characters and situations that feature the Internet or the Internet of Things,[18] in all their digital banality. A less perceptible authorial decision is how *content* from the Internet is deployed in a novel. It is this more epistemological shift in the Internet's influence on novelistic prose that preoccupies this study.

From an authorial stance, Wikipedic Novels can be understood as texts partially constructed with Open-Source, web-based information. This embedding can be done via some the novel form's most orthodox components: dialogue, point of view, proper nouns, paratextuality, ellipses, summary, and characterological scaffolding. Paradoxically, this lacquering of authorially culled and incorporated information by means of plot and character introduces finishing cracks that risk exposure to the reading public. Narrative prose's fluidity might break into staccato, highly esoteric facticity that reads like a textbook than a novel. Conversations between characters might become so pedagogical that they divert long expanses of the novel from advancing the plot. Narrators might offer hazy impressions of true events, eliciting extratextual verification. In *JUICE!*'s case, chapter headings for a plot rooted in "historical fiction" (in this case, the history is the O.J. Simpson trial) might meander from a deeply specific date like "June 17th, 1994" to "April 1995." Or with *Open City*, an ekphrastic depiction of an esoteric philharmonic's interpretation of a classical fugue might beg for readerly participation (and corroboration) through a YouTube search and listening session. As events unfold within these story worlds, the minutes, memories, and media of fictionalized history become less stable as invented details amass and the temporal scope of chapters expand. As I hope these broader examples illustrate, the Wikipedic Novel provokes a range of readerly compulsions for adding digital extracurriculars to the reading experience: suspicion, fascination, corroboration, mistrust, or allegiance are just a handful of possibilities. This type of extracurricular participation in a reading experience is historically unique thanks to the common and convenient information source of the Internet.

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[17] Martin and Magee, *Late American Novel*, 139.

[18] Earlier called the "embedded Internet" or "pervasive computing," the "Internet of Things" was coined and popularized by Proctor & Gamble engineer Kevin Ashton in 1999. The term refers to the billions of physical devices around the world that are now connected to the Internet, all collecting and sharing data. See Stephen Ornes, "The Internet of Things and the Explosion of Interconnectivity," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113, no. 40 (2016), 11059-1060.

It is of course not new for authors to borrow from other works or to include research in their novels. In the past, scholars have reconstructed the bibliographies and libraries of literary greats—one need only to look toward the scandalous near-Norton Anthologization of *Ulysses* by John Kidd during the "Joyce Wars" of 1993. Kidd claimed to have researched enough to bear the master-key to Joyce's notoriously allusive tome before abandoning the project, abruptly, and falling off of the scholastic radar for decades.[19] Where the contemporary scholar might still be committed to doing physical, on-site archival work to dig through an author's papers amongst a rare books collection, authors' more perfunctory records of inspiration are often as easily discoverable on the web. In fact, Steven Fulwood of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has noted that repositories now face complex ethical and procedural obstacles as handwritten letters and authors' notes slowly become overtaken by e-mails and dictated notes to Siri stored in their iPhone's Notes applications.[20] Even the exchange between Franzen and Bates above was originally communicated through private, e-mail correspondence that was subsequently copied, pasted, and reformatted for delivery to the editors of a collection on the novel. The challenges for gathering insights into the machinations of authorial *intentionality* may be becoming more vexed, but the access to authorial inspiration may well balance the scale.

I recount these vantages that might seem of interest to professional literary critics because the very archival impediments to research I outline have been counterpoised by the authorial use of Open-Source information. Both author and reader are now drawn closer by convenience—the Googlability and Wikipedifying of information for the novelistic world is accessible to author and recoverable by the reader in ways W.G. Sebald's marginalia in his extensive personal library simply is not.[21] The Wikipedic Novel, then, can also be described as a novel that opens the terrain for the concordant informational engagement of a small network: the novel author, reader, characters who draw *from* the web, and the (often) anonymous collective of authors and uploaders who feed and revise information *on* the web for broad reuse. This digital agape feast brings together the viewers of a print book to share in the spoils of an ever-expanding, ever-changing, ever-present Internet. And while this study is not necessarily another rejoinder for the vitality of the novel against its supposed death (to me, this is an issue of quantifying book sales or scales of production), *The Wikipedic Novel* certainly makes the argument that the process of reading a novel has gained a surprising evolutionary vigor.

Unfortunately, the traditional publication timelines of academic peer review have prohibited a clear and current account of how long Internet users spend online today; fortunately, two networks—We Are Social and Hootsuite—have annually reported on the world's Internet use since 2012. Of Earth's 7.83 billion infants, adolescents, adults, and senior citizens in the year 2021, 5.22 billion were global mobile device users, and 4.66 billion were Internet users.[22] The average time

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[19] John Kidd and Hans Walter Gabler were at odds to draft the definitive Norton edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in the late Eighties and Early Nineties. To see a clear synthesis of the academic debates this catalyzed, see Charles Rossman, "The Critical Reception of the 'Gabler" *Ulysses*': or, Gabler's *Ulysses* Kidd-napped" *Studies in the Novel* 21, no. 2 (1989), 154-81.

[20] Steven Fulwood (former Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Curator) in conversation with the author, August 2012.

[21] Sabine Wilke describes at length the significant influence of Marcel Proust (among others) on the writing of W.G. Sebald, whose prolifically annotated library has been subject to scholarly examination. See Sabine Wilke, *From Kafka to Sebald: Modernism and Narrative Form*, (London, Continuum, 2012).

[22] We are Data and Hootsuite have work with a consortium of data aggregators including GWI, Statista, App Annie, The ITU, GSMA Intelligence, Semrush, SimilarWeb, Locowise, and Kenshoo to generate the Digital 2021 Global Overview Report, subtitled "The Latest Insights Into How People Around the World Use the Internet, Social Media, Mobile Devices, and Ecommerce."; "Digital 2021 Global Overview Report." We Are Social, 2021. https://wearesocial.com/blog/2021/01/digital-2021-the-latest-insights-into-the-state-of-digital

spent online via smartphones alone is more than four hours per day. General Internet use averages six hours and fifty-four minutes (ostensibly, seven hours) across all users, or roughly 106 days of an entire year dedicated solely to a computer, phone, or tablet screen (and this is not to count televisions and movie screens). Needless to say, the numbers have exclusively increased by the year since the millennium; people are *reading* as much as they have in history. *The Wikipedic Novel* is one attempt to understand how the way we lay our eyes on the text of web browsers influences the way we lay our eyes on the pages of novels.

Why These Novels?

By now I hope it is clear that I do not believe there is a correct answer to what an "Internet Novel" might be. The question might be as singularly answerable as the question, "What comes after Postmodernism?" Instead, this study is more interested in how one vital and distinctive feature *of* the Internet—the Open-Source—has, since its rise to ubiquity, altered both the process of reading and writing novels. In its most basic definition, the Wikipedic Novel is a figure for the manner by which novelistic form incorporates Open-Source information. I use the word "Wikipedic" in part because it is a nimble and lighthearted semantic inheritor to the Encyclopedic Novel and its tradition of polymathic extratextual knowledge. However, I also adopt the term because in most monographs and essays addressing the promise and effects of Open-Source information, Wikipedia is championed as the paradigm of Open-Source platforms that have "worked." To better-understand precisely what the Open-Source is, it is profitable to turn to Wikipedia itself:

> The Open-Source model is a decentralized software development model that encourages open collaboration, meaning "any system of innovation or production that relies on goal-oriented yet loosely coordinated participants who interact to create a product (or service) of economic value, which they make available to contributors and noncontributors alike." A main principle of Open-Source software development is peer production, with products such as source code, blueprints, and documentation freely available to the public. The Open-Source movement in software began as a response to the limitations of proprietary code. […] The Open-Source model for software development inspired the use of the term to refer to other forms of open collaboration, such as in Internet forums, mailing lists and online communities. Open collaboration is the principle underlying peer production, mass collaboration, and wikinomics. It was observed initially in software, but can also be found in many other instances, such as in Internet forums, mailing lists, Internet communities, and many instances of open content, such as Creative Commons. It also explains some instances of crowdsourcing [and] collaborative consumption.[23]

This long definition and its inclusion in this dissertation's introduction perfectly model the decidedly contemporary complexity of reading and writing prose that integrates Open-Source information. The three central complexities I will discuss here are themes that I will also consider for each Wikipedic Novel in this study: the (textually) formal integration of borrowed ideas, a reader-author entanglement in extratextual information, and the ethical outcomes of how Open-Source information is deployed in a work. In this instance, the ethics of the information have to do with my role as the author of an informational and argumentative piece of non-fiction, but the

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[23] "Open Source," (2021, April 15), in *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_source

ethical stakes become even denser once fictional novels, characters, and plots are introduced in the forthcoming chapters.

The formal complexity of this plain sighted pilfering is amplified by my referential heavy-handedness and the passage's repetitive density. In a different academic monograph, I might go through the normal motions of summarizing and condensing elements of this long passage to my own slight interpretation. However, this prosaic condensation that is so necessary in the academy is not always done for salutary stylistic effect: it is often to shirk claims of plagiarism or copyright violation.[24] The benefit of Wikipedia is that I can shamelessly draw on the information with impunity. The downside is that the quote—if I were *not* to have made it into a block quote—would immediately register as stylistically different from my own prose. Were I to iron out some of its wrinkles I might strike one of the five instances of the word *collaboration* or begin fewer sentences with "The collaboration" and "The Open-Source." While I might be able to take full advantage of my right to non-attribution and make these stylistic adjustments, there would still be traces of the numerous authors' voices that pervade this piece. My only choice to erase the voices would be pure summary—which is why I argue that Wikipedic Novels become clickable (expanded upon in the next section) when moments like broad summary feel inadequately factual.

The reader-author engagement with this passage is obvious: I directed you to review the passage for the stylistic redundancies because I am currently writing in the first-person. As I will show, the Wikipedic Novels in this study take advantage of first-person point of view alongside extratextual information to elicit readerly trust and confidence. The act of verification is central to the Wikipedic Novel's narrative and characterological effects. And indeed, the results of this reader-author engagement can pose ethical issues. If a reader engages too much with the verifiability of a character's ideas, the character's *character* might become misperceived or worse, altogether concealed, due to the extratextual engagement. This is what motivates *Open City*'s Julius, a connoisseur of the arts concealing a forbidding secret, as I explain in chapter three. The ramifications for the novel's ethical capacity risks becoming vexed by the abundant information it can now process so easily.

This study's three novels do similar work to the metacognitive exercise I am now finishing: they feature first-person narrators who work in fields of knowledge and cultural production. Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* features a Ph.D.-wielding, alt-academic protagonist named "U." who works as an influential corporation's in-house anthropologist while questioning his own fitness as an expert. Teju Cole's *Open City* is narrated by Julius, a resident psychologist at Columbia University. Unlike U., Julius discusses topics that are broadly *unrelated* to his expertise—high art, cultural politics, and philosophy. Because the novel is comprised primarily of Julius aggressively showcasing his cooptation of others' ideas, I affiliate him with the notion of a dilettante: an ambitiously knowledgeable patron of art who is at once practically deficient in becoming an artist himself. Having a dilettante in one's company offers a person whose compendium of knowledge is useful and amusing, bearing an informal authority. Rendered narratively, however, this posture of informational relationality risks concealing a dilettante narrator's diegetic actions. Ishmael Reed's *JUICE!* tells the tale of Paul Blessings, a syndicated satirical cartoonist who mournfully recounts the ramifications of the O.J. Simpson trial on his art and identity as a Black man. Blessings represents a

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[24] In fact, the ninth of edition of the *MLA Handbook* admits within its own plagiarism and academic dishonesty guide that it is vital to "carefully identify all borrowed material, including quoted words and phrases, paraphrased ideas, summarized arguments, and facts and other information," while in the same breath admitting that "[d]ocumentation is not required for every type of borrowed material. Information and ideas that are common knowledge among your readers need not be documented. Common knowledge includes information widely available in reference works." *MLA Handbook*, Ninth ed., *The Modern Language Association of America*, 2021, web.

different type of authorial power: the (re)collection of a griot (an African elder and keeper of provincial village history) who has seen what the reader cannot—in this case, not because of age, but because of the obsolescence of live television events that are only partially recoverable through online footage and archiving. Each of these novels—whether its themes are explicitly oriented around characters' Internet engagement or a simple, realist depiction of a social world—invites clickability, a driving force that affects narrative space through exratextual engagement with the Open-Source web.

What is Clickability, and How is it Connected to Trust?

In attempting to periodize the Wikipedic Novel and its concomitant type of reading practice—one I call "clickable reading" or "clickability"—I draw on the epistemological shifts in information's dissemination through technology between 1996 to the present moment. Clickability is a narrative feature that appends itself to otherwise traditional narrative maneuvers redeployed and reconfigured in reading print sources. One good example of a clickable moment is from August 16th, 1996. The *New York Times* published the 138-word article "Footnotes Get the Boot" as part of its Week in Review spread. The brief piece proclaims that the "tide has now turned against all that distracting, sorry, dazzling erudition" embodied in the footnote's ancillary print.[25] The thin gravity that supposedly turned that tide was generated by a single quotation from a managing editor at Harvard University Press, who revealed, "A lot of our authors are aiming at the general reader, and our marketing department tells us that footnotes scare off people" (Ibid). The comment, which could fringe on anecdotal benignity to ungenerous eyes, ultimately *did* make major waves in the coming months. Before long, Anthony Grafton, the eminent scholar of the footnote, swiftly emerged to quash what he dubbed the "Footnote Furor of '96."[26]

In his own article, "The Death of the Footnote (Report on an Exaggeration)," Grafton explains that he seeks to contribute a "serious discussion" amongst the rankled pens at the "*The Guardian, Time, Newsweek*, and many other publications" who "weighed in with essays [responding to the *Times* article], most of them deploring the footnote's supposed decline and fall, many of them deploying heavy-footed humor at the expense of that ever-attractive subject, the folly of scholars."[27] After discussing the citation's emergence from late antiquity to its application in historiography at the end of the 20th century, Grafton assures his reader that the footnote's foothold is well-entrenched—largely for reasons of social structuration. He explains: "in an impersonal world, where credentials give the only assurance that a particular doctor or dentist is 'good enough' to remove our appendix or fix our teeth, solid, well-executed footnotes indicate that a particular historian is 'good enough' to interpret the thought of the Founding Fathers or the development of sanitation" (73). The posture of appraisal Grafton occupies goes to show how social positions have evolved since the Nineties; of course, to vet a periodontist or, well, a veterinarian in 2020, one can rely on a business directory service like Yelp or a crowd-sourced review website like RateMDs.com. Yet still, these mediums lead to the same essential guesstimation: seems "good enough." And in a superlative irony, Grafton's very article bears nary a footnote, forcing his own reader to presume that his credentials and the artifice of his knowledge's presentation (in the scholarly magazine *The Wilson Quarterly* with the biographical blurb that he is the Dodge Professor of History at Princeton University) "seems good enough."

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[25] Alexander, Daryl Royster, "Footnotes Get the Boot," *The New York Times*, 1996.
[26] Anthony Grafton, "The Death of the Footnote (Report on an Exaggeration)," *The Wilson Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (February 1, 1997), 72–77.
[27] Grafton, "The Death," 7.

Grafton's position as a narrator of history is paradoxically thrown off balance by precisely what he describes goes *wrong* when there are no footnotes. Perhaps without the metacommentary on the inviolable nature of the footnote no suspicion would be warranted. But even without taking into account Grafton's *authority*, the very "widespread discussion" he characterizes leaves readers obliquely oriented with the names of entire publications—*The Guardian, Time, Newsweek*. In addition, his own paraphrase of the culpable "Footnotes Get the Boot" only identifies the text as "an article in the *New York Times*." In fact, his summary of what the *Times* article communicates eclipses the original's entire word count by thirty percent. Given his salacious description in a forum for scholars, he inhibits the other major positive of participation the footnote is supposed to enable. To conclude his article, Grafton describes the "peculiar and wonderful experience" of reading footnotes: "The reader hears, and even takes part in, a conversation, with the author and the author's witnesses alike—a conversation more intense, more critical, and more suggestive than the reading of a bare text can ever be."[28]

The readers of Grafton's text, then, are left in a one-sided conversation—because of the mediated nature of the discourse, readers seeking to hear the other voices in the debate would have to guesstimate what "late summer and early fall" signifies when Grafton describes how "[f]or a few weeks in the late summer and early fall of 1996, men bit dogs. Well, not quite, but something almost as surprising happened. Footnotes grabbed headlines."[29] Grafton's (clearly resolved) readers would then have to pull the probably-not-yet-circulating microfiche of the publications mentioned in the Furor, again approximating what "early fall" might mean in relation to each news source's print cycle. This is not to mention locating the heretofore titleless and authorless articles of dissent within the spools of microfiche.

Of course, in order to recount this debate, I have reverse-engineered aspects of Grafton's account of the Furor using the Open-Source—I Googled the term "New York Times footnotes 1996" and found my way to the original piece (its author, by the way, is Daryl Royster Alexander). This would not have been possible in 1996—Google was not launched until September of 1998. Its precursor search engine, Ask Jeeves, was still being architected in Berkeley at the time of the *Times* article; Ask Jeeves was launched in beta in April 1997, just when Grafton's response was published. In addition, in the very same Sunday paper featuring "Footnotes Get the Boot," a full-page advertisement invites *Times* readers to submit slogans for their new initiative: making the paper available online. The Grafton example embodies the most obvious narrative features that precipitate clickability: dates, proper nouns, and the act of summary. Grafton introduced an element of narrative unreliability in his rendering of a mediated history even though he was not writing fiction. This effect—one that *could perhaps* be mitigated through footnotes—was incited by the act of narrative.

In the Wikipedic Novel, clickability promotes itself through narrative form even more persistently than in nonfiction. In Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*, characters incorrectly summarize stories from Nietzsche's life to the point of absurdity, charging scenes with the provocation to fact check. *Open City* features highly particular descriptions of the 9/11 Memorial with names and backstories that feel so fraught that they might be from a real experience—or real experience rendered on the web. *JUICE!* positions its narrator to reflect on his experience watching the O.J. Simpson trial through such vivid emotions that he recalls minute details that land in key, filmed moments that caught his eye: one chapter describes how at some point in June 1995 "The cameraman from GC Productions, Chris Bancroft, zeroes in on O.J., usually after some ghastly photos and exhibits are shown. In Bancroft's hands, the camera is accusatory, indicting" as it

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[28] Grafton, 77.
[29] Grafton, 72.

"lingers over the way O.J. looks at the ceiling. Trains his eyes on a calendar. Wipes away a tear."[30] The compiling of referents—from the production company to Chris Bancroft's name—alongside the realist descriptive detail and the earlier acknowledgment of "June 1995" position the fictitious narrator as both a researcher and supposed witness to the broadcast.[31] This position places his knowledge (and thus reliability) in flux: is he a wizened recaster or a broadcast researcher? The borderline between narrator, author, and primary source places the reader's trust (and patience) at a unique crossroad between the historical and the fictional. To resolve the impulse to verify with a handheld device—to seize on the text's *clickability*—is a reactive impulse that expands readers' interactive capacities with the novel as a matter of narrative course.

The Mechanics of Wikipedia and its Effects on Readerly Trust/Verification

Wikipedia is *written largely by amateurs*. Those with expert credentials are given no additional weight. Wikipedia is also not subject to any peer review for scientific, medical or engineering articles. One advantage to having amateurs write in Wikipedia is that they have more free time on their hands so that they can make rapid changes in response to current events. The wider the general public interest in a topic, the more likely it is to attract contributions from non-specialists.

- Wikipedia[32]

Given my interest in clickability and reading the novel, this project neatly expands on textual scholar Gregory Ulmer's phrase "electracy"—a portmanteau of "electronic literacy." Electracy is the "affective body's" natural response to engage the real world alongside digital devices.[33] This 1997 characterization of people's engagement with digital devices anticipated the smartphone's invention and ascension—a larger discussion hewed to the ease of clickability and information pilfering that I will save for another essay. Twenty-one years after Ulmer's term was coined, Teju Cole vividly accounted for electracy's role in novelistic production, describing how making a previously noble 500-paged Encyclopedic Novel in 2018 simply required "two computers, one of them open to Wikipedia, and the other one open to a Word document, and [you] just bang away."[34] There is a clear binary in play here: where the novel once functioned as an omnivorous form fit to shape an illusion of information totality, the Web now serves that function better. Still, how do readers opt to trust one form of textuality above another? If book authors derive and collate ideas online, then are we to trust the Internet more than the books themselves?

In order to gain further footing on how trust operates in Wikipedic Novels, a thorough account of Wikipedia and the trust mechanisms that undergird it is vital. Wikipedia exists more as a response to what knowledge means in the digital age than as a digitized version of an Encyclopedia. Many of the people to whom I have made mention of the Wikipedic Novel tend to characterize their actions on Wikipedia as representative of its purpose. To many, Wikipedia is a portal for answers, then associative distraction. To some, it is a place to skim and affirm details. As Joe Pinsker has noted, "the way people answer their everyday questions today means that a lot of research does end on Wikipedia. The site's pages are regularly among the top links that search engines turn up—

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[30] Ishmael, *JUICE!: A Novel*, (Funks Grove: Dalkey Archive Press 2011), 129.
[31] In *JUICE!*, 19 of the 54 chapters have titles that specify dates like "June 17, 1994" to date ranges ("June 12-16, 1995" or "May – Nov. 2001").
[32] "Wikiedia:About," (2021, April 15), in *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About
[33] Gregory L. Ulmer, *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 37.
[34] Khalid Warsame. "Teju Cole: 'We Are Made of All the Things We Have Consumed.'" Literary Hub, 2018.

among the general public, the site's medical articles are estimated to have a larger readership than WebMD. Google has even begun embedding excerpts from Wikipedia pages alongside its search results. Wikipedia isn't just the final destination of typical denizens of the Internet; sometimes it's where professional researchers end up as well."[35] For others, it is a place for play: one peculiar-yet-common "game" is to weave through six links across six random until you are hyperlinked to Adolf Hitler's Wikipedia page. And for many, Wikipedia is a portal for answers that are good enough—this notion has been pervasively capitalized upon by Apple's "personal assistant" Siri, which originated in combination with Wolfram|Alpha (A Computational Knowledge Engine) to highlight statistical facts (the age of Neptune) and time-contingent dynamic facts, like the score of the Oakland Athletics game right now.[36] But ask Siri esoteric questions (*what was the last album Lindsey Buckingham recorded with Fleetwood Mac?*) and Wolfram|Alpha's neural crawlers hunt the web for the associative terms of the search string and direct users to the Wikipedia page where an answer most likely rests.[37] Sometimes an answer is in plain sight, but many times the shoving off to Wikipedia is simply because there is so much knowledge that cannot be curated in a sedate, measured fashion. In this regard, Wikipedia's hive mind looseness can be a boon.[38]

At the time of this writing there are 5.5 million English articles on Wikipedia. The last available statistical data from Wikipedia notes that there are 47 million articles in 299 languages, and that there are nearly 71,000 contributors the globe over.[39] Wikipedia lists five pillars as to what this content stands for: 1) Wikipedia is an encyclopedia ("*not* a soapbox, an advertising platform, a vanity press, an experiment in anarchy or democracy, an indiscriminate collection of information, or a web directory" 2) Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view 3) Wikipedia is free content that anyone can use, edit, and distribute, Wikipedia's editors should treat each other with respect and civility, and 5) Wikipedia has no firm rules."[40]

The way Wikipedia works is astounding in its messy functionality: users can propose topics and edit the site directly, but to make significant changes requires learning a light markup language. Users who first contribute edits on the level of content can eventually earn rank to become authorized page editors and moderators. There are discrete roles to which all users can earn and apply based on the level of productive contribution archived in their edit histories. The top two roles of the hierarchy are administrators and bureaucrats: these high-level positions are "elected by the community" and have the ability to revoke the responsibilities of contributors with more discrete responsibilities. For English pages, there are 1,239 administrators and 23 bureaucrats at the time of this writing (Ibid).[41] These positions are of particular interest to my study because the terms of their

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[35] Joe Pinsker, "The Covert World of People Trying to Edit Wikipedia—for Pay," *The Atlantic*, 2015.

[36] Joe Aimonetti, "Siri Brings Nearly 25 Percent of Wolfram Alpha Traffic," CNET, 2012.

[37] The answer, by the way, is 1987's *Tango in the Night*. The answer was not on the Fleetwood Mac Wiki, but on the Stevie Nicks page.

[38] This is especially the case with news events, which carry more texture than the next two article categories: geek and popular culture, which have a disproportionate amount of depth to other Wikipedia entries. Roy Rosenzweig notes: "Encyclopedia Britannica editor in chief Dale Hoiberg defensively pointed out to the Guardian that 'Wikipedia authors write of things they're interested in, and so many subjects don't get covered; and news events get covered in great detail." Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History Be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (2006), 128.

[39] The most recent and revised numbers are available and autogenerated at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Statistics

[40] "Wikipedia:Five Pillars." (2021, April 15). In *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars

[41] Administrators have the technical ability to perform the following actions: block and unblock user accounts and IP addresses from editing; apply, modify, and remove page protection on a particular page to restrict or allow editing, moving, or creation; delete pages with 5,000 or fewer revision; grant and revoke user permissions requested by user accounts; view and restore deleted pages; hide and delete page revisions; edit fully protected pages; override the title

qualification are rooted more in quantity and consensus than in the particular quality of a singular field of contribution. For instance, James Heilman is an emergency-room physician who has been cited as "one of Wikipedia's most prolific medical editors" wielding a large range of knowledge, but he gained his stature from sheer quantity.[42] He told the *Hamilton Spectator* that he began editing Wikipedia after noting a slew of errors on an obesity page. He then went on to edit medical articles for nearly 60 hours a week.[43] While Heilman's edits range from pages on rhinoplasty to pediatric medicine, by trade he specializes in emergency medicine. But his work is said to model Wikipedia's aspirationally democratic potential: "Heilman takes part in an initiative through Wiki Project Med Foundation with Translators Without Borders, working to improve and translate English Wikipedia medical articles of top importance into minority languages The Wiki Project Med Foundation has started a collaboration with the University of California, San Francisco as a recruit for scientifically literate editors, by giving students college credit for improving medicine-related Wikipedia pages.[44]

Heilman and the students in The Wiki Project Med Foundation represent the validity of *editing* rather than *creating*. All of the validity is based on research, and the quality control of Wikipedia pages is based broadly in truly authoritative citationality. Somewhat paradigmatically, though, the medical students feel like an exception, as they can cross mediums with ease compared to the average page editor—they have textbooks, after all. One limitation of Wikipedia comes from its very nature as an Internet entity—many of its citations come from websites, hence the treasure map of hyperlinks commonly associated with the site. This is not intrinsically limiting to its knowledge, but it does create a recursive logic to the notion of placing solid information on the Internet when it proliferates from the intellectual wilderness of the very network itself.

Nowhere does this become clearer than with Wikipedia's struggle to gain editors since 2005, creating pressure to pay people to take on the responsibility (a practice befitting the gig economy). One of the chief issues in the steady editorial decline since 2005 has been (in an ironic turn) due to the ubiquity of smartphones. If a person notices an error on a Wikipedia page while browsing from a phone, she would have to *really* want to provide an edit in that moment, as she would need to open another page to find a reputable source to validate her correction, open the Wikipedia editing interface, then try using her phone's thumb pad to employ the markup language and insert her edit. The shift to the quick-but-imperfect mobile platform has provided a strange paradigm that I believe characterizes the Wikipedic moment: a lapse between receiving information, cognizing its validity and context, and the much more immediate process of appending that information to one's own corpus of knowledge and experience.

Here, let's take a closer look at the fifth pillar of Wikipedia's charter: *Wikipedia has no firm rules*. The community has come to consensus that "Wikipedia has policies and guidelines, but they are not carved in stone; their content and interpretation can evolve over time. The principles and spirit matter more than literal wording, and sometimes improving Wikipedia requires making exceptions," encouraging contributors to "[b]e bold but not reckless in updating articles. And do not agonize over making mistakes: every past version of a page is saved, so mistakes can be easily corrected."[45] To ask an editor or contributor not to agonize over making mistakes is perfectly

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blacklist; move a page to any desired title; and other high level actions. When administrators face major dissent from the community, "bureaucrats" settle squabbles and provide lengthy accounts of the ultimate decisions in the absence of consensus. "Wikipedia:Administrators," (2021, April 8), in *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators

[42] "Wikipedia: James Heilman," (2021, Apri 16), in *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Heilman.

[43] Thomas Shafee et al, "Evolution of Wikipedia's Medical Content," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 71, no. 11 (February 1, 2017), 1128.

[44] "Wikipedia:James Heilman."

[45] "Wikipedia:Five Pillars."

humane and encouraging to the author. But what does this do for the reader and consumer of this writing? What sorts of demands does this make on a person coming for answers? To arrive at Wikipedia (which is to arrive at the top result of most Google searches, which themselves are the chief corpus of casual knowledge-gathering) is to arrive at an always-already fallible domain of intellectual dynamism.

A Wikipedic "vandal" can radically alter a page. One of the features that keeps Wikipedia stable is the assignation of the "recent changes patrol" and the voluntary page "watchlist." The sheer volume of edits that come through will alert a person who has a page—say, in my case, Gwendolyn Brooks—and I will, due to my own fascination, glance at every edit that comes through. This vigilance could be due to my own interest (seeing the edits as similar to following a Twitter feed of various information from sources I choose to hear from) or due to a sense of cyber-authority and snitchmindedness. Either is effective in sending vandalic acts on Gwendolyn Brooks' page to Wikipedic purgatory and away from innocent eyes.[46] But what happens if I am hiking without Internet service and the other Brooks watchlister is on an Internetless budget flight from San Francisco to Djiboute? Or, to return to an earlier issue, what if we both are away from our computers and flagging the vandal is a burden from our mobile devices? The answer is simple: the information lingers, and an unwitting pair of eyes could sadly believe that Gwendolyn Brooks was famous for penning *The Least of These*, which is in fact a minor play within Maya Angelou's archive. The duration of unreliability is the chief concern here, and a natural invitation to consider how moments of inevitable factual lapse might affect a novelist incorporating Open-Source "history" into his or her work of fiction. Likewise the duration of Wikipedia's unreliability provokes a discussion of how Wikipedia *resembles* the novel. Like Wikipedia, novels have a recognizable form (pages, binding, covers, formats) yet also have no firm rules. In addition, both resources have implied authorships: Wikipedia's implied author is a static, abstract, but very real "community" that binds it as an institution—one that always hews toward a "neutral point of view" of informational anonymity. Novels, on the other hand, invite a malleable sense of the implied author—an ironic sense of dynamism one might expect from Wikipedia, but at once one that is pragmatically foreclosed due to its static nature.[47]

This foreclosure creates a compelling contrast in literature of the contemporary, which tends to feature more and more research-based knowledge that reflects a globalized period of information circulation. As we read novels that gesture toward what Edward Mendelsson named the "Encyclopedic," we see authors render characters and narrators who carry a vast array of knowledge and factual minutiae laid plain for the reader. Wikipedic Novels do not aspire to respond directly to Wikipedia itself, but instead to the contingency of digital information and electronic media (necessarily embedded in digital information, now) on user trust. Trust becomes a major thematic in the Wikipedic Novel, which features characters who research, bear expertise, moonlight as aesthetic dilettantes, and represent the media themselves. As we read them, we—the implied readers—make the decision to inhabit a contextual orientation that the author has presumably researched.

The copyrighted novels, the curated editorial staffs, the laudatory remarks of critics and peers on the dustjackets—these all point to the process of publication, which has moved from a vocational signifier to one of loose rigor: luddites (or even those who are just finicky with semantics)

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[46] Really, these are just sent for community and administrator review and approval or dismissal.

[47] When Wayne Booth coined the term "implied author," he described an "authorial character" who sits in a relative neutrality to the flesh and blood author and the text's character, construed by the reader's response to a text." While this has faced much criticism the notion of a reader's intuition to bear a neutral vessel for textuality is of interest for this study. See Tom Kindt and Müller Hans-Harald, "The Implied Author: Concept and Controversy," *Narratologia*. 9. Berlin: De Gruyter, (2008), 43-44.

might point to an article by *Vanity Fair* or *The New York Times* that notes how Narendra Modi or one of Banksy's colleagues has "published a tweet." Early adopters of the weblog including LiveJournal and Blogger might recall hovering a cursor over the "Publish" button for a post. To be sure, the verb *to publish* has moved from a vocational signifier to a more translucent action, whittled to something the everyman can perform to varying degrees that are not always socially demarcated.

The natural response to this looseness on the Wikipedic front is a belief in the Copyleft, a term coined by copyright law professor Lawrence Lessig in the aggressively titled *Free Culture: how big media uses technology and the law to lock down culture and control creativity* (2004). Copyleft is a form of licensing that can be used to maintain copyright conditions for works ranging from computer software, to documents, to art, to scientific discoveries and instruments in medicine.[48] In general, copyright law is used by an author to prohibit recipients from reproducing, adapting, or distributing copies of their work. In contrast, under copyleft, an author may give every person who receives a copy of the work permission to reproduce, adapt, or distribute it, with the accompanying requirement that any resulting copies or adaptations are also bound by the same licensing agreement. Thanks to the nature of Web 2.0, the reappropriation of random ideas and citations has left Internet users aesthetically unprincipled: memes move freely, melodies are parodied again and again in user-generated videos, Pinterest posts share recipes that can be found verbatim on amateur food blogs, and the bottom being—to do my own cribbing of Gertrude Stein—of so many sources has become more fraught with no-riginality.[49] In fact, my entire definition of the Copyleft beginning from the phrase, "In general, copyright law"" above is not mine, it is Wikipedia's, which technically still means it is mine because with Wikipedia it belongs to nobody—it is nobody's information.[50] My only agency was to ensure it is bereft of hyperlinks. The permissive nature of the copyleft is compelling in its possibility for bricolage and pastiche as a form of contemporary online culture, and, as Teju Cole describes above, the way anemic offshoots of "Encyclopedic" novels can reappropriate the infinite regress of duplicate notions in the Open-Source.

All of this, then, forms the constituent parts of Wikipedicness: reappropriated sources, associative (hyperlinked) citationality, and an abstract form of authority—something between the expert, the dilettante, and communal consensus. The only missing component in all of these—the singular presence that makes all of it cohere to a logic, is the cognizing subject. As I have covered, why we click can have manifold reasons: to self-diagnose knee pain, to settle a bet on a fact, to pilfer information for a term paper, or just because we're bored. The subject is erratic. But the novels I call Wikipedic here negotiate plot for information: they carry categorical themes (not unlike those of the online Encyclopedia itself—Culture, History, Nature, Society, Technology, Philosophy, People), they render authorial control by sharing information, and they play on motifs of common knowledge. They provide characters who are dilettantes, experts, and griots who do online research

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[48] Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock down Culture and Control Creativity.* (London, Penguin Press, 2004), xi.

[49] Web 2.0 is a shorthand for changes in the way Web pages are designed and used. Whereas Web 1.0 featured "static" pages for readers to simply consume, Web 2.0 marks the period after a shift to dynamic content that allows for readers to comment directly on pages, render weblogs, upload content, and do all of the general "sharing" that has become ensconced in the digital vernacular.

[50] I use the phrase "nobody's information" as an allusion to Catherine Callagher's groundbreaking *Nobody's Story*, in which she argues that fictionality and the novel's capacity for "libel," publicly resisted at first during the Restoration, was developed through the abstraction of authorial personae, printed books, and intellectual property as referring to no particular person. The copyleft's invocation in the construction of novels provokes a contemporary extension to this theory, attributing unknown knowledge as characterologically vitalizing for fictional people while placing a strategic shroud on informational origins via narrative. See Gallagher, Catherine, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*, (Oakland, University of California Press, 1995), especially 162-65.

within the books and recall digitally mediated events whose details are at time archivally irrecoverable. They lay plain the pursuit of information and how trying to add it all up it affects fictional subjects comprised of knowledge and point of view. And they all diegetically engage with the digital sharing economy and how it affects the way we live in an electronically globalized world.

Upon exploring these novels, what is certain is simple: we do not know what our clicking online adds up to, but the novel provides a haven of information curation that calls into question the notion of subjective knowledge. There are no strict rules in novels, but the literary form, while in many ways wielding the capacity to absorb Wikipedia, offers a different type of reading and informational consumption that represents essential facets of characterological subjectivity: durative consciousness, the process of misremembering and recovering memory, and contradictions of feeling. No matter how dynamic the Internet is, the static novel holds a place that affords the cognizing agent more mobility within the decidedly mortal capabilities of her memory, recollection and ability to synthesize. In chapter three, Ishmael Reed writes about the O.J. Simpson trial and imputes his narrator with humorous characterizations of how Geraldo Rivera, Nancy Grace, and Alan Dershowitz came across during their extensive airtime during the O.J. Simpson trial. The unflattering portrayals are even less flattering than how these television figures appear now in 2021. Some of the footage and moments the narrator recounts can be corroborated on YouTube, while some of his most extreme characterizations may be from live television moments that were not archived into the Open-Source. They might also be pure fiction. *JUICE!* pushes historical fiction and hyperbole to their limits. Unlike Toni Morrison rememory, which requires a conjuring of affect and the risk of responsibility in recreating a history long past, Ishmael Reed's recasting of a media event's history offers information he has lived through and witnessed with only a partial mediatic record (Perez 196). No single person could have experienced the coterminous airing of pundit pontification, radio caller commentary, or local, Nevada gazette op-eds for a paper whose company lifespan lasted two years.

The partial archive and impossibility of absolute verification situates narrators and authors, in turn, as "digital griots," a term Adam Banks has coined for wizened storytellers who seek to help their communities by transmitting local histories through digital means like music or film.[51] The compelling aspect of the griot to this study is the reliance on storytelling—the ability to point to what empirically informs facets of a story while at once filling in the lacunae with personal experience itself. *JUICE!* models how there are limitations in revising and moderating the words of any single "contributor" to an event's narrative. While Wikipedia cannot digest the overly-subjective, the novel can and does. Thanks to this, the novel and the apparatus of trust it yields for an author like Ishmael Reed and his potentially fictionalized experience of live media opens the terrain for *recollection*—an element that novel narrators facilitate much better than the Web. The Open-Source slips into the sonance of *JUICE!* when the narrator recounts Congressman Gary Condit's extramarital affairs, parenthetically describing how "[Dominick] Dunne had to settle out of court for suggesting that Congressman Gary Condit 'frequented Middle Eastern embassies for sexual activity with prostitutes, and during those times, he made it clear that he wanted someone to get rid of [Sandra] Levy.' So says Wikipedia . . ."[52] After the narrator offers forty pages of thick, sensorious recollections of the trial and the cast of its circus, this explicit moment of Open-Source interruption shows how the digital intertext can render itself in the contemporary novel while also calling into flux narratorial (and by extension, authorial) knowledge. Even more than this are the stakes of cultural discourse within an "in-group" and the deferred public commentary of a marginalized

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[51] Adam J. Banks, *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), 33.
[52] Reed, *JUICE!*, 63.

community, imbuing narrative with what Harlon Dalton calls a "political economy of racial discourse."[53]

Literary and Digital Openness

Indeed, 21st century society has become inured to the Open-Source as a model for society. The Open Knowledge Foundation, The Obama administration, and conservative libertarian movements have all developed initiatives to increase parity and civic engagement by imitating Wikipedia.[54] In *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness*, Nathaniel Tkacz suggests that these efforts advance an ironic neoliberal agenda wherein information is a competitive commodity best yielded, surprisingly, through cooperation. As Charles Armstrong describes the appeal of the open for governments, they can "lead to democratic systems that are more fluid, less centralized, and more responsive than we know today; systems where people can participate as little or as much as they wish and where representation is based on personal trust networks rather than abstract party affiliations."[55] The appeal of these ideas is, for Tkacz, inextricable from the early 21st century Open-Source's mass adoption of software and network culture.

The Wikipedic Novel draws on one especially compelling assertion from this orientation toward openness in society, accounting for how "openness is placed in a variety of settings, articulated alongside different concepts, and put to use in different ways. The open circulates, scales up, garners new allies, is reconfigured, distinguished, and remixed: each movement troubles and destabilizes the articulation of its meaning. The open sways between means and ends, between noun, verb, and adjective. [. . .] What to make of a concept championed in all walks of political life? When conservative liberals, libertarian liberal democrats, postautonomous Marxists, and left-leaning activists all claim the open as their own and all agree that openness is the way forward?[56]

Understanding the Internet itself as a foil or extension of textuality is nothing new, but the resonances of Open Computing create a perfect duplicate of a literary term that serves as one of the most interdisciplinary instances of recombinant conceptualization (the idea that inventions and innovations can occur in parallel, unbeknownst to their respective inventors).[57]

We might begin thinking about open *literary* textuality through two clear forebears—Umberto Eco and Henry James. Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* understands a specific set of conditions that create an open work—art with a dynamic propulsion and lack of fixity, in which endings and meanings are not in pure control by the artist. It is very much a term that sounds like it could be related to the novel form, but unlike Henry James's classic sense of the novel as a "house of fiction" in which "not one window but a million" are opened and seen through by readers, providing no objective vantage to a similar event or meaning, there may well be no *authorial intent* beyond the openness itself.[58] That is, for James, the novel is a private endeavor of construction to be gawked at by readers. He explains in "The Art of Fiction" that "execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that."[59] The novelist has the *sole*

[53] Harlon L. Dalton, *Racial Healing: Confronting the Feat Between Blacks and* Whites, (New York: Doubleday, 1995) 57.
[54] Nathaniel Tkacz, *Wikipedia and the Politics of Openness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 31.
[55] Charles Armstrong, "Emergent Democracy" in *Open Government* ed. Daniel Lathrop and Laurel Ruma, (Sebastopol: O'Reilly Media, 2010), 75.
[56] Tkacz, *Wikipedia and the Politics*, 32.
[57] The idea that inventions and innovations can happen in parallel.
[58] Henry James, "Preface to the Portrait of a Lady," in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000.*, ed Dorothy J Hale, (Hoboken, Blackwell Pub., 2006), 431.
[59] Henry James, "Art of Fiction," in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000.*, ed Dorothy J Hale, (Hoboken, Blackwell Pub., 2006), 433.

responsibility to be the "executant" who derives the scope and aim of the fiction, for "[h]is manner is his secret, not necessarily a deliberate one. He cannot disclose it, as a general thing, if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others."[60] James's conception of novelistic authorship is then much different from Eco, who prizes the reader's agency. In *Lector in Fabula*, Eco describes textual cooperation, rendering a text as "a lazy (or economic) mechanism that lives on the surplus value of meaning introduced by the recipient" and he sees the "Model Reader" as someone who understands that the text is an "incomplete entity, with elusive boundaries, full of strategies implanted by the author in the hopes that the reader might actualize them during the reading process."[61] The Wikipedic Novel's author-reader relationship sits somewhere between these two poles. On one hand, each author in this study has clear novelistic aesthetic aims and ambitions that do bear artistic unity. On the other, the texts all introduce layers of unattributed citation and intertextuality that might certainly reward the diligent reader who does the work of always contextualizing. The jostling of Eco's Model Reader, seizing the novel's open capacity for context is coupled with the hopeful reward of a Jamesian unity. While Postmodernism (of which Eco is an exemplar) has pushed the "openness" of the novel to exhausting contextual capacities with its intertextuality, the concentrated form of vision for which James advocates in earlier novel theory still maintains itself in these Wikipedic Novels.

1996: Historicizing Clickability, the Wikipedic, and Leaning into the Drift

What critic since 2010 hasn't pored over a novel or piece of philosophy, paused in the act of reading to weigh a run-of-the-mill citational gesture, and turned to their smartphone to look it up? Of course, to look something up is to seize upon a text's *intertextuality*—that term Julia Kristeva affixed for narratologists in her 1980 "Word, Dialogue, and Novel" as "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings."[62] This development importantly extended M.M. Bakhtin's theories of spatialization in language, opening words to operate across planes of intertextuality that expand both horizontally ("the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee") and vertically ("the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus.")[63] A year later Roland Barthes would animate Kristeva's description of texts as "mosaic[s] of quotations," asserting in his *Theories of the Text* that "[a]ny text is a new tissue of past citations" (Barthes 181). And then one year after Barthes Gerard Genette would offer the term that motivates this study: *the hypertext*—"any text derived from a previous text either through simple transformation […] or through indirect transformation, which I shall label imitation."[64] Unlike the rote citation, which enunciates itself in quotation or paratextual sidelining (think epigraph or footnote) the hypertextual moment in literature is not always explicitly visible. Genette qualifies that "some works are more so [hypertextual] than others (or more visibly, massively, and explicitly so than others)" such that the reader transforms from a mere comprehender into an adjudicator of literarity.[65] For, in Genette's construction, "[t]he less massive and explicit the hypertextuality of a given work, the more does its analysis depend on constitutive

[60] James, 432.
[61] Cited in Burcu Serra Bakioglu, "In Pursuit of the Model Reader: The Problems of Readership in 'The New Life' and 'The Island of the Day Before,'" *The Turkish Studies Association Journal* 26, no. 2 (April 20, 2002), 2.
[62] Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1980), 65.
[63] Kristeva, "Desire in Language," 37.
[64] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 7.
[65] Genette, *Paratexts*, 13.

judgement: that is, on the reader's interpretive decision."[66] At this point, we are at 1983, and the language of intertextuality across Kristeva, Barthes, and Genette suggests a new type of reader whose task is not only to read a novel, but also to see and appreciate its genealogy of creativity while assessing the stability of its referents. Thus, we see the how Genette comes to characterize the hypertext reader as the bearer of "constitutive judgment." This reader is evocative of the reader I am to describe of the 2010s.

The bridge for my interest in Postmodern hypertextuality and the digital is surprisingly anachronistic, both to now and to the 1980s moment of intertext theory—for the bridge comes in Derrida's 1969 *Dissemination,* when he unwittingly forecasted what I argue is the chief vessel of intertextuality in the 21st century: the screen. Derrida writes that "[e]verything 'begins,' then, with citation, in the creases [*faux plis*] of a certain veil, a certain mirrorlike screen."[67] This account of untraceable origins broadens into a prophetic metaphor when one considers the function of a computer screen, which serves as a conduit for information that is called upon from an unseeable network of data transmission with no concrete "beginning." Just as citationality creates a veil over the elusive intertext, so too does the screen create a veil for the elusive origin of a given piece of hypertext. And indeed, I argue in this dissertation that the screen is where the intertext in the contemporary novel offers a fluctuation between readerly acceptance and intertextual suspicion. The reader in a world of both inter- and hyper- text bears an agency rooted in (mis)trust and a new form of textual unreliablity, able to work in conjunction with what is retrievable from that mirrorlike screen, black and smudged with thumbprints. The computer screen looks like an informatic beginning, but as Derrida suggests, perhaps it is as impossible as any other (site)ational beginning. It is in the text's clickability that New Historicism finds a digital subtext and that novelistic *mimesis* must contend with a new rapidly emergent ontological condition that is as rapidly evolving and adaptive as the epistemological condition of reading in 1996.

In considering other reasons for primacy of the year 1996 as the Wikipedic Novel's starting point, I want to draw on Theodore Martin's study *Contemporary Drift*. Martin describes how "the truncated form of the decade seems to have become a preferred framework for imagining our present as a period," while in fact many critics actually append more years to the ten—he cites terms like the "long nineties" and the "Long 1980s" of financialization that actually begins in the 1970s."[68] His ultimate assertion is that the decade as a temporal unit is "arbitrary, pliabile, ironic" and "perfectly captures the contemporary's syntax of periodization.

With Martin's sense of temporal malleability in mind, to historicize the Wikipedic Novel I take as a starting point a mid-decade phenomenon—the 1996 rise of the Open-Source, connect it to the 2006 acknowledgment of the Open-Source's influence on a plural entitity ("You" the digital commons, as in *You*Tube) and push the formal developments of the novel into the moment of this writing. My study covers nearly two decades of development because I do not see the Wikipedic moment as an instance, but as an *era* marking the reading public's fundamental shift in entitlement to knowledge and the (mis)trust involved in the reading process of information and ideas aggregated by an anonymous collective. The act of reading itself cannot be bound to a period, for it has been tirelessly traced by thinkers from the Walters Ong and Benjamin—concerned with the shift from orality to literacy—to the slew of Narratologists like James Phelan and Brian Richardson who parse

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[66] Genette, 9.

[67] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 318.

[68] Theodore Martin, *Contemporary Drift : Genre, Historicism, and the Problem of the Present*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 28.

the narrative anatomy that allows texts to derive readerly effects. [69] My assertion is that words are the same on the Internet and in novels, but the suspicious mistrust and blind acceptance of digital information cannot help but scale to reading the Wikipedic Novel: it is at once encyclopedic and informational yet still tied by the thin thread of a plot conceived by a single author's intent. The tender nexus of plot and character coalesce into a fairly brief text relative to traditional encyclopedic novels.

In thinking about encyclopedic novels and returning to the primacy of 1996, just six months prior to the Footnote Furor David Foster Wallace's novel *Infinite Jest* was published, with all of its 1,079 pages and 388 footnotes. The alarmist literary-luddite Sven Birkerts noted in a review that "Wallace's narrative structure should be seen instead as a response to an altered cultural sensibility. The book mimes, in its movements as well as in its dense loads of referential data, the distributed systems that are the new paradigm in communications. The book is not *about* electronic culture, but it has internalized some of the decentering energies that computer technologies have released into our midst. The plot is webbed, branched, rife with linkages. This could be a liability."[70] Indeed, Birkerts—a critic who admitted that the "portents of change" in the elevation of browser-based reading "depresses" him—feared the "evanescent" nature of digital content, and more precipitously found its ramifications for history especially disconcerting.[71] His trepidation toward databases looked toward a world in which all history would be had in a piecemeal: "Once the materials of the past are unhoused from their pages, they will surely *mean* differently. The printed page is itself a link, at least along the imaginative continuum, and when that link is broken, the past can only start to recede."[72] Birkerts' anxiety has been reflected in many of the hallmark texts that characterize the transition to the "Postmodern," including any Pynchon novel, DeLillo's *Underworld*, and the works of William Gibson (especially his pioneering cyberpunk fiction *Neuromancer* of 1983 and Pynchon-esque search for symbols through online marketing in 2003's *Pattern Recognition*).

However, Birkerts' reading of the Internet as "an altered cultural sensibility" in the form of *Infinite Jest* shows an anxiety between social and literary criticism that lines the years 1996 to today. While Wallace has written about the potentially deleterious social effects of mass media writ large—especially television in *Infinite Jest*—the Internet as a thematic was slightly ahead of his interests, for Wallace was, like Birkerts, a deep resistor to a progressively more networked world.[73] In fact, two weeks after *Infinite Jest's* publication, Wallace asserted he had "never been on the Internet" at all.[74] His encyclopedic novel wedges itself in a strange time in the Encyclopedic Novel tradition. Its footnotes do not point to online sources—they maintain an emphasis of the author's voracious mind (explained further in my history of the Encyclopedic in the following section, but they animate an anxiety that was rising in referentiality by 1996).

This leads to my third brief point on why 1996 was an important year: nine days before the *Times* published "Footnotes Get the Boot" the world's largest computer service, America Online,

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[69] See especially Walter Ong, *Language as Hermeneutic: A Primer on the Word and Digitization*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 54-76. Also, Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory, 1900-2000.*, ed Dorothy J Hale, (Hoboken: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 361-378; also James Phelan, *Somebody Telling Somebody Else: A Rhetorical Poetics of Narrative.* (Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 2017).

[70] Sven Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 37.

[71] He develops these ideas substantially. See Sven Birkerts, *Changing the Subject: Art and Attention in the Internet Age*, (Minneapolis, Graywolf Press, 2015), 85.

[72] Birkerts, *Gutenberg Elegies*, 129.

[73] In the posthumously released *Pale Fire* there is unfinished story from 2000 about a terminally ill tabloid reporter who seeks to capture pictures of Ronald Reagan's decline into Alzheimer's to post on a half-tabloid/half-pornographic website (now *actual* pornographic website) called wicked dot com.

[74] Stephen J. Burns, ed. *Conversations with David Foster Wallace*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 184.

crashed during routine maintenance, keeping 6 million people from using the Internet for nineteen hours. Remember, in 1996 the Internet was still in a "Web 1.0" state—a one-way platform of information for average users to read news, watch stocks at will (rather than waiting for scrolling television tickers), find products and services, but *not* contribute much of their own information.[75] The outage is the longest period any mass iteration of the Internet has ever been down globally, and while the six million affected users is an infinitesimal fraction of today's five billion users, its exponential growth was (no pun intended) on the line: over one-fifth of that six million users had signed up for the online service in just one month before the outage. At the time, it cost nearly two dollars an hour until it inverted to a flat fee of $19.95 per month at end of 1996—a year that signified a major shift in what the popular imaginary of information and reading was to become.

The Encyclopedic Novel, its Variants, and the Readerly Text's Recuperation

I periodize the year of *Infinite Jest's* publication because it was the last Encylopedic Novel published before the Web 2.0 era. Before discussing how Internet history comes to bear on Encylopedic Novelistic form, it is important to account for the development and bounds of the Encyclopedic Novel. Originally, the notion of the Encyclopedic was placed less on novels as on *narrative* in Edward Mendelson's 1976 *Encyclopedic Narrative, from Dante to Pynchon.* For Mendelson, the Encyclopedic "attempts to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture, while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge."[76] He conjectures that "[b]ecause they are the products of an epic in which the world's knowledge is larger than any one person can encompass, they necessarily make extensive use of synecdoche."[77] For Mendelson in 1976, there were only seven Encyclopedic narratives: Dante's *Commedia,* Rabelais' five books of Gargantua and Pantagruel, Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, Goethe's *Faust*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Other qualities include "the full account of at least one technology or science" and the display of "an encyclopedia of literary styles, ranging from the most primitive and anonymous levels [...] to the most esoteric of high styles."[78] Encyclopedic modes are intended to capture the range of a society in a way that a single subject might not be able to alone. This also helps explain why many of the novels that are considered Encyclopedic after *Gravity's Rainbow* contain assemblages of particular characters— synechdochal signifiers of society at large. Additional novels of this ilk include Wallace's *Infinite Jest*, Roberto Bolaño's *2666,* Don Delillo's *Underworld*, or Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*. All of these texts are focalized through third person omniscient points of view, ultimately positioning the author as the fecund mind through which a universe of depth grows.

More recently, Vesa Kyllönen has noted that "whereas Mendelson treated the encyclopedic narrative as a genre for the chosen few, since the 1970s we have witnessed a global, but mostly American, trend of encyclopedic novel. After *Gravity's Rainbow*, both the first generation of Postmodernist authors (Pynchon, Don DeLillo, William Gass) and the second generation following it (Richard Powers, David Foster Wallace, William T. Vollmann) have produced, in America alone, a host of similar novels."[79] Ultimately, for Kyllönen, although an encyclopedic novel may well position

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[75] Jessa Lingel, *An Internet for the People. The Politics and Promise of Craigslist*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2020), 53.

[76] Edward Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon," *MLN* 91, no. 6 (1976), 1271.

[77] Mendelson, "Encyclopedic Narrative," 1271.

[78] Mendelson, 1267.

[79] Vesa Kyllönen, "Information and the Illusion of Totality: Reading the Contemporary Encyclopedic Novel," in *Reading Today* (London, UCL, 2018), 31-32.

"tens of minor characters, fragmentary snapshots, stylistic shifts, runners and loose ends," in the aggregate, these combined features serve only to preserve an illusion of a totalizing system.[80] Among this particular list of encyclopedic characteristics is a diversity of information and fodder for pattern recognition—when the style shifts, a rationale or a symbolic must be unearthed. When one end fails to meet another, the disconnect must be intentional: perhaps for an effect that contributes to the novel's affect. And of course, every fragment or minor character serves to offer that Bakhtinian trait of polyphony that is leveraged to its maximal possibility in this voice-saturated genre.[81]

However, one idea that Kyllönen does not address is the type of implied reader who can see deeply enough to decode these patterns. Given its voluminous nature, the Encylopedic Novel resists types of symptomatic reading: psychoanalysis may well work in a scene tracking one character but suddenly turn to psychoanalytically-oriented drivel in the language of another. The urge to read the Encyclopedic text's surface, as Sharon Marcus and Stephen Best might have it, also proves daunting and impossible given how it is suited to host so many characters and ideas.[82] In some sense, the ideological thrust of the Encyclopedic Novel may be less about deriving a steady or solid *reading* of the text as a whole, but more about recognizing the curatorial force of its fragmentation.

Stefano Ercolino places more positive pressure on the importance of scale in the Encyclopedic Novel by stripping it of Mendelson's requisite nationalist underpinnings and emphasizing its literal and lyrical density. In doing so, Ercolino rebrands the Encyclopedic Novel as the *Maximalist Novel*. In laying out the maximalist function, Ercolino notes that "the fragment not only serves as the basic morphological unit located at the core of its peculiar narrative organization, resulting as we know from an inextricable intermingling of chorality and polyphony, but it is also the tool which enables the deployment of the novel's extraordinary diegetic exuberance."[83] In this account, Ercolino prioritizes a reader's markers of rationality as he describes a *peculiar* narrative organization and coins his key term, "diegetic exuberance," which positions activity and scenes in the narrative field as excited, constantly moving energy. The point, he determines, is that these warm nodes of diegesis, while recognizable against the surface of the pages, are "completely devoid of a unifying narrative action" and, given the lack of a stable narrative pole, offer themes but not answers—an offering not dissimilar to the reality these maximalist novels portend to totalize.[84]

However, the deluge of minutiae incited by the maximalist novel does afford the implied author authority as the hub of discursive production. If the maximalist novel bears no "stable narrative pole" yet it is still recognizable as a novel, what centers it? The author. Franco Moretti, in describing *Faust* as a Modern Epic, notes that its "digressions have themselves become the main purpose of the epic Action," which Ercolino considers "not far removed from maximalist narrative practices."[85] The digression (rather than the mere fragment) is a particularly useful way to characterize the prime mode of narrative information in these large novels. A digression is a "departure or deviation from the subject in discourse or writing" (OED). This definition implies a

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[80] For more on totalization in the Encyclopedic Novel, see Hillary Clark, "Encyclopedic Discourse," *SubStance, 21*(1) (1992), 95-110.
[81] Mark Greif, in his own iteration of Encyclopedic writing called the "big, ambitious novel" also acknowledges that how the polyphony of character voice is vital to distrusting knowledge in novels. He notes how many of these texts are written from "a kaleidoscopic 'third-person close,' in which all knowing is accomplished through countless limited and idiosyncratic characters who together prove a kind of encyclopedic or superhuman range that must belong to the author but is never acknowledged as an authorial possession." Mark Greif, "'The Death of the Novel' And Its Afterlives: Toward a History of the 'Big, Ambitious Novel,'" *boundary 2* 1:36 (May 2019), 29.
[82] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009), 1-21.
[83] Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel: From Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow to Roberto Bolaño's 2666*, (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 72.
[84] Ecolino, *Maximalist*, 72.
[85] Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013), 48-9.

stable subject—a center—who can think in a line to begin with. The digression signals the wending, not the ending, of an emplotted path with some kind of destination. The point of view is intentionally jarring and polyphonic, bearing little sense of neutral footing.

Perhaps the most contentious point on presenting information is the notion of neutrality. The most turbulent of the Wikipedic pillars is point two: the entire body of information ought to be "written from a neutral point of view." What are the benefits of neutrality? There is a powerful dichotomy here: on the one hand, the pursuit of neutrality might curtail the risk of bias, yet on the other hand neutrality might dilute the authority of the specialist, whom one could easily argue is inherently biased. This dichotomy is being waged against partisan media outlets at the time of this writing, but it extends beyond the mere coloring of narrative. There are biases on Wikipedia that signify a lack of neutrality in spite of the aspirant pillar to write from a "neutral point of view." For instance, some types of information are prioritized: especially those related to technology, science, and science fiction. Given that it takes a particular technical skillset to modify a page, Wikipedians themselves have acknowledged a slant toward "geek priorities" that shapes the content. The "shaping" in this case has not particularly to do with how the content is presented, but rather the quantity. Lyndon LaRouche (conspiracy theorist and perennial presidential candidate) has 5,400 words dedicated to his page, whereas President Woodrow Wilson has 3,200 words.[86] More than this, current events (particularly events that have occurred since the inception of Wikipedia) are significantly more contoured, revised, and documented than those which predate it by greater than ten years.

Although these are not all explicitly *stylistic* points of view, they showcase a vantage of interest that moves the corpus of Wikipedia away from objectivity, even in its own ambition. These particularities can provoke a range of responses: who is to say that length is indicative of quality? What would quantitative parity among word counts say about value? Aren't Encyclopedias biased in their own omissions? As with all large-scale ideas, the notion of neutrality carries with it a surfeit of exceptions-to-the-rule that can seem to render it moot. And yet, regardless of the *intent* of a point of view, there is always a function for the user, who comes to Wiki- or Encyclopedia to become more whole in his knowledge—to gain something that wasn't there but might be here. Ultimately, if a page fails to nourish the user or its content feels inefficacious, the user can simply modify a search string or look outside the realm of Wikipedia to any number of search engines and databases. A blinking cursor steadily invites the chance to supplement, extend, or rebuff a point of view. In this regard, the Internet's text is always "writerly."

In Roland Barthes' formulation, the writerly text in printed literature bears the potential for "a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduced the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages."[87] In this regard, the web browser—you—are always a partial author in making meaning of the things you read. The meanings you make as you click from link to link and navigate from page to page are pliable and influenced by the quality of the pages you click, the versatility of the information presented, and the duration of your choosing to search, read, and interpret. At this point, the idyllic aspiration for neutrality becomes always diluted by an Internet user's perception.

The very boundedness of the book—in a Postmodern flourish—is what makes the Wikipedic Novel a useful paradox to the issues of Internet Neutrality. First and foremost, a book is a commodity that, once accessed, is processed at the pace of our reading. As such, regardless of its

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[86] Clay Shirky, *Cognitive Surplus : Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*, (London: Penguin Press, 2010), 41.
[87] Roland Barthes, *S/Z An Essay* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 5.

semantic breadth, the issue of the "value" of access is ameliorated as soon as a book is possessed. At once, a book's content can simulate the variegated forms of commentary and informational onslaught (flurry of signifiers) we recognize as constituent facets the Internet, but crucially, a novel has no search bar: it is a book. More than this, it is a *readerly book*, to which the reader has "no more than the poor freedom to either accept or reject the text." Though Barthes called this freedom "poor" in 1970, it may well be a welcome poverty in 2021 given the opulent access to the imperfect whole of what exists on the Internet, which is like a lived-in home whose possessions will never be completely unpacked. The Internet is semantically like a home by fact of possession, but it can never be *made* a home by placing everything within where it ought to be. [88] The book, by contrast, has all of its information framed, hung, leveled, and fit to each page. It begins and it ends. To play on Jaron Lanier's impassioned book title *You Are Not a Gadget*, when you read a novel, you are not a gadget, you are a reader. In Lanier's book he warns that the "wisdom of the crowd" and the notion of "ratifying information by committee" often does not result in the best product but results instead in a collectivist ethos that fosters a hive mind and thwarts the uniqueness of individual voice.[89]

In this regard, the novel, generally speaking, offers a single author to whom one can attribute the schema of its network of information. This is no departure from the Encyclopedic genre. Mark Greif (in laying out an account of his own term, "the big ambitious novel") also marks Encyclopedic Novels as bearing a polyphony of characters and voices that are vital to disbursing knowledge through the novels. To do so, he says that their authors write "a kaleidoscopic 'third-person close,' in which all knowing is accomplished through countless limited and idiosyncratic characters who together prove a kind of encyclopedic or superhuman range that must belong to the author but is never acknowledged as an authorial possession."[90] This affiliates with Ercolino's "super-omniscience": a mode that provides an "orientative-evaluative" account of events, laying bare the fact of their historicity while making value claims in their redescription. As he puts it, this type of point of view is accomplished by using the "sum of all of the narrative information advanced by each of the focalizations of the different units constituting the narrative."[91] In this account of authorship, an overarching theory of purpose—an intentional authorial agenda—appears in the sum of an Encyclopedic Novel's parts. What this means for the reader is unclear. Greif suggests the polyphony amounts to a point of proof. The gesture registers as indulgent: if the author merely offers a text that is "kaleidoscopic" and "idiosyncratic" to "prove . . . a superhuman range" that "must belong to the author but is never acknowledged" then the aesthetic is implicitly intended to awe and convince. Inspiring awe might be one effect of literature, but to intentionally invest over 600 pages in the basic pursuit of widening eyes verges on a kitsch mode of production.

Ercolino's reading, meanwhile, insists on a form of authorial didacticism in which the author maintains control as a philosophical dragoman who knows precisely how every detail, every vantage, and every point of focus orients us to evaluate society writ large. In this formulation, the orientative-evaluative lens emerges *after* working thorough the "sum of all of the narrative information."[92] When a reader has to hold all of the pieces in order to render an author's meaning, the effect is again one that relies on a type of endurance test that itself is an awe-inspiring endeavor (remember, the novels to which these authors study are all 600-plus-paged data troves).

The large departure in the authorship of Wikipedic Novels comes with the notion that these are *first-person narratives* that accomplish much of the "orientative-evaluative" qualities flagged by

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[88] In semantic home, think—homepage.
[89] Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget : A Manifesto*, (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 24
[90] Greif, "The Death," 29.
[91] Ercilino, *Maximalist*, 100.
[92] Ercilino, 100.

Eroclino. The "transparent" narration is a favorite technique of Postmodern authors, who regularly use it to transgress the carefully maintained ontological boundaries observed by realist and modernist writers—such a narrator can readily and incontrovertibly articulate the ideas of the author. As Brian Richardson stages *transparent narration*, "the narrator may be temporarily 'emptied' and his character dispensed with as the author speaks directly and sometimes incongruously through that character's mouth."[93] This speaking—the emptying of a narrator's information through a character living in world fraught with inputs—is at once the challenge and the vessel of the 21st century Wikipedic author.

How the Wikipedic Distinguishes Itself from the Encyclopedic

It is a critical commonplace that in the digital age attention spans have shrunk. *You can't assign long novels to the Facebook generation,* professors tell one another: do what you can to shave a hundred pages here (*Robinson Crusoe* without too much God in it) or five hundred there (Who needs *Middlemarch* when you can have "The Lifted Veil"?). Perhaps. You could make the case, though, that the new normal for artwork is . . . enormous. Epic. Global.

-David Letzler[94]

      I want to put pressure on the notion of length as a clear general association with novels in the Encyclopedic vein. For Ercolino, "length should be understood to be the indispensable material foundation of the maximalist narrative project: the container that has made and makes possible its existence as a highly experimental literary genre."[95] Length is perhaps a marketing tool used to good effect (even for non-Encyclopedic-but just-really-long novels like Proust's *Recherche*, surely volumes broken into three distinct books versus one, relatively compact version with narrow margins and microsomal font appeal differently to different readers. Think even at a smaller scale, of the visual cues from a Shakespeare collection from a Penguin Edition against a Norton Critical Edition). The Wikipedic Novel is shorter, but it does similar work to Encyclopedic/Maximalist texts. What might be sacrificed in length from the Encyclopedic to Wikipedic is beautifully rendered by David Letzler as "cruft," drawn from programming and Internet culture. Cruft (pulling a definition from Wikipedia itself), "refers to the characters that are relevant or meaningful only to the people who created the site, such as implementation details of the computer system that serves the page."[96] For instance, take the following hyperlink:
> "http://www.alexcatchings.angelfire.com/archive/olderfiles/drafts/graduateschool
> /Diss_Intro_v3_2020-04-21.docx"

Note all of the cruft—directories, version numbers, underscores, dates—pointless in final practice, but bearing some use at inception, cruft is truly residual *stuff*. Letzler believes that appendixes, footnotes, and excessive detail about scientific processes (like the ones Mendelson necessitates for encyclopedic modes) are not truly inserted to be read, but "to bewilder readers with the vastness and inaccessibility of that which it catalogs."[97] The impression of cruft is to reinforce

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[93] Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative : Theory, History, and Practice,* (Athens: The Ohio State University Press, 2015), 128-9.

[94] Letzler, David. "Encyclopedic Novels and the Cruft of Fiction: Infinite Jest's Endnotes." *Studies in the Novel* 44, no. 3 (April 20, 2012): 304 (emphasis in original). http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.berkeley.edu/stable/23406575.

[95] Ercolino, *Maximalist*, 21.

[96] Letzler, "Encyclopedic Novels and the Cruft," 304.

[97] Letzler, 304.

the author her or himself as the interlocutor of expert research, quirky knowledge, and eccentric attentiveness. For Letzler, the onslaught of detail and minutiae is rooted itself in something digital: "This encyclopedic cruft impresses upon us, I think, some humility in the face of our era's ever more easily accessible, but also ever more voluminous and unmanageable, information—most of which is, of course, utterly pointless, enticing only due to the occasional hidden gems obscured within it" (306) But if cruft is left out of the Wikipedic, what remains?

Presupposition. The Wikipedic is gestural more than it is an *actual* gesture of mastery (which the Encyclopedic Novel is). The heart of the material to impress is sieved of its cruft in the Wikipedic Novel, and in its place is a signifier—a leitmotif of intellectual range that elicits a similar feeling to Letzler of "bewilderment" or "humility." The Wikipedic Novel reader who is unable to keep pace with the rangy author, linking idea to idea, philosophy to philosophy, is left not to turn to Encyclopedias or Encarta 95, but to a smartphone, Google, and Wikipedia to fill the gap. An engagement that is possible with a shorter text and that realizes more fully the connection between the authority of a text over a reader. The Wikipedic Novel is, in this sense, like a Wikipedia page: nothing but a few paragraphs, but with linkages that take one to a range of other preestablished discussions.

This more intense relation to intertextuality and citationality works in tandem with Jonathan Culler's notion (building on Julia Kristeva's work) of presupposition and intertextuality, which creates discursive texts. Kristeva writes "Whatever the semantic content of a text . . . its condition as a signifying practice presupposes the existence of other discourses."[98] Culler goes on to expand upon linguistic constructions of presupposition, which are essential to the value of Wikipedic Novels. Presupposition is not defined in terms of speakers' or authors' beliefs; rather, it relates every sentence to a set of assumptions before the posed set of words. Culler offers how the sentence *Where did he go?* presupposes the idea that he went somewhere—a simple but useful example of the idea.[99] But presupposition becomes much more fraught and dynamic when mobilized through a first-person narrator trying to make meaning in a frenetic world of information. McCarthy's *Satin Island* is composed of single paragraph vignettes, broadly chronological but leaping across sentences that insinuate plot movement *and* narratorial growth: "*Had it, when these events took place, found its shape?*" begins section 6.10, which leaves the reader looking back to 6.9 to trace the antecedent to "it" and placing weight to the deictic reference to "these events."[100] It is a sensational hyperlinking that resembles a focus on steadiness in the form's narrative bull riding and also the reader's sense of information retention. It becomes more pronounced when the narrator considers how data centers work, imagining "a giant *über*-server, housed somewhere in Finland or Nevada or Uzbekistan: stacks of memory banks, satellite dishes sprouting all around them, pumping out information non-stop, more of it than any single person would need in their lifetime, pumping it all my way in an endless, unconditional and grace-conferring act of generosity. *Datum est:* it is given."[101] The connotations, ranginess, and force of the humor and irony presuppose a reader's ability to discern fact from absurdity.

All of this work helps us return to the difference between third- and first-person vessels for information. Third-person works allow for increased complexity with each character, who can recur and fade out of a scene or chapter, extending and contracting with the plot. First-person point of view lends itself more to burrowing the reader into meanderings and unreliable contemplations— fictitious memories, affect, and documentary. The first-person and brief, staccato nature of

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[98] Jonathan D. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs : Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002), 105.
[99] Culler, *The Pursuit*, 108.
[100] Tom McCarthy, *Satin Island: A Novel.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 63.
[101] McCarthy, *Satin Island.*, 74.

Wikipedic Novels do the work of stationary exercise bikes: much movement but little movement forward for plot itself. This helps rationalize why the three texts under study here have only the lightest of plots and slightest of protagonists, and why their inherent lengths can still resemble encyclopedism while shedding the maximal nature of sheer textuality insinuated by the form.

The Wikipedic Novel, then, can be characterized in the following ways:

- Novels bearing first-person narrators (often knowledge workers) that suggest omnivorous knowledge while bespeaking Internet research, opening digitally mediated forms of unreliability
- Novels that oscillate readerly trust between characters and external information, altering the experience of reading plot and character itself
- Novels that are intertextually digressive with ruptures in style
- Novels that deprioritize plot in favor of the presentation of ideas
- Novels whose characters traffic between online life and depictions of a social world
- Novels whose authors directly admit to using Wikipedia during the writing process

While this study analyzes three novels that classify as Wikipedic, others that fall under this subgenre include Barbara Browning's *I Am Trying to Reach You* (2012), Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), Joshua Cohen's *Book of Numbers* (2015), and Lucy Ellman's *Ducks, Newburyport*. Likewise, in unfurling the notion of clickability, this dissertation attempts to offer new ways of understanding Wikipedic gestures when reading prose.

CHAPTER II | THE EXPERT: VISUAL RHETORIC & *SATIN ISLAND'S POINT OF U.*

I. Acknowledgments
I should also mention Paul Rabinow, whom I've never met, but whose brilliantly formulated thoughts on the notion of 'the contemporary' I have freely and shamelessly lifted. *Satin Island*, like all books, contains hundreds of borrowings, echoes, remixes and straight repetitions. To list them all would take up as much space as the text itself. The critical reader can entertain him- or herself tracking some of them down, if he or she is that way inclined.

-Tom McCarthy[102]

What do we make of the chronology of expected forms? This is the second chapter of a dissertation—a fact that is center justified, spelled out in bold capital letters at the top of the page. There is a title that begins with a noun phrase, "The Expert," punctuated by a colon. That colon's twinned dots let us know to anticipate an explanation, a definition, or a list (I like to say the colon always precedes its "punchline.") Of course, we know this is the colon's function because there are no digits, which might otherwise suggest that the colon separates the book name of a religious text from its verses (as in "Quaran 10:5") or the hour, minutes, and seconds of a particular time (as in 10:04:00). The period behind the letter 'U' suggests that it is an abbreviation, since the 'i' in 'in' is lowercased. The italics of *Satin Island* indicates a proper noun—a title within the chapter's subtitle. And of course the 'I.' before 'Acknowledgments' is clearly to be read as the ordinal 'first' since it falls to the leftmost margin and boasts its own period (then again, looking at its inclusion in this paragraph it is easy to first encounter it homophonically as "I" sounded *aye*). The body of the block quotes, demarcated with its narrow margins and shrunken font, launches with the pronominal 'I,' which gives way to a deeply deferred antecedent. Only after the quote, suspended on an island of attribution, do we see that the 'I' refers to Tom McCarthy, whose novel is the focus of this chapter.

This mental relation between the visual sign of typography and the cognitive engagement with what language *does* has been characterized since poststructuralism as "visual rhetoric"—a field that is adjacent (if not conjoined in the last twenty years) to that of digital rhetoric.[103] This chapter explores the role visual rhetoric plays in the print novel's reckoning with its multimedial competitor, the computer screen. Through an extended reading of Tom McCarthy's 2015 novel *Satin Island*, I will show how the interface's rhetoric and post-Postmodern play with the typographic sign evokes a type of implied reader by *destabilizing* the reliability in what a narrator (and in turn, a novel) can know. Buttressing this argument is the notion of intertextuality. As McCarthy admits in the block quote above, his intertexts, or "borrowings, echoes, remixes and straight repetitions," are embedded in the novel's form.[104] While he lines these influences with a sonic quality, my argument is that visual rhetoric and the usual markers of narrative attribution in the novel invite readers to "hear" these extratextual echoes by *looking* them up online. This functionary cue of visual rhetoric is what I will

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[102] Tom McCarthy, *Satin Island: A Novel*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 191.

[103] Two major studies followed Roland Barthes' "Rhetoric of the Image": Jonathan Berger's 1972 *Ways of Seeing* and Rudolf Arnheim's 1969 *Visual Thinking*. Both helped formulate a foundational range of concepts that troubled the previously linguistic-bound usages of sign, signifier, and the connoted. The idea that moveable text itself is a form of image and interface expressed on a page is most recently theorized by Johanna Drucker, wherein she describes the user interface and the page as part of a "visual epistemology" that rests beneath a "language of form." See Johanna Drucker, *Graphesis: Visual Forms of Knowledge Production*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 12-3.

[104] McCarthy is not shy about his sense of literature's identity as a cannibal art. In his *Tradition and the Individual Remix* the author explicitly recalls T.S. Eliot's seminal treatise on depersonalization during artmaking. In McCarthy's view, contemporary literature is "a set of signals that have been repeating, pulsing, modulating in the airspace of the novel, poem, play—in their lines, between them and around them—since each of these forms began." See Tom McCarthy, *Tradition and the Individual Remix*, (New York: Vintage, 2012), 21.

call throughout the remainder of this dissertation "clickability," a readerly incitement hewn into the form of the novel due to the mutual interactions authors and their readers can have with the Internet.

McCarthy's novel (in a metafictional tradition) is a book about a book. Even more, it is a novel that makes manifest the challenges of maintaining faith in individual expertise against an increasingly collective "hive mind" in the networked Internet. *Satin Island*'s protagonist is an "in-house" corporate Anthropologist whose boss charges him with the task of writing "The Great Report," a text his company intends to use to better-understand all of society for capital gain. The glitch in point of view begins as soon as the narrator is introduced. In a Melvillian flourish to begin the second chapter, he says, "Me? Call me U."

By allowing the visual plane to blur with the homophonic subvocalization of the proper noun, a reader can hear "You" and momentarily interpret the novel (one focalized through a first-person narrator) as a narrative told in the second-person. In this way, *Satin Island* exploits a mandatory feature of novelistic form—point of view—using visual rhetoric. Across the novel, the anxious U. reveals a rangy collection of information and specious connections, probing for the most valuable insights into human nature to include in his Great Report while at once second-guessing his own fitness as an expert. While showcasing his training and admiration in structuralist approaches to anthropology, U. also attempts to make connections from the many screen interfaces around him, further complicating his pursuit for the ultimate truth. As the signs overwhelm his ability to write, he eventually wonders if "perhaps the truly terrifying thought wasn't that the Great Report might be un-writable, but—quite the opposite—that it had already been written. Not by a person, nor even by some nefarious cabal, but simply by a neutral and indifferent binary system that had given rise to itself, moved by itself and would perpetuate itself: some auto-alphaing and auto-omegating script."[105] Of course, U. is positioning the Internet as a superior aggregator of knowledge, undermining his own expertise.[106]

This novel is a digressive and full-blooded satire whose commentaries on the contemporary moment are aggressive and opaque. Phil Hogan reads *Satin Island* as a novel with "single-minded zeal and businesslike numbered paragraphs" that creates "a feeling here of being hemmed in, of horizons narrowing as the futility of trying to know everything becomes understandably apparent."[107] Cynthia Quarrie, on the other hand, reads the novel as a meditation on British avant-garde exceptionalism: in her view, U. is a figure for British literature's post-colonial melancholy—a narrator who "addresses the materiality of shame and the way that it manifests itself in the text as an anxiety about anthropology and writing," penned by a Tom McCarthy who "is not interested in preserving culture or identity" but instead "is interested precisely in the detritus that is the material legacy of the production of identity," and—crucially for Quarrie—British identity.[108] Timothy Beyes, in a more Marxist bent, emphasizes the *purpose* of the Great Report as a critique of "performance studies," which organizes the decentralized labor of the 21st century.[109] In this postulation, U.'s company and

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105 McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 133.

106 Concerns about the death of expertise have been expansive. See range from Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, (New York: Knopf, 1963) to Damian Thompson, *Counterknowledge : How We Surrendered to Conspiracy Theories, Quack Medicine, Bogus Science and Fake History*, (London: Atlantic, 2009), which was penned in response to science's cooptation and redistribution through the Internet amidst the 2020-21 pandemic.

107 Phil Hogan, "Satin Island by Tom McCarthy Review – a Brief Theory of Everything," *The Guardian*, 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/22/satin-island-tom-mccarthy-review.

108 Cynthia Quarrie, "Sinking, Shrinking, *Satin Island*: Tom McCarthy, the British Novel, and the Materiality of Shame," *Journal of Modern Literature*, 41 (2) (2018), 152.

109 Timon Beyes, "'The Machine Could Swallow Everything,'" in *Performing the Digital*, ed Martina Leeker et al, (Berlin: Verlag, 2017), 229-44.

his anxiety to simply be *productive* under scrutiny exemplifies the next step to Lyotard's Postmodern condition, which anticipated an emergently vital "performativity criterion" in multinational capitalism: a general heuristic for understanding and assessing organizational "performance" in order to better-organize both labor space and worker identity."[110] All of these rich readings account for U. as a specific type of "you," be that a claustrophobic reader, a melancholic British subject, or the open office member of the technocratic proletariat. I read U. as a much broader subject—the dissolving expert in the 21st century, whose modes of reading and information management fall prey to the ineluctable tool of the open web—specifically, of Open-Source collaborative modes of information gathering and amendment, typified by Wikipedia, YouTube, or the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The informatic access to data in all of its mediatic permutations makes possible the widespread understanding of the ontological entity signified by "You" in YouTube or "My" in MySQL.[111] U. is situated as a particularly polymorphous entity of potential and the past: he is at once the promise of informational collectivity, a vestige of the 19th Century British Empire's imperializing determination supported by the burgeoning discipline of Anthropology, and also the metaphor for the singular, everyday user of the Internet.

This chapter's argument is not merely that McCarthy's protagonist is cleverly named to represent a blurred knowledgebase of the singular and the collective, but further that *Satin Island* deploys visual rhetoric to blur the informational ownership of the Internet's interface, its carrier devices, and the physical book's pages that have long been the vessel of literary citationality. This visual rhetoric serves as a specific mode of 21st realism that I call *virtual* realism—an engagement with language that adopts the semantic blur between the many words and interfaces people see on web browsers against the text that books bear.

Unlike expressly experimental novels that verge on book artistry to understand the adaptation of the traditional codex to hypermedia and the Internet's fragile form,[112] *Satin Island* evinces an analog-print-based hypermedia that draws on traditional means of literary meaning-making. As I modeled in the vignette to begin this chapter, visual rhetoric (which is timeless and distinct from digital user interfaces) can now, in the 21st century, make the rhetorical act of seeing into a referential "mouseover effect"—the iconographic metaphor of the pointer converting to a pointed finger from the desktop on text than can lead to another text. This effect in realist literature is the moment that previously navigable moments of visual rhetoric become prone to a decidedly more *assertive* social obligation. At one time, critics who believed hypertext novels (hyperfiction) would win the 21st century felt that more novels would bear literal hypertext linkages and be read on computers. Ironically, such a posture was most pervasive in the early 1990s, foreshadowing the Dot-Com Boom's iteration of late capital, wherein technology was designed with "planned obsolescence," to be of only temporary use as the next, newer iteration was being engineered in the wings of research and development labs. And yet literary critic George Landow vociferously planned the novel's obsolescence in 1993 as he imagined "hypertext presentations of books (or the equivalent) in which the reader can call up all the reviews and comments on that book, which would then inevitably exist

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[110] Beyes, "Machine Could Swallow," 236.

[111] SQL is short for "structured query language," and MySQL is the relational database management system that—after a user codes commands—executes much of the information retrieval and interpretive insights for today's "Digital Humanities" projects that allow for "distant reading."

[112] Here, I think of five key novels that attempt to reconcile the Internet's formlessness with the book codex's formal capacity: Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), Ellen Ullman's *The Bug* (2003) Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (2008), Steven Hall's *Raw Shark Texts* (2008), and Matthew McIntosh's *TheMystery.doc* (2017). These novels incorporate copious footnotes, literal hyperlinks, ink-printed lines of object-oriented programming language, screenshots, and unconventional typeset that allows pages to feel claustrophobic or strangely mute—all explicitly to reckon with mediated life.

as part of a complex dialogue rather than as the embodiment of a voice or thought that speaks unceasingly" since hypertext linking "tends to change the roles of author and reader" and thus "also changes the limits of the individual text."[113] Landow found promise in the ancillary materials that could be placed within the primary text without creating the "fixed hierarchies of status and power" between the conventional printing press's margins and body text. To Landow's credit, these hopes and versions of digital, textual formatting have come to fruition, but they have certainly not become a cultural dominant.[114]

However, the print novel *can* (and I believe *is*) read in ways Landow thought were only possible with his version of the desktop Hypertext during the infancy of web browser.[115] Largely, my conception of the "clickable" hypertext latent in the *print* novel is possible because the desktop computer has become rapidly supplemented by a new species of mobile communication convergence—smartphones and tablets—that offer the affordance of portability one might expect from a book. The simple principle of portability is deeply underestimated by the ludic overtures of literary nostalgists and (for now) hampers the futurist vision of hyperfiction devotees. In Sven Birkerts' prophetically cautionary jeremiad *The Gutenberg Elegies* of 1994, he claims "[e]verything in contemporary society discourages interiority. More and more of our exchanges take place via circuits, and in the very nature of those interactions are such as to keep us hovering in the virtual now, a place away from ourselves."[116] A decade later, Birkerts notes in "The Book and the Web" how he admires Nicholas Carr's assertion that "the net seizes our attention to scatter it."[117] Both of these popular commentators' accounts of digital attentiveness implies an ocular sense of subjectivity: the self can see another version of itself, miniature, rectangular, and with latency snapped to the corner of a video chat. As Birkerts sees it, the ontic person of the "virtual now" is distinct from the embodied person who sees that virtual self from afar, and Carr seems to suggest that interiority—the site at which accreted information processes the new—is made porous and less inhabited as the Internet overpopulates the sensorium and cognitive capacity of the embodied self.[118]

But what of the embodied self who reads a physical book? What are the odds that a person who curls up on a couch with a book in the year 2020 will *not* have a smartphone in reach, if not for the Internet, to be idly open for a message from a spouse, friend, or child? While ease of pre-determined links is not integrated into the print book, the *capacity* to search a referent or pursue a subjective concern about the novel's contents is more than manifestly possible.[119] And it is this

[113] George P. Landow, *Hypertext 2.0*, (Baltimore,: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 117.

[114] One pioneering work of hyperfiction was J. Yellowless Douglas's *I Have Said Nothing* (1993), which was the first anthologized hyperfiction when an abbreviated version was published in 1996's *Norton Anthology*. Rendered on the hyperfiction platform Storyspace, the work tracks the lives of people in the aftermath of a pair of car accidents. And still, for its pioneering role, it sits in the shadow of the Whitney Houston ballad *I Have Nothing* as a conspicuous cultural treasure of 1993. Douglas reflects on the hypertext ideology he envisioned in 2000. See J. Yellowlees Douglas, *The End of Books--or Books without End?: Reading Interactive Narratives* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), esp 31-39

[115] Others have found the notion of hypertextuality in experimental fiction. See especially Hayles on *House of Leaves;* N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 108-131.

[116] Birkerts, *Gutenberg*, 204.

[117] Birkerts, 200.

[118] Birkerts' understanding of a "virtual now" and its relation to embodied cognition is not the only one—Friedrich Kittler provocatively suggests that any digitized channel or piece of information is indistinguishable once it is converted into binary for transmission, for "sound and image, voice and text are reduced to surface effects, known to consumers as interface" that "sense and the senses turn into eyewash." Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1999), 32.

[119] See Alexander S. Dent, "What's a Cellular Public?" *Anthropological Quarterly* 91, no. 2 (2018), 581–601. Dent draws on Michael Warner's notion of a "public" from *Public Culture* (2002) as a "dynamic mode of subjectivity associated with text production and reception" (quoted in Dent 582). This public, Dent argues, is a "coral reef-like agglutination of sensate bodies . . . thought of as visually engaging with public-cultural texts, though sound, smell, touch, and taste are often just

notion of authorial predetermination—this hyperfictional debate drawing on deconstructive questions of readerly and writerly authority—that elicits my preoccupation with visual rhetoric in the realist text. It was earlier mentioned that previously navigable moments of visual rhetoric have become prone to a more *assertive* social obligation: this notion of mimetic assertion animates my discussion of visual rhetoric. Realist depictions of the contemporary moment become instances of mimetic assertion when novels are read alongside the Internet as a medium for social and informatic life. My commitment to mimesis aligns with Barbara Foley, who sees the shopworn, structuralist "hypostatization of elements such as linguistic texture, ontology, and affective response" in understandings of mimesis as resulting from "a textual fetishism that insists upon fragmenting mimetic communication into its component parts and divesting it of its social significance."[120]

When Tom McCarthy dismisses his own novel's "critical reader" seeking to track some of the author's potential referents, he implies that individual work can be read on its own terms, with no need for an individual citation's valuation or extratextual appraisal. This sense of a work of art echoes Roman Ingarden, whose phenomenological approach to mimesis suggests that "we remain in the realm of the work itself without taking an interest in extraliterary reality."[121] In Ingarden's view, "the semantic units, clothed in particular sound materials, project an intuitive material permeated with special materially colored qualities, which allows the reader to apprehend just that qualitative cluster of values which arises as a necessary phenomenon from such intuitive material."[122] McCarthy, though, cannot affiliate his work with this view of language, in part because he commits so deeply to the Postmodern peppering of brand names and the general self-conscious ethos that there is no such thing as originality, given his keen attention to how contemporary technology affects his own novels' diegetic space.

Much of *Satin Island* is precisely about how highly specific modes of contemporary information technology affect its protagonist. This moves the mimetic mode of interpretation to one that aligns with Foley's argument that it is "only when the authorial subject is viewed as a social subject rooted in a specific historical context . . . that the propositional content and assertive force of the text can be fully appreciated" (43). As Foley convincingly notes, "*Waverley* would not persuade its readers to take a certain view of historical processes if its Bonnie Prince Charlie did not signify the real Pretender; the J.P. Morgan who appears in Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* is not merely a fictional character who comments in a general way upon the depredations of capital."[123] Based on the terms of realist detail just rehearsed, I will show how McCarthy's deliberate attempt to pastiche or critique the project of Postmodern representation in the informatic age ultimately magnifies a new way of understanding realist representation in the novel. Ever since the novel became the leading literary genre in the Victorian moment, realism has been rooted in its social reflexivity, be it from tracking an emerging middle class at a moment commensurate with the printing press's rise, a response to Darwin's social theories in naturalist novels, or Soviet Socialist Realism's aim to "develop the revolutionary self-consciousness of the proletariat" against a tradition of novelistic, bourgeois romanticism.[124] Across all of these moments, narratorial description and detail have catalyzed the manifold political possibilities of "seeing" across class and alterity.

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as relevant" (Ibid.) His article ties this notion of a legible, textual public to the invariant ubiquity of smartphones, affirming the devices as virtual hubs for private, subjective public engagement through a digital commons.

[120] Foley, Barbara. *Telling the Truth: The Theory and Practice of Documentary Fiction*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) 41.

[121] Roman Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art,* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 48.

[122] Foley, "Telling," 42.

[123] Foley, 46-7.

[124] Maksim Gorky, "Comments on Socialist Realism," in *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 374.

Of course, point of view is the primary mechanism that enables description and detail to develop. As I will argue in this chapter, the visual rhetoric and thematics in *Satin Island* place together a partial representation of an *information* society—a slightly more egalitarian collective of *possible* data apprehension.[125] Where character typologies might have previously embodied the society due for critique (think of Dickens' minor characters or Proust's Marcel saying "that one ought not to take an interest in particular facts except in relation to their general significance.")[126] Yet rather than depicting a stable set of exterior sources through which the first-person protagonist U. marshals sense data to account for his relevance as a professional anthropologist, he instead faces a typology of "the Internet," which is actually composed of *many* people unknowable to Tom McCarthy, the novel reader, and the fictional anthropologist. In positioning an abstract network of collectivity at odds with a singular expert, the irony of the battle sits in its explication—in the visual rhetoric that enunciates knowledge of the fictionally rendered expert, whose own knowledge and its traces are subject to clickable verification. The novel form's holdover of *antirealist* modernist techniques (unmarked dialogue, non-attributive citation, irregular chapter division) ultimately create a visual rhetoric that invites into the supposedly closed novel form a trace of an Open-Sourced and anonymous collective. The virtual realism thus fits into the novel's very constitution of mimetic representation.

Diegetic Clickability

This novel is this project's paradigmatic Wikipedic Novel for reasons both formal and informal. Formally, its narrative is literally mimics the interfaces of two informational aggregators: Wikipedia and the Bible. Before U. is revealed as the narrator, *Satin Island* begins with one full chapter of knowledge belonging to an anonymous narrator speaking in the first person. Whether the name U. is any less anonymous than a mere first-person pronoun is up to the discretion of any given reader. The first sentence is a half-hearted gesture of ekphrasis: "Turin is where the famous shroud is from, the one showing Christ's body supine after crucifixion: hands folded over genitals, eyes closed, head crowned with thorns."[127]

Typographically, the first edition Vintage print presents a "Radley" font. Each of the fourteen chapters is marked by typical center-justified numerals: 1. 2. 3. 4. However, each of the paragraphs is numbered as a type of "subsection." The first paragraph of the first chapter is marked with a "1.1," but because of the stylistic particularities of the Radley font each digit "1" forces an alphanumeric blur with the letter "I," as the Roman Numeral substitutes the typically tapered digit 1. And so, to look at the first page is to see a triptych of redundancy preceding the first line—an insinuation of whom the owner of the knowledge likely is. Chapter I. section I.I—me, me, me: but then the first morsel of narrative comes from a surprisingly neutral point of view. It is an opinion embedded with a fact, inflecting the narrative with an extratextual verifiability in an ekphrastic gesture that enunciates a known materiality. The description of scantness and the particularity of the

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[125] The term "information society"—which is commonly accepted as the successor to Daniel Bell's so-called "Post-Industrial Society" of the 1970s—is also interchangeably called the "Network Society," as depicted by Manuel Castells in his 1996 *Information Age Vol. 1*. The Information society, while a somewhat effete term due to incessant reuse and mutation, has more recently been called "data colonialism." See Nick Couldry and Ali Mejias Ulises, *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*, (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2019), 15. In their iteration, human life becomes the direct input of capitalism as it is sieved through data collected by "tethered devices" through which humans connect to "the infrastructures of data collection."

[126] Translated in Christopher Eagle, "On 'This' and 'That' in Proust: Deixis and Typologies in À La Recherche Du Temps Perdu," *MLN* 121, no. 4 (December 12, 2006), 1000.

[127] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 3.

next sentence, "The image isn't really visible on the bare linen" brings with it intimacy's textures: the informality of the approximation ("not *really*") evokes the concentrated squinting of prolonged examination and a known presence not fully communicable—a transmission of casual imperfection (3). The shroud's "bare linen" is evocative; it is literally sheer exposure. And by the third sentence the intimacy recedes, making way for a clinical yet incomplete fact: it only emerged in the nineteenth century. The knowledge here careens between objective guesstimation and internally focalized judgment. The narrator knows enough history to summarize three hundred years' worth of narrative about the Turin shroud, but that knowledge is not precise enough to identify the name of "some amateur photographer" or precisely what year the shroud was carbon dated. And yet, in a flourish of confident transhistorical omniscience, the narrator can also surmise the reaction of the masses in those indistinct years of the 1250s (Ibid).

The narrator confidently extrapolates that the historical inaccuracies of the religious fabric, when exposed by science, will not shake the faith of Christ's believers: "People need foundation myths, some imprint of year zero, a bolt that secures the scaffolding that in turn holds fast the entire architecture of reality, of time: memory-chambers and oblivion-cellars, walls between eras, hallways that sweep us on towards the end-days and the coming whatever-it-s. We see things shroudedly, as through a veil, an over-pixellated screen" (Ibid). The shroud, as it turns out, is to be understood as a totem of belief—an anchoring of the material world with the flesh of divinity and enduring into linear time, tethering Christ's attestation to the most corporeally yoked relic that was said to be buried with him. The shroud is the most intimate piece of known physical evidence for Christ's existence, well beyond the shards of the cross for his crucifixion, the two nails allegedly discovered in a 2,000-year-old tomb in Jerusalem, or the two pieces of media associated with him (the Dead Sea Scrolls and the corroborative accounts of his existence across the various Gospels composing the Bible itself).[128] And yet, the narrator brings the lines of faith into an account of contemporary media that perfectly accounts for the novel's emphasis on rendering present tense. The shroud, narrated to begin the passage in what Paul K. Saint-Amour calls the "literary present tense,"[129] rapidly shifts in examination from the attendant position of a current viewing in an unknown narrative time to a resolute past tense.

This proximity of past and present, of form and the codex book's visual rhetoric, perfectly models the technology of reading since the bible. As Alan Liu posits (thinking about Peter Stallybrass's "Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible") the Bible's indexical evolution for preachers and university teachers brought subject indexes, reference tools, numbered manuscripts, numbered folios, and chapter divisions to create 'systematic methods of discontinuous reading . . . The codex and the printed book were the indexical computers that Christians adopted as its privileged technologies.'"[130] And at once the codex accommodated 'the *combination* of the ability to scroll with the capacity for random access" and was thus "a technology of discontinuity."[131] In this

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[128] G.A. Wells provides an extensive case for Jesus Christ's existence. For his discussion of the Dead Sea Scrolls see G. A. Wells, *The Historical Evidence for Jesus*, (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1982), 17.

[129] The term, extended from Peter Brooks's use in *Reading for the Plot*, allows "long-dead writers to feel like colleagues" by referring to their quotations in the present tense—we as critics "us[e] the literary present to confer on canonical authors' words the status of general knowledge. Quoted in Paul K. Saint-Amour, "The Literary Present," *ELH* 85, no. 2 (2018), 382.

[130] Peter Stallybrass likens the Bible to contemporary computing, noting how its physical nature provokes "the combination of the ability to scroll with the capacity for random access." See Alan Liu, *Friending the Past : The Sense of History in the Digital Age*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 83; and also Jennifer Andersen et al, "Chapter 2: Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England : Material Studies*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 42-79.

[131] Liu, *Friending the Past*, 83.

understanding, the Turin shroud's strongest ally for what the narrator calls an "origin story" to Christianity is the book form—its visual rhetoric, its glossings and gleanings that place the narrative and particulars of Christ into conversation and corroboration. The anachronistic futurism of the notion that "we see things shroudedly, as through a veil, an over-pixelled screen" implicates the implied reader(s) into an idyllic vision of centralized knowledge—one in which a primeval figure of knowledge, faith, and fidelity is mediated by a translucent layer. The disembodied voice speaking for "we" then abruptly reveals his first-person position in section 1.2 (alternately known as *the next paragraph*) to describe how, "One evening, a few years ago, I found myself stuck in Turin. Not in the city, but the airport: Torino-Caselle. Lots of other people did too: nothing was taking off. The phrase *Await Announcements* multiplied, stacked up in columns on the information screens, alternately in English and Italian" and in waiting, "I sat, like everyone else, sifting through airline- and airport-pages on my laptop for enlightenment about our quandary—then, when I'd exhausted these, clicking through news sites and social pages, meandering along corridors of trivia, generally killing time."[132] Ending this "section," paragraph 1.3 begins, "That's when I read about the shroud. When done reading about that I started reading about hubs. Torino-Caselle is a hub-airport. There was a page on their website explaining what that is" (Ibid). After describing how the map on the website looked like "Jesus' crown, with all its jutting prongs" he confesses that a "link took me to an external page that explained how the hub-model was used in fields ranging from freight to distributed computing" and in a short while "I was reading about flanges, track sprockets and bearings in bicycle construction. Then I clicked on *freehub*," learning that these "incorporate splines—mating features for rotating elements—and a ratchet mechanism, built into the hub itself (rather than adjacent to or above it, as in previous, non-freehub models (whose temporary disengagement permits coasting."[133] There is no need to carbon-date the origins of the narrator's information: it is from Wikipedia. To click on that same italicized link from the novel, *freehub*, in Wikipedia launches a striking page of loose facsimile.

The foundational elements of the narrator's description are themselves hyperlinked in blue, and the elements that have been collapsed into summary are easy to spot due to their progression of ideas both in and outside the novel—the last detail from the introductory description actually mentions how "A freewheel mechanism allows a rider to stop pedaling whilst the cycle is still in forward motion" and the narrator acknowledges in his final parentheses that coasting is the result of the "temporary disengagement" of non-freehub models (i.e. freewheels, which the Wikipedia page says "freehubs have replaced" before describing the coasting).[134] Because we are already visually comparing one page to one screen, it is useful to note the "Contents" box that adorns the top left of all Wikipedia pages. This classification system is, according to Wikipedia's own page on its contents, a page that "can and should be divided into sections, using the section heading syntax. For each page with more than three section headings, a table of contents (TOC) is automatically generated." The box of contents "floats" near the content and is optimally to be placed at the end of the "lead section of the text" (the unattributed, introductory overview of the topic, as we saw the narrator draw from on the Freehub page.) The formatting recommendations on the website take into account that "users of screen readers do not expect any text between the TOC and the first heading, and having no text above the TOC is confusing," revealing a typical User Interface orientation toward how knowledge ought to be oriented and toward the variability of reading apparatuses for

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132 McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 4.
133 McCarthy, 5.
134 "Freehub." (2021, April 15). In *Wikipedia*

any given user.[135] While the *Freehub* table of contents rendered above is composed of five, discrete composite links, when more substantial Wikipedia pages have various subsections, the contents can look more like the figure to the right. Here, in the actual contents for the Wikipedia page *on* Wikipedia itself, the main sections are indexed with a round digit. Subsections are categorically marked with a decimal—precisely in the same way *Satin Island*'s paragraphs are marked.[136]

Indeed, the typographic visual rhetoric of this novel is enacting some type of presentism in its own right—the page simulates the 21st century Wikipedic screen while at once drawing attention to the visual formatting of the Bible.[137] Once the at-first omniscient knowledge winnows down to a narrating-I, then this narrator divulges that his sections are built on a free-association not far from a type of associative clickbait, portions like the above language on freehubs ultimately belong neither to the narrator nor the flesh-and-blood Tom McCarthy, in full. Rather, the language is sourced from an online encyclopedia with no center that is culpable to change at any second. And so, this language from the novel is neither the narrator's, the novelist's, the reader's nor necessarily any one person's strict writing on Wikipedia (depending on editing permissions). When it is finally revealed that the reader should "call me U." in the second chapter, the informational dynamic commits to both an irresolute interface that does not wholly commit to duplicating Wikipedia, and also a feeble narrator—an expert knowledge-producer—whose entire motivation for the plot is his lack of belief in his own ability to produce "The Great Report."

Beyond the manner in which the visual nonattribution of the text recalls the interfaces of Wikipedia and the Bible, the direct references to each make this text operate as a form of what Lev Manovich calls meta-media: forms of media that "preserve the granularity and syntactical structure of the old media object, while giving us new ways to navigate it, to experience its structure, to compress and expand our views of the object, and to interactively control it."[138] In this case, the book form pulls at two axes, reinvigorating the Bible's indexical form while metabolizing the interface of Wikipedia.[139] This positions McCarthy's novel as a text with an encoded interface by

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[135] Lori Emerson draws a direct connection between linguistics and computers, arguing that "interface brings with it strong messages of its own" that is only partially translatable to other media. She explicitly points to an Open-Source interface: Google, which she acknowledges creates an interface where users "are quietly guided through the process of searching with autocompleted phrasal searches, answering questions before we have even finished forming our questions, and selling 'ourselves and our language back to us.'" These facets of the data colonization cross language with organized interfaces. In drawing the two together, Emerson offers another way into my contention here, which is that the language of interface brings with it compulsions to search the language that is transposed from one medium to another. See Lori Emerson, *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound*, (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2014) 144, 146.

[136] *Satin Island*'s adapted mimicry of Wikipedia's form enacts a longer history of typographic cooptation as texts evolve. Roger Chartier argues that there are many "ways in which transformations of material typography (in the broadest sense of the word) have profoundly changed the uses, circulation, and understanding of the 'same' text," from variants of the bible's divisions and numbering across editions to the English theater's transition of Elizbethan scripts—without the divisions acts and scenes—to the 18th century French's more user-friendly conventions, replete with stage directions. These adjustments to typography and interface would adapt reader usability in a manner that *Satin Island*'s paratextual divisions echo. Roger Chartier, *Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer*, (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 21-22.

[137] To be clear, visual rhetoric here is the literal optical messaging of language as a part of the page's interface. For others on book pages as interface see Pino Trogu, "The Image of the Book: Cognition and the Printed Page," *Design Issues (MIT)*, 31.3 (2015), especially the discussion of spatiality on pp. 37-38.

[138] Lev Manovich, "Understanding Hybrid Media," (2007), http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/055-understanding-hybrid-media/52_article_2007.pdf.

[139] Manovich conspicuously excludes the novel in a list of examples of "remixing of previous cultural forms of a given media (most visible in music, architecture, design, and fashion), and a second type of remixing – that of national cultural traditions into the medium of globalization." This, he argues, positions meta-media as a "remixing of interfaces of various cultural forms and of new software techniques—in short, the remix of culture and computers." In the case of

discretely, visually, and perhaps permissively bespeaking its source texts and functionary antecedents without betraying the origins of *Satin Island*'s borrowings.

U. and You: Open-Source Visual Rhetoric

The Sebaldian-style prose integrates the dialogue of the novel into the narration without speech markers, heightening the double-entendre of U.'s name and maintaining the loose attribution of the novel, as in this moment when U. first accounts for his appointment to the Great Report by his boss, Peyman:

> The Great Report: this needs explaining. It was Peyman's idea. When he first hired me, as he shook my hand to welcome me onboard, he fixed me with his gaze and said: U., write the Great Report. The Great Report? I asked, my hand still clenched in his; what's that? The Document, he said; the Book. The First and Last Word on our age. Over and above all the other work you'll do here at the Company, that's what I'm really hiring you to come up with. It's what you anthropologists are for, right? [140]

The project is described in biblical terms. The visual rhetoric of the Great Report marks both the document and its characterizing language with reverential capitalization as the "First" and "Last Word" in the new Book. However, the task is a decidedly secular one—one that seems to play God in a way that positions Peyman as a neo-Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness*, for he assures U. that this Great Report "won't be composed in a study; it will come out of the jungle, breaking cover like some colourful, fantastic beast, a species never seen before, a brand-new genus" that proves "[w]e're the noblest savages of all" (62). In his excitement for The Company to produce this document, he insists that "you, U., are the one to write it. . ." to "name what's taking place right now" (Ibid). U., overwhelmed, asks, "What form should it take? To whom it should be addressed?" before being dismissed with no answers. [141] The challenge posed in this moment is one that has been tirelessly theorized in Postmodern writing: the challenge (if not impossibility) of "making it new" and the question of textuality in general as a stable vessel for meaning. The formal slippages I have outlined so far, from the Wikipedic/biblical numbering to the speech presented "in concealed form" (as Bakhtin would have it) to the homophonic play on U. all risk registering as old hat—the shrewd maneuvers that Postmodern masters from Pynchon to Calvino and Acker have managed in their novels' breadth and experimental forms. But it is the stability of this narrator, U., that interests me. U.'s name represents the paradox of the individual and the collective of people named "Who matter[s] Most" and "Person of the Year" in 2006 by *Business 2.0* and *Time* magazine: You—and the concomitant subjective position of the discrete individuals of that collective coming to use "their" own materials.[142] The *Business 2.0* article acknowledges that "You—or rather, the collaborative intelligence of tens of millions of people, the networked you—continually create and filter new

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Satin Island's optical relation to Wikipedia, the novel metabolizes the interface of the computer, thereby "encoding," and I accede this is subliminal, an allowance for the external pursuit of the information inscribed in the book bound text.

[140] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 60-61.

[141] In this case, the "you" that seems to bespeak a constituent reader-character blur also draws on the most recent annex to metafiction, autofiction. For more on autofiction and data in the digital commons, see Sian Petronella Campbell, "On the Record: Time and The Self As Data in Contemporary Autofiction," *M/C Journal* 22 (2019), 6.

[142] For a greater discussion of the relationship between the content producers of the Open-Source and the evolving definition of what the word "publish" means, see Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing without Organizations*, (London: Penguin Press, 200), 44-51.

forms of content, anointing the useful, the relevant, and the amusing and rejecting the rest . . ." while *Time* does more to describe the tools of this collective in this particular year:

> But look at 2006 through a different lens and you'll see another story, one that isn't about conflict or great men. It's a story about community and collaboration on a scale never seen before. It's about the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace. It's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes.[143]

These egalitarian overtures are quite different than the reading provided by Wendy Chun, who has explained how the pronouns "my" and "you" motivate the formation of Internet users more insidiously: as drug users. For Chun, *software produces* users, and the term user, resonating with "drug user," discloses every programmer's dream: to create an addictive product.[144] Users are produced by benign software interactions, from reassuring sounds that signify that a file has been saved to folder names such as "my documents" that stress personal computer ownership. Computer programs shamelessly use shifters, pronouns like "my" and "you," that address dress you, and everyone else, as a subject—an interpellating maneuver fit for Adorno that hails each user with each glance at "My Computer" while at once showing that they are situated as subjects only because the computer itself exists." The common denominator between these two constructions of subjectivity is of course the act of reading, so it is providential to consider how the novel invokes both sides of these cultural logics: a popular understanding of the reader's collative/contributive role online and the reader also as a consumer. This is in alignment with the types of skepticism pervasive in recent studies on the dissolution of expertise—Thomas Nichols's fear that society is "witnessing the death of the ideal of expertise itself, a Google-fueled, Wikipedia-based, blog-sodden collapse of any division between professionals and laypeople, students and teachers, knowers and wonders," and, as we see through the literal visual rhetoric of the novel's form, book authors and book readers.[145] This strand of self-conscious interface convergence also extends from the "interface" of the novel into its exploration of the mythos of expertise.

Humanist Experts vs. Cultural Aggregators

If *Satin Island* bears a visual rhetoric in both name and typographical layout, it also models the strangeness of expertise's visual rhetoric as its characters deify the possibility of experts of centralized knowledge in the cultural arbiters of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Leibniz.[146] Institutionalism is at the heart of *Satin Island*—the corporate and academic domains are at odds as U. struggles to determine his own fitness for his job, for he is one of those rare humanities academics poached from the ivory tower for corporate profit. U.'s Ph.D. dissertation involved infiltrating the London nightclub scene and "helping direct crowds to these [illicit raves] through coded messages put out on

[143] Lev Grossman, "You — Yes, You — Are TIME's Person of the Year," *Time Magazine*, 2006. http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1570810,00.html.

[144] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016), 15.

[145] In a 2020 interview with Amanpour & Company, Thomas Nichols acknowledges that his book (see bibliography) was written in direct response to the campaigns of misinformation wrought during and after the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V50HMNB4qX4.

[146] McCarthy's novel situates the societal potential of Lévi-Strauss's structural understanding of the world against the corporatization of Leibniz's work setting the foundations of computing and, eventually, the systematic digital archive of society's data. The canonization of these two figures within university halls and technology corporations informs the novel's investment in the influence of institutionalism.

pirate radio stations, cellular networks, and the array of whisper-lines that spring up around this type of dubious activity."[147] His thesis, he notes, became a "famous" book not for "the insight it afforded in the *demimonde* or 'mindset' or whatever you want to call it of clubbers, but rather the book's frequent and expansive 'asides' in which I meditated on contemporary ethnographic method and its various quandaries."[148] After an underhanded fame ("Rather than 'made me famous,' it would be more accurate to say that the book 'garnered me some attention'—the odd public reading, the odd newspaper review") U. is grateful that it was enough press to allow Peyman to discover his work, explaining how the profiteer knew to "pluck me from the dying branches of academia and re-graft me inside the febrile hothouse of his company" (26). U. is not the only poached talent: Daniel, his office neighbor who "was a visual-culture guy" is an avant-garde short filmmaker turned video editor for The Company (Ibid). The corporation sieves fringe talents from exclusive (often illegible) domains in order to manipulate mass culture. And yet U. describes both Daniel's and his own fitness for their positions as rooted in juvenilia—Daniel bears just two short films before steering the company's visual culture department. U., whose own work's value is not actually in the *work* itself, but rather his peripheral commentary, is asked to generate society's master text. The Company is able to find value in the more minor operators of fringe domains, and this sort of speculative onboarding actually affiliates U.'s sense of intellectualism with Peyman's social project. It becomes transparent as both men describe their academic heroes—for Peyman, Gottfried Leibniz, and for U., Claude Lévi-Strauss.

The abstract value of cultural institutions partially drives *Satin Island*, and the legitimacy of their value is drawn from their names. McCarthy merges the parodic titles of institutions with some that are verifiably extratextual with no clear irony, creating a pull toward clickability. U. recounts an interview Peyman has with *Consulting Today* magazine, in which the boss describes the point of their corporation: "If I had to, he'd say, to sum up, in a word, what we (the Company, that is) essentially do, I'd choose not *consultancy* or *design* or *urban planning*, but *fiction*. Fiction? Asks the interviewer (this one comes from *Consulting Today*—but he says the same thing in his *Urban Futures* profile; and in the RIBA transcripts.)"[149] Peyman goes on to describe how the Company was commissioned by the EU to "imagine what a concrete affirmation of a European commonality might look like—purely speculatively" and they in turn produced a fake flag "more like a rainbow bar-code formed of strips of all the colours of the member-nations' flags" that is Photoshopped into images with the EC president, at entrances to governmental buildings, and in especially compromising photos. Eventually, as the public goes into a "furor" about the reality of the signs, progressives begin producing real ones and, Peyman explains, "Fiction was what engendered them and held them in formation. We should view all propositions and all projects this way" (Ibid). This section of the novel aggressively entrenches *Satin Island*'s investment in visual rhetoric. McCarthy's hallmark thematic of repetition occurs here, when U. interrupts his account of the *Consulting Today* interview to parenthetically announce *Consulting Today* and *Urban Futures* as corroborative duplicates of the fictional Peyman's remarks.[150] The italicized proper nouns are ostensibly asked to be looked up—the realist effect of these phony titles bespeak their own typological force, parodying the insistence on timely temporalities with *Today* and *Futures* appended to the bastions (or perhaps even, bastards) of

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[147] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 24.

[148] McCarthy, 24.

[149] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 47.

[150] For more on McCarthy's investment in replication see S E B. Franklin, "Repetition; Reticulum; Remainder," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* (August 2017).

financialization: Consulting and Urbanity.[151] The representation of a social caste is made here, yet they are fictions, although the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architecture) is a real organization that could have served as a "hub" of transcriptions were they not fictions. The blend of invented and appropriated detail in this moment becomes an act of purely optical deception in the fake flag episode, which provides the imperative for understanding the broken-linked clickability of *Consulting Today* and *Urban Futures*: fiction is what engenders the ideas and holds them in formation, and what meets the eye has the potentiality of being a dupe.

In addition to the names, the hardly-marked or abruptive dialogue (in which the speakers' utterances are not accompanied by tag clauses) creates a visual obstruction: whose dialogue belongs to whom?[152] At first glance, "I'd choose not *consultancy* or *design* or *urban planning*, but *fiction*. Fiction?" looks like the emphatic assertion is double-taken by a rhetorical question, but in fact the uncertainty belongs to the interviewer. The redoubling that it takes to comprehend this unmarked dialogue requires a narrative disorientation, as the two traditionally epistemic perspectives of time that occur in the novel are thrown out of joint. On the one hand, the perspective of the characters becomes discursively blurred, and the magazine reporter's incredulity momentarily undermines the force of Peyman's sentence as reported to the novel reader. And at once, the narrator's retrospective position opens as a possibility for the rhetorical question, until U. mentions that it is asked to the interviewer. The retrospective expanse of the reference is then accounted for in the parenthetical other publications, which necessarily places the false trackability of the publications into clickable terrain. The compressed acronym RIBA sits amongst the list, inscrutably compressed, for the non-professional expert. It is illegible without some form of corroboration, and the fact of its extratextual existence ultimately serves to doubly-characterize both U. and the implied author as the types of people who would *know* to make the RIBA reference as a form of either credibility or plausibility amidst an account of literal fiction. Given the malleability of knowledge and its legitimacy, U. continues to describe Peyman's "most famous riff" that is not about "knowledge in and of itself" (*not*, he emphasizes, "*of* anything in particular"):

> Who was the last person, he would ask, to enjoy a full command of the intellectual activity of their day? The last *individual*, I mean? It was, he'd answer, Leibniz. He was on top of it all: physics and chemistry, geology, philosophy, math, engineering, medicine, theology, aesthetics. Politics too. I mean the guy was *on* it. Like some universal joint in the giant Rubik's Cube of culture, he could bring it all together, make the arts and sciences dance to the same tune. He died three hundred years ago. Since Leibniz's time (Peyman would go on), the disciplines have separated out again. They're on totally different pages: each in its own stall, shut off from all the others. Our own era, perhaps more than any other, seems to call out for a single intellect, a universal joint to bring them all together once again—seems to demand, in other words, a Leibniz. Yet there will be no Leibniz 2.0. What there *will* be is an endless set of migrations: knowledge-parcels traveling from one field to another, and mutating in the process. No one individual will conduct this operation; it will be performed collectively, with input from practitioners of a range of crafts, possessors of a range of expertise.[153]

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[151] Matthias Kipping and Timothy Clark describe how the very zenith of Postmodernity and financialization—1976—saw a concentrated academic response to the rise of consultants. Matthias Kipping and Timothy Clark, *The Oxford Handbook of Management Consulting*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2054

[152] This is at minimum a modernist holdover, as Beckett, Joyce, Stein famously declared to a reporter that "Punctuation is necessary only for the feeble-minded," as her own work often occluded commas and punctuation marks. Moving into Postmodernity, E.L. Doctrow and Cormac McCarthy have influentially excised quotation marks.

[153] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 48.

Unlike the previous long quote from Peyman, this one is deeply *un*clickable. If *Satin Island* bears a visual rhetoric in both name and typographical layout, it also models the strangeness of expertise's visual rhetoric as its characters deify the possibility of experts of centralized knowledge—what we might call the arbiters of Pierre Bourdieu's "field of cultural production" in the cultural arbiters of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Leibniz.[154] The generalities of Leibniz's accomplishments are collapsed into one character's strongly felt summary, and in this deluge of Peyman's praise and opinion, U. intercedes again with a parenthetical reminder of his retrospective telling.

Within Peyman's remarks, there is a remarkable investment in the stakes of academia as he laments the rupturing of knowledge. Leibniz, as the first major figure of the German Enlightenment and one of the four great rationalists (after Descartes and alongside Spinoza yet just before Kant) found a *a priori* reason behind all truths and facts—what he calls "sufficient reason."[155] Given the infantile state of institutionalized science, he was what we now call "interdisciplinary" by default. As Peyman sees it, the porousness of Leibniz's intellectual investigations created his greatness, though beneath this laudatory posture rests a more urgent irony: Leibniz was a pioneer in computing, inventing the "fundamental theorem of the calculus" in integration and differentiation entirely separately from Newton while at once advancing the calculator in a significant movement toward the notion of computing.[156] Leibniz's dream (what he has famously called his "wonderful idea" was to find a "special 'alphabet' whose elements represented not sounds, but concepts that could make possible symbolic calculations of truth and whether or not logical relationships existed among "sentences" in this alphabet. The dream would be greatly advanced by one of his followers, George Boole, whose development of Boolean logic now facilitates the precision of results in search engines when users employ three propositional terms when searching for sets of information the terms *and*, *nor*, or *not*. Given the rich pathways to contemporary computing that run from the history of Leibniz, Peyman's assertion that "there will be no Leibniz 2.0" is ironic—first, because 2.0 is the parlance of software, in which iterative versions are part of the lifecycle of any singular innovation, and second, because the yield of Leibniz's particular genius is precisely what undoes his own position as an expert polymath—the fulfillment of Leibniz's wonderful dream enables Peyman's understanding that no Leibniz 2.0 can exist, for the network of computers that now transmit those "knowledge-parcels" of a "collectivity, with input from practitioners of a range of crafts, possessors of a range of expertise" magnify the finite nature of the singular expert, in a process of tautological undoing.

While Peyman sees Leibniz as the last true polymath, U. shows equal reverie for eminent anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. U. admits that "Lévi-Strauss [. . .] was my hero" due to the anthropologist's ability to travel "through worm-holes of association."[157] And indeed, Lévi-Strauss *did* mine for associations from the particularity of un-globalized cultures to scale on to an understanding of mass culture and the world writ large. A brief disquisition on the anthropologist's influence is useful to gain purchase on U.'s occupational ideology.

Lévi-Strauss's contribution to anthropology and social history is captured wonderfully in *The View From Afar*—a tome whose title at once elicits the pervasive thrust of Appiah's cosmopolite reading and whose pages are dedicated to Roman Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss's structuralist influence. For Lévi-Strauss, imagining culture as a discrete and localized construction only examinable by freely traveling cosmopolitans is wrongheaded, for a cosmopolitan can be stagnant, so long as there is

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[154] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, ed. J. G. Richardson, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241.

[155] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1989) 149.

[156] Martin Davis, *The Universal Computer: The Road from Leibniz to* Turing, (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2018), 8.

[157] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 31.

encounter.[158] This fundamental sense of structuralism and systems formalized and extended in Lévi-Strauss's account of anthropology is not far off from the founding cosmopolitan philosophy expressed in Emmanuel Kant, whose very notion of the cosmopolitan is rooted in a dialectic of human reason: "humans neither pursue their aims purely by instinct, as the animals do, nor act in accordance with any integral, prearranged plan like rational cosmopolitans." [159] Much like Lévi-Strauss's sense, the willful or "prearranged" task of a traveling cosmopolitan, pursuing meaning through a sense of local particularity, is an unfruitful endeavor. However, Kant does believe there could be a "secret mechanism of its [a universal human nature's] workings" but the short mortality of man limits its true exploration. Thorough and complete account of "every older or contemporaneous history" that has "been handed down or at least certified" from Greece to Rome and "adds episodes from the national histories of other peoples insofar as they are known from the history of the enlightened nations" then there could be found a "regular progress in the constitution of states on our continent (which will probably give law, eventually, to all the others).[160] Here, Kant anticipates Lévi-Strauss's project to structure a universalist logic to break the borders of culture into a shared humanism. The *project*, interestingly, is actually the collection of data points—"thorough and complete accounts" with a sense of certifiability and authentication.[161] This crucial predilection toward history is reliant on enduring narratives. Lévi-Strauss's commitment to the *discipline* of anthropology affords the opportunity to exceed the boundaries of a single human's syncretic ability into an enduring and capturable effort of many. The relationship between the forefathers of both modern cosmopolitanism and modern Anthropology reveals a strong fundamental reliance on narrative exposure and the boundaries of human cognition.

Given this understanding of Lévi-Strauss, text with a cosmopolitan or anthropological thrust necessarily carries with it a particular set of textual features: explicit moments of intercultural encounter, the mimetic representation of culture in action, and referentiality. But U. is driven to delusion because of the impossibility of a rigorous, accurate, and syncretic universalization. His failure to use the Internet as a productive tool in his massive vocation plays the chief role in the limits of Anthropology as a form of High Cosmopolitanism. Just as Peyman coupled Leibniz with the Internet, U. struggles to describe Lévi-Strauss in terms that are *un*web-like:

> . . . he saw all these [patterns] as co-related, parts of larger systems lying behind not just a single tribe but also the larger one of all humanity. If we had some kind of grid that we could lay across it all, he reasoned, we could establish a grand pattern of equivalences. Describing sunsets, he saw spun webs of lit-up vapour, a whole architecture of reflective strands that both revealed and hid the source that lay behind them; even landscape seemed to him to withhold, in its layers and strata,

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[158] In "Cosmopoiltanism and Schizophrenia" from *The View From Afar,* Lévi-Strauss highlights this foundational insight between anthropology and cosmopolitanism with an account of the Chinook tribe of the American Pacific Northwest. Living on and sharing the resource of the Columbia River on what is now Portland, Oregon, the Chinook made contact many nearby tribes that bore entirely "different languages, life styles, and cultures" (184). The preserved mythology of the Chinook, whom anthropologists attempted to study for a discrete conception of nativism, ends up being "less an original corpus than an ensemble of secondary elaboration—systematic at first in this sense—to adapt the ones to the others and reconcile, by transforming them, miscellaneous mythical materials. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 159.

[159] Amélie Rorty and James Schmidt, *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim: A Critical Guide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 34.

[160] Rorty, *Kant's Idea*, 36.

[161] For an extended account of Kant's "cosmopolitan purpose" see Esther Wohlgemut, *A Cosmopolitan Nation?: Kant, Burke and the Question of Borders*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

some kind of infrastructural master-meaning of which any one layer was a partial, distorted transposition."[162]

The Internet associations here are rife with Internet loanwords. If we had some kind of *electrical* grid? He saw spun world wide *webs . . . information architecture*, or even the possibility to reveal a hidden *source* code. Even the term *landscape* recalls *Netscape Navigator*—one of the earliest web browsers that literally held all of the *infrastructural* content as each page would load on a 256-megabyte connection, *partial, distorted* until all was there to be read by the user. In U.'s eyes, Lévi-Strauss was a one-man Internet analogous to Peyman's sense of Leibniz. This connection is not a specious one, as Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan has written at length about Lévi-Strauss's avowed celebration of "the power of new instruments—telecommunications, computers, electronics—to reveal the organization of the world in discrete signals" while at once managing to "organize a 'closed system' of transcultural and transdisciplinary human knowledge.[163] Both Leibniz and Lévi-Strauss could generate myriad experiences and diverse information into literal pages whilst always carrying an intentional source code in their heads. At once, both anticipated the nascent potential of computing and the Internet in how they considered approaching the challenge of apprehending totality. To be sure, the above punning insertions are not unfounded in the logic of U.'s narration, for he meditates on having bandwidth issues while doing his own research for the Koob-Sassen project—while aspiring to be a 21st century version of his hero.[164] Unlike Lévi-Strauss, who seemed to have a fast, broad, banded connection to the diffuse experiences and information he encountered, U. laments having to wait in his research center for pages to load:

> we started experiencing problems with our bandwidth. There was too much information ‚I guess, shuttling through the servers . . . My computer, like those of all my colleagues, was afflicted by frequent bouts of buffering. I'd hear Daniel swearing in the next room—*Fucking buffering!* [. . .] The buffering didn't bother me, though; I'd spend long stretches staring at the little spinning circle on my screen, losing myself in it. Behind it, I picture hordes of bits and bytes and megabytes, all beavering away to get the requisite data to me.[165]

While he at first finds comfort in the convenience of waiting, U. realizes that this comfort of the pursuit of information (or its pursuit of his screen) suspends his ability to be a thoughtful agent. U. meditates:

> But when the narrating cursor catches right up with the rendering one, when occurrences and situations don't replenish themselves quickly enough for the awareness they sustain, when, no matter how fast they generate, they're instantly devoured by a mouth too voracious to let anything gather or accrue unconsumed before it, then we find ourselves jammed, stuck in limbo: we can enjoy *neither* experience *nor* consciousness of it. Everything becomes buffering, and buffering

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[162] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 31.

[163] Structuralism's connection to the Internet and cybernetics writ large has been explored recently. See Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "From Information Theory to French Theory: Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and the Cybernetic Apparatus," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2011), 99.

[164] U.'s anxiety is one of current interest. See Judith Broady-Preston, "The Information Professional of the Future: Polymath or Dinosaur?" *Library Management* 31 (March 30, 2010), 66–7. Broady-Preston locates the Internet Professionals (IPs) at many corporate offices as a "previously enshrined shibboleths of professional education, training and development" who "are undergoing a fundamental re-examination, including that of achieving a robust definition of the concept of 'professionalism'."

[165] McCarthy, 73.

becomes everything. The revelation pleased me. I decided I would start a dossier on buffering.[166]

Note the shift in point of view. Although U. is experiencing the wait on buffering, suddenly *we* "can enjoy neither experience nor consciousness" of our pursuit of information. His job as Anthropologist online is enfolded with us, the readers. None of us is Lévi-Strauss, who could process his superlative trove of information thanks to the purity of his idyllic form: experience, heuristics, and field notes. The subjective state of his suspension at his screen becomes a universalizable experience, a commonplace affective position fit for enunciation in this moment of the novel.

The autonomy of writing feels crucial for both U. and Lévi-Strauss. Interestingly, by attempting to downplay the centrality of his own admiration for Lévi-Strauss, U. notes that his role model did not seek to be perceived as a master connecter, himself. Rather, U. acknowledges that Lévi-Strauss sought recognition as *a writer*: "I spent my twenties wanting to be Lévi-Strauss—which is ironic, since he spent most of his life wanting to be somebody or something else: philosopher, say, or novelist, or poet."[167] The philosopher, the novelist, and the poet all ultimately demarcate the boundaries of their ideas into texts. The treatise, the novel, and the poem each bears boundaries that hold immoveable thoughts, signifiers, and decisions from syntax to diction and line, chapter, or section breaks. There is great irony in Lévi-Strauss's desire to propagate concrete texts rather than the mere capacity of his mind, and this irony ultimately reveals the novel's anxious understanding of expertise in a networked society. Common between both Leibniz and Lévi-Strauss is the idea that expertise is not necessarily *felt* by the individual. Where Lévi-Strauss sought to capture his many gleanings in over twenty-five books, Leibniz's "wonderful dream" eventually chiefly came true thanks to a fraction of his own investigations amongst a congeries of intellectual involvements.

The respective heroes of Peyman and U. further model two ways in which expertise is mobilized. Peyman is resigned to the fact that there can be no "Leibniz 2.0," understanding that the digital has superseded the role of the expert. Leibniz himself is less consequential to Peyman as the function of programmatic polymathy. In his tautological explanation for why there can be no Leibniz 2.0 (because the 2.0 version found in the digital collective has been created by the very ideas of the individual Leibniz), Peyman maintains his position as a corporate manager: he ultimately knows to prioritize the dividends over the laborer.

Of course, if this is so, the question remains as to why U. is employed to "write the Great Report" at all. Here is where corporate optics collide with the myth of liberal humanist expertise. Peyman, who coins a term that ultimately *de*motivates U. in "Present Tense Anthropology™" U.'s position as a certified expert helps the visual rhetoric of The Company itself—U. maintains the very visuality of expertise that helped to animate the propagation of academic professionalization: he spreads ideas as a donnish public orator.[168]

The Expert's Narrated Body

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[166] McCarthy, 73.

[167] McCarthy, 32.

[168] The ™ symbol is also vital to the inability to audibly articulate abstract ownership over an entire field. This is intended to magnify the absurdity of U.'s position as a for-profit anthropologist, but I might also argue to call into question the role of the Internet user encountering culture through the web—an entity that is always confronting itself as a seemingly democraticizing yet expansively profiteering space.

Satin Island is constructed with an especially slight plot in favor of describing the anxiety-making freedom of U.'s job. Unlike the office lackey Bartleby who would prefer not to, U. is an unsupervised collector of knowledge whose work mainly consists of compiling "a lot of dossiers."[169] In this pursuit of visualizing data, U. seeks repetitions and pattern recognition. Put another way, he seeks informational form, and his manual curation of information resembles the 1945 Memex that would come to inspire the Internet:

> "And yet . . . And yet . . . And yet. The Great Report still had to be composed . . . it was *all a question of form*. What fluid, morphing hybrid could I come up with to be equal to that task? What medium, or media, would it inhabit? Would it tell a story? If so, how, and about what, or whom? . . . How could I elevate the photos I had pinned about my walls, the sketches, the doodles, musings, all the stuff cached on my hard-drive, the audio files and diaries not my own—how could I elevate all these from secondary sources to be quantified, sucked dry, then cast way, to primary players in this story, or non-story?[170]

Here again, we find a hybridity—a redundancy. U. has the Internet outside of the Internet. The only items he has generated are perhaps "sketches, the doodles" and "musings," representing the old-fashioned version of the Internet envisioned in Vannevar Bush's mimeograph "memex" machine of 1945.[171] Even still, he characterizes his list as "secondary sources," which reads as entirely the result of his research. As he admits, "They weren't always for the clients. The Company gave me *carte blanche* to follow my own nose when not working on a specific brief. I went to conferences, read (and, occasionally, wrote) articles, kept my finger on the soft pulse of the media—and compiled dossiers."[172] U.'s main form of agency throughout the novel is to serve merely as a receptacle: he fetishizes an oil spill—one of the novel's main motifs fetishizes the death of a parachutist, insisting that these events on the news must hold some structural key to his task of metaphorizing the state of humanity. While those two mysteries preoccupy his frame of mind, his social interactions open plot points that are oriented around his two friends, Madison and Petr. These elements: the unstructured task of writing the Great Report, understanding why Madison has been to the Torino-Caselle Airport, and watching Petr succumb to cancer across the novel—line the few plot points of the rangy novel.[173]

Although the novel features much scrolling, buffering, and browsing, its most peculiar point of clickability is literalized in an anachronistic vignette following a failed conference talk. U. attends at an unnamed conference in Frankfurt to present on the theme "The Contemporary." Before the conference, he reluctantly notes that while the contemporary was a subject to which he'd "given

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[169] McCarthy, 78.

[170] McCarthy, 79 (emphasis added).

[171] In his theorizing of a projector-based Internet to rapidly sort through a version of microfiche, Bush describes the machine: "Most of the memex contents are purchased on microfilm ready for insertion. Books of all sorts, pictures, current periodicals, newspapers, are thus obtained and dropped into place. Business correspondence takes the same path. And there is provision for direct entry. On the top of the memex is a transparent platen. On this are placed longhand notes, photographs, memoranda, all sorts of things. When one is in place, the depression of a lever causes it to be photographed onto the next blank space in a section of the memex film, dry photography being employed." Vannevar Bush, "As We May Think," *The Atlantic*, July 1945, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/303881/.

[172] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 35.

[173] See Michael F. Miller, "Why Hate the Internet?: Contemporary Fiction, Digital Culture, and the Politics of Social Media." *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 75, no. 3 (2019), 56. He argues that "McCarthy's novel contends that this document [the book itself]—written and comprehended by humans—actually highlights the inevitable failure of any totalizing, computationally-inflected, and data-driven attempt to account for the literary in the Present."

much thought: radiant now-ness, Present-Tense Anthropology and so forth," his strategy is to offer a rhetorical strategy: "To air the doubt about a concept before airing the concept itself was, I thought, quite intellectually adventurous; it might go down well."[174] At the conference, U. beholds a range of other speakers who all notably use "PowerPoint presentations" that "moved with sub-second precision from one image to the next as they talked with evangelical zeal of neuroscience, genomics, bio-informatics and a dozen other concepts currently enjoying their moment in the sun" before he is up. In contrast to the other speakers, U. notes he has no slides or clips, but instead delivers a jeremiad against the term "The Contemporary," proposing an alternative understanding of "a *moving ratio* of modernity." His strongest rhetorical maneuver comes when he describes how "[t]he term *epoch* . . . originally meant 'point of view, as in the practice of astronomy," and that the later understanding of the term as a way of sorting history and space was wrongheaded (180). Instead, he argues that "we should return to understanding *epoch* as a place from which one looks at things" and instead should (tautologically) refuse contemporary anthropology in favor of an anthropology *of* The Contemporary)" (Ibid). The talk is met with a chilly silence, and U. remains haunted by his lack of preparation. Later, he describes in great detail a fever-dream in which he envisions an alternate conference talk on the contemporary, this time focused on describing oil spills. Curiously, he describes the talk on the present deep in the past:

> In my mind's eye, the hi-tech modern conference hall morphed into a nineteenth- or even eighteenth-century auditorium: steep-banked rows of wooden benches, an audience made up exclusively of men with bushy sideburns and high collars, pipe- and cigar-smoke mingling with murmurs of approval in air already thick with erudition and just plain old age—although I still had a projector wi-fi'd to a sensor on my index finger, split-second responsive . . .[175]

The talk, as it turns out, takes place in what can only be described as a parody of a lyceum—the lecture system that "not only expressed a national culture" but "was one of the central institutions within and by which the public had its existence."[176] Indeed, Angela G. Ray describes the lyceum as a "culture-making rhetorical practice" by which debates, public addresses, and oratorical showcases allow "Americans in cities on the Eastern seaboard and in hamlets on the frontiers of European settlement" to "acquire[] habits of mind that created cultures."[177] The lyceum, as Graff notes, is what transitioned American academic institutions from Humanistic havens of Eurocentric memorization into pursuant havens of knowledge and research—and yet, McCarthy draws on the hub of literalized visual rhetoric for the singular academic: the performance of knowledge and its mastery that led to the very professionalization of the Humanities department in the 19th century is made modern. The forgone notion of the singular academic expert is melded with the contemporary click, heightening the absurdity of persuasion itself. In the fantasy, U. unfurls an obtuse argument for how oil spills are always recurring, he narrates the speech, interceding his talking points with an emphatically visual onomatopoeic refrain of literal clicking:

> There's always an oil spill happening, I'd say. Which is why. That's the reason, gentlemen. Which, gentlemen, is the reason we can name it in the singular: *the* Oil Spill—an ongoing event whose discrete parts and moments, whatever their particular shapes and vicissitudes (*vicissitudes!* I'd serrate the word time and again), have run

[174] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 99.

[175] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 110.

[176] Donald M. Scott, "The Popular Lecture and the Creation of a Public in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History* 66, no. 4 (December 12, 1980), 791–809

[177] Angela G. Ray, "Frederick Douglass on the Lyceum Circuit: Social Assimilation, Social Transformation?" *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 5, no. 4 (2002), 625–47.

together, merged into a continuum in which all plurals drown. *Click*. Here, gentlemen, you see a tanker trailing its long, black tail. *Click*. Here are vinyl-coated rocks; and here—*click*—a PVC-hemmed coastline. Nature got up in her fetish gear, her gimp-outfit. *Click*. Here's one showing men with body-suits and gloves pacing a taped-off beach the way forensic detectives do at crime scenes. *Click*. Here's a video-file: a close-up sequence, captured by a hand-held underwater camera, of a few feet of seabed. Note the way the semi-hardened oil stretches and folds as the diver's hand lifts it. Can you see the look on his face? Come, now, come: of course you can. It is the fascinated look your own one had when, as a child, you stood (didn't you?) rooted to the pavement in front of a candy-store window in which taffy was being pulled.[178]

The literal visual rhetoric *of* the academic expert here draws a stark attention to the Corporate deployment of "Present-Tense Anthropology™" sought by Peyman. Without the scene's unspoken textual maneuvers of the trademark and the click, the symbolic of informational ownership by both the for-profit entity and the academic expert seeking peer-reviewed affirmation sit in twinned isolation.[179] The anachronistic movement of the PowerPoint and the video-file turned into a delirious anecdote for an impossible collective highlights the artificiality of the expert as a curator. After the cacophony of interruptive clicks that intercede his sentences and provide purchase to the deictic "Here" throughout the vignette, U. serves as a forceful docent to his own digital materials with strong imperatives—he summons "you" to interpret the look on the face of a diver, asking with a literal rhetorical question if "you can see the look on his face?" He follows suit with the imperative to "Come, now, come," teetering the interpretation of his addressee and persuading, "Of course you can."

The strange, almost jesting invocation to universalize a subjective childhood memory looking at pulled taffy ruptures the poetics of his clicking. As the scene develops over a delirious set of pages, U. unapologetically runs over his fifteen minutes while laying out an inchoate poetics of oil, pausing momentarily to vanquish a nay-sayer in the audience who accuses him of "aestheticizing" the "spectacle of nature's defilement."[180] After a strong rebuttal that oil itself is natural, he goes on to again aestheticize it. U. cues up "a second video-file that showed dead fish lolling around congealed oil on the sea's floor. The slowness of this scene (it had been edited by Daniel for maximum effect) was lulling, soothing. Look, I'd say in a quiet voice after we'd all watched the footage, mesmerized, in silence for a while; look at these fishes' eyes. They're black and opaque. And rightly so: for aren't eyes windows to the soul" (117)? After an extended metaphor and poesis on ichthyomancy, he is met with "clamorous" cheer that ensures to him that "I'd be forced to come back again and again, to take another bow. Delegates would be surging forwards, address books open, business cards stretched out towards me, their numbers overwhelming the security personnel who tried to hold them back."[181]

This moment of fantasy does much to highlight the visual rhetoric of information legitimation. As the crowd grows into an eager frenzy, U.'s performance is emphasized and

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[178] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 111.

[179] The blending of technology with the lyceum anachronizes an argument made by Thomas Augst in his concluding chapter "Humanist Enterprise in the Marketplace of Culture." He persuasively argues that social media specifically, the Internet writ large, and "digital tools" have "captured polis and cosmos for the personal sue of individuals around the world," thereby stultifying the physical commons of the 19th century lyceum. See Tom F. Wright, *The Cosmopolitan Lyceum: Lecture Culture and the Globe in Nineteenth-Century America,* (Minneapolis: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 223.

[180] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 115.

[181] McCarthy, 115.

bracketed in parenthetical flourishes and the rhetorical question mark—the valor of his expertise generated not by the information, but instead by the visual mastery of the knowledge itself. Each still is dramatically *clicked*, the force of the onomatopoeia impressing its anachronistic echo in the lyceum hall amongst its bemused and tobaccoed cognoscenti. The PowerPoint and the compilation of unsourced stills might otherwise be no more than a compilation of the results from a typical Google image search of the term "oil spill." The PVC, the taped-off beaches, and wet-suited divers are archetypes more than particulars.

The irony in U.'s rebuttal to his dissenter is rooted in the scene's anachronism. The visual rhetoric of the projected images and the collocated performance are *only* possible through the aestheticized and performative presentation. Without the "lulling, soothing" fabrication of the video from The Company's "visual culture" expert Daniel or the imperative declamations implanting the taffy-machine narrative into the minds of his viewers (and thus, the novel's reader), the images would be precisely as they rest in the above figure—a set of reasonably associated stock images.

It is no accident that U.'s finger is a "wi-fi enabled" sensor, vying for an Open-Source connection to the Web itself when it could have merely been a Bluetooth connected clicker allowing the clicking of offline materials. The wi-fi enabled finger indicates less the province of an expert and more the recollection of the smartphone user—the clickability here blurring with the tapping of a digit to make the images on a screen move. If U. needs to do his work 150 years earlier to be appreciated for his narrativizing prowess as an expert, he still requires the informatic tools of any amateur netizen who can Google an image.

This expanse of stock images, public domain content, and predictably present versions of signs are part of a virtual realism—an expansive referent by which the signified can be anticipated before the sign is input into a search string. An analogue here might be the moment that an illustrator needs a picture of a tree to trace for a vector illustration, but having a vague tree in mind might turn to Google's image search function for unlicensed photographs before finding a tree from across an expansive field of variety—a cartoonish Christmas conifer, a squat acacia tree, or an aerial view of a forest of pointed firs that would make Sarah Orne Jewett weep.

The denotative image as a set of pixels is nothing more than a set of signifiers, but the author, speaker, or in this case, expert, can meaningfully accord aesthetic vitality and even interpretive counsel merely through the performance of rhetorical exercise.[182] In this sense, then, the aggregated, informatic visual of the search result is imported with rhetoric and the collage-state of virtual realism can be transmogrified into *meaningful* results. The affiliation between description and the ekphrastic depiction of Open-Source images and video is made clear by the recurrent imagery of oil spills. Throughout the entire narrative—especially in the early moments of the novel before U.'s descent into anxiety—the anthropologist observes oil spills on television and computer screens, describing them in great detail—"aerial shots of a stricken offshore platform around which a large, dark water-flower was blooming; white-featured sea birds, filmed from both air and ground, milling around on pristine, snowy shorelines, unaware of the black tide inching it way towards them; and, villain of the piece, shot by an underwater robot, a broken pipe gushing its endless load into the ocean."[183]

Beyond the crass, phallic imagery to conclude this description, U. further anthropomorphizes the oil spill pages later while watching it on his computer, describing how the water "seemed to

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[182] I use "denotative image" here in the same vein as Ferdinand Saussure's understanding of denotation as a "literal" meaning. The semantic divide between a search string and set of images creates a digital exemplification of the lexical and the visual's complexity. The word "tree" in the case figured above has no presupposed referent, and the search results yield no precise denotation. The complexity of the conversion of textual connotation into digital denotation is addressed well by Anthony Wilden, who sees all language is divided between digital and analog "codes." Read Anthony Wilden and Rhonda Hammer, *The Rules Are No Game: The Strategy of Communication*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 1987)*, 224.
[183] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 6.

move, to swell and crest, once more slowly and faster than usually does."[184] While this description might seem fairly innocuous, he emphasizes that he "found this movement fascinating" and "watched the images for hour after hour, my head rotating with them as they moved from screen to screen" (10). This digital repetition and its replay on a computer then rationalizes the dossier he later compiles on oil spills. The dossier, meant as a collection of information to contribute to the great report, features extensive notes tracing oil spills "right back to before the First World War" because "[a]n anthropologist's not interested in singularities, but in generics. Oil spills are perfectly generic: there's always one happening, or one that's recently transpired, or, it can be said with confidence, one that's on the verge of happening."[185] The generic nature of oil spills and their capacity for viewing—coupled with U.'s self-conscious Internet engagement and presentation of their many images—builds on the shifting anthropological terrain of traveling to observe to web-surfing across a digital commons. Indeed, U.'s fantasy of scholarly triumph draws on the promise of the Open-Source availability of a virtual realism.[186]

U.'s daydream thus recuperates the fantasy of Lévi-Strauss's greater ambition to be a "philosopher, say, or novelist, or poet" in the aestheticization and rumination of the present through *narrative*. The scene as a whole deploys anachronism to emphasize the ordinariness of "virtual realism"—the associative images that can be searched for through a default moment of "contemporary" curiosity. It is the presentation of the images—the expert's rhetoric and the editor's manipulation that vivify them. Although U.'s triumph in the lyceum might on surface read as a humorous threnody to the erudite scholar's role as foil to the Internet, its own visual rhetoric on the page emphasizes narrative's ability to animate the value of the expert's literal vigor. Just as U. must appeal to his audience through his gesticulations and dramatic clicking (what we might consider a truly *visual* rhetoric), the very description at the narrative level develops a dramatic irony that shows the authorial hand that hems the depiction of virtual realism on U.'s screen. While U.'s enfeebled fantasy imagines a boys' club galvanized by a simple PowerPoint, the implied author's aestheticization of the Internet becomes exaggerated, making a case for the aesthetic value of authorship in the age of the Open-Source image.

Novelistic realism, with its parenthetical description that drives the scene's action, animates the virtual realism in a way that could only be done on the page interface and with narrative's formal mechanics. Even more, the unspoken rhetoric of U.'s counterpoint in Peyman's slogan "Present-Tense Anthropology™" betokens the quiet ludicrousness of truly trademarking the results of a Google Search. Even if amateurs can generate the images, the hope still stands that a curator or, even better, an author, can create a poetics of the information, giving language to the otherwise purely visual rhetoric of the many "seen" images of virtual realism. To *say* one owns Present-Tense Anthropology™ would cheapen through omission the very claim to the idea. It must be written, just as the visual rhetoric of the oil spill's stock images are vivified through clicked commentary. Without

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[184] McCarthy, 10.

[185] McCarthy, 36-7; See Christa Grewe-Volpp, "Oil as matter, oil as discourse: Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island*," *Green Letters*, 23:2, (2019), 141-151. She reads this notion of ceaseless oil spills as an explicit symbol of the "energy unconscious in petrofiction" that offers new materialist potentials for encountering climate disaster.

[186] In the 2015 "Bibliometric Study of Scholarly writing and Publishing Patterns Concerning Copyright and Digital Images," Corinne Rebecca Kennedy explicitly discusses how "faculty and researchers in the humanities disciplines turn frequently to these [search engines] quick access information outlets for their image needs" while at once altering their "ability to use and interpret visual media effectively." Corinne Rebecca Kennedy, "Bibliometric Study of Scholarly Writing and Publishing Patterns Concerning Copyright and Digital Images*," Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 34, no. 1 (2015), 60, 65. See also Katharine Martinez, "Image Research and Use in the Humanities: An Idiosyncratic Bibliographic Essay.*" Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 28, no. 1 (2009), 9-15.

narration, knowledge is authorized but not necessarily validated. These moments might merely seem like U.'s own hysterical neurosis borne into a scene of real-time peer review, but it also positions McCarthy as an authorial agent who recuperates the role of the *author* as an aesthete. The truth of the oil spill is that it is an unnatural, grotesque event, but in beautifying what would otherwise be unfiltered images from the search string "oil spill" McCarthy's prose makes a strong case for the solution that perhaps expertise may not solve, but literal language arts can. The presentations of knowledge within the novel (dossiers, public addresses, and the Great Report itself) are all products of the real-life author's interaction with extratextual online sources. This artistic rendering is a sort of defamiliarizing, as Victor Shklovsky would have it, of the same unconscious habitualization that allows perceptive effort to recede. In this case, however, the perceptive effort may well be from viewing virtual images.

Monologic Dialogue—Authorial Space to Copy-Paste

The lyceum scene is not the only scene that mobilizes the generic knowledge I am calling "virtual realism." While the images in the lyceum PowerPoint are bland tropes liable to be culled by any basic search algorithm, the novel bears other invitations for clickability. These ones are more specific not merely as a component of a citational language game, but are in praxis a mode of characterization that positions the reader as a type of prosumer in an age of institutional uncertainty. The prosumer, or portmanteau of *professional* and *consumer* (sometimes relatedly swapped with *producer* and *consumer*) is part of an emerging niche market. Electronics manufacturers have found mid-priced tiers for goods like cameras, microphones, music and video production software, and stage lighting that allow non-professionals to create nearly professional-grade material (often to be posted online). The efficacy of the aesthetic products' "legitimacy"—their approximation to professionalism— verges on the previous chapter's account for "seems good enough." Likewise, the Open-Source Internet's weighty range of reusable information creates the landscape for authorial (in U.'s case, academic authorial) gestures of professionalism through "prosumer" means. Put another way, some of the novel's extratextual references split a self-conscious middle-distance between conceptual specificity and unsteady accuracy. This provocation toward clickability traces the thin line between the ideation of the expert, the ideas of the social connection, and the generative Open-Source of the network (or hive mind). The line is made of words in a search string. If the disconnectedness of contemporary social life is one of this novel's chief concerns, then its own diegetic representation of sociality bears a blunted edge. Within its unspooling facts and recursions, the province of its informational belonging is deeply monologic.[187]

The offloading of the networked "known" is dramatized into the novel's flat quasi-dialogues between characters. While U. attempts to reconcile what he "knows" from his studies and work online, he struggles to then generate his own sentiments or sympathies for the people around him, instead broadly copying and pasting facticity as "The Great Report" seems to find its way into his very understandings of people and intimacy. His research on the digital network becomes ensnared with his networks of kinship in the novel's few plot arcs. Specifically, as he carries prolonged conversations with Peyman, his dying friend Petr, and his love interest Madison, U. broadly serves as a conversational prodder. In one conversation with Petr, the cancer patient explains in confidence a new potential remedy for his ailment and U., as he does in the majority of his conversations, merely facilitates the extensive knowledge of his interlocutor with mirroring questions:

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[187] In using the term monologic, I am referring to M.M. Bakhtin's conception that a "monologically understood world is an objectified world, a word corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness." See M. M. Bakhtin and Caryl Emerson, *Problems of Dostoevsky's* Poetics, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 41.

The idoine's not getting any traction, […] so they're trying a new tactic. Oh yes? I asked. What's that? Well, he told me, they've taken sample cancer-cells from me and sent them to this lab where they mix them with cells from honey, and thyme, and rosemary, and the sweat of humming-birds, and all kinds of natural things. The cells of these have quite specific structures, which react in certain ways with other structures—and, once in a while, one set of cells can neutralize another, take them out. If they find one that takes out my cells, then we're rolling. Don't they know already which cell-structure will suit you? I asked. No, he replied, they haven't got it all mapped: it's still hit and miss. You just have to pair your cells with each of these others, moving down the line, running the gauntlet, and you never know, you might just find a match. The lab's in Greece he said. Greece? I asked. Yeah, he answered: Greece. How about that?[188]

The incongruous mixture of cancer cells and the listed items allow Petr's explanation to foreground the bizarre scientific proposition over U.'s interest in the conversation. The anthropologist's questions merely prod the monologue forward, evoking clarifying details that contribute to the absurdity of the remedy and at once invoking more realist detail to heighten the question of its veracity. Surely enough, a quick Internet search of the cure's specifics ("cancer-cells honey thyme hummingbirds Greece") leads to a PubMed.gov peer reviewed article from 2014 whose abstract explains, "We have previously demonstrated that Greek thyme honey inhibits significantly the cell viability of human prostate cancer cells. Herein, 15 thyme honey samples from several regions of Greece were submitted to phytochemical analysis for the isolation, identification and determination (through modern spectral means) of the unique thyme honey monoterpene."[189] The study's absent details of hummingbird sweat and rosemary fittingly come at the end of U.'s list, before "and all kinds of natural things"—the fingerprints of fictional embellishment on the very real process of the first two items. The strange precision of these realist detail exposes the shifting aperture of mimetic referent. If the aperture of citationality were closed for the archetypical details of the lyceum, placing dim yet recognizable images for U.'s aestheticization, this scene overexposes the details, the aperture gaped open and allowing the light of such precision to provoke a squinting validation—are such incongruities (the foundation of the anecdote's humor, if we follow Henri Bergson) a firm fact or a fabrication?[190] The zooming in and out of detail through these extended, monologic paragraphs moonlighting as dialogues are clear vessels for authorial research to martial a position in this Open-Sourced fiction.

Of course, the facts matter little to U., for he is less preoccupied in responding to his friend than he is in settling into another anachronistic daydream vision—this time of the scientists who might help Petr in Greece. Listening to the process, U. begins "shedding, even as I held it in my mind, its modern, scientific ambiance and acquiring an ancient one instead."[191] Much like the lyceum fantasy, in this instance U. positions the scientists as "robed ministers [who are] served offerings of blood and flesh" in a "grotto full of hetacombs and urns." Once the "supplications" of cancer cells, honey, herbs, and hummingbird sweat are made, U. imagines the deified Greek scientists doing "what only they could do: look up an entry and send back to meek, afflicted mortals a celestial *ping!* Of recognition" (81). Breaking from his digressive anachronism, U. looks back to Petr who is

[188] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 80.

[189] Eva Kassi et al. "A Monoterpene, Unique Component of Thyme Honeys, Induces Apoptosis in Prostate Cancer Cells via Inhibition of NF-KB Activity and IL-6 Secretion," *Phytomedicine : International Journal of Phytotherapy and Phytopharmacology* 21, no. 11 (September 2014), 1483.

[190] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic,* (London: Macmillan &co. limited, 1913), see esp. 12-14.

[191] McCarthy, 80.

"speaking again, his words floating above this vision like a voiceover," before Petr says, "It's worth a try." In both this anecdote and the lyceum scene, U.'s frame of reference is limited by his desire to be a polymath expert—the author of the Great Report. In other experts he sees people who "look up an entry" and ping back their findings—he struggles to imagine a past without the Internet as an informatic hub.[192]

Indeed, each of U.'s conversations is undergirded by his own, academized compulsion to move past a type of symptomatic reading. With all of his significant relations, U. says and asks much but tells little of himself. In fact, one of the few moments in the novel where U. *knows* something worth *telling* occurs when Madison shares with him a traumatic tale that serves as the novel's climax[193]—Madison, while attending a 2001 protest at the G8 summit in Genoa, was detained during a raid by the Italian police, taken to their station, and made to sing fascist songs before being forced to pose for an ambiguous boss who listens to abstruse transmissions from a radio. Throughout the fourteen-page tale, U. simply parrots or fills in lacunae, as he does with Petr.

When Madison describes a man's ribs cracking beneath a policeman's boot she describes the sound "a bit like those old chocolate bars—the ones with the synthetic honeycomb inside. That used to crunch when you bit into them," before U. intercedes with "Crunchies?" and Madison affirms it, admitting, "I'm not sure you can get them anymore."[194] U. asks why he has never heard about this episode, and Madison admits "I've never spoken about it before" before U. corrects her and clarifies, "I mean why didn't I read about it in the press—especially if there were journalists there, staying in the very building where it happened?" Madison incredulously tells him that this occurred the same time as 9/11, which absorbed all significant media space. For the remaining pages, U. exclusively asks questions—"Did you get stamped on?" "So what happened next?" "Hadn't you heard them pulling up?" "How long did this go on for?"—U. asks over thirty prompting questions through the tale." When she is concluding the final scene (where she had to dance for the peculiar boss), she describes her improvised choreography and how the man began weeping: "At one point I saw big tears rolling down his cheeks. You saw . . . ? I started asking, but she went straight on, cutting me off. Then gave over to sobs, she said. *Sobs?* I asked. That's right, Madison answered."[195] After the fundamental monologue—not dissimilar to Petr—she prepares to punctuate her story and turn to the Torino-Caselle airport when U. finally contributes something more than a question. A rare moment of non-figurative scenic description precedes his question: "The staff had finished eating. Dusk was coming down, but they hadn't switched on the restaurant's lighting yet. Madison sat back in her chair. As her face retreated from me, it grew indistinct" (Ibid.) The intimacy of the moment and her vulnerable story makes space for U. to share his contribution when she begins, "The thing about Turin, she said after a pause, is that it's where ... I know, I said: it's where the shroud is from." The occurrence of these ellipses is the one moment where narrative careens into abrupt dialogue—because the novel bears no quotation marks around dialogue and because em-dashes take the province of colons and interrogative markers, the ellipses create suspense where there is actually intended to be none. U. does not wait, he finally believes he knows something and deviates from his line of questioning. The definitional colon places in complete certainty his interpretation, worked through early in the novel and affirmed by his clickable history of research. And yet, Madison says no.

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192 McCarthy, 80.

193 In one instance on page 87, U. says "I told him, that (unlike a windmill) a parachute functions not in a fixed location but rather in *transit* from a point A (the aero plane) to a point B . . ." Likewise, the instance with the man in airport began with "I told him that the word *tragedy* derived from the Ancient Greek..." (11).

194 McCarthy, 155.

195 McCarthy, 155.

"I was thinking of that other guy, . . . The famous philosopher . . . Kierkegaard or Schopenhauer or someone; the one who said that God was dead." "Oh, I told her: you mean Nietzsche." And in the midst of this telling, his knowledge is deflated as she responds, "Maybe. . . Whoever, […] it doesn't matter: the point is—I found this out later—he saw a horse being beaten in a square in Turin, and he lost it."[196] The detail is both anecdotally common and easy to corroborate—a slightly more open-apertured realism than the underexposed archetypes of the oil spill in his fantasy. Nietzsche's encounter with the horse bears its own Wikipedia page thanks to the incident's dramatization in the 2011 Hungarian film *The Turin Horse*. In addition, the story is featured in Nietzsche's Wikipedia page, its detail doubly cited in Ronald Hayman's *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* and a direct letter to Karl Von Gersdorff dated in June 1868.

Again, the novel's typography creates an interruptive uncertainty with its ellipsis, which models the paradox of narrative's visual rhetoric and its adaptation into Postmodern prose. Where the ellipsis usually stands to allow the addressee to supply the omitted content, it belies the confusion of the Open-Source. The incomplete sentence, "The thing about Turin is that it's where" would suggest Madison is about to state a clear supposition, and U.'s obtrusion fills the gap with his own reading. That is, the dynamic of clausal interruption bespeaks another type of ellipsis-interjection: the "typing awareness indicator" that has become popularized in Apple's iMessage text-messaging interface and has become normalized into discourse-oriented social networking applications like WhatsApp (2 billion users) Facebook's Messenger application (1.3 billion users), Tinder (57 million users), or Grindr (5 million users).[197] The ellipsis signals a double-agency: the sender is of course actively typing, thinking, and completing; and yet the addressee gains a moment to intercede, to anticipate, or place a deviant rock on the train of thought's rails. When the three meek dots stray in a space of discursive non-attribution, their rhetorical force disrupts the flow of narrative time in a temporally irreconcilable way. At once, there is both incomplete content and the latent headwind of new content, not to mention the seemingly decelerative visual force of the caesura on the screen. This happens both on the computer interface and the codex's page, yet the issue once again of semantic *belonging* obscures the message in the novel. The sudden and interruptive nature of U.'s interjection completes all of the aforementioned functions: the gap of interpretation is filled by both he and Madison, and where U. finally deploys part of his own private sense of interpretation to complete an idea into certainty, Madison decisively rejects his connotation. Moreover, when she completes her statement with a corroborative fact that positions U. to "tell" an objective correction without diffidence (Nietzsche saw a man run over a horse in Turin), Madison regards his expertise in a posture of skeptical impiety while continuing with every word to *affirm* the accuracy of his emendation.

The force of this humorous tête-à-tête is generated by the tensions between the expert and the amateur—the active information professional against the passive consumer. The gap between them is the moment of individual searching, whether in a mind's RAM or the browser's search bar. The lay reader in this instance is left with a clear alternative: to, in the rhetoric of the details, bridge the difference between the closed positions of the expert academic and the self-assured amateur by turning to an Open-Source. This invitation to clickability is not merely a component of a citational language game but is also in praxis a space of uncertainty that charges the ellipses with the capacity to visualize information insecurity. Even when Madison admits "the point is—I found this out

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[196] McCarthy, 156-173.

[197] Daniel Research Group. (2019, September). *Most popular global mobile messenger apps as of January 2021, based on number of monthly active users (in millions)* [Chart]. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/258749/most-popular-global-mobile-messenger-apps/

later—he saw a horse being beaten in a square in Turin, and he lost it," she withdraws from the scene time of her tale in Turin to offer the notion of conceptual encounter with an extradiegetic morsel of information that could have been found from another character or from a text of some sort. The em-dashes forming what would grammatically be called a non-essential clause work instead to visually signify her agency as a pursuant of information. While it is not absolutely marked that she might have found this information out online, the fact stands that the capacity to "find" through the search bar charges such cognitive-temporal sidelining with a renewed energy in narratives rendered in a space bearing Open-Source technologies. This is an invitation for the reader to share in the extratextual Internet, as well.

        The particular *source* in this case is of little interest to me, but the embedded mode of attribution distinguishes the novel form's interaction with the Internet. Although McCarthy's fiction is deploying a mode of referentiality to add to its thematic, the terms of the symbolic are anchored in the fact that Madison's referent is "based on a true story"—that phrase that drives much mass consumerism and lines the visual narratives of television programs and the cinema. This question of the "base" is where I want to conclude here.

        When facticity or historicity are embedded in aesthetics, the materials of that foundation are stable until they aren't: a foundation made of dried mud—hardened under particular conditions, then perilously putty-like when the atmosphere invariably brings precipitation. As film scholar Ela Bittencourt notes, the notion of "documentary" dramatizations "belies the tension between documentation that evokes verifiable, fact-based knowledge and the artifice inherent in artistic creation."[198] In cinema and television the narrative force may come in modes of extremes: when Leonardo DiCaprio's character in *The Revenant* (2015) pulls the innards from a dead horse so he can sleep inside of it and exploit its warmth for protection from a snowstorm, the absurdity of the desperate maneuver is at once locally sensical and universally irreconcilable with normative understandings of body heat preservation. Of course, the analogue for "based on true events" is *dramatization*, so perhaps the effect of a scene is rooted in Aristotle's conception of drama as a catharsis-oriented vehicle of pity and terror, and the immediate question of *did this really happen?*[199] becomes superseded by a necessarily rapid form of a suspension of disbelief. Do the facts matter if they are coming from a film that, while based in a true story, *is* a dramatization? The question of the scene's veracity and its accuracy to its potential extradiegetic analogue is smothered by narrative time before its (the question's) rhetorical force can be felt by a viewer. In other words, the *run time* overtakes both scene time and real time. *Did* Hugh Glass, the fur trapper DiCaprio's depicts, sleep inside a horse when he was near the Upper Missouri River in the early 19th century?

        To click on the film requires more individual responsibility—the visual of the film must be truncated into a search string, but that string can only be as intelligible as the viewer. Imagine the strings "Revenant true story horse sleep" or "Did Hugh Glass sleep inside horse?" The clickability of more exact text like RIBA is unlikely in a film—even in *Satin Island* such a detail comes from U.'s character's consciousness precisely to *affirm* his sources. Only very specific films bearing voiceover access to character interiority would allow an opportunity to introduce the acronym. The dialogue of realistic film necessarily coheres to the vagueness of everyday description, while the novel can incorporate more registers of citationality, more visual clues as to how the heteroglossia is construed. Where in film or television dialogue is never marked—then it must be in the novel.

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[198] Ela Bittencourt, "Delineating the Nonfiction Film: The True/False Film Festival," *Film Quarterly* 1 67 (3) (March 2014), 71.

[199] The sole moment of *Poetics* that explicitly mentions catharsis finds that within tragedy there exists the potential for the imitation of an action "with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions" Aristotle., and S. H. (Samuel Henry), 1850-1910. Butcher. 1907. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. London, Macmillan: 73

Unless some kind of Carwinian biloquial vocality motivates the plot of a novel, or the novel itself is based in consciously unmoored language as in Beckett's *The Unnamable*, dialogue is generally attributed in the form. Even loose detail within the many monologic undertakings U. endures with other characters flag moments of surprising clickability, as with the curiosity of a cancer treatment mixing hummingbird sweat with viscous honey and human cells for contemporary science. These disruptions of mimetic fidelity and their potential facticity leave abundant space for turning to Open-Source searches—with a modularly formed novel whose sections bear varying degrees of referentiality and a lack of linear plot, the novel itself allows the reader to share in U.'s anxieties about not just containing, but also performing knowledge at a time where it can be so easily found disembodied. Even the novel's diegetic action reaches a conclusion with the acknowledgment that U.'s expertise was always simply visual rhetoric—his very occupation nothing more than one of the corporate world's favorite words: optics.

The Company wanted to have an anthropologist on staff just as informally as it wanted Daniel "the visual-culture guy."[200] When U.'s manager, Tapio, phones him near the end of the novel, U. is instructed to bring his "files, your findings, all the stuff you're working on," and the anthropologist does show up "holding a set of dossiers—physical, leather dossiers—beneath my arm, as per Tapio's instructions. None of them, to my knowledge, contained any type of data, code or misinformation whose effects would be subversive, let alone lethally destructive. So much for armed resistance." But Peyman simply "beamed at me, and told me that my contributions had been vital" before informing U. he would be talking about his work at a major symposium in New York."[201] At this point, U. has sought to convert Peyman's notion of Present-Tense Anthropology into a destructive force of misinformation, only to realize that because the master code for society is so vast and inclusive his own wreckage would produce no true alteration. And so, the empty dossiers and arbitrary successes indicate the illogical impotence of his intelligence. Ultimately, a fever dream that had been leading nowhere—the fantasy of a trip to a New York waterway that was erroneously labeled "Satin Island" leads him to Staten Island before the New York conference's final scene.

After an entire narrative rife with the aesthetics of virtual realism, U. aestheticizes one final moment. In an inversion of his anachronistic daydreams bringing the present to the past, U. watches a "homeless guy [. . .] going slowly down the row of payphones, searching for forgotten change caught in their mechanism. In his attempt to trigger its release, he lifted each receiver from its cradle and held it up for a few seconds, waiting for coins to drop. None did."[202] The man, who seems to be caught out of joint with the present, hunting for change in a device no-longer-relevant, signposts a hopelessness to return to the past. Nonetheless, U. looks toward the harbor one final time and ends with one of the novel's most stable forms of rhetoric: "The dazzle on the water now was all-consuming, overexposed, blinding: the departed ferry, Staten Island, all the other landmarks and most of the sky had disappeared in a great holocaust of light, whose retinal after-effects, in turn, made the interior too dark when I turned back to it" (189). McCarthy the flesh-and-blood author probing for links is absent here. Instead, the implied author emerges, occupying the classical space of rhetorical description. This moment is not quite as Googlable. It requires what Genette says is the critic's skill to have read and recognized the "hypotext" of a literary reference's antecedent.[203] This moment of description is a play on Walt Whitman, whose roving "I" crossing Brooklyn Ferry pauses to take in the "reflection of the summer sky in the water" and who "Had my eyes dazzled by the shimmering track of beams,/Look't at the fine centrifugal spokes of light round the shape of my

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[200] McCarthy, *Satin Island*, 26.
[201] McCarthy, 149.
[202] McCarthy, 188.
[203] Genette, *Paratexts*, 233.

head in the sunlit water." The people are "impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day, The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself/disintegrated, every one disintegrated yet part of the scheme."[204] For U., the light hitting the water is a moment of redolent paradox—the bright sky overexposing the rest of the landscape and destroying nature before U. must go back into a dark tunnel, unable to see anyone else.[205] Ironically, for Whitman, the bright light of the beams allows the speaker to focus on the other people looking out at the Brooklyn Bridge, merging into a collective. U., blind to seeing others, must only understand their collectivity anonymously, turning into a dark tunnel with impaired vision, but surely plenty more of the rhetoric of expertise.

Conclusions

Satin Island is unique as a Wikipedic Novel insofar as its typographical form resembles the numbering system of Wikipedia and it is a book about writing a formless text. The thematic of U.'s name—which I have argued represents a greater plurality of pronominal referent in the collective Open-Source community of the Internet's information—is also distinctive (though also instructive for the remaining texts in this dissertation). The *narrative* features I have outlined, however, are typical of numerous texts produced since the Open-Source boom I locate in 2004. The closed and large aperture of realist depiction, the presence of diegetic clickability in which characters use the Internet to point to virtual realist referents, the distinctively thick monologic dialogues that feature one character explaining in depth a particular concept while another serves to clarify and facilitate the narrative inclusion of the detail, and the use of decontextualized proper nouns and abbreviations.

All of these methods establish a type of narrative framing that draws the reader out of the typical narrative-communicative situation that narratologists since at least Seymour Chatman have imagined.[206] In this construction, the narrative text exists in its own box while the real author and the real reader sit outside of it, substituted instead by the implied author and the implied reader who bear ideological imperatives from the effects of the narrative work. As I have attempted to show with the dual visual rhetoric of U., whose expertise is performed for others while the logic of that performance is embedded within the very rhetoric that is visualized through written language, the real author Tom McCarthy diverges in formal practice from his implied author. The implied author creates a challenge between nature and the machine, the brain and the digitized prosthetic of computer memory and Internet "hive minds." Yet McCarthy's aesthetic ultimately recuperates the narrative force of *rhetoric* over signification. The unclickable in this text *is* the decision making of both the author from a rhetorical point of view, and U. from an aestheticizing vantage. The real reader, who must navigate the narrative referential, then has license to see the formal cracks in the rhetorical stitching of found, Open-Source materials. The real author and the narrator make space for the real reader to exit the narrative text not out of what McCarthy calls in this chapter's epigraph

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[204] Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings: Authoritative Texts, Other Poetry and Prose, Criticism*, (New York: Norton, 2002), 161.

[205] This scene is especially compelling for its return to Whitley Carpenter's dissertation on McCarthy has associated *Satin Island* with George Bataille's conception of aesthetic formlessness, in which all art ought to be brought to its base materialism. The ferry ride's return to plot places in stark contrast the to the novel's digital and researched material, in fact bringing into greater relief the level of informational assemblage constituting the text. Whitley Carpenter "Formless Literature, the Novels that Aren't Novels: Or, the Catastrophic Materialism of Tom McCarthy," Order No. 28154191, University of Georgia, 2020, 13.

[206] Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse : Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film,* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1978), 109.

a mode of "entertainment," so much as to understand a world rooted in virtual realism. We can now understand omniscience in a different way and see that the real author and real reader now share a pair of Open-Source bifocals when it comes to novelistic focalization. In the age of both mimetic recall to a world outside the story world *and* a social world that has become the provincial referent to what I have been calling virtual realism, the jostling back and forth of realist detail and the rhetorical work of fiction change the way the once inert "readerly" text sits. It makes omniscience not the province of a head on a swivel, but a disembodied group on their computers: you.

CHAPTER III | OPEN (SOURCE) CITY: TEJU COLE'S DILETTANTE

Teju Cole's Digital Writing

Chapter one argues, in part, that one consequence of Open-Source information on the novel is a dialogic asociality: language exchanged between characters can register as encounters of brusque transaction. I argued that Tom McCarthy achieves this literary asociality in his cooptation of post/modernism's formal technique of nonattributive dialogue. In omitting quotation marks and opting instead for paragraphs that optically blur sentences, McCarthy's novel visually exaggerates knowledge's porous belonging between characters. In the case of *Satin Island*, this knowledge is at times drawn from Wikipedia and its kin of the digital commons. In turn, Tom McCarthy's dark humor emphasizes how digital life confounds and malfunctions the Cartesian axiom that thinking accrues to an individual's being, as McCarthy depicts an "expert" knowledge-worker who is self-consciously skeptical of his own fitness as an anthropologist while he anxiously attempts to wrest an objective logic out of subjective encounters with digital media. I emphasized that three specific elements of *Satin Island* insinuate new pathways to understanding the novel's coexistence with the very screens from which their material and materiality spring: 1) the aforementioned typographic qualities 2) the homophonic double-entendre of the protagonist's name (U.), and 3) the "interface" of the novel page's layout, which bears clear echoes of Wikipedia's visual configuration. Put together, I call the effects that allow the physical book and its textuality to coincide with the Internet's trace "visual rhetoric." *Satin Island* shows how even if the novel may feel more asocial due to its cooptation of Internet information, the reader of a Wikipedic Novel can wear the virtual clothes of the anthropologist, fact-checking and drinking from some of the same wellsprings en route to facts.

This chapter extends my discussion of Wikipedia's (along with other Open-Source websites') influence on both novel reading and novel writing. In addition, it examines the reader-character-author triangulation of trust. Teju Cole's *Open City* is a quintessential (and historically foregrounding) example of what the Wikipedic Novel can be. One strong feature of the type of novel I am classifying throughout this project is the first-person point of view. In the case of *Open City*, the protagonist, Julius, has a point of "view" that, from the standpoint of plot-and-setting, flattens a sensory representation of the fictional world and its characters in favor of rendering a more three-dimensional representation of Julius's cerebral mind. Where there is external stimulus in the novel, there is even more for Julius to say. I argue that *Open City's* emphasis on the contents of Julius's mind—which does affiliate this novel squarely in the camp of a "novel of ideas"—models a surprising capacity for the Wikipedic Novel to manipulate readerly trust.

Even more, I argue that the novel's inducements to corroborate character knowledge online in both narratively explicit and stylistically tacit ways broadens the ethical capacity of the novel by making it "clickable." Whether it be watching a movie trailer online to see if Julius's account in the novel holds muster, attempting to correspond a moment of Julius's musical ekphrasis against a YouTube recording of a specific composer's interpretation of a classical piece, or fact-checking a surprising piece of historical minutiae, the experience of reading the novel can easily become entangled with a multimedia online experience. What I will show is that the ethical knot that *Open City* famously cinches at its conclusion—that the ever-erudite Julius may be a sexual assailant—is especially constricting because of the *verifiability* of much of what he says elsewhere. This verifiability, which I will continue to call "clickability," helps to heighten readerly understanding *with* a character. Rather than gleaning ideas or descriptions *from* a narrator, readers can experience the art alongside him and corroborate his ability to aestheticize or to experience aesthetics coterminously. However,

this clickability and its necessary deviation from the narrative life of the novel opens an ethical aporia in that a reader may not have a strong understanding *of* a character. Put another way, the more typical notion of "character development" that might otherwise be emplotted through a character's actions or decision-making is ostensibly occluded by the sheer volume of information and explication, which leaves little space for narrative to advance.

In order to understand how discursions and discourses obstruct both plot and character development while developing a peculiar trust, I read Julius as an embodiment of Goethe's figure of the dilettante. Unlike the socially aloof expert in McCarthy's *Satin Island*, Julius represents a different relation to dispersing knowledge: the eager-to-please dilettante who culls and collates information in appealing ways. While the effect plays nicely to invite clickability, *Open City*, like the infinitely "writerly" Internet, meets a decisively readerly limit of the author's machinations: Julius's encounter with his own character within a social world with social stakes as a potential sexual assailant. When the fictional world incapacitates referential clickability, the novel reminds us of its chief function to facilitate modes of ethical engagement through storytelling—a relief to Walter Benjamin's infophobia, and at once a rebuttal to his suspicion of the novel as a text penned solely by the "novelist who has isolated himself."[207] In *Open City*'s compiling and concatenation of information, the effect in the end is for the novel to open the question of what happens when the novel itself is deficient in story—a lesson not just for *Open City*, but for the other Wikipedic Novels I will address, which all bear anemic plots in favor of robust citationality.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

If there is a novelist who has successfully bridged multimedia platforms, it is Teju Cole. His photography book *Blind Spot* highlights his penchant for aphorisms and apertures. He has also made headlines with his short story "Hafiz"—a tale whose sentences are wrought through a series of 23 retweets from fifteen people. The "Twitter Novel" is more of a vignette, starting *in media res* with a narrator nearing a subway, who, with a small group, witnesses a man lying dormant on the ground after having complained of chest pains. The narrator considers his emotional reaction to the potentially dead man until an ambulance arrives and the man is inexplicably okay. The final image is a pair of EMTs who, "Without a word to us, . . . lifted the stretcher into the back of the ambulance, and without a word to us..." The trailing thought leads to no new detail. Instead, media personality and MSNBC host Chris Hayes "closes the cover" by announcing "FIN" in his tweet.[208]

The reaction to Hayes's abrupt denouement is strong: Twitter user Nanjala Nyabola begs in a reply to the final retweet, "NOOOO!! I was really enjoying that!" while ukulele artist BrittnyCharity admits, "That story has been my best experience on twitter. Unbound & brilliant!" before asking, "How may one join in the next?" Both followers must have been disheartened to soon learn that the story was not an abruptly ended, collaborative tale showing the upside of Twitter. Rather, "Hafiz" represents a benign form of social engineering: it was all masterminded by Cole, for he had penned the entire story previously and privately Direct Messaged each of the contributing users (all personal friends or associates), asking each to post a sentence or two. He then retweeted the posts in the according sequence of his original story. For a few days, the Internet posted laudatory reactions, and by January 10th and 16th of 2014 Cole retweeted articles from NPR and *The New York Times* with the respective headlines "Teju Cole Writes A Story A Tweet At A Time" and "Teju Cole Puts Story-Telling to the Twitter Test." To this day, only the articles reveal

[207] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 456.
[208] Teju Cole, "Hafiz," 2014, https://twitter.com/tejucole/timelines/437242785591078912.

the dupe. He made no remarks himself on his Twitter. Still, while this creative (not-so) novelistic endeavor is certainly compelling in its singularity, Cole is recognized most widely for his PEN/Hemingway Award Winning novel, *Open City*.

      Open City is a controversial, first-person account of a Nigerian psychologist in residency at Columbia University named Julius. Roaming Manhattan at all hours by foot, Julius "people watches" passersby and has lengthy conversations with a coterie of associates: the eighty-nine year old emeritus Professor Saito, a medieval scholar who serves as a literary mentor, and an unnamed Black, jazz aficionado Earth Sciences professor at Columbia who "had strong opinions about books and films, opinions that were against mine" and who, while in Paris, "acquired a taste for fashionable philosophers like Badiou and Serres."[209] Eventually, Julius vacations in Brussels where he has a flirtatious dalliance with another jazz love in Dr. Annette Malliotte, an alluring white woman who can draw fine distinctions between Ghanaian and Nigerian culture with a "precise" diction and "an accent only vaguely European."[210] Upon his return to Manhattan from a vacation full of radical political conversations in Internet cafes and much reflection on his childhood in Nigeria, Julius eventually encounters a social circle including a childhood acquaintance, Moji. After remaining silent across a variety of encounters in New York, she finally reminds Julius of the time he sexually assaulted her, and the novel ends with his own clumsy reflection (or lackthereof) on a moment he struggles to remember.

      Open City is indeed a dynamic work about memory, cross-cultural exchange, political violence, and—in manifold ways—the male gaze. At this point, the novel has contributed to a range of fields: Cosmopolitan studies, fiction about New York after 9/11, transnationalism and African identity, post-Postmodern theories of writing and reading, and even Music Studies. However, it is not mentioned within the literature of media studies, which is strange given that much of the criticism on Teju Cole the author focuses on his experiments in mixed media, from the aforementioned "Hafiz" to his three hybrid photobooks published from 2017 to 2020. Cole himself, when asked why he attempted a range of literary experiments on Twitter, admitted "I try to find out what I can do in that space [. . .] and then without any compunction or regret I move on."[211] However, Cole's own website and all of his biographic blurbs identify him first as a novelist.

      This chapter argues that Cole's proclivity for digital aesthetic involvement is not merely bound to his computer endeavors, but also to the novel that launched his assent into contemporary literature canonization. Ultimately, I will show how the ethical dupe that concludes *Open City* derives from a form of narcissistic dilettantism that is generated, paradoxically, by a narrative strategy that compiles information both apprehensible through print and online to create an intellectual work that distracts from the novel's narrative work. In imbuing his character with knowledge from the "ambient commons" of digital life, Cole renders the effect of literary encyclopedism—a seemingly defunct novelistic category that I argue is refurbished in his slim book as a Wikipedic Novel of ideas.

      The Internet does occasionally feature in the abundance of *Open City* criticism (mostly as a vessel for digital cosmopolitanism), but only two particular critics flag the relation of Cole to Wikipedia with passing glances. Pieter Vermeulen has noted that the historical connections that line the text "may seem to underwrite an ethic of cosmopolitan 'hyperlinking'" because "they are delivered in an inspid tone that also surfaces elsewhere in the novel and that is inevitably reminiscent of a Wikipedia page."[212] In a footnote, Vermeulen expands that the novel's "descent into the tonality of a Wikipedia entry points to the danger that such a principled openness may always devolve into

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[209] Teju Cole, *Open City: A Novel*. (New York: Random House, 2011), 23.

[210] Cole, *Open City*, 23.

[211] Steve Paulson, "Finding My Way," 2017.

[212] Vermeulen, "Flights of Memory," 50.

the accumulation of mere information."[213] Rebecca Clark, while unfurling her own theory of the novel's protagonist as a "narrative parasite," suggests that the "lulling ebb and flow of Julius's encyclopedic (or at least Wikipedic) musings makes logical continuity errors hard to catch."[214] Clark's reading expands on a scene in which Julius describes bedbugs as creatures "visible only in speech," which stands in frank contradiction (and falsity) to the facts laid out by his counterpart in the scene. Interestingly, these two readings of Julius's Wikipedicness are directly opposed in their claims about narrative effects. For Vermeulen, the Wikipedic appropriates the resonance of his narrative style, whereas Clark's quip positions part of the stylistic "ebb and flow" that can *conceal* factual misgivings. Indeed, the sheer breadth of the novel's meandering vignettes beckon for confirmation.

Amanda Chemeche and others at Yale's Digital Humanities Lab have undertaken such a project through *Open the City, a* literary mapping project whose mission "charts the narrative of Teju Cole's novel *Open City*, through the use of maps, artifacts, and photographs. Drawing on the concept of the palimpsest—a document written over many times that reveals traces of its past incarnations—the project analyzes the city's overlapping economic, social, and political legacies in four historic epochs."[215] In a fittingly metacognitive subsidiary project, Chemche meditates on undertaking her *Open the City* site for Yale's *American Literature in the World* blog. In a post titled "Fact vs Fiction: Approaching Historical Inaccuracies in Open City" she discusses:

> Starting on page twenty-five, Julius describes his patient, V., who is writing about Cornelis van Tienhoven, in a book called the Monster of New Amsterdam. Cole identifies van Teinhoven as the most influential schout, or secretary, in New Amsterdam. He was employed by the Dutch East India Trading Company.
> An important moment of time-travel in the text, I started doing research, hoping to find out more about this figure—perhaps where he lived, his family, where he was buried—to annotate into the exon.
>
> But as I searched, "Cornelis van Tienhoven AND East India Trading Company" nothing came up. Turns out, there was a big inaccuracy in Cole's writing. The East India Trading Company functioned in East Asia. New Amsterdam was the hub of the West India Trading Company, a corporation founded nearly 21 years later than the former. Cornelius van Tienhoven was the schout of the West India Trading Company.[216]

Thereafter, she admits that at first read she took Julius as a wizened docent of New York's history, "as if he is a historian." Interestingly, after detecting the factual slip she describes feeling subversive, "as if I have caught him and by extension the author, in the act. Cole is not a historian, he is an author and this well of knowledge he draws from, is not as deep as it seems." After her post, an anonymous commenter offers reassurance that Cole must not have been up to anything malicious: "I'm sure 'East Indian Company' is an oversight on Teju Cole's part — it's not a fatal error, but probably a common one. And in the end, it might say more about all of us than about Cole himself." Indeed, the post does reveal something: what I call the Wikipedic Reader and the effects of information in the virtual age. The irony of the entire discussion is that in doing her own research, Chemche cites information about the less famous Dutch West India Company. Her source? "Wikimedia Foundation, 05 Apr. 2017. Web. 05 Apr. 2017.

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[213] Vermeulen, "Flights of Memory," 56.

[214] Rebecca Clark, "'Visible Only in Speech': Peripatetic Parasitism, or, Becoming Bedbugs in Open City," *Narrative* 26, no. 2 (May 2018), 192.

[215] Chemeche, Amanda. "Open the City." Yale Digital Humanities Lab, 2017.

[216] Chemeche, "Open the City."

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_West_India_Company>" (Ibid). I am inclined to agree with the blog respondent that Cole's error "might say more about all of us" than the author. The very compulsion to track this nove's references might be what figures the Wikipedic Reader, which this chapter will more thoroughly theorize. Further, this "probably common" error could well be motivated by the at-times fallible digital commons that Wikipedia represents. But the small slippage also represents some subtle expectations of readers: that novelists will not create "harm" through historical inaccuracy and that the conflation of character and authorial knowledge is fundamentally interchangeable. This moment weds the notion of extratextual verifiability to novelistic stakes—to *whom* does Cole intend no harm: the reader, or the novel itself? Either answer unbinds the prose and opens the terrain of the Internet in understanding how trust operates in the novel.

Placed alongside this chapter's interest in the Open-Source, *Open City* is a punnily providential exemplar of the digital trace conceived in a print codex. While much criticism has been penned on this novel, I turn to it for its historic specificity and its author's extensive commentary about the novel's becoming. *Open City* was published in 2011, but both it and Cole's other novel, *Every Day Is for the Thief"* were penned in the same year. The author describes how "I wrote *Every Day Is for the Thief* in January 2006, and I started writing *Open City* in November 2006 as a way to procrastinate to do the edits for the book version."[217] 2006, as I have discussed in Chapter 2, is the year that numerous global publications identified the "Person of the Year" as "You," and a year that verifies as cultural entities "the cosmic compendium of knowledge Wikipedia and the million-channel people's network YouTube and the online metropolis MySpace," for "[i]t's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing."[218] I recast this quotation because it brings to the fore an issue that is otherwise hidden in plain sight for *Open City*: in a novel penned after the web's incorporation into everyday life, to what degree can an author's rendering of a contemporary mind in the contemporary moment *hide* the Internet as a source?

Even by July of 2006 Stacy Schiff of *The New Yorker* was asking, "Know It All: Can Wikipedia Conquer Expertise?" and Wikipedia's self-generative community "grew increasingly conscious of its public role, and by 2006 an organized index of all media references to Wikipedia was set up—first with a list for every year and then, as coverage swelled, one for every month as well."[219] Given my citation of both Clark and Vermuelen above, it seems authors might not. Both critics surmise and intuit that elements of his prose draw from Wikipedia, but there is no clear certainty. And in fact, Cole manages to toe the line of pure insinuation that the online encyclopedia informed the making of *Open City* in a 2018 interview with *Lit Hub*. In it, Cole addresses the notion of Encyclopedic Novels:

> But now we have this new challenge where we know that people can look things up, and not only can readers look things up, *we* as writers can look things up, right? So how do you give the work an organic feeling? Where it doesn't become like you're regurgitating Wikipedia. So, sort of like the David Foster Wallace or even before him, the James Joyce or William Gaddis or William Gass encyclopedic approach to knowledge and to evocation of information. It becomes tricky.[220]

In line with the language of the 2006 magazines, Cole is not shy to render a collective of "we" writers who use the Internet to pen their novels for a "you" who faces the plight to charge a text with a higher aesthetic value that can be recognized as organic produce. In addition, he is quick to identify a "challenge" from the entanglement between the reader and the author—understanding

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[217] Christopher Bollen, "Teju Cole," *Interview Magazine*, 2014, https://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/teju-cole.
[218] *Time* 2006.
[219] Schiff, Stacy. "Know It All: Can Wikipedia Conquer Expertise?" *The New Yorker*, 2006.
[220] Warsame, Khalid. "Teju Cole: 'We Are Made of All the Things We Have Consumed.'" Literary Hub, 2018.

that if the novel is the artifice of web-based information, are readers able to feel the synthetic nature of the text's production during the reading experience? He amplifies the issue, attesting that the "interesting challenge is, how do you evoke the internal states of somebody who know the things that they know and are interested in the things they're interested in. […] In virtually all the work that I do, there are things that are very accurately conveyed that a reader might know or nor know about—I have to look things up too, we all do . . ."[221] Cole shares that his approach to addressing this so-called challenge is to "leave in uncertainty" and "half-remembered things." He exemplifies this part of his craft by pointing out that in *Open City* "there's a lot of, "I don't remember . . . " or "I seem to recall that . . . "—you know? And it's not too tightly woven with perfect recall." Across this confessional interview, Cole implicates *Open City* into a Wikipedic mode of writing while never fully *saying* it was penned with the aid of the online encyclopedia.

What is more, Cole stages a counterintuitive claim to authorship ahead of his discussion of Wikipedia by asserting that "it's less impressive, especially nowadays, to sit down and write a 500-page encyclopedic novel. You could have two computers, one of them open to Wikipedia, and the other one open to a Word document, and just bang away." The pronouns across his hypothetical any-author (the "you" with two computers), his personal craft (the "I" who looks things up), and *Open City's* implied narrator (the "I" who seems to recall) blunge into a strange vessel to hold information. Put together, Cole's "challenge," then, becomes yet more complex. He believes novels should maintain a readerly rhythm that conceals the incorporation of borrowed information and also that characters should be able to express their ideas and interests from firmly established "internal states." The challenge is to render an interiority that goes beyond parroting raw knowledge retrieved from the Internet. And somehow most important yet at once discrete in this interview, the author might strive to be "impressive."

To connect this constellation of ideas—the conversion of Wikipedic cribbing into palatable literary style, the characterological responsibility to emplotted knowledge, and the authorial pursuit of literary impressiveness—it is useful to consider the generic traditions to which *Open City* belongs. Cole's concern with the novel's formal obligation to fluidly incorporate ideas affiliates with scholars who study "the Novel of Ideas" (NOI). *Open City* certainly sits on the sideline of this coterie of fiction that qualifies as "a vague category [. . .] in which conversation, intellectual discussion and debate predominate, and in which plot, narrative, emotional conflict and psychological depth in characterization are deliberately limited."[222] J.A. Cuddon's 1977 definition points to a wresting of pages from the engaging clutches of fictional action by the sluggish discourse of commentary and explanation that exceeds the novel's diegetic terrain. Works like *Moby-Dick*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Iola Leroy*, and *Elizabeth Costello* represent a range of narrative apparatuses that metabolize and emplot essayistic discursions. Building on Cuddon's identification of "intellectual discussion," Timothy Bewes rebrands the NOI as the "Philosophical Novel," subtly divesting the NOI of "authorial predetermination" by placing the onus of interpretation on the act of character "meditation" that negotiates explanation and understanding as a responsibility that "seeks to meet the reader halfway, refusing to play to the gallery and appeal to the market."[223] Bewes' Philosophical Novel offloads the responsibility of the act of ideation itself to the reader. Within this genus of literary production, the formal accommodation of information seems to bear a negative relation to the positive capacities of the novel. In Bewes's view, the lack of explication and conceptual "handholding" of the

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[221] Warsame, "We Are Made."

[222] J. A. Cuddon, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 216.

[223] Timothy Bewes rebrands the NOI as the "Philosophical Novel." Timothy Bewes, "Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism," *Differences* 21, no. 3 (December 1, 2010), 1–33.

Philosophical Novel divests the author from intruding on the discourses incorporated into the novel with contextual window dressing. If we take the literary marketplace to be readers who visit novels for dynamic plot that moves with little difficulty, then the Philosophical Novel refuses such accommodations, asking readers to bring their own extratextual context to the reading experience.

In *Open City*, Cole refurbishes the ideas of both the Novel of Ideas and the Encyclopedic Novel outlined thus far, distending the novel's idea into character itself (countering the "deliberate limitations" to psychological depth and character Cuddon sees). The erstwhile textual girth of the Encyclopedic Novel becomes compressed into a relatively svelte 259 pages because of the prioritization of the first-person purview. The maximal prerequisite of polyphonic, third-person point of view introducing a plenitude of perspective and conceptual contrast is restricted, making for a more economical engagement with ideas. Secondary and minor characters need not be developed at length because the novel's space is so dominated with Julius's impressions, in opposition to an engagement with setting or general activity beyond walking, sitting, talking, and observing. In this novel, there is little space and little narrative time for the author to "grow" more characters. The novelistic form that makes room for character development is coopted by the knowledge-claims that emerge from the narrator-protagonist—even about others. In its social flimsiness, this approach to the protagonist generates the surprising ethical quandary both Julius and the reader encounter at the novel's end. His ideas make people homework—not agents with any exuberant capacity to provide alternate modes of understanding through their actions. As Clark notes in her reading of the novel, this creates a "parasitic" effect on the narrative.

The fairly inert plot, by novel's end, reveals a lacunae in the Novel of Idea's form: stretch and summary. Sianne Ngai argues that "stretch and summary are the only temporal modes in which an innovation entirely unique to the novel has been able to discourse"—stretch being the temporal elongation of a story event that takes "less than a second" into several pages and summary being the lapse of time and its events "accounted for in a single paragraph or even sentence."[224] Interestingly, Ngai's account of the NOI also presupposes the same free indirect discourse that generates the Encylopedic Novel's maximalism. She describes how the ideas from the NOI's cooptation of plot into idea-driven discourse shackles free indirect discourse, which is the typical generator of stretch and summary. Ultimately, these imported ideas push the novelistic quality of plot into "a 'looser family of forms' privileging 'character, direct speech, scene and action, to the exclusion of narration and interiority" that can be considered more akin to the drama of plays.[225]

When Ngai describes this type of privileging, each category is motivated by the capacity of the narrator (and occasionally dialogic interlocutors) to critique, expand, or cogitate in fits and starts. Put another way, the typical necessities for novelistic propulsion and temporal force (scene and action) become reduced to accessories from which characters affiliate or disaffiliate in order to establish their identities. Ngai excerpts a passage from Martin Puncher's *Drama of Ideas* where he suggests that "calling those moments [of "dialogic scenes of intellectual discussion"] examples of 'typical novelistic hybridity'" is wrong—instead, it is "more appropriate to think of them as dramatic moments in the novel, with the narrator, retreating into stage directions, giving over the scene to the pure action (and dialogue) of characters."[226] This, Puncher suggests, might be called "dramatic Platonism." However, there is one significant wrinkle in all of the preceding accounts—the novel of ideas, philosophical novel, encyclopedic maximalism, and dramatic Platonism: the inclusion of content for contemplation is social, realized dialogically or by the inclusion of the phantom voice of

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[224] Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist* Form, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 36.

[225] Ngai, *Gimmick*, 42.

[226] Martin Puchner, *Drama of Ideas: Platonic Provocations in Theater and Philosophy* (Oxford University Press I, 2014); 24.

that third person narrating in all their indirectness. When monologue intercedes, as in *Moby-Dick*'s Ishmael, the very citation of cetology is made plain, but Julius's blurring of strict memory, vague recall, and verified facticity evoke an effect both narratively and characterologically.

The vector by which the remainder of this chapter will operate presupposes two ideas about first-person NOI: 1) the phase change from conceptual thickness into fluid plot is "impressive," and 2) both the range and fact of possession of novelistic knowledge is "impressive" (whether accorded to characters or author). *Open City* is unique in that Julius's interiority—constituted wholly of what seems to be his own knowledge—does not sacrifice characterization as the aforementioned critics suggest the novel ought to, but instead amplifies it. His knowledge comes to mark him as an "impressive" character, but the narrative subsumption of the scene time and capacity for summary of the storyworld itself veils his ethical character. His painstaking performance of quick encyclopedism and meditations on ethicality are undone when the summary of his past is forced by another character who is completely divorced from his ideas. The dupe, I argue, is informed by the *way* his information is mobilized. Unlike *Moby-Dick*, whose ideas are borne out in a clear citationality, the sources of Julius's knowledge career from gleanings that engage his memory in modes of unscrupulous uncertainty to intentionally sought fact. His profession as an interpreter of thoughts creates friction against his abiding interest and supposed authority in the arts. The fragility of his mastery on these topics necessitates, at times, an accounting of *how* he has come to know. It is precisely in rendering his dilettantism and the necessary research such knowledge necessitates that Cole opens a pathway for insinuating the use of Open-Source online material in his plot, even when it appears unannounced. This type of early digital banality—even in 2006 when Wikipedia was just piquing the popular conscious's understanding in the Open-Source's integration into the practice of everyday life—is vital to understanding how the novel and its systems of character knowledge slowly come to betray the craft of authorial *and* character embedding of Wikipedia and its cohort of Internet knowledge resources.

The Ethical Impressiveness of Cosmopolitanism

Open City's central thematic for critical analysis has been Julius's "cosmopolitanism" and its ethical entanglements. Katherine Hallimer points to exemplary excerpts endorsing the novel's cosmopolitanism from *The New Yorker*'s James Wood, who writes that "[m]ore than anything, *Open City* seems a beautiful, modulated description of a certain kind of solitary liberalism common to thousands, if not millions, of bookish types."[227] To Wood, the novel's spirit of cosmopolitanism enables "liberal journeys of comprehension" (Ibid). Werner Sollors even sees the novel as a requisite example of Kwame Anthony Appiah's definition of cosmopolitanism, claiming "Cole's novel offers a full representation [of the philosophy]. . . though perhaps with some more hard-core elements than Appiah's 'rooted' version" as evinced through "explicit opposition to totalitarian figures and xenophobic violence."[228] Even more, Julius's "strong universalist endorsement of such utopian art as Mahler's music, which, despite the homogeneous audience that comes to listen to it, is 'not white, or black, not old or young, and whether it is even specifically human, rather than in accord with more universal vibrations, is open to question."[229] Both Wood and Sollors admit that the success of *Open City*'s cosmopolitan project is at once capacious yet quite specific. Sollors wrinkles Wood's claim—Wood anchors the liberal journey for comprehension in being "bookish," where Sollors finds

[227] James Wood, "'The Arrival of Enigmas.' Rev. of Open City, by Teju Cole," *New Yorker*, 2011.
[228] Werner Sollors, "Cosmopolitan Curiosity in an Open City: Notes on Reading Teju Cole by Way of Kwame Anthony Appiah," *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 49, no. 2 (2018), 242.
[229] Sollors, "Cosmopolitan Curiosity," 242.

cosmopolitan achievement in the narrative's musical textures. This case for hearing music within literature puts a particular form of pressure on the cosmopolitan reader, who is apparently expected to bear facility in an (admittedly "homogenous") practice of classical listening. This is the point from which my concern with dilettantism emerges, for I see the figure of the aesthetic cosmopolitan as a welcome friend to the dilettante. In using the term "aesthetic cosmopolitan," I describe a particular attentiveness and perceptiveness to national and transnational modes of expression within art, styles, and postures. Pieter Vermeulen points to examples of this explicitly in *Open City*, noting "the portrait, the symphony, the fugue, the photograph, the cathedral," and other vessels for cultural containment to which Julius serves as an aesthetic cosmopolitan reader and dilettante narrator. Through these vantages, Julius evokes a unique form of trust and reliance while conjuring the conditions for an "impressive" book even despite its brevity.[230]

Goethe began a project attempting to formally outline dilettantism that now exists in fragments of the 1799 "Notes on Dilettantism." For Goethe, dilettantism has mainly to do with art. In his conception, the dilettante actually has a "first impulse to self-production from the effect of works of art on him."[231] In this effort of self-making, the dilettante "confounds these effects with the objective causes and motives" in order to "make the state of feeling he has been put into productive and practical; as if out of the fragrance of flowers one should try to reproduce flowers themselves.[232] A dilettante is not necessarily a polymath, but a commentator who characterizes art and curates feelings into something that aspires toward a product. By reproducing or commoditizing the art, the dilettante can then heighten his posture of authority (and in the case of Julius, this commodity is a book). By distinguishing a dilettante as a creator, Goethe draws a clear line between the dilettante and connoisseur. Unlike the dilettante who attempts to render some form of imitative offering, the connoisseur of art must simply "be able to appreciate what is simply beautiful, but the common run of people is satisfied with ornament" (72). The dilettante-connoisseur distinction drawn here affords an implicit hierarchy of cultural capital. Lowest on the pole would be the absorptive, behaved, yet commonplace connoisseur. Next would be the dilettante fixed on the fact of craft. And atop the hierarchy, the artist who can produce work for the sake of ideas and artfulness itself. The intermediary status of the dilettante illustrates a useful nexus between the admirer and the creator, the adherent and the architect. Further, Goethe's dilettante is one whose "ignorance of [himself] puts the passive in the place of the active" and who "runs particularly to neatness, which is the completion of the thing in hand, wherefrom a sort of illusion arises, as if the thing itself were worthy of existing (Ibid). What is Goethe describing here besides the illusion of totality? Implicitly, the "passive" is merely the act of assembly, moving the connoisseur's proclivity to acutely look and hear into the act of imitation.

As Goethe is loath to admit yet can't help but imply, there is simply value in the act of having fashioned a text. His lithe pejoratives are not inherently negative—the "passive" sits in stark relief to the active, the "neatness" of the text is like a conservative embrasure to which the dilettante's creativity runs to hide. And of course, the completion of the thing in hand conjures nothing more than an illusory effect. However, in most alternative terms the act of completion is seen as a creditable feat. This is to say, what Goethe works to show how the negative productive cycle of the dilettante may not be so negative. Especially today, in a time where labor, commodities, and text itself is less tangible and "in hand" (existing more *in pixels*) the idea of rendering a complete

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[230] Pieter Vermeulen, "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's Open City and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Modern Literature VO - 37*, no. 1 (2013), 54.

[231] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Notes on Dilettantism," in *Literary Essays*, ed Joel Elias Spingarn, (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, 1921), 21.

[232] Goethe, "Dilettantism," 71-2.

physical work brings with it an authoritative allure that Goethe could not have anticipated. In this regard, we can begin to see the way in which artistic *impression* or *impressiveness* can operate outside of the boundaries of a critical praxis that determines artistic merit. Under these conditions, a unique type of implied reader is positioned for Julius, who *is* an expert of psychiatry delivering a narrative directly to a specific type of implied reader (one, of course, who can till through his citation to be impressed).

The chief beneficiaries of a dilettante's work might look like a cosmopolitan reader and an Internet user. After all, while aesthetic cosmopolitanism is premised on the consumption of art, the cultural orientation is not evaluative of the art's quality. Aesthetic cosmopolitanism is a nimbler connoisseurship, a meandering ideology in which a person is persistently braced to apply theory to practice in an encounter with difference.[233] Likewise, the Internet user can benefit from a dilettante because the dilettante and all of his information is centralized—it is in himself. Online, how do we know where anything comes from? The Internet lacks direction. In fact, the only orienting coordinate for a fresh browser is its "homepage," an arbitrary marker that could be anything from *The Baffler's* splash page to Dior's savoir-faire tips. This is as close as an Internet experience might have to a North Star, a Prime Meridian, an absolute horizon from which the networked plane emerges. Words link with (to, from) words and from the sighted media the user may construe meaning. And yet, each discrete page carries with it some perspective, some user who has inputted text. Attribution is no longer a prerequisite for a work "published" online, and non-attribution actually defines the contributive community of Wikipedia.

For both the Internet user and the cosmopolitan reader there is relieving utility in the dilettante as a source. Further, I see the dilettante narrator as a solution to the aesthetic cosmopolitan's waiting (if ever a moment arises) to apply the homework of connoisseurship. Here, Goethe's sense of the dilettante's plagiarism becomes valuable:

> All Dilettanti are Plagiarists. They enervate and pull to pieces all that is original in manner or matter, and at the same time imitate, copy, and piece out their own emptiness with it. Thus the language gets filled with phrases and formulae stolen from all sides, which have no longer any meaning, and you may read whole books written in a fine style and containing nothing[234]

Reserving strong commentary on the creator's "emptiness," I would like to recuperate Goethe's notion of plagiarism for the Wikipedic Novel. If what he describes—imitation, and formulaic phraseology—is plagiarism, then it is certainly not the type to be met with expulsion by an academic senate. No, these decisions register more as the debt of influence real artists mortgage in pursuit of individual style. Of course, Goethe's point is that the dilettante's emptiness will never lead to true style, for this would necessitate a singular entity who is not empty. Although this plagiaristic "fine style" may not be suitable for the bibliophile seeking paginated sanctification (as Goethe's ideal reader might be), it is the optimal circuit course for aesthetic cosmopolitans seeking to exercise their connoisseurship.

Every worldly reference to which the aesthetic cosmopolite might be ignorant can be quickly converted into cultural nutriment. And for the Internet user, whose every encounter with information and culture is a potential duplication, detached from authority, the dilettante's citations carry the good grace of culpability, for the reader knows the source. There is a hermeneutic relief in knowing where one's information comes from (even if it still risks inaccuracy when any given piece

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[233] At its best, this practice may forge a connection. At its most misapplied, it may be the American man delighting in saying "Gracias" to a server shaving dry-aged steak on to his plate at a Brazilian Steakhouse—a failed connection that cannot bridge the Portuguese idiom, met with a smirk and a brusque, "*De nada*."
[234] Goethe, 79.

of digital writing could have been copied and pasted from the Associated Press or a WebMD article and reposted on to countless sites of imitation—a silent plagiarizing chiefly uncoverable by the person whose pursuit of information is akin to comparison shopping). Between misattribution on quotation sites (surely there is a commonplace book's-worth of false Thomas Jefferson quotes online to rival his original),[235] and videos that become "viral" and are reposted countless times from various content providers who seek to profit from the videos' popularity, all of this replication sits like a perverted Borgesian Library of Babel—content drifts in cyberspace until it collides with minds. Thus, there is a particular mode of unconfident bracing in simply *searching* online. For as much clicking a user might do to gain confidence in his information, the clicking could invariably continue on to find some seed of contradiction.

Julius as a dilettante who narrates a novel surely *does* render the Encyclopedic effect of impressiveness Cole outlined in his *LitHub* interview, as Birgit Neumann and Yvonne Kappel have characterized Julius as a person who "at first, […] impresses readers with his immense historical knowledge, meticulous descriptions of various aesthetic experiences, sensitivity to humanitarian injustices, and sharp analyses of pressing socio-political issues, much of which he unfolds 'on the background of a globalized imagination.'"[236] They go on to describe how this impressiveness erodes as "his cosmopolitan attitude is gradually unmasked as a shallow, frequently self-aggrandizing posture."[237] However, this "globalized imagination" that seems to be part of his immense, meticulous, sensitive, and sharp mind are rooted differently for Edward Comentale, who sees *Open City*'s global imagination as more concerned with "regional belonging in an era of mass media and specifically the digital 'no-place' of the Internet."[238] Comentale positions the more institutionally bourgeois affinities to which Julius finds himself drawn as part of social "programs" while at once making an analogy to his much less centralized use of the computer programs for social capital:

> Even when Julius wanders through the city on his off hours, he seems stuck in certain programs. He practices migrancy in more or less programmatic ways, dutifully playing the role of the thoughtful nomad. In fact, he matches his solitary wandering through the city, during which he muses on the rich and diverse cultures on display, with his more sedentary, technological wandering at home, where he imports music and other forms of culture in his home via radio, cds, books, and computer.[239]

These moments of technological engagement are early moments of what Zara Dinnen calls the "digital banal," extensions of Roland Barthes' reality effect in which literary details are "neither incongruous nor significant."[240] These technological inclusions might at first glance seem like superfluous matters of course for mimetic renderings of a social world, but they are not. As Dinnen explains, the presence of these devices in literature can allow insight into "software and the fuzzy edges of mediational interfaces—our screens, the platforms we write through, [and] the ontologoical realities at stake in becoming-with digital technology."[241]

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[235] For a vivid account of the pervasive proliferation of misattributed quotations online, see "Counterfeit Quotations: Swelling with a Digital Tide" from Joseph W. Campbell, *Getting It Wrong: Debunking the Greatest Myths in American Journalism*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

[236] Daniel Levy & Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound." ed by M. Rovisco, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2011), 196.

[237] Neumann Birgit and Yvonne Kappel, "Music and Latency in Teju Cole's Open City: Presences of the Past," *Ariel* Vol. 50 (2019), 34.

[238] Edward P. Comentale, "Database Regionalism in Infinite Jest and Open City." *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 36, no. 2 (January 13, 2017), 9.

[239] Comentale, "Database Regionalism," 103.

[240] Dinnen, *Digital Banal*, 3.

[241] Dinnen, 13.

These conceptions of computing and literature provide two crucial lenses for understanding *Open City* as a Wikipedic Novel. Comentale's assertion that Julius's knowledge and sense of regional belonging is constituted from a digital "no-place" implies an open terrain, which Dinnen would call the Digital Commons: a space of reuse and remix for "[t]he author-who-is-not-really […] a kind of enduring aesthetic fact, a literary instantiation of co-individuation" (6). These commons are everywhere—Matthew McCullough calls the digital infrastructure that pervades society through Wi-Fi and sites used by the billions "ambient commons."[242] The amount of information that is produced in a year fundamentally shifts human existence. McCullough cites a 2003 study that found that the new information produced that year amounted to forty-seven times more content than that within the Library of Congress. This superabundance, he argues, is both positive and negative. It "gives cause to rejoice: all the world at your fingertips, on demand, and no need to clutter your head with it."[243] However, after citing former Google CEO Eric Schmidt's 2010 announcement that "every two days we create as much information as we did from the dawn of civilization until 2003" McCullough acknowledges information ethicists who warn that overwhelming a person's capacity to reflect and empathize with this superabundance "poses a real threat to judgment, well-being, and relations with others."[244] Herein is where the digital commons and Wikipedic access for author, reader, and character create new possibilities for how novels can be written and read.

Ekphrasis and The Dilettante's Playlist

Cosmopolitan gazes necessarily dilate and contract depending on different modes of cultural exposure. We may contain multitudes, but not necessarily in equal parts. Julius models this perfectly in his relationship to music, which not only characterizes his particular pretensions and sonic ideologeme, but also invites readers into sounding out the differences themselves. While Julius enjoys lyricizing his own love for classical music, the music he recognizes as equally cosmopolitan but of diminished taste—in this case, jazz—still invites readerly clickability as he constantly names the key artists he knows he ought to know yet hasn't listened to. It begins on the second page, when Julius characterizes his cultural acumen by acknowledging that "I generally avoided radio stations, which had too many commercials for my taste—Beethoven followed by ski jackets, Wagner after artisanal cheese—instead turning to Internet stations from Canada, German, or the Netherlands. And though I often couldn't understand the announcers, my comprehension of their languages being poor, the programming always met my evening mood with great exactness."[245]

This moment of explicit characterization accomplishes a great deal. First, it situates Julius as an epicurean purist—he wants his Beethoven and Wagner, but also wants to skirt any posture of complicity or distraction in heavy-handed American capital. Second, he demonstrates his valuation of polyglots, for he makes clear that he understands *some* French, German, and Dutch, as his comprehension is "poor" but not absent. Third, he understands that beyond linguistic difference, he can find a rootedness in the Adornian notion that the translingual nature of music is because musical concepts rest "in their own existence and not in something to which they refer," thus existing as universally apprehensible entities.[246] The fourth accomplishment of this moment (and most crucial to me here) is that Julius reveals very early on in the novel that he avails himself of the Internet as a

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[242] Malcolm McCullough, *Ambient Commons: Attention in the Age of Embodied Information,* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013).
[243] McCullough, *Ambient Commons*, 28.
[244] McCullough, 28.
[245] Cole, *Open City*, 4.
[246] Theodor W Adorno, "Music, Language, and Composition," *The Musical Quarterly* 77, no. 3 (1993), 114.

research tool. Not only does he seek adequate classical music stations that align with his evening mood, but he goes on to describe "rare moments of astonishment, like the first time I heard, on a station broadcasting from Hamburg, a bewitching piece for orchestra and alto solo by Schedrin (or perhaps it was Ysaÿe) which, to this day, I have been unable to identify."[247] Indeed, this moment proffers a quiet mimetic insight that recurs throughout the novel—while Julius reflects his own uncertainty quite vividly in the narrative instance, he also implies a transient temporal distortion since the moment he first heard the alto solo. Every instance of Julius's own implied Internet sleuthing is one of clickability—the reader, too, can bring this research in to life so long as Julius places in a sentence the basic data of his search string.

How else is a reader to engage with the difference between a composition from Rodion Schedrin or Eugène Ysaÿe? What reader can sound out the styles of each, and even if a reader could, how might a person identify which of the two composers makes the more musically compelling decisions? Julius's lost details are irrecoverable and unsleuthable, but the inclusion of what he *does* remember bears an uneasy presupposition. Julius even offers a parallel in one of his points of cosmopolitan minutiae, as he accounts for the way he would read aloud beneath the "murmur of the French, German, or Dutch radio announcers, or with the thin texture of the violin strings of the orchestra" (6). This distancing and abstraction from the music affords a valuable piece of commentary on listening, but not in the way one might expect:

> In that sonic fugue […] St. Augustine, and his astonishment at St. Ambrose, who was reputed to have found a way to read without sounding out the words. It does seem an odd thing—it strikes me now as it did then—that we can comprehend words without voicing them. [. . .] We have for too long been taught that the sight of a man speaking to himself is a sign of eccentricity or madness; we are no longer at all habituated to our own voices, except in conversation or from within the safety of a shouting crowd. But a book suggests conversation: one person is speaking to another, and audible sound is, or should be, natural to that exchange. So I read aloud to myself as my audience, and gave voice to another's words.[248]

How might a dilettante mix his messages further? This early moment in the novel establishes the peculiar terms of Julius's narrative ambiguity as the reader's transmitter. He begins by listening to music, then (for no clear reason related to the strictly instrumental nature of the classical composition) recalls St. Augustine, and relays a philosophy on the act of hearing *reading*. More confusingly, he meditates on the very form through which he addresses the reader without actually acknowledging that he is writing. This is no Enlightenment epistolary plea, directed to the dear reader. Instead, Julius actually diverts the fact that he is narrating a story to pledge his fidelity to orality.

In the very moment where Julius has the reader trying to sound out music while withholding any ekphrastic sensibility, he resuscitates the concerns of Benjamin in "The Storyteller," when Benjamin professes that "A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller […]. The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, more so than any other reader.[249] The reason for this

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[247] Cole, 4.

[248] Cole, *Open City*, 6.

[249] Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 456; The Benjaminian connection feels in no way incidental to the implied author, given that Benjamin is without doubt the most cited theoretician throughout this novel, prominently figuring Julius's confidence in Farouq on their first conversation, when he notices the café owner reading something: "It was a secondary text on Walter Benjamin's *On the Concept of History*. Its difficult reading, he said, requires a lot of concentration. Not much of that here, I said. Another customer came up, and again Farouq flipped seamlessly into French, and back again into English. He said: It's about how this man, Walter Benjamin, conceives of history in a way that is opposed to Marx though, for many people, he is a Marxist philosopher" (103). The appeal of this connection is that Benjamin believed

resistance to the novel is related to routine and attention—of course, for production reasons: the novelist has secluded himself. The birthplace of the novel is the individual in his isolation."[250] Given the context of *Open City*'s reception as a Sebaldian text of displacement, Benjamin's account of the novel of the isolationist writer fits this particular novel well.[251] However, the context by which Julius invokes the merits of the oracular are peculiar and require context to rime with Benjamin. Part of what motivates Benjamin's theory on storytelling is his understanding of boredom's obsolescence. He figures boredom as a "dream bird that hatches the egg of experience [. . .] His nesting places— the activities that are intimately associated with boredom—are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the country as well. With this, the gift for listening is lost and the community of listeners disappears."[252] Indeed, for Benjamin the 'Rauschen im Blätterwalde' (the rustling 'in the leaves', but also, metaphorically, 'of the pages/newspapers')—drives away boredom's "dream bird" and forces "the replacement of the older relation by information, and of information by sensation" which "reflects the increasing atrophy of experience" (411). The immediacy of this contemporary and urbanized distraction incapacitates oral epics (which could transport readers to journey into other horizons) and instead become absorbed in modern news items that could appeal for their "prompt verifiability" and rootedness in the familiar world of the reader.[253]

As with Goethe's conception of the dilettante, Benjamin's stakes for postindustrial reading sit quite differently in the Internet Era of *Open City* than in 1936. While Goethe's dilettante is recuperated in the Wikipedic Novel, Benjamin's sense of "prompt verifiability" in place of boredom may well become the engaging part of the genre. When Julius draws what seems to be a loose connection between abstract classical music and Saint Augustine, his narrative withholding of the *particular* music in his given fugue may well be the presupposition of clickability. The traces of searchable text allow a form of external characterization. They strengthen the sensibility that Julius is not a posturing layperson flagging Beethoven and Wagner, but instead a more acculturated ear that can come close to discerning Rodion Schedrin or Eugène Ysaÿe. The limitations of writing are clear here—the reader can't hear for herself the sonic differences in order to adjudicate the level of Julius's taste—but the possibility to open YouTube and click through the top viewed performances of these two composers works (perhaps even with "alto solo" appended to the end of a search string with the composers' names) could well become a temporal distortion for the reader's *reading*, and also allow for a reproduction of his peculiar sonic fugue. It invokes storytelling, yes (perhaps laying claim to an insistent relevance of its own status as a novel told in the first person) but it also figures into the admitted nature of online research and citationality to which the novel's author abides.

After being asked about a Seamus Heaney allusion in his book *Blind Spot* during an interview, Teju Cole proffered a vital philosophy on both reading and writing today:

> You know, when we sit down to make work we are made of all the things we have consumed. Our creative, artistic, musical, filmic diet goes towards our intellectual formation.

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that receiving a story required a particular mode of concentration and mental relaxation for constructive engagement, but that the "state of mental relaxation which is so essential for constructive, preservative listening is eroded with the introduction of industrial labour" (456). Thus, the irony is thick as Farouq bemoans his lack of concentration in his workplace.

[250] Goethe, "Dilettantism," 433.

[251] For an extended account of Benjaminian cosmopolitanism see Carolin Duttlinger, "Between Contemplation and Distraction: Configurations of Attention in Walter Benjamin," *German Studies Review* 30, no. 1 (2007), 278.

[252] Goethe, "Dilettantism," 466.

[253] Goethe, 444.

But the other thing is that I also wanted to say that the game of allusions or half-allusions or any of those things is also completely different in our time now, because we can always look things up, you know? And in fact that passage that you're talking about: I don't mention Seamus Heaney. Like you said, it's obvious in this case that I'm talking about somebody specific, and I actually quoted something—some people might recognise it, and for those who don't? *They can look it up, and that's fine. But even if you don't look it up, it still works as an evocation* of what it means to think about physical fitness or mobility or walking, which is very much a secondary concern in the book, side-by-side with the primary concern which is the limits of vision.[254]

Open City, already, offers a clickability that may not be a didactive cosmopolitanism for use in an encounter of alterity, but rather a guide on what constitutes the sinew of aesthetic cosmopolitanism that should certainly prove evasive to the solitary liberalism common to thousands, if not millions, of bookish types. This may register as a fairly trivial detail for the niggling—and it is. For this type of minutiae is the puffing of the chest dilettantes do to distinguish themselves in front of a potential new friend. But if this is the company the bookish types care to keep, then the dilettante serves his purpose as the sage of cultural minutiae. Further, the expansive nature of the contemporary Wikipedic Novel *does* allow a more thorough mode of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Music, visual art, and of course literature are no longer randomized prerequisites to understanding a given moment in a text. *Open City* does not need the reading guides of its Encyclopedic cousins *Infinite Jest* or *Ulysses* for two reasons: one, it is not meant to impress by virtue of citational onslaught, rewarding the literati—its monologism affords a hermeneutic relief. Two, it is clickable.

Yet, in spite of his initial advocacy of online radio, Julius constantly teeters between a practitioner of the contemporary and the public nostalgist for the culturally effete. When Julius encounters a Tower Records store that is going out of business in the book's first ten pages, a pang of nostalgia compels him to believe "it seemed right, if only for old times' sake, to revisit it, before the doors closed for good. I went in, intrigued also by the promise that prices had been slashed on all items, although I didn't particularly feel like buying anything."[255] This moment of precise focalization into Julius's interiority is rare relative to other types of discursive acts within the novel's free indirect discourse. It is key to spotting his dilettante cracks, as he is less interested in buying precisely what he would like as in acknowledging a reflective understanding of the store's (and CD medium's) incipient obsolescence. However, just after acknowledging that he relies on Internet radio to suit his musical tastes, in the moment when he has absolute control he "doesn't particularly feel like buying anything," though he is quick to acknowledge that he recognizes a "rousing anthem" by Purcell playing over the speakers, and insists that "I recognized right away [it was] one of the birthday odes for Queen Mary. I usually disliked whatever was being played on a music store's speakers. It spoiled the pleasure of thinking about other music" (Ibid). Later in the novel, now in Belgium, on a day that "had become drizzly again, but as a fine mist, not rain," Julius finds that he has forgotten an umbrella. Realizing his mistake, his eye that gravitates toward high culture leads him to the Musées Roaux des Beaux-Arts. Upon entering, he realizes "once I was inside, … that I was not at all in the mood to look at paintings. I stepped outside again, into the mist" (116). Julius's engagement with art is quite minimal. Rather, as he states while reflecting on Tower Records, he prefers "to think about" other art, even when around art. Julius's role is to offer efferent clickability in the art he consistently recognizes and a lyricism to stylize that efference. He actually provides deep and specific insight into why this might be his compulsion. Early in the novel Julius reflects on

[254] Warsame, "We are Made," https://lithub.com/teju-cole-we-are-made-of-all-the-things-we-have-consumed/ (emphasis added).
[255] Cole, *Open City*, 16.

his time being harangued by his music teacher as a student at the Nigerian Military School in Zaira. As he recalls the teacher, he notes how "[h]is classes never involved any listening to music, or the use of instruments, and our musical education was composed of memorized facts: Handel's birth date, Bach's birth date, the titles of Schubert lieder, the notes of the chromatic scale. Beyond a vague sense of the correct answers to put down on exams, none of us had any idea what a chromatic scale actually was or what it sounded like" (82). He lays the hyperlinks, makes the reader aware, but seems to admire something greater than the sum of the signified.

In a central passage of the novel, Julius, wandering through Brussels, enters a church in which an "unseen organist" plays a "Baroque piece" that soon "takes on the spirit of something else," something that resembles Peter Maxwell Davies' 'O God Abufe'" (138). The piece is made up of "distinct fugitive notes that sh[o]ot through the musical texture," creating a melody that is "difficult to catch hold of" and that elicits a "fractured, scattered feeling" in Julius (Ibid). In fact, he actually points directly to what dictates his value system while listening to Mahler's "Der Abschied" over the speakers in Tower Records: while listening he "sensed the woodsiness of the clarinets, the resin of the violins and violas, the vibrations of the timpani, and the *intelligence* that held them all together and drew them endlessly along the musical line."[256] It is about intelligence.[257]

But it is *not* about music merely for music's sake—as he admits that his Black New York friend who lives only a few blocks away was "especially passionate about jazz," though "most of the names and styles that he so delighted in meant little to me. Yet still, Julius can "sense, even from my ignorant distance, the sophistication of his ear. He often said that he would sit down at a piano someday and show me how jazz worked, and that when I finally understood blue notes and swung notes, the heavens would part and my life would be transformed."[258] When he tries to call Dr. Maillotte to arrange a dinner meeting she explains how she met Cannonball Adderly, Chet Baker, and asks if Julius knows "Philly Joe Jones, the drummer, and Bill Evans, too" along with Art Blakey. Julius, of course, does not, but "was happy to be there, and enjoyed the way she pulled each vignette like a rabbit out of a hat. The names of the jazz artists Dr. Maillotte was not listing meant nothing to me, but I could tell that she had gotten something meaningful out of having been part of, or rather having fallen into, that milieu" (144). Upon parting, her last words are, "And be sure to get Cannonball Adderly's *Somethin' Else.* That's the great one of all his albums, a true classic."[259]

All of this listing, and especially the emphasis to listen to *Somethin' Else,* ultimately positions a guide to what *ought* to be heard. Dr. Maillotte scaffolds her experience with a list of artists who make clear sense from a listening and taste standpoint. They represent a sense of broad listening in their mentions: reeds in Adderly (saxophone) and Baker (trumpet), then drummers in Jones and Blakey, and a pianist in Bill Evans. There is a definite comfort in the solidity of this list. It offers a complexity characteristic of the literary list. As Robert Belknap has shown about the literary list, "Lists are adaptable containers that hold information selected from the mind-deep pool of possibility," and authors serve as "Compilers" who "must observe distinctions and make decisions" in order to "shift the list beyond the minimum requirements of listing into ornament."[260] Umebrto Eco, in his extensive study on the history of lists across literature, identifies a particular genus—the mass-media list. He asserts that "the technique of the list is not intended to cast doubt on any order

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[256] Cole, 17 (emphasis added).
[257] For more on Mahler and Julius, see Josh Epstein, "Open City's 'Asbchied': Teju Cole, Gustav Mahler, and Elliptical Cosmopolitanism," *Studies in the Novel* 51, no. 3 (September 2019), 412. Epstein draws on an interview in which Teju Cole calls Mahler "an American composer" in part because the Jewish Bohemian-Austrian musician was, in Epstein's words, an explorer of "placableness and itinerancy" (413).
[258] Cole, 24.
[259] Cole, 144.
[260] Robert E. Belknap, *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 37.

in the world, on the contrary its purpose is to reiterate that the universe of abundance and consumption, available to all, represents the only model of ordered society."[261] Writing in 2009, he admits that

> …we come to the Mother of all Lists, infinite by definition because it is in constant evolution, the World Wide Web, which is both web and labyrinth, not an ordered tree, and which of all vertigos promises us the most mystical, almost totally virtual one, and really offers us a catalogue of information that makes us feel wealthy and omnipotent, the only snag being that we don't know which of its elements refers to data from the real world and which does not, no longer with any distinction between truth and error.[262]

The lists in *Open City*, be they texts to read, audio to hear, or art to see, do not just (or even often) work to service the novel's plot. Rather, they curate Julius's cultural acumen and, when he sees but does not understand they provide outliers for further investigation. Reading book reviews in major periodicals shows just how much readers take lists from the novel. James Wood's review "The Arrival of Enigmas" notes how "This narrator has a well-stocked mind: he thinks about social and critical theory, about art (Chardin, Velázquez, John Brewster), and about music (Mahler, Peter Maxwell Davies, Judith Weir), and he has interesting books within easy reach—Roland Barthes' 'Camera Lucida,' Peter Altenberg's 'Telegrams of the Soul,' Tahar Ben Jelloun's 'The Last Friend,' Kwame Anthony Appiah's 'Cosmopolitanism.'"[263] Writing for *The Guardian*, Giles Folden notes how lists internal to the novel create sonic ironies that might need hearing for believing:

> Part of the delight of Cole's book is how it exploits refinement until Julius reveals himself as a poseur through intellectual over-reaching, disclosing an irony for which readers may not be prepared. One instance of this comes when Chinese musicians in a park remind him "of Li Po and Wang Wei, of Harry Partch's pitch-bending songs, and of Judith Weir's opera *The Consolations of Scholarship*."
>
> How to read *Open City* is obliquely signalled by these pretentious pratfalls. In the notes of the trumpet of another Chinese band, Julius hears the "spiritual cousins of the offstage clarion in Mahler's Second Symphony." I'm not a musician, but I suspect that's twaddle.[264]

Both of these critics attribute these multimedia experiences to Julius alone. This illusion of informational belonging is of course not private—it is available for readerly assessment, and these "pretentious pratfalls" highlight precisely how unique subjectivities in a multimedia age can be partially constructed purely through the creative contrast of consumed content. In this way, Julius as a dilettante serves a partially positive function as a dilettante curator. Until Moji, Julius feels like a friend. Perhaps not a good friend or one who might pick you up from the airport (he seems to only walk, anyway). Rather, he is like a friend who drops off important albums, recommends books, and shares playlists. While this might sound absurd, in Wayne Booth we can find clear precedent for the novel's capacity to be a "friend" and in the novel's ethical negotiations of including such informational breadth.[265]

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[261] Umberto Eco and Alastair McEwen, *The Infinity of Lists*, (New York: Rizzoli, 2009), 353.

[262] Eco, *Infinity of Lists*, 353.

[263] James Wood, "'The Arrival of Enigmas.' Rev. of Open City, by Teju Cole," *New Yorker*, 28 February 2011.

[264] Giles, Foden. "Rev. of *Open City,* by Teju Cole," *The Guardian*, 17 August 2011.

[265] Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), xii.

Social Life, Referential Characterization, and the Space for Clickability

In order to understand how the Internet operates as a referent, it is first useful to consider how narrative form moves from conventional literary referentiality into the terrain of the clickable. *Open City*'s social world is funneled through Julius's point of view, and his eye is drawn to people who are deeply literate. If not literate in terms of books, many of the characters bear stature and institution. Julius attends a viewing of *The Last King of Scotland* at a doctor's house during medical school. When the doctor collapses a statement on all Africans before watching the film, Julius is disturbed and admits that "I wondered, as Coetzee did in *Elizabeth Costello*, what the use was of going into these recesses of the human heart."[266] Even those whose employment is not lavish bear institutional affiliations, as a Caribbean man approaches Julius one evening at bar and admits, "I noticed you at the museum, about a week ago, the Folk Art Museum. . . . I'm a guard there, and that was you I saw, right?" Julius describes how the man is "dark-skinned, bald, with a broad, smooth forehead, and a carefully trimmed pencil mustache," and how "[h]is upper body was powerful, but his legs were spindly, so that he looked like Nabokov's *Pnin* come to life" (Ibid). When he first encounters Dr. Annette Maillotte on the plane to Belgium she is first characterized by her wedding ring and index finger holding a page in her copy of *The Year of Magical Thinking*. Julius notes that "I hadn't read the book, but I knew it was Joan Didion's memoir of coming to terms with the sudden loss of her husband."[267]

When Julius confesses admiration for three other characters in the novel, his respect always comes from literary connection. The first of these characters is Professor Saito, Julius's old English professor at NYU whose Early Modern reading puzzled and challenged Julius. "He must have seen something in me that made him think I was someone on whom his rarefied subject (early English literature) would not be wasted. I was a disappointment in this regard, but he was kindhearted and, even after I failed to get a decent grade in his English Literature Before Shakespeare seminar, invited me to meet with him several times in his office" (9). The second of the three exceptional acquaintances includes Annette, whom he admires for her speech verging on "the risk of alienating the person she was talking to" both intellectually and in terms of politically sensitive propriety (88). The third is Farouq, owner of a Brussels Internet Café who surprises Julius in their first conversation with a discussion of Walter Benjamin and Tahar Ben Jelloun (an author Julius mentions is on his reading list eighty pages earlier).

> Farouq's face—all of a sudden, it seemed, but I must have been subconsciously working on the problem—resolved itself, and I saw a startling resemblance: he was the very image of Robert De Niro, specifically in De Niro's role as the young Vito Corleone in The Godfather II. The straight, thin, black eyebrows, the rubbery expression, the smile that seemed a mask for skepticism or shyness, and the lean handsomeness, too. A famous Italian-American actor thirty years ago and an unknown Moroccan political philosopher in the present, but it was the same face.[268]

The visuality, intentional description, and recall of a fictional character in an acclaimed film do more than the work of simple referentiality: they invite a Google Image search or a visit to YouTube to add further dimension to the description. While this reference does follow Julius's trend of cultural exhibition, it distinguishes itself from the description of Kenneth as Pnin, who is also a literary figure with no absolute representation beyond the linguistic (then again, a Google Image search

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[266] Cole, *Open City*, 31.

[267] Cole 87; in addition, Werner Sollors has identified that Maillotte's literary taste is heightened by a thematic of precise diction that comes to define the social status of women throughout the novel (see Sollors 7).

[268] Cole, 121.

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could also show different illustrators' interpretations on various editions' covers). This consistent mode of accounting for first impressions shifts attention from the way these characters act or how the treat him. In turn, Julius establishes a distance from the other characters, as well. He places the grand narratives of high literature, philosophy, and critically acclaimed mass culture on to the particularities of the characters in his network, cobbling together a value system and cultural milieu out of a range of incidental individuals.[269] These particular individuals could be exchanged for others, and the technique of extratextual substitution as description advances Julius's program to inure himself to the reader by fostering moments of either "insider" knowledge or clickable affiliation. In positioning these moments of seemingly egalitarian, open associations, Julius looks to transcend cultural impasses between his esteemed acquaintances—after all, Pnin, even if a literary character, is certainly not a dark-skinned Caribbean, and De Niro is not Moroccan.

This said, every one of Julius's associates, after more extended engagement, is diminished and discarded. Dr. Saito dies by the middle of the novel, but before he does, he shares many private facets of his life with Julius. When Julius finds that Professor Saito has had a run-in with bedbugs, he renders a surprisingly tone-deaf and ageist passage of sympathy: "His recent encounter with the bedbugs troubled me more than what he had suffered in other ways: racism, homophobia, the incessant bereavement that was one of the hidden costs of a long life. The bedbugs trumped them all. […] But it was there, an example of how an inconvenience can, because of one's proximity to it, take on a grotesque aspect."[270] He pities the professor almost immediately after accounting for his (Julius's) deficiencies in reading medieval texts. He patronizes Annette because of her affinity for jazz (an Adornian disposition from the classical music aficionado, to be sure), and he privately demeans Farouq after an intense philosophical exchange in which Farouq imposes his ideology to Julius powerfully. After the discussion, Farouq shares "I am meant to be a scholar. I might apply for a doctorate, in translation. I want to write about Babel, about how the many languages came out of one—a religious idea, maybe, but I can do a scholarly study of it. It's not my first choice, but what can I do? The other door is closed now. Farouq's eyes shone. [. . .] He had brought me too close to his pain, and I no longer saw him."[271] From a characterization standpoint (useful to the novel's plot) we see Julius maintain an incredulity for every person he admires—especially in relation to professional success and affiliation. This is as clear a marker of the dilettante as could be, and it is also a loud accounting for his value system on a literary economy.

But this is not as loud as the onslaught of citations that accompany each of his acquaintances. He harvests from each person a strictly aesthetic discussion for pages at a time: with the Earth Sciences professor Julius "half-believed" the scholar's assertion that "he would sit down at a piano someday and show me how jazz worked, and that when I finally understood blue notes and swung notes, the heavens would part and my life would be transformed" (23). From Farouq Julius recounts three personal stories and the thoughts of half a dozen philosophers. As each character shares their interests and their knowledge, Julius expands concepts through pontification for pages at a time. Comentale argues that Julius is merely an agent of classification: "He describes murders, rapes, suicides, genocides, environmental degradation, species extinction, even his own mugging with the same blankness, computing and calculating each according to larger historical permutations, coding and sorting them in mental folders labelled 'atrocity' and 'suffering.'"[272] These broader

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[269] Pieter Vermeulen views the novel as a critique of literary cosmopolitanism, "no longer mobilized as a tool for aesthetic articulation, but as the site where this indistinguishability is registered, and where the insufficiency of a merely aesthetic cosmopolitanism is signaled." See Pieter Vermeulen, "Flights of Memory: Teju Cole's Open City and the Limits of Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism," *Journal of Modern Literature* 37, no. 1 (2013), 40-57.

[270] Cole, *Open City*, 173.

[271] Cole, 129.

[272] Comentale, "Database Regionalism," 104.

thematics play themselves out regularly—particularly during his charged conversations with Farouq in the Brussels Internet Café, which has been extensively analyzed for its movement from a discussion of how Farouq would like "to be the next Edward Said" to Farouq's endorsement of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, which pushes the convivial liberalism that begins when Julius first notices Farouq reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History" behind the counter as he pays his Internet connection fee in an earlier encounter. Although Farouq's radical overtures make Julius feel uncomfortable, he does note one particular phrase Farouq uses: "*the victimized Other:* how strange, I thought, that he used an expression like that in a casual conversation. And yet, when he said it, it had a far deeper resonance than it would have in any academic situation."[273]

If Julius's economy of judgment is still unclear, one need only see his perspective on strangers. One early moment helps establish the negative piece of his value system. While riding the subway he observes how, "to my right sat a man whose full attention was on Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, and to his right, a russet-haired man leaned forward in his seat and read *The Wall Street Journal*."[274] This pair reading canonized and well-respected publications are worthy of inoffensive note. But then a man enters the train on Forty-second Street "in a pin-striped suit" and "holding a volume with the title *You've GOT to Read This Book!* The book was open in his hand, but as he came in and stood by the seats, he kept his eyes fixed on a spot on the floor. He did so for a long time. He kept the book open in front of him, but read nothing out of it. He eventually closed it on a finger when he got off, at Fulton" (45). Julius focuses on the man for his entire duration on the subway. The book, though, should not be looked past. Its foreignness to Julius is evident in his clinical sense of its existence—it is a "volume" with an ostentatious title demanding that it be read, and the man in the pinstriped suit is not even following the imperative.[275]

The book, as it turns out, is serialized by the creators of *Chicken Soup for the Sould*. The franchise is not high culture: now, in 2021, *Chicken Soup for the Soul* is less a series than an empire, a multimillion-dollar franchise with an auxiliary pet-food line. More than 500 million books have been sold—and the original has been translated into forty languages. The titles pour forth with comic specificity, targeted to every conceivable family member—grandparents, mothers (new and expectant), fathers, sisters, brothers, and various combinations thereof—as well as most major religions (but not, strangely, Muslims, though there is one for Latter-Day Saints). Our soup-craving souls become mystics never envisioned: Beach Lover, American Idol, Dental, NASCAR, Menopausal, Golfer, Woman Golfer, Canadian, Coffee-Lover, Tea-Lover, Fisherman, Chiropractic, Scrapbooker. *You've GOT to Read This Book!* is a serial compilation of popular culture figures from Martha Stewart to Lionel Richie who discuss how they stay motivated and keep in touch with their modest, pre-fame roots.[276] This is not a book Julius would read, and his insistent attention on the man *not* reading the book yet making appearances to be a literary person is a significant insight into Julius's investment in good literature. In addition, Julius's ignorance betrays Cole's authorial hand. If *Open City* yields encyclopedic effects through its range of erudition, then its instances of highly specific (arguably obsolete) popular culture betoken a nostalgia and specificity best resolved through contextualizing clicking.

These moments that denote themselves as a step below digressive and too singular to be symbolic—not theoretical, not utterly citational, but the trace of social knowledge, perhaps

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[273] Cole, *Open City*, 105.

[274] Cole, *Open City*, 45.

[275] Dena Fehrenbacher has read this scene as representative of "unspoken expectations about the socially coded valences of retreat, disclosure, and removal," which perhaps explains his fixation on a book as a social signifier over the faces in the crowd (petals on a wet black bough, as Pound might have it). See Dena Fehrenbacher, "The Tone of the Monstrous Liberal Subject: Getting Out of Open City." *ASAP/Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020), 328.

[276] *Publishers Weekly*, "You've Got to Read This (Book Review)," September 19, 1994, ix.

confirmable online or perhaps the mined-for minutiae of a lived life—bridge the hermeneutic solidity of both the literary and social world. They push to the digital for confirmation, and if not, end in a form of surprising trust (perhaps even a type of faith) in the fact of the implied author as architect. They push the reader out of a posture of "Theory Novel" presupposition or ideological adroitness and collapse back into the type of neural triviality that constitutes human encounter with cultural ephemera.

"I have searched myself": Retrospect and First-Person Narrative as Hyperlink

To this point, the examples I have highlighted have been broadly intertextual, but not necessarily *digital*. Now that I have accounted the social stakes of extratextual engagement in *Open City*, it is vital to account for the narrator's diegetic engagement with Internet research. In a beautiful parable on the nature of attention and recall, Sven Birkerts describes the process of looking for a coat: "I can imagine looking everywhere, turning the house upside down, because it is the essential thing, the coat must be worn, and *Where did I see that thing? I saw it somewhere.* For that one moment it is the answer to the question; it is wanted. After which, of course, it falls back out of awareness, into its former near oblivion."[277] Indeed, the particular thoughts imbibed from the Internet prepare users well for the winter—coats abound, but like the original data, stay cached throughout the house. Part of what makes memory and recall all the more impressive now is that it requires such sifting. For the Internet rapidly inundates us with all orders of information in a single search session, and once a user thickens her research across a range of reliable and unreliable sites, the specifics of her knowledge blur once it is time to apply. *Where did I see that thing? I saw it somewhere online.* This principle lines the allure of Julius's eideteic memory—his is the inverse of Karl Ove Knausgard or a Ben Lerner character, whom Marta Figlerowicz describes as contemporary bastions of "this new ability to log one's life so easily [that] will make it possible for the self's detailed existence to persist while also disappearing into a mass of other, equally similar details."[278] Julius is the person who buries the details of his life in favor of ruminations and hyperlinks—he is more Twitter than Facebook.

If we take Teju Cole's statement that we are what we consume seriously, then a clear question arises: what happens to the pronoun in this statement? *I* am what *I* consume, yet if I am constantly consuming a newsfeed and flossing with search strings, what is left of *me*? Beneath the trove of references, theory, and hyperlinks—all that Julius has consumed—there is *himself*. Thus, the final third of the book that reveals his potential implication in sexual assault and his dispassionate disavowal is fittingly titled: "I have searched myself." The first-person nature of this and other Wikipedic Novels alters the reportorial nature of the narrator. While the plots of history and fiction share certain features, the novel is distinguished at the level of discourse chiefly in its ability to harvest minds. Third person fiction allows the narrator an epistemological privilege that accrues neither to real life nor to the writing of history: unrestricted access to the inner life of other persons. Referencing this experience of mind-reading—which surfaces across a swathe of realist and modernist texts—Dorrit Cohn draws attention both to its sheer strangeness and the lack of sustained theoretical analysis it has received in *Transparent Minds*. Fiction is the only medium in which the interiority of persons is promiscuously plumbed, where narrators routinely know more about the minds of characters than they know themselves. Bound by criteria of verifiable evidence, historians reference the inner lives of their subjects only when authorized to do so by letters, diaries, or memoirs. The protocols of historical research require that other forays into interiority be clearly

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[277] Birkerts, *Gutenberg Elegies*, 244.
[278] Figlerowicz, Marta. *The Novel of Infinite Storage*. Vol. 39 2018: 216

marked as speculative. Even when history verges on biography, it draws on a language of conjecture and induction rooted in referential documentation that differs significantly from the discourse of novels. Precisely because of the epistemological shakiness of fiction, its freedom to ignore empirical criteria and constraints of evidentiary argument, it offers an initiation into the historical aspects of intersubjectivity that is unattainable by other means.

These decisions align with Rachel Greenwald Smith's assertion that the twenty-first century has borne a renewed emphasis on the lyric "I" and "a growing interest in procedural, conceptual, and algorithmic" sense of literary expression.[279] Indeed, the return to the "lyrical novel" that Ralph Freedman earlier outlined as expanding the lyrical "I" from a "poet's stance . . . into an epistemological act" befits the Internet age, which features self-centered pronomial abundance, as Margaret Morse has noted regarding iPhones and the ubiquitous "My Documents" folder. To these digital mainstays I would add YouTube and MySpace. These shifts in naming reorient pure informational processors and platforms into thoroughgoing cyberculture, which is the delegator of "soft" social and epistemological control. More specifically to the novel form, the first-person free indirect discourse affords dissonant self-narration, in which a narrator makes a self-reflexive autobiographical account, narrating "from an analytic distance" that he can "alternately adopt or reject.[280] When all of these narrative modalities work in tandem—free indirect discourse in the first-person, the posture of a lyric "I" that aestheticizes through the guise of an absent author, and the subsequent dissonance of the narrator—the perfect conditions for a twenty-first century discursive dilettantism exist.

Open City is not merely a first-person text that portends to make transparent a mind that is truly translucent, but it is also a *monologic* text that consists entirely of a free-indirect discourse sieved through its narrator's consciousness, such that voices are defragmented and conformed into the narrator's prosody. Of course, as Todorov notes, it is "not really possible [. . .] to maintain a distinction between a discourse of dialogical nature and a monologic discourse, since every discourse is, by its very nature 'dialogical,', that is, caught in intertextual relations," but he acknowledges that for Bakhtin there is a monological *outlook* that, in Bakhtin's words "denies that there exists outside of it another consciousness, with the same rights, and capable of responding on an equal footing, another and equal *I (thou)*. [. . .] Monologue makes do without the other; that is why to some extent it objectivizes all reality. Monologue pretends to be the *last word*."[281]

Here again, we see the efficacy of Julius as a dilettante. He expresses his openness to the world and questions, after watching *The Last King of Scotland* (a film about Idi Amin's blood-soaked rule), "Why show torture? Was it not enough to be told, in imprecise detail, that bad things happened?"[282] Indeed, a rhetorical question that suggests a humanist account of spectatorship, but later, his own imprecision in identifying or rebuffing the sexual assault casts a stark pallor on the idea. This type of performativity leaves no space for other—he is all excuses—and from a narrative standpoint, it reinforces Frederic's dialectic that the first-person point of view brings with it the same limitations of a third-person subjective narrative, in that both points of view do not position a reader to "confront the world side by side with the protagonist, looking along with him at the prospect, but are rather ourselves confronted by a mask that looks back at us and invites a trust that can never be

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[279] Rachel Greenwald Smith, *American Literature in Transition, 2000-2010*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4.

[280] Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds : Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction.*, (Princeton: Princeton University, 1983), 160.

[281] Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich (1981; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 20 (emphasis in original).

[282] Cole, *Open City*, 172.

verified."[283] This posture—the monologic treatise that leaves the reader outside of it is rooted in what Cohn calls a "limitation imposed by mnemonic credibility."[284] Because of Julius's dissonant self-narration, he merges his coming-to-knowledge with his ignorance in subtle ways through his rumination.

One of the restrictions of the first-person is a responsibility to show where memories come from—as Cohn notes, when the third person "James tells about Maisie's early childhood feelings, he does not and need not explain how he found out. When David Copperfield explains himself in the first-person, he refers to his source: "if it should appear from anything I may set down in this narrative that I was a child of close observation, or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood, I undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics."[285] In the Wikipedic instance, this mnemonic fortitude shows itself through the casual but pervasive influence of search engines. There are consistent lapses of knowledge that Julius implies or directly points to having looked up online. At the American Folk Art Museum, he observes John Brewster's portraits paintings of New England children, who stand out for their serious faces that bear "a gravity all out of keeping with their tender gazes" (36). Unsettled, Julius reveals that "[t]he key, *as I found out*, was that John Brewster was profoundly deaf, and the same was true of many of the children he portrayed" (37). In considering the long nineteenth century's history of wars, Julius considers "the epidemics that wiped out ten, twenty, even thirty percent of populations in Europe: *I read somewhere recently* that the city of Leiden lost thirty-five percent of its population in a five-year period in the 1630s. What could it mean to live with such a possibility, with people of all ages dropping dead around you all the time? The thing is that we have no idea. In fact, *when I read it*, it was as a footnote in an article about something else, an article about painting or furniture."[286] The collapse of summary and statistic makes the moment untraceable—with no direct quotation to search as an exact string online, the loose information becomes fodder for verification.[287] There is no source text to precisely place into a search engine, so the verity of the facts alone become a space for the reader to engage.

One crucial moment highlights how this capacity for Open-Sourced citationality affects narrative construction and also the manner in which cobbling together Wikipedic Novel's information exposes dilettantism, in spite of its trove of factuality. While making his way from Wall Street to the World Trade Center, Julius decides to visit Trinity Church, "where an ancient wall hemmed the church in and the air was cold and smelled of the sea" (49). As he is wont to do, Julius reflects on the historical meaning of Trinity Church—how "seafarers in general and whalers in particular had set out on their outbound journeys with the blessings of [the church's] congregation.'" He considers an interesting fact about how "one of the many privileges accorded Trinity in those years was full rights over any shipwrecks or beached whales on the isle of Manhattan. The church was near the water." Then, Julius begins walking around, "looking for the entrance, thinking of those nearby waters" (Ibid). The narrator's contemplative and immersive historical mind is on full display as he prepares to enter this historical building. In his reflection Julius looks for the church entrance, but he pulls the narrative away by noting "*Later, I would find* the story recounted by the Dutch settler Antony de Hooges in his memorandum book" about a "snow-white, without fins, round of body" whale. This unsurprisingly leads to a discourse on the mythologizing of de Hooge's

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[283] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, (London: Verso, 2013),

[284] Cohn, *Transparent Minds*, 44.

[285] Cole, *Open City*, 144.

[286] Cole, *Open City*, 200 (emphasis added).

[287] The compulsion to look at all affiliates with Simon Barker's discussion of dynamism in print text against digital text. In his purview, memory (and argumentation) itself intuitively necessitates a RAM crutch, even by the mere year 2000, when his research is undertaken. This is well before the Open-Source as we know it. For more see Barker, Simon. "The End of Argument: Knowledge and the Internet," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 33, no. 2 (2000), 154-181.

tale by a local young fisherman who was an "occasional parishioner of Trinity Church."[288] Of course, Julius mentions how the parishioner "called his book *The Whale*" before pausing with a semicolon to add, "the subtitle, *Moby Dick*, was added only after the first publication" (51). Like a superior docent, Julius draws the story out and provides an educated punchline; he never says that the parishioner was Herman Melville—any educated reader in on the story would know this. And just after presenting this line, Julius returns to the diegesis of his walk:

> This same Trinity Church had now left me out in the brisk marine air and given me no place in which to pray. There were chains on all the gates, and I could find neither a way into the building nor anyone to help me. So, lulled by sea air, I decided to find my way to the edge of the island from there. It would be good, I thought, to stand for a while on the waterline[289]

In a play of subtle irony, Julius, much like Melville's Ishmael, is locked out of Melville's church.[290] There is no access for him in spite of the obvious value he would take as a visitor. Not only does this metaphorize the very dilettantic nature of his own narration (he is an admirer of the music of language while locked out of high artistry), but perhaps more interestingly, Julius's narrative authority is given away as something less than empirical: he "would find the story recounted" somewhere else and relay it in this passage, but the source is not one rooted in the emplotted experience—it is simple research for the retrospective hemming of the tale into the novel. Julius does quote de Hooges's memorandum book at length, but he summarizes a Dutch narrative that follows thereafter.

Julius's quiet, narrative admission of his own erudition's construction is especially heightened at the novel's climax. Moji and Julius happen to be at a common friend's dinner party-turned-drunken slumber. Rising before the other guests the next morning, Moji confronts Julius on a balcony, frankly saying, "You forced yourself on me eighteen years ago because you could get away with it, and I suppose you did get away with it. But not in my heart, you didn't" she asks him, "But will you say something now? Will you say something?" Instead, Julius says nothing in the narrative time, instead musing on how, "The just risen sun came at the Hudson at such an acute angle that the river gleamed like aluminum roofing."[291] Immediately, he retreats into another citation: "At that moment—and I remember this as exactly as though it were being replayed in front of me right now—I thought of how, in his journals, Camus tells a double story concerning Nietzsche and Gaius Mucius Cordus Scaevola" (245). Scaevola was captured in an attempt to capture the Etruscan king, and rather than give up his accomplices he puts his right hand in fire. Camus, Julius, reports, recounts how Nietzsche's schoolmates refused to believe the story.[292] The future philosopher, in a show of indignation, then "plucked a hot coal from the grade, and held it." Most importantly, Julius

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[288] Cole, *Open City*, 51 (emphasis added).

[289] Cole, *Open City*, 51.

[290] This pursuit toward imitative written aesthetics is commensurate to a type of "engagement with other art forms to explore how a culturally specific and racially charged subject is mapped outward to occupy a broader aesthetic realm," according to Sam Reese and Alexandra Kingston-Reese. For these thinkers, Julius's cosmopolitanism is not merely one of epicurean posturing, but also one exploring racial "invisiblity" in the manner of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. See Sam Reese, and Alexandra Kingston-Reese, "Teju Cole and Ralph Ellison's Aesthetics of Invisibility." *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 50, no. 4 (December 1, 2017), 106.

[291] Cole, *Open City*, 246.

[292] This recounting of Nietzsche draws an interesting parallel to the falsely remembered tale of Nietzsche's school days in my earlier discussion of *Satin Island* (see p. 55). Likewise, *Open City* ends with Julius looking out against the water in a similar recollection of "Crossing Brooklyn Fairy," provoking the idea that canon itself is up for rework and play in these Wikipedic Novels (perhaps as sorts of Open-Source creative license). Likewise, these moments draw on a specific form of literary and print cultural capital that is worth identifying in other Wikipedic Novels not included in this study but described in my introduction.

then says "Of course, it burned him. He carried the resulting scar with him for the rest of his life. I went inside and greeted the risers. Five minutes later, I left."[293]

The long paragraph of digression ruptures the scene time and attempts to conceal that Julius neither dignifies Moji nor takes any semblance of accountability surrounding their encounter. More than this, the vignette ends with even further misdirection, as he admits that "[i]t wasn't until several days afterward that, looking up the story elsewhere, I saw that Nietzsche's contempt for pain had been expressed not with a coal but with several lit matchsticks that he had placed in the center of his palm and that, as they began to burn his hand, an alarmed school yard prefect had knocked to the ground."[294] Read one way, this might be a symbolic detail about the neutering of self-conception—Julius bridging his martyrdom with Nietzsche and Scaevola before admitting that his own account of his silent resoluteness in the face of Moji was a distortion of the feeble grip he had on the situation. Read another way, Julius throws his own knowledge (knowledge that he remembered "as exactly as though I were being replayed in front of me right now" in the same moment he could not remember if he sexually assaulted the woman in front of him) into greater flux. If we take the "elsewhere" that he revisited the Nietzsche tale as the Internet, then the clickable exposes Julius (as it were) to be unreliable himself. This moment of self-verification only serves to model to the reader how clickable even Julius's most supposedly authoritative "replays" of his life are.[295]

Because Julius fails to actually account for his life in the story world, all he can remember with acuity is information, and faulty information at that. While many of this chapter's aforementioned critics of *Open City* root the distraction from Julius's foibles in his *aesthetic* prowess, this crucial moment exposes the risks of the Wikipedic Novel and its *informatic* onslaught: the suffusion of verifiable ideas and cultural ephemera can isolate readers with a character's psyche at the cost of the novel's social world. None of Julius's other acquaintances required action from him—they simply exchanged ideas. Moji, however, brings to the fore the fact that Julius exists in a world that is more than an existential bazaar. He lives in a world of actions and interactions that have consequences, and when confronted with this social responsibility Julius entirely shirks sociality in favor of more information, and days later, a revisitation and revision of that information from an anonymous, likely Open-Source authority (he is, after all, "looking up" the story). Indeed, when Moji asks, "Will you say something now?" Julius has a similar but stronger reaction to his reaction to Farouq: "it had a far deeper resonance than it would have in any academic situation," and so to stifle the overtones he turns precisely back to his academic dilettantism.[296]

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If it is not clear that citational clickability can be seen as a distraction from a plot, this case and the next section model how Julius's narrative cunning persists from the novel's end. After Julius leaves the party, the chapter ends and the next leaps closer to the moment of the novel's narrating, as Julius explains that "Monday was my first full day in private practice" (247). Thereafter, he attends a concert, boarding a touring boat in the Upper Bay and looking at the Statue of Liberty. As he examines it, he lays out a precise history of the statue, paying special attention to how it has served

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[293] Cole, *Open City*, 246.

[294] Cole, *Open City*, 246.

[295] Within a greater tradition of "Afropolitan" texts, Yékú identifies *Open City* and this particular seen as one of a handful that addresses "sexual and erotic fantasies" typically "devoid" of other novels. To this she includes Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua* Nana, Buchi Emechet's *Joys of Motherhood, and Chimamanda Adichie's* Half a Yellow Sun" in the provocatively titled essay "Thighs Fell Apart." See Yékú James, "'Thighs Fell Apart': Online Fan Fiction, and African Writing in a Digital Age," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 29 (3) (2017): 261–75.

[296] Cole, *Open City*, 105.

as an avian morgue:

> Although it has had its symbolic value right from the beginning, until 1902, it was a working lighthouse, the biggest in the country. In those days, the flame that shone from the torch guided ships into Manhattan's harbor; that same light, especially in bad weather, fatally disoriented birds. The birds, many of which were clever enough to dodge the cluster of skyscrapers in the city, somehow lost their bearings when faced with a single monumental flame. A large number of birds met their death in this manner. In 1888, for instance, on the morning after one particularly stormy night, more than fourteen hundred dead birds were recovered from the crown, the balcony of the torch, and the pedestal of the statue.[297]

This moment of confident historical fidelity ultimately goes on to weft a delicate meditation on mortality and nationhood, but its curious specificity beckons verifying. He describes how a Colonel Tassin collected "two hundred or more" carcasses and had them sent to "the Washington National Museum, the Smithsonian Institution, and other scientific institutions" and that "on October 1 of that year, for example the colonel's report indicated that fifty rails had died, as had eleven wrens, two catbirds, and one whippor-will."[298] As I have outlined in Chapter 1, the visual rhetoric of clickability is strongest with proper nouns, dates, and quantification. This section, which I have abbreviated liberally, contains such singularly precise detail that it wears its research as gaudily as any other section of the novel. Indeed, in 2020 one scholar—Calista McRae—was compelled to extend her reading online to corroborate Julius's account:

> The first time I read *Open City*, I was a graduate student preparing to teach it, and mainly worried about how my class would react to the plot; I essentially skipped the birds. But when I picked up the novel again last fall, it was after I'd seen hundreds of dead birds myself, and so I looked for confirmation of Cole's figures in old periodicals. A 1916 letter to the Cleveland Bird Lovers Association proposed installing railings around the Statue of Liberty, so that birds "might have places to perch until they could regain their strength, collect their thoughts, and get their bearings," a suggestion that had allegedly worked at similar structures in Europe.[299]

The old periodical she finds is from a journal called *Bird-lore*, Volume 9: one of the top five results on Google Books if one searches for the string "birds statue of liberty."[300] Julius as a digital dilettante seems to mobilize his capacity for knowledge acquisition to continue distracting from the plot. Of course, McRae cleared this narrative hurdle in the purpose of pedagogy, but the notion that it had her clicking in hindsight (and authoring an article expanding on her findings) models the staying power of clickable style and the surprisingly stable trove of Open-Source knowledge.

Ultimately, *Open City*'s deployment of the culturally acute dilettante highlights the contemporary slippage of characterological knowledge and Internet knowledge in subtle but decidedly prescient ways. The narrative strategies Julius uses to conceal his own Internet sleuthing typifies a mode of uncertainty that invites clickability and destabilizes narratorial knowledge. This builds on the notion of digital banality without always directly acknowledging technology's presence. Further, the onslaught of information has drawn critics—this one included—to the Internet's Open-Sources to verify and expand on the narrator's knowledge. If not by design, the Wikipedic Novel is charged with this capacity for readerly engagement. In the electricity of this extratextual charge, *Open*

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[297] Cole, *Open City*, 259-60.
[298] Cole, *Open City*, 260.
[299] Calista McRae, "The Bird at the Window," *The Boston Review*, 2020.
[300] "Liberty at Launch," *Bird-lore: An Illustrated Bi-monthly Magazine Devoted to the Study and Protection of Birds: Official Organ of the Audubon Societies*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1916).

City models how the blending of digital and fictive trust can divert from questions of ethicality within novelistic plot. Ironically, while drawing attention away from Julius' dubious ethics through the course of the novel, in the end the Wikipedic form undoes the fantasy of locating citationality's origin point. Instead, it returns the reader to precisely the ethical apparatuses hemmed into the novel's fictional space itself.

Chapter IV | The Digital Griot and the Media Event's Paratext

This chapter extends the idea of visual rhetoric, clickability, and virtual realism developed in the previous three chapters. While I have so far directed attention to novels whose actions are set in the literary present-tense (that is, an implicit present that is contemporaneous to their publication dates), this chapter focuses on a novel that resembles a different temporal posture: historical fiction. Ishmael Reed's *JUICE!* (2011) models the stakes of representing a media event from "recent history": the O.J. Simpson trial. The novel tracks Paul "Bear" Blessings, a Black political cartoon satirist and senior citizen who reflects on his experience of the trial shortly after Barack Obama's 2008 election. The novel jostles back and forth from his retrospective rehashing with online friends to vignettes of his life in the Nineties, watching the trial and turning over its political implications against his job's demands. The corpus of media surrounding a not-too-distant historical event experienced primarily through television opens compelling terrain for Wikipedic Reading and considerations of the Open-Source on (semi) historical fiction. Beyond the literary representation of a media event, this chapter also places emphasis on the authority of the author himself in darning the holes of digitally rooted history with the fabric of lived experience.[301]

JUICE! is compelling not just because of its subject matter, but also because Ishmael Reed himself maintains his stylistic signature: the deployment of technological anachronism inside of novelistic plot. Where he placed an FM radio in a slave-catching Antebellum carriage in *Flight to Canada* (1976), he makes more subtle shifts in *JUICE!*, placing blogs and message boards at the hands of senior citizens in the mid-Nineties. In many ways, Reed uses this novel to examine how facets of the experience of live media become fixed into digital Internet memory. At once, he places a narrator (Blessings) who narrates from two ends: on one end, he sometimes self-consciously confesses that he reviews details he cannot remember online while on the other, he provides a range of vivid details that elude Internet confirmation. To compound this, I have personally been exposed to the flesh-and-blood Reed's (proud) collection of materials from the trial—cassette recordings, newspaper clippings, books and biographies. These were seemingly archived in anticipation of their impending obsolescence in order to explicitly craft *JUICE!* a decade after the trial. At once, he asked me if I have subscribed to an "O.J. Watch" bulletin that updates its members of any new headlines on O.J. Simpson still in the 2020s.

Reed's use of *Internet rooted* technological anachronism in *JUICE!* shows a decisive evolution in his style from his more recognized works published prior to the 21st century. By capturing the "liveness" of the televised broadcast and Reed's lived experiences up to the event's recast fragments in digital reproduction, his Wikipedic Novel serves a loosely historical function by capturing the lacunae of the transition from traditional media to digital media. The novel perhaps embodies the cost of conversion.

Throughout this study, I have flagged Walter Benjamin's trepidation around information and Roland Barthes' resentment for "readerly," closed works of literature. Both thinkers' lamentations are well-taken: for Benjamin, the value of perpetuating stories through oral transmission is sunk by the technological development of print, and for Barthes the capacity for textual meaning is foreclosed by overdetermined "works" that proffer meaning to readers while inhibiting participation in the process of signification. The "readerly" limitations of the Wikipedic Novel and its necessary wefting of Web-based information accord the readerly text with a positive value—for the "writerly" project of the Internet has driven a morass of signification and contradiction that becomes more

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[301] When I use the term "digitally rooted," I am referring to the archived detritus of the broadcasts available on YouTube, CNN.com, CSPAN.com, and other sites that serve as repositories of the trial's key (and often most dramatic) moments.

palpable when sieved through the novel form's embrasure. Benjamin's concern with the waning of orality is less clearly reverted by this project. Instead, this chapter makes the case for a form of storytelling that is necessarily non-oral yet transmitted in a way that still prioritizes memory—for it tells the narrative of a mediated event: a televised trial. In confronting the striations of a recorded moment from different camera angles, with different overlaid text from broadcast networks, featuring the commentary of numerous pundits during a simulcast airing across multiple channels, his Wikipedic novel becomes a narrative that supersedes the mediated event's "plot." The literary subsumption of this point of view is not necessarily a recuperative salve to Benjamin's lost art of storytelling, but the representation of a television viewer's consciousness does recall an enduring storyteller: the griot.

Mamadou Kouyate describes griots as storytellers who "are vessels of speech . . . we are the repositories which harbor many centuries old. The art of eloquence has no secrets for us; without us the names of kings would vanish into oblivion, we are the memory of mankind; by the spoken word we bring to life the deeds and exploits of kings for younger generations."[302] These performer-historians have endured across West Africa, retaining the tales, family histories, and origins of their villages while sharing them through performances of music, recitation, and dance. If ever there were a non-Western analogue to Benjamin's storyteller, it would be the griot. Unlike the dissolved and luddite storyteller Benjamin mourns, the griot has been brought to the 21st century by Adam Banks, who has coined the "digital griot as a functional multimedia disc jockey (not necessarily bound to audio itself)." The digital griot represents "the wide range of cultural practices, literacies, rhetorical mastery, and knowledge of traditions that DJs in black traditions represent" which in turn "make[s] them griots, link[s] them to other griotic figures, and offer[s] a model for writing that thoroughly weaves together oral performance, print literacy, mastery and interrogation of technologies—technologies that can lead to a renewed vision for both composition and African American rhetoric."[303] Indeed, Banks has identified Ishmael Reed as a Digital Griot for his work in *Mumbo Jumbo*:

> In many ways, LaBas, especially as Nelson interprets him as a model for linking technologies and black identity, is the ultimate DJ and griot: an archivist, a canon maker, time binder; someone with an encyclopedic knowledge of traditions, a searing and searching awareness of contemporary realities, and the beat-matching, text-blending abilities to synchronize traditions, present realities, and future visions in that future text[304]

Banks affiliates Reed not just as a time binder, but someone who "lives with the ancestors and their stories" and can walk with the "living dead" while understanding that "the social weight of the ancestors frequently transcends the physical boundaries of life and death, as narrowly defined in the West."[305]

The Digital Griot in the novel thus heightens the capacity of oral gestures—summary, evaluative language, direct address, and the preservation of endangered minutiae. Reed's pre-Internet novels already positioned him as a type of literary griot who safeguarded history's most indelicate moments through narrative. Likewise, he had already cleverly deployed some of the novel's more reliquary features like markers of paratextuality (weaving time through intertitles) and free indirect discursions to bring the author's metacognitive hand into play. But Reed as a web-rooted Digital

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[302] Djibril Tamsir Niane, et al. *Sundiata: an Epic of Old Mali*. (London: Pearson Longman, 2006), 15.
[303] Adam J. Banks, *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011), 8.
[304] Banks, *Digital Griots*, 8
[305] Banks 9.

Griot gives shape to a broadcast television event whose pieces have become strewn in cyberspace over time—luminescent on a screen until its evanescent traces of *liveness* cannot exist anywhere except language. In cable, there is "dead air" during which nothing is being broadcast, and when live broadcasts are no longer live, *JUICE*'s Digital Griot "walks with the dead" to reanimate moments. The moments to which I refer are not necessarily the media or its reproduction itself, but rather the essence of its "liveness" as experienced in the necessary fragmentation of a given participant.

Reed channels his knowledge of—well—*channels* via his protagonist, Blessings, who rerenders events and hearsay. The experience of the event becomes reanimated not just through his compulsive attention, but also through literal comics drawn by Reed, who attended a San Francisco arts conservatory to meet the task. We must take the Digital Griot figure seriously as a medium of the ephemeral "facts" of opinions themselves. The traditional Griot is distilled neither to pure rhetoric nor facticity. This knowledge function is what allows the novel to take its ostensibly digressive form. The Griot is a storyteller and a history teller, and in so doing lines his words with the marks of his informatic subjectivity. In the novel, marking a teller's own subjectivity has been called "metatextuality," but the mode of metatextual reference in *JUICE!* foregrounds the hypotactic clickability I have been modeling in this dissertation—it keeps a reader engaged with the teller and his life. Rather than trace a lived experience with mere words, the Digital Griot can tell of an experience and point to traces of its occurrence in a decidedly non-anonymous manner that differentiates this Wikipedic Novel from the abstract collective of this dissertation's prior case studies.

Reed's Neo-HooDoo Critical Trinity: A Case of Career Implied Authorship

Ishmael Reed's archive of novels is *not*—like Henry James's or those of fellow Postmodernists Toni Morrison and Thomas Pynchon—often read by critics in terms of "early and late" divisions. This is despite eleven novels produced from 1967 to 2018, beginning with *The Free Lance Pall Bearers* and most recently ending with *Conjugating Hindi*; or, a novel about a used car salesman who rules a kingdom of urban blight from his toilet to a novel about Black-on-Indian xenophobia at an Oakland community college. Then again, Reed could himself be responsible for the fairly stagnant posture of critical attention toward his work, as he offered a mystifying and powerful politicohistorical prism that has served as a decoding ring to everything since its publication in 1972: his essay "The Neo-HooDoo Manifesto." This incisive and formidable proclamation has, in its endurance, obscured the ways Reed's style in his late novels has been read. Across his enormous bibliography, including seven books of poetry, four plays, over a dozen anthologies, and hundreds of interviews, the manifesto maintains a status of loud supersession across the interpretations of his work. Before I lay my claims as to why it is important to accord Reed an Early and Late phase, though, it is important to account for the Neo-HooDoo's terms and influence on Reed's criticism.

"The Neo-HooDoo Manifesto" is a call for countercultural expressivity in the United States rationalized through an alternative conception of religious influence. Beginning, "Neo-HooDoo is a 'Lost American Church' updated," Reed radically accounts for a new way of situating Black culture's influence on American life.[306] As he notes, "Neo-HooDoos would rather 'shake that thing' than be stiff and erect" and the form includes "the music of James Brown without the lyrics and ads for Black Capitalism."[307] The manifesto reveals a pathway of emergence for the aesthetic it unfurls—

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[306] Ishmael Reed, "The Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed Henry Louis Gates and Nelly Y. McKay, (New York: Norton, 2004), 2062.
[307] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo," 2062.

while Reed ultimately asserts that Black aesthetics and their influence on popular culture have emerged from a line of African-rooted spirituality across time, the chronology of this emergence is buried and blurred in lines like "Moses had a near heart attack when he saw his sons dancing nude before the Black Bull God Apis . . .dancing to a 'heathen sound' that Moses had 'heard before in Egypt' (probably a mixture of Sun Ra and Jimmy Reed played in the nightclub district of ancient Egypt's 'The Domain of Osiris'—named after the god who enjoyed the fancy footwork of the pigmies.)"[308] In this example, Reed's revisionist sense of history requires a revisionist sense of reading that maintains a remove from chronology in favor of syncretism.

Nonetheless, Reginald Martin has heroically distilled a chronology of Neo-HooDoo's pre-text from the essay's rangy examples and citations to help ground our understanding of Reed's historical investments. In Martin's construction, the Neo-HooDoo emerges from: 1) The pantheistic and syncretic worship of Osiris in Ancient Egypt; 2) West African religions (especially Yoruba and Fon) until the beginning of the Arabian and European slave market; 3) Voodoo, as the result of the transplantation of tribes from the Gulf of Guinea to the Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; and 4) Hoodoo, as a consequence of the Diaspora of African Americans in the US (nineteenth and twentieth century).[309] Thus, the Neo-HooDoo proposed by Reed is the syncretism between voodoo-hoodoo forms and US popular culture.

> In each of these stages, the different manifestations of voodoo have suffered persecution by fanatic followers of Judeo-Christian culture, which [Reed] represents as monolithic, hierarchical, rigid, foreboding, and repressive. Neo-HooDoo sensibility, on the other hand, is plural, participatory, open, lively, and tolerant. In Reed's vision of religious history, Judeo-Christian civilization defends orthodoxy and cultural and religious dogmas. The Neo-HooDoo world view, in contrast, values dissension and syncretism on all possible levels. In opposition to the Western manipulation of the environment, Neo-Hoodooism advocates absolute respect for Nature.[310]

Reed's counter-system favors intuition, mystery, and emotion through conjurers of seeming magic: the thick reediness of Charlie Parker's unpredictable saxophone, the literary imbrication of voodoo in Zora Neale Hurston's texts, and the concoctions of nails, earthworms, and chicken sold by New Orleans Hoodoo practitioner Julia Jackson in the 1940s.

Needless to say, Reed effectively self-fashioned *his own* image as a career implied author in publishing such an exigent and mystically capacious aesthetic manifesto so early in his career (at that point of the roiling Seventies, Reed had only published *Free Lance*, *Yellow-Back Radio Brokedown*, and *Mumbo Jumbo*). Coined by Wayne Booth, the original implied author is founded on the notion that the reader will "inevitably construct a picture of the *official scribe who writes in this manner* [. . .] His different works will imply different versions, different ideal combination of norms."[311] The *career* implied author is the sum of interpretations across the implied author's oeuvre—it is an identification that keeps the author entrapped in the eyes of his readers as a purveyor of a specific range of stylistics. In addition, the implication is that the "career" is composed not only of artistic texts, but also of interviews, autobiographical writing, and other ephemera that contain the flesh-and-blood-author in conversation with his "scribal" products. Brian Richardson has noted that "[s]ome actual writers will be unable to maintain the former 'implied authorial self' and, as in the case of the final works of Hemingway, merely produce an unintended parody of what Wayne Booth

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[308] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo," 2063.

[309] Reginald Martin, *Ishmael Reed and the New Black Aesthetic Critics*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 286

[310] Martin, *Reed and the New Black*, 288.

[311] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 71 (emphasis added).

calls the 'career implied author.'"[312] In its worst-case scenario, this career implied author is an almost parodically identifiable stylist whose hackneyed literary maneuvers produce anemic works relative to the originals that constituted the implied author's very becoming. One is hard-pressed to find a piece of scholarship on Ishmael Reed's aesthetics that does not associate his authorial intent with some tenet of the Manifesto. In the case of the career author Ishmael Reed, his texts have generally been received as mere reminders of the politics his manifesto established in the 1970s.

Ishmael Reed *has not* stayed the same. Looking across the long stretch of authors who write contemporary fiction, we can actually see how aesthetic features are adapted to pivotal shifts in the lived technological environments of authors, which in turn affects the diegetic interests of their works. In the case of Ishmael Reed, because his career implied authorship is so stable, the deviations and microseisms of his eccentric aesthetics are especially pronounced. As we have seen, it is not unusual for Reed to write about history, but *JUICE!* distinguishes itself from his other historically situated novels, which also happen to generate the vast bulk of critics' attention—I sportively call these acclaimed texts Reed's Critical Trinity: *Flight to Canada* is set in the Antebellum past, *Mumbo Jumbo* in the Roaring Twenties, and *The Freelance Pall Bearers* in the 19th Century Wild West. *JUICE!*'s terms of difference from these three novels are both practical and methodological, and their differences reveal as much about contemporary mediated life and novelistic narrativity as they do about Ishmael Reed's artistry.

Practical Differences between Reed's Critical Trinity and *JUICE*!

Considered practically, Reed did not live through the historical environments of his Critical Trinity, and in these texts, he features a variety of supplements and intertexts showcasing his own research. The formal inclusion that marks his research has come to distinguish his prosaic style: across his novels, one will find paragraphs that are visually interceded with block quotes, photographs, completely-capitalized sentences pulled from news headlines, and footnotes. Famously, in the back of *Mumbo Jumbo* there rests a "partial bibliography" listing some of the texts Reed drew from in writing the novel. Keying on the erudition of such a paratext, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. reads *Mumbo Jumbo* as a "textbook, complete with illustrations, footnotes, and a bibliography," while Robert Elliot Fox considers the novel to be an "historico aesthetic textbook."[313] Indeed, Reed himself has made plain his interest in textbooks, as *Japanese by Spring* is both the title of his 1993 novel and the title of the textbook its protagonist professor uses to learn Japanese. His non-fiction features a variety of reference texts that don't merely expand literary canons, but machine entirely new artillery for them: from *Pow Wow, Charting the Fault Lines in the American Experience—Short Fiction From Then to Now* (which his website proudly notes "includes work ranging from bear stories of the Tlingits [. . .] to the hip-hop writings of Kevin Powell") to *The Complete Muhammad Ali,* a 440-page tome that moves beyond collating the boxer's powerful words, instead featuring the other sides of his most formative conversations. These range from the Filipinos who saw the cultural and political aftereffects of the famed "Thrilla' in Manila" (effects that helped erase the "developing" honorific from their country) to the Black Nationalists and Nation of Islam

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[312] Brian Richardson, *Unnatural Narrative: Theory, History, and Practice*, (Athens, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2015), 173.

[313] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014) 140; Robert Elliot Fox, "Blacking the Zero: Toward a Semiotics of Neo-Hoodoo," *Black American Literature Forum* 18, no. 3 (April 19, 1984), 93.

members from his mosque, whom Reed pointedly qualifies are "hear[d] from . . . in their own words" "instead of being dismissed as 'Lunatics' and 'thugs.'"[314]

JUICE! is Reed's most historically distinctive novel because it focuses on one real and entirely mediated event whose broadcast began in 1994 and ended in 1995: People of the State of California vs. Orenthal James Simpson—"The Trial of the Century." Compared to his historical fiction, this is one, complete event Reed lived through, changing the nature of what "bibliography" might mean and how his texts can be read. Reed's novels have always been considered diegetically challenging, and much work has to be done to excavate his plots from the huge corpuses of research, commentary, and historical counternarratives embedded in his Critical Trinity. Digression is more of a rule than an exception across Reed's oeuvre—in many ways, it distinguishes his style. Sami Ludwig offers a smart and svelte account of Reed's aesthetic core, claiming that the most "salient feature of Reed's chaotic-seeming narratology is the fact that he presents voices in an unmediated way, which forces upon the reader the task of performing an act of narratological induction, of recognizing 'Who speaks?'"[315] Ludwig's particular study in this instance focuses on *Mumbo Jumbo*, but his characterization applies to the other architexts of Reed's Critical Trinity. Again, one will always find words, images, and quotations that visually obtrude his fiction trying to connect one fact from another fiction. From the Emancipation Proclamation that motivates *Flight to Canada's* plot to the satiric transformation of Black Arts patron Carl Van Vechten into Hinckle Von Vampton in *Mumbo Jumbo*, enormous moments and people in history have always created external referents in Reed's texts. In the Critical Trinity, the diegetic space is broadly fictional—representative of the types of contemporary historical novels Fredric Jameson detests, wherein there are "a host of names and an endless warehouse of images ... Harlequin 'histories,' in which a romantic tale is played out against this or that costume setting."[316]

As Wai Chee Dimock notes, *Flight to Canada* finds the Emancipation Proclamation "play[ing] a starring role [in its plot]—although, significantly, not initially as that, but rather as its earlier incarnation, something [that Reed] called 'Compensatory Emancipation' in which the novel's caricature of Abraham Lincoln explains how he wants to "buy up all the slaves and then tell them to go off somewhere," which Dimock notes is not "entirely facetious or fictitious."[317] The flesh-and-blood Abraham Lincoln *did* attempt in 1861 to push a "colonization program to rid the US of its black population by settling the emancipated slaves elsewhere—whether in Mexico . . . or Chiriquí, Haiti, or Liberia."[318] Dimock delineates this infelicitous history's inclusion in Reed's novel to contrast its outright omission in Steven Spielberg and Tony Kushner's Disney-produced biopic, *Lincoln* (2012). In his Critical Trinity, Reed tends to render counternarratives through glaringly conspicuous caricatures (again, Cal Van Vechten becomes Hinckle Von Vampton in *Mumbo Jumbo*) or by directly emplotting his figures of interest into the story, as he does when he features Harriet Beecher Stowe as an active character in *Flight to Canada*.

But in *JUICE!*, Reed features nearly no fictionalizing of real historical figures. Narratively, he considers them—of course O.J. Simpson himself, but also (wryly) the usual suspects affiliated with the trial: Nicole Brown's sister Denise, prosecutor Marcia Clark, Mark Fuhrman, and others. However, he also includes the peripheral media figures who collectively helped transform the trial into an event of commentary, opinion, and distribution in mainstream media outlets, including the

[314] Barbara Lowenstein, 2021, https://ishmaelreed.org/drupal/.

[315] Sämi Ludwig, "Ishmael Reed's Inductive Narratology of Detection," *African American Review* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1998), 210.
[316] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, (London: Verso, 2013), 263, 259.
[317] Wai Chee Dimock, "Crowdsourcing History: Ishmael Reed, Tony Kushner, and Steven Spielberg Update the Civil War," American Literary History, 25(4), (2013), 900.
[318] Dimock, "Crowdsourcing," 900.

likes of Bill Maher, Nancy Grace, Geraldo Rivera, and Dominick Dunne. Whereas the plots of Reed's Critical Trinity tend to bind a range of historical concerns together, *JUICE!*'s plot is recused of such responsibility because its historical context is self-evident and temporally narrow: a cartoonist hates watching the O.J. trial, his publisher asks him to villainize O.J., and he makes an outrageous illustration defending Simpson that inflames leftist communities before eventually ceding to his publisher and receiving an award from the Cartoonists Guild. All the while, Blessings tells the tale from the year 2010, describing more about his mindset and what he watched during the trial than the actual sequence of events leading to his Cartoonist Guild award. The Trinity derives its dizzying narratology by featuring reimaginings of events and figures that readers might never have known simply from never having encountered them in reading. *JUICE!*, on the other hand, is effectively an entirely fictitious plot in which characters interact with mediated, real events that can be rebroadcast on YouTube or CNN.com today. If we take either Gates or Eliot's understanding that *Mumbo Jumbo* serves a textbook function, then it is because it introduces ideas and concepts to a reader who might not have looked for them. In these texts, Reed is more a figure of Encyclopedism—he has done the research and capitalized on his bibliography, dispersing his own learned facts into his fiction. Which leads to the methodological differences between *JUICE!*'s construction from that of his Critical Trinity.

Methodological Differences between Reed's Critical Trinity and *JUICE!*

JUICE! is not reliant on research alone—yes, its force comes from some bibliographic bookreading, but it also capitalizes on Reed's *biography, bookmarks,* and *blogs*. Writing this novel, Reed (who is a short drive away from the University of California, Berkeley) can deprioritize a visit to the libraries on campus, favoring instead his own hippocampus.[319] While he still maintains his career's general mission to disrupt dominant narratives, simply by writing *JUICE!* at all Reed shows how cultural memory shrinks over time, as media events, news cycles, and online "feeds" condition amnesic engagement with affectively charged events. The trial's denouement was only a decade old when Reed began writing *JUICE!*, but penning the novel was as much *recovery* as it was *research*. Again, this is only possible because he lived through this event and could reconcile his own memory of how the media event (for most Americans, an entirely televised event that now exists in a chiefly digital iteration) occurred. Thus, *JUICE!* deprioritizes plot, and instead is a novel about *characterization*. In section II I explain how the novel's girth is due to a consistent deferral of the plot as Blessings associates people with events and media, creating a mode of media-driven synecdochic description that overwhelms the narrative itself.

Remember, Ludwig suggests that *Mumbo Jumbo* bears an "unmediated" polyphony, which I argue is catalyzed in part by the fact that *Mumbo Jumbo* (and the other two of Reed's Critical Trinity) are third-person omniscient novels. Because *JUICE!* is atypically focalized through a stable (though crucially unreliable) first-person narrator, it relies on different gestures and maneuvers of heteroglossic inclusion than his typical, third-person polyphonic narratives. Some of Reed's default stylistic tricks feature in *JUICE!* (anachronism, characters who read texts in the story-space, and the inclusion of images), but these gestures register differently because there exists a mutually constitutive plane of vision between the author, reader, narrator, and plot: a bafflingly tentacular media experience in the Simpson trial. A portion of those televised events can still be replayed online, which motivates my argument that placing a media event at the novel's center bears

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[319] Unfortunately, my preferred rhyming polyptoton pun falls just short of inclusion in this chapter's body, for Reed's *Flight to Canada* research on the Antebellum does *not* tap into his cerebellum, which, to my own stylistics' chagrin, is the region of the brain that stores memory for motor skills.

significant stakes on novelistic description itself. What is the chronotope—Bakhtin's configuration of time and space—of a web page in a novel's plot?[320] What time and what space does this occupy for the characters, and if a reader pulls a page up to match, what then happens to novelistic space?

The media event is intrinsically defined by its publicity—anyone can know about it, and its own appeal is rooted in its ability to have scenes and moments replayed as it unfurls on many screens at once. Media events are documentary, yet they operate at a different register from localized history that falls outside of the camera lens's peripheral vision—while both may be historical, they place different pressures on language. As I will show, the author, reader, and—in the case of *JUICE!*—narrator can generally all *see* or *hear* the same moment of a media event in its archive, so there is no particular pressure on language to recapture its mimetic fidelity. However, rhetorical space then opens for a narrator (a subject who experienced the event) to offer a constitutive event's context, or to offer temporal sinew linking the characters of specific media events with *other* media moments outside of the event. In *JUICE!*, this mode of narration is catalyzed by the principle that the O.J. Simpson media event could not be seen by any single person at once because its simulcast broadcast and the accompanying ephemera were too multifarious. Pundits across different networks covering the trial spoke simultaneously after key moments of the "live" broadcast. Thereafter, radio callers at local and national levels offered input and opinion the globe over, leaving a trail of dispersed information (after all, it was all broadcast and received in real-time by *some* listeners). And of course, the trial's main cast lived as much off the camera as on it. Thus, the subjectivity of a media collator and subjective commentator *on the commentators* affords a truly novel narrative function that situates the narrator in a uniquely powerful position, recuperating novelistic form as a distinctively well-fit, snapped-shut Tupperware to the big, baggy Ziploc of the Internet in terms of media events. Thus, this novel bears little need for a bibliography.

To be clear: I argue that the partial bibliography—what might have compelled research previously, becomes (about to borrow a computing term) an embedded system in the narrative. Rather than a mere list of sources, *JUICE!*'s narrator self-consciously enfolds dates, times, summaries, transcriptions, and his own cartoons representing the trial and its aftereffects as he describes how his allegiance to Simpson's innocence altered his home life and career. Because of the diegetic enfolding of his source texts, *JUICE!* straddles a hyper- and hypo-textuality.[321] While there are stylistic moments of hypotextuality in my earlier discussion of *Open City* (the majority of its early reviewers delighted in identifying a scene clearly echoing the falling snow from Joyce's "The Dead") no part of my study thus far has explicitly placed into flux the veracity of citation.

The Partial Bibliography's Obsolescence

Let us read four samples from across Ishmael Reed's work. The first text is "The Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," and the other two are the legs of his Critical Trinity: *Mumbo Jumbo*, and *Flight to Canada*. Then, we will consider *JUICE!*, which has been given scant critical attention even a decade

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[320] See M.M. Bakhtin tr. Emerson and Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1981), 84.

[321] Graham Allen notes that Gerard Genette's *hypotext* "is termed by most other critics as the *inter-text*, that is a text which can be definitely located as a major source of signification for a text." For Genette, a hypertext is "any relationship uniting a text B (*hypertext*) to an earlier text A (*hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is no that of a commentary" (Genette, *Paratexts* 5). *JUICE!* pushes the limit of the hypertext versus the rote citation—Genette himself explains the blur, when he notes that "all texts are hypertextual, but that sometimes the existence of a hypotext is too uncertain to be the basis of for hypertextual reading." See Graham Allen, *Intertextuality*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2011), 103-4.

after its publication.[322] Based on the tepid reviews that lean on Neo-HooDooism, uninterest in *JUICE!* seems to be in part because critics "get" what Reed's work tends to do: syncretic Neo-HooDoo that blends the past with the present and features mixed media, prescient technology, and playful anachronism. Otherwise, they focus on the quality of his pastiche.[323] Try spotting these stylistic traces across these samples. First, from the "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto" (1972)—

> . . . Neo-HooDoo is "your Mama" as Larry Neal said. Neo-HooDoos Little Richard and Chuck Berry nearly succeeded in converting the Beatles. When the Beatles said they were more popular than Christ they seemed astonished at the resulting outcry. This is because although they could feebly through amplification and technological sham 'mimic' (as if Little Richard and Chuck Berry were Loa [Spirits] practicing ventriloquism on their "Horses") the Beatles failed to realize that they were conjuring the music and ritual (although imitation) of a Forgotten Faith, a traditional enemy of Christianity which Christianity the Cop Religion has had to drive underground each time they meet. Neo-HooDoo now demands a rematch, the referees were bribed and the adversary had resin on his gloves.

> *The Vatican Forbids Jazz Masses in Italy*
> *Rome, Aug. 6 (UPI)—The Vatican today barred jazz and popular music from masses in Italian churches and forbade young Roman Catholics to change prayers or readings used on Sundays and holy days. It said such changes were "eccentric and arbitrary" . . .*
> -The New York Times, August 7, 1970.[324]

Now, a passage from *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) describing how "Jes Grew," a viral personification of ragtime, jazz, polytheism, and freedom is overtaking the world in 1920 through the media. Those afflicted with Jes Grew begin dancing uncontrollably, and no culture is immune. While a Harlem Vodoun priest races against the Wallflower Order (an international conspiracy group sought on maintaining monotheism and rigidity) to find Jes Grew's source, the narrator describes how the scientist responsible for the radio reacts to his implication in the viral moment:

> It has been a busy day for reporters following Jes Grew. The morning began with Dr. Lee De Forest, inventor of the 3-element vacuum tube which helped make big-

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[322] At present, only one peer-reviewed article on *JUICE!* is in print, a portion of a chapter titled "Discipline and Punish" from Martin Paul Eve's *Literature Against Criticism: University English and Contemporary Fiction in Conflict*. In Eve's reading, "Reed seeks to complicate his protagonist's distorted narrator in order to extend the traditional Postmodernist deconstruction of binaries, again centred around supposed post-raciality. Bear [Blessings] alternates between poles of paranoia and viable critique, the one continually undercutting the plausibility of the other in order to show, at one remove, how it is that cultural reading practices of paranoia and truth degrade the efficacy of radical critique." Martin Paul Eve, "Discipline and Publish," in *Literature Against Criticism: University English and Contemporary Fiction in Conflict*. (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 185–204.

[323] Paul Devlin of the San Francisco Chronicle said in his April 13, 2011 review, "Reed's tendency to go too far has not diminished. Most readers would probably characterize Blessings as misogynistic, homophobic, anti-Mexican, anti-Indian (subcontinent) and more. He's against any individual out to make the black man look bad, but too often he indicts entire groups (or implies guilt by group membership)." To reward him, Reed created a series of essays entitled *Going Too Far: Essays About America's Nervous Breakdown* the next year. Its opening sentences: "Just as the ex-slaves were able to challenge the prevailing attitudes about race in the United States after arriving in Canada, I am able to argue from Quebec against ordained opinion that paints the United States as a place where the old sins of racism have been vanquished and that those who insist that much work remains to be done are involved in 'Old Fights.'" See Paul Devlin, "'Juice!' by Ishmael Reed review: O.J. obsession," *San Francisco Gate*, April 13, 2011, https://www.sfgate.com/books/article/Juice-by-Ishmael-Reed-review-O-J-obsession-2375092.php.

[324] Ishmael Reed. "The Neo-HooDoo Manifesto." Essay. In *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, edited by Henry Louis Gates and Nelly Y. McKay, Seconded. New York, NY: Norton, 2004, 206.

time radio possible, collapsing before a crowded press room after he pleaded concerning his intervention, now in the grips of Jes Grew.

"What have you done to my child? You have sent him out on the street in rags of ragtime to collect money from all and sundry.

"You have made him a laughing stock of intelligence, surely a stench in the nostrils of the gods of the ionosphere."*[325]

The asterisk then leads to a footnote citing *The Fabulous Century: 1920-1930,* Vol. 3, indicating that Dr. Lee De Forest's dialogue is pulled from a real context unrelated to Reed's fictitious construction. Now, consider this description of a slave catcher from Reed's 1976 *Flight to Canada*, in which Stray Leechfield (who finds runaway slaves so plantation owners can leech fields for cotton) tries to track Raven Quickskills (who is black with fast skills)*:*

And then that glistening rust-black Stray Leechfield. We saw him as nothing but a low-down molasses-slurper and a mutton thief, but do you know what he did? He was stealing chickens—methodically, not like the old days when they'd steal one or two and try to duck the BBs. He had taken so many over a period of time that he was over in the other county, big as you please, dressed up like a gentleman, smoking a seegar and driving a carriage which featured factory climate-control air conditioning, vinyl top, AM/FM stereo radio, full leather interior, power-lock doors, six-way power seat, power windows, white-wall wheels, door-edge guards, bumper impact strips, rear defroster and soft-ray glass.[326]

The anachronistic inclusion of motor vehicle amenities in a carriage pulled by horses is just one of Reed's many satirically syncretic maneuvers to show how the markers of class and excess transcend generations to signify the same basic superfluity. These samples evince many of Reed's tendencies: anachronism, popular culture, skepticism toward Western ideologies, and a relentless level of referentiality. Now, let us consider how this referentiality differs in *JUICE!*

Rasheed Wallace's Tattoo and the Work of the Buried Paratext

Forty years after *Flight to Canada*, Reed does offer his patent anachronism, popular culture, and skepticism toward Western ideology. But the referentiality sits differently when positioning a detail that relies on the context of live television. This passage is *JUICE!*'s first paragraph. The narrator, Paul "Bear" Blessings tries to describe his emotional state during an online chat with his tough-skinned, opinionated, and aging friends, collectively dubbed the "Rhinosphere." These first details feature Reed's trademark deployment of anachronistic technology (here, blogs) in the wrong moment (1994), the blending of factually historical figures into his fiction (which I will hereafter call "faction"), and flashes to Neo-HooDoo's past origins (Egypt):

None of my Rhinosphere buddies, Snakes60@, Rabbit64@, Bat68@, or Otter73@, would have ever predicted that by June 2007, I'd be sounding like Shaquille O'Neal of 2004, because up to that year, I was like Rasheed Wallace. A team player. A minor Egyptologist. A man who drew technical fouls (called "Rodmans," after Dennis Rodman) and suspensions for criticizing those who, in my mind, delivered unfair calls against me and my brothers. How did the Times put it after the Los Angeles Lakers were blown away in 2004 by these ragged upstarts, these Motown Hood Rats:

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[325] Reed, "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto," 206.
[326] Ishmael Reed, *Flight to Canada*, (Manhattan: Random House, 1976), 36.

"Teamwork Thumps Star Power." Not always. I found that out the hard way, backing loser after loser all for the sake of the team. The brothers. The Fellas.[327]

On its surface, the first paragraph of *JUICE!* seems typical of an Ishmael Reed Neo-HooDoo work. It only takes five complete sentences to feature his anachronism and faction (a portmanteau of *fact* and *fiction*). We see Rasheed Wallace—a former professional basketball player—associated with Egyptology. While confusing in its rationale, the maneuver unsurprisingly allows Reed to connect his text to the same Egypt and celebrity in counterintuitive ways; the gesture is similar to the manner in which he flippantly associates the Beatles as conjurers of Black alternative aesthetics in the "Neo-HooDoo Manifesto." But there is a clear difference—while Rasheed Wallace is a specific person, he is nowhere near as historically permanent as The Beatles or Dr. Lee De Forest. But it seems important to understand this—after all, this is the narrator's description of himself. Let us first understand potential base presupposition for the average basketball fan. In 2004, Rasheed Wallace was part of an underdog Detroit Pistons team with no clear superstar that defeated the star-studded Los Angeles Lakers in five out of seven possible games in the National Basketball Association's Finals Championship Series. While it is possible that a reader from the year 2036 could perhaps recover these details in a basketball almanac thirty years from *JUICE!'s* publication (after all, Reed recovered the thirty-year-old dialogue from De Forest for *Mumbo Jumbo*) how would they recover that Wallace was a "minor Egyptologist?" *This* detail seems impossibly obtuse in the face of the greater metaphor Bear draws about himself.

Unlike the deployment of De Forest or The Beatles in Reed's earlier texts, Rasheed Wallace is not deployed entirely as a synecdoche of his own career for *JUICE!*. While he is being used in a basketball metaphor and he was a professional basketball player, the detail of his interest in Egyptology is not officially in print beyond this novel—in part because no print biography exists on Wallace. There are two books about his championship pistons, the self-published *Blue Collar Champions: 2004 NBA Champion Detroit Pistons* by John Hareas and a children's book by Aaron Fisch titled "NBA Detroit Champions."[328] Neither features any account of Wallace's relationship to Egypt. There are two reasons for this confusion: one is that Wallace is *alive*, and this text is set in the relatively contemporary moment. While it focuses on the 1994 trial, its narrative moment is actually in hindsight from 2008—the point of the novel is to draw parallels on the media excoriation of O.J. Simpson with its trenchant skepticism toward Barack Obama through the front half of his first term in office. Reed writes this text with a clear present moment in mind. This is a distinctive departure from his early works, which I characterize as his novels penned before 1967 to 1978, comprised *The Free Lance Pallbearers* and *The Last Days of Louisiana Red* in addition to the Critical Trinity. These constitute nearly half of his eleven-booked archive. The early works feature either historically distant or entirely fictitious settings (*Pallbearers*) set before Reed's birth date of 1938. Thus, these novels left Reed researching and writing conventional historical fiction. *Louisiana Red* begins to bring his settings into the contemporary, but it does so by bridging *Mumbo Jumbo's* voudoun detective Papa LaBas into Berkeley, California during the Free Speech years of the '60s to investigate the murder the proprietor of a gumbo establishment. Not incidentally, Reed wrote *Louisiana Red* while he began his 35-year tenure as an instructor at the University of California, Berkeley, which allowed him to enfold his own witnessing into the novel. This 1974 work would also pre-date a spat of campus novels that seem to periodically calibrate his archive to contemporary political issues, including *Japanese By Spring* (1993), and *Conjugating Hindi* (2018).[329]

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[327] Ishmael Reed, *JUICE!: A Novel*, (Funks Grove: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011), 17.

[328] Aaron Freisch. *Detroit Pistons*. (Mankato, MN: Creative Education, 2012).

[329] For more on campus novels and Ishmael Reed, see Crystal S. Anderson, "Racial Discourse and Black-Japanese Dynamics in Ishmael Reed's 'Japanese by Spring,'" *MELUS* 29, no. 3/4 (2004), esp. 379-81.

So what does this have to do with Rasheed Wallace? The basketball player models the challenges (or, perhaps as I show, the ease) of reading Reed's syncretism in his later works. Because Reed began writing texts that more explicitly carried diegetic space in the contemporary moments of their publications from the Eighties, his description began to necessitate that readers be inured to the swift stream of media and information across many mediums. If someone is not one of the 21.84 million viewers who at least tuned in to the final game of the 2004 NBA Finals (a clear exaggeration of the average number of viewers who might have encountered Rasheed Wallace's tattoos) then they are left with an empty citation to be read past. To contextualize the reference becomes a unique form of work.

In Reed's work, the labor of reading his citations has been complicated due to his manifesto. Joseph Weixlmann has suggested that "Reed's literary canon is permeated by his unique blend of the verbal and visual, prosaic and poetic, old and new, fictive and factual, serious and satiric, African and American, traditional and popular."[330] In so doing, Weixlmann considers Reed as a "deconstructionist" of the novel, in that he deconstructs what a novel might conventionally be (especially the Victorian tropes that line histories of realist representation) and reassembles it as a veritable container for various forms of culture. Citing a Northouse interview from 1978, Weixlmann highlights how Reed himself said, "I think the linear novel is finished . . . As a matter of fact, I don't think we're going to call [books that are normally referred to as novels] 'novels' anymore—that is a name that is imposed on us . . . I would call mine a 'work."[331] After this rich elucidation on the novel form, Weixlmann proceeds to connect Reed's multimedial ambitions *with* the novel as one connected to hoodoo. As he notes, "Like hoodoo, with its ability to absorb traditions drawn from worldwide religious practice, 'the novel,' in Reed's view, must not be tied to externally-imposed criteria . . . the novel, as the term itself suggests, must ever remain new. Techniques associated with the print media are valid, but so are those borrowed from oral cultures, the electronic media, or anywhere else."[332] Here, we see the restlessness with technological anachronism and the compulsion to hew Reed's novelistic approaches to his Neo-HooDoo faith that courses through his career implied authorship. Reed actually opens an entirely new vocabulary that is vital to understanding how to read *anything—work*. For as much labor as it is to read one of Reed's texts—to understand what Rasheed Wallace's minor interest in Egyptology might be—there must be a reciprocal labor for Reed to spin a (excuse the pun) web of citations. Put another way, a reconstruction of Reed's referent involves deviating from the work itself to apprehend where Reed's antecedent cultural work begins.

Arguing that Roland Barthes' sense of *The Preparation of the Novel* renders a positive positioning of the literary Work, Elaine Freedgood acknowledges that "there is labor represented in the novel; there is the research of the novelist; there is the work that characters do; there is the work represented in the documentation the novel provides, the buildings, infrastructure, trade, travel war, colonization: all represent the social relations of a kind of production the novel represents, helps create, and teaches us about in ways we have largely ignored."[333] And indeed, this reaches back to Iser's sense of the implied reader—the person who, in reading, trudges toward the esthetic pole to seize the literary work from her original disposition. While this labor—Iser terms it "convergence"—is difficult to locate, he unwittingly points to what it is in the 21st century, which is something that "must always remain virtual, as it is not identified either with the reality of the text or

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[330] Joe Weixlmann, "African American Deconstruction of the Novel in the Work of Ishmael Reed and Clarence Major," *MELUS* 17 (April 17, 1991), 58.

[331] Weixlmann, "African American Deconstruction," 58.

[332] Weixlmann, 60.

[333] Elaine Freedgood, and Cannon Schmitt, "Denotatively, Technically, Literally," *Representations* 125, no. 1 (2014), 8.

with the individual disposition of the reader."[334] Beyond this, Iser describes the implied reader as one who "incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process. It refers to the active nature of this process—which will vary historically from one age to another—and not to a typology of possible reader."[335] The implied reader must engage texts through an active reading process—in other words, the implied reader is a reader who works. While there may well be a determinate meaning in authorial intention, the labor of distilling arcane references demands that a reader either draw inferences from the Career Author—*oh, just another humdrum Neo-HooDoo gesture*—or activate the process of verifying this prestructure. This interaction with the text is *work*. Iser goes on to describe in great detail how authors and readers mutually create the work artistically and esthetically:

> …the literary work has two poles, which we might call the artistic and the esthetic: the artistic refers to the text created by the author, and the esthetic to the realization accomplished by the reader. From this polarity it follows that the literary work cannot be completely identical with the text, or with the realization of the text, but in fact must lie halfway between the two. The work is more than the text, for the text only takes on life when it is realized, and furthermore the realization is by no means independent of the individual disposition of the reader—though this in turn is acted upon by the different patterns of the text. The convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence, and this convergence can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with the reality of the text or with the individual disposition of the reader.[336]

For Iser's implied reader, the work is the actual result of the novel reader's laboring over a text. The reader's "individual disposition" plays a clear stake in how this labor converts the act of reading a text to understanding a work, for the reader must seize the presupposition and convert it to comprehension, and the better positioned the disposition, the more efficient the conversion. All told, this laboring is precisely how it sounds: a *form of work*. This is not merely to play with verbal nouns, but to highlight an antinomy in how literary theorists and authors have creased a verb—work—that carries shared responsibility from two entirely different actors and forms of labor in the making of meaning. Within his belief in the "active nature of this process [actualizing meaning]" is inevitably going to "vary historically from one age to the other," and Freedgood realizes that the implied reader has as much labor as ever. This blending of terms—virtual, convergence, research, and documentation—sets the terms of Reed's implied reader. The person who lacks the ideal disposition to understand Rasheed Wallace's investment in Egyptology is to position themselves better through an environment more virtual than Iser could have anticipated—a media convergence zone in New Media theorist Henry Jenkins's sense, where "the proliferation of channels and the portability of new computing and telecommunications technologies" create "a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process" that allows "a kind of kludge – a jerry-rigged relationship between different media technologies" from film to television to popular music and periodicals.[337] This convergence zone is broadly facilitated by the Internet: the implicit locale of research and documentation for Iser's convergence between the author's artistic work and the reader's esthetic work.

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[334] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader; Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 275.
[335] Iser, *Implied Reader*, xii.
[336] Iser, *Implied Reader*, 275.
[337] Henry Jenkins. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 17.

So what is the answer? *Is* Rasheed Wallace a minor Egyptologist? The answer is best apprehended for the esthetic reader through a Google search. The first item to offer insight is from the decidedly *suspicious and illegitimate looking* https://bodyartguru.com/rasheed-wallace-tattoos. Past its on-the-nose URL is an ad-littered user interface bespeaking spyware and Internet viruses, but there past the gratuitous advertisements is an image and an explanation: "Rasheed has a tattoo inspired by ancient Egypt. He has got an elaborate tattoo on his upper right arm depicting an ancient Egyptian royal family. Wallace's right arm is adorned with an homage to the Egyptian Gods Akhenaten, Nefertiti and their children below rays of the Sun. This body ink is quite meaningful to Rasheed." There are no sources for the caption. But there is one image that portrays a screen capture of what is presumably Rasheed Wallace's arm adorned with the family of Egyptian lore, precisely as the bodyartguru.com author describes.

What hath this search wrought? It brings with it clarity, but not functionality. The minor nature of Wallace's Egyptology is that he got a tattoo—there must be some meaning to Wallace, but now the paraphrase of the anonymous Internet author is to be trusted. Is the next step to Google the search string "Rasheed Wallace AND "meaningful" and "Egypt"? The results lead back to the same site. However, an excision of the qualifying adjective "meaningful" leads to the context: a 2009 forum post from the site http://www.insidehoops.com/forum/showthread.php?t=124246.

User stuckey.and1 opens a thread titled "Rasheed Wallace and Egyptian Mysteries." They ask:

> "Why does Sheed have a tattoo of Pharoah Ahkenaten and Nefertiti on his arm? For those who don't know, Ahkenaten was the first guy to bring in monotheism, the worship of one god, in the form of the sun god, aka Aten [. . .] interestingly a sponsor of the pistons is the Rahmani eye institute. it uses the egyptian Eye of Ra symbol. is there some egyptian religion going on here? or is it coincidence? i know jay z for instance grew up in a nuwapian community where he learned about the old religions. do you know of any other "stars" who have an egypt thing going? what does it mean to you?"

After a series of responses, user loot offers the solution to it all:

> about the tat:
> http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/sport...ory?id=1992812
> http://ballhype.com/story/video_rash..._s_new_tattoo/
> http://www.mtv.com/photos/mtv-news-social-history-of-the-tattoo/1483012/156729/photo.jhtml
> he probably just saw a nice egyptian family

Two of the three links are dead, but fortunately the one leading to ESPN.com works—an article from February 16, 2005:

> A Portland, Ore., man who put a tattoo on the right arm of Pistons forward Rasheed Wallace is suing to stop Wallace from displaying the work in ads for Nike basketball shoes.
>
> Matthew Reed from TigerLilly Tattoo and DesignWorks claims he owns the copyright for the design of the tattoo. Reed's lawsuit wants the Nike ad featuring Wallace and the tattoo off the air and the Internet, as well as damages.
>
> According to the suit filed last week in U.S. District Court, Wallace, who was then playing for the Portland Trail Blazers, approached Reed in 1998, saying he wanted an Egyptian-themed family design with a king and queen and three children and a stylized sun in the background.

> Reed researched the idea and came up with a design. Reed said the $450 charge was a small amount, but he expected to benefit from the exposure.
>
> But Reed claims he became aware last year of a Nike ad that centers on the tattoo and its creation. He claims the ad violates the copyright he holds to "the Egyptian Family Pencil Drawing."
>
> A representative for Wieden+Kennedy, which made the ad and is named in the suit, declined comment to The Oregonian of Portland. Representatives for Nike and Wallace did not return phone messages seeking comment.[338]

Here is confirmation—undoubtedly, Rasheed Wallace bears a tattoo of some kind of meaning given that he bore this vision. There is no proof that he is as an "Egyptologist," but such overstatement is a signature component of Reed's deployment of African American Vernacular English's verbal games (in this case, exaggeration).

At this point, my belaboring of the tattoo deviates far from the novel's first page and has brought us askance from the plot itself (of which we know little, yet!) And this proves one of my chief points about reading late-career Reed. Given Reed's blend of fact and fiction over his oeuvre, readers must make quick decisions to engage in his plots.[339] There is a suspension of disbelief as parody distorts popular opinion, and the accrual of motifs eventually lends an almost counterfactual realism to his works. Beginning his novel with minutiae from the NBA is a striking maneuver that might formerly have been called Postmodern—it melds a rather complex temporal metaphor with the quotidian act of watching basketball ("by June 2007, I'd be sounding like Shaquille O'Neal of 2004, because up to that year I was like Rasheed Wallace.") However, the formal quality of *JUICE!* that elicits a particular mode of mediated reading comes in its use of dates. The dates place pressure not just on verity, but on comprehension altogether—it is not enough to merely know of Shaquille O'Neal as an historical figure (remember from the contrast from the original sentence? "I'd be sounding like Shaquille O'Neal of 2004, because up to that year, I was like Rasheed Wallace. A team player. A minor Egyptologist. A man who drew technical fouls (called "Rodmans," after Dennis Rodman)". A reader must necessarily understand a particular facet of the 365 days in 2004. This alone is discomfiting—how can Rasheed Wallace figure as a contrapuntal figure to Shaquille O'Neal? The temporal expectations on the implied reader are daunting: when in 2004 is the narrator locating O'Neal? Why is Rasheed Wallace (and by extension, Dennis Rodman) able to be captured in stereotype or infamy? This opens a different terrain—but in narrative recursion. Confounded, we could have read on, and we would find in the next sentence the answer to Shaquille O'Neal:

> How did the *Times* put it after the Los Angeles Lakers were blown away in 2004 by those ragged upstarts, these Motown Hood Rats: "Teamwork Thumps Star Power." Not always. I found that out the hard way, backing loser after loser all for the sake of the time. The brother. The Fellas. But now I'm like Shaquille O'Neal. He said after the fifth game Lakers, "It's going to be a funny summer. Everyone's going to take care of their own business and everyone is going to do what's best for them.[340]

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[338] Associated Press, "Artist Sues Wallace over Use of Tattoo," ESPN, 2005. https://www.espn.com/espn/sportsbusiness/news/story?id=1992812.

[339] Ishmael Reed is read alongside a cohort of other authors who consciously aestheticize fact and fiction without clear demarcations—particularly Maxine Hong Kingston. See Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, "Ethnicity and Ethnography: The Artist's Fiction as Cultural Artifact in the Works of Maxine Hong Kingston," *CEA Critic* 58, no. 1 (1995), 17-24.

[340] Reed, *JUICE!*, 17.

Wallace's time is over and O'Neal's contextualized. [341] This is the fascinating intersection of research and the Internet. Reputation and cultural memory in the Internet era allow figures and histories to live beyond the death implied by "live" television. The live-ness is never reanimated, but the essence of the trace caught in The Web can be replicated. In the case of the novel, though, this replication invites (perhaps even incites) a compulsive clickability. Summary motivates the hypotext (the Egyptology had to have come from *somewhere*) and disrupts the plot, causing a redoubling of description in characters.

The key to of this all is Reed himself. On the one hand, Ishmael Reed the author would have had to have seen or noticed Rasheed Wallace's tattoo on television, or in person in some sort of encounter. These are finite opportunities, in many ways—especially in relation to the Shaquille O'Neal in 2004 reference—this is not a synecdochal Superman lionized historically, but a specific instance of this figure. This understanding demands a "liveness."[342] Of course, Shaquille O'Neal did a live interview at one point—Rasheed Wallace played in the playoff broadcast live in those two weeks. There were these for Reed's recognition, and then there was the *remediation*—the repetition of media in other media coined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. The contours of television screen are mimicked in the video display of the YouTube browser that recasts footage of Rasheed Wallace or Shaquille O'Neal. Still, though, if it is the case that Reed dubbed Wallace an "Egyptologist" based on the ESPN.com article, that *itself* is ephemeral, immediately swallowed by the flow of new articles in a given day. Thus, we can see that Reed, no matter his originary encounter with Rasheed Wallace's tattoo, *lived* through an encounter with Wallace *or* the moment of media that Wallace's tattoo passed through. There is a "liveness" to media—the moment of relevance and pertinence, broadcast and dissemination—but once it is gone, potentially-but-not certainly recessed into the archive of a computer's memory, Reed serves as a type of Griot. A digital Griot.

Speaking of death—I will end this introduction considering the biology of "live" television. If a component of television is aired live—made relevant, pertinent, broadcasted, disseminated— when is its death? The replay keeps it animated, and the richer moments of media become (say, on YouTube) a type of cryogenesis. But when the archive is inaccessible and the links are broken, the content must be dead. For all that is not found—what we might consider the center of the hole in our embedded systems "partial" bibliography—the novel's narrator (and, by extension, the author) plays a distinctive role. That of the Digital Griot. In the rapid decay of mass media from the eyes, ears, and Google search, Reed the Digital Griot helps transcend the physical boundaries of *media's* life and death, as narrowly defined in the Web—through the novel.

The role of digression through description bears a distinctive extratextual navigability as Postmodern aesthetic entreat on the historical novel that Lukács admired in Walter Scott. In Scott's characters, Lukács lauded "psychology and destiny" that "always represent social trends and

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[341] I will leave it to the textual scholars to determine which *Times* is Blessings' referent. A direct quotation search of the "funny summer" passage yields two different results, depending on if one includes the period after "them." Searching *with* a period brings the *New York Times* transcription, whereas the *Los Angeles Times*'s transcription of the interview accounts for O'Neal pausing at a comma before admitting, "and I don't know what that entails." The consequentiality of such deviations are beyond the scope of my argument, but worth considering.

[342] As Philip Auslander has noted, the idea of "live" experience is not actually an ontological given, but rather a "historically variable effect of mediatization." Further, he notes that early conceptions of liveness involved a clear "co-presence" of performer and audience, which has definitionally deviated with the notion of live *broadcasts*. As I use liveness here, I refer to the witnessing of a broadcast before it is subsumed by an archive. The cultural knowledge that is developed in the moment (or even televisual replay) helps to constitute a common ethos of experience, not merely of participation, but also of usable information for discursive and aesthetic reworking. Philip Auslander, "Digital Liveness: A Historico-Philosophical Perspective," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 34, no. 3 (2012), 3-11.

historical forces," eluding the pure garb of historical thematics. However, Reed's Postmodern play with history leans into the political paradigm of modernity, which sublimates geopolitics and power to "images and influence" and "sloganeering."[343] While this particular description of a minor historical figure certainly does not attest to the historical forces of reification Lukács saw the novel's realism confronting, it does represent the role of narrative description against a mediated world of experience through different "image space classes." These are not the conflation of subject and object of Marxist reification, but rather a conflation of relation between object and source. Aharon Kellerman deftly points to technology philosopher David Weinberger's relation between cyberspace and screen space. Weinberger says that "Space isn't a mere metaphor. The rhetoric and semantics of the Web are those of space. More importantly, our *experience* of the Web is fundamentally spatial."[344] Kellerman theorizes on a progressive circle of space—first of virtual space, which features paintings, films, photographs (in this case, Rasheed Wallace's tattoo).[345] Then, the transmission of the image comes to the image space class of cyberspace (television in this case), which is then transmogrified to the screenshot we recovered from the Internet itself as a visual, digital communications space. The narrowest class then become the "Internet screen-space" of the literal computer or smartphone. The collapse of the image via layers of virtuality into rote textuality through Bear's description amplifies the tension of media's visual space and signification in the novel.

Partial Bibliography and Neophenomenological Reading

We have just answered a question importantly posed by Beth McCoy in her masterful account of citationality in Reed: "Paratext, Citation, and Academic Desire." She believes that *Mumbo Jumbo* "seduces many readers to act upon two impulses that they would, perhaps, prefer to disavow. One is a profound trust in citationally buttressed knowledge claims. The other is a profound mistrust of black knowledge claims, even—and perhaps especially—when those claims are augmented by paratextual trappings like citation." McCoy makes a strong case that *Mumbo Jumbo* intentionally models citations like academic footnotes to provide "a paratextual trail of knowledge, research, data, and hypotheses informing an encapsulated matter" that "authorize and respond to methodological imperatives."[346] The reason, in McCoy's eyes, is to make readers "view the paratext conceptually as what it has always been in a 'Protestant country ignorant even of Western mysteries': a site of divination through which meaning, power, and subjecthood are accorded" (McCoy 607). Her use of paratext refines the slightly less precise characterization of past scholars like Henry Louis Gates, who focuses on Reed's use of "intertext," "intratext," "subtext," and "undigested texts."[347] McCoy links these assertions to *Mumbo Jumbo's* physical print, which is unlike the "novel's received visual form, recognizable still to many eyes—even in these days called Postmodern—as page after page of relatively unbroken, gray typographical space." Rather, "six pages of relatively unbroken type may be punctuated suddenly by a graph ("U.S. Bombing Tonnage in Three War"), a party invitation, an "S.R." (situation report) that appears in a manual typewriter's print, or the filled empty circle dyad of a Haitian *vé vé*, the symbol of the loa (or spirit) being invoked."[348] The novel, then, looks like "A

[343] Peter Van Ham, "The Rise of the Brand State: The Postmodern Politics of Image and Reputation," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 5 (2001), 2-6.

[344] David Weinberger, *Small Pieces Loosely Joined (A Unified Theory of the Web)*, (Cambridge, MA: Perseus (2002), 35.

[345] Sharon Kellerman, "Image Spaces and the Geography of Internet Screen-space," *GeoJournal* 81, no. 4 (2016), 515.

[346] Beth McCoy, "Paratext, Citation, and Academic Desire in Ishmael Reed's 'Mumbo Jumbo,'" *Contemporary Literature* 46, no. 4 (2005), 609.

[347] Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 258

[348] McCoy, "Paratext, Citation," 613.

contemporary manifestation of a Ramist 'textbook.'[349] So McCoy, too, adds to the chorus of critics who read *Mumbo Jumbo* as a textbook. In fact, among those critics, she may well be the thickest, reediest voice in the ensemble. And indeed, at the end of *Mumbo Jumbo*, Reed offers a "Partial Bibliography" of 104 texts—all books—including novels by Katherine Dunham, Giulia Veronesi's 1968 study *Style and Design, 1909-25* the U.S. Department of Agriculture's *The Classification of Cotton* of 1956, Mark Sullivan's synoptic-yet-contemporaneous 1935 study *Our Times: The United States, 1900-1925*. The bibliography's own titling advertises its vacancies—what makes the bibliography incomplete, and is it always-already incomplete? In 1972, drawing on contemporary guides to style and a decades-old analysis of the Roaring Twenties makes strong authoritative sense—it is an academic, almost New Historical (excuse the reference, but Reed believes in anachronisms) gesture of interpretive authority. But even when met with interpretive authority is suggested, McCoy's *students* find a limit to the bibliography's efficacy:

> Indeed, driven by both the novel's nonlinear density and their own skepticism about the claims that Reed appears to be making about history, culture, and "race," my students have sought habitually to manage *Mumbo Jumbo*'s difficulty by conducting their own research [. . .] Apparently, the reading of *Mumbo Jumbo*—a text now over thirty years old—forces such issues to the forefront in a way that, for instance, the Internet and its dizzying array of authoritative claims do not; it is thus worth contemplating why Internet-savvy students frequently see cyberspace as seamless but struggle to trust *Mumbo Jumbo*. So great, apparently, has been the skepticism circulating around *Mumbo Jumbo*'s claims that seldom, if ever, have my students compiled those glosses using any of the works that Reed lists in his own footnotes and bibliography. And when things that Reed asserts have turned out to be "correct," the readerly reaction has been true surprise. [. . .] it is thus worth contemplating why Internet-savvy students frequently see cyberspace as seamless but struggle to trust *Mumbo Jumbo*.[350]

McCoy's meditation on paratextuality and her anecdote of readerly (mis)trust open the terms of my investment in late career Reed. It is absolutely the case that Reed's archive of texts in *Mumbo Jumbo* are constellated and jigsawed into a tapestry of a wide band of history with referents large, small, and missing. McCoy's students (it is worth noting her article was published in 2005) were part of a different type of Internet, with a toddler-aged Wikipedia (four years) and one year into what we now understand as the "Web 2.0" era—a more community-based Internet that featured, according to Wikipedia, "websites that emphasize user-generated content, ease of use, participatory culture, and interoperability (i.e., compatible with other products, systems, and devices) for end users." This historical shift is important, and even more important is the distinction that *Reed himself did not have the Internet when writing Mumbo Jumbo.* When I discuss Reed's cartoons I will discuss his metafictional inclusion in *JUICE!*, but in true Reedian style, I want to include something the author himself said to me as we sat in his computer room the first time I went to his house. I asked him about his thoughts on the Internet for his creativity. He furrowed his brow and rhetorically said, "The Internet? Hm. I became a monster after the Internet."[351]

As you, dear reader, may see—Reed's citationality has interrupted my account of the novel's plot. And this itself embodies the nature of reading *JUICE!* Remember, Rasheed Wallace and the ensuing explanations were part of the narrator describing himself. This is what makes the narrative challenging—nearly every character is described metaphorically or synecdochally through a specific

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[349] McCoy, 613.
[350] McCoy, "Paratext, Citation," 617.
[351] Ishmael Reed in conversation with the author, May 1, 2019.

media event. Personhood is synecdochic, as parts represent the whole and metaphors (whole films!) conjure personalities and affects. There is an enormous level of interpretation involved here that divests people of the real. It is a mediated distortion—precisely what a cartoonist would do. This was our Rasheed Wallace moment—Blessings was simply introducing his own feeling-state through a metaphor, which digressed for over a paragraph into context rather than content. When we divagated toward the "lowness" of the reference, away from rote bookishness and into the mining of a basketball forum, we participated in a type of suspicion and curiosity superseding narrative authority just as McCoy's students did.

This Internet-motivated extratextual reading may be motivated by what Rita Felski calls "neophenomenological reading," in which "[c]ritic and work are thus bound together in an alliance of mutual mistrust via-à-vis congealed forms of language and thought. Suspicion sustains and reproduces itself in a reflexive distrust of common knowledge and an emphasis on the chasm that separates scholarly and lay interpretation."[352] This is a type of reading that "springs from a desire to build better bridges between theory and common sense, between academic criticism and ordinary reading, by delving into the mysteries of our many-sided attachments to texts. Such an approach pivots on our first-person implication and involvement in what we read, calling on us to clarify how and why particular texts matter to us."[353] Felski's characterization of reading literature today rhymes with the very literature being produced today. Nicolas Dames has labeled the "Theory Novel" and Mitchum Huehls calls the "Post-Theory Theory Novel"—these referential texts continue to proliferate, explicitly calling to attention post-structuralist philosophers in best-selling books (here, we can extend to Ben Lerner, Tom McCarthy, Lorrie More, Jeffrey Eugenides, and Jennifer Egan).[354] Teju Cole also fits in this coterie, as we might recall how Julius experiences life and consistently applies the ideas and lenses of Benjamin on history to reflect on his interactions. This is the side of the bridge on which "theory resides." In *JUICE!*, we simply see the neophenomenological bridge more from the "common sense" side.

So when a novel is about a media event and the history is contained on sites, it moves beyond a textbook function.[355] Once the history is contained to a media event, a textbook cannot be sufficient because it necessarily refuses the primary source due to its print nature. I do not see *JUICE!* as a textbook, but more as a commonplace book. A subjective compendium of rhetorical function—of an identity that has captured and *experienced* media and cared to write it down. But the *function* of the narrator is still a novelist, who stitches it into a novel insofar as it bears a plot. But within that plot there are clear remnants and shifts in voice and register, highlighting the performer of lived memory, the researching Wikipedian, and (fitting since the novel begins in Hawaii) the surfer of both channels and the Web. Since we now have a taste of the plot's beginning, we might as well pull a summary through to its end.

JUICE!'s Plot

From the foreword through section four, the novel tracks the aforementioned Bear, a carotonist who came to prominence in the Sixties drawing *Attitude the Badger*, his "old alter ego" that featured critiques of the LAPD and militant thoughts on civil rights—his political satire was once

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[352] Rita Felski, "After Suspicion." *Profession*, 2009, 28-35.

[353] Felski, "Suspicion," 31.

[354] Mitchum Huehls, "The Post-Theory Theory Novel." Contemporary Literature 56, no. 2 (2015), 280-310.

[355] Ishmael Reed has been explicitly connected with mobilizing amplified stereotypes precisely to distort media portrayals to confounding (thus nullifying) proportions. See Nicholas Donofrio, "Multiculturalism, Inc.: Regulating and Deregulating the Culture Industries with Ishmael Reed," *American Literary History* 29, no. 1 (2017), 100–128.

"considered rowdy by some" and situated a comfortable life for his family.[356] Bear's employer, "alternative television" station KCAK (hint: say it out loud and pronounce *CA* like a letter) is "undergoing downsizing, and being threatened by right-wing congressmen" and must move from "progressive" to commercial (45).[357] Unusually, *Attitude the Badger* is itself a quasi-commercial, aired on an "alternative television" network KCAK rather than distributed in a conventional print format. Bear is disturbed by how his "formerly government supported [and] viewer-sponsored" station is now made to appeal to "progressives who practiced their diction by listening to BBC broadcasts […] Alumni of Woodstock, who lectured the younger generation about their morals. I guess you'd call them neo-liberals. Coffeehouse liberals who would later elect Bush by voting for Nader" and, as 1994 progresses, a seemingly more insidious brand of viewer in "high-school teachers, dot-commers, and MBAs."[358]

Once the Simpson case breaks into public purview, KCAK finds the event it needs to reanimate its programming. But even before capitalizing on the trial, the station's leadership makes bureaucratic moves that seem to cater to their target neoliberal audience; owner Jonathan Kraal works to manage the optics of his organization by employing marginal figures who maintain conservative postures: he hires a queer station manager, Sebastian Lord, whose introduction is met by the sweeping protests of "gay demonstraters" upset because "they regarded [Lord] as a gay turncoat, a right-wing lap-dog, and one who benefited form the Stonewall revolt, yet was critical of militant gays."[359] Likewise, Kraal appoints a figurehead "black president," Renaldo Louis, understanding that "he could deflect criticism about the lack of diversity in his operation if he put a black man at the top, even though he had no power. Renaldo. He was a man who kept his thoughts to himself."[360] Kraal also ousts many of the station's older figures while suspiciously retaining the services of Bear. However, he asks the cartoonist to spin off Attitude the Badger into Koots Badger, "a harmless crank, paranoid, out of touch and still under the impression that Badgers were being pursued by hunters," in exchange for an increase in salary, a downtown studio, and a four-bedroom condo for his family.[361] Soon after extending this offer, KCAK attempts to join the lot of other media outlets drawing ratings from the trial, and Bear is asked to render cartoons slanted against O.J.'s innocence. However, Bear, in his private and cyber- life, adamantly supports Simpson, fixated on the evidence and mishandling of the trial with his online group of black, aging artist friends called

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[356] Reed, *JUICE!*. 41, 43.

[357] The pun on "KKK" highlights Reed's unease with the virtue signaling that was fomenting during the Culture Wars, which were peaking at the moment of the Simpson trial; in Reed's purview, California could well represent the precise kind of neoliberal bubble through which the marginalized subjects he believes undermine the distinctive plight of black men, especially, continued to endure in society and culture. His collection of essays *Airing Dirty Laundry* has been characterized as Reed's effort to point out how "Feminists, National Public Radio, think-tankers, television commentators and producers, and editors and columnists of certain magazines and newspapers seem to have the most dirty laundry, particularly as the dirtiness relates to the image of black males." See Ishmael Reed, *Airing Dirty Laundry*, (Boston: Addison-Wesley, 1993), 106.

[358] Reed, *JUICE!*, 45; it is worth noting that "dot-commers" as a social label was slightly ahead of its own coinage in the novel—this chapter is labeled as occurring in "New York, March, 1994" while the official boom has been marked as beginning in 1995 (45). Bear's unflattering take on high school teachers and MBAs is likely more targeted toward a subset of people who were positioned as beneficiaries of the financialization boom of the late Seventies and Eighties— early retirees who become benevolent teachers and Wall Street pups seeking formal training to become full-fledged sharks.

[359] Reed, *JUICE!*, 48.

[360] Reed, *JUICE!*, 47.

[361] The implication here is that Bear's ideology focusing on the endemic social pathologies that afflict black men's social mobility makes him a "Koot"—a type of insanity that is borne out in his singular fixation on the ways O.J. Simpson was, in his eyes, unfairly treated for all to see. This is heightened by the subsequent alienation he faces for expressing his opinion.

The Rhinosphere. Erstwhile, he manages type two diabetes that only seems to become more acute as he stress eats while consuming more of the trial (more O.J.). This request renders the chief tension of the novel—what does it mean for Bear to sell out? The other characters in the novel become synecdochal mouthpieces against which Bear argues: while aware and trepidatious of his station's optics-oriented maneuvers, the cartonist faces pressure at home to sell out and support his family by his arts lawyer wife Esther (whom he notes is Jewish but looks Cuban) and his college-aged, bisexual daughter, Hibiscus.

At work, Bear faces the ire of Princessa Bimbette, a feminist talkshow host with a rapidly expanding audience. KCAK begins to laud a Haitian Graffiti artist named Crazy Goat, whom Bear (as a competitive artist and seasoned cultural critic) describes as "one of these artists who were pouring into New York from the Caribbean hoping to become the next big primitive to be adopted."[362]

These are important details of characterization, for beyond the novel's simple plot, the bulk of the chapters are focused solely on Bear's debates with the many non-black male characters that together represent a "multiculturalism" that he considers a rose by any other name—a commercialized conception of self-interest that shirks the complexity of cultural and social marginzalization in America. And so, in the first two of the novel's four parts, Bear drives the plot with two cartoons. To appease Kraal, Bear draws *JUICE!,* a cartoon that most of his viewers and Sebastian Lord interpret as "O.J. sodomizing this female figure. That's supposed to symbolize America."[363] This illustration also serves as the cover of the novel. Bear argues that "O.J. is not sodomizing the figure, but calling a play. I wanted to show how this O.J. case has energized America. That's why I called it 'JUICE'" (55). Derisive of Lord's interpretation, Bear snaps that Lord knows "nothing about football," although later during lunch, Bear is met with a strong contradiction from Ben, KCAK's sportscaster, who notes that "O.J. was never a quarterback. He was a running back. Gained 11,236 yards. He was seventeenth in rankings among all-time rushers. You may know a few things about basketball but you don't know a damned thing about football."[364] But in the most precise enunciation of his own identity, Bear retorts that this is precisely "what cartooning is all about. I have to blow up a situation in order for the viewer to detect irony" (81). Ultimately, though, Bear is suspended and spends many chapters meditating on the trial, until he learns that he has been awarded a $250,000 first prize from the International Society of Cartoonists for a cartoon his wife found and submitted in his name while cleaning out his wastepaper basket— "O.J.'s face pasted to a horse's behind" (249).

After Bear accepting the award and delivering a rousing speech, O.J. Simpson is acquitted and a decade passes in Part 3's strikingly short eleven pages, composed of one chapter titled "Years 2008 – 2010." KCAK's on-air talent capitalizes on the fanbases grown from the trial, and the station itself descends into a type of tabloid reality network, headlined by *Nigguz News* that positions Jagid and Jagin, two black rappers employed by KCAK to run street documentaries that expose erroneous

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[362] The pastiche here embodies the antithesis of the spirit Reed originally draws in his poem "Time and the Eagle," where he sees the artist as a potential prophet drawing on Haitian powers of distinction. The commoditization of non-Western culture draws his ire in this passage. For background on Reed's vision of the artist as soothsayer see Shamoon Zamir, "The Artist as Prophet, Priest and Gunslinger: Ishmael Reed's Cowboy in the Boat of Ra," *Callaloo* 17, no. 4 (1994), 1205-235.

[363] Reed, *JUICE!,* 47.

[364] Reed, 80; this moment softens Reed's traditional prioritization of black, heterosexual male hegemony. For more on Reed's history of a "masculine unconscious" see Andrew Strombeck, "The Conspiracy of Masculinity in Ishmael Reed," *African American Review* 40, no. 2 (2006), 299-311.

"truths" about black life.[365] One episode "argues that rape is exclusively a black male problem It's a canard" (166). Finally, part 4, which takes place in 2009, situates an entirely different plot arc. Bear's Rhinosphere friends progressively "sell out"—his filmmaker companion Rabbit accepts a commission to create an anti-O.J. documentary, his academic friend Snakes accepts an appointment as president of a college and tenders a letter of resignation from the online chat, and Bear himself remains pacified, making rural paintings of Southwest landscapes. But when Simpson is arrested once more in Vegas in 2009, Bear is invited to Jonathan Kraal's catered viewing party to celebrate Simpson's jail sentence. Acquiescing, Bear encounters his old colleagues and a spat of other "right wing media types" At the party, the waiters wear masks resembling O.J. Simpson in an act of carnivale. However, in the middle of the event, the waiters pull guns and hold the media personnel hostage—the ringleader reveals himself to be Renaldo Louis, the former Black President who feels implicated by his guilt in selling out for the station. Bear is let free for maintaining his stance, and he follows the rest of the three day police standoff both on television and online.[366]

The hostages are eventually freed, and after this, Bear calms down, moving with Hibiscus to Arizona and painting apolitical landscapes of the desert when he falls into what seems to be a fever-dream in which a dancing monkey stalks him, eventually leading him to the office of his own creation—Attitude the Badger, who reveals that his wife is facilitating the sale of Crazy Goat's six million dollar art piece, *Uncle Ben's Dutch Ears.* Rushing to the release party, Bear smashes the piece over Crazy Goat's head, and the photograph is captured by his frustrated wife, whose picture is purchased by a collector of conceptual art for six million dollars. This plotline is reconciled when Crazy Goat and Young Brothers of *Nigguz News* find funding to animate "Koots Badger" to illustrate a postrace America, and Crazy Goat drops the charges against Bear. As he relaxes with his wife, Hibiscus return to their home and they are greeted by visitors: the dancing monkey and Attitude the badger.

The plot carries heavyhanded and multivalent themes in its critique of Nineties media and the Culture Wars: what are the ethics of being a cultural spokesperson? Is comparing group suffering ever viable? What happens to the aging artist? However, these themes are not nearly as linear as presented above. Interceding every plot point and new character is an extensive dialogue or four-paged digression that draws focus away from the diegetic movement and into Reed's historical sources (or memory). To read *JUICE!* (let alone to describe it) is to wrest the recit from an onslaught of information. The novel's plot is necessarily bound to the narrative of the Simpson trial, since the characters, radio station, and their outcomes must satirize and become analogues to the real.

In one peculiar chapter that focalizes through B.S. Rathwseiler, the seventy-five-year old media magnate meditates on how the rappers and show hosts "Jagid and Jagan saved Kraal's ass. That Nigguz News. CNN, Fox, and MSNBC are really jealous. So as Jagid and Jagan say, they can party hearty."[367] This historical backdrop ultimately creates a novel effect in rendering the fictional characters. In this instance, Jagid and Jagan become hyperbolic figures without any hyperbolic literary language because they are listed alongside networks that produced flesh-and-blood newpersons who benefitied from the trial (think Nancy Grace, who had a prominent show on CNN-owned Headline News MSNBC; Greta Van Susteren, whom Bear reveals in an early

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[365] The broad success of Jagid and Jagin as "viral" sesnsations extends a cybernetic approach to the proliferation of racial discourse (for better or for worse, by the time Reed writes *JUICE!*) that was earlier developed in *Mumbo Jumbo*. See Madeleine Monson-Rosen, "Messenger Bug: Ishmael Reed's Media Virus," *Cultural Critique* 88 (2014), esp. 28-32.

[366] Renaldo's largest demand was that "corporate press be banned from the scene" while he was exchanging messages with the black chief of police. As Bear notes earlier, "since most of the white anchorment were being held back, people were relying upon altenrative media and cyberspace for news" (281).

[367] Reed, *JUICE!*, 284.

digression he belives to be "one of those whose career was made by being connected to the case"; and Geraldo Rivera, who went on to host Geraldo at Large on Fox, (now a CNN legal analyst).[368] While Bear does little in the way of realist description for the other people in his world, he associates them with events and occurences in a form of synecdoche (just as he does for himself with Rasheed Wallace at the very beginning).[369] Perhaps, though, describing characters with distortions and media is precisely how Bear ought to narrate, given that in the midst of an argument with KCAK's manager he "remembered the line in the classic study of cartooning entitled *The Art of Cartooning* by Roy Paul Nelson: 'What sets the cartoon apart from other art forms is exaggeration. A cartoon screams, while an ordinary drawing or painting whispers.'"[370] Regardless, this peculiar format of narration creates an uneven reading experience that invokes even more clicking than the plot lets on. It becomes clearer in looking toward the intertitles.

Intertitles

JUICE!'s plotlines are minor to a narrative that never fully emerges in a linear fashion. The intertitles (Gerard Genette's portmanteau of internal titles) highlight a paratextual issue of intimacy. Genette argues that as far as paratexts go, chapter headings constitute a private existence that is for the readers of the book—unlike the conceivably obscene cover and technicolored back of *JUICE!* the physical book, which puzzles with its contextless symbolism, the intertitles offer interpretive clues to find and track the *recit* among Bear's digressive narration. While *JUICE!* carries the function of the "main classical tradition of numbered divisions" that have characterized novel chapters for so long,[371] its numbered sections themselves occasionally carry *extra* subtitles—dates. Of the 62 chapters, 19 are subtitled with a time unit. The first of these are chapter 3 ("June 1994"), chapter 4 (also "June 1994"), and chapter 5 ("June 17, 1994"). Chapter 13 is titled "April 1995," signifying temporal progression, and chapter 17 and 18 are respectively entitled "May 20, 1995" and "June 12, 1995," continuing the ascendant calendar. However, chapter 19 recedes a few weeks backward to May 24, 1995, and chapter 20 pushes forth to "July 24-28, 1995." After four more undated chapters, chapters 25-27 continue the spring-summer jostling, returning to "May 14, 1995", "June 12-16, 1995," and "June 10, 1995."

This is just in the first section. Some referents are fairly clear—June 12, 1995 is one year from the night of the murders. June 17, 1994 is the day of the famed Bronco chase. But the broader expanses of time have unclear boundaries—July 24-28 1995 sets a finite timescale for its contents but has no component of the novel's plot. Instead, it begins, "July was a good month for the defense" and derides the media's lack of attention to or alleged distortion of key moments in the handling of the case's bloodwork. He reveals that "Agents confess that they are told to lie in favor of the prosecution. Roger Marts is transferred as a result of the scandal and even *Time Magazine* says in its April 28, 1997, issue that suspcions about Martz's performance affects the O.J. case."[372] A curious moment that draws out from the chapter title's four-day frame to be deployed as

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[368] Reed, *JUICE!*, 20.

[369] This parodic deployment of key mainstream figures advances Myungsung Kim's assertion that white culture in a "coded communications network" earlier rehearsed in Reed's conception of Jes Grew. See Myungsung Kim, "The Grapevine Telegraph 'Jes Grew': Sonic Materialism, Afrofuturism and Information Theory in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*," *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 39 (2018), 89–109.

[370] Reed, *JUICE!*, 81.

[371] Gerard Genette says that these standard divisions are "basically thematic inasmuch as they indicate (by way of a numeral) only a relative place and a type of textual section (book, part, chapter, and so forth)" Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 300.

[372] Reed, *JUICE!*, 118.

information from within that week. This becomes significant insofar as the singular insertion of a character to the five-paged report is Bear himself—he recalls "Nothing can remove my joy on this weekend. Not even Melanie Lomax, yet another pro-prosecution commentators, who has made nasty and hostile remarks about the defense and Simpson since the beginning of the trial, but, like other feminists, black and white, who gave O.J., Tyson, and Clarence Thomas a hard time, she swoons over Clinton, even though feminist theory would read his affair with Monica as a case of a powerful man exploiting a woman less powerful than her" (120). However, the dates and references jettison everywhere, as in this example which is part of the 2008 – 2010 Part 3, but spans cultural references far outside of the intertitle's given bounds:

> But what was supposed to be a two-week story, the Brentwood murders, is still being discussed sixteen years later. Henry Lee's famous comment about the trial, "Something Wrong," is as current as it was in 1995. Simpson's alleged wearing of Bruno magli shoes, whose prints were supposed to have been found at the crime scene, was proof, according to the lawyers in the civil case, that Simpson committed the crime, yet in 2008, forensics expert Michael Baden, on his show *Autopsy*, said that most of the shoe prints found at the crime scene were made by the police who believed that wearing booties, the proper procedure, was somehow sissy, which refutes the claim made by FBI agent William Bodziak that there were no other footprints left behind on the night of the murder. (In *Big Daddy*, the 1999 comedy starring Adam Sandler, a character says, "If O.J. can get away with murder, why can't Sonny have his kid?" He's a goofy slacker who gains custody of a five year old.) So Hollywood and television through years of propaganda were able to do what the criminal jury, which studied htre evidence, was incapable of doing. [convicting Simpson][373]

I quote these moments of temporal amalgamation at length not only to show the mediated switchbacks one must traverse to simply follow *JUICE!*'s narrative style, but also to emphasize how inconspicuous the actual plot can and does become. The majority of the chapters, which bear no date at all, completely vary in either advancing the plot or collaging together pieces of the trial and its ephemera. Beyond the segmentational function of the chapters, the four "parts" of the novel bespeak the insignificance of plot, for the bulk of the contiguous fiction and resolution occurs in part four—chapters 55-62, or a span of merely 50 pages. Nearly two-thirds of the story elements appear in part four, calling into question precisely what has been *emplotted* for the first 54 chapters. *JUICE!* challenges Wolf Schmid's argument that "facticity and autonomy of being are lacking in literary happenings, incidentally including those instances where—as in a historical novel—the material of the literary story appears to be made up of historical occurences."[374] The oscillation between digressive historical documentation (collapsed from conventional paratexts into character speech and narratorial summary) and diegetic propulsion creates a novel that necessarily blurs reference levels. This blurring situates the inconsistently titled chapters as extratextual aids—for any "fact" or opinion in a date-bearing chapter, the oblique text a reader can append to a search phrase a date or month. Now the 2008 season of *Autopsy* is fair game to track Bear's source.

Ultimately, the novel's plot describes how Bear and his entire group of wizened and opinionated Rhinosphere African American artists have become a "fading anachronism." "I had tried to play it down the middle. Drawing Koots Badger who didn't represent anybody's race. A creature out of step with his time. A fading anachronism. Someone who doesn't recognize freedom when he sees it. Doesn't realize that the dogs and the hunters have been called off. Thinks that

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[373] Reed, *JUICE!*, 269.
[374] Wolf Schmid, and Alexander Starritt, *Narratology: An Introduction*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 197.

hunting season is all year long, etc."[375] Indeed, the very first words of the foreword secure this phrase as a thematic, as Bear describes how he and the Rhinosphere were being "challenged by a younger generation and their manifestos in which we were dismissed as part of an old school or, as one writer with a penchant for redundancy put it, 'fading anachronisms'" (9). Later, while Esther laments Bear's attack on Crazy Goat, he explains, "Well, somebody had to strike a blow for the return to common sense in the arts. You have these self-reflexive novels where the novelist interjects himself as a character. Novels like those written by that Ishmael Reed. He's probably out in some obscure hole in Califonria right now, thinking of another way by which he can badger himself into his work having been criticized for introducing himself as a character in his novel *Japanese by Spring.* You have art where the artist thinks that his personal items are of interest to the people."[376]

The invocation of media in these moments of metatextuality push against some of the more powerful takes on meta- and para-textuality. As Linda Hutcheon notes in "Postmodern Paratextuality and History," metafictional self-reflexivity through paratextual footnotes (and self-commenting footnotes especially) bear a clear "irony" in that they *seemingly* documen character psychlogy authoritatively way while doing little to explain characters' behavior. She feels similarly about photographs and images in novels. Extending Benjamin's idea that photographic paratextual representations in fiction both "verify and void the past of its historicity," Hutcheon misses an opportunity to account for what other forms of technological implication do to texts and history.

The digital griot—especially one with the political framework of Ishmael Reed—is not trying to merely be a "historiographic metafictionist, grappling with the representation of exactly that kind of past" represented by the photograph, which Barthes calls a "certificate of presence."[377] Rather, Reed shows through his *sparse* paratext that dialogue, commentary, and summary in a digitized world bring new terms for the memory of a media event's remains. Hyperlinks die, web domains go unpaid and content is pulled, or filmed moments are simply never captured to begin with. The Digital Griot's novel shifts from paratext to repository because of the event's necessary erosion to memorabilia. Yes, a somewhat archival impulse is drawn from this: as Hutcheon notes "another function of this kind of paratextual insertion of historical documents into historiographic metafictions is related to the Brechtian alienation effect: like the songs in Brecht's plays, the historical documents dropped into the fictions can have the effect of interrupting any illusion, of making the reader into an aware collaborator, not a passive consumer." The Digital Griot exploits this mode of collaboration by entrusting the almost autotelic response readers have to suspicion.[378]

That the Internet now archives dually lived lives—digital ephemera, their recycling and reculturation (O.J.'s old footage is reanimated a decade later, and his pundits add to commentary across many multimedial forums)—skirts the supposed stability of the paratextual archive for the core of all history. From Rasheed Wallace's tattoo to the description of Bernard Shaw's affect in his

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[375] Reed, *JUICE!*, 56.

[376] Reed, *JUICE!*, 321.

[377] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (1st American ed. New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 1.

[378] Fittingly, Linda Hutcheon's conclusion includes *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Rudy Iwebe's "attempt[], in a very self-reflexive manner, to capture in print and in ficiton a historical character whose essence was his voice. He also had to convey, in written English, the rhetorical and ritualistic power of oral speech. This attempt to present the historical fact of Big Bear's oral presence was furhter complicated by the lack of records (much less recordings) fo the great orator's speeches" (301). The limitations, unfortunately, are that "the novel's textual self-consciousness about this oral/written dichotomy points to the text's ironic realization that Big Bear's dynamic oral presence can only be conveyed to us in static print; the oratorical power that goes beyond words can only be expressed in words; and perhaps the truth of historical fact can only be recounted today in self-consciously novelistic fiction" (311). Linda Hutcheon, "Postmodern Paratextuality and History," *Texte* (1986), 308.

last moments as a CNN anchor, singular moments on a timeline begin to feel less like the wreckage on which of Benjamin's angel of history looks as he is blown back—for 1921 was a less eco-conscious time—and now that mediated "wreckage" feels more like items to be sorted into recyclables, compostables, and rote, immutable wreckage. After Encyclopedism comes the digital: Wikipedism, Postmodernity, meme culture, and millenial "early-onset nostalgia" that is capitalized on by "strategic and effective marketing techniques" in a "Proustian madeleine [taking] an array of forms and flavors" in the order of time—two months, ten years, or six weeks as Stephen King horror films are rebooted, Motoralla creates a bending smartphone to recapture its patented "2004 razr flip phone" feel in 2019, or the FX 2016 remake of an event that feels nostalgic from this chapter's last section: *The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story* starring Cuba Gooding Jr. as O.J. Simpson and John Travolta as Robert Shapiro.[379] I belabor this point to make this conclusion: The Digital Griot is the experienced person online. It may be that terms and trends fade rapidly, and moments become distorted to the point that constituent features of media events recede into memories that cannot be completely expressed in giga- or tera- bytes. The fading anachronism—the career implied author and his memory not only of experience, but of art and its reception—is relegated to the blog. But if we are to take this novel as a materialist solidarity fighting the fade in favor of the attitude, then in its form, in its language, and in its cover (which is uncomfortable to tote about with the compromising depiction of O.J. Simpson and blonde Lady Liberty) the novel's form maintains its own attitude toward political anachronism. And it illustrates at a deeper level the amount of discourse that becomes relegated online and out of print, waiting to collaborate with narrative. In the case of Bear and the Rhinospere, away from their art they could air their experiences both in race and in culture.

> *RABBIT: In John Carpenter's movie Ghosts of Mars, everybody, even Pam Grier, has hots for the blonde. Everybody that is except for Chuck D., who plays the protector and the nurturer of the blonde. In one scene he even offers her Hattie McDaniel type services. Sews up her wound after she has been injured—by the way, Bear, I'm worried about you. You see that picture, A Beautiful Mind? You're going to be like that character. The guy gets an obsession about the Russians planting an A bomb and starts reading things in magazines and newspapers—codes that aren't there.*

> *SNAKES: I saw that movie. They break into the guy's garage and he's got all of these clippings that he has decoded. That's going to be like Bear.*

> *BEAR: You guys may think I'm crazy, but who do you think they're after when they do O. J.? All of us.*

>   (We're telepathic. How did Snakes know that I had that image in mind? One of America as a serial killer obsessed with O. J.?) Richard Wright and his circle entertained French women and tourists with their clever, often put-down banter in

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[379] Millennials are "inundated with information" and "coming of age in an age of economic turmoil — a difficult job market," said Cassandra Mcintosh, senior insights analyst at Exponential. "Therefore, they end up romanticizing simpler times much more – even those times they weren't around for" See https://digiday.com/marketing/early-onset-nostalgia-surge-cola-mad-libs-renaissance/. An interesting notion, given that it was Cicero who said that "Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child." The irony here is that Millennials, living in the impossibly *fast* digital age that repurposes its own anachronisms and calls it innovation, may well be trying to *act* adult when it is unclear what *matters* from before they were born based on all that can be "experienced" online. Is life in that decade more typified by synth-fueled aerobics as a legitimate form of exercise or the mark of financialization in the term "junk bonds?" Both strangely "adult," ideas to understand, yet *how* much requisite history pushes Cicero's adulthood into full form?

the Café Tournon over cognac and cigarettes. The white expatriates gathered at Harry's and Shakespeare & Co. bookstore. We have an Internet chat room. Less expensive. No romantic entanglements. We don't even have to leave the house.)[380]

This tender "telepathy" of camaraderie and intimacy in sharing mutually mediated space models a distinctive affect—Bear's amazement is not that Snakes and Rabbit saw the same film, but that they independently recalled the *same scene* as a collective in order to contextualize concern for Bear. This convergence of media, memory, and Black men free to share the gamut of their thoughts and feelings in a safe space leave Reed as a surprising reivsionist of W.E.B. Du Bois, whose "double-consciousness" was, in many people's eyes, exploited by O.J. Simpson and his team throughout his trial. Reed wryly understands that the Du Boisian second sight that the Simpson trial revealed to America did not properly convey the Souls of Black Folk. To understand blackness after decades of media manipulation, CNN or MSNBC.com are not the proper sites. No, to look up race in America, *JUICE!* shows that one is better suited going to a second site—something like the Rhinosphere, replete with the Souls of Blog Folk.

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[380] Reed, *JUICE!*, 73.

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