# LITERARY FICTION AFTER POSTMODERNISM: THE INTERMEDIAL TURN IN JEFFREY EUGENIDES'S *MIDDLESEX* AND LOUISE ERDRICH'S *SHADOW TAG*

by

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# I. INTRODUCTION

According to Theodore Martin, the contemporary is not a period but "a literary historical problem" (2). Even when Martin meant that as a universal axiom, it certainly rings truer than ever at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when the last fully conceptualized literary period is the beast of postmodernism. What can follow after the "modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* ix)? Approaching the two most intuitive reactions to this logical cul-de-sac, contemporary literary criticism either seems to suggest that "fiction was never postmodern" or "it remains postmodern" (Hoberek 236). Yet, what Andrew Hoberek points out in the introduction to *Twentieth Century Literature*'s 2007 special issue on literature "After Postmodernism" is that ultimately both of these tendencies, the *never-was* and the *still-is*, are "ironically, fundamentally postmodern gestures" (237) themselves.

Hoberek is part of a third reaction: the theoretical attempt to take the pile of broken pieces that postmodernism has left literature with to build up something new again. Along lines similar to Hoberek's, Theodore Martin distinguishes a specific perspective of and on contemporary literature. So does, for example, Alexander Moran in "The Genrefication of Contemporary American Fiction." All three of them, and many others, find that the central aesthetic shift after postmodernism is one towards genre. Still, to me there is a problem, which I want to illuminate with a quote from Robert Rebein's *Hicks, Tribes, and Dirty Realists*: *American Fiction After Postmodernism*. Rebein formulates the issue that he, as much as Hoberek, Martin, and Moran, tries to solve in the end as following: "Not one of [the seminal works on postmodernism] can speak to us

about the strange similarities and even stranger differences between ‘Cathedral’ and *Infinite Jest*, why each of these works is in some sense ‘postmodern’ while each may also be said to have arrived ‘after’ postmodernism” (10).

Looking at the examples of “not-anymore”-postmodernist fiction given in the quote above, David Foster Wallace's novel and Raymond Carver's short story, it is surprising that the answer Martin, Hoberek, Moran, and many others give is *genre*. It is true that “there is a difference between the transitional but still self-consciously ‘literary’ appropriation of popular genres in the work of authors like Barth and Pynchon [...] and a newer tendency to confer literary status on popular genres themselves” (Hoberek 238). Surely, it is arguable that “one of the distinguishing aspects of twenty-first-century culture is art's transformed relationship to genre” (Martin 7). And by all means, “many contemporary authors are recovering older, and often ostensibly less ‘literary’ forms for their fiction” (Moran 229). Nevertheless, though, it is hard to build up a coherent formal aesthetic that includes Colson Whitehead, Jennifer Egan, and Michael Chabon as much as Carver and Foster Wallace when *genre* is supposed to be the foundation—as long as everyone agrees that “Post-Alcoholic Blue-Collar Minimalist Hyperrealism” cannot signify the same cohesive system of aesthetic forms as do markers like “Crime” and “Romance.”

I want to share a different suggestion and theory in this thesis on what might be the aesthetical shift that moved literary fiction away from postmodernism. In no way do I want to claim, though, that the considerations of genre are in any wrong or senseless. Only, for my purpose a concern for genre is just one subcategory of a more universal shift. Something that is comparable to seeing a camera point-of-view in Ernest

Hemingway's short stories and an internal first-person point-of-view in James Joyce's novels both as negotiations of subjectivity marking literary modernism. Or, seeing a concern for schizophrenia and a concern for historiography just as different iterations of the same universal shift towards metafiction, allowing literary scholars to count Kurt Vonnegut's *Breakfast for Champions* and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Wife* to one line of thought: postmodernism. In the following, I argue that a logical marker of literary fiction in recovery from postmodernism on the level of form is a new sensibility for intermediality. (Thereby, without elaborating genre specifically in this thesis, one can consider a changed treatment of genre just as an heirloom from more capitalized and commercialized media like television, comics, and film, but leaves room for other negotiations of the concept as well.)

Intermediality as a marker suggests itself, first, through the methodologies of the aforementioned critical publications on *after postmodernism*. Its risen relevance is evident in Hoberek's "Introduction," which references the movie *The Last Action Hero* as one imagined end of postmodernism while speaking of literature. Theodore Martin's *The Contemporary Drift* also relies heavily on film to explain observations in culture and literature. Moran even acknowledges a problem with referring to genre as a universal term which reflects the intermedial nature of it, because "Egan's turn to genre is distinct from writers such as Chabon, Lethem, and Whitehead. While their embrace of genre is partly the result of a lifelong love of comics (Chabon and Lethem) or zombie films (Whitehead), Egan's gothic novel is not a product of a love of popular forms. Instead, it is a rather academic approach, [...] to defamiliarise communication technologies" (231)—or as most of them are called in the twenty-first century: social *media*. Further examples

would be Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction," which has the engagement with media in the title, and Phillip Wegner's *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties*, which also relies on film to illustrate general observations. Coming back to Rebein's riddle, thinking about the treatment of other forms of media within literature creates contexts between "Cathedral"'s failure to reproduce images from television and *Infinite Jest*'s interwoven narratives that connect via a film—a context which the treatment of genre alone only veiled.

Of course, intermediality is not unique to contemporary literature; its earliest form, *ekphrasis*, goes back to ancient epics and, having mentioned *Breakfast of Champions* before, postmodernist literature certainly used the integration of other media, too. (In Vonnegut's novel, for example, crude drawings supplement the prose narrative on almost every page.) However, metafiction was also not unique to postmodernism (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* 3) or the idea of subjectivity unheard of before modernism. The mission of this thesis is not to present intermediality as the new invention that constitutes a seminal shift through its sheer occurrence in literary works. Rather, I want to present how intermediality would be a logical answer to the question of how literary fiction can define its aesthetic place in the medial landscape of the early twenty-first century as distinctly after postmodernism.

The first chapter of this thesis intends to clarify how a literary period like "after postmodernism" can be conceptualized. I want to distinguish "after postmodernism" clearly from other concepts like Jeffrey T. Nealon's "post-postmodernism," while nevertheless sharing with Nealon the same theoretical foundation, namely Frederic Jameson. The chapter outlines my understanding of the mechanics of literary and cultural

periodization and revisits conceptions of realism and modernism of the past.

Chapter Two then argues what about the specific cultural and literary moment of the early twenty-first century suggests an intermedial turn of literary fiction as logical. For this, I explore the transitional space that lies between the clear moment of postmodernism and the early twenty-first century's after postmodernism. The argumentation for that intermedial turn goes along the lines of the general medial turn of the time period(s) considered, evaluating it from a Marxist perspective based my considerations of Jameson so far, and therefore trying to pick up where he ended *Postmodernism* in 1991. As a starting point for literary fiction's position in that space, I take David Foster Wallace's "E Unibus Pluram." The foundational theories of mediality and intermediality I use are Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of "remediation," respectively Richard Grusin's concept of "premediation," and Irina O. Rajewsky's writing on intermediality.

To exemplify all the theoretical observations and arguments from Chapters One and Two, the Chapters Three and Four will be close readings of literary fiction. I have chosen two novels from the early twenty-first century, each of which tends to defy any clearly assignable genre: *Middlesex* by Jeffrey Eugenides and *Shadow Tag* by Louise Erdrich. I argue that both novels use intermediality to define and position themselves as literary writing after postmodernism. I will review the previous problems in scholarship of these novels to stress how intermediality as a perspective on these works can offer answers. I specifically focus in the close readings on those instances of intermediality that stress the literary progression, and I try to account for discourse and story the same. However, as no two novels are the same, the forms of my readings and analyses will

differ, and perspectives between the two authors are not necessarily shared in all points.

My conclusion returns to the beginning of it all. If the contemporary is “a literary historical problem” (Martin 2), I have to ask the important question if the moment I am describing as after postmodernism is actually still contemporary. Being able to describe it as a period is a strong indicator to the fact that it is already over again. Therefore, I want to explore some open questions that come up with literary works of fiction after Eugenides and Erdrich. What might have changed there and could possibly change in the future? What can come after after postmodernism? Are some of the earlier problems already obsolete again? Has literary fiction become the privileged medium again?

# II. PREVIOUSLY ON LITERATURE

## Post-postmodernism, or The Question of Literary Critique

To define what is meant by after postmodernism in this thesis, a good place to begin is to define what it is not: post-postmodernism. At first glance both terms seem to denominate a pretty similar condition, but it is important to distinguish between the two. The term post-postmodernism is most conclusively theorized in Jeffrey T. Nealon's *Post-Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism* (2012). Nealon prefers "post-postmodernism" over "after postmodernism" because the culture he describes "is hardly an outright overcoming of postmodernism." It is rather "an intensification and mutation within postmodernism" (ix). Throughