Postmodernism and Cold War Military Technology in the Fiction of Don DeLillo and William S. Burroughs

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August 2008

Volume One

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This thesis explores Don DeLillo's and William S. Burroughs' ongoing fictional engagements with the intimacy between Cold War military technology and postmodern networked culture. These novelists respond from seemingly divergent perspectives to the social and historiographical uncertainty generated by networked militarization. For DeLillo, this takes the form of a neo-realist narrative reconsideration of history, designed to emphasise the effects of the Cold War unconscious propagated by the speed and dissemination of cultural data. By fictionalising the breaks and ambiguities in our everyday experience of social reality, DeLillo's novels *White Noise* (1982) and *Underworld* (1998) require that the reader participate in metafictional processes of historical restoration. This thesis suggests that DeLillo's rewrite of history works to expose the military initiatives underpinning cultural life; thereby reinstating the societal 'balance' and equilibrium otherwise lost to networked subjectivity. Burroughs' response takes the form of a counter-assault designed to overthrow and replace the 'control machinery' operating through the military-technological information system. By using avant-garde methods of linguistic resistance in the 'Nova' trilogy (1962-1964) to break the 'associational lines' of control, and by redirecting the application of Cold War military-technological research in the 'Red Night' trilogy (1981-1987), Burroughs' narrative routines work to fashion retroactive counter-histories of utopian possibility. This thesis investigates how Burroughs uses the postmodern historical fragmentation derived from military-technological ascendancy as a springboard for uninhibited fictional escapism. Although divergent in terms of their engagement with militarization and networked information culture, the fiction of DeLillo and Burroughs supports a reassessment of the 'de-realised' postmodern society identified by Fredric Jameson, Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard. For example, Jameson sees the intimacy of military and networked information technology as symptomatic of the postmodern situation. However, as DeLillo and Burroughs recognise, rather than being symptomatic, the merger between military and information networks taking place during the Cold War has helped establish postmodernism. This thesis, then, will draw upon DeLillo's and Burroughs' fictional engagements as a means to reorient and consolidate existing postmodern analyses.

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Introduction

Every position on postmodernism in culture—whether apologia or stigmatization—is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today.[1] (Fredric Jameson)

According to Fredric Jameson, all concepts of postmodernism provide an ideological response to the conditions of a late-capitalist society. This set of global economic relations, otherwise identified as the post-industrial or consumer society, make apparent the evolution of capital from the growth of industrialism, to the development of advanced technological forms of production and information distribution. From Jameson's perspective, the easiest way to understand the concept of postmodernity is to think of it as an attempt to historicize this techno-capitalist present in an age incapable of thinking historically in the first place. This frustrating condition leads to a kind of 'historical deafness' whereby serialised culture attempts to recuperate the loss of historicity in a 'spasmodic', 'intermittent' and 'desperate' fashion.[2] In fact, 'culture' has become a product in its own right, and so postmodernism can be described as 'the consumption of sheer commodification as a process'.[3] In this sense, postmodernism is not necessarily the cultural dominant of a brand new social configuration, but rather it is a perceptual shift denoting these alterations in the economic system. The relationship between the late-capitalist economic base and the cultural superstructure takes the form of a continuous interaction prone to ambiguity and fluctuation. Therefore, the certainty of totalising and stable concepts becomes engulfed by the heterogeneity of a system subject to perpetual feedback.

Jameson attributes the economic preparation for postmodernism to the introduction of new technologies, consumer products and media networks taking place during the 1950s. The material shortages of World War Two had somewhat dissipated by this stage, meaning that the burgeoning consumer society was ready to accommodate

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[1] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 3, (Jameson's emphases).
[2] Ibid., *Postmodernism,* introduction, xi.
[3] Ibid., introduction, x.

a new era of techno-scientific research and innovation. As a result of these progressive forces of production and consumer demand, society now faces a situation in which

> aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes) at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.[4]

This sense of speed and urgency in cultural and commodity production causes the following postmodern constituents: 'a new depthlessness' which is prolonged and propagated by a society fixated on the image or 'simulacrum', a subsequent 'weakening of historicity' affecting both public history and 'private temporality', and a 'schizophrenic' subjectivity determining new spatial aesthetics and emotional 'intensities'.[5] Although Jameson acknowledges this historical crisis as a worldwide phenomenon, he stipulates that these conditions are particularly noticeable in American culture and society, and as such they spread outward across the globe. Jameson states that each of these factors contributes to a new historical situation in which the subject is forced to experience and elucidate history through the simulations and popular images we produce in lieu of that history. Hence, the focus on technological precision and networked communication capability has contributed to the fragmentation of our historiographical perception of everyday social reality. This type of historical and aesthetic fragmentation is identifiable as a key motif of modernism; however it becomes subject to an unprecedented level of technological intensification within the postmodern situation.

I concur with Jameson that the economic and aesthetic basis for postmodernism is tied to the technological initiative of American enterprise since the 1950s. Crucially, this period of aesthetic and technological success was stimulated by the military-industrial requirements of strategic Cold War hostility. The techno-scientific research and advancement enabling military precision ensured that the US/Soviet binary opposition remained in a perpetual state of competition. Therefore, the continual focus on weapons systems and network communication capability engendered the

[4] Ibid., 5.
[5] Ibid., 6.

militarization of society at large. The consumer society demanding 'fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods' became implicated within military-industrial productivity as it merged with domestic technologies and information networks. For journalist Fred J. Cook, the social and economic pressures experienced post-World War Two had created a new phenomenon in the United States, a power complex otherwise recognised as the warfare state.[6] First identified by President Eisenhower in his 1961 farewell address, this complex was described as a combination of military-industrial power based upon two major assumptions. First, that national security could only be achieved through absolute power, and second, that American prosperity was now dependent upon the constant augmentation provided by military expenditure.[7] Justified by the spectre of Soviet expansionism and the threat of a nuclear attack upon the United States, the military-industrial complex became the organising principle behind the domestic economy. As a result, it underpinned all social relations and cultural outlets during the Cold War. In order to support the ongoing demands of a warfare state designed around an 'imminent' threat, the US military outsourced a proportion of its manufacturing requirements, and commissioned private industry to develop and produce its intelligence hardware and weapons systems. In this sense, the domestic consumer became involved in a system of military-industrial enhancement employing the citizenry, and infiltrating the American household via technological products. Military expenditure was to increase year on year throughout the Cold War, and by the winter of 1981 President Reagan's administration had proposed a 32.6 billion dollar add-on to the defence budgets for 1981 and 1982.[8] In total, Reagan sought 200 billion dollars in accelerated weapons programmes, including investment in the B-2 Stealth bomber, one-hundred MX missiles, six Trident submarines, three thousand cruise missiles, one-hundred B-1 bombers and investment in command, control and communications systems for US nuclear strategic defence.[9] By 1983, Reagan had announced his plan for the 'Strategic Defense Initiative' (SDI), a satellite system designed to provide 'a space shield to protect the nation against

[6] See Fred J. Cook, *The Warfare State*, (New York: Macmillan, 1962), 376 pp.
[7] See Ibid.
[8] See Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 148.
[9] Ibid., 148.

destruction by Soviet nuclear missiles'.[10] Although these plans never came to fruition in the way that the Reagan administration had envisaged them, the commitment to a warfare state remained central to US domestic and foreign policy. When considering the Reagan years in particular, the link between national prosperity and the warfare state becomes questionable. During this period, Americans faced high levels of unemployment, and the nation moved from being the largest creditor to the largest debtor.[11] This unfaltering commitment to the military-industrial complex is paradoxical because prolonged investment in military hardware is a proven drain on national resources, and a harsh impediment to domestic economic growth. The postmodern situation, then, can to an extent be attributed to the military-industrial drive for supremacy, a system responsible for distancing the subject from unambiguous historical reality.

Jameson does not explore the relationship between Cold War military-industrialism and postmodernism in any great detail. Rather, he insinuates that American military and economic global supremacy is related to postmodern culture, and as such it conceals a dark underside of exploitation and political violence.[12] Therefore, this thesis will reconsider Jameson's critical analysis in *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) in order to demonstrate these links between Cold War militarization and the technological network. Through this interrelationship, I intend to reorient Jameson's work by showing that the intimacies between military and technological networks are not symptomatic of postmodernism, but rather that they help establish postmodernism in certain ways. In this sense, Jameson's identification of postmodern culture becomes a concept grounded by the dissemination of Cold War discourses and military-technological influence. In *The Vietnam War and Postmodernity* (1999), Michael Bibby is critical of Jameson's assessment of Vietnam as 'the first terrible postmodernist war'.[13] He sets out to demonstrate slippages in Jameson's narratives of postmodernity, by underlining how the policies and technologies shaping

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[10] Ibid., 15.
[11] See Coral Bell, *The Reagan Paradox: American Foreign Policy in the 1980s*, (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 224 pp.
[12] Ibid., 5.
[13] Quoted in Michael Bibby, *The Vietnam War and Postmodernity*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), introduction, xiv.

the Vietnam War are not expressions of postmodernism, but are constitutive of the postmodern condition. Similarly, I intend to re-evaluate Jameson's analysis so that it becomes possible to trace a techno-scientific and aesthetic trajectory, from the speed and urgency of the Cold War, to the information flows and historical disorientation indicative of the postmodern situation.

In order to reassess Jameson's postmodernism, and demonstrate this meshing between military production and technological sophistication, it is important to investigate the cultural and literary forces conveying these circumstances. Therefore, I will analyse the fiction of Don DeLillo and William S. Burroughs to show how these writers rewrite the collective degeneration of a networked information society, while simultaneously asserting a critical response to these conditions. I have chosen to look at selected novels by DeLillo and Burroughs for two distinct reasons. First, they both display an extended fictional engagement with the correlation between military-technology and networked postmodernism, and second, they approach the problem from fictional perspectives that are ostensibly opposed. For DeLillo, this takes the form of a realist reconsideration of our Cold War historical unconscious designed to highlight and reconcile the military-technological breaks in contemporary social experience. In contrast, Burroughs fictionalises techno-scientific possibilities from choice historical fragments, in order that we may embark on an escape from prescribed social reality altogether. This thesis will compare and explore these two fictional approaches, highlight the critical benefits of each, and finally demonstrate how they shed light on the interrelationship between postmodernism and the military-industrial complex.

DeLillo and Burroughs are both concerned with the role of the novel as a means for deciphering, reconfiguring and reacting to the political and cultural climate forming our perception of social reality. However, as I have indicated, these writers employ very different fictional methods to engage with, and respond to, the conflicts and ambiguities of socio-historical experience. For DeLillo, fiction can be a historical research method for examining the marginalised 'corners' of human experience that are often eclipsed by the magnitude and 'magnetic force' of public events. As far as he is concerned, the writer wants to 'see inside the human works to locate the neural strands that link him to

men and women who shape history'.[14] By linking together the public and the private, DeLillo believes that fiction may reinforce the historical record of 'genius, ruthlessness, military mastery' and 'eloquent self-sacrifice' with the memories and emotional nuances otherwise lost or misrepresented by documentary evidence[15]:

> If any art form can accommodate contemporary culture, it's the novel. It's so malleable [...] Maybe the challenge for the novelist is to stretch his art to the point where it can finally describe what's happening around him. I still think that's possible.[16]

By fictionalising these unconscious aspects of the national record, DeLillo endeavours to restore a sense of historical equilibrium, and address some of the societal confusions caused by techno-cultural representation.

Conversely, William S. Burroughs considers fiction to be a means of 'guerrilla' resistance against the systems of control transmitting their supremacy via contemporary communication networks. By incorporating fragments of social reality and history into the fabric of his fiction, Burroughs intends to initiate narrative routines that reconfigure documentary history with counter-narrative alternatives of heterogeneity and liberation. He is interested in exploring the 'turning points in history' that are tantamount to 'entirely different possibilit[ies] for the Americas'.[17] Burroughs' purpose, then, is to be 'taken literally' so that he may 'expose the true criminality of our times' via these processes of historical absorption. Through these counter-historical 'routines' he sets out to initiate fictional worlds of possibility based on a reversal of the control apparatus defining the limits of cultural life and production.[18] Through this precise 'manipulation of word and image' Burroughs believes that the novel filled with new techno-scientific potentials may create a revolutionary 'alteration in the reader's consciousness'.[19]

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[14] Don DeLillo, 'The Power of History', *The New York Times*, Sunday September 7, 1997, accessed via http://www.nytimes.com/library/books/090797article3.html.
[15] Ibid.
[16] DeLillo's interview with David Streitfield, 'Don DeLillo's Hidden Truths' in *The Washington Post*, (November 11, 1997), accessed via www.perival.com/delillo/ddinterivews.html.
[17] William S. Burroughs' interview with V. Vale, 'Under Psychic Attack', in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs 1960-97*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2001), 558.
[18] Burroughs' 1961 interview with Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg, 'The Birth Time-Death Gimmick', in ibid., 581.
[19] Ibid., 581.

Despite their divergent fictional approaches, both writers focus on the interpretative problems occurring in a contemporary society no longer capable of discerning a coherent historiography. DeLillo and Burroughs effectively concur with Jameson that this inability to engage in a critical assessment of the recent past is the result of an over-proliferation of information and technological production in the late-capitalist era. As a consequence of this excess, the contemporary subject suffers the symptoms of a debilitating disorientation that dislocates cultural life and production from its historical precedents. However, DeLillo and Burroughs believe that the principal cause of this social and historical confusion is the military-industrial complex directing the technological precision of the Cold War. As far as DeLillo is concerned, this refinement in military-technologies and information distribution caused a 'sense of danger that an enormous cataclysm might take place, affecting virtually everyone on the planet'.[20] Since the height of the Cold War, this sense of danger has been disseminated through the information networks facilitated by military innovation, and therefore it has evolved into an indefinable threat both comprehensive and 'specific' in nature. For DeLillo this has caused a situation where 'the world isn't going to be destroyed, but you don't feel safe anymore in your plane or train or office or auditorium'.[21] With strategic nuclear weapons systems and research into biological warfare developing in tandem, it is not surprising that DeLillo's fiction taps into the residual anxieties of Cold War testing and development. This anxiety is a product of external threats and networked anxiety, but it also reflects the paradoxical activities of the warfare state in safeguarding the nation with nuclear and chemical agents harmful to the American populace. As William Blum has highlighted:

> Approximately 60,000 military personnel were used as human subjects in the 1940s to test two chemical agents, mustard gas and lewisite (blister gas). Most of these subjects were not informed of the nature of the experiments and never received medical follow-up after their participation in the research. Additionally, some of these human subjects were threatened with imprisonment at Fort Leavenworth if they discussed these experiments with anyone, including their wives, parents and family doctors. For decades, the Pentagon denied that the research had taken place, resulting in decades of suffering for many veterans who became ill after secret testing.[22]

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[20] DeLillo's interview with Gabe Pell in the *Daily Princetonian*, Princeton University, (October 16, 2002), accessed via http://perival.com/delillo/ddinterviews.html.
[21] Ibid.
[22] William Blum, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower*, (London: Zed Books 2003), 2.

As Blum demonstrates, this type of nuclear and biological testing began during the formative years of the Cold War and continued at a number of military compounds up until the 1990s. This series of government 'programmes' used soldiers and civilians as guinea pigs to test the fallout effects at nuclear explosion sites and chart the physical symptoms of a range of chemical and biological contaminants:

> And in the decades between the 1940s and 1990s, what do we find? A remarkable variety of government programs, either formally, or in effect, using soldiers as guinea pigs—marched to nuclear explosion sites, with pilots then sent through mushroom clouds; subjected to chemical and biological weapons experiments; behaviour modification experiments that washed their brains with LSD, exposure to the dioxin of Agent Orange in Korea and Vietnam [...] the list goes on [...] literally millions of experimental subjects, seldom given a choice or adequate information, often with disastrous effects to their physical and/or mental health, rarely with proper medical care or even monitoring.[23]

In the fiction of DeLillo and Burroughs then, the omnipresent sense of anxiety and military-technological danger is not just specific to the imminence of nuclear war, but is also indicative of the range of covert biological and chemical weapons cultivated during the Cold War and beyond. For DeLillo, the subsequent feelings of intangible military-technological threat, propagate an overall socio-cultural climate of 'randomness', 'ambiguity' and 'chaos', that causes a 'deeply unsettled feeling about our grip on reality'.[24] Subsequently, the paranoid subject caught within systems of information exchange and technological speed begins to feel as though history has been manipulated by unseen forces of control.

For Burroughs, such historical fragmentation and societal uncertainty has been caused by, and propagates, a control machine of 'national security' intent on monopolising knowledge acquisition and technological superiority:

> What are you getting out of national security? The Cold War is an essential factor in maintaining the establishment of the West and in Russia, and has all the marks of a deal under the table. Top secret classified research is not top secret because the Russians might find out about it. The Russians already know and in most cases are well ahead of the West. Top secret research is top secret because establishments do not want young people of the world to find out what they are doing.[25]

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[23] Ibid., 3.

[24] DeLillo's interview with Anthony DeCurtis, 'An Outsider in this Society' in *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. Frank Lentricchia, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 48.

[25] William S. Burroughs and Daniel Odier, *The Job: Interviews with William S. Burroughs*, (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 59.

The Cold War conflict, according to Burroughs' observations, is part of an all-encompassing game logic whereby East and West adhere to a structure of 'Mutually Assured Destruction' (MAD). This perpetually delayed threat of 'hot' warfare constitutes a bid to maintain and monopolise the global balance of power and superiority. Therefore, the speed and precision of military-technological research initiatives take precedence, while the improvement of the social project becomes prone to a kind of developmental inactivity. Although the military-industrial complex supporting contemporary society works to increase channels of communication and technological resources for the domestic populace, it effectively causes a degeneration of knowledge. As Burroughs suggests, vested military interests direct scientific and technological research endeavours toward weapons enhancement, but this knowledge is concealed from the society it affects. To exacerbate this situation, the surplus of information generated by network technologies further prevent the subject from critically interpreting and contextualising this complex as a whole. It is in this sense that the military-industrial escalation contributes to the subjective disorientation and historical decline indicative of postmodernity in general. Before I return to the fictional engagements with militarization and networked postmodernism espoused by DeLillo and Burroughs, it is important to consider how other critics have responded to their novels. By doing so, I can contextualise this analysis amidst other critical viewpoints, and emphasise how my military-technological perspective on these writers contributes new knowledge to literary criticism and postmodern theory.

Critical Responses to DeLillo and Burroughs

Although DeLillo and Burroughs champion seemingly divergent literary points of view, both novelists reflect the conditions of postmodernism in their writing. Despite this, there has not been an extended comparative analysis of their fictional approaches and, to date, no one has investigated the Cold War military-technological contexts shaping their literary engagement with postmodern conditions. Therefore, I will summarise a varied selection of critical responses to each novelist, and underscore why this thesis contributes a new perspective on DeLillo and Burroughs. Furthermore, I will emphasise

why this textual analysis is distinct from existing work in the way that it reorients established theory on the foundations of postmodern culture.

A large proportion of existing criticism on DeLillo's writing has tended to focus on the profound and heterogeneous qualities of contemporary American life captured in the pages of his novels. The montage of stylistic qualities, tones and narrative voices that DeLillo blends together seem to provide what Frank Lentricchia has described as 'the essential tone of contemporary America'.[26] As a result of this fictional anatomy of the American nation, DeLillo's novels are generally received as acts of socio-cultural criticism designed to highlight how the constitution and direction of culture simultaneously 'dictates the shape and fate of the self'.[27] This relationship between collective public behaviours and identity, and the inward introspections of the individual or private self have spawned a number of different analyses on the nature of subjectivity in DeLillo's fiction. Therefore, this provides an ideal starting-point with which to investigate and chart his critical reception.

For Daniel Aaron, the key to being able to 'read Don DeLillo' is to recognise that his novels intentionally mystify the reader with the sheer impenetrability of cultural outlets, disparate information networks and unexplained phenomena circulating within our contemporary society. Consequently, the characters DeLillo places at the centre of his narratives tend to become pre-occupied with the conspiracies and media crises that 'flourish in the technological climate'.[28] Aaron feels that DeLillo's characters are the 'beneficiaries of a technology they can't control' and that as such they tend to be 'shadowy figures doubly dangerous because they are ignorant of their ignorance'.[29] The socio-cultural climate within which DeLillo's protagonists reside has become so difficult to interpret that quite often they attempt to locate cryptic meanings, patterns and associations in order to piece together an interpretation of national life. Therefore, the discontinuous fate of the culture most certainly dictates the fate of individual subjectivity. This type of indecipherable technological system is also a central feature of Thomas Pynchon's novels, particularly *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) his postmodern opus

[26] Frank Lentricchia, 'The American Writer as Bad Citizen', in Lentricchia *Introducing Don DeLillo*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 1.
[27] Ibid., 2.
[28] Daniel Aaron, 'How to Read Don DeLillo', in Lentricchia, *Introducing Don DeLillo*, 67.
[29] Ibid., 70.

focusing on the design, production and distribution of V-2 rockets by the German military at the end of World War Two.[30] Pynchon's influence upon DeLillo and Burroughs is notable because his cryptic narratives delineate information networks encompassing Cold War technology, the activities of the security state and the confusion of the paranoid subject. Burroughs and DeLillo both analyse the insidious nature of this unfathomable network; however DeLillo's treatment of these relations has been described in terms of 'systems theory'. Tom LeClair's analysis of Don DeLillo and the systems novel concurs with this technological treatment of the impenetrability of social reality. For LeClair, DeLillo's novels are 'deceptively artful' and 'mysteriously profound' treatments of American life as it is altered by the communication systems of the postindustrial era.[31] Subsequently, the subject is prone to incorporation into 'saving and destroying' communication loops that convey information, and then complicate it by disseminating it through channels of feedback and replication. LeClair compares DeLillo's writing to the epistemological and scientific paradigms of systems theory, which he describes as 'a metascience, rather than as a scientific discipline with its own rules of experimentation and proof'.[32] This analogy is useful in LeClair's analysis because it accounts for the nature of the communication feedback loop as an all-encompassing and complex interpretative framework denying the subject of any meaningful social orientation. As far as LeClair is concerned, the counterbalance to the totalising nature of our technological system is the 'mystery' and technological dread that DeLillo refuses to incorporate into the textures and logic of the communication network.

Throughout this thesis I refer to the variety of political, economic and technological 'systems' directing American life and interactions during the Cold War. These systems can be split into two separate and yet interrelated categories: first, the organisational, such as the political infrastructure, military-economic relations and the subsequent ideological regulation of society; and second, the technological, such as weapons advancement and cybernetics. For the most part, it can be difficult to define

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[30] Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*, first published in 1973, (New York: Penguin Classics, 1995), 760 pp.
[31] Tom LeClair, *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 1.
[32] Ibid., 3.

and describe how these systems influence and interact with one another. However, the systems theory that LeClair aligns with DeLillo's novels provides some explanation for the complexities of this all-pervading term. The interdisciplinary analysis of systems theory suggests that all phenomena, both social and scientific, are subject to a form of abstract organisation independent of their substance, type or scale. Systems theory investigates these organising principles, usually with mathematical models, in order to identify the components common to all systems. In doing so, this multi-faceted theory is able to demonstrate that autonomous systems, such as the economic and the technological, not only share a similar form of arrangement, but that their connectivity allows them to interact with one another and change over time. In this sense, the organisational and technological areas highlighted above relate to one another as part of an immense complex and adaptive system subject to positive and negative feedback loops. These feedback loops convey information about the changing nature of the system in question and, as LeClair is aware, this causes the 'saving and destroying' channels of information that complicate social and historical organisation for the postmodern subject. In terms of my analysis, then, it is important to note that each of the individual 'systems' I describe are interrelated, and that structural adaptations occur to accommodate movement in the social, economic and technological milieu.

Other critics have considered the conflict between individuality and collective subjectivity as it is transmitted via contemporary culture and communication channels. For example, Laura Barrett's consideration of intertextuality and the postmodern sublime describes our tenuous grip on socio-historical reality, and highlights how DeLillo's novels recognise our 'indebtedness to previous representations' as a means to orient ourselves in the heterogeneous confusions of the present.[33] Likewise, Tim Engles' analysis of collective subjectivity and 'fantasies of the white self' in *White Noise*, considers the quest for white middle-class American individualism in the face of paralysing ambiguities caused by the representational instability of American culture.[34] Therefore, it is clear that the majority of criticism on DeLillo's novels highlights the

[33] Laura Barrett, 'How the Dead Speak to the Living: Intertextuality and the Postmodern Sublime in *White Noise*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 25.2 (2001-2002), 98.
[34] Tim Engles, 'Who are You Literally?: Fantasies of the White Self in *White Noise*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3 (1999), 755-787.

disintegration of self-autonomy caused by an over-proliferation of information in the postmodern society.

Since the publication of DeLillo's most controversial novel, *Libra* (1988), an intertextual reconsideration of the Kennedy assassination, critics have tended to focus on key statements made by DeLillo about the loss of historical clarity and sense suffered as an aftershock of this violent event. As I have already indicated, DeLillo sees fiction as an almost cathartic method for confronting and 'working through' our historical confusion. Therefore, critical analyses from this point onward have tended to intimate the loss of historical totality in DeLillo's texts. In their considerations of *Underworld* (1998), DeLillo's fictionalisation of forty years of fragmentary public and private experience, Phillip Nel[35], Timothy Parrish[36] and Peter Knight[37] have each focused on the ramifications of this historical breakdown. For Nel, this analysis takes the form a debate about the dialectical quality of the novel as a response to the periodising concepts of modernism and postmodernism. As far as Parrish is concerned, *Underworld* captures the indicators of a postmodern technological culture more concerned with the instant gratification of mass media representation and communication. Finally, according to Peter Knight, *Underworld*, with its excessive narrative interconnections and paranoid nostalgia constitutes a kind of postmodern resonance for the loss of 'secure' identity construction.[38]

All of the critical analyses I have just described contemplate, in one way or another, the relationship between communication technologies, collective subjectivity and postmodern culture. However, none of these perspectives have, in any great detail, accounted for the military-industrial bases fortifying and propagating these interconnected areas. By highlighting the meshing of Cold War militarization and postmodern culture as it manifests in two of DeLillo's novels, *White Noise* (1982) and *Underworld* (1998), I intend in this thesis to fill in the military-industrial subtexts and associations otherwise under-researched in terms of DeLillo's fictional output. By

[35] Phillip Nel, 'A Small Incisive Shock: Modern Forms, Postmodern Politics, and the Role of the Avant-Garde in *Underworld*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3 (1999), 724-752.
[36] Timothy Parrish, 'From Hoover's FBI to Eisenstein's *Unterwelt*: DeLillo Directs the Postmodern Novel', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3, (1999), 697.
[37] Peter Knight, 'Everything is Connected: *Underworld's* Secret History of Paranoia', Modern Fiction Studies, 45.3, (1999), 811-836.
[38] Ibid., 815.

considering these novels as historiographical appraisals designed to expose and respond to the veiled military-technological intimacies shaping postmodern culture, this research proposes a new critical framework with which to approach DeLillo's fictional anatomy of American society.

Critical analysis of William S. Burroughs' novels and personal philosophy has tended to accumulate around the textual experimentation of the early fictional routines, dating as far back as the 1950s and early1960s. His theories concerning authorial production and the importance of the 'cut-up' method as a means for counter-revolutionary force have been well-documented since then, with the majority of critical accounts focusing on Burroughs' violent aversion to the 'word virus' replicating control. As Robin Lydenberg has highlighted in her consideration of radical theory and practice in Burroughs' fiction, the 'cacophony' created by intertextual, or 'cut-up' experimentation liberates the reader from the grammar and logic of the sentence, and as a consequence it also frees us from our prescribed roles as speakers and listeners hopelessly replicating the conditions of control.[39] This type of debate about authorship and the ownership of language is a standard consideration of Burroughs' stylistic methodology, and so it is pertinent to begin with these perspectives on counter-narrative force.

For Lydenberg, the intertextual cut-up experimentation that Burroughs' espoused for a number of years, can be described as a kind of 'negative poetics' intent on defying the rules of copyright, ownership, identity and convention.[40] In this sense, the cut-up narrative encourages a kind of non-linear reading in which 'the whole exists simultaneously, sensed almost subliminally by the reader in vague feelings of familiarity, dislocation, premonition'.[41] This type of experimentation is an exercise in 'negativity' because it works against the reverence of the word, and inspires a kind of destructive force in the reader. Consequently, Lydenberg believes that Burroughs' textual experimentation is able to transgress the boundaries of subjective identity and communicational control. Similarly, Todd Tietchen has recognised this type of counter-

[39] Robin Lydenberg, *Word Cultures: Radical Theory and Practice in William S. Burroughs' Fiction*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 47.
[40] Ibid., 49.
[41] Ibid., 48.

narrative device in the 'postmodern activism' of Burroughs' *Nova* trilogy. According to Tietchen, Burroughs' cut-up philosophy employs the same modes of production responsible for 'massifying society' in order that it may introduce ruptures in the ideological universe of the control machinery. Referred to as 'Guerrilla Semiotics', or 'Culture Jamming', this kind of postmodern 'radical (re)productivity attempts to discover the gap in discourses of control.[42] Therefore, Burroughs actively encourages his readers to recognise the construction of their subjectivity via consumed ideologies, and to: 'afterwards employ the same channels responsible for their dissemination to interrogate and reanimate these implanted texts in a way that leads to liberation from their influence.[43]

In his critical analysis of Burroughs and the Beat Generation, Jonathan Paul Eburne refers to this kind of subjectivity. He considers a Cold War American cultural environment in which 'individual identity had become inexorably bound up with stifling artistic, societal, and existential norms'.[44] In this sense, identity becomes an oppressive regulatory practice of 'cultural formation' designed to control and maintain the behaviours of the populace. As far as Eburne is concerned, Burroughs makes 'trouble' for these regulatory practices of cultural formation by questioning the 'self' as the most privileged signifier. The cut-up routines offer this kind of resistance by proposing multiple subject positions and shifting identity configurations with which to destabilise accepted notions of narrative unity, character cohesiveness and 'linguistic propriety'.

In addition to these textual forms of reconfiguration and guerrilla resistance, critics have also identified a kind of performativity in Burroughs' writing. This often relates to the development of the all-male counter-communities that have been a central focus since the Nova novels. For Jamie Russell, these alternative modes of communal existence place the homosexual male at the centre of the narrative, and inspire a kind of 'reclamatory challenge to the heterosexual dominant's discourses' and modes of binary control.[45] Russell believes that Burroughs' increasingly radical textual and sexual

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[42] Todd Tietchen, 'Language out of Language: Excavating the Roots of Culture Jamming and Postmodern Activism from William S. Burroughs' *Nova* Trilogy', *Discourse*, 23.2 (2001), 107-129.
[43] Ibid., 110.
[44] Jonathan Paul Eburne, 'Trafficking in the Void: Burroughs, Kerouac, and the Consumption of Otherness', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 43.1 (1997), 53-92.
[45] Jamie Russell, *Queer Burroughs* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 81.

politics drew upon the anti-establishment discourses of the 1960s, and so The Nova trilogy and the later 'Wild Boy' texts of the 1970s document the subjectivity imposed upon the gay man during this period.[46] Jennie Skerl also identifies this movement from the experimental cut-up routines to narratives built around the resistance of all-male counter-communities. However, rather than solely focus on Burroughs' reclamation of gay male identity she suggests that his fiction takes the form of a two-phase writing project.[47] The first phase consists of the textual experimentation responsible for the expansion of technical innovations like the cut-up, and the second phase constitutes a return to narrative that enables the creation of new mythologies intent on re-establishing the fight against the control system. Skerl acknowledges that this second phase writing differs from the earlier routines because Burroughs' new imaginary opens the way for human potential and social change through metaphor and fantasy.

In *Wising Up The Marks: The Amodern Burroughs*, (1997), Timothy S. Murphy provides a comprehensive analysis of Burroughs' social resistance. By plotting an amodern course that highlights the failures of modernist cultural enterprise and challenges the apparent inadequacies of postmodern indeterminacy, Murphy demonstrates how Burroughs' writing constitutes an attempt to 'wise up the marks' and liberate the subject from the societal and bodily control impeding the improvement of human condition.[48] Burroughs' amodern stance against social control is ultimately viewed in terms of a violent revolutionary upsurge manifesting in each and every one of his novels, experimental routines and collaborative projects.

Rather than compartmentalise Burroughs' writing in terms of a two-phase project, or movement, from non-linear narrative routines to gender-specific mythologies, I have chosen to consider Burroughs' fiction as a continuous evolutionary trajectory toward socio-cultural resistance, reversal and transcendental escape. As an isolated statement, this relates to the critical considerations I have just considered. However, the Cold War military-technological basis shaping this thesis differentiates it from existing

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[46] Ibid., 84.

[47] Jennie Skerl, 'Freedom Through Fantasy in the Recent Novels of William S. Burroughs', in *William S. Burroughs At the Front: Critical Reception*, eds. Jennie Skerl and Robin Lydenberg, (Urbana: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 189.

[48] Timothy S. Murphy, *Wising Up The Marks: The Amodern Burroughs*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 256 pp.

analyses. Although each of the critics I have mentioned are aware of the Cold War conditioning contributing to Burroughs' literary-counter assaults, none have chosen to explore his counter-historical reversals of game planet ascendancy and military precision. This analysis of textual resistance and narrative potentiality constitutes a new perspective, because it demonstrates how Burroughs appropriates and redirects Cold War military escalation and techno-scientific research toward a liberating post-human escape. I am suggesting, then, that this reconfiguration of military-technological supremacy forms the most successful means in Burroughs' literary 'arsenal' for initiating control resistance and utopian zones of possibility. By foregrounding a comparative study of DeLillo and Buroughs, and by investigating their extended fictional engagement with military-technological networking, this thesis constitutes an original critical interpretation hitherto overlooked in terms of both novelists. Furthermore, existing critical analyses on the literary output of these writers have been based around accepted perspectives on the origins and indicators of a postmodern culture. This thesis is different in the way that it uses fictional analysis not only to situate the novels within postmodern culture, but to use them as means to reorient the postmodern approaches espoused by such critics as Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio. As I have suggested, for Jameson the intimacy of militarization and networked technology is 'expressive', or symptomatic, of postmodernism in general. However, I intend to demonstrate that this military-technological intimacy provides the foundations for postmodern conditions to develop. Consequently, this textual analysis also sheds light on Jean Baudrillard's consideration of a 'de-realised' technocratic society prone to 'potentialization' beyond our control.[49] Baudrillard is concerned with the simulations and social degeneration caused by technological speed and dissemination; however he does not consider in any detail the military origins underpinning this system. Paul Virilio, on the other hand, provides a detailed account of the military-technological infrastructure responsible for a trans-political system and societal non-development.[50] However, Virilio's detailed military-technological account does not analyse the postmodern cultural texts conveying and responding to these

[49] Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, ed. Jim Fleming, trans. Philip Beitchman, and W.G.J. Niesluchowski, first published 1983, (London: Pluto, 1990), 41.
[50] Paul Virilio, *Pure War*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 27.

conditions. Therefore, this thesis not only reorients Jameson's work, but also consolidates postmodern and military theory more generally. Now that I have discussed existing critical viewpoints on DeLillo and Burroughs, and stated how this analysis contributes new knowledge to this field, it is prudent to return to the contrasting fictional engagements explored by these writers, and summarise an outline for the thesis as a whole.

DeLillo and Burroughs: Fictional Responses to Military-Technological Culture

DeLillo believes that the fiction writer is drawn to the awe of large-scale public events, from the national sporting victory to televised scenes of disaster and warfare, because the sheer immensity of these historical occasions inspires a deep desire to 'enter the narrative'.[51] The 'nearly palpable lure' of large events becomes part of a quest to absorb, 'flesh out' and master the remnants of documentary material that comprise our limited grasp of history.[52] However, this very desire to reinvigorate the scraps and fragments of historical experience stems from the loss of 'manageable reality' and coherent temporality caused by their representation in the first place. In response to this degenerative cultural condition, DeLillo has stated that 'there is a deeply self-referential element in our lives that wasn't there before'.[53] This kind of media-generated introspection ostensibly confirms Jameson's observation that we are now forced to experience history by way of our 'pop images' and simulations of historical events, and that as such we have lost our grip on the intricacies and significance of social reality. DeLillo is more than aware of the Cold War military-industrial schema contributing to this historical and cultural disorientation, particularly in terms of the unspoken or unconscious technological interconnections conveying the speed, instantaneity and precision of military research origins:

[51] DeLillo, 'The Power of History', *The New York Times*, (Sunday September 7, 1997).
[52] Ibid.
[53] Delillo's interview with Anthony DeCurtis, 'An Outsider in the Society' in Lentricchia, *Introducing Don DeLillo*, 48.

The microwave, the VCR remote, the telephone redial button and other time-collapsing devices may make us feel that our ordinary household technology reflects something that flows through the deep mind of the culture, an impatient craving for time itself to move faster.[54]

As a result of the 'time-collapsing' effect of these domestic technologies, the subject becomes further detached from the military significance framing their development. Therefore, the associations and significance of the military complex mutate into a kind of localised threat, or Cold War unconscious, always on the periphery of the frantic representations and informational flows of the present.

For DeLillo, the 'light of history is aloof and regal. The final flash of the half-century—the final iconic fury—belongs to the fireball and mushroom cloud of the nuclear bomb'.[55] From this integral moment of Cold War militarization onward, all forms of technological and cultural production became infused with the magnitude and responsibility of nuclear power. DeLillo recognises the ramifications of this meshing of Cold War techno-science and postmodern culture in terms of a collective schizophrenia denying our ability to identify and register the symbolic potency of our times. The writer of fiction, then, may embark on a creative mission to reinstate the experience of the individual through the ingenuity of the text; to vocalise a microcosm of history against the vast and uncontrollable forces of representation caused by military-technological domination and nuclear fear:

Against the force of history, so powerful, visible and real, the novelist poses the idiosyncratic self. Here it is, sly, mazed, mercurial, scared half-crazy. It is also free and undivided, the only thing that can match the enormous dimensions of social reality.

As far as DeLillo is concerned, then, the only way to inspire a sense of historical equilibrium and reconcile some of the breaks and fissures in Cold War military consciousness is to fictionalise individual experience as it relates to the magnitude of public events. By focusing on postmodern schizophrenic behaviours, the 'scared half-crazy' responses of the individual subject to historical disorientation, DeLillo is able to

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[54] DeLillo, 'The Power of History', *The New York Times*, (Sunday September 7, 1997).
[55] Ibid.

highlight the Cold War unconscious and therefore initiate a critical dialogue on its debilitating effects.

However, in order to accommodate the gradations and timbre of contemporary culture, DeLillo realises that the novel, by its very nature, must 'engineer a swerve' from the composition that binds 'history to what has been reported, rumoured, confirmed or solemnly chanted'.[56] Therefore, it is inevitable that the writer of fiction will, when dealing with historical reality, break some of the 'codes and contracts' of that reality in order to 'imagine deeply' certain 'unreliable regions of experience'. Consequently, the novel becomes a kind of release; it is the 'suspension of reality that history needs to escape its own brutal confinements'.[57] Ultimately, DeLillo believes that this unconscious release is what enables the novel to reconcile our personal relationship with collective historical reality, and counter the resulting unease of fragmentary subjective experience.

By reconfiguring the remnants of history to suit his ideological stance on individual and collective Cold War relations, DeLillo initiates a dialogue between the textures, inventions and biases of fiction, and the semi-documentary records and materials derived from social reality. In order to shed further light on this interplay between historicity and fictional imagination, I will align DeLillo's narrative project with Fredric Jameson's analysis in *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (1981). According to Jameson's opening statement, the literary text must 'always historicize' in order that narrative achieve its status as the ultimate means of cultural analysis. In accordance with the confusions and complications of the late-capitalist system, history has become inaccessible to us except through narrative texts where it takes the form of a 'political unconscious', or buried history of political relations. In order to 'unmask' socio-historical artefacts to reveal the symbolic framework governing their construction and dissemination, Jameson believes that a literary hermeneutic' is required.[58] Hence, narrative becomes a socially symbolic act able to reinstate the ideological conflicts of our historical unconscious, and initiate processes of dialogical opposition. DeLillo's realist fiction creates these symbolic

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[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (London: Methuen, 1981), 20.

conditions by incorporating Cold War historical fragmentation into the fabric of the fictional imaginary. By merging the social reality of public history with fictionalised private perspectives, DeLillo not only creates a literary 'subtext' to reveal the military-industrial unconscious, but he also initiates the means with which to question its detrimental effects.

In direct contrast with DeLillo's realist approach to Cold War historical rewriting and resolution are Burroughs' counter-historical narrative routines of utopian possibility and transcendental escape. For Burroughs, the primary motivation for writing novels is to explore alternative social realities based around certain historical potentialities that did not flourish in the confines of this world. For Burroughs 'reality is simply the whole input, and I don't see any lines at all. A dream is just as real as a table. There are levels of reality, of course, but there's no 'this is real and that isn't'.[59] Therefore, the fictional narrative may pose a viable societal alternative to be 'taken literally'. It operates as a manipulation of word and image specifically designed to initiate a revolutionary change in the reader's consciousness, a semiotic stand against dogmatic control. As far is Burroughs is concerned, the game logic of Cold War opposition is part of an overriding control system, or 'machine', intent on maintaining the human condition in a state of developmental and evolutionary inertia. Rather than direct research initiatives toward methods of societal and bodily improvement, Burroughs feels that the control machinery purposely blocks these kinds of discoveries by monopolising and directing knowledge toward weapons enhancement: 'No, I don't see any salvation in the machine, in the machinery or technology or computing machines in the hands of the present individuals and groups in power on the planet'.[60] As a result of this military deployment of science and technology, the binary opposition of the Cold War remains in a perpetual state of 'game play', and society at large becomes prone to a kind of de-escalation in terms of unified improvement.

As I have already suggested, Burroughs concurs with DeLillo that the primary cause of our collective subjectivity, societal degeneration and historical crises is this Cold War militarization underpinning postmodern culture and technological production.

[59] Burroughs' 1986 interview with Jurgen Ploog, 'Writing in the Future', in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 626.
[60] Burroughs and Odier, *The Job*, 60.

However, rather than create fictional subtexts with which to showcase the Cold War historical unconscious and restore a sense of balance, Burroughs feels that a total rejection of social reality and military-historical establishment is required in order to progress:

Now you take a formula like Nationalism—Army—Police—trouble with other stone-age tribes—and when they start using atomic bombs instead of stone axes—closing time, gentlemen [...] Well looks like some folks figure the only solution to this mess is to blow up the set and start over.[61]

Burroughs states that if we continue to deploy techno-scientific research toward the enhancement of arms precision, then we will eventually wipe out 'civilisation' altogether. Consequently, methods of literary resistance must be formulated to counter the military-industrial control apparatus. Burroughs initiates various kinds of narrative assault upon the societal and technological purveyors of control. These include experimental textual routines designed to negate the associational lines maintaining 'viral' power, and the creation of revolutionary fictional counter-communities intent on overthrowing the system in its entirety.

However, in order that these counter-communities may flourish in a 'zone' exempt from the totalising conflicts and control regimes of this world, Burroughs realises that he must fictionalise worlds of continually evolving possibility. Rather than draw fragments of social reality into the narrative structure for purposes of historical reinforcement, Burroughs' novels deliberately use the breaks and fissures in our historical consciousness as a catalyst for counter-historical alternatives. These alternative worlds, or zones, incorporate fragmentary historical resonances so that they may become subject to perpetual processes of reconfiguration and reversal. By ensuring that the counter-historical fragment remains in a state of performative ambiguity and fluctuation, the subject can then embrace the utopian freedoms to be gained from heterogeneous potentialities. Burroughs' fiction and personal philosophy, then, exploits rather than resolves the conditions of military-industrial escalation and postmodern confusion. He believes that through these half-formed fictional counter-potentials, the subject may commandeer the techno-scientific control apparatus directing the limits of

[61] Ibid., 72.

social reality and global conflict: 'Technology I believe is quite neutral. It's like a hammer you can hit someone over the head with. But nothing is used as a neutral agent, otherwise it's quite useless'.[62] In this sense, the historical resonances Burroughs creates for the techno-scientific advancements of the Cold War become the basis for transcendental programmes designed to uncap the limits of bodily possibility, and initiate escape-routes from the planet's constraints and weaknesses.

This counter-historical assault on the limitations of social reality requires textual mapping techniques in order to convey its potentiality as a form of utopian escape:

> Writing is a form of self-reproduction, and in a real sense a writer lives on in his works. Writing is the process of making maps, spatial and social maps. It's the role of art and creative thinking to give us orientation in space, like maps of space.[63]

As far as Burroughs is concerned, the novel should chart new spatial and social frontiers emancipated from the limitations and boundaries of this world. By reconfiguring social and historical resonances into the fabric of his fiction, he uses the fragmentation and inconsistency of our social and historical experience as an escape-route to uncultivated potentiality. Burroughs' subversive approach contrasts markedly with DeLillo's fictional methods of historical reconsideration, because it rejects the confines of socio-historical experience altogether, and postulates possibilities in direct opposition with the past, present and future of our social reality. Rather than provide accurate journalistic accounts of 'just what people do' in order to better understand the conditions of our socio-political environment, Burroughs suggests that we 'rework' these factual observations into completely new modes of existence.[64]

In order to further understand a theoretical framework for Burroughs' utopian/escapist fictional counter-histories and DeLillo's historical reconsideration, it is useful to refer to Linda Hutcheon's study of historiographical metafiction in *Narcissistic Narrative* (1984). Hutcheon recognises metafiction, or 'fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its narrative and/or linguistic identity' as another manifestation of

[62] Burroughs 1981 interview with Arthur Shingles, 'Mutation, Utopia and Magic', in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 518.
[63] Burroughs' 1980 interview with Robin Adams, 'Viral Theory' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 494.
[64] Burroughs and Odier, *The Job*, 43.

postmodernity.[65] As such, the historiographical text produced under these conditions works to position itself within aspects of history and discourse, while also maintaining its sense of fictional autonomy. The subsequent dialogue taking place between social relations, the writer of fiction and the audience, works to initiate a change in the forces of literary production that turns the reader into a 'collaborator' instead of a consumer of literary texts. Consequently, in metafiction, the writer takes on the role of celebrated manufacturer of a social product brandishing the narrative potential to promote social change through reader participation. Although DeLillo's fiction sets up this kind of literary collaboration in order to reconsider Cold War historiography, Burroughs' fictional possible worlds conceive of a much more extreme method of reader participation. Hutcheon explains that:

> In all fiction, language is representational, but of a fictional 'other' world' [...] created by the fictive referents of signs. In metafiction, however, this fact is made explicit and, while he reads, the reader lives in a world which he is forced to acknowledge as fictional. However, paradoxically the text also demands that he participate, that he engage himself intellectually, imaginatively, and affectively in its co-creation. This two-way pull is the paradox of the reader. The text's own paradox is that it is both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader.[66]

This self-awareness of fictional artifice provides DeLillo with the means to include the reader in processes of Cold War military-technological re-writing that suggest new ways of interpreting historiographical experience. This fictional engagement is narcissistic in the way that it is focused inward on imaginative artifice, and yet it also holds up a mirror to this world of experience. Burroughs, on the other hand, takes this one stage further by transforming the historical crises caused by military-industrial precision and proliferation altogether. Through processes of narrative defamiliarisation, Burroughs lays bare the apparatus directing our ailing perception of social reality, and subjects it to processes of textual reconfiguration aimed at initiating social change and uninhibited evolutionary advancement. What differentiates Burroughs' approach to Cold War mechanisms and postmodern culture from DeLillo's realist stance, then, is this production of transformative worlds of indeterminacy and flux. Burroughs does not

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[65] Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, (London: Methuen, 1984), 1.
[66] Ibid., 7.

intend his fiction to be an accurate representation of social reality, but rather he suggests that the reader participate in the creation of alternative worlds subject to their own rules of historical engagement.

Now that I have outlined how Burroughs and DeLillo engage with the meshing of military and technological networking, and have discussed their divergent approaches to the problem of postmodern representation, I will provide a brief synopsis of this thesis. Chapter One focuses on Cold War containment narratives and biotechnological risks in DeLillo's *White Noise.* I will suggest that the characters of the novel are subject to a collective historical unconscious that deprives them of the ability to interpret cultural data, contextualise historical experience and identify biotechnological hazards. As a consequence, central protagonist, Jack Gladney attempts to maintain the perceived safety of a Cold War containment identity in order to rationalise the techno-scientific threats encroaching on his esteemed domestic sphere. By viewing this Cold War unconscious as part of a 'return of the repressed,' I will demonstrate how the novel fictionalises the veiled significance of military-technologies as they come to the surface of contemporary consumer and information networks.

Chapter Two will continue this biotechnological focus by investigating William S. Burroughs' mythological Cold War resistance from the 'Nova' trilogy comprising of *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962) and *Nova Express* (1964) to the first novel of the 'Red Night' trilogy, *Cities of the Red Night* (1981). I will chart the movement from Burroughs' textual resistance and 'guerrilla semiotics' in the early novels, to the development of a new nuclear/biotechnological mythology in *Cities.* By comparing Burroughs' bio-technological narratives with examples of government agency research and clandestine experimentation, I will highlight Burroughs' mission to create fictional counter-histories intent on undermining and escaping the technological ascendancy of the Cold War control apparatus.

Chapter Three will consider the remainder of the Red Night trilogy, *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983) and *The Western Lands* (1987), as part of an over-arching quest for posthuman potential based on a creative use of biotechnological research. By aligning Burroughs' fictional potentialities with the military-technological contexts informing cybernetic systems theory and genetics, I will suggest that Burroughs' posthuman

project is a techno-scientific reversion, intent on initiating a planetary and transcendental escape into utopian realms of possibility. Burroughs' fiction, then, uses a combination of military-technological productivity and postmodern historical indeterminacy to engender a transformation of the social project.

Finally, Chapter Four will return to, and expand upon, the historiographical themes discussed in Chapter One. I will analyse DeLillo's *Underworld* (1998) from the same sub-textual perspective used to consider Cold War containment identity and socio-historical disorientation in *White Noise*. In *Underworld*, this historical unconscious punctuates the fragmentary structure of the narrative; thus denoting the loss of historical clarity caused by the merger between military and media technologies. Rather than draw obvious associational lines between military-technological advancement and contemporary information culture, the novel highlights the breaks, interruptions and inconsistencies in everyday social experience. Subsequently, we are encouraged to consider and respond to the effects of postmodern historical degeneration. By linking these representational gaps to the media technologies prevalent throughout the narrative- including radio, satellite, television and computer networking/the internet- I will suggest that it is possible to piece together a sub-textual military trajectory from Cold War technological innovation to the generation of a contemporary 'information bomb'. In this sense, the forty years of fragmentary public and private history conveyed in the novel via mass media representation becomes subject to processes of historiographical reconsideration and reassessment. As I have set out to demonstrate, each of the novels examined in this thesis acknowledge and engage with military-technological networking. Although DeLillo and Burroughs champion markedly different approaches to the role of narrative, I have no doubt that their fictional accounts of Cold War militarization and socio-historical uncertainty give credence to a new perspective on the foundations of postmodernism.

Chapter One: Cold War Containment and Biotechnological Risk in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*

You can see heroes every day going in and out of factory gates. Others, a handful in number, produce enough food to feed all of us and then the world beyond. You meet heroes across a counter—and they are on both sides of the counter [...] Their patriotism is quiet but deep. Their values sustain our national life. I have used the words 'they' and 'their' in speaking of these heroes. I could say 'you' and 'your' because I am addressing the heroes of whom I speak—you, the citizens of this blessed land.[1]
(President Ronald Reagan)

The above extract from Reagan's Inaugural Address, dated January 20th 1981, conveys the emblematic nature of the official discourse of national identity and pride used to unite the population after the recent traumas of the Vietnam War, Watergate and the economic instability of the Carter administration. By invoking a symbolic vision of industrious, proud American citizens committed to family morals, community bonds and 'liberty for all', Reagan had managed to create a powerful narrative of nationhood that commanded loyalty and repelled all forms of ambiguity and opposition. By targeting and valorising the efforts of working individuals and local community, Reagan was able to secure support for his conservative values, economic recovery commitment and national defence plans, whilst detaching them from the realities of the military-industrial policy underpinning their development. Consequently, this narrative contributed to a leadership based upon ambitious concepts, storytelling and the revival of American traditions that worked by separating the American citizen from the military-economic realities sustaining 'national life'.

The character Murray Siskind from Don DeLillo's novel *White Noise*, (1984) doesn't buy it. He questions the secretive nature of socio-political symbolism, the meaning veiled by communal 'mystery' and layers of 'cultural material' and the intangibility hidden beneath officially sanctioned narratives of nationhood and citizenship:

Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery and layers of cultural material. But it is psychic data, absolutely. The large doors slide open, they close unbidden. Energy waves, incident

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[1] President Ronald Reagan's Inaugural Address, West Front of the US Capitol, (January 20, 1981), accessed via the Reagan Foundation website: http://www.reaganfoundation.org/.

> radiation. All the letters and numbers are here, all the colors of the spectrum, all the voices and sounds, all the code words and ceremonial phrases. It is just a question of deciphering, rearranging, peeling off the layers of unspeakability.[2]

Experienced as 'energy waves' and 'incident radiation', the concealed significance Murray can only experience as subliminal fragments are derived from the military-industrial bases directing the nuclear arms race. Fascinated by the networks and systems of meaning obscured by an over-abundance of cultural data, Murray unknowingly attempts to locate the military-industrial logic disconnected from the symbolic rhetoric of 'national life', and by doing so unearth the ambiguity and opposition contained on the boundaries of national consciousness.

By considering the disengagement taking place between symbolic narratives of nationhood and the military-industrial 'psychic data' contained beneath, it is possible to view DeLillo's *White Noise* as a fictionalisation of the communal Cold War unconscious caused by 1980s domestic containment culture. DeLillo's narrative response to this unconscious historical condition is comparable with Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (1981), a theoretical consideration of the chronology of literary forms, and the buried historical narratives and social experiences contained within cultural texts. These submerged socio-historical narratives convey the political relations and the history of subjectivity as it permeates through the surface of cultural experience. For Jameson, this unconscious concerns 'the construction of the bourgeois subject in emergent capitalism and its schizophrenic disintegration in our own time'.[3] Hence, the subject is incapable of a direct historical experience of political relations and subjective struggle. In this sense, the literary text becomes an important means for ideological criticism, and the most successful method for deciphering the socio-political experiences at the margins of our conscious comprehension. In particular, the novel creates an intricate hermeneutic designed to decipher and critically assess concealed subjective social relations, while simultaneously conveying their debilitating effects. In *White Noise*, DeLillo engages with this kind of political unconscious as it is evident in the social and cultural experiences of a domestic sphere infused with veiled Cold War anxieties

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[2] Don DeLillo, *White Noise*, first published 1982, (London: Picador, 2002), 37-38, hereafter cited as *WN*.

[3] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (London: Methuen, 1981), 9.

and military-technological networks. The symptoms of this unconscious military-technological condition are under-researched in terms of the novel. Therefore, this deficiency justifies an interdisciplinary analysis of Cold War containment narratives, their historical impact, and DeLillo's fictionalisation of their socio-political effects. However, before I begin this focused analysis of *White Noise*, I must first address existing critical studies and pose some pertinent questions about the novel's treatment of containment in the Cold War military-industrial complex.

The mass dissemination of containment culture provides a specific Cold War angle on the novel that, so far, has not been addressed by other critics of DeLillo's fiction. Previous analyses have centred on the 'dialogic' nature of white middle class identity in the novel, for example, Tim Engles' consideration of the regulatory practices that simultaneously racialize the 'other' while asserting white individuality and exceptionalism.[4] Engles' reflection on white American subjecthood can be aligned with the narratives of containment and national identity shaping this study; however these Cold War associations are never investigated in his work. Other research, such as Laura Barrett's article on intertextuality and the postmodern sublime in *White Noise*, investigate the trespassing of genre boundaries and the fragility of identity construction in the novel; however these postmodern conditions are not contextualised with the nuclear threat developing in tandem with them.[5] Moreover, Ursula K. Heise's work on risk narrative and the contemporary novel, although taking into account insights into contemporary risk culture and simulated risk management, does not consider the responses of a containment society in relation with risk analysis.[6] Therefore, I intend to elaborate on these areas by understanding *White Noise* as a Cold War narrative that responds to military-scientific risks, symbolic containment strategies and postmodern dislocations as socio-political conditions developing in symbiosis. I shall identify how the novel exposes dominant Reagan era containment narratives and collective identity codes by situating potential danger within the home and the local neighbourhood. As a consequence, underlying currents of nuclear and military-scientific threat are intimated that paradoxically compromise and reinforce American narrative

[4] Tim Engles, 'Who are you Literally?: Fantasies of the White Self in *White Noise*', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3, (1999), 762.
[5] Laura Barrett, 'How the Dead Speak to the Living: Intertextuality and the Postmodern Sublime in *White Noise*', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 25.2, (2001-2002), 97-113.
[6] Ursula K. Heise, 'Toxins, Drugs and Global Systems: Risk and Narrative in the Contemporary Novel', *American Literature*, 74.4, (2002), 747-778.

enclosure. The suppressed anxiety generated by the technologies of the military-industrial complex manifest in the novel's domestic scene as uncontrollable fears of dissolution. This apprehension is disconnected from socio-historical significance, and so masks the totalising effects of the nuclear system. Rather than mention nuclear risk explicitly, the novel explores the effects of living within a containment culture whereby all kinds of potential threat are deliberately eradicated from national consciousness and placed upon a negative 'other'. I will demonstrate, then, how the undercurrent of nuclear and biotechnological fear conveyed in the novel can be described as a 'return of the repressed', as it encroaches upon the strategic unconscious of Cold War containment.

In order to understand the symbiosis between political unconscious, military-industrial production and Cold War containment narratives in *White Noise*, it is vital to highlight their influence on coherent historicity and collective identity construction. First, to what extent does the replication of containment culture in the novel lead to the conditions of acute historical disorientation identified by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*, and more prominently in *Postmodernism* (first published in 1984)[7]. Second, how does this containment condition impact upon collective subjectivity and the individual's ability to critically interpret and assess the profusion of cultural data surrounding them? As far as Jameson is concerned, we have moved from concepts of historical temporality to a new spatial and aesthetic logic. As a result of this shift, historical time is lost to the instantaneity of the 'spectacle' and we are no longer able to 'unify the past, present and future of our own biographical experience or psychic life'.[8] If narratives of containment stem from the military-industrial bases causing this loss of temporality then is the novel's narrative able to counteract this, or does it merely become a reflection of this Cold War historical disorientation?

By applying Jameson's approach to the risk culture and contingency prevalent in the novel, I will investigate whether Cold War containment narratives purposely weaken the individual's response to crisis management. Through key comparisons of televised representations of disaster, small-scale household hazards, simulated contingency plans and the real event, I will consider how the subject in

[7] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 472 pp.
[8] Ibid., 27.

White Noise assesses and responds to internal risk. By associating this fictional risk culture with the nuclear reactor accident at Three Mile Island, and the nuclear contingency planning proposed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during the 1980s, I will argue that the novel showcases the intangible and yet all-pervasive nature of nuclear risk directing international Cold War strategy and domestic policy. This system of nuclear deterrence and the regulation of national behaviours indicate the dominance of the military-industrial complex in both public and private spheres. As a corollary of this chapter, then, I intend to demonstrate the novel's fictionalisation of local culture, consumerism and collective identity as powerful reflections of the socio-economic framework circulating US military dominance during the Reagan era. Before embarking on a close examination of the text, I will highlight the integral role of national containment in shaping domestic policy and behaviour during the Reagan administration.

Cold War Simulation: The Reagan Era

Strategic narratives of nationhood were central to Reagan's rhetoric throughout his terms of office, and his 1983 address on 'Defense and National Security' is no exception to this rule. Relying upon hyperbolic language as opposed to factual analysis, this key speech on the escalation of US and Soviet hostilities, simplified defence policy for a domestic populace gripped by narratives of national enclosure and Cold War nuclear risk:

> There is no logical way that you can say, let's spend x billion dollars less. You can only say which part of our defense measures do we believe we can do without and still have security against all contingencies? Anyone in the Congress who advocates a percentage or a specific dollar cut in defense spending should be made to say what part of our defenses he would eliminate and he should be candid enough to acknowledge that his cuts mean cutting our commitments to allies or inviting greater risk or both.[9]

Thus, the address avoided actual statistics and projected expenditure in favour of thematic national allegiance and a diatribe on potential threats and hostilities, which aimed to question the loyalty and reasoning of potential dissidents opposed to the military-economic expansion. This doctrine can be considered as a strategy to

[9] President Ronald Reagan's Address to the Nation of Defense and National Security, (March 23, 1983), accessed via the Reagan Foundation website: http://www.reaganfoundation.org/.

neutralise public scrutiny and opposition via national defence rhetoric devoid of informational substance. Despite the circulation and replication of official discourse on defence and security, the American population would have learned little about the intricacies of foreign policy and military expenditure because official accounts harnessed and promoted a kind of communal unconscious. As historian Frances Fitzgerald has noted:

Americans have always been sceptical of politicians and experts, but during the Cold War they trusted their Government with national life and death [...] yet to look back over the public record of the late 1970s and 1980s is to be struck by how little of what was said about these subjects had anything to do with reality. It is to enter a world of phantoms and mirages.[10]

The communal unconscious fuelled by the 'phantoms and mirages' of the public record enabled an invasive security state and an acceptance of nuclear stalemate designed not only to contain the communist aggressor, but regulate domestic values and behaviours. By securing the approval of middle-class America via the promise of economic stability and the restoration of national strength, the Reagan administration was initially able to rouse vital public support for these increases in arms expenditure and military expansion. This national security drive had proved popular during Reagan's presidential campaign because the representation of a secure and united American nation, safeguarded from 'outside' threats, provided a positive vision of American supremacy after the combat losses and hardships of the previous decade. The strategic demonization of the Soviet Union as the 'Evil Empire' and communism as an aggressive ideology placing American liberty in jeopardy, revived the Cold War tensions of previous decades and destroyed the agreements instigated by earlier presidential negotiations. This demonization constituted a reproduction of the Cold War paranoia and binary hostility of the 1950s and early 1960s, the simulation of a tried and tested containment structure that conveniently situated risks and threats to the populace outside of national boundaries, while glossing over the military-industrial escalation.

This narrative of enclosure and nuclear threat proved useful to the Reagan administration because it afforded the ideal conditions for the codification and control of the nation via domestic policies designed to regulate moral and social

[10] Frances Fitzgerald, *Way out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 16.

behaviour. Paradoxically, the increased public fear of nuclear attack provided justification for the growing intensity of the arms race and the possession of nuclear power, whilst concurrently supplying a vehicle for the New Right policy crusade concerning family values, sex education, pornography and censorship, homosexual rights, abortion, drug abuse and religion. One such feature of conservative policy on social issues during this ongoing climate of moral regulation was the 'war on drugs', instigated to provide an official stance on the increase of drug abuse and drug-related crime. By 1986 this agenda had evolved into the 'Just Say No' media campaign fronted by Ronald and Nancy Reagan. As James Der Derian has stated:

> The war against narco-terrorism is better marked, with Nancy and Ronald Reagan in 1986 sitting on a sofa somewhere in the White House, giving the American public the first high-level, televised debriefing on the 'war on drugs'. At a time when Gorbachev seemed intent on unilaterally calling off the Cold War, and Khaddaffi preferred to sulk in his tent rather than execute his threat to bring terrorism home to the US, narco-terrorism moved up the ranks to become the most immediate and dire foreign threat to the US.[11]

This discursive media strategy was intended to promote public faith in the containment of the South American 'narco-terrorism' that had begun to propagate gang related crime and violence in US cities. As Der Derian outlines, the demonization of the Cold War binary 'other', and the enclosure of national boundaries was strategically replicated with the 'war on drugs' at a time when Cold War hostilities were beginning to 'thaw' and other external threats diminish. By instigating a massive media campaign designed to incite public moral outrage at the drug threat jeopardising the local community, the administration was once again able to propagate Cold War moral and behavioural containment with external threats. These strict domestic policies constitute a resurgence of 1950s and early 1960s social concerns and conditions, a kind of historical replay of national defence, domestic policy and containment ideology emulated and reproduced to fuel the latter portion of the Cold War. By displacing national 'in-security' onto an alien 'Other', the Reagan administration simultaneously created an internal system of codification and control while also deflecting attention from domestic instabilities. In this sense, internal acts of terror in the form of gang warfare, the emergence of sects and militia groups, domestic bombings and technological failures, although able to jeopardise

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[11] James Der Derian, *Antidiplomacy, Spies, Terror, Speed and War*, (London: Blackwell, 1992), 108.

official systems of simulation and denial, could be projected outside of national borders.

Alan Nadel's consideration of American Cold War containment culture during the 1950s and 1960s examines the dissemination of containment as a means to control the unparalleled language of terror and apocalypse that emerged in connection with increased testing and possession of nuclear weapons:

> Very shortly after the bomb initially exploded upon American consciousness [...] a national narrative developed to control the fear and responsibility endemic to possessing atomic power. The central motif of that narrative was 'containment' in which insecurity was absorbed by internal security, internationalism by global strategy, apocalypse and utopia by a Christian theological mandate, and xenophobia, the fear of the Other – by courtship, the activity in which Otherness is the necessary supplement to seduction.[12]

The implementation of containment worked to absorb and control the insecurities of the nuclear age, and by doing so it placed all signs of 'Otherness' outside of national borders. The concept of Soviet containment began with the political turbulence experienced after World War Two. By 1946, antagonisms between Moscow and Washington had reached boiling-point as both nations vied for an advantage in the power struggle left by the defeat of Germany. The two nations stipulated safeguards and security by means that intensified the fears of the other, and these fears widened existing ideological tensions:

> Stalin's refusal to abandon dominance in Eastern Europe was matched by Truman's unwillingness to concede Soviet supremacy beyond Russia's own borders. What Stalin sae as critical to Russia's national security the Truman administration viewed as a violation of the right of national to self-determination, a betrayal of democratic principles, and a cover for the spread of communism.[13]

For the Truman administration, this 'violation' contravened the principle of all nations working within the structure of the United Nations. Made confident by America's monopoly of atomic bombs and bolstered by its economic superiority, Truman aligned his leadership with escalating anti-Soviet opinion. In response to this assertion, Stalin took steps to confiscate materials from occupied territories, and forced the Eastern European Satellite countries to cease Anglo-American trade. By

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[12] Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism and the Atomic Age*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 14.
[13] Paul S. Boyer et al., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*, second edition, (Lexington, Mass: Heath Press, 1990), 938.

February 1946, Stalin had proclaimed that there would be no lasting peace with capitalism, and that the Soviet Union would overcome the Americans' superiority in weapons development.[14] Two weeks after this announcement, George F. Kennan, the American Chargè d' affaires in Moscow sent a detailed telegram to Washington regarding the Soviet threat. During the war, Kennan had frequently asserted the problem of Soviet expansionism, and until this point his advocacy of toughness against communism had failed to find a receptive audience. Kennan's telegram detailed the 'inevitability' of American conflict with the Soviet Union, and stated that it would be 'foolish' to try and negotiate terms with Moscow. Instead, he recommended a US foreign policy of 'long-term, patient, but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.[15] Kennan felt that containment would force the Soviets to retract when faced with unfaltering resistance. These statements worked to amplify mutual hostilities, and escalate a conflict waged by economic pressure, nuclear intimidation and propaganda rather than by traditional warfare. In later years, Kennan apologised for the content of his telegram and admitted that it worked as a primer designed to engage the public with ideas of a communist conspiracy.[16] In addition to the containment of Soviet geo-political and economic expansionism, came ideas of domestic containment and behavioural control as described by Nadel in his study of containment culture. Not only did containment work to enclose and inhibit Russian opposition, but it also influenced and encircled an array of American attitudes and activities under the auspice of the burgeoning security state.

As a central feature of the crisis atmosphere of the 1950s and 1960s, domestic containment was enhanced by public belief in conservative views, domesticity and Christian religion as the path to social and economic stability. These moral and behavioural values provided the American public with a sense of stability to counteract the nuclear threat. In this sense, the similarities between 1950s domesticity and foreign policy, and the renewal of Soviet alienation and traditional values during the 1980s becomes clear; however the Reagan era conception of national identity functions as a strategic replica or simulation of an earlier set of American cultural and societal conditions. This simulation of previous cultural,

[14] Ibid., 939.
[15] Quoted in Ibid., 939.
[16] Ibid., 940.

economic, military and political circumstances therefore operates through an official discourse of illusion and myth designed to curtail public fear and opposition. By recognising containment as the central motive of a 'national narrative' to pre-empt dialogue and absorb anxiety, Nadel highlights the self-regulatory nature of official Cold War history. Thus, the subject is caught in a system of vast and impenetrable story-telling that explains away all contingencies, a system that *White Noise* satirises with its own narrative ingenuity. By upholding a system of binary oppositions and alienation, these narratives of containment effectively set in motion a 'courtship' with the 'Other' that would order global strategy and national identity throughout the years of Cold War impasse. The 'Us' and 'Them' binary opposition between US and Soviet relations was a necessary feature of the containment culture of the period because the construction of a Soviet mentality emphasised the American counter-response to that opposing mentality. By figuring the Soviet Union as a perverse threat and an 'evil seductress', US policy makers were in a position to impose multiple narratives of national containment that justified the regulation of social behaviour and ideological beliefs on domestic soil. Hence, the juxtaposition of 'Us' and 'Them' identities during the Cold War signified the range of ideological binaries used to contain individual political, sexual, and social actions during the period. Moreover, because containment culture replaced coherent global meta-histories with localised and fragmentary narratives designed to regulate internal behaviours and the representation of external threats, for Nadel, it signified the formulation of a kind of 'proto-postmodernism' developing in tandem with nuclear deterrence.

I am suggesting that the foundations established by these prototype conditions of postmodern narrative disorder and Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), set the stage for the strategic replication of containment culture via serial signs and simulacra during the 1980s. Ingrained within the fragmentary and fluctuating narratives supporting the Cold War binary system, the representational flux developed to maintain the race for nuclear supremacy implemented what Jean Baudrillard considers 'the impoverishment' of politics to a system of 'banal strategies'.[17] This is an 'obscene' system of surplus information, culture and meaning that enables a cycle of historical replication that becomes increasingly detached from its strategic origin:

[17] Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, ed. Jim Fleming, Trans. by Phillip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchchowski, first published 1983, (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 14.

> When everything is political, it is the end of the political as destiny, it is the beginning of the political as culture, and means the immediate impoverishment of this political culture. When everything becomes cultural, it is the end of culture as destiny: it is the beginning of culture as politics, and means the immediate impoverishment of this cultural politics. The same is true for the social, for history, economy and sex.[18]

For Baudrillard, the cyclical incorporation of culture and politics into a 'cultural politics' relates to the weakening of all aspects of the social system. History and the military-industrial economy also become linked and incorporated into this chain of knowledge impoverishment. Accordingly, Reagan's containment revival can be placed within Baudrillard's system of banalisation through excess because the simulation of containment structures endorses the 'illusion' of meaningful social relations, whilst instigating public inertia through the promotion of disorienting information flows. This process of simulation functions tactically, because official containment narratives attempt to restrain public opposition and response via the replication, trivialisation and generalisation of policy designed to disorient the masses. The simulated containment strategy of the 1980s, then, had the same objective as its 1950s predecessor: to eradicate domestic fears and weaknesses by projecting them onto oppositions within the international arena. However, the informational excess resulting from this 'banal' system has made it increasingly difficult for the contemporary subject to understand the cultural and historical data generated within the simulated Cold War system. As the following analysis will show, in DeLillo's *White Noise* the central characters are subject to the historical disorientation and social de-realisation symptomatic of a containment identity.

Containment Identity in *White Noise*

The events in *White Noise* take place amidst the local community of Blacksmith, a deliberately generic illustration of 1980s small town America, where central characters Jack and Babette Gladney lead a chaotic existence bringing up four children, Heinrich, Steffie, Denise and Wilder. Despite conventional surface appearances DeLillo has purposely highlighted the unconventional nature of this family unit by noting that three of the above-mentioned children are the product of previous marriages, and that the parents are unnervingly reliant upon these children

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[18] Ibid., 57.

for insight, comfort and security. At first, the novel appears to take the form of a conventional domestic drama focused upon the daily routine of home life, work and colleagues, local neighbourhood, the shopping mall and television, but as the narrative progresses we become aware of a drive to subvert not only the confines of genre, but also generic representations of domesticity, American pastimes and traditional behavioural codes. *White Noise* deconstructs the replication of traditional moral values and family bonds by developing dysfunctional characters who perceive threats to personal health and safety within Reagan's esteemed domestic sphere. This sense of risk intensifies as Jack and Babette are overcome by an uncontrollable fear of death, which frames a chain of events leading to a disaster plot based around a chemical spillage, and a bizarre revenge plot linked to Jack's quest for a drug to suppress existential fears about death. DeLillo therefore destabilises the domestic narrative by introducing a disaster scenario. Due to a tank car derailment poisonous chemicals are released into the atmosphere forming a toxic cloud over the town. The Gladney family become embroiled within the subsequent evacuation, but during the journey to a makeshift refugee camp, Jack becomes exposed to the gases in the atmosphere. For the remainder of the novel Jack is left to ponder his bodily deterioration and the possible detriment to life expectancy this incident has incurred.

By highlighting the interactions between the individual subject, the family unit and the local community, *White Noise* alludes to the simulacra of Cold War identity construction and the 'official' narratives regulating moral and social behaviour. The containment identity resulting from these regulations is evaluated and critiqued through the characterisation of Jack Gladney, and the relationship he has with family and colleagues. This individual and collective construction of privileged identity functions by effacing socio-historical origins, and capitalising on the knowledge impoverishment resulting from the dissemination of containment culture. As a result of this social enclosure, Jack feels a sense of unease and 'otherness' when encountering 'unfamiliar types of people', a sense of difference that not only emphasises what Tim Engles calls an intrusion 'on the presumptions of middle-class whiteness to universality', but also 'the *Us* and *Them* Cold War binary' directing social relations on domestic soil and internationally.[19] The town unified by its local college and the demographic of wealthy white students descending upon the town

[19] Engles, 'Who are You Literally?', 755.

each semester. Jack is a committed academic at the university, working within the department of 'Hitler Studies', and the remainder of his daily experience consists of observations about the university campus, the shopping mall and the family home. Other 'types' of people are not usually encountered in his contained environment, and such exposure to cultural diversity only tends to occur by watching television:

> But Blacksmith is nowhere near a large city. We don't feel threatened and aggrieved in quite the same way other towns do. We're not smack in the path of history and its contaminations. If our complaints have a focal point, it would be the TV set, where the outer torment lurks, causing fears and secret desires. (*WN*: 85)

The erosion of historical consequence caused by the over-abundance of a national containment culture has effectively caused Jack to consider history as a threatening contaminant. By watching television he embarks on a 'courtship', to use Nadel's term, with the 'outer torment' and 'fear' generated by difference and otherness, a focal point for 'secret desires' similar to the nuclear courtship between the US and the Soviets. Jack's personal unease is meant to epitomise white, middle-class denial based upon a standardised collective identity and mistrust of heterogeneity, apprehensions and prejudices synonymous with Cold War containment anxiety. The enclosure of white American identity and society from 'outside' or 'alien' influences, and the escalation of Cold War apprehension was replicated by the Reagan administration as a means to safeguard the unity and security of the nation by demonizing figurative threats to national identity. Therefore, Jack's desire to categorise and separate 'unfamiliar types of people' can be viewed as symptomatic of the containment tendencies embedded within such collective conditioning. By adhering to a narrative of white middle class authority Jack has forsaken self-autonomy in favour of the collective project of simulated national identity. Therefore, in accordance with this false containment consciousness, he constructs an acceptable middle class status in order to feel integrated and accepted by the self-regulatory and insular local community. In this sense, the novel works in opposition to the spirit of frontier individualism by focusing on a subjectivity that is reliant on the perception and conceptions of others. As I shall highlight, this construction of social bonds and the collective acceptance of containment simulacra provide the basis for Jack's ignorance, passivity and critical indifference as the novel progresses.

The novel begins with what Jack describes as a 'spectacle', the return of the university students to the College-on-the-Hill. He describes the convoy of station wagons filled with student possessions, and the shared status between the proud parents because it confirms their distinction as a 'collection of like-minded' and 'spiritually akin' people:

> The parents stand sun-dazed near their automobiles, seeing images of themselves in every direction. The conscientious suntans. The well-made faces and wry looks. They feel a sense of renewal, of communal recognition. The women crisp and alert, in diet trim, knowing people's names. Their husbands content to measure out the time, distant but ungrudging, accomplished in parenthood, something about them suggesting massive insurance coverage. (*WN*: 3)

Jack's first-person narration perpetually alternates from present to past tense, at certain times intimating the self-awareness of hindsight, while at other times disclosing his perceptive ignorance. These present tense observations centre upon the shallow surface qualities of the community, the 'conscientious suntans' and 'well-made' faces that convey a level of artificial perfection. Jack feels a sense of empathy and comfort from the annual gathering because the families represent collective experience and reinforce the recognition of familiar traits and attitudes. Here, the novel outlines the dual nature of American identity formation based upon simultaneous self-recognition and collective identification. The parents see superficial mirror 'images of themselves' everywhere they look, the kind of replicated images indicative of a media-saturated society. Jack and Babette are able to relate with this congregation because each family constitutes a copy within an ongoing chain of containment simulacra supporting normative behaviour. Family bonds, community expectations and status are transmitted via this system of familial replication, therefore maintaining the dominant narratives of social control.

Furthermore, this materialistic 'spectacle' reveals Jack's willingness to categorise and make assumptions about members of the local community. By making value judgements about other people he is actively participating in processes of domestic containment because individuals are fused into a collective mass of shared characteristics, and differentiation is excluded in favour of shared norms and values. By classifying this congregation of parents in terms of a superficial collective of surface appearances and socio-economic trappings, Jack attempts to eradicate ambiguity and unease from his enclosed perception of neighbourhood life. Moreover,

he uses this act of collective identification to reinforce his own self-image as an 'accomplished' parent, husband and member of the local elite; even though his previous marriage reveals a personal history in conflict with uniform values and behaviours. Because self-autonomy has been overwhelmed by systems of social reassurance and approval Jack deliberately seeks the constant respect and admiration of his family and colleagues, and relies on his status as a University lecturer in the Department of Hitler studies to amplify his sense of importance and respectability. Jack reminiscences about recent events and conversations with ironic hindsight:

> The chancellor warned against what he called my tendency to make a feeble presentation of self. He strongly suggested I gain weight. He wanted me to "grow out" into Hitler. He himself was tall, paunchy, ruddy, jowly, big-footed and dull [...] If I could become more ugly, he seemed to be suggesting, it would help my career enormously. So Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop toward, tentative as I have sometimes been in the effort. (*WN*: 16-17)

These visual emblems of academic achievement and personal excess are integral to his fragile identity construction because they immediately mark him out as a reputable society member and authority figure. However, the spectacle and ceremony of Jack's academic lifestyle masks an inability to engage with concepts of diversity, social conflict and the historical ambiguity behind contemporary narratives of containment. The chancellor's advice that Jack gain weight and work on his 'presentation of self' highlights the extent to which surface appearance and staged persona take precedence over knowledge acquisition and balanced historical analysis in the insular college society. This inability to engage with historical conflict and difference frames Jack's status as Head of Hitler Studies, because the historical 'impoverishment' resulting from the containment system has compromised his ability to recognise the horror of the Nazi regime, and the German technological contribution to the Cold War arms race. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) works as an unconscious narrative influence here, as DeLillo invokes the shadow of Nazism and the German military-scientific achievement contributing to Cold War weapons development. Like Reagan invoking a passionate national rhetoric of social and economic reform divorced from social realities and reasoned analysis, Jack claims to be chief authority on the Hitler leadership without acknowledging balanced historical insight. Jack is especially proud of his contributions to the subject, as his conversation with Murray Siskind reveals:

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> He is now your Hitler, Gladney's Hitler. It must be deeply satisfying for you. The college is internationally known as a result of Hitler studies. It has an identity, a sense of achievement. You've evolved an entire system around this figure, a structure with countless substructures and interrelated fields of study, a history within history. I marvel at the effort. It was masterful, shrewd and stunningly pre-emptive. (*WN:* 12)

This contribution thus centres on an analysis of Hitler as an icon, a reified image divorced from historical memory. The containment impulse has worked to repress the atrocities of the past to the point that history has become a sanitised study of Hitler's rhetoric and 'public performances': 'Advanced Nazism, three hours a week [...] a course of study designed to cultivate historical perspective, theoretical rigor and mature insight into the continuing mass appeal of fascist tyranny, with special emphasis on parades, rallies and uniforms' (*WN*: 25). This lack of inclusive insight is made possible because American containment conditions eradicate the systemic threat of historical culpability and inference. 'Gladney's Hitler' has enabled the college to gain an international reputation based on Jack's implementation of an interrelated system of knowledge, complete with substructures and intricacies of interpretation. However, it is glaringly obvious that Jack's analyses are built upon an uncompromising and imbalanced view of the subject, conditions caused by the surplus of information circulating within a banal system of containment simulacra and public inertia. The information surplus generated to support strategies of containment, including Jack's system of study, has not only detached historical analysis from its point of origin, but has also initiated a system whereby the subject is unable to interpret historical contexts and plot their own thoughts and actions along a historical trajectory.

In *Fatal Strategies,* Jean Baudrillard states that this set of debilitating conditions generates 'senseless signs, signs that point nowhere' and disappoint our 'demand for meaning'.[20] Ultimately, for Baudrillard, the subject becomes 'anaesthetized' because the political and the historical have become 'perfectly formless and impotent, in perfect solidarity, yet paralyzed, perfectly frozen in a worldwide [...] complex', which is an 'ecstasy of communication' accessible to all and yet completely 'soluble'.[21] Similarly, in *Postmodernism* Fredric Jameson notes that an understanding of the full implications of the historical moment is made

[20] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 52.
[21] Ibid., 66-67.

impossible by the breakdown of the signifying chain, thus rendering the individual incapable of recognising historical reality because events have been transformed into 'heaps of fragments' and displaced narratives.[22] Jameson highlights the loss of historical clarity and significance to pastiche and simulacra – the procession of copies without an original and the 'de-realisation of the whole surrounding world of everyday reality':

> this mesmerizing new aesthetic mode itself emerged as an elaborated symptom of the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way [...] this approach to the present by way of the art language of the simulacrum, or of the pastiche of the stereotypical past, endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage.[23]

Historian Frances Fitzgerald has described the Cold War America of the 1970s and 80s as a world submerged in 'phantoms and mirages' created to distance the subject from political and historical clarity.[24] Therefore, it is logical to align this de-realisation and Jack's lack of historical perspective with the 'glossy mirage' and 'waning' of 'historicity' experienced as aspects of Jameson's postmodern situation. This is a situation in which 'we are condemned to seek history by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach'.[25] These illusions and simulations emphasise the ambiguity of the postmodern condition as history becomes detached from fixed meanings and representations, and the 'meta-narrative' and homogenous ideological control gives way to heterogeneous representation. The individual may experience the liberating effects of postmodern heterogeneity, but it is stipulated that the emergence of a new aesthetic mode will lead to a new sense of superficiality in relation to personal and collective experience. Hence, Jack is unable to experience history in any productive way; rather he adheres to a historical record, both personal and collective, that rejects diversity and heterogeneous representation in favour of replicated homogeneity, itself a by-product of postmodern de-realisation.

The novel explores this lack of unification and orientation in terms of a selective identification with history on both an individual and national scale, therefore meaning that Jack is able to devote his academic life to the study of Hitler

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[22] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 27.
[23] Ibid., 21.
[24] See footnote on page 6.
[25] Ibid., 26.

without once acknowledging the devastation of the holocaust. He is unable to relate what he describes as the 'signs' and 'clues' of Hitler Studies to the persecution and mass murder of the Jewish people; instead he remains mystified and fascinated by the 'image-gloss' and mystery of his chosen subject:

> Every semester I arranged for a screening of background footage. This consisted of propaganda films, scenes shot at party congresses, outtakes from mystical epics featuring parades of gymnasts and mountaineers—a collection I'd edited into an impressionistic eighty-minute documentary. Crowd scenes predominated. Close-up jostled shots of thousands of people outside a stadium after a Goebbels speech, people surging, massing, bursting through the traffic. (*WN*: 25)

This selective response to the Nazi parades and propaganda exercises can be explained by considering the narrative production of history. Jack cannot recognise Jewish persecution because his own montage of the past has displaced suffering and death. In other words, critical methodology, narrative craft and visual impression have supplanted comprehensive factual consideration, and so balanced historical analysis gives way to the aesthetic mode indicative of the 'waning of our historicity'. The atrocities of the Holocaust appear to have been engulfed by Jack's narrative interpretation of Nazi tyranny as a 'mystical epic', to the extent that human aberrations and violent events have been neutralised and assimilated by personal rendering.

The Historians' Debate of the early 1980s caused serious public controversy because leading cultural critics and historians began to consider whether valid accounts of the Holocaust could be achieved via written historical accounts. These concerns stemmed from the thought that personal agendas and potential revisionist motives could contaminate narrative history and events of the past, as Dominick LaCapra has argued:

> The views of revisionist historians were [...] symptomatic of a neonationalist resurgence that was most prominent on the part of conservative forces that wanted to rewrite that Nazi past in order to provide a 'positive' or affirmative German identity in the present.[26]

Narrative history is subject to interpretation and factual imbalance if used to serve personal and political objectives such as the neonationalist and conservative agendas LaCapra outlines as responsible for a Nazi 'rewrite'; however the narrative form can

[26] Dominick La Capra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 43.

also be employed to confront and 'work through' personal traumas by considering the importance of interpretation upon past and present understanding. The Holocaust debate is primarily an issue of subject positions, contextualisation and objectivity because these variables will produce different intonations and doctrines. Most importantly, though, it is important to remember that the inflections produced by different theoretical perspectives possess the power to alter narrative representations of events. Saul Friedlander has noted that attempts to integrate the Nazi period into everyday social history could potentially cause the 'relativization' of humanitarian crimes:

> For the historian, the widening and nuancing of the picture is of the essence. But the 'historicization' [...] could not mean so much a widening of the picture, as a 'shift of focus'. From that perspective, the insistence on [...] long-range social trends could indeed relativize what I still consider as the decisive historiographical approach to that period.[27]

The selective bias functioning within containment culture is comparable with this re-working and 'relativization' of history, because damaging events and political atrocities may be 'glossed over' or removed from official accounts through the 'shift of focus' and 'nuancing' of which Friedlander speaks. Similarly, Alan Nadel's discussion of nuclear containment highlights how 'officially sanctioned' meta-narratives have functioned to select certain ruling historical interpretations in competition with socio-historical diversity: 'divided in this way, meta-narratives become particularly legible as discourses that function to separate *substance* from *waste*, to select events that will be represented as history, and to affect the repetition of privileged narratives'.[28] Just as the political inflections surrounding the Historians' debate have had the power to alter interpretations of the Holocaust and shift the historiographical focus, so does the nuclear containment narrative have the capability to select the events that will constitute the future historical record.

In this sense, containment narratives have had the power to unify and codify the US nation, while promoting those narrative accounts beneficial for the nuclear, technological and general military-economic power relations of the late-capitalist moment. However, nuclear containment narratives differ from the 'relativization' of the Holocaust because rather than attempt to re-intepret an event that has already

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[27] Saul Friedlander, *An Essay on Nazism: Reflections on Kitsch and Death*, (London: Harper Collins, 1984), 104.

[28] Nadel, *Containment Culture*, 4 (Nadel's emphases).

taken place, containment systems attempt to historicise and record an event that has not taken place, and that in doing so would mean the end of history altogether.[29] For Nadel, then, the power of nuclear discourse is integral to notions of postmodernity because it consumes history and 'renders impossible' the conditions for reliable historical accounts. Although the relativization of the Historians' debate and the attempts of containment narratives to historicise an event that has not taken place render the same concerns about the validity of written history, they also differ in the sense that one tries to efface past events beyond reasonable comprehension, while the other attempts to assimilate a potential future event that is otherwise unrepresentable.

If we return to the novel, then, we can understand that Jack's academic career is built upon this revisionist impulse, the drive to record and interpret those aspects of the historical record that he views as privileged or integral. However, contrary to those historians instigating politically inflected narratives of the past, Jack's apparent disregard for accounts of the Holocaust and the horrors of the fascist regime do not stem from such specific political motivation. Rather, his study of Hitler is a symptom of the general weakening of historical memory contemporaneous with simulated Cold War containment narratives. His denial of a comprehensive historiography is not necessarily a voluntary condition but a consequence of the disorientation resulting from containment narratives in the first place. Ironically, it is this type of subject disorientation that enables the postmodern containment narrative to replicate and disseminate as a privileged historical account. This occurs because the individual no longer possesses the critical skill to challenge and refute knowledge claims within a system where signifier and signified no longer relate to one another.

This fictionalisation of Jack's subjective disorientation relates to the question I posed earlier, on the extent to which containment conditions lead to the loss of historicity described by Fredric Jameson. As these examples of Jack's academic pursuits and local community experience suggest, such disorientation is both a voluntary and involuntary condition central to containment society and identity. The novel's containment culture is a direct result of the military-technological relations responsible for an involuntary historical disintegration in the present. However, a voluntary submission to containment subjectivity also operates to weaken the socio-historical artefact. For Jack and his family, containment identity provides a kind of

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[29] Ibid., 4.

blissful ignorance, a historical weakening that reasserts the familiar and eradicates threats, hostility, difference and ambiguity. These conditions indicate that the containment culture functions as a symptom of, and reaction to the Cold War historical unconscious dislocating the political content of everyday life. Subsequently, Jack relies on the facts of Hitler's life and death as a means to grasp onto something secure in contrast with the ambiguity and threat residing on the borders of his containment existence. He recounts the smallest details of Hitler's past, as if they were a part of some over-arching scheme designed to repair the breaks and fissures in his containment identity: 'Hitler called himself the lonely wanderer out of nothingness [...] spoke to people in endless monologues, free-associating, as if the language came from some vastness beyond the world and he was simply the medium of revelation' (*WN*: 72). These Hitler sound-bites work to further emphasise Jack's dislocation from the balanced historical record because they appear in the text as isolated facts and interjections divorced from context. As the novel progresses and Jack's containment identity is strained under the pressure of ambiguity and domestic threat, we recognise that his reliance upon privileged history is also compromised by these domestic pressures and the confusions generated by a return of the historically repressed. Therefore, we must turn our attention to the officially sanctioned narratives and references framing Jack's experience and negating his critical judgment.

Media Risk Containment

Jack's containment identity and socio-historical disorientation also supports his assertion that political atrocities, disasters and personal tragedies can only happen beyond national borders, typically in Third World Countries, and that the strength and security of middle-class American identity is the very reason that individuals in privileged societal positions have nothing to fear:

> These things happen to poor people who live in exposed areas. Society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and man-made disasters [...] I'm a college professor. Did you ever see a college professor rowing a boat down his own street in one of those TV floods? (*WN*: 114)

Jack's assertion about the poor and unfortunate living in exposed areas is undermined by the nature of his rhetorical questioning. By framing his statement with a glib remark about college professors in televised floods he exposes the underlying insecurity compromising his containment identity. This parochial self-delusion that educated people living in affluent areas are unlikely to suffer the main impact of man-made and natural disasters is supported by the flow of information circulating within the containment system, the surplus of mass media reports and images seemingly confirming that disasters only happen elsewhere and to unfortunate people. Jack's sense of security and enclosure is enforced by television representation because images of poverty and suffering in distant countries work to accentuate the official narratives of American strength and superiority. The novel emphasises that television media is one of the primary means of comprehending contemporary existence, and that spectacles of violence and catastrophe can be used to unite the nation into a communal gaze. The TV disaster should inspire a level of identification and sorrow, but Jack is mostly gratified that his status as an American citizen safeguards him from natural catastrophe and technological failure. This narrow-minded view of global suffering and the subsequent reinforcement of containment narratives it invokes can be explained in terms of the over-abundance of banal information circulating throughout postmodern society. Subjects like Jack are anaesthetised and disoriented by this decentred profusion of cultural material, and as a result they cannot frame their perspective with socio-historical significance. The surplus of information circulating in this system negates any attempt at social enlightenment because the sheer volume and velocity of its dissemination cancels out meaning with uniformity, a condition Baudrillard identifies in *Fatal Strategies*:

> The masses are also made of this useless gluttony of information that claims to enlighten when it only encumbers space and cancels itself out in silent equivalence. No one can do anything about this circularity of the masses and information. The two phenomena fit each other: the masses have no opinions, nor does information inform them: one and the other continue monstrously to feed each other – the speed of the rotation of information increasing the weight of the masses, but not at all their level of consciousness.[30]

This obese system of de-contextualised media consumption by the masses increases the volume of cultural information circulating from one network to another.

[30] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 91.

However, this excess does nothing for cultural consciousness and critical depth. As far as Baudrillard is concerned, the over-representation of war and catastrophe on a global scale is central to this state of unconsciousness and public ennui because even though we are exposed to duplicate narratives of nuclear destruction and technological death, we still cannot really imagine or understand these totalising acts as realities:

> There is no necessity nor credibility for us in the events of [...] terrorism, inflation and nuclear war. We are exposed to an over-representation of these things by the media, but still we can't really imagine them. All of that, for us, is simply obscene, since images in the media are made to be seen but not really looked at, hallucinated in silhouette, absorbed—like sex absorbs the voyeur: from a distance.[31]

By its very nature as an act of total destruction, we cannot understand the absolute implications of nuclear war. Because the nuclear event is disseminated through media channels we even become disoriented from its representation, since media images fulfil only a superficial desire to view without engaging in critical assessment. Consequently, the subject indulges in a voyeuristic gaze which takes in images of death and destruction without ever really interpreting them beyond surface-level.

The Gladney family gather together on a Friday evening to watch television and eat Chinese takeaway, an act of ritualised mass media consumption. Babette has instigated 'TV night' as a family tradition, a conditioned and repetitive norm intended to 'de-glamorize' the children's perception of media representation. However, contrary to Babette's intention, this ritual and repetitive act causes the family's reliance upon television to regulate personal experience and collective awareness. Unable to piece together the facts of the present in any other way, and disoriented from historical precedents, the family formulate their subject-position through television consumption. Earlier in the novel, Jack considers how television is the only medium through which the security and enclosure of his local community can be compromised, the only means of disturbing the contained domestic scene by exposing the 'torments', 'fears' and 'secret desires' existing beyond national enclosure. Contrary to Babette's belief that this collective viewing exercise strips media representation of glamour, it effectively encourages a form of technological

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[31] Ibid., 65.

fascination and dread that captivates the children and the parents alike. The family are engrossed by disaster footage on network news because it induces the aforementioned 'anaesthetising' effect. This media-induced de-sensitivity reinforces containment identity and detaches the individual from personal risk and the constraints of mortality:

> That night, a Friday, we gathered in front of the set, as was the custom and the rule, with take-out Chinese. There were floods, earthquakes, mud slides, erupting volcanoes. We'd never before been so attentive to our duty [...] Heinrich was not sullen, I was not bored [...] We were otherwise silent, watching houses slide into the ocean, whole villages crackle and ignite in a mass of advancing lava. Every disaster made us wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping. (*WN*: 64)

The family crave these increasingly horrifying scenes because they are conditioned to believe that their subject status protects them from misfortune. Jack reminisces about how the family gathered in front of disaster scenes as part of some 'duty' and 'custom' designed to reassert the safety of the contained sphere. These self-delusions of infallibility are supported by the media flows complementing containment culture, flows that disseminate and replicate a surplus of information. As a consequence of this system of knowledge saturation, the family no longer possess the critical distance to associate the reality behind the de-contextualised image. Media power is strengthened by the representation of natural and man-made catastrophes because viewing figures are maximised by shocking media 'spectacles'. Moreover, media information flows maximise the primacy of containment culture by intensifying communal image addiction, and silencing the populace with a plethora of information defusing opposition with equivalence. Initially, Jack is puzzled and concerned about his family's reaction to these violent images so he seeks the advice of Alfonse Stompanato, the chairman of American environments at the university. Alfonse suggests that people are intrigued and entertained by tragedy because 'we need an occasional catastrophe to break up the incessant bombardment of information' (*WN*: 66). Paradoxically, the 'occasional catastrophe' impacts upon the overload responsible for this 'incessant bombardment' in the first place; thus perpetuating a cycle of knowledge saturation and disorientation. Alfonse insists that these images are fascinating so long as they are happening elsewhere and to other people; therefore supporting the narrative that disaster, death and destruction can only happen outside personal and national boundaries. The externalisation of mass-

dying via television broadcasts thus aids the maintenance and dissemination of containment codes by highlighting the relative safety of the television spectator. Jack and his family are brought together by television viewing; an act that they believe strengthens familial bonds and therefore upholds and sustains the tenets of collective identity. However, as Fredric Jameson has noted, this type of media-reliant behaviour

> effectively abolish[es] any practical sense of the future and of the collective project, thereby abandoning the thinking of future change to fantasies of sheer catastrophe and inexplicable cataclysm, from visions of 'terrorism' on the social level to those of cancer on the personal.[32]

On the surface, Jack and his family feel integrated into their society and shielded from threats by watching these external images from the confines of their contained environment. However, this voyeuristic consumption of death and destruction distances the family from any real collective project by highlighting the alienation sustaining the Gladney's conception of communal American life. As Jameson highlights, this abolition of the collective project begins with shared fantasies of catastrophe on the social level, but these fantasies may also manifest in visions of degeneration on a personal level; a symptom that Jack and his family will display throughout the course of the narrative.

Jeremy Green's study of spectacles of violence in DeLillo's fiction draws attention to the way that 'acts of violence performed in a stylised way are typical of a culture of simulation and repetition', meaning that violent events and disaster footage become 'cinematic episodes' causing the 'routinization' and 'banalization' of violence and the 'weakening of historical memory'.[33] In the media-dominated age historical representation is in part controlled by the flow and repetition of images, and therefore individual and collective experience of history is dictated by image reproduction:

> To the notion of broadcast disaster as a culturally binding form, DeLillo introduces a historical dimension: in the past, collective identities were formed around iconic celebrity images; now they are also established around repeated spectacles of violence and catastrophe.[34]

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[32] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 46.
[33] Jeremy Green, 'Disaster Footage: Spectacles of Violence in DeLillo's Fiction', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3, (1999), 573.
[34] Ibid., 573.

These postmodern conditions have helped instigate the breakdown of coherent historicity, and as a result the Gladney family can only shape personal experience via external reproductions of technological failure and sanitised human suffering. Whereas previously collective identities were reinforced by the cult of celebrity and affirmative images of national success, now in this climate of socio-historical uncertainty, all hope of a positive collective project is lost as identities are formed around acts of violence committed against others. However, despite the efforts made to contain and project the consequences of disaster elsewhere, this fascination with televised death ultimately accentuates Jack and Babette's personal weakness and susceptibility. In spite of the proposed comfort and security generated by the reproduction of televised disaster, it is obvious that the human body has become ensnared by technological systems, often with devastating effects. Simulated containment conditions have failed to account for the sudden impact of technological collapse within imposed borders. The growing list of hazardous incidents, accidents and biotechnological threats occurring within the Gladney's comfort zone demonstrates that nuclear containment culture is subject to interruption and breakdown from within.

The deconstruction of personal identity in *White Noise* exposes the 'collective false consciousness' of national identity. Therefore, the novel questions the simulation of Cold War anxieties and identity codes during the Reagan era by displaying the historical disorientation contemporaneous with the continuing enclosure of American culture and beliefs. The socio-cultural origins of these containment simulations can, in part, be attributed to a figurative state of national 'germophobia' during the 1950s, the fear of a highly contagious communist 'disease' which threatened to contaminate the national 'body'. This fear of infection helped to enforce dominant containment narratives upon the population by generating a sense of threat based around the potential usurpation of American life by degenerate forces. This figurative anxiety, combined with the actual threat generated by nuclear testing and potential warfare, proved potent enough to merge the codes of bodily and national health. In this sense, physical health and well-being became inextricably tied with the rhetoric of national security, and accordingly a dominant American subject position was created to withstand external threats. Because the type and level of threat has been subject to change throughout the Cold War, so has containment

identity been subject to a number of narrative shifts and alterations in keeping with the matrix of opposition.

Therefore, individuals like Jack Gladney must contend with a further level of disorientation and uncertainty in addition to the deterioration of history by containment simulation. Identity becomes a fluid and unstable concept, influenced by the perceived threats and degenerate forces of that particular moment. The aforementioned simulated 'social body' works to expel forms of contamination by the Other, not only to thwart the spread of communism but to eradicate abject, deviant and corrupting behaviour such as drug use and homosexuality on both a local and national scale. The revival of these structures of self-enclosure during the 1980s aided the potency of Reagan's symbolic rhetoric of defence and domestic reform, by stressing the need to deter risks to national integrity. The novel, then, deconstructs this replication of national containment identity by threatening Jack Gladney's self-autonomy and lifestyle choices with a return of the repressed, the unspeakable, unquantifiable and yet all-encompassing fears indicative of an era of potential nuclear destruction.

Initially, Jack is content within this state of parochial enclosure, and accepts unquestioningly what we recognise as the simulacra of national Cold War codes and behavioural constraints. However, he becomes subject to an identity crisis that manifests a number of anxieties and paranoia about personal safety within the domestic sphere. From the beginning of the novel he registers a sense of unexplained dread filtering throughout domestic life:

> I woke to the grip of a death sweat. Defenseless against my own racking fears. A pause at the center of my being. I lacked the will and physical strength to get out of bed and move through the dark house, clutching walls and stair rails. To feel my way, reinhabit my body, re-enter the world. Sweat trickled down my ribs. The digital reading on the clock-radio was 3:51. Always odd numbers at times like this. What does it mean? Is death odd numbered? (*WN*: 47)

These 'racking fears' are so consuming that even the time on the clock radio sparks existential concerns and questions about the interconnections and overall meaning of life and death. Synonymous with the timer on a nuclear device, the digital reading on the clock takes on some unknown significance for Jack. The odd numbers appear to relate to some over-arching conspiracy or scheme because this nuclear association remains on the periphery of wilful understanding. As a result of his unconscious

condition, Jack has become a paranoid subject sensing ambivalent significance in everyday objects. On the one hand these symptoms signify Jack's paralysing out of body acknowledgement of dissolution, but on the other hand they constitute a subconscious questioning of the artificiality of autonomous selfhood. Jack's initial acceptance of a safe and contained individual and communal identity is gradually giving way to the fears and paranoia glossed over by narratives of segregation, American exceptionalism and enclosure. As a result, he feels insecure and despite the comforts and safety of the domestic realm, daily life constitutes a risk to personal health and safety. Paradoxically, the containment codes originally anaesthetising Jack's fear exacerbate personal anxiety by repressing concerns that should be confronted and 'worked through'.

This consuming obsession with death signifies a subconscious response to living in the nuclear age, thus causing the Gladney family to focus upon exposure to health risks and the subsequent deterioration of the human body. The potential for nuclear obliteration is diffused into an everyday domestic panic, a condition that paradoxically jeopardises and yet perpetuates narratives of containment. On the one hand, nuclear threat provides the basis and justification for narratives of containment and Cold War cultural conditioning, but, on the other hand, nuclear threat has the capability to break down these narratives by projecting a permanent state of emergency onto the domestic domain. Hence, containment narratives and identities are subject to a state of flux depending on the level and type of threat pervading the domestic scene at any given time. This intangible threat becomes prefigured within a variety of biotechnological domestic risks. Heinrich, undoubtedly named after the SS leader Heinrich Himmler, becomes a focus for this unhealthy obsession because Jack believes his teenaged son is prematurely losing his hair:

> Heinrich's hairline is beginning to recede. I wonder about this. Did his mother consume some kind of gene-piercing substance when she was pregnant? Am I at fault somehow? Have I raised him, unwittingly, in the vicinity of a chemical dump site, in the path of air currents that carry industrial wastes capable of scalp degeneration, glorious sunsets? [...] Man's guilt in history and in the tides of his own blood has been complicated by technology, the daily seeping falsehearted death. (*WN*: 22)

Jack's perception of man's historical guilt and the 'tides of blood' complicated by technology appear reminiscent of Jameson's thoughts about the blood and terror

constituting the military-industrial complex.[35] Although he is unaware of the implicit connections between military-technological development and his own daily anxiety, Jack is able to sense the 'falsehearted death' seeping through domestic technologies. Jack and Babette experience this overwhelming fear of death to such an extent that Jack begins to question whether he has put his family at risk by unwittingly exposing them to toxic substances within the household. They begin to feel besieged by biological and technological risks in the home and local community because the nuclear threat residing on the margins of their consciousness begins to manifest within small-scale technological hazards. In the early stages of the novel, Denise reprimands Babette for purchasing chewing gum because it has been proven to cause cancer in laboratory animals, the local grade school is evacuated because the children were suffering from 'headaches and eye irritations, tasting metal in their mouths' (*WN*: 35), and the radio urges the local community to boil water before consumption. The visibility of the small-scale health risk denotes the reproduction of Cold War 'germophobia', because citizens develop a sense of paranoia about sources of 'contamination' and succumb to containment narratives as a means to maintain personal and national 'integrity'. However, this condition perpetuates a culture of risk by inciting a perpetual state contingency designed to justify systems of Cold War regulation.

Even though Jack is exposed to a toxic spillage during a localised disaster, *White Noise* does not centre on one 'technological accident', but accentuates the widespread nature of twentieth-century risk society in general. The work of sociologist Ulrich Beck, whose analysis of risk society is based on the changing nature of global relations sheds further light on the novel's relentless risk culture. Beck proposes that the nature of the modern technological risk differs from earlier concerns because 'social risk positions' have evolved.[36] Previously, the wealthy had been geographically and financially contained from the natural dangers and catastrophes experienced by the poor, but the contemporary risk has taken the form of a global phenomenon via pollution, global warming and other forms of environmental decay; therefore even privileged social groups face the potential for misfortune and suffering.

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[35] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 5.

[36] Quoted in Alan Scott, 'Risk Society or Angst Society? Two Views of Risk Consciousness and Community', in *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*, eds. Barbara Adam et al., (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 36.

These analyses can be extended to address the potential consequences of living within a networked technological society based upon incessant nuclear competition. Military network technologies, weapons systems and strategies of defence have been developed to fulfil the dual purpose of regulating binary Cold War opposition while providing the justification for domestic containment. However, such systems and innovations have had the potential to create turbulence and social instability through the risk of total breakdown. Obviously, the testing and possession of nuclear weaponry poses a substantial risk to domestic safety, but official narratives of containment and deterrence have provided the justification for this type of arms escalation and social control. Nuclear research and military biotechnological development is entrenched in institutional rules and practices, a factor ultimately meaning that the nuclear industry is concealed from public view. As Alan Irwin et al. have noted with reference to this clandestine system: 'Turning first to consider the public saliency of ongoing disputes about nuclear weaponry, it would seem that the risks engendered by such technologies have been all but neglected to the dustbin of history'.[37] This level of historical effacement is directed by paradoxical discourses of 'arms control'. When these are combined with the public's inability to interpret nuclear risk directly, it leads not only to the projection of that risk onto the domestic realm, but also causes the subject's inability to differentiate between simulated contingency and actual disaster. Disoriented by the unstable narratives propagating containment culture and deterrence, and anaesthetised by the supporting media representations of catastrophe, subjects like Jack Gladney are unable to assess the difference between the actual event and its simulation. Subsequently, a state of permanent preparedness for large-scale disaster prevails where the simulated event becomes interchangeable with the actual disaster. DeLillo addresses this condition in *White Noise* through the 'airborne toxic event', a tank car derailment leaking noxious chemicals into the surrounding atmosphere. The event conveys the de-realisation of nuclear risk, and the indefinable threat posed by biological weapons development by projecting the potential for mass devastation onto a chance technological accident. As I shall demonstrate, the Gladneys' mystified response to this accident emphasises how contingency planning has superseded reality with simulated responses devoid of historical foundation.

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[37] Alan Irwin, et al., 'Nuclear Risks: Three Problematics', in Ibid., 79.

Community Risk Containment

The abrupt interruption of the chemical accident punctures the established domestic scene a third of the way through the novel; thus forming one incident amidst many perceived domestic risks. The event takes on a cinematic quality because DeLillo cuts the action into the main body of the text, and the narrative begins to use the exaggerated rhetoric of the media news broadcast to describe the development of the spillage. Initially the radio reports that Heinrich avidly listens to convey the derailment of a tank car and the smoke rising from the scene of the wreckage. Gradually this accident becomes a 'toxic spillage', then a 'feathery plume', and eventually an 'airborne toxic event' (*WN*: 111). In *White Noise* no social comprehension exists beyond the simulacra of the event, and because of this de-contextualisation the Gladneys seem to accept their 'role' in the cinematic incident. Jack and Babette fail to recognise the seriousness of the situation until the very last minute because they can only formulate personal experience via the selective representation that surrounds them. The family continue to listen to the radio broadcast and even watch the toxic cloud form over the city, but fail to pay much heed to the sirens outside: 'It wasn't until a second noise became audible in the pulse of the powerful sirens that we thought to effect a pause in our little episode of decorous hysteria' (*WN*: 118). As the disaster progresses the family actually seem disappointed by lack of national media coverage and sensationalism surrounding the proceedings. Consequently unable to orient what they are experiencing via television discourses and official narratives of containment, the Gladneys simply do not know how to respond to the disaster in a sensible manner. Furthermore, Jack's reliance upon visual recognition and 'mediaspeak' to interpret the action de-realises the event even further because now he can only conceive of the evacuation as a live television 'episode' rather than a legitimate threat.

After twenty minutes of indecision and disagreement, the family decide to follow the instructions bellowing from a loudspeaker to 'evacuate all places of residence', due to the incoming 'cloud of deadly chemicals' (*WN*: 119) by heading for the abandoned boy-scout camp, where the Red Cross are dispensing 'juice and coffee'. En route, Jack decides to get out of the car to fill it with gas and in the process walks straight into the toxic cloud, blatantly placing himself at risk of contamination. The Gladneys are continually divorced from proceedings and cannot

comprehend the failure of technologies because, as conduits for containment, they separate the subject from proceedings even further. Even though the family cannot instantly understand the magnitude of the toxic event without the intervention of media representation, with narrative hindsight Jack can differentiate the randomness of the natural disaster from the potential chaos of human device: 'This was a death made in the laboratory, defined and measurable, but we thought of it at the time in a simple and primitive way, as some seasonal perversity of the earth like a flood or tornado, something not subject to control' (*WN*: 127). Only after his self-inflicted exposure to potentially lethal toxins can Jack begin to recognise the ironies and inconsistencies of a system of containment and deterrence built upon the potential for man-made technological disaster; a system ill-equipped for such disasters because it supersedes the real event with simulated contingency scenarios and externalised representations of catastrophe. In retrospect, Jack recognises that acts of natural devastation seem more acceptable than products of man-made techno-scientific intervention. In this sense, the 'defined and measurable' products of laboratory development alluding to biological and nuclear weapons precision can be absorbed by the natural forces beyond human manipulation and control.

The mobilisation of the civilian population to a makeshift camp away from the scene of the spillage is reminiscent of the conditions associated with the movement of political and environmental refugees. By making this association the reader is faced with historical culpability as it resurfaces through narrative events and situational resemblance. Ironically, the Gladney family's decision to leave the family home and follow the advice of the loudspeakers reflects the televised scenes of dispossession and suffering they are used to watching together on a Friday night; thus emphasising how the boundaries of personal containment have been compromised. At the camp, Jack is told to provide information about the nature of his exposure to the chemical substance. During this consultation he learns that the evacuation is being managed by the state contingency programme, 'SIMUVAC', an acronym for 'simulated evacuation'. Jack points out that this event is real and not a simulation, only to be told that they are using the toxic spillage as a model for future simulations. The event is thus so de-realised by this chain of simulacra that the SIMUVAC representatives fail to recognise the potential for actual fatality:

> The insertion curve isn't as smooth as we would like. There's a probability excess. Plus which we don't have our victims laid out where we'd want them if this was an actual simulation. In other words we're forced to take our victims as we find them [...] You have to make allowances for the fact that everything we see tonight is real. (*WN*: 139)

The toxic event has not produced any real deaths and Jack's exposure, although potentially lethal, fails to produce any immediate symptoms. The shift to present tense narration at this point highlights the immediacy of the contingency situation, and yet there is little evidence to suggest a state of emergency. This lack of fatalities and mass-devastation impacts upon SIMUVAC's computerised probability exercise, and so they set about modifying the data in order to cast a detailed projection for future simulations. In this sense, the real event appears less traumatic than the subsequent simulated copies it will generate. During Jack's consultation, the SIMUVAC representative inputs personal details into a statistical database such as age, medical history, and the conditions of his exposure to the substance leaking from the tank car, a chemical referred to as 'Nyodene D'. The database prints out probability statistics relating to Jack's exposure, but surprisingly this information fails to provide Jack with a tangible sense of life and death. From this moment onward he is left with an overwhelming uncertainty about the seriousness of his condition because fifty years of lived experience have been instantaneously reduced to charts of indecipherable data. This confusion and uncertainty only serves to highlight the general anxiety attached to Jack's fear of risk and fatality before the toxic event; therefore emphasising the culture of risk paradoxically developing in conjunction with containment. At the beginning of this chapter, I questioned how the containment disorientation caused by the Cold War historical unconscious impacts on collective subjectivity and the assessment of cultural data. Primarily, Jack's reliance upon collective identification, and the mass consumption of televised spectacles of disaster, demonstrates how collective subjectivity becomes a method for eradicating threats to personal and national security. However, this impulse to project disaster onto external bodies causes a representational dislocation whereby the individual can no longer recognise and react to hazardous situations. Consequently, the cultural data that should forewarn and safeguard the Gladney family becomes implicated in the risk scenario. This is because the collective subject has become incapable of assessing and differentiating between internal and external threats.

Previous studies of *White Noise* have focused upon the similarities between the 'airborne toxic event' and the accident at the Three Mile Island (TMI) nuclear reactor near Middletown, Pennsylvania, on 28th March 1979.[38] These studies have described TMI as a precursor to the meltdown at Chernobyl in 1986, but what they have not addressed is that such events highlight how national containment propagates its own cycle of disaster. During the Three Mile Island incident, a chain of complex factors led to a partial meltdown of the TMI-2 reactor core meaning that radioactive waste escaped from the facility and polluted the local atmosphere. However, according to the fact sheet provided by the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) only very small off-site releases of radioactivity occurred during the incident, and these were allegedly contained with the minimum of harm to the local environment. This official report details a determinist summary of the accident suggesting that certain technologies create an inevitable level of risk and that sufficient forms of management and contingency are operating at federal and state levels to 'contain' disasters and minimise civilian threat:

> The NRC's regional office in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, was notified at 7:45a.m. on March 28. By 8:00, NRC Headquarters in Washington D.C. was alerted and the NRC Operations Center in Bethesda, Maryland, was activated. The regional office promptly dispatched the first team of inspectors to the site and other agencies, such as the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency, also mobilized their response teams. Helicopters hired by TMI's owner, General Public Utilities Nuclear, and the Department of Energy were sampling radioactivity in the atmosphere above the plant by midday [...] At 9:15 a.m., the White House was notified and at 11:00 a.m., all non-essential personnel were ordered off the plant's premises.[39]

The details of the NRC fact sheet focus public attention upon the containment operations put into action after the event and the prompt response and dispatch times of the government agencies involved in the containment operation. However, the fact sheet fails to consider the cause of the accident in terms of prior management and communications failures. The potential for disaster began when the plant experienced a mechanical or electrical failure which caused the main feedwater pumps to stop running, causing the system to overheat. As a result of this chain of events, the reactor automatically shut down. Further failure occurred when:

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[38] See Glen A. Love, 'Ecocriticism and Science: Toward Consilience', *New Literary History*, 30.3, (1999) 561-576 and Bill Luckin, 'Nuclear Meltdown and the Culture of Risk', *Technology and Culture*, 46.2, (2005), 393-399.
[39] NRC Fact Sheet on the Three Mile Island Accident, United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission, accessed via: http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/doc-collections/fact-sheets/3mileisle.html.

The pilot-operated relief valve opened. The valve should have closed when the pressure decreased by a certain amount, but it did not. Signals available to the operator failed to show that the valve was still open. As a result, cooling water poured out of the stuck-open valve and caused the reactor to overheat [...] There was no instrument that showed the level of coolant in the core. Instead, the operators judged the level of water in the core by the level in the pressurizer, and since it was high, they assumed that the core was properly covered with coolant.[40]

Because the warning systems were confusing, the operators did not realise that adequate cooling was not available and as a result the nuclear fuel began to melt. Fortunately, a massive release of radiation into the surrounding environment was avoided because the integrity of the containment unit was not breached. So while the NRC took a technological determinist stance with regard to the accident at Three Mile Island, design faults and management oversights nevertheless created the conditions for this accident to take place. Andrew Hopkins' study of accident management at the site suggests that:

Although the particular sequence of events at Three Mile Island was unprecedented, *sections* of the event sequence had occurred previously. There had, in short, been warnings. Had these warnings been properly attended to, the Three Mile Island accident would not have occurred.[41]

It seems implicit within this particular containment structure that contingency and crisis management took precedence over daily running and safety procedure, and therefore the warning signs of technological failure were lost to the potential crisis scenario. By creating a hyperreal mode of preparation, the containment impulse embedded within American control systems effectively worked to create its own disaster. In one sense, containment structures are strengthened by threats such as natural disasters and technological breakdowns, because the binary logic of national enclosure seeks to characterise potential threats and failures as external concerns and opposition divorced from internal security. When a disaster occurs within the enclosed domestic arena, containment narratives fail to provide a sufficient explanation of events. The integrity of national boundaries is put into question due this denial of susceptibility and possible weakness. Therefore, the containment narrative may be redeemed and reinforced by the implementation of 'contingency plans' and clean-up operations to minimise consequences and effects.

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Andrew Hopkins, 'Was Three Mile Island a Normal Accident?', *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 9.2, (June, 2001), 68.

Jean Baudrillard proposes that this system of prevention attempts to capture the 'symbolic energy' of 'material destruction', and that the potential scenario of disaster and evacuation would release greater levels of panic than actual catastrophic events:

Here we fall into full derision: lacking a real catastrophe, it will be easy to unleash a simulated one, one which will be as good as the first and can even replace it [...] On the pretense of prevention, they materialize all the consequences in the immediate future. How true it is that we cannot rely on chance to bring on catastrophe: we have to find its programmed equivalent in the preventive measures.[42]

Three Mile Island cannot be described as a simulated event, but the official response to the accident scenario can be understood as a product of the 'preventive measures' Baudrillard links to the programmed catastrophe. In this instance, prevention, preparation and the spotlight upon potential threat created the scene for disaster by taking precedence over daily procedure and safety routine; thus acts of prevention become self-fulfilling prophecies of future catastrophe. Similarly, the 'state program' SIMUVAC in *White Noise*, stages disasters and crisis response activities as a means to plan and anticipate the actual event. As the following section will expound, the real catastrophe is treated as a strategic training exercise for future disasters in a system where deterrence overshadows reality.

Simulated Disaster and Nuclear Contingency

In a satirical fictionalisation of this phenomenon of preventive simulation, the SIMUVAC representatives return to Blacksmith shortly after the toxic spillage to retrospectively rehearse the evacuation process:

On the way home I drove down Elm intending to make a quick stop at the supermarket. The street was full of emergency vehicles. Farther down I saw bodies scattered about. A man with an armband blew a whistle at me and stepped in front of my car. I glimpsed other men in Mylex suits. Stretcher-bearers ran across the street. When the man with the whistle drew closer, I was able to make out the letters on his armband: SIMUVAC. (*WN*: 204)

Local community members have been enlisted by SIMUVAC to take on the role of disaster 'victims', and so when Jack drives down the street he sees bodies scattered about and emergency vehicles waiting on standby. The SIMUVAC officials have

[42] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 21-22.

gone to great lengths to create a simulated disaster for future preventive modelling, but ironically, the disorientation caused by this chain of simulation overwhelms reality and reduces the subject's ability to interpret the immediacy of the crisis situation. Furthermore, the events of Three Mile Island are embedded into the toxic event in the way that this fictional scenario reflects the uncertainty of the health hazards faced by the citizens of Harrisburg Pennsylvania. The NRC fact sheet suggests that the levels of radiation detected in the surrounding area posed a minimum long-term threat to health and safety:

> Estimates are that the average dose to about 2 million people in the area was only about 1 millirem. To put this into context, exposure from a full set of chest x-rays is about 6 millirem. Compared to the natural radioactive background dose of about 100-125 millirem per year for the area, the collective dose to the community from the accident was very small.[43]

Despite the NRC's minimal radiation estimates and probability statistics, these official prognoses have failed to dispel panics about radioactivity in the soil and local water supply, hair loss, vomiting, pet deaths and alleged increases in the number of cancer cases per year. Advice given during the incident about the evacuation of 'vulnerable' members of society, namely pregnant women and pre-school-age children within a five mile radius of the site has continued to feed speculation about the release of radioactive gases into the atmosphere. These concerns are depicted in the novel's bio-risk community, and aforementioned symptoms such as Heinrich's hair loss and concerns about the contamination of the water-supply feature throughout the narrative as aspects of an uncertain risk culture. Moreover, the lack of clarity surrounding Jack's exposure to the chemical Nyodene D during the toxic event also reflects the vagueness of official reports and statistics, and the resultant loss of public certainty:

> I had my second medical checkup since the toxic event. No startling numbers on the printout. This death was still too deep to be glimpsed. My doctor, Sundar Chakravarty, asked me about the sudden flurry of checkups. In the past I'd always been afraid to know. (*WN*: 204)

Previously content to maintain a state of containment unconscious, Jack now craves the certainty of a projected life expectancy and so consults with his physician, Dr. Sundar Chakravarty, a minor character whose ethnicity contrasts with Jack's limited

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[43] NRC Fact Sheet on the Three Mile Island Accident, United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

containment identity. Since the toxic event he has sought clarification on the unintelligible statistics produced by SIMUVAC, a quest for deep and meaningful interpretation to ease existential fears. Ironically, now that Jack is ready to face up to reality beyond the boundaries of containment, the answers he requires are beyond explanation. Just as the local community members of Middletown, Pennsylvania have been unable to dispel the sense of panic emanating from the Three Mile Island accident, neither can Jack gain closure on the ramifications of his exposure because he cannot penetrate the layers of data pertaining to his condition.

As seen in response to the accident at Three Mile Island, statistics and reports only served to heighten existing anxieties about health and safety stemming from technological breakdown to all out nuclear war. In this sense, the toxic event and the efforts of SIMUVAC also reflect the contingency plans proposed by Reagan to minimise the catastrophe of nuclear war. During 1981, Thomas Jones, Deputy Under-Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, spoke to the Los Angeles Times about the need for a strong civil defence agenda in the light of U.S./Soviet tensions. He notoriously suggested that the United States could recover from a nuclear strike within two years, and that the civilian population would survive if they built makeshift shelters: 'Dig a hole, cover it with a couple of doors and then throw three feet of dirt on top [...] If there are enough shovels to go around, everybody's going to make it'.[44] These comments once again reflect the lack of insight contained within official defence doctrine because national symbolism has taken precedence over factual investigation. By highlighting these alleged survival chances it was considered that the population would believe in the potential to win a nuclear war. Following these ill-advised comments, the Reagan administration began to consider the role of civil defence as a possible alternative to the mutual liability of assured destruction, and therefore began to devise civilian relocation plans.

In 1982 the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) outlined an elaborate civil defence plan whereby city residents would flee to remote host communities in the event of nuclear attack. These plans were to work on the basis of self-help and community participation, but endorsement and community spirit proved difficult to promote under the shadow of unthinkable nuclear destruction. Statistics have shown that during 1981 sixty percent of Americans thought that they

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[44] Thomas K. Jones' interview with the Los Angeles Times, quoted in *Time Magazine*, (Monday March 29, 1982), accessed via: http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,923242-2,00.html.

would not survive a nuclear attack, and these figures rose by nine percent during 1983.[45] Despite growing concerns, the American people did not want to face the prospect of threats to the stability of daily domestic life. FEMA's contingency plans were to be put into motion at state level, and several relatively small-scale evacuation experiments revealed the difficulties attached to staging such a considerable social programme. Jon Timothy Kelly has described how 'spirited' citizens in the towns of Burlington, Connecticut and Becket, Masschusetts decided to put the relocation plans to the test:

> About 150 spirited Burlington residents drove the 65 miles up Route 8 to Becket, halting on two occasions because autos ran out of gas. Upon reaching the host community, residents were welcomed with the sign, 'Water contaminated cold beer ahead' while two teenagers in surgical masks ominously scanned entrants with Geiger counters. The citizens of Becket saluted the evacuees for carrying out the exercise in less than three of the allotted four hours.[46]

In addition to the ridiculous evacuation scenario played out by the local residents, Kelly also stresses that the host community of Becket was approximately twelve miles from a missile plant, therefore making it a key target for a nuclear strike. DeLillo recreates this ludicrous situation in *White Noise* by conveying the Gladneys' botched evacuation attempt. The similarity between Burlington's evacuation 'rehearsal' and DeLillo's representation of small-town 'simulated evacuation' procedure is clearly striking. Jack's decision to leave the safety of the car to get gas, and SIMUVAC's management of the relocation process replicate the farcical events of September 1982. By creating the perceived conditions of a nuclear strike and attempting to simulate the evacuation of the civilian populace, the dominant containment systems attempted to 'act out' and preclude the actual sequence of nuclear destruction. Containment narratives again create their own disaster, but this time the event has become a simulation for the otherwise unimaginable scene of nuclear war. This simulated evacuation and strategic war-game cannot reflect the reality of nuclear destruction because the event would obliterate all forms of representation and repetition. Consequently, the townsfolk of Burlington and Becket responded to the unfathomable and de-realised government contingency plans with a mock evacuation exercise of their own.

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[45] Ibid.
[46] Jon Timothy Kelly, 'Thinking the Unthinkable: The Civil Defense Plan Debate in the 1980s', presented at the 26th Annual Conference, Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, (June 2000).

These de-contextualised contingency plans stem from the development of what Paul Virilio calls 'pure war' or war of 'deterrence' whereby the possession of 'increasingly sophisticated weaponry deters the enemy more and more', and at this stage war 'is no longer in its execution, but in its preparation'.[47] Virilio identifies the 'fatal coupling' between the U.S. and USSR as the major reason for this escalation of the arms race and the increased threat of nuclear war during the early 1980s. He notes that beneath the rivalry and opposition U.S. and Soviet alienation served to support a unified effort in the 'sophistication' of the 'war-machine'. When referring to the 'war-machine', Virilio means the escalation of military-technological precision underpinning all strategic aspects of the perpetual war of deterrence. Therefore, arms negotiations and agreements actually served to strengthen arms development:

> Agreements between the Americans and the Soviets are agreements on perfecting the war-machine. *That is their only purpose*, period. And they are allied in this responsibility. There is absolutely no remission for either side.[48]

Two systems are at work in the 'mutual' purpose of pure war, the 'system of defense against an enemy' and the 'system of security against a threat'.[49] In *White Noise*, the government sponsored agency SIMUVAC focuses upon the outcome of the simulated event and remains in a state of preparation for a potential disaster. This disaster appears to be a constant threat, and yet it is de-realised in its virtual reproduction. Once again, the novel emphasises how subjects can no longer interpret and differentiate between different kinds of cultural data. In this instance, the simulation and the actual event become cross-wired so that the preparation for potential emergency becomes indistinguishable from the actual event. Hence, SIMUVAC's simulated contingency reflects and perpetuates the 'system of security against a threat' contributing to war-game development. Virilio takes his analysis one step further by noting the power of nuclear deterrence to condition the population and change the nature of the American territory:

> Cities will be evacuated, a diaspora provoked, territories disorganized. It's deregulation. The threat's hypothetical and completely phantasmic nature in the doctrine of national security contributes toward the disintegration of territory. In the name of security, in the name of protection everything is undone,

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[47] Paul Virilio, *Pure War*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 92.
[48] Ibid., 120.
[49] Ibid., 104.

deregulated: economic relations, social relations, sexual relations, relations of money and power. We end up in a state of defeat, without there ever having been a war.[50]

The 'deregulation', 'disorganization' 'disintegration' and 'state of defeat' of which Virilio speaks takes place in the name of national security and deterrence. The social, economic and trans-political conditions contributing to the perpetuation of the nuclear war-game eventually spawn societal non-development, the devolution of social and economic relations and the overall disorientation of the masses. As the arms race speeds up, and the technological and military-economic networks supporting the machinery of war expand, so does the collective social project de-escalate in order to maintain this system of 'phantasmic' war. Virilio's state of 'pure war' is not simply the development of nuclear weapons, but the maintenance of an intricate military-economic and social system designed to propagate and perfect the logistics of the war-game. In this sense, the consumer products, media information flows and social relations circulating in the domestic realm each transmit and disseminate this military-industrial infrastructure. Bewildered and unsettled by this social de-escalation and the waning of historicity implicit within postmodernity, the Gladney family attempt to orient themselves and interpret the 'layers of psychic data' contained in consumer items and household activities. Hence, *White Noise* depicts the semiotic struggle the subject faces when caught within a system of social containment and permanent military-industrial perfection. In order to demonstrate this semiotic struggle, and the interconnections the novel infers between domesticity, consumerism and Cold War military development, we must now focus our attention on the relevance of Jack's compulsive shopping habits.

Consumerism and the Military Complex

Prior to his exposure to the Nyodene Derivative during the 'airborne toxic event', Jack was incapable of recognising the immediacy and magnitude of disaster because he was subject to a fragmented experience of history, culture and society as refracted through narratives and norms of containment. Accordingly, the superficial distractions of television and shopping provided the Gladneys with a false sense of

[50] Ibid., 104.

comfort and security, because these banal activities paradoxically anaesthetised the psychological fallout of a nuclear containment society:

> I shopped with reckless abandon. I shopped for immediate needs and distant contingencies. I shopped for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it. I sent clerks into their fabric books and pattern books to search for elusive designs. I began to grow in value and self regard. I filled myself out, found new aspects of myself, located a person I'd forgotten existed. Brightness settled around me. (*WN*: 84)

Jack and his family embrace the surface prosperity of the Reagan era by partaking of the mass desire to consume with reckless abandon. By exerting the potency of purchasing power Jack feels that his own personal value increases and strengthens in tandem with the economy. Assuming office during a high period of inflation and unemployment, President Reagan initially gathered support for his campaign by outlining proposed fiscal policies intended to combat these pressing domestic issues. Termed 'Reaganomics' by radio broadcaster Paul Harvey, these policies were based upon free market advocacy and neoliberal thought regarding trade.[51] Reflecting the rhetoric of Reagan's campaign promises to lower taxes and reduce state control, his economic plan implemented the reduction of income taxes, particularly for those on the highest incomes, and an overall raise in deficit expenditure to its highest level since World War Two. Although the statistics show that inflation significantly decreased and employment levels increased during Reagan's terms of office, it has been constantly debated to what extent Reaganomics was responsible for these trends. The efforts of the Federal Reserve to resolve the problems of inflation, and the decline of oil prices resulting from supply shocks in the Middle East were overshadowed by the polished rhetoric of Reagan's policy. Furthermore, the combination of significant tax-cuts, the massive increases in defence expenditure during the period and the overall instability of the stock-market by the mid-1980s, eventually raised the national debt from $700 billion to $3 trillion.[52] The United States moved from being the world's largest creditor to the world's largest debtor. Consequently, it can be argued that Reagan's economic policy was successful on a narrative level and that beneath the perceived middle-class prosperity of official rhetoric laid the detrimental ramifications of a perpetual war economy.

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[51] See W.A. Niskanen, *Reaganomics: An Insider's Account of the Policies and the People*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 363 pp.
[52] Lou Cannon, *Ronald Reagan: The Presidential History as Told Through the Collection of the Ronald Reagan Library and Museum*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 128.

Jack's craving to buy for 'immediate needs' and 'distant contingencies' both 'puzzles' and 'excites' him and the family 'gloried the event' and spectacle of a trip to the mall. However, this desire to purchase is not based on actual need; rather it forms part of a compulsion to collect reified material goods. Indicative of the demographic targeted during Reagan's campaign, the Gladneys partake of the apparent prosperity of the period, a problematic economic system feeding directly into military expansion. This consumer compulsion serves to mask the incoherence of containment identity with the instant gratification, contentment and 'self regard' garnered from the consumer purchase, a system of exchange that simultaneously dulls containment anxiety and disseminates it through military-economic association. The novel addresses American military-technological domination by linking Jack's consumer impulses to the emergence of a new kind of 'flatness' and 'superficiality'; a cultural phenomenon which Baudrillard describes as a fundamental constituent of the 'mutation' affecting the ecology of the human species. Daily exchange is no longer based upon human relations, but upon the 'acquisition of goods and messages':

> We have reached the point where 'consumption' has grasped the whole of life; where all activities are sequenced in the same combinatorial mode; where the schedule of gratification is outlived in advance, one hour at a time; and where the 'environment' is complete, completely climatized, furnished, and culturalized.[53]

Jack's compulsive devotion to the supermarket and the mall belongs to the moment of sequential, climatised and total consumption that Baudrillard describes. This is a system where consumer impulses have already been mapped out, and where the immediate social environment has been overwhelmed with a surplus of cultural material that swamps the senses. Therefore, the subject is unable to make the association between domestic consumption and its place within the system of military-economic development aligned with Virilio's conception of 'pure war'. In this system of perpetual deterrence and permanent war-game opposition, domestic consumption forms part of an all-encompassing military economy dedicated to the escalation of the arms race and the rules of global domination. The infrastructure of this military-industrial complex is not only composed of the armed forces, military research agencies and civil government. Rather, the term can be applied to a much

[53] Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 36.

broader spectrum of network flows and economic variables, that takes into account the funding and research of private defence contractors. The military complex, then, is a changing network of government and private groups, each displaying vested social and material interests in the perpetuation of sophisticated weaponry and the military-strategic command of internal affairs. The Cold War created an indefinite period of defensive conflict based upon the continuous enhancement of these weapons systems, and so a specialised labour force was required to produce these complex systems on a permanent basis. As Peter W. Singer has noted in his analysis of private military industry[54], the result of this military demand was a massive economic integration dedicated to defence and national security. Therefore, multiple partnerships between the Pentagon and private enterprises began to surface, and major manufacturers began to bid for highly lucrative military contracts for the development of advanced information networks and bespoke weaponry. In recent years, the likes of Boeing, private equity firm Carlyle Group, General Electric and advanced technology manufacturer, Lockheed Martin have each secured contracts with the Pentagon. Therefore, the investors and manufacturers providing services and goods for the domestic populace are an inherent part of the military infrastructure. Unable to make the circuit connecting consumer activity with its military-economic counterpart, anaesthetised and perplexed subjects like Jack can only experience this military underside as all-pervading dread.

Jack's colleague and friend, Murray Siskind views himself as a cultural analyst because he feels compelled to investigate and interpret the American consumer impulse. He describes the supermarket as 'a revelation' (*WN*: 38) therefore imbuing the family shopping trip with a spiritual significance. He engages in a theological discussion with Babette about Tibetan death, transition and rebirth, and states that the mall has the power to spiritually regenerate us because it is rich in depths of hidden significance. Murray's belief in the religious awakening of the shopping trip seems farcical, but what he is referring to is the symbolism he attributes to consumer goods, recreational pursuits and American culture. Murray feels the need to immerse himself in the 'American magic and dread' (*WN*:19) of television images and consumer packaging because he believes that cultural products and surface images contain hidden codes that enable the individual to make sense of

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[54] Peter W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatised Military Industry*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 350pp.

their personal ontology. In contrast, Jack prefers to seek the stability of the homogenous meta-narrative and contains himself in official rhetoric and enclosed narrative structures because of a need to assert the simple relationship between signifier and signified. Jack wishes to keep at bay the 'semiotic nightmare' (*WN:* 103) that engulf all forms of cultural production; whereas Murray strives to embrace the artistic licence of this schizophrenic condition. By attempting to locate hidden meaning and significance within consumer items and television representation Murray denounces a total acceptance of surface images, instead undertaking a study of the 'codes' and 'messages' to be found in the 'self-referring' medium of television:

> You have to learn how to look. You have to open yourself up to the data. TV offers incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth, it welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the picture pattern. (WN: 51)

However, Murray's analysis of aesthetic modes, and his willingness to 'open' himself 'up to the data' fails to account for the loss of history and personal origins aggravated by these very forms of media reproduction and networked communication. As a result, he attempts to trace 'world birth' via the pastiche of television programming, but fails to garner a coherent interpretation within these complex interrelated systems of media saturation and information overflow. In a statement that explains Murray's inability to penetrate the hidden depths of cultural data, Fredric Jameson notes the power of cultural and material content to, ironically, 'contaminate' real experience and negate critical response:

> here too the content seems somehow to contaminate the form, only the misery here is the misery of happiness, or at least contentment (which is really complacency), [...] the gratifications of the new car, the TV dinner and your favorite program on the sofa—which are now themselves secretly a misery, an unhappiness that doesn't know its name, that has no way of telling itself apart from genuine satisfaction and fulfilment.[55]

For Jameson, domestic consumer routines become a form of regulated misery designed to dull the senses and minimise critical opposition with the passing 'gratifications' of home entertainments and throwaway goods. In this sense, Murray's fascination with the spiritual and semiotic depth of cultural and consumer

[55] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 280.

material is doomed to failure because, as a subject living within the postmodern climate, he lacks the critical distance to initiate a meaningful interpretation. Although he recognises that there is a series of interrelationships and connections displayed in cultural material, and that an underlying logic relates the domestic scene to a much more grandiose design, he fails to understand that these are the totalising effects of the military-industrial complex. Subsequently, Murray's semiotic analyses are misguided and misplaced. For example, when conversing with Jack about their academic achievements and contributions, he fails to recognise Jack's study of Hitler as a product of historical fragmentation and revisionism. To compound this lack of insight, he compares his aforementioned plans to investigate the cultural data surrounding Elvis Presley's singing career with that of Jack's devotion to Hitler studies. Murray may possess the desire to locate the significance holding together the cultural project, but like Jack he lacks the critical ability to recognise containment narratives as part of a deliberate system of knowledge saturation designed to stultify fear and opposition. Murray recognises the symptoms of the Cold War historical unconscious, the layers of socio-historical meaning and experience submerged in popular culture and social relations. Unfortunately he is ill-equipped to understand and map their political significance, because he too is subject to the schizophrenic dislocations and confusions of this unconscious condition.

It is only after his exposure to Nyodene D that Jack becomes aware of the home and the shopping mall as sources of indefinable discomfort and dread: 'The supermarket shelves have been arranged. It happened one day without warning. There is agitation and panic in the aisles, dismay in the faces of older shoppers. They walk in a fragmented trance, trying to figure out the pattern, discern the underlying logic' (*WN*: 325). The consequences of the toxic event instigate a new sense of responsiveness which permits Jack to achieve a very basic level of self-actualisation beyond containment codes and collective identity constraints. He can begin to see how his actions as a local community member and consumer relate to an underlying 'pattern' or 'logic'. However, due to the dislocations and over-abundance of this society he cannot recognise the military-industrial complex as a definable source. By exploring Jack's struggle to come to terms with the fragmentation, discrepancies and confusions of accepted containment narratives, the novel is able to demonstrate the psychological difficulties encountered when attempting to assert self-autonomy and historical clarity. Jack hopes to achieve personal stability by deciphering the cultural

materials around him, but the novel suggests that under these circumstances of extreme socio-historical uncertainty, the individual must accept the spatial and temporal confusions beyond the uniformity of containment. Jack's gradual recognition of an over-arching connectivity forces him to realise that a complete reliance upon domestic enclosure heightens personal anxieties as opposed to alleviating them. Although he cannot comprehend this, the home becomes a site of dread because the weight of possession accentuates the abject waste indicative of mortal limitations. Moreover, domesticity becomes a figurative point in the network of connections stemming from the military-economic system, a point of accumulation for the consumables that enable the escalation of the nuclear arms race. Household items have become ingrained with the 'psychic data', 'energy waves' and 'incident radiation' of a system of nuclear deterrence; thus the imminent sense of Cold War danger has penetrated into the fabric of Jack's daily existence. Consequently, he throws away the material objects he has collected over the years in an act of psychological purification:

> There was an immensity of things, an overburdening weight, a connection, a mortality. I stalked the rooms, flinging things into cardboard boxes. Plastic electric fans, burnt-out toasters, *Star Trek* needlepoints. It took well over an hour to get everything down to the sidewalk. No one helped me. I didn't want help or human understanding. I just wanted to get the stuff out of the house. (*WN*: 262)

This purging of consumer culpability in the military-economic system is reminiscent of Alan Nadel's discussion of metanarratives as constantly evolving discourses used to separate official historical 'substance' from cultural 'waste' products.[56] Although this act of purification relates to Jack's increasing personal and social awareness, he still manages to replicate the functions of containment by selecting the personal memories and cultural artefacts to be retained as privileged personal history. This abject household waste signifies the fragments and remnants of the military side of the American consumer legacy, as it breaks through imposed limits to haunt the present moment as a 'return of the repressed'.

Therefore, Jack's process of purification and selection signifies another act of containment dependency in the face of historical turmoil. A sense of compulsion and terror overwhelms this fascination with garbage because it displays how easily national structures and ideologies can be turned to waste. He is faced with the fusion

[56] Nadel, *Containment Culture*, 4.

of human and consumer waste, the dark underside of consumer consciousness: 'The full stench hit me with shocking force. Was this ours? Did it belong to us? Had we created it? I took the bag out the garage and emptied it. The compressed bulk sat there like an ironic modern sculpture' (*WN*: 258). The 'compressed bulk' of household waste also suggests the eventual overload of technological and communications networks as they wind down and collapse under the strain of too much information and cultural production. What Jack is faced with when he studies the compressed garbage is the figurative depiction of technological and organic death as it contaminates sacred domesticity. As Tom LeClair suggests: 'DeLillo recycles American waste into art to warn against entropy, both thermo-dynamic and informational'.[57] Consequently, the novel can be interpreted as thematically and structurally implosive because the impulse to reduce and compress cultural and historical material, as metaphorically implied with the Gladney's trash compactor, can lead to psychological and sociological meltdown. Therefore, it is important to consider the significance of Jack's psychological 'meltdown', and draw some conclusions about the state of containment culture and identity at the close of the novel.

Containment Meltdown

White Noise reverses the risk scenario by contemplating the containment link between involuntary exposure and willing consumption of toxins. In the early stages of the novel, Denise suspects that Babette is taking unidentifiable drugs and studies medical journals to confirm her suspicions. Begrudgingly, she shares this information with Jack who then attempts to confront Babette about the mystery drug 'Dylar'. The reasons for Babette's use of Dylar remain a mystery until the last section of the novel when Jack discovers that she has obtained this experimental 'psychopharmaceutical' to curb her fear of death. The magnitude of her fear and desperation is revealed when she admits that she obtained the drug in exchange for sexual favours, and was completely prepared to commit these acts of adultery in exchange for ignorance of her own mortality. Despite her protestations that the drug was unsuccessful Jack becomes obsessed with the idea of Dylar:

[57] Tom LeClair, *In the Loop: DeLillo and the Systems Novel*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 212.

> The drug could be dangerous, after all. And I was not a believer in easy solutions, something to swallow that would rid my soul of an ancient fear. But I could not help thinking about that saucer-shaped tablet. Would it ever work, could it work for some and not for others? It was the benign counterpart of the Nyodene menace. Tumbling from the back of my tongue down into my stomach. The drug core dissolving, releasing benevolent chemicals into my bloodstream, flooding the fear-of-death part in my brain. The pill itself silently self-destructing in a tiny inward burst, a polymer implosion, discreet, precise and considerate. (*WN*: 211)

Jack's preoccupation with the 'saucer-shaped' tablet stems from the fact that his Doctor has been unable to ease his fears about Nyodene contamination, and so he decides to formulate a plan to track down and kill the Dylar company representative Willie Mink in order to obtain a supply. Rather than seek revenge for his wife's dishonour, Jack's motives for committing murder are driven by the small hope that the release of 'benevolent chemicals' into his bloodstream will neutralise his fear of death and restore the selective balance of containment identity.

Therefore, the Gladneys' hunt for an experimental drug to eradicate existential fear is a reversal of the involuntary risk scenario depicted in the airborne toxic event. Jack is now willing to go to extreme lengths to track down a secret and potentially lethal chemical because he hopes to cancel out the possible side-effects and psychological trauma of his Nyodene D exposure. He moves from involuntary exposure to potentially lethal toxins, to a self-destructive acceptance of potentially lethal drugs because of this faint hope that Dylar will suppress self-awareness and facilitate a return to narratives of comfort and security. Ironically, these drastic attempts to curb the 'fear-of-death part' of the brain with a form of drug-induced containment are caused by the psychological meltdown Jack and Babette experience as a consequence of containment in the first place. Just as Jack's trash compactor worked as a metaphorical demonstration of the thermo-dynamic and informational entropy threatening technological and cultural systems of containment, so is the 'tiny inward burst' and 'polymer implosion' of the Dylar pill indicative of the same potential de-escalation. Although, 'discreet', 'precise' and 'considerate' in its silent 'self-destruction', Dylar and the containment impulse driving Jack to ingest it are derived from the same bio-technological base as Nyodene D. Although he cannot explain why, Jack recognises Dylar as the 'benign counterpart' of the Nyodene menace', the 'human face' (*WN*: 211) of biotechnological innovation as it offers him a potential escape from psychological insecurity. However, as I have already demonstrated in relation to the replication of containment narratives as their own

cycle of disaster, this attempt to mask the effects of one chemical with that of another would ironically propagate another cycle of uncertainty and risk. Jack is unaware and incapable of realising that the Dylar is also the 'counterpart' of Nyodene D because both are the types of products and innovations derived from, and contributing to, the economic and technological scope of the military complex. Therefore, the Dylar induces the same insecurity and dread as Jack's exposure to the toxic spillage, and the threatening undercurrent upsetting the balance of his lifestyle remains undeterred.

Jack's exposure to Nyodene D during the toxic event initiated a basic level of responsiveness, which caused him to apprehend the underlying instability surrounding his personal ontology. However, in accordance with the shifts and self-regulating nature of containment, this journey toward enlightenment and personal autonomy is not as straightforward as it seems. The toxic event does not instil an immediate sense of awareness in Jack, rather it intensifies the existing military-industrial angst surfacing through personal enclosure and contained societal structures. What the event serves to highlight is the potential risk we all face on a daily basis in the home and neighbourhood, the de-contextualised risk that instigates insecurity and in doing so validates an endless cycle of containment. Because of the uncertainty of his life expectancy and the temptations of Dylar, Jack continues to obsess about personal weakness and the imminence of death even though there is no physical evidence of a degenerative health condition. As a result of this mental and physiological contemplation, Jack's narrative is inflected with an air of self-absorption as he becomes convinced that the toxic exposure has facilitated a spiritual and intellectual rebirth:

> My airy mood returned. I was advancing in consciousness. I watched myself take each separate step. With each separate step, I became aware of processes, components, things relating to other things. Water fell to earth in drops. I saw things new [...] I sensed I was part of a network of structures and channels. I knew the precise nature of events. I was moving closer to things in their actual state as I approached a violence, a smashing intensity (*WN:* 304-305).

Jack's 'airy mood' (a veiled reference to the ubiquitous 'airborne toxic event') may lead him to believe that he has achieved a precise understanding of events, but his past tense reminiscence highlights his misunderstanding of the situation. Furthermore, the way that Jack describes this scene as though he was able to watch himself in a kind of out of body experience suggests that he is subject to the mental

fragmentation of a psychotic episode. Although he senses the intensity and immediacy of the network structures and channels that constitute and dictate his identity, he most certainly fails 'to move closer to things in their actual state' and achieve a higher level of consciousness. As a disoriented and anaesthetised postmodern subject living under the shadow of nuclear containment and contingency, Jack is denied the capability of contextualising himself within these structures. As mentioned previously with reference to Baudrillard's *Fatal Strategies*, the over-production of banal information through these channels and networks guarantees social confusion and inertia, while propagating military precision and nuclear escalation. Psychologically ill-equipped to understand and interpret the cyclical logic of American containment culture, Jack confuses self-assertion and actualisation with his re-absorption into containment unconscious.

Jack's final attempt to take control of his fear occurs when he decides to obtain a supply of Dylar from Willie Mink, the con-artist otherwise known as 'Mr Gray' who supplied Babette with the substance at a seedy motel. Babette has already told him to forget it because the drug was a confidence trick, 'Fool's gold or whatever the appropriate term' (*WN*: 209). Nonetheless, he convinces himself that the 'psychopharmaceutical' will ease his condition and restore the comparative bliss of false consciousness. Ironically, this fixation evolves into a murder plot that critics have seen as a parody of Humbert Humbert's murder of Clare Quilty in *Lolita*.[58] Jack believes that by shooting Willie Mink he will wipe out personal ambiguity and irregularity; thus the fear of death will be supplanted by taking another life:

> Here is my plan. Drive past the scene several times, park some distance from the scene, go back on foot, locate Mr Gray under his real name or an alias, shoot him three times in the viscera for maximum pain, clear the weapon of prints, place the weapon in the victim's staticky hand, find a crayon or lipstick tube and scrawl a cryptic suicide note on the full-length mirror, take the victim's supply of Dylar tablets, slip back into the car, proceed to the expressway entrance, head east toward Blacksmith (*WN*: 304)

Jack's narrative account of the murder attempt, which suddenly shifts to present tense for dramatic irony, takes on the quality of a de-realised cinematic episode. This is not only because his planning is reminiscent of a contrived crime drama with little concern for feasibility, but also because Jack appears to 'act' the leading role in a

[58] See Barrett, 'How the Dead Speak to the Living', 107.

revenge plot. In fact, the omnipresent viewing screen of audio-visual technologies is entrenched in Jack's vivid rendering. The victim's hand becomes 'staticky' in the same way as a television set, and the 'cryptic suicide note' he intends to leave will be scrawled on a 'full-length mirror', a potent motif for Jack's cinematic treatment of the scene. Eventually, Jack drives to the motel where Willie is staying, fully prepared to kill another man for a supply of pills, but things fail to go to plan because he is not prepared for the scene that unfolds. Willie's prolonged personal addiction to the drug has induced strange psychological side-effects whereby media-speak and television representation merge with reality. This causes him to suffer an exaggerated form of postmodern schizophrenia, whereby he can no longer differentiate between television footage and live events as they take place in front of him. Consequently, Willie is only capable of limited and de-contextualized conversation beyond the mediated fragments of language he picks up from the TV:

> I was doing important work. I envied myself. I was literally embarked. Death without fear is an everyday thing. You can live with it. I learned English watching American TV. I had American sex the first time in Port-O-San, Texas. Everything they said was true. I wish I could remember [...] Dylar failed, reluctantly. But it will definitely come. Maybe now, maybe never. The heat from your hand will make the gold-leafing stick to the wax paper. (*WN*: 308)

Willie Mink's exaggerated schizophrenic condition of fragmented sentence structuring, de-contextualised subject-matter and the symptomatic separation of signifier and signified reflects the potential instability of the Gladney family's mediated experience. Jack and his family already rely upon the ritual consumption of television as a means to interpret society at large, and the subsequent dislocation of reality this engenders is in part responsible for Jack's toxic exposure. Therefore, Willie's disconcerting condition becomes an amplified reflection of the social malaise disconnecting Jack from a coherent and complete sense of reality. In fact, Jack and Willie effectively suffer from the same condition because both are distanced from, and anaesthetised by, systems of military-industrial regulation. Therefore, the Dylar comes to represent the self-replicating cycle of Cold War military-industrial escalation, justification and containment degenerating the social project as a whole.

Unable to identify Willie as a magnified projection of his own condition, Jack carries out the shooting and immediately gains a sense of self-righteousness and pleasure from the deed:

> I stepped back to survey the remains of the shattering moment, the scene of squalid violence and lonely death at the shadowy fringes of society. This was my plan. Step back, regard the squalor, make sure things were correctly placed. (*WN:* 313)

For a man gripped by an unbearable fear of death he seems strangely preoccupied with the thought of regarding the 'squalid violence' of his actions. However, his attempt to kill Willie, and contain his 'lonely death' at the 'fringes of society' is thwarted because Willie musters the strength to pick up the gun and shoot Jack in the wrist. Immediately the 'smashing intensity' of the moment turns into confusion and disappointment as Jack begins to experience first-hand the pain he has inflicted:

> The world collapsed inward, all those vivid textures and connections buried in mounds of ordinary stuff. I was disappointed. Hurt, stunned and disappointed. What had happened to the higher plane of energy in which I'd carried on my scheme? The pain was searing. Blood covered my forearm, wrist and hand. I staggered back, moaning, watching blood drip from the tips of my fingers. I was troubled and confused [...] The extra dimensions, the super perceptions, were reduced to visual clutter, a whirling miscellany, meaningless. (*WN*: 313)

Jack's plan has not taken into account contingency for retaliation by Willie, and the visceral act of this unforeseen shooting obliterates the higher state of consciousness and connectivity that Jack believes he is experiencing. The momentary psychosis compelling him 'collaps[es] inward' in a figurative representation of systems collapse and entropy. Furthermore, the 'vivid textures' and 'connections' that he senses become consumed by 'ordinary stuff', and the alleged 'super perceptions' are reduced to meaningless clutter because the extreme chain of events he has set into motion have restored the basic human instinct of compassion: 'The old human muddles and quirks were set flowing again. Compassion, remorse, mercy' (*WN*: 313). It takes an act of mindless violence for Jack to relate and empathise with another human being, and in doing so he can no longer rely upon mediated representations of catastrophe, pain and suffering to shape his response. At this very moment, the mediated or cinematic form of experience through which Jack has been able to plan and execute the shooting comes to an end, and his first-hand experience of pain releases him from a misguided self-obsession. This final act of containment

and repression fails because the double shooting forces him to face the trauma and uncertainty inherent within his social system and subject-position; moreover he begins to identify with the 'Other' embodied in Willie Mink. The connections and perceptions that Jack sensed he was a part of instantaneously disappear because, for this brief moment, the ruling narratives of containment and deterrence cannot account for the crushing reality he has engendered. During this brief moment, the hidden significance, interconnections, and socio-historical experiences of the political unconscious rise to the surface of Jack's recognition in a transient return of the repressed. In this sense, the totalising influence and perceived safety of containment culture and identity ruptures to release the insecurity, immanence and visceral impact of the event. The disorientation caused by containment identity has enabled Jack to carry out the shooting, but it could not suppress the impact and corporal significance of the shooting.

This is not to say that Jack gains total enlightenment after the events of the shooting have unfolded. Once he has attended to his own wound, he drags Mink across the floor and out into the street where he attempts to perform mouth-to-mouth before driving him to a trauma room run by local nuns. While in conversation with Sister Hermann Marie, Jack displays his naivety concerning religious belief, not to mention the realities of human pain and suffering witnessed in the trauma room on a daily basis. Furthermore, he cannot bring himself to admit that he was responsible for the shooting: 'The original nun took me into a cubicle to work on my wound. I started to giver her a version of the shootings but she showed no interest. I told her it was an old gun with feeble bullets' (*WN*: 316). Although Jack's final act of containment is undermined by the crushing reality of the double shooting, Jack still cannot orient himself within a local community besieged by violence and risk. Unable to contemplate and interpret the true nature of containment as it maintains and contributes to a system internal regulation, Jack remains confused, but also fascinated, by the cultural climate of which he is part.

After the events of the shooting have passed, he returns to the banal routine of his daily existence in the home, college and shopping mall. However, the collective safety and enclosure of the local environment is once again penetrated by a strange and intangible event. Jack's youngest son, Wilder leaves the confines of the house with his tricycle, takes it out onto the road and peddles down the hill until he reaches the highway where shocked motorists watch as the toddler peddles alongside them.

Eventually he loses his balance and falls down an embankment in a 'multicolored tumble' (*WN*: 323). It turns out that Wilder has managed to cross the expressway and fall down the embankment into a creek without harming himself whatsoever. After news of this bizarre event spreads, and Wilder is returned to the apparent safety of his parents' care, the family decide to visit the site of this miracle, a place where Jack senses that:

> There is an anticipation in the air but it is not the expectant hum of a shirtsleeve crowd, a sandlot game, with coherent precedents, a history of secure response. This waiting is introverted, uneven, almost backward and shy, tending toward silence. What else do we feel? Certainly there is awe, it is all awe [...] but we don't know whether we are watching in wonder or dread (*WN:* 324)

Prior to Wilder's tricycle feat, Jack could sense the connectivity of the systems encircling his existence, but could not contextualise this hidden significance in relation with a national infrastructure of military-industrial development. Hence, this vagueness led to harmful levels of anxiety and confusion. Since Wilder's tricycle experience, this awareness of networked connectivity has been replaced with feelings of 'awe', and Jack makes no attempts to search for hidden significance or order resulting from this freak event. Despite this, we are still reminded of the omnipresence of Jack's toxic exposure because he describes feelings of anticipation 'in the air'. Rather than compare Wilder's feat with the 'coherent precedents' and 'history of secure response' stemming from prescribed American pastimes and norms of containment, Jack appears content to embrace the ambiguity and uncertainty of postmodern subjecthood. This change in subject-position leads Jack to actively avoid projected statistics and medical reports concerning his Nyodene exposure: 'Dr Chakravarty wants to talk to me but I am making it a point to stay away. He is eager to see how my death is progressing. An interesting case perhaps' (*WN*: 325). He now prefers to remain ignorant of any potential bodily degeneration and feels content to live for the present moment, thus explaining the final narrative shift from past to present tense.

White Noise does not constitute a quest for self-enlightenment and autonomy through the recognition of containment and deterrence. This is because the characters remain unable to interpret and contextualise events and cultural data by the close of the novel. Although a change of outlook has been affected in Jack, it constitutes more of an acceptance of postmodern heterogeneity and flux as opposed to an

epiphany about self-identity and Cold War socio-cultural control. I am suggesting, then, that the novel showcases the impenetrability of self-regulating narratives of containment and opposition, and that rather than try to interpret and expose these, the postmodern subject would be better placed exploiting the lack of fixity resulting from this military-industrial environment. Once this acceptance of uncertainty has been achieved, then subjects like Jack may escape the perpetual cycle of fear and containment dictating contemporary existence, and begin to perceive events beyond the boundaries of self-regulating Cold War mediation. The American citizen remains separated from the military-economic realities sustaining 'national life', and the presidential rhetoric of community enclosure continues unchallenged by significant semiotic interpretation. However, Jack's reduced reliance upon the official 'secure history of response' intimates the latent potential within postmodern subjectivity for a reconsideration and acceptance of those histories discarded as abject national waste.

At the outset of this chapter I posed some questions regarding the representation of Cold War containment culture and identity in the novel. First, to what extent does the fictionalisation of cultural enclosure and containment identity in *White Noise* indicate the waning of historical effect argued by Fredric Jameson in *The Political Unconscious* and *Postmodernism*? Second, how does this bewildering condition impact upon the characters' ability to interpret cultural data and respond to internal risk mechanisms? Finally, if containment is an essential factor in the military-industrial complex shaping all social and cultural output, then is this novel able to counteract any subsequent loss of historical grounding? In answer to the first question we need only to refer back to Jack Gladney's comfort in the secure boundaries of his local community, and the relief he garners from his social status as university lecturer and respected citizen. The containment identity he has embraced works to eradicate all forms of ambiguity from the immediacy of the domestic sphere, and as such the Gladney family feel certain that catastrophe only strikes those outside of respectable borders. The waning of historicity is a crucial factor in Jack's characterisation, and as I have argued, it explains his lack of insight and perspective regarding Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. Although Jack is victim to the disorientation resulting from military-industrial relations, he thrives on this separation from historical culpability by accepting the dislocations of a Cold War unconscious. My analysis of crisis-management during the 'airborne toxic event'

relates to this schizophrenic disorientation because the characters become subject to a form of postmodern de-realisation whereby the actual event becomes a simulation for contingency planning. In response to my second question, then, the characters are unable to respond to internal risk appropriately because they fail to recognise the all-pervasive threat of the military-industrial network sustaining their domestic existence. Experienced as unknown torments on the periphery of conscious interpretation, the containment subject in *White Noise* cannot penetrate the hidden layers of significance contained within information networks and cultural data. It is only after Jack becomes exposed to the toxic spillage that the repressed anxieties of his containment unconscious return to the surface as psychological meltdown. As I have noted above, Jack's only release from this cycle of containment and Cold War anxiety occurs at the close of the narrative when he abandons a 'secure history of response' in favour of the uncertainties of postmodern subjectivity.

To answer my final question, although the novel highlights the waning of historicity apparent in a military-industrial containment society, it is able to counteract this deterioration by reflecting and satirising the fragments that constitute past events. Historical resonance binds together this fictionalisation of containment culture and risk, and the similarities I have made between the 'airborne toxic event', Three Mile Island and FEMA's nuclear contingency planning serve to demonstrate this. Rather than being a compliant receptacle for the disorienting and fragmentary cultural conditions derived from the military-industrial complex, the novel uses these conditions to prompt isolated reconsiderations of Cold War history. These reconsiderations reject totalising official accounts of national unity and pride in favour of alternative narratives that constitute an analysis of the Cold War unconscious.

DeLillo's treatment of Cold War containment culture and identity in *White Noise* provides a frame through which to revisit and critically reassess fragments of the recent past. These fragments are merged into the narrative in such a way that the resonance of the real event permeates throughout the text. Therefore, the novel both fictionalises and resists the weakening of historical memory without being party to its degenerative effects. Although satirical in its treatment of Cold War risk culture and identity construction, DeLillo's novel is grounded in the realities of the containment society of the 1980s, and as such it attempts to complement and reinforce those aspects of history diminished by containment representation. By

fictionalising the schizophrenic confusions and symbolic fragmentation caused by the conditions of the political unconscious, DeLillo is able to initiate a hermeneutic that focuses on the 'unmasking of cultural artefacts as socially symbolic acts'.[59] Even though his narrative of containment culture and identity conveys historical disorientation, it also constitutes a successful method for deciphering the hidden significance that 'reassert[s] the specificity of the political content of everyday life and of individual [...] experience.[60] Therefore, DeLillo is able to fictionalise and replicate the unconscious framework depriving the subject of historical resonance, while simultaneously engaging in a critical commentary about its effects. DeLillo's novels work to convey the concealed symbolic messages contained within cultural material. Therefore, in order to demonstrate this unifying theme further, I will return to this consideration of the Cold War historical unconscious in my analysis of *Underworld* in Chapter Four.

In contrast with DeLillo's realist consideration and commentary on Cold War military-industrial relations are William S. Burroughs' vivid narrative counter-histories of military-scientific ascendancy and nuclear/biological warfare. Instead of reinforcing the historical record via realist fiction, Burroughs constructs mythical narrative zones in order to oppose, and ultimately escape, the restraints of Cold War binary opposition and nuclear deterrence. The following chapter will analyse the development of Burroughs' Cold War counter-historical routines, from the dystopian scientific viral control systems of the 'Nova' trilogy (1962-1967) to the nuclear mythology of the first novel in the 'Red Night' trilogy, *Cities of the Red Night* (1981). By analysing the various forms of linguistic resistance and historical possibility contained within these texts I will demonstrate Burroughs' radical revisionist approach to narrative counter-history.

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[59] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 20.
[60] Ibid., 22.

Chapter Two: William S. Burroughs' Biotechnological Mythology: Narratives of Cold War Resistance from the *Nova* Trilogy to *Cities of the Red Night*

All of my work is directed against those who are bent, through stupidity or design, on blowing up the planet or rendering it uninhabitable. [1]

We thought we could survive because of our intelligence and technology. That's probably what we're going to be destroyed by. [2]

The above extracts, taken from interviews with William S. Burroughs in 1964 and 1981, highlight the continuation of nuclear arms development and military technological research as constant concerns throughout the Burroughs writing project. During this period, his body of fiction and personal philosophy anticipated the emergence of political analysis during the 1980s by describing US and Soviet Cold War hostilities as aspects of an antagonistic 'game planet', dedicated to the impasse of total weapons advancement:

This is a *game planet.* All games are hostile and basically there is only one game, and that *game is war* [...] One of the rules of this game is that there cannot be final victory since that would mean the end of the war game. Every player must believe in final victory and endeavour to attain final victory with all his resources. In consequence all existing technologies are directed towards producing total weapons that could end the game by killing all players. [3]

Burroughs describes this security deadlock as a mutually beneficial system for the superpowers because the creation of virtual enmity strengthens the presiding networks of national and global control. In this sense, the binary oppositions of East and West can be viewed as complementary aspects of the 'machinery' of control, meaning that final victory and the cessation of global opposition is made untenable as all powers adhere to an overriding system of rules and internal regulations. This virtual war game model

[1] William S. Burroughs' 1964 interview with Conrad Knickerbocker, 'White Junk' in *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs, 1960-97,* ed. Sylvère Lotringer, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2001), 81.
[2] Burroughs' 1981 interview with Sylvère Lotringer, 'Exterminating' in ibid., 529.
[3] William S. Burroughs, *The Adding Machine: Selected Essays,* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1986), 155.

reflects and critiques the nuclear parity achieved by the Soviet Union and United States since the Kennedy Administration, as the military doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction 'MAD', stemmed from the approval of permanent nuclear threat as effective Cold War strategy. Throughout this chapter I shall demonstrate how Burroughs' fiction harnesses the sense of national vulnerability caused by this nuclear escalation. He creates a fictional war game universe that imitates and exaggerates the nuclear paranoia augmenting global control. As the above statement underlines, total power and supremacy become unattainable goals for all players because opposition and conflict are required to justify the existence of the control machine. Global antagonisms exist as aspects of this framework, and may be reconfigured to reinforce mutually beneficial 'surface' conflicts:

> Political conflicts are merely surface manifestations. If conflicts arise you may be sure that certain powers intend to keep this conflict under operation since they hope to profit from the situation. To concern yourself with surface political conflicts is to make the mistake of the bull in the ring, you are charging the cloth.[4]

In this sense, control needs both resistance and acquiescence otherwise it ceases to be control; hence the 'the surface political conflict' enacts a perpetual power struggle. If the machine succeeds in its mission of total subordination, then its regulatory rationale is negated simply because there is 'nothing left to control'.

By the early to mid-1980s cultural and political criticism akin to Burroughs' assessment of global power was beginning to emerge in response to the aggressive rhetoric and military-industrial system revived by the Reagan administration. In particular, Paul Virilio's analysis of the 'war of deterrence' shares distinct similarities to Burroughs' thoughts on control machinery because he considers the decline of 'hot' war, or total combat, in favour of a system of perpetual opposition intended to propagate the global 'machinery' of tactical warfare:

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[4] Burroughs' 1961 interview with Gregory Corso & Allen Ginsberg, 'The Time Birth-Death Gimmick' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 42.

The decline of war into the art of deterrence, the art of deterrence prohibiting political war, favors the upsurge, not of conflicts, but of 'acts of war without war'. It's the endemicism of the acts which is now corrupting the entire world.[5]

The links between Burroughs' hostile war game planet, based on the rule that 'there cannot be final victory', and Virilio's 'pure' war of deterrence are clear: both outline the universal endeavour to enhance technologies and produce total nuclear weapons systems to reinforce a state of unending escalation. Moreover, both novelist and cultural critic consider the vital link between global power networks, technological advancement and the spread of communications systems able to replicate and convey Western homogeneity.

Burroughs actively highlights and opposes this system as a form of global 'virulence', because he sees it as the definitive vehicle for behavioural control. As far as he is concerned, these communication networks enhance the war game by promoting virtual antipathy, whilst conditioning the populace to absorb and accept the images and messages circulating throughout the global network. Therefore, he proposes a comprehensive programme of textual resistance to combat this network domination. As he told Graham Masterton and Andrew Rosgabi in 1972: 'there is always psychological influence, there's nothing new about that. All governments, all religions have used it through history [...] now the means of control are much more efficient [...] we have populations exposed to exactly the same images and words, millions of people every day'.[6] The development of Cold War technologies may have increased the capability of global communication, but at the price of amplified surveillance and social control restraining personal and collective agency to varying degrees. These media-fuelled networks support a programme of control by imposing a technological structure of information and image exchange devoid of critical depth. For Burroughs, media technologies and global networks enforce the spread of the 'virus power' by employing the word as the principal instrument of control; thus the continuing onslaught of globalisation disseminates viral contagion to a captive world audience:

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[5] Paul Virilio, *Pure War*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 27.
[6] Burroughs' 1972 interview with Graham Masterton and Andrew Rosgabi in *Conversations with William S. Burroughs*, ed. Allen Hibbard, (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 40.

My general theory [...] has been that the word is literally a virus, and that it has not been recognized as such because it has achieved a state of relatively stable symbiosis with the human host [...] But words are still the principal instruments of control. Suggestions are words. Persuasions are words. Orders are words. No control machine so far devised can operate without words, and any control machine which attempts to do so relying entirely on external force or physical control of the mind will soon encounter the limits of control.[7]

This vision of viral communications is more than just a figurative illustration of social control, rather it is considered to be a literal parasite with the power to dictate human perception. Burroughs sees a symbiotic relationship existing between channels of communication and the overriding control system because both are reliant upon one another for validation and strength. His fictional and political resistance stems from this growing concern about linguistic and visual manipulation, but he also recognises total communications control as symptomatic of the escalation of technological developments during the Cold War. Technological and scientific innovations take on a sinister aspect because of the measures taken to conceal information from public view. Furthermore, Burroughs highlights the correlation between research findings and the enhancement of the war game:

Vested interests, whether operating through private, capital or official agencies, suppresses any discovery, product or way of thought that threatens its area of monopoly. The Cold War is used as a pretext by both America and Russia to conceal and monopolize research by confining knowledge to official agencies. Paranoia is having all the facts.[8]

Similarly, Virilio views deterrence as a 'war operating in the sciences'. These technological and scientific discoveries become 'perversions of knowledge' because they align all areas of research 'in a perspective of the end', in other words, all efforts are devoted to the enhancement of the nuclear age: 'War today is either nuclear war or nothing [...] we have passed into a dimension other than that of real war, a dimension comparable to what I've called a great delinquency'.[9] This 'delinquency' is a trans-political system of virtual conflict designed to perfect the technological precision of pure

[7] Burroughs, *The Adding Machine*, 47.
[8] Burroughs 1981 interview with Edmund White, 'The Inner Burroughs' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 476.
[9] Virilio, *Pure War*, 26.

war and perpetuate a military economy, while instigating behavioural control through social degeneration.

These theoretical comparisons outline some important questions about the relationship between Burroughs' fiction, nuclear discourse and political theory during the latter portion of the Cold War. By analysing Burroughs' 'Nova' Trilogy, consisting of *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962), and *Nova Express* (1964), and the first novel of his 'Red Night' Trilogy, *Cities of the Red Night* (1981), this analysis aims to show how the creation of a 'war game' universe, and the evolution of a bio-technological mythology constitute a fictional map of the military-technological age. During the early 1980s, cultural criticism, including that of Virilio and Jean Baudrillard, conveyed a similar vision of Cold War game tactics, technological threat and virtual opposition to delineate strategic nuclear deterrence with the growing deterioration of the real. As Baudrillard has stated in *Fatal Strategies*:

> At the point of the overcoming of destructive forces the war scene is over. There is no longer any useful correlation between the potential for annihilation and its objective, so it becomes senseless to employ it [...] We should therefore hope for the continuation of this nuclear escalation and arms race as the price we pay for pure war; that is, for the pure and empty form—the hyperreal and eternally deterring form of war, where for the first time we can congratulate ourselves on the absence of the event.[10]

As far as Baudrillard is concerned, we may have avoided total nuclear destruction by adhering to the game rules of perpetual war; however we pay the price in terms of endless nuclear advancement and social de-realisation. The potential for total annihilation, and in correlation, the potential for societal development are deferred in favour of a system of absences designed to minimise actual conflict. On the contrary, Burroughs' conception of potentiality and possibility works to create the opposition and societal development otherwise stultified by this system. This fictional interpretation of international game conflict serves as an influential reaction to the dominant global techno-structure, and a discursive basis for political analysis during the early 1980s. Close consideration of these links will explain why Burroughs' fiction has provided a persuasive argument about the disintegration of historical reflection, and the foundation

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[10] Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, ed. Jim Fleming, Trans. Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski, first published 1983, (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 14-15.

for new ways of thinking about global relations. However, what differentiates Burroughs' view from those of Virilio and Baudrillard is his ability to envisage a means of resistance and escape from these technological perversions through fiction. Nightmare visions of nuclear and viral collapse are purposefully juxtaposed with utopian possibilities to show the reader a means of fictional escape from global degeneration: 'I'm creating an imaginary—it's always imaginary—world in which I would like to live'.[11] For Burroughs the act of creating possible worlds through fiction becomes more than just a trip into the imaginary, it is a means of opening a gateway to alternative spatial and temporal dimensions. Therefore, it is these potentials and Burroughs' ability think beyond the constraints of critical theory that will require further examination in this study. But before we can consider the development of Burroughs' influential mythology between the 1960s and 1980s, a time marked by heightened rhetorical aggression toward communist divergence, and civil concern about escalating Cold War tensions generally, it is important to relate his control philosophy and technological defiance to methods of linguistic resistance.

Cut-Ups: Viral Pandemics and Textual Resistance

As I have suggested, Burroughs' fictional projects and personal beliefs combine to reveal distinct social and cultural concerns about the types of technologies produced without prior public knowledge, and their potential application within a regulated system of subordination and control. These concerns manifest themselves within Burroughs' novels as dystopian realms, signified by the perpetual threat of total destruction and the loss of personal freedoms, including the ability to shape and direct subjective experience. The human body is under constant attack from mass epidemics that transmit the 'virus power' via channels of communication. In the 'Nova' novels of the 1960s particularly, submission is spread via the 'word virus' which has the power to infect and enslave the global population to such an extent that the simple speech act becomes a means for conveying and perpetuating control. The effects also manifest themselves physically as infected human subjects degenerate to such an extent that they become

[11] Burroughs' 1964 interview with Conrad Knickerbocker, 'White Junk' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 81.

hollow control receptacles stripped of the ability to attain physical and verbal autonomy, as Burroughs' noted in 1964:

> The virus power manifests itself in many ways. In the construction of nuclear weapons, in practically all the existing political systems which are aimed at curtailing inner freedom, that is, at control. It manifests itself in the extreme drabness of everyday life in Western countries. It manifests itself in the ugliness and vulgarity we see on every hand and of course it manifests itself in actual virus illnesses. [12]

The physical collapse caused by viral contagion provides an outward sign of the damage caused by verbal domination, but for Burroughs the word virus has the power to affect biologic changes in the human subject. Therefore, nuclear/biologic allegory and scientific theory merge to demonstrate social and bodily decay. These dystopian imaginings and viral epidemics, central to the progression of the Nova trilogy, are also a direct result of growing concerns about the development and application of nuclear weapons and other military research within this presiding control machinery. The potential horror of the nuclear disaster is transfigured onto the viral deterioration of the human body. This is made even more shocking by the lack of actual protection available to the subject. Burroughs' notion of bodily collapse reflects the paradox of an American political system prepared to jeopardise human safety, and compromise the principles of democracy in the name of strategic weapons development. The conflicting rationale behind Cold War technology is revealed through Burroughs' fevered visions of bodily disintegration, both the human form and the body politic, at a time when the arms race seemed to take precedence over honesty in domestic and foreign affairs. The utopian notion of national and personal liberty takes on a merely symbolic significance, and according to Burroughs' thinking, is used to shield a commitment to intensifying the war game. The borderless spread of viral authoritarianism encourages nuclear strategy by feeding off the behavioural conditioning it instigates. Hence, the mythological structure of the Nova novels consists of a binary, or Manichaean, opposition based upon subjugation and the battle for psychological freedom:

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[12] Quoted in Eric Mottram, *William S. Burroughs: The Algebra of Need*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), 98.

> Heaven and hell exist in my mythology. Hell consists of falling into enemy hands, into the hands of the virus power, and heaven consists of freeing oneself from this power, of achieving inner freedom, freedom from conditioning. [13]

As the above statement shows, Burroughs' fictional mythology explores the consequences of being subject to self-perpetuating systems of viral control. However, he also suggests that the means for initiating a counterattack upon semiotic conditioning exists in a stylistic antidote for both written and spoken strains of the word virus.

The word virus concept provides the thematic basis for the Nova mythology by anticipating the battle against psychological and physical compliance central to the expansion of Burroughs' fractured dystopian narratives. His early novels and essays provide a manifesto for rebellion against control by demonstrating the technical means of resistance available to the writer. By subverting the conventions of form and style, Burroughs believes that the writer has the ability to stage an attack on the supremacy of the word virus and the de-realisation of subjective experience:

> Now if writers could get together into a real tight union, we'd have the world right by the words. We could write our own universes, and they would all be as real as a coffee bar or a pair of Levis or a prom in the Jazz Age [...] So they must not be allowed to find out that they can make it happen. [14]

Not only does Burroughs suggest that writers create their own alternative universes and reclaim reality, but that they subvert the power of the word to codify and subjugate, by using 'cut-up' and 'fold-in' compositional techniques to defuse language of its viral potentials. These stylistic forms of resistance are used extensively throughout the Nova trilogy, but they came to fruition prior to the publication of these novels. Cut-ups were used in two texts published in 1960, *Exterminator!* and *Minutes to Go*, the latter being an instructive guide to the method and its revolutionary promise which Burroughs collaborated on with artist Brion Gyson, and poets Gregory Corso and Sinclair Beiles. Previously, Gysin had stated that the experimental methods available to the writer were limited, and at least fifty years behind the montage techniques accessible to the artist; thus the cut-up provided a new literary form influenced by other artistic mediums. Authorial power of all kinds is diminished because the cut-up weakens structural control

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[13] Burroughs' 1964 interview with Eric Mottram, 'The Algebra of Need' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 58.
[14] Burroughs, *The Adding Machine*, 180.

by imposing arbitrary design. For example, a page of text may be cut into horizontal or vertical sections, or folded over, and then rearranged accordingly; therefore the original intentions of the author become merged with the random word-play imposed by the procedure. This may be taken a stage further by introducing fragments from existing writing into the structure of the developing text:

> Method is simple: Take a page or more or less of your own writing or from any writer living or dead. Any written or spoken words. Cut into sections with scissors or switch blade as preferred and rearrange the sections. Looking away. Now write out result [...] Applications of cut up method are literally unlimited cut out from time limits. Old word lines keep you in old world slots. Cut your way out. [15]

As Gysin notes the method provides a way to free the writer from the temporal limitations of language by 'cutting out' an escape route into new textual dimensions. According to Burroughs' accounts of this period, the cut-up evolved by chance when Gysin was preparing mounts for his artwork because the Stanley knife he was using to cut out the mounts also sliced through the protective newspaper beneath. On examination, Gysin could see alternative syntactical structures and meanings within these fragments, which eventually led him to believe the method could be employed to demonstrate concealed images embedded within the text:

> I saw the possibility of permutations, particularly of images, which is the area in which it has worked best over a period of time [...] any extremely visual text will cut up and give you new combinations that are quite valid new images. In other words, you are drawing a whole series of images out of this page of text [...] We began to find out a whole lot of things about the real nature of words and writing when we began to cut them up.[16]

Gysin stated that he had thought of this experiment with visual and spoken word structure as a 'rather superior amusement', and was surprised when Burroughs' identified its import as 'a project for disastrous success'.[17] Later on, Burroughs and Gysin claimed that the technique had been influenced by the writing of essayist and poet Tristan Tzara, and Cubist and Dadaist experimentation with collage: 'At the surrealist rally in the 1920s, Tristan Tzara the man from nowhere proposed to create a poem on the

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[15] Quoted in Tony Tanner, 'Rub out the Word' in *William S. Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception 1959-89,* eds. Jennie Skerl & Robin Lydenberg, (Urbana: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 108.
[16] Ibid., 36.
[17] Ibid., 37.

spot by pulling words out of a hat. A riot ensued wrecked the theatre'.[18] As Gysin's statement shows, Tzara's early manifestation of the cut-up highlighted the performative qualities of the method, and it unlocked the confrontational nature of word-play. Burroughs would take this subversive element and build a fictional universe of conflict and struggle around it in the Nova trilogy. He would also recognise other prospective uses for the cut-up, including its potential as a textual portal into new spatial and temporal dimensions. This application is made clear in *The Third Mind*, a series of essays again written in collaboration with Brion Gysin. The pair worked on these during the mid-1960s; however they remained unpublished until 1976. Here Burroughs describes himself as a 'map maker' and 'explorer of psychic areas' because his writing builds new fictional zones and psychic conditions designed to transgress the boundaries enforced by tangible concepts of space and time.[19] The cut-up aids this liberation by creating a hole through prescribed discourses into unchartered territories, 'zones' created and explored within Burroughs' novels. This takes us back to Gysin's comment about the power of the cut-up to eradicate 'time limits' and 'old world slots' because the writer is literally able 'cut out' a counter-narrative to oppose and challenge these limitations.

At this stage the characteristics of the cut-up are employed in accordance with Burroughs' quest to subvert the language of control, but the experiment takes on a further significance by initiating new textual terrain which becomes the basis for literary emancipation and simultaneous social criticism. The Nova trilogy displays a persistent commitment to this mission, and connects the cut-up with a programme of confrontation and revelation designed to expose the communicative channels responsible for transmitting Cold War power relations. Burroughs saw the development of the Nova mythology as a 'warning against either-or conflict, against the Cold War, against ecological distortion, a prophetic warning sounded early'.[20] By cutting up the work of writers 'living and dead', official rhetoric, contemporary journalism and his own writing, he not only intended to create an 'anti-message' to counter the discourses behind Cold War opposition, but also to reveal the multiplicity of messages to be located

[18] William S. Burroughs, 'Fold Ins' in William S. Burroughs & Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind*, (London: John Calder, 1979), 5.
[19] Ibid., 95.
[20] Quoted in Barry Miles, *William Burroughs: El Hombre Invisible*, (London: Virgin, 1992), 147.

within all written discourse. The same rhetoric used to codify society is reconfigured by the cut-up so that the breaks within our ideological system become apparent, and new reverse discourses may emerge from within the original text. The following passage from *Nova Express* demonstrates this counter-narrative device at work as sanctioned Cold War discourse and journalism are merged within the narrative project:

> Police juice and the law are no cure for widespread public petting in chow lines the Soviet Union said yesterday—Anti-American promptly denounced Kennedy's moribund position of insistence: "Washington know-how to deal with this sort of demonstration in Venezuela of irresponsible propaganda—Outside Caracas I am deeply distressed at the Soviet Union's attempt to drag us back just when we was stoned in violation of the administration's twenty billion dollar solemn word". [21]

Merging news bulletins concerning both sides of the Cold War impasse, fragments of presidential rhetoric on this conflict and Burroughs artistic interjection, the cut-up provides a sort of 'deconditioning' that enables the reader to consider their subject position outside of the machinery of control. Burroughs' 'war universe' is a 'verbal universe', therefore alternative methods of communication, combined with a counter-attack on the word provide the best means for liberation: 'the more precise your manipulation or use of words is, the more you know what you are actually dealing with, with what the word actually is. And by knowing it you can supersede it'.[22] For Burroughs, then, this deconditioning means removing all enforced responses to the agents of control:

> Deconditioning means the removal of all automatic reactions deriving from past conditioning [...] all automatic reactions to Queen, Country, Pope, President, Generalismo, Allah, Christ, Fidel Castro, the Communist Party, the CIA [...] When automatic reactions are no longer operative you are in a condition to make up your mind [23]

Burroughs provides the textual means for this rejection of state power and image worship, but he stresses that it is up to the reader to liberate his or herself from the overriding machinery. Such partisan resistance is also reiterated in *The Job* and *Electronic Revolution* (1970), which take the form of interviews interspersed with

[21] William S. Burroughs, *Nova Express*, (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 90, hereafter cited as *NE*.
[22] Burroughs' 1964 interview with Eric Mottram in *Conversations with William S. Burroughs*, ed. Allen Hibbard, (Jackson Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1999), 14.
[23] Quoted in Miles, *El Hombre Invisible*, 181.

articles and fictional routines based around the exposure and annihilation of absolute need and imposed conformity. Before we can look in more detail at the development of the cut-up as a programme of deconditioning in these texts, an analysis of the Nova mythology is required to align the potentials of Burroughs' technical resistance with the production of fictional worlds based around these methods of counterattack.

The Nova Conspiracy

The development of this revolutionary programme can be traced back to the construction of a 'pre-recorded' universe in the Nova trilogy whereby the future of the human race has already been decided, and all events taking place on this 'copy planet' move toward an inevitable nuclear disaster. The individual caught within this predetermined system of events believes that his or her subject position is autonomous, however the controlling forces behind these reality recordings, or scripts, manage and direct the distribution of implanted inter-subjectivities. As with Burroughs' earlier novel, *Naked Lunch* (1959), the unity of character, narrative voice, time and space is thrown into disarray because external representation is accepted at face value. Therefore, characters remain ensconced within the systems of signification prescribed by the oppressive 'Reality Studio':

> Board books scattered to rubbish heaps of the earth – symbol books of the all-powerful board that had controlled thought feeling and movement of a planet from birth to death with iron claws of pain and pleasure – The whole structure of reality went up in silent explosions – paper moon and muslin trees and in the black silver sky great rents as the cover of the world rained down – Biologic film went up[24]

This scene is described in terms of an artificial film set, where subjective reality has been replaced with one-dimensional props like 'muslin trees' and a 'paper moon'. Furthermore, an all powerful 'board' directs the thoughts of planet's inhabitants by scattering 'board'/bored books across the earth, the linguistic or symbolic receptacles of the control system. Hence, the reality studio has the representational power to take control of the planet's development from inception to demise. One of Burroughs' central concerns in the Nova books is the methods of resistance used against the Reality

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[24] William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine,* (London: Flamingo, 1968), 114. Hereafter cited as *SM.*

Studio's 'biologic film', the bodily tape recording that dictates all events, human actions and experiences. In order for the individual to attain liberation from prescribed patterns of existence, the production techniques used by the Reality Studio must be subverted by reconfiguring word and image combinations, or by destroying the film copies completely. The Reality Studio replicates and distributes the word virus through mass media technologies conveying the signifiers of control:

> What does virus do wherever it can dissolve a hole and find traction?—It makes exact copies of itself that start eating to make more copies that start eating to make more copies that start eating and so forth to the virus power the fear hate virus slowly replaces the host with virus copies—Program empty body—A vast tapeworm of bring down word and image moving through your mind screen (*NE:* 73)

The virus power is at work here, expanding and disseminating through processes of biologic and verbal replication that overwhelm the human host and dictate experience. The 'fear hate virus' infects the body via a 'tapeworm' programmed to take over word and image associations in the mind. Hence, a connection is forged between the technological capability of the tape recording and the biologic success of the parasitic organism. The ethos behind the cut-up strategy obviously provides the structural basis of these novels, and supports Burroughs' attempts to de-contaminate the written text from the degenerative word virus. However, plot structure and thematic fruition also stem from the defiance and subversion ingrained within the expanding cut-up mission. A kind of carnivalesque anarchy is present in Burroughs' fevered vision of the biological cut-up. This constitutes a grotesque fusion of bodies and technological systems working to undermine control with nightmare narrative imaginings. These anarchic renderings are designed to mock and parody the control apparatus with the performative powers of exaggeration and embellishment, the arsenal of a carnival counter-aesthetic. In this sense, Burroughs' assault on the Reality Studio manifests in terms of the aforementioned textual subversion, but also through this extreme and unnerving satire of social control.

The three novels, *The Soft Machine, The Ticket That Exploded* and *Nova Express*, are part of an extended fictional universe, and may be viewed as a continuous piece of writing rather than three separate books. Many of the themes, plot strands, and even word for word fragments of text are repeated and expanded from one book to the next; suggesting that Burroughs' fiction reflects the processes of evolution and

adaptation apparent in living organisms. The central plot strand running through these fragmented fictional zones takes the form of an interplanetary invasion, led by the 'Venutians'. As with *Naked Lunch*, Burroughs is trading on Cold War containment anxieties over national borders and identity constructions by transfiguring American paranoia about communist otherness into this literal alien invasion. The Venutians make up just one aspect of the notorious 'Nova Mob', a group of rogue criminals intent on blowing up the planet by creating 'as many insoluble conflicts as possible and always aggravat[ing] existing conflicts' (*TE*: 43). This is achieved by 'dumping on the same planet life forms with incompatible conditions of existence' (*TE*: 43) as a means to cause 'nova', or nuclear war, through a system of feedback:

> At any given time recorders fix the nature of absolute need and dictate the use of total weapons – Like this: Take two opposed pressure groups – Record the most violent and threatening statements of group one with regard to group two and play back to group two – Record the answer and take it back to group one – back and forth between opposed pressure groups – This process is known as "feedback" [...] Manipulated on a global scale feeds back nuclear war (*TE*: 43)

Taking the form of an audio assault upon opposition groups, these feedback recordings have become a formidable means for instigating social degeneration. While writing the Nova trilogy Burroughs became interested in the subversive capabilities of tape recording, and so he began to use feedback processes to incite a kind of revolutionary assault upon social controls. Based on the paper cut-up method already promoted by Burroughs and Gysin, these spliced tape experiments began to feature in the narratives as methods of group sabotage. In the Nova novels, both the control apparatus and those in opposition use these methods of playback to destroy the equilibrium of the other. This interplanetary vandalism is seen as an extension of Cold War theatrics between the US and Russia, because the Nova Mob is prepared to push through the safeguards of nuclear stalemate in an act of total destruction. The hollow nature of this particular binary opposition is revealed by the Nova Mob's plans because it takes an external malignant force to initiate an actual nuclear threat. As previously discussed, Burroughs' conception of a 'game planet' infers that the Cold War is a strategically engineered conflict, prolonged to strengthen the overriding control machinery that encapsulates both Soviet and American power, as proposed in an interview in 1964:

The Nova Mob is using that conflict in an attempt to blow up the planet, because when you get right down to it, what are America and Russia really arguing about? The Soviet Union and United States will eventually consist of interchangeable social parts and neither nation is morally 'right'. [25]

The trilogy fuses its fictional mythology with fragments of foreign policy and military strategy as a means to reflect and satirise the mutually beneficial regulatory practices required to maintain a hyperreal binary conflict.

Burroughs' hypothesis about the viral nature of power and control is extended throughout the mythology, because the Nova criminals are parasitic organisms that spread their special brand of disruption and conflict by invading the human host. These viral organisms find a suitable human subject, or 'co-ordinate point', to assimilate, thus allowing Nova activities to go unnoticed. In fact, one of the central objectives of the Nova conspiracy is to infect the entire population with this biologically engineered virus to cause molecular changes that transform the human host into a Nova replica, as stated in the '*Technical Deposition of the Virus Power*' in *Nova Express*:

Our virus infects the human host and creates our image in him. "We first took our image and put it into code. A technical code developed by the information theorists. This code was written at the molecular level to save space, when it was found that the image material was not dead matter, but exhibited the same life cycle as the virus. This virus released upon the world would infect the entire population and turn them into our replicas" (*NE*: 48)

The 'technical code' devised by the information theorists to aid in the endless replication of the virus is reminiscent of the DNA coding able to map our genetic make-up, but it also conveys the linguistic mechanisms coding the body into a system of subjectivity. Moreover, this invasion of the human host by 'foreign' bodies, and the emphasis placed upon mutation at a molecular level appears to amplify and reflect the nuclear paranoia central to American consciousness. The atmospheric nuclear test series carried out between 1946 and 1963 at various sites including the Nevada Desert and the Pacific Ocean and the continuing fears about radiation spreading over populated areas manifest within Burroughs' alternative universe as a viral contagion effecting unwanted changes

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[25] Burroughs' interview with Conrad Knickerbocker, 'White Junk' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 80.

within the human condition.[26] Burroughs identifies the core of the infectious Nova mob as: "Sammy The Butcher", "Green Tony", "Iron Claws", "The Brown Artist", "Jacky Blue Note", "Limestone John", Izzy The Push", "Hamburger Mary", "Paddy The Sting", "The Subliminal Kid", "The Blue Dinosaur", and "Mr. & Mrs. D", also known as "Mr. Bradly Mr. Martin also known as "The Ugly Spirit" thought to be the leader of the mob—The Nova Mob" (*NE*: 54); therefore imbuing these viral organisms with identifiable character traits. The most elaborate example of this occurs in *The Ticket That Exploded*, when Inspector Lee considers the development of a virus named 'Genial 23':

> The sound track *illuminates* the image .. "Genial's" image in this case .. almost tactile .. Well there it is .. biologists talk about creating life in a test tube .. all they need is a few tape recorders: "Genial 23" at your service sir .. a virus of course .. The sound track is the only existence it has no one hears him he is not there except as a potential like the spheres and crystals that show up under an electron microscope: Cold Sore .. Rabies .. Yello Fever .. St Louis Encephalitis .. just spheres and crystals until they find another host. (*TE*: 15)

Created from spliced tape recordings, like those undertaken by Burroughs at the time of publication, Genial 23 is an engineered virus with human character traits, but 'he' is also described as the ultimate biologic weapon used by unknown powers for unknown ends. This viral character's name indicates Burroughs' growing preoccupation with the unquantifiable forces operating beyond total scientific manipulation and control. During the 1960s, Burroughs became interested in the mathematical and mystical properties of the number twenty-three. He began to collect evidence detailing strange synchronicities relating to this prime number. Burroughs told novelist and futurist Robert Anton Wilson about his findings, and subsequently Wilson would write about the properties of the '23 Enigma', or 'Discordianism' in great detail.[27] Although the 23 Enigma can be attributed to selection and confirmation bias, Burroughs became fixated on the numeric coincidences to be found in science and the occult. For example, human deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) is organised into forty-six chromosomes, the human foetus gets twenty-three of these from its mother and twenty-three from its father. Males

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[26] See, Radiochemistry Society: US Nuclear Tests Gallery, accessed via http://www.radiochemistry.org/history/nuke_tests/index.shtml.

[27] For further information on the 23 Enigma see, Robert Anton Wilson, *Cosmic Trigger: Final Secret of the Illuminati*, (Reno: New Falcon Publications, 1977), 269pp.

and females share twenty-two pairs of identical chromosomes, but the twenty-third is different. The combination of 'X' and 'Y' chromosomes at this point in a DNA strand dictates the development of male or female characteristics. Furthermore, occultist Aleister Crowley described the number twenty-three as the 'number of life' or 'a thread' shaping human destiny.[28] For Burroughs, though, the number twenty-three not only conveys the codification of the human subject, but the untapped and ambivalent potential for (post)human development. As such, instances of this number recur throughout Burroughs' novels as coded motifs for both conspiratorial associations and libertarian release.

Described as a 'potential' life form derived from microscopic beginnings, Genial 23 constitutes a scientific possibility for new modes of being, a kind of potentiality that Burroughs reconsiders in the Red Night trilogy. Here, Burroughs showcases his belief that biologic engineering may pose an even greater threat than nuclear development if deployed for the wrong reasons, a concern to be reiterated in *Cities of the Red Night*, and in later interviews such as his 1981 conversation with Sylvère Lotringer:

> The whole question of a selective pestilence is quite within the range of modern technology. They can produce a plague that would only affect white people, or black people, or mongoloids [...] that's where you start when you want to use a selective pestilence. You look at all the diseases to which only certain races are subject [29]

For Burroughs, biological engineering designed to target particular ethnic groups would establish a greater urgency because, in contrast with the perpetually deferring form of nuclear warfare, a 'selective pestilence' may constitute a covert form of genocide.

Cold War containment anxieties about 'communist' infection are played out through science fiction plots where the human body is literally taken over by alien 'body snatchers', that place national and personal boundaries into question. Many science fiction and 'b-movie' themes are replicated in the Nova trilogy and beyond, therefore linking Burroughs' dystopian vision directly with the circulation of popular reactions to

[28] For further details see, Aleister Crowley, *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings of Aleister Crowley*, ed. Israel Regardie, (Newburyport MA: Red Wheel/Weiser, 1986), 336pp.
[29] Burroughs 1981 interview with Sylvère Lotringer, 'Exterminating' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 531.

weapons development. The influence of nuclear testing upon popular culture is noted by Paul S. Boyer et al., in an analysis of American society at mid-century:

The year was 1954, and moviegoers all across America were shivering in terror at *Them!*, the giant ant film that was part of a wave of mutant movies pouring out of Hollywood in the fifties. The atomic bomb and nuclear radiation played a big role in these productions. In *The Incredible Shrinking Man*, the unlucky hero is accidentally exposed to "atomic dust" and begins to shrink. In *The Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman*, the process is reversed; and nuclear testing spawns a giant octopus in *It Came from Beneath the Sea*.[30]

Hence, these fears began to manifest themselves as information came to light about H-bomb tests and atmospheric radiation experiments throughout the period. The populace became fixated by scenes of bodily disintegration and attack from mutant creatures exposed to biotechnological hazards.

The parasitic architects of Burroughs' interplanetary invasion enforce conformity by enslaving humans to systems of viral semiotic suggestion, but they inhibit human potential even further by addicting the subject to the 'birth-death cycle' (*TE*: 8) of procreation and dissolution: 'Death *is* orgasm *is* rebirth *is* death in orgasm *is* their insanitary Venusian Gimmick *is* the whole birth death cycle of action' (*TE*: *8*). As a result humans will never be able to transcend the limitations of their 'flesh addiction' and climb to the next level of the evolutionary ladder. This 'gimmick' has the effect of satirising fixed identity constraints, and the binary opposition of masculine and feminine by demonstrating how the nova parasites feed off 'the existing fucked up situation' of prescribed sexual division. The word transmits this addiction by enforcing an acceptance of this evolutionary inertia. To make matters worse, society is also susceptible to attack from the persuasive communication channels used by the Nova Mob to escalate conflict and divorce the subject from any means of active resistance. As previously mentioned, the Reality Studio produces the scripts that enslave the population to a predetermined biologic film. But even more alarmingly, Burroughs envisages the body, or 'soft machine', as a recording instrument that continuously absorbs and plays back the messages implanted by the Nova Mob into the genetic composition of the host:

[30] Paul S. Boyer, et al., *The Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*, Second Edition, (Lexington, MA: Heath Press, 1993), 963.

Virus defined as the three-dimensional coordinate point of a controller—Transparent sheets with virus perforations like punch cards passed through the host on the soft machine feeling for a point of intersection—The virus attack is primarily directed against affective animal life—Virus of rage hate fear ugliness swirling around you waiting for a point of intersection (*NE*: 73)

The human condition is degraded to such an extent that the body becomes a receptacle, prepared for occupation by parasitic alien organisms and biologic recordings. The body is appropriated by the virus of 'rage hate fear ugliness' mentioned on several occasions in *Nova Express*. This virus runs through the infected host following a set of pre-ordained coordinates that map out intersections for total assimilation. Therefore, the human subject endures two forms of Nova assault: physical deterioration, and preconditioned psychological control. At a time when the CIA was involved in various 'mind control' experiments, it is not surprising that Burroughs had envisaged a system whereby human beings functioned as networked recording instruments designed to follow the fear and rage impulses programmed by a centralized control mechanism. Consequently, we must consider the impact of government agency experimentation on Burroughs' fictional routines.

Government Agency Mind Control Experimentation

Beginning in 1953 and continuing throughout the 1960s, including the same time period as the publication of 'The Nova Trilogy', the CIA was engaged in a widespread programme of human experimentation using mind altering drugs and various other psychological techniques as a means to direct human behaviour. The MKULTRA programme used LSD and electromagnetic waves, among other treatments in an attempt to develop the perfect vehicle for psychological conditioning and encoded brain reaction. As Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain have stated in their study *The CIA, LSD and the Sixties Rebellion* (1985), the intelligence agency thought that LSD would make them 'virtual masters of the universe', and that programme enthusiasts became consumed with an interest in developing 'dial-a-brain' drugs:

The CIA realized that an adversary intelligence service could employ LSD 'to produce anxiety or terror in medically unsophisticated subjects unable to distinguish drug-induced psychosis from actual insanity. The only way to be sure that an operative would not freak out under such circumstances would be to give him

a taste of LSD (a mind control vaccine?) before he was sent on a sensitive mission. Such a person would therefore be in a better position to handle the experience. CIA documents actually refer to agents who were familiar with LSD as 'enlightened operatives'. [31]

Psychiatric patients, military servicemen and agency operatives alike were used as guinea pigs in numerous conditioning experiments designed to test psychological suggestibility in controlled situations. It was proposed that LSD may be employed for interrogation purposes on both sides of the Cold War, and so a section of CIA operatives would undergo a course of LSD treatment in order to counteract this eventuality. Burroughs was to develop a further interest in these types of mind control practices over the next decade, often stating his interest in scientific journals and popular conspiracy theories about 'out of body' experiences and covert testing. Sheila Ostrander's and Lynn Schroeder's *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* (1971) details studies by communist scientists into astral body experiments and electromagnetic energy fields: 'Mediums say you can expand your consciousness via the human energy body. Evidence seems to suggest that often telepathic information appears to be picked up by our bodies but never reaches our conscious awareness'.[32] This fascinated Burroughs, not only because of the implications for control structures but because of the potentials these experiments created for human development, an area not fully explored in his fiction until the 'Red Night' trilogy.

Despite his misgivings about regulatory systems, Burroughs introduces the 'Nova Police' in *The Soft Machine* as a force to counter the mind control activities of the Nova Mob. As Inspector J. Lee explains at the beginning of *Nova Express,* the central task of this agency is to 'order total resistance against The Nova Conspiracy and all those engaged in it' (*NE*: 7) by arresting the Nova criminals, occupying the Reality Studio 'and retak[ing] their universe of Fear Death and Monopoly' (*NE* 7). Burroughs limits the power of the Nova Police by describing them as a regulatory cure to the Nova corruption, in much the same way as the addict is cured of their drug dependence. Once the job is complete, the agency will no longer have a reason to operate on this planet.

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[31] Martin A. Lee & Bruce Shlain, *The CIA, LSD and the Sixties Rebellion,* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 17.
[32] Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain,* (New York: Marlow & Company, 1997), 190.

The agents, including Inspector Lee and Agent K-9, plan their assault on the reality script by inciting the use of street-level resistance and guerrilla tactics in a fight toward the Reality Studio where they intend destroy the film completely by exposing the negatives:

> "Street gangs, Uranium born of nova conditions, get out and fight for your streets. Call in the Chinese and any random factors. Cut all tape. Shift cut tangle magpie voice lines of the earth. Know about The Board's 'Green Deal?' They plan to board the first life boat in drag and leave 'their human dogs' under the white hot skies of Venus. 'Operation Sky Switch' also known as 'Operation Total Disposal.' All right you bastards, we'll by God show you 'Operation Total Exposure.' (*NE*: 15)

These guerrilla tactics inciting resistance from 'Uranium born', or nuclear age street gangs, take the form of cut-ups to counter the mind control imposed by the recordings absorbed by the human soft machine. Playing on the celluloid control of the Reality Studio, and inverting the total destruction of nuclear warfare, the rebellious Nova Police make plans for 'Operation Total Disposal' otherwise known as 'Operation Total Exposure' as a means to destroy the prescribed reality films imposed upon them. The Nova agents recognise that this 'machine strategy' can be 'redirected' by deconstructing the relationship between word and image. The applications of the tape recording are reversed so that words may be 'cut in' at random, therefore undermining the embedded word patterns with substituted arrangements beyond Nova indoctrination.

As we can see, Burroughs' fictional plot lines intersect with the aforementioned semiotic experiments he attempted during this prolific period. The contemporaneous development of cut-up into a major multi-media artistic project involved further collaborations, this time with production assistant Ian Sommerville and filmmaker Anthony Balch. These experiments in sound recording and film revealed to Burroughs the flexibility of the technique because film and tape could be edited and spliced together in alternative formations. Burroughs' pursuit of the cut-up had become so relentless that he experimented with tape recordings on the streets of London in order to evaluate the revolutionary power he attributed to the technique. He even claimed to have

closed down a London café by playing back disparate sound recordings that allegedly unnerved the customers to such an extent that the establishment lost all of its business.[33]

'Operation Rewrite', introduced in *The Ticket That Exploded* and continued in *Nova Express*, best describes the objectives of the Nova resistance by outlining the need to extract the word virus, or 'Other Half' from its parasitic relationship with the human victim, before cellular degeneration can take hold. Seeing as the ability to maintain inner silence has been undermined by the act of 'sub-vocal' speech, the subject must 'splice' audio recordings of their bodily sounds with external noises in attempt to detach themselves from the viral Other Half:

> Remember that you can separate yourself from the 'Other Half' from the word. The word is spliced in with the sound of your intestines and breathing with the beating of your heart. The first step is to record the sounds of your body and start splicing them in yourself. Splice in your body sounds with the body sounds of your best friend and see how familiar he gets. Splice your body sounds in with air hammers. Blast jolt vibrate the 'Other Half' right out into the street. (*TE*: 49-50)

By rewriting these biological messages the human host is able to attain such a level of deconditioning that escape from predetermined behavioural patterns and prescribed responses is made possible. But even more revolutionary are the new forms of existence created by this act of physical and verbal resistance. By 'splicing in' with the recordings of other individuals, new identities may be formed with greater subversive potential: 'this is the invisible generation it is the efficient generation hands work and go see some interesting results when several hundred tape recorders turn up at a political rally' (*TE*: 162).

The cut-up ethos not only provides the structural basis of the Nova trilogy but also the underlying agenda for unlocking human potentials. Although the cut-up and tape recording techniques would be promoted by Burroughs over the next few years in essays and interviews such as *The Job* and *Electronic Revolution*, his novels would gradually return to conventional linguistic structures and narrative techniques. As far as fictional writing was concerned, Burroughs felt that he had 'taken the cut-up as far as it would go [...] I had such an overrun on tape recorders, cameras and scrapbooks that I

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[33] See Miles, *El Hombre Invisible*, ch. 9.

couldn't look at them, and started writing straight narratives and essays'.[34] This is why a distinction must be made between the methods of resistance employed in these earlier fictions, and the programme for human development outlined in the Red Night trilogy. Nonetheless, this transition from stylistic resistance to narrative escape justifies further consideration as the cut-up constituted a method of social deconditioning in the pamphlets and routines of the 1970s.

Burroughs' 'Guerrilla Semiotics' and the Return to Narrative

Jennie Skerl has described the chronological development of Burroughs' fiction from *Naked Lunch* to the Red Night trilogy in terms of a 'two-phase' writing project. *Naked Lunch* and the Nova trilogy are viewed as part of the first writing phase responsible for the expansion of such 'technical innovations' as the 'addiction metaphor, the creation of a mythology (the Nova conspiracy), the use of a montage structure, and the cut-up technique'.[35] The second phase Skerl identifies includes: *The Wild Boys* (1971), *Exterminator* (1973), *Port of Saints* (1975), and the evolution of the 'Red Night' mythology during the 1980s. The creation of this new metaphorical world is seen to take over from Burroughs' earlier Nova mythology by re-establishing the fight against control structures, and the quest for freedom from 'social and biological' preconditions. But this second phase differs from the earlier novels, because a new metaphorical world opens the way for human potential and social change through 'fantasy' and human development. Rather than describe this fiction as a two-phase project, it is useful to consider the continuous evolutionary nature of Burroughs' writing. As we have seen, the earlier novels develop a dystopian fictional realm whereby the individual is caught within a series of predetermined events and responses. Severe limits are placed on human agency, and even textual resistance 'offers nothing' by way of utopian hopes for the future, as Inspector J. Lee of the Nova police reiterates in *Nova Express*:

[34] Quoted in Oliver Harris, 'Cut-Up Closure': The Return to Narrative' in Skerl and Lydenberg, *William S. Burroughs at the Front: Critical Reception*, 256.
[35] Jennie Skerl, 'Freedom Through Fantasy in the Recent Novels of William S. Burroughs' in ibid., 189.

And what does my program of total austerity and total resistance offer *you?* I offer you nothing. I am not a politician. These are conditions of total emergency. And these are my instructions for total emergency if carried out *now* could avert the total disaster *now* on tracks (*NE*: 6 – Burroughs' emphases)

The evolutionary analogy is appropriate because the novels move from this technical resistance of power, to a realisation that fictional worlds provide the means for transcendence and escape. As previously indicated, the later novels, particularly the 'Red Night Trilogy', return to a conventional narrative structure, thus leaving behind the more radical forms of technical resistance in favour of fictional realms of human potential and social change. Not only has Burroughs' writing evolved at this stage, but the identities and spatio-temporal dimensions introduced in the Nova novels now offer new types of being in accordance with a utopian possible world.

The last texts to advocate the cut-up as the primary means of action against authority are *The Job* and *Electronic Revolution* (1970), where Burroughs expands his programme of resistance by outlining the extent of mass media coercion, and by giving instructions about the 'deconditioning' and 'retraining' designed to combat these channels of imposed allegiance. Written after the Watergate scandal, *Electronic Revolution* takes on the activist spirit by accrediting the tape recording with the ability to 'spread rumors', 'discredit opponents', and 'produce and escalate riots'.[36] By cutting up official rhetoric with recordings of 'stammering coughs sneezes hiccoughs snarls pain fear whimperings apoplectic sputterings slobbering drooling idiot noises sex and animal sound effects', Burroughs claims it is possible to discredit political opposition:

I consider the potential of thousands of people with recorders, portable and stationary, messages passed along like signal drums, a parody of the President's speech up and down balconies, in and out open windows, through walls, over courtyards, taken up by barking dogs, muttering bums, music, traffic down windy streets, across parks and soccer fields. Illusion is a revolutionary weapon.[37]

By applying the same multi-media technologies used to spread the word virus, Burroughs is suggesting that the public has the ability to subvert the messages of control by neutralising them with the art of random artifice. As far as he is concerned, illusion becomes a revolutionary weapon because the masses can be influenced by parodies of

[36] William S. Burroughs, *Electronic Revolution*, (Göttingen: Expanded Media Editions, 1970), 12-13.
[37] Ibid., 12.

presidential rhetoric and establishment doctrine that effectively expose political agendas. Cut-up recordings become a 'long range weapon to scramble and nullify associational lines put down by mass media', but they can also be used as 'unscrambling devices' with the power to decode the implanted signals and messages allegedly infiltrating all communications systems. According to Burroughs' semiotic theory, these encrypted messages have the potential to dictate the outcome of events by penetrating news publications with future conflicts and outcomes:

> imagine that a news magazine like TIME got out a whole issue a week before publication and filled it with news based on predictions following a certain line [...] giving our boys a boost in every story and the Commies as many defeats and casualties as possible, a whole new issue of TIME formed from slanted prediction of future news. Now imagine this scrambled out through the mass media. [38]

Exposing the covert communications upholding Cold War binary opposition provides the subject with the ability to recognise, and chart the communication flows otherwise concealed by the myriad of information circulating within postmodern society. *Electronic Revolution* is also used as a vehicle for explaining the complexities of the word virus. He goes as far as to suggest that the word may be a 'living time bomb left on this planet to be activated by remote control', 'an extermination program' based on the fact that 'all viruses ultimately destroy the cells in which they are living'.[39] According to this mixture of philosophy and scientific speculation, the act of speech has developed from this word virus via a process of biologic mutation, effecting biologic changes in the host at an adaptive genetic level. Therefore, the word virus takes on the disastrous potential of the biological or nuclear weapon, and so guerrilla tactics, both semiotic and literal, are required to counter its influence: 'There's a lot of violence in my work because violence is obviously necessary in certain circumstances. I'm often talking in a revolutionary, guerrilla context where violence is the only recourse'.[40]

The Job also attempts to stimulate a revolt against state control by proposing schemes of deconditioning and retraining to reverse the effects of conservative control and nationalist conformity. Burroughs believes that a 'worldwide monopoly of

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[38] Ibid., 17.
[39] Ibid., 17.
[40] Burroughs' 1987 interview with Jim McMenamin and Larry McCaffrey, 'The Non-Body Route' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 672.

knowledge and discoveries for counter-revolutionary purposes is the basic issue' and that 'all knowledge, all discoveries' belong to the populace as a 'basic right'.[41] Therefore, the time had come to formulate tactics to destroy dictatorial structures by supporting the counter-cultural schemes advocated by such contemporary movements as Black Power and the Hippie community. The process of deconditioning suggested here includes the formation of 'academies' and 'authority units' whose purpose is to *mirror* and *infiltrate* the activities and policies of central authority in an attempt to *undermine* the basis of control: 'These authority units honeycombed the Western world, destroying the whole concept of authority, as an unlimited flood of detectable counterfeit money would destroy the monetary system'.[42]

The revolutionary counterforce is also educated in the political exploitation of words, and the ways in which to escape the boundaries of the word virus. As with *Electronic Revolution,* the manipulation of word and image combinations is emphasised, and a mission to divorce signifier from signified is used to reverse viral conditions. *The Job* takes this revolutionary standpoint a stage further by noting a need to escape the ideological conditioning of 'inner' and 'outer' space as separate entities. New frontiers must be reached by escaping from bodily incarceration: 'Free men don't exist on this planet at this time, because they don't exist in human bodies. By the mere fact of being in a human body you're controlled by all sorts of biologic and environmental necessities'.[43] By the end of the 1950s the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union was beginning to pick up momentum, and Burroughs was obviously influenced by the space programmes taking place on both sides on the Cold War divide. In 1957 the Soviets successfully launched the first satellite, *Sputnik I,* into orbit, and this was immediately followed by *Sputnik II,* which carried the first living organism into space—a dog called Laika. Following these advances, the American response took the form of a 'National Aeronautics and Space Act' which was passed by the Eisenhower administration in April 1958, and the formation of the 'National Aeronautics and Space

[41] William S. Burroughs and Daniel Odier, *The Job: Interviews with William S. Burroughs,* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 74.
[42] Quoted in Mottram, *The Algebra of Need,* 140.
[43] Ibid., 141.

Administration (NASA).[44] The United States successfully launched its own satellite in January 1958, and as a consequence the funding made available for NASA endeavours increased dramatically over the following years. The race was taken to the next stage of development in 1961, when the Soviets sent the first man into orbit, Yuri Gagarin in *Vostok I*. The US would then match this achievement the following month, at which stage President Kennedy declared his intention to direct the US manned space programme towards a lunar landing. In addition to this exploration of 'outer' space came a growing interest in the limits of 'inner' or sensory space, particularly in relation to the psychic capabilities of the human subject. Burroughs, then, would begin to harness these frontiers of inner and outer space in his quest for alternative forms of existence.

Reminiscent of Ostrander and Schroeder's investigation into extra-sensory research by the Soviets, Burroughs promotes the simultaneous mastery of inner and outer space as interrelated frontiers. As Russian rocket scientist K.E. Tsiolkovksy stated in the 1930s:

> Especially in the coming era of space flights, telepathic abilities are necessary. And they will aid the whole development of mankind. While the space rocket must bring men toward knowledge of the grand secrets in the universe, the study of psychic phenomena can lead us toward knowledge of the mysteries of the human mind. It is precisely the solution of this secret which promises man the greatest achievements.[45]

This pseudo-scientific objective of physical and spatial discovery offers a taster of Burroughs' fictional themes in the 'Red Night Trilogy'. The transcendental properties of the cut-up are redirected toward counter narratives, and the creation of 'possible worlds' whereby biological evolution effects positive changes in the human condition. This becomes the fictional ground for the type of psychic and spatial achievement hoped for by Tsiolkovksy, an uncapped narrative frontier beyond biologic and environmental constraints. This point also marks the aforementioned return to straight narrative, because Burroughs rethinks methods of linguistic insurgency. He begins to engineer fictional escape-routes designed to free the individual from corrupt political systems and psychological bondage. Therefore, I will now outline the development of other forms of

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[44] For details on the space programmes, see: Dale Carter, *The Final Frontier: The Rise and Fall of the American Rocket State*, (London: Verso, 1988), 280pp.
[45] Quoted in Ostrander and Schroeder, *Psychic Discoveries*, 74.

social revolt and scientific potential in Burroughs' writing, and contrast these with the government agency radiological testing and scientific scandal exposed during the 1970s.

Burroughs' Scientific Revolt and Government Agency Exposure

I have already demonstrated that the conversations, articles and fictional routines included within *The Job* are intended to counter the perceived state system of intimidation and absolute control. Burroughs suggests that liberation may be achieved by harnessing the alienation of youth caused by the current control machinery. By divorcing the subject from a condition of absolute need, and creating alternative forms of education and training, Burroughs anticipates a way to break down national boundaries and the knowledge monopoly into an open market of shared cultures and ideas. The central vehicle for achieving this potential social system is 'Academy 23', an educational project which creates a means of escape from obligatory thought and identity construction. It is the role of the aforementioned 'authority units' to parody the concept of authoritarianism, thereby undermining the control structure without becoming embroiled within a system of paradoxical binary opposition. The 'job' of the academy is to attain 'complete freedom from past conditioning' in order to realise total independence and alternative living spaces free from ideological organisation.[46] Based upon the social de-conditioning proposed by L. Ron Hubbard's scientology movement, Burroughs suggests ways of providing the individual with the power to recognise oppression as it is disseminated via technological channels and mass media information flows. Submission exists within the contemporary social structure because the media spread and implant information designed to confuse and exploit the global population. According to Burroughs, systems collapse is inevitable because 'punishment now overbalances reward in the so-called permissive society, and young people no longer want the paltry rewards offered to them. Rebellion is world-wide'.[47]

The first step toward the curtailment of control is an understanding of 'control addiction' within American politics. The whole domestic scene and education system

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[46] Mottram, *The Algebra of Need*, 141.
[47] Ibid., 143.

works to uphold this dependence, and therefore alternatives to imposed social functionalism are required to unlock human potential. The schooling offered by Academy 23 takes the form of networked institutes which train the young in a number of counter-political methods, including the exploitation of the word, knowledge of virology, lessons in yoga, martial arts, ESP, sense-withdrawal and the formulation of revolutionary techniques such as weapons training and riot escalation. The eventual aim of these learning foundations is the formation of all-male counter-communities, linked on a global scale by a belief in the principles set out by the academy and a rejection of enforced gender roles. In fact, the destruction of existing social roles and institutions is viewed as the only alternative to an impending nuclear war. Although Burroughs' vision of an all-male revolt takes on the qualities of a sinister regime by excluding female influence, it also presents a form of social organisation that he views as a desirable alternative. In spite of potential feminist criticism directed against a male community propagated by cloning and other forms of scientific experimentation, and the questionable similarities with Hubbard's Scientology cult, Academy 23 is Burroughs' vision of a harmonious possible utopia beyond ideological struggles. *The Job* projects this personal vision of the future by mixing fictional scenarios with statements of revolt. This is Burroughs' attempt to put an end to conflict by suggesting the possibility for human development and evolution, areas he would apply in *The Wild Boys* (1972) and his later Red Night trilogy. These fictional worlds give life to the revolutionary powers contained in *The Job* by projecting partisan resistance onto a homosexual guerrilla army, capable of self-sufficiency and adaptation. From now on, Burroughs' protagonists exceed collective insubordination and opposition because they encapsulate the triumph of the male youth movement over imposed systems. The students of Academy 23 are metamorphosed into the 'wild boys', a later manifestation called the 'Johnson Family', and the pirate community central to narrative development in *Cities of the Red Night.* It is this latter fictional society that I will look at in detail later in this chapter, principally because the separatist pirate colony in *Cities* demonstrates the 'retroactive' utopianism of Burroughs' fictional potentials. The quest for social improvement and enlightenment advocated in *The Job* is apparent within these brotherhoods because the fictional

possible world fashions alternative modes of being, and defies the spatio-temporal limits imposed by the control apparatus.

This mission to create a fiction of unrestricted human agency and progress by means of insurgency and positive scientific progress, is completely at odds with the kinds of experimentation, secrecy and exploitation taking place on American soil during the 1970s. Whereas Burroughs imagined a liberating scientific age enabling new social structures, education systems and physiological enhancement, federal agencies were employing science to maintain the gridlock of the Cold War power structure. Between 1947 and 1975, the Department of Energy (DoE) and its predecessor the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) sanctioned a series of covert radiation and drugs tests to be carried out on sections of the American population. The questionable nature of this secret human experimentation was withheld from public knowledge until a trickle of leaks, reports and investigations managed to reach the public domain during the 1970s and early 1980s.[48] It came to light that from its inception with the Manhattan Project, the US nuclear programme and supporting government policy had placed scientific and military advancement above the safety of the American people. Local communities were not only living in close proximity to atmospheric tests with nuclear weapons such as those undertaken in the Pacific between 1946 and 1958, and the 204 underground nuclear blasts authorised in Nevada from 1963, but were also used as human guinea pigs in radiation experiments during this thirty year period.[49] The following examples display the lengths Federal agencies were prepared to go to in the name of Cold War supremacy, and the contradictory nature of security and containment legislation at this time. A cross-section of American citizens, including newborn infants, pregnant women, psychiatric patients, prisoners and cancer patients were exposed to nuclear radiation in a number of ways. Examples of these methods range from atmospheric exposure and contaminated foodstuffs, to full body irradiation and plutonium injections. The following passage, taken from an essay by Tod Ensign and Glenn Alcalay, details the horrific nature of these clandestine tests:

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[48] See Tod Ensign & Glenn Alcalay, 'Duck and Cover(up): US Radiation Testing on Humans', *Covert Action Quarterly*, (January 1996), accessed via http://www.netti.fi/makako/mind/radiatio.htm
[49] Ibid.

> From 1960-71, in experiments which may have caused the most deaths and spanned the most years, Dr. Eugene Saenger, a radiologist at the University of Cincinnati, exposed 88 cancer patients to whole body radiation. Many of the guinea pigs were poor African-Americans at Cincinnati General Hospital with inoperable tumors. All but one of the 88 patients has since died [...] Following exposure to 100 rads of whole body radiation (about 7,500 chest X-rays), Amelia Jackson bled and vomited for days and became permanently disabled.[50]

Although knowledge of these tests was beginning to reach the public domain by the early 1970s, and internal inquiries such as the 1974 AEC investigation were being created to inspect the legality and legitimacy of the programme aims, patient monitoring and the concealment of data would continue throughout the decade. Secrecy in government affairs was upheld to such an extent that, for many years, patients remained unaware of the treatments they had been subjected to, and the subsequent threats to health and safety. Throughout the 1960s, a number of 'guinea pigs' were provided by the state prison system for experimentation with radiation exposure, biomedical procedures and pharmaceutical products. Inmates in Oregon and Washington State were exposed to six-hundred roentgens of radiation, one-hundred times the allowable annual dose for nuclear workers, and were not informed of the risk of developing cancer. By 1972 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) estimated that more than ninety percent of all investigational drugs were first tested on prisoners.[51] These astounding statistics caused a human rights scandal based on the belief that prisoner experimentation was part of a system of intimidation inherent within the prison structure, and as such inmate participation could hardly be described as voluntary. An article by Jessica Mitford published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1973 would expose these atrocities by highlighting the dehumanising nature of biomedical research on disadvantaged sections of the population.[52] The result of this adverse publicity was the creation of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, a group of commissioners employed to investigate experimentation on prisoners. However, the commission's findings displayed a 'hesitancy to call for a complete halt to the use of prisoners in nontherapeutic experimentation'.[53] The advisory

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[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Jessica Mitford, 'Experiments Behind Bars: Doctors, Drug Companies and Prisoners', *Atlantic Monthly*, January, 1973, 64-73.
[53] Quoted in Ensign & Alcalay, 'Duck and Cover(up)'.

report stated that the use of experimental subjects was ethical, if the research was 'compelling' and subjects lived in an environment of 'openness' and 'equity'.

In 1974 yet another scandal hit the headlines, this time implicating the Central Intelligence Agency and Department of Defense in a number of illegal domestic trials, including clandestine Cold War chemical experiments. The *New York Times* published a report on these activities; therefore instigating another public outcry and further congressional hearings.[54] The aforementioned MKULTRA programme was at the centre of this investigation, and suggestions that the CIA was researching the uses of chemically induced mind-control techniques on prisoners of war were quickly dismissed by officials. Moreover, the majority of documents pertaining to these psychoactive drug trials were destroyed in 1973, 'by order of then Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms'.[55] As a result, a complete picture of the LSD, mescaline and alleged radiation programmes endorsed by the CIA is made virtually impossible. However, the congressional committee put together to question CIA research came to the conclusion that prior consent was not obtained from the subjects used in the programme, and that the nature of MKULTRA 'called into question the decision by agencies not to fix guidelines for experiments'.[56] The federal government attempted to avoid legal liability for the consequences of these trials, but a number of military subjects, supported by the Army, filed lawsuits for compensation. This legal battle began in 1975, the year Burroughs began researching and writing *Cities of the Red Night*, and was to continue well into Reagan's terms of office.

Obviously, the rights and well-being of American citizens had been forsaken in favour of nuclear deterrents that pose a greater threat than any external attack. The 'classified' information collated on test subjects and follow-up medical examinations was withheld not only in the interests of national security, but because the release of this sensitive data would prove to be a public relations nightmare, at a time when the nation was coming to terms with the Vietnam war and the scandal surrounding the 'Watergate' tapes. The classification of information, subjectification of the domestic populace, and

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] See the *Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 620 pp.

the development of intricate communication channels to protect 'national interests', reflects Burroughs' control machinery to an alarming degree, and gives some explanation for the depth of his political revolt during the 1970s. The alternative social systems and application of pseudo-scientific methods for bodily release cited in *The Job* encompass a total rejection of this history of Cold War corruption. What would begin as a manifesto for revolution would become the basis for fictional escape in the Red Night trilogy. *Cities of the Red Night* directly reflects the scandal and anxiety surrounding nuclear, biological and chemical testing during the Cold War, by fictionalising the shocking implications for human subjects and our biospheric surroundings. The virus power is converted into another system of infection with devastating effects on the human condition, but this time the fusion of nuclear and biological components provides a new spin on established ideas. What distinguishes *Cities* from the earlier fiction is Burroughs' ability to convert oppressive systems and viral devastation into the foundations for his counteractive possible worlds. Before I analyse these qualities, the relationship between nuclear anxiety, viral control and narrative development must be addressed to explain the introduction and development of a new mythological structure.

Brion Gysin's Gobi Desert Myth and *Cities of the Red Night*

The later novels seem to owe their evolution to the mythological aspects of the Nova trilogy, and the resistance groups outlined in *The Job* rather than to the extreme methods of linguistic resistance contained in the earlier fictions. So this is where we must look in order to locate the origins of the nuclear mythology central to plot progression in *Cities of the Red Night.* In *Cities,* Burroughs embarks on a mission of historical disorientation and science fiction fantasy by splitting the narrative into three 'books', or episodes that link together in unanticipated combinations. The three main narrative strands signify distinct styles and genres, including a story set in the eighteenth-century detailing the fictional history of a separatist pirate community, the story of Clem Snide, a private detective investigating a missing person's case, and a mythological tale about the six cities of the Red Night, an ancient civilisation located in what is now the Gobi desert. Although this marks a return to straight narrative, the influence of the cut-up ethos is

evident in the way that the novel merges time and place from one narrative thread to the next. The text is imbued with the power to break through the boundaries imposed by the historical order because characters can travel into alternative spatial and temporal frontiers, and project into new forms of being. From this brief structural description, it is possible to deduce that Burroughs has chosen to explore new textual terrain, reaching beyond the linguistic power struggles of his earlier Nova trilogy, to fashion new imaginary spaces. Before the full implications of this counter-historical fiction can be investigated, an analysis of nuclear and biologic concerns is required to explain the formulation of a new mythological landscape for the Red Night trilogy.

The Nova trilogy had introduced the concept that all history is pre-recorded and that all events, including the nuclear disaster, are part of a cycle set to repeat at key stages in human development:

> 'The earliest artifacts date back about ten thousand years give a little take a little and 'recorded' – (or pre-recorded) history about seven thousand years. The human race is said to have been on set for 500,000 years. That leaves 490,000 years unaccounted for. Modern man has advanced from stone ax to nuclear weapons in ten thousand years. (*TE*: 39)

According to this interpretation the nuclear disaster has happened before and will happen again in agreement with the principles of the Reality Studio; therefore plotting Cold War nuclear weapons development along the lines set out by the reality scripts. What makes this so crucial to the development of a nuclear mythology in *Cities* is the inclusion of Brion Gysin's fable about an ancient civilisation wiped out by a nuclear explosion:

> 'Mr Brion Gysin suggests that a nuclear disaster in what is now the Gobi desert wiped out all traces of a civilization that made such a disaster possible. Perhaps their nuclear weapons did not operate on the same principle as the ones we have now. Perhaps they had no contact with the word organism' (*TE*: 39)

Further information about Gysin's myth can be found in *Exterminator!* where the white race: 'results from a nuclear disaster [...] some 30,000 years ago. The only survivors were slaves marginal to the area who had no knowledge of science'. Genetic changes were conveyed throughout the species, in much the same way as the dissemination of the

word virus, instigating the creation of a new albino race. Unfortunately, this contagion is passed on through the generations meaning that the virus will remain a threat to human existence:

> This virus this ancient parasite is what Freud calls the unconscious spawned in the caves of Europe on flesh already diseased from radiation. Anyone descended from this line is basically different from those who have not had the cave experience and contracted this deadly sickness that lives in your blood and nerves [...] They didn't belong to themselves anymore. They belonged to the virus.[57]

Subsequently, life on this planet is on course for a swift termination because mankind's parasitic 'other half' reduces human instincts to the basic fear and rage also mentioned in *Nova Express.* The virus, aligned here with Freud's identification of the unconscious, is made even more potent when exposed to the diseased flesh of the subject suffering radiation sickness. Subsequently, any individual descended from this line will be genetically different, and a carrier of this virulent infection. The natural conclusion for this behaviour is a man-made apocalypse that systematically wipes out all chances of escape. The only way for Burroughs to envisage escape from this premature death is to discard predetermined human history in favour of confrontational counter-narratives. These fictions reconstitute the past into alternative forms, but also contain potential visions of future resistance. By including Gysin's myth in *The Ticket That Exploded,* Burroughs sought to emphasise the extent of these pre-recorded systems as they forced civilisation toward the inevitable nuclear end. In this fictional process, military stratagems and scientific discoveries become fused with mythological nightmares. Cold War history is fictionalised in this way because the Nova plot provides the means to expose the foolishness of assured destruction; whilst the call to arms of those 'Uranium born', individuals subordinate to the Reality Studio, enacts a partisan stand against our stage-managed nuclear annihilation. Although Burroughs has mythologized Cold War history and global relations in the dystopian space of his Nova trilogy, there is little suggestion of life beyond the nuclear interruption. Therefore, it is up to the later trilogy to create prospective forms of freedom from technological despotism.

[57] William S. Burroughs, *Exterminator!,* (New York: Penguin, 1973), 24.

In Book One of *Cities*, the mythology is reworked into the destruction of the six cities of the Red Night; Tamaghis, Ba' dan, Waghdas, Yass-Waddah, Naufana, and Ghadis. The nuclear explosion is in someway fused with a natural disaster as a radioactive meteor hits Tamaghis, causing fallout to seep into the surrounding atmosphere. The effects differ from Burroughs' earlier accounts of nuclear disaster because the radiation instigates the devastating 'B-23 virus'; thus denoting a significant amalgamation of nuclear, mystical and biological matters in the Red Night trilogy. The character Dr. Pierson provides a preliminary report on the effects of the virus, and the history of its pandemic potentials:

> "Virus B-23 has been called, among other things, the virus of biological mutation, since this agent occasioned biologic alterations in those affected" [...] "The original inhabitants of these cities were black, but soon a wide spectrum of albino variations appeared, and this condition was passed on to their descendants by techniques of artificial insemination which were, to say the least, highly developed" [58]

Virus B-23 spread throughout the biologically altered inhabitants because it caused 'sexual frenzies' that have 'facilitated its communication' (*C*: *32)* throughout the species. Hence, the white and even albino race came into being as a symptom of viral mutation, a side-effect then propagated by scientific intervention through processes of artificial insemination. Here, Burroughs has re-worked Gysin's Gobi desert myth and the Nova virus into a new condition whereby the toxic human body is reduced to a series of base psycho-sexual instincts:

> Every sort of copulation was going on in front of him, every disgusting thing they could think of. Some of them had pillow-cases and towels wrapped around each other's necks in some kind of awful contest. As these crazed patients seemed in danger of strangulation (and here the doctor almost slipped in shit), he ordered attendants to restrain them, but no attendants were available. (*C:* 31)

Evocatively, B-23 takes on the qualities of total biospheric ruin; thus encapsulating very real fears about the destruction of the planet. There are also obvious similarities between radiation sickness and viral infection, as the figurative social and actual human body are devastated by biohazardous effects. The parallel between viral illness and nuclear radiation is made explicit in *Cities* because this 'radioactive virus' strain fuses

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[58] William S. Burroughs, *Cities of the Red Night*, (London: Picador, 1981), 32. Hereafter cited as *C*.

Burroughs' nuclear concerns with new fears about the manipulation of medical science. Characters Dr. Pierson and Dr. Peterson embark on a heated discussion about the origins of B-23, with Pierson arguing that the ancient nuclear disaster produced a new viral strain; whereas Peterson believes that the viral 'other half' has lain dormant in the human host, only to turn 'malignant' when exposed to the radiation from Tamaghis. Burroughs' earlier belief in the theory of viral evolution is reflected here because the Red Night virus has achieved a 'stable symbiosis' with the human host, slowly affecting alterations in the genetic constitution of the race. As Burroughs indicated in an interview in 1980: 'the only way we know that a virus is present is if it produces symptoms. If the virus achieves any sort of symbiosis with the host, you would have no way of recognizing it as a virus'.[59]

We are provided with further information about the mutation of the virus in Book Two, where a pamphlet relates details about life in the ancient cities. We learn that the ancient people propagated their species through sexual rituals that ensured the equilibrium of civilisation. Before the radioactive meteor, the people were split into a caste system of 'Transmigrants' and 'Receptacles', whose existence depended on a process of reincarnation through astral projection:

To show the system in operation: Here is an old Transmigrant on his deathbed. He has selected his future Receptacle parents, who are summoned to the death chamber. The parents then copulate, achieving orgasm just as the old Transmigrant dies so that his spirit enters the womb to be reborn. (*C*: 141-2)

This relationship of astral 'insemination' became unstable after the nuclear disaster because the Red Night virus triggered various biological and genetic mutations in the people. The women, led by an albino mutant called the 'White Tigress', seized the city of Yass-Waddah and instigated a war between the genders. The development of 'artificial insemination' by the people of Waghdas, the Transmigrants eventual addiction to death, and the spread of the Red Night virus mutations led to the eventual failure of peaceful civilisation. This division denotes the latent presence of the viral 'other half' before the radiation occurred because the people organised their social system along a similar parasitic rule of binary dependence. Through the generations, the original Red

[59] Burroughs' 1980 interview with Robin Adams, 'Viral Theory' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 465.

Night virus has mutated to such an extent that the human body succumbs to a total toxic breakdown, with fever, skin rashes, seizures and psychological disintegration ultimately leading to sexually charged death spasms. Not only is nature enacting an unpleasant revenge on humanity by highlighting the destruction of a sophisticated social system, but the dysfunctional toxic human body has become a grotesque analogy for the effects of the contemporary 'bio-risk'. Therefore, it is important to contextualise the nuclear and viral mythological structure of *Cities* with Burroughs' concerns about biotechnologies as impediments to natural human development.

Biotechnological Conspiracy

Burroughs exploits Cold War anxieties about contamination by rendering the body open to external attacks analogous with American containment anxiety. The infected subject becomes a vivid depiction of internalised control mechanisms, nuclear and biotechnological fear, and a microcosm of global deterioration. The failure of biocontainment procedures and the degeneration of the human subject, restate Burroughs' belief that all scientific and technological endeavours have been devoted to the enhancement of the eternal war game. In a 1961 interview with Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg, he stated that the elimination of scientists working for the control machinery was required before any positive steps toward human progress could be made:

> If anybody ought to go to the extermination chambers, definitely scientists. Yes, I'm definitely anti-scientist because I feel that science represents a conspiracy to impose as the real and only universe, the universe of scientists themselves—they're reality-addicts, they've got to have things real so they can get their hands on it.[60]

This statement marks Burroughs' persistent concern about the disturbing changes he perceived in American society and the global balance of power at this time. Rather than instigating a programme for human development, nuclear and biological research is shown to pose a threat to basic existence, a backdrop of fear exploited to highlight the

[60] Burroughs' 1961 interview with Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg, 'The Time-Birth Death Gimmick' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 44.

perils of the control apparatus. Just as the Nova trilogy set the scene for scathing criticism of nuclear weapons development, and the writing projects of the 1970s resisted covert nuclear testing, *Cities* extends these existing concerns to encompass fears about biological weapons development and the potential for genetic engineering during the 1980s. During several interviews, but most notably his discussion with Sylvère Lotringer in 1981, Burroughs had mentioned the relative ease of producing biological weapons, and their application as a 'selective pestilence' capable of wiping out isolated sections of the world population. He thought that the development of a biological arsenal would pose a much more realistic threat than nuclear war because engineered viral epidemics would be virtually impossible to trace back to source: 'That's the thing about biological weapons; you can't be sure who's done it. The more you think about the whole thing, the weirder it gets'.[61] The power structures at work in *Cities* reflect this belief in the clandestine application of biological arms; therefore emphasising the atmosphere of disquiet about scientific and military developments directly before the time of publication. Distrust of government agency research into virology and radiation can be traced back as far as the creation of "Genial 23" in *The Ticket That Exploded* and the consideration of secret experiments in *Electronic Revolution*:

> What then accounts for this special malignance of the white word virus? Most likely a virus mutation occasioned by radioactivity. All animal and insect experiments so far carried out indicate that mutations resulting from radiation are unfavorable, that is, not conducive to survival. These experiments relate to the effects of radiation on autonomous creatures. What about the effects of radiation on viruses? Are there not perhaps some so classified and secret experiments hiding behind national security. And such a virus might well violate the equilibrium with the host cell. [62]

Burroughs has built upon these earlier concerns about the covert testing hiding behind 'national security' to provide the central conspiracy theme in the later novels. Moreover, statements such as these consolidate the links between the radiological fallout resulting from nuclear research and viral mutation. Although Burroughs creates fictional scenes of radiological experimentation on viral agents, this consideration of biological weapons is most certainly derived from the series of human radiation, biological and chemical tests implicating numerous government agencies since the 1940s. Although the effects of

[61] Burroughs' 1981 interview with Sylvère Lotringer, 'Exterminating' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 532.
[62] Burroughs, *Electronic Revolution*, 6.

radiological testing on 'autonomous animals' have been deemed disadvantageous to development, Burroughs seems to be suggesting that exposing viruses to radiation may initiate a new 'super' strains with the power to control the host cell. Moreover, he implies that this type of research may already have taken place, and that we may have been subject to such covert activity for some time. The impenetrable nature of government agency and military research outlined in *Electronic Revolution* provides a working model, then, for the unfathomable and disconcerting power network in *Cities*.

After recovering from a bout of the B-23 virus, Dr. Pierson has takes a job at the 'Pickle Factory', a top secret organisation in league with the Central Intelligence Agency and other interested parties, dedicated to the development of biological projects. Although we are never given a clear picture of the structure of this organisation, and the scientific projects it sanctions, Burroughs permits us to deduce that the Pickle Factory and its associates are involved in a dangerous mix of biological weapons development, satellite communications systems and space exploration. Pierson jumps from one intersected narrative strand to the next, overseeing the organisation's covert operations, and in one such episode in Book Two encounters Clem Snide the private detective. In the resulting conversation, Pierson insinuates their horrific plans:

"Now, just suppose an atom bomb should fall on New York City. Who would be blamed for that?"
"The Commies."
"Right. And suppose a mysterious plague broke out attacking the white race, while the yellow, black, and brown seemed to be mysteriously immune? Who would be blamed for that?"
"Yellow, black brown. Yellow especially".
"Right. So we would then be justified in using any biologic and/or chemical weapons in retaliation would we not?"
"You would do it justified or not. But the plague might well decimate the white race ... destroy them as a genetic entity."
"We would have the fever sperm stocks. We could rebuild the white race to our specifications" (*C*: 181)

Just as the Nova mob's central mission was to provoke indissoluble conflicts, the Pickle Factory plan to instigate nuclear and biological warfare for the purpose of genetic 'cleansing'. By targeting political opposition groups and instigating racial attacks, Pierson suggests that a total decimation of the races would be possible. Much to Snide's horror, Pierson believes that total destruction is mandatory in order to be able to rebuild the white race to Pickle Factory standards. Prior to this meeting, Snide's story in Book

One has centred on the hunt for clues about a missing person named Jerry Green. Eventually, his investigation uncovers Jerry's bizarre murder, and a complex conspiracy leading back to the Pickle Factory's sinister projects. Jerry's parents have hired Snide to locate their missing son, misleading the reader to believe that a conventional detective case will unfold. Snide uses sex magic rituals and astral projection to discern Jerry's location, and the leads he generates take him to Athens where he finds Jerry's headless body. Snide continues to work on the case, determined to track down the whereabouts of Jerry's head through tape-recording cut-ups. At this stage, he begins to realise that Jerry's murder was the work of 'Servants. Dupes. Hired killers, paid off with a special form of death' (*C*: 85). Ultimately, he is provided with information that a 'higher organization' had used Jerry and a second missing boy named John Everson for 'identity transfer' experiments. Hereafter, the detective story fuses with the aforementioned cities of the Red Night narrative because we learn that Jerry was suffering from the B-23, or Red Night virus, and that he may have been the original carrier.

We also learn that a powerful aristocrat, the Countess De Gulpa, is involved in this case. Her criminal empire in Yass-Waddah is built on the 'manipulation of commodity prices' (*C*: 53), and the exploitation of Third World populations, but her main interests are developed in secret laboratories: 'She has employed biochemists and virologists. Indication: genetic experiments and biologic weapons' (*C*: 53). Therefore, more than one interested party has designs on global domination. In book two Pierson describes how the Pickle Factory do not perceive the Countess to be a major player in these proceedings, and that they had considered using her to discredit the 'rank and file CIA' (*C*: 182). Her experiments are of limited use for Pierson and his connections, due to their 'specialized' nature: 'She has, for example, succeeded in reanimating headless men. These she gives to her friends as love slaves. They are fed through the rectum. I don't see any practical applications' (*C*: 181). Despite Pierson's remarks, these horrific experiments share some similarities with the aforementioned identity transfer research and subsequent Jerry Green murder case. The interrelated parties involved in these scientific atrocities, the Pickle Factory, Blum and Krup (Snide's employers and the financial backing behind the genetic tests and satellite communications technologies) and the Countess all try to discredit one another, but all are implicated within a complex

power structure of intimidation and financial gain. Private interests and official agencies display identical behaviour, and in the process act out a complex network of conspiracy and criminality designed to destroy global peace and originate a horrifying 'new world order'. Snide is given an apt description of this network in Book One:

> "You want to find the man who hired him. You find another servant. You are not satisfied. You find another servant, and another, right up to Mr. and Mrs. Big—who turns out to be yet another servant ... a servant of forces and powers you cannot reach. Where do you stop? Where do you draw the line?" (*C*: 85)

Burroughs' new fictional power structure is so difficult to penetrate because the layers of collusion and conspiracy linking these factions create an indecipherable information system. This impenetrable system works to defeat Snide's attempts to reveal the truth. 'Vested interests', both private and official possess the means and the inclination to cause a systematic universal collapse.

The national security culture shrouding human experimentation during the Cold War appears as impenetrable as the conspiratorial networks in *Cities*. Burroughs' fictional representation of an enclosed system of control and collusion emphasises the attempts of government agencies to impede an honest dialogue with the general public. Former Department of Energy (DoE) Secretary Hazel O'Leary's admissions in 1993 confirm the findings of an earlier report entitled, 'American Nuclear Guinea Pigs', by Rep. Edward J. Markey that described thirty-one radiological experiments involving six-hundred and ninety-five people.[63] Prior to this, the Reagan administration had refused to investigate this exposé, despite numerous other accounts including a 1980 report by Congress stating that the AEC had chosen to undertake atmospheric nuclear weapons tests regardless of the risks to local communities.[64] Furthermore, evidence collated by the New York Times in 1982, showed that policy-makers had actively worked to cover up these experiments in order to maintain public support for the nuclear escalation.[65] Ensign and Alcalay have stated that, following the Clinton presidential directive in 1994, the CIA conducted an internal investigation for information about agency involvement in radiation tests. After an alleged review of thirty-four million documents, the search

[63] Quoted in *Newsweek*, (December 27, 1993), 15.
[64] See Ensign and Alcalay, *Duck and Cover(up)*.
[65] *The New York Times*, (September 14, 1982), accessed via www.nytimes.com.

team concluded that it had found no material implicating the CIA, or any other agency, in human experimentation, even though it was known that any incriminating documents had been destroyed two decades earlier.[66] Hence, the enclosed networks sanctioning covert experimentation were, for the most part, able to remain immune to public outcries for accountability.

Burroughs' network of official and private concerns directing genetic experiments and the biological weapons industry, at first seems a fictional exaggeration of contemporary fears, but contained within this depiction is a glimpse of the types of power relations directing scientific research throughout the Cold War. The relationship between the 'Pickle Factory', the mysterious Blum and Krup, and the Countess De Gulpa provides a fictional replication of the treacherous power networks supported by government agencies, military research interests and private industry. In the case of the covert Cold War radiation tests, prominent research companies, medical professionals and academic institutions were implicated in the proceedings, not to mention the involvement of the CIA, The Department of Defense, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Veteran Affairs and NASA. The novel fuses concerns about biotechnological and nuclear research to highlight the physical and social degeneration caused by interconnected 'toxic' systems. The degradation of bodily tissue caused by the B-23 virus encapsulates this collision between nuclear testing and bio-medical procedures as it accrues human casualties in the name of scientific advancement. Furthermore, the B-23 virus may also be viewed as representative of a crisis in contemporary communication technologies, a crisis aggravated by the barrage of media-generated information impeding the subject's ability to recognise and oppose the apparatus of control. For Burroughs, the dissemination of a network information culture takes on the qualities of the viral epidemic as it spreads and compromises the integrity of the social 'body'. Therefore, it is essential to consider viral transmission as a motif of technological collapse within the military-industrial system.

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[66] See *Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 620pp.

Burroughs' Viral Technologies: The 'Germs' of Political Criticism

For Burroughs, the hastened growth in Cold War technological and scientific discovery strengthened the supremacy of the control apparatus by imposing a dehumanising state of 'machine addiction'; whereby the individual succumbs to the coding systems and information flows of a network culture. The individual forfeits the right to function as an autonomous individual because the body, or 'soft machine', is integrated into the very electronic systems created to service human requirements. Therefore, the B-23 virus in *Cities* serves as the perfect metaphor for conveying the parasitic relationship between the body and toxic communications. Kendra Langeteig's analysis of 'terminal' systems in the 'Red Night Trilogy' aligns the lethal effects of viral transmission with the 'crash culture' inherent in the dissemination of advanced communications technologies. Just as the infected subject is likely to suffer massive cellular damage, the computer terminal is subject to viral attacks, which align the systems 'crash' with the description of terminal diesease in the Red Night cities. Langeteig's analysis combines posthumanist anxieties about technological domination with Burroughs' fevered visions to highlight the '*horror autotoxicus*' of our postmodern condition.[67] The Red Night's toxic bodies not only reflect the consequences of a biospheric catastrophe, they also emphasise how viral communications endanger physical and psychological autonomy. The body is enslaved to the machine terminal and mental faculties are assimilated into the overbearing control apparatus; thus exposing the subject to debilitating and addictive viral messages. Burroughs conveys multiple interconnected connotations through the B-23 virus, from unease about communications networks, prophetic warnings about genetic experimentation and biological weapons development, to visions of future disorder and total systems collapse. Hence, the viral degradation of both bodily and social structures demonstrates the consequences of technological entropy: 'Well, the big danger is that our social structures are so cumbersome that we can't accommodate new discoveries, particularly biologic discoveries [...] These biologic discoveries would cause just

[67] Kendra Langeteig, '*Horror Autotoxicus* in the Red Night Trilogy: Ironic Fruits of Burroughs's Terminal Vision', *Configurations*, 5.1 (1997), 135-169.

complete chaos in our social systems'.[68] As far as Burroughs is concerned, then, our preoccupation with technological innovation and complex social structures has impeded our ability to initiate natural forms of biologic development. Consequently, the discovery of such human potentials would cause a total breakdown of the body politic. These pessimistic views about human dependence upon technological systems are shared by Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio. It is this relationship between Burroughs' dystopian viral condition, and contemporaneous critical analysis that I shall now consider.

For Virilio, the fragile human body is being torn and disintegrated by technologies that cause a 'de-corporation' of our physical functions: 'The body is important because it is a planet. Technology splits the unity of the body. Now the most powerful technologies are becoming tiny all technologies can invade the body'.[69] Virilio's 'Tiny technologies' take on the qualities of Burroughs' viral systems because they invade and govern the subject, turning the body into a transmitter for control messages. In such an extreme vision of technological invasion, the subject loses all autonomy to a network of electronic signals, and the body and personal identity are absorbed into the overriding structure. 'De-corporation' is just one symptom of what Virilio identifies as an 'information bomb'. Information and communications technologies become the new weaponry and 'interactivity' the equivalent of radioacivity because they trigger bodily rupture and social collapse. This extends the conditions of Virilio's earlier analysis of the 'art of deterrence', by further highlighting the efficiency and absolutism of global communications. Virilio politicises the speed of military and media technologies in a bid to align these developments with the instability of networked existence, and our total surrender to accelerated information flows:

> Technology infinitely promotes speed, and this promotion is absolute depletion to the extent that it's technological progress that decides, and not a rationale. It's not a philosophy of movement. We pass from freedom of movement to tyranny of movement.[70]

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[68] Burroughs' 1980 interview with Robin Adams, 'Viral Theory' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 466.
[69] Paul Virilio's interview with Louise Wilson, 'Cyberwar, God and Television: Interview with Paul Virilio', eds. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, *CTheory*, (12th January, 1994), accessed via http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=62.
[70] Virilio, *Pure War*, 70.

Such conditions of speed and depletion lead to an 'absolute deterritorialisation' and the 'automation of war' as spatial and temporal boundaries are challenged by the immediacy of technological progress. In the process, speed promotes the virtual violence of Cold War enmity, and reduces our power to recognise the influence of these information flows on our perception of global relations. To use Burroughs' term, each technological development causes a change in the 'reality script', and in turn, in the composition of our consciousness. Virilio recognises this phenomenon in the following statement:

Epilepsy is little death and picnolepsy, tiny death. What is living, present, conscious, here is only so because there's an infinity of little deaths, little accidents, little breaks, little cuts in the soundtrack, as William Burroughs would say, in the soundtrack and visual track of what's lived. And I think that's very interesting for the analyses of the social, thecity, politics. Our vision is that of a montage of temporalities which are the product not only of the powers that be, but of the technologies that organise time.[71]

The breaks and cuts in the soundtrack and visual track of lived experience, take on the quality of the film montage because the contemporary subject can only interpret events through the audio-visual technologies ordering space and time. For Burroughs, methods of resistance against this technocracy take the form of the cut-up and routines of narrative potentiality, means of defiance unavailable to the political analyst or cultural critic. However, the ingrained influence of Burroughs' philosophy is evident within Virilio's consideration of politics and temporality, principally because the control mechanisms and viral systems dictating Burroughs' fictional realms and social projects provide a convincing explanation for the fragmentation of human consciousness, the loss of inclusive historical narratives and the collapse of total war into perpetual 'pure war'. Burroughs' aforementioned theory of Cold War relations as aspects of a 'war game' planet reliant upon mutual adherence to the rules of opposition is also reflected here, primarily because Virilio concurs that the strategy of deterrence inhibiting political warfare propagates global economies based on the arms industry and communications that jeopardise the fabric of history: 'History is on the level of the great narrative. I only believe in the collage [...] the great narrative of total war has crumbled in favour of a fragmented war which doesn't speak its name'.[72] Our 'terminal' status is upheld via

[71] Ibid., 34.
[72] Ibid., 36.

media technologies and scientific developments that both Burroughs and Virilio believe will draw us toward the ultimate break in the recorded reality: 'nuclear death'. This is the end of history, of 'societies, people, nations and cultures', and such a bleak vision can only emphasise the parasitic partnership of the East/West impasse: 'When you say East and West, it's already a dual function between two different forms of empire, and especially between two empires of which one is the other's student'.[73]

Jean Baudrillard has also identified this viral system at work in his critique of the global techno-structure. Technologies become the central source of a 'virulent contamination' designed to ensnare the postmodern subject into an obscene 'hyperreal' devoid of critical depth and resistance:

> From the moment when the universal disappeared, an omnipotent global techno-structure has been left alone to dominate [...] today's global culture has replaced universal concepts with screens, networks, immanence, numbers, and a space-time continuum without any depth [...] Better than a global violence, we should call it a global virulence. This form of violence is indeed viral. It moves by contagion, proceeds by chain reaction, and little by little it destroys our immune systems and our capacity to resist.[74]

The result of this global 'virulence' is a technocratic information network that consumes the senses and de-realises acts of violence and war. The subject is incapable of resisting this global culture and so becomes enslaved by it. What both Baudrillard and Burroughs are implying with their viral networks is the latent potential for random disorder to take hold of compound systems and instigate a total biological, nuclear and electronic collapse. For Baudrillard, this is a hopeless vision because we are completely subordinate to a chaos of our own making. In concurrence with Virilio's nuclear criticism, Baudrillard feels that the war scene is over because of the 'overpotentiality' of strategic weapons and the effacement of the real by 'obese' information systems. The Cold War has set the scene for this because nuclear deterrence causes a permanent deferral of the actual event. Catastrophe and breakdown are composites of the 'fatal strategy' of media saturation, a system that binds the subject to the viral messages it conveys. Therefore, the potential for technological breakdown implicates the integrity of

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[73] Ibid., 162

[74] Jean Baudrillard, 'The Violence of the Global', trans. François Debrix, eds. Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, *Ctheory,* (May 2003), accessed via http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=385.

the human subject. The end result of Baudrillard's global decline is the loss of historicity to the depthless space-time continuum of network existence:

> In a sphere foreign to history, history itself can no longer reflect or prove itself. This is why we call on every previous epoch, every way of life, every mentality to historicize itself, to recount itself with proof and documents in hand [...] it is because we feel that all this has been invalidated in our own sphere, which is that of the end of history.[75]

The end of the historical meta-narrative has implications for societal organisation and subjectivity. The new forms of temporality instigated by this loss of coherent history force the subject into a state of disorientation; whereby a breakdown in the signifying chain forces the individual to accept the multiplicity of inputs fed to them via the networked techno-structure. Therefore, the subject can only reason with a series of present temporalities due to the deterioration of historicity. For Virilio and Baudrillard, this is a debilitating symptom of the trans-historical, trans-political, military-technological system. As a consequence of our lack of critical and historical reasoning effective methods of resistance and opposition are unobtainable.

On the contrary, Burroughs harnesses this multiplicity of inputs in *Cities* as a means to destroy the boundaries between temporalities, and initiate an escape into uncharted fictional realms. His fusion of styles, genres and historical periods attempts to liberate the subject by embracing the disorientation and flux indicative of the trans-historical, or postmodern, condition. Both Virilio and Baudrillard offer a bleak view of global relations based on virtual conflict and toxic communications. Although Burroughs agrees with these analyses, and has influenced their production to a certain extent, he is able to create a fictional realm that develops these dystopian conditions into a means for political resistance and transcendental escape. To conclude, then, we must consider the fictional potentials Burroughs uses to undermine the viral control apparatus and reconfigure our relationship with narrative history.

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[75] Baudrillard, *Fatal* Strategies, 16.

Fictional Escapism

So far, the corruption, power struggles and revolutionary potency of Burroughs' fiction has been investigated, with limited emphasis on the transcendental quest motivating these areas of resistance. The 'Red Night' narrative initiates a terrifying vision of toxic global systems, game planet opposition, political conspiracy and bodily collapse. This vision is designed to reflect the physical and social degeneration of the Cold War control apparatus. However, Burroughs creates a liberating impulse within the devastation caused by this viral corruption, a physical and behavioural impulse beyond the limits of social and biological containment. In *Cities*, the unusual symptoms displayed by the patients under Dr. Pierson's care include ritualistic 'sexual frenzies' where the body succumbs to uncontrollable orgasm and the desire to enact scenes of erotically-charged strangulation. Rather than describe the symptoms of the B-23 virus simply in terms of cellular attack and bodily shut-down, the patients are seen to experience a bizarre form of sexual and cerebral release which, ironically, emancipates the body from imposed behavioural control and containment. The 'virus power' is undermined from within by these extreme demonstrations of sexual 'vampirism'. The symptoms of the B-23 virus permit the individual to express carnal pleasure, homoeroticism and uncapped hysteria at the moment of death. Therefore, the control system directing this pandemic is subverted by the viral agent it has engineered for purposes of social regulation and ideological domination; an unfortunate oversight according to Pierson:

> However, I question the wisdom of introducing Virus B-23 into contemporary America and Europe. Even though it might quiet the uh silent majority, who are admittedly becoming uh awkward, we must consider the biologic consequences of exposing genetic material already damaged beyond repair to such an agent, leaving a wake of unimaginably unfavorable mutations all ravenously perpetrating their kind. (*C*: 33)

While the Nova virus achieved a relatively successful campaign of control over human actions via a system of parasitism and replication, the various mutations altering the B-23 virus have made it an unstable means for conveying totalitarian power. As Pierson suggests, the Pickle Factory and its associates cannot anticipate or control the unfortunate mutations such exposure would cause on the defective human specimen, particularly those inhabitants of America and Europe. Furthermore, the biologic and

identity transfer experiments funded by Blum and Krup and the 'Pickle Factory' are also subject to the same counteractive treatment. Burroughs indicates the sinister possibilities presented within the Pickle Factory's covert operations, when Clem Snide stumbles on the conspiracy plot behind the Green murder case. The result of the establishment's illegal activities is an attempt to achieve a successful identity transfer, with obvious implications for surveillance, mind control and social conformity. While attempting to assemble information on the whereabouts of Jerry's body, Snide undertakes a strange 'sex magic' ritual in which he invokes Jerry's spirit into the body of his assistant, an act of identity transfer based on supernatural rather than scientific precepts:

> At first I think the candles have flared up and then I see Jerry standing there naked, his body radiating light. There is a skeleton grin on his face, which fades to the enigmatic smile on the statues of archaic Greek youths and then he changes into Dimitri, with a quizzical amused expression. (*C*: 78)

Eventually, Snide is forced to undertake a second ritual to free Jerry's soul from its bodily incarceration: 'When I got back to the loft Jim was there, and I explained that we were going to perform this ritual to get Jerry's spirit out. He nodded "Yeah he's half in and half out and it hurts" (*C*: 115). Burroughs' interest in astral projection and fluid identities is reflected in these rites and the Pickle Factory's unethical research. Whereas the control machinery attempt to harness these powers in a scenario strikingly similar to that of the CIA mind control experiments and Soviet psychic research, Snide incorporates these supernatural abilities as a means to create a higher level of consciousness. Burroughs challenges this dystopian vision of biologic engineering and mind control by using it as the basis for an imaginative space where the subject is able to escape the confines of the body, social restrictions and spatio-temporal parameters by taking a 'non-body route' to new modes of being. When asked to give a summary of *Cities* Burroughs replied: 'the limitation imposed through biologic structure and the potential for transcending this through biologic change'.[76] He believed the human species to be in a permanent state of transition because of our apparent 'fixation' with the 'larval' stages of development: 'I'm advancing the theory that we're not biologically

[76] Burroughs' 1981 interview with Michael White, 'Astral Evolution' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 490.

designed to remain in our present state any more than the caterpillar.'[77] By divorcing the body from prescribed limitations, the individual is now free to explore new dimensions beyond binary organisation and the 'security' of physiological and ideological containment. In contrast with Cold War mind control initiatives, character identity is released into interchangeable forms, and temporality subject to flux under these new conditions of fictional opportunity.

The protagonists in *Cities* are also able to reject the scientific knowledge monopoly supporting the control network by internalising the utopian potential within de-centred identity and non-linear history. This is demonstrated in the eighteenth-century pirate story introduced at the beginning of the novel, with a foreword taken from Don C. Seitz's *Under the Black Flag* (1925), about the advantages of the self-regulating separatist colony founded by Captain Mission, off the Madagascar Coast. Burroughs' fascination with the historical colony known as 'Libertatia' predominantly relates to the rejection of centralised power in favour of the self-regulation described in the 'Articles', a tender for harmonious living:

> The Articles state, among other things: all decisions with regard to the colony to be submitted to vote by the colonists; abolition of slavery for any reason including debt; the abolition of the death penalty; and freedom to follow any religious beliefs or practices without sanction or molestation. (*C*: 10)

The pirate colony based all social interaction around this egalitarian proposal, and declared themselves a republic independent of other forms of governance; hence Burroughs recognised some revolutionary similarities between Mission's idealist social project and his fictional all-male counter-communities. In fact, Burroughs attributes the 'liberal principles embodied in the French and American revolutions and later in the liberal revolutions of 1848' (*C*: 9) to the practices of pirate communities of the seventeenth-century. Burroughs' accounts of this commune are apocryphal in nature not only because of his narrative intervention, but because Daniel Defoe had written about Captain Mission in a quasi-historical book titled *A General History of the Pyrates.*[78] Therefore, rather than adhere to sustained historical accuracy on the subject, Burroughs

[77] Ibid., 490.
[78] Daniel Defoe, *A General History of the Pyrates*, first published 1724, (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1999), 383-418.

uses a mixture of recorded fact, popular pirate legend and fictional embellishment as a means to explore the potential 'retroactive utopia' codified within this textual synthesis:

> I cite this example of retroactive utopia since it could have happened in terms of the techniques and human resources available at the time. Had Captain Mission lived long enough to set an example for others to follow, mankind might have stepped free from the deadly impasse of insoluble problems in which we now find ourselves. (*C*: 11)

As Burroughs intimates, Captain Mission's independent society lasted for forty years, in spite of external threats from the French and the British, and muted hostility from the natives populating the island. Although Mission was eventually defeated, as far as Burroughs is concerned, the 'Articles' provide a successful model for possible future revolutionary communities and resistance groups. Thus, scenes from the past are reconfigured into a future 'possible world' of counter-cultural triumph. This becomes a fictional realisation of the partisan resistance and social reconfiguration cited in *The Job* and *Electronic Revolution*. The pirates working to expand the colony and spread their way of life to new territories by way of revolution and integration, resemble the training academies regarded by Burroughs to be the only way of escape from state regulation and nuclear impasse:

> Who are we? We are migrants who move from settlement to settlement in the vast area now held by the Articulated. These voyages often last for years, and migrants may drop out along the way or adventurous settlers join the migrants. We carry with us seeds and plants, plans, books, pictures, and artifacts from the communes we have visited. (*C*: 196)

These pirate 'migrants' have developed an all-inclusive learning programme on their voyages, akin to Burroughs' proposed training academies, with knowledge transfer and territorial expansion occurring simultaneously. Burroughs' purpose here is to use the pirate story as a form of counter-narrative to release past events from the manifestations of control entrenched within written historical accounts. The possibilities he demonstrates in the past, can then become a model for future social projects. Mission's experiment is viewed as a 'turning point' in history, 'an entirely different possibility for the Americas which didn't happen', an opportunity Burroughs capitalises on because he sees a certain 'appeal' in 'going back and rewriting history from certain critical

junctures'.[79] Although he demonstrates this counter-historical potential with the isolated successes of an eighteenth-century resistance group, the ramifications of this historical rewrite project impact upon the control apparatus dominating the plots and routines of the novel as a whole. By proposing narrative potentiality in this way, Burroughs offers a fictional alternative for every historical account and resonance interwoven in the fabric of the text. Rather than accept the status quo of the Cold War control network insinuated in the novel's illusory power relations, the reader is provided with the means to adopt the alternative histories shaping Burroughs' 'retroactive' fictional possibility.

This method of reconstructing history through the alternative ontologies generated by fiction is reflected in the unorthodox plot twists woven into all three narrative strands. We learn that Clem Snide has been employed to locate the written history of the six Cities of the Red Night. His employers, the mysterious 'Iguana Twins' provide him with a disjointed copy of the original Red Night text, and tell him that 'The only thing not prerecorded in a prerecorded universe are the prerecordings themselves. The copies can repeat themselves word for word. *A virus is a copy.* You can pretty it up, scramble it—it will reassemble in the same form' (*C*: 151). Rather than undertake the paradoxical and somewhat futile task of locating the prerecorded original immersed in the confusions of a 'prerecorded universe' Snide decides to launch an 'operation rewrite' by forging his own version of the Red Night text; an action that mirrors Burroughs' counter-historical assignment. Instead of taking inspiration from the cut-up by 'scrambling the associational lines' found in the original, Snide fabricates a narrative history to replace the existing fragments; thus he takes authorial control of the Red Night manuscript and fulfils the Iguana Twins' grand design: 'I decided to visit the art-supply store alone. What I wanted would be under the counter. Anyone handling that kind of paper and ink would be into art forgery, probably passports and documents as well' (*C*: 155). Once he has obtained the correct materials, Snide begins to stage his rewrite along the lines of cinematographic pastiche, mixing live-action photography, the shock of the 'snuff' movie and pornography with an amalgam of narrative styles and genres including a pirate story line and an 'Egyptian number'. Consequently, Snide's textual

[79] Burroughs' 1987 interview with Jim McMenamin & Larry McCaffrey, 'The Non-Body Route' in Lotringer, *Burroughs Live*, 675.

experiment challenges the boundaries between history and narrative creativity; thus opening an infinite space for performative possibility. Snide's scripting of the Red Night pamphlet reiterates Burroughs' subversive treatment of global power relations by demonstrating the escapism engendered by narrative subjectivity. Both character and author take on the qualities of the fictional 'map maker', reconfiguring history to release a multiplicity of future potentials.

Because these counter-historical narratives are able to confuse the boundaries between ontological realms, it becomes possible for characters to defy the rules of historical linearity and fixed identity. From his initial meeting with the Iguana Twins, Snide's contemporary pulp routine becomes spliced with the Red Night narrative and the piracy directed by Captain Nordenholz and Captain Strobe, Burroughs' versions of the Captain Mission figure. Plot developments become extremely disjointed from hereon, because the timelines previously maintained by the separate narrative strands are intersected to a bewildering degree. At this stage we learn that Blum and Krup have been financing the Iguana Twins, and are therefore Snide's real retainers. Moreover, Blum and Krup's aforementioned classified experimentation is extended to encompass the launch of a 'communications satellite' and spacecraft. The most prevalent temporal shift takes place when the adventurous eighteenth-century pirates become the crew of this 'kooky spaceship', and Captain Nordenholz is revealed to be Krup in another guise. Although it becomes increasingly difficult to penetrate the layers of conspiracy and intrigue circulating throughout the narrative, and there is no real sense of resolution engendered in any of these interrelated stories, this temporal and spatial intersection offers instead a kind of perpetual re-working of character and plot. The alternative ontological spaces bred by Burroughs' fictional imaginary become a liberating backdrop for the growth of performative identities and fluctuating historical events beyond the confines of textual closure.

The novel's multifarious fictional potentials exploit the attributes of what Brian McHale calls the 'ontological instability or indeterminacy' of a world devoid of fixed experience. This indeterminacy creates the conditions for a postmodern ontology because 'this may include a plurality of universes' including the 'possible' or even

'impossible' universes instigated by the 'heterocosm', or 'universe apart' of fiction.[80] As McHale highlights: 'the oldest of the classical ontological themes in poetics is that of the otherness of the fictional world [and] its separation from the real world of experience'; however, through a process of literary mimesis, points of reference from the actual world begin to enter this separate fictional domain to create an 'overlap between the heterocosm and the real'.[81] It is this 'mythification' of the real that enables counter-historical possibility in *Cities of the Red Night*, possibility that offers a means of escape from prescribed control and historical absolutism. The performative possible world, or 'zone', proposed in *Cities* also relates to McHale's description of Michel Foucault's 'heterotopia', where 'the interpolation of a spurious space between known spaces serves here as the opening wedge for a total assimilation of the known to the spurious'.[82] This total assimilation of the real and the counterfeit, works, then, to defamiliarise accepted histories in favour of an ontological landscape of deconstruction, ambivalent opportunity and temporal flux. As far as McHale is concerned, Burroughs' fictional possible worlds are spaces for:

> overlapping subjectivities, including shared fantasies and nightmares, which comes into being whenever his cast of bohemians and cosmopolitans convenes somewhere in (the DMZ demilitarized zone) atmosphere of cafes. Burroughs' zone [...] is a vast, ramshackle structure in which all the world's architectural styles are fused and all its races and cultures mingle, the apotheosis of the Third World shanty town. Sometimes it is located in Latin America or North Africa, sometimes in a lost civilization of the distant past.[83]

McHale is critical of this merger between the worlds of fantasy and nightmare and the interpolation between time and space. He sees these fictional realms as limited in terms of their overall success because they are fragmented and incomplete structures prone to the inconsistency and flux of postmodern pandemonium:

> Burroughs' fiction fails to function adequately as satire because of the radical instability of his fictional worlds. The same could be said of Burroughs' allegory: if the intention was to produce an unequivocal allegory of the struggle between the control principle and principles of liberty and pleasure, then

[80] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 1991), 26.
[81] Ibid., 28.
[82] Ibid., 46.
[83] Ibid., 44.

Burroughs has failed for the instability of his world blocks our efforts to establish an integrated allegorical interpretation.[84]

McHale's assessment of these worlds as half-formed, continuously developing compositions is just; however Burroughs did not view the resulting lack of establishment and resolution as disadvantageous to his narrative mission. By creating these intersecting zones of heterogeneity and contrasting styles as a means for exploring counter-historical potentials, Burroughs rejects and excludes contemporary conflict and control in favour of uncharted and uncultivated narrative alternatives. Therefore, the 'overlapping subjectivities' contained within his narratives of possibility incorporate a fusion of cultures and historical periods in order to insinuate new and unrestricted social configurations. This heterogeneity also signifies Burroughs' exploitation of the multiplicity of inputs and lack of fixity indicative of the military-industrial age. As I have demonstrated, Paul Virilio and Jean Baudrillard have focused their analyses of the Cold War socio-political climate on the subjective disorientation and historical deterioration resulting from military-technological enhancement. Burroughs uses these conditions of indeterminacy as the basis for a revolutionary narrative counterforce of possibility. His textual resistance of viral control systems, use of 'guerrilla semiotics' and 'game planet' philosophy has proven influential in the development of Virilio and Baudrillard's political analysis during the 1980s. However, the 'Red Night' narratives use these germs of political enquiry and textual resistance in the creation of the limitless fictional spaces described by McHale as 'heterotopia[n]' in nature. These spaces are designed to initiate an escape from viral control and nuclear impasse altogether. Consequently, Burroughs' writing projects and personal philosophy engenders a level of performative resistance and escapism otherwise not available to those engaging in Cold War criticism. By accepting the futility of game planet opposition, Burroughs considers an escape into 'retroactive' fictional possibility as the only recourse left available. The historical instability and loss of fixed subjectivity engendered by Cold War techno-scientific innovations provides the foundation and technical means for Burroughs' uninhibited and borderless narrative spaces; thus Cold War impasse is transformed into the springboard for transcendental modes of being and social [r]evolution.

[84] Ibid., 143.

Now that I have established Burroughs' narrative resistance against Cold War game planet hostility and viral control as a perpetually evolving mission, it is important to address how the remaining novels of the trilogy develop existing methods of defiance. In *Cities*, Burroughs proposes his fictional zones of possibility as portals for revolutionary counterforce and escape. Furthermore, he begins to incorporate the nuclear and biological interests of the military-industrial complex as the basis for a subjective release from social controls and identity constraints. In this sense, the techno-scientific methods of the control machinery become involuntary aspects of Burroughs' performative bodily release. The novel provides little in the way of narrative closure and resolution, with the main narrative strands converging and merging into one another to initiate an infinite chain of narrative potentiality. Consequently, the central themes, counter-communities and methods of resistance introduced in *Cities* are reconfigured and expanded in *The Place of Dead Roads* (1983) and *The Western Lands* (1987) to instigate a biotechnological quest for posthuman development and planetary escape. The following chapter, then, will examine how these remaining novels draw on Cold War techno-scientific research and innovation to achieve this utopian transcendentalism.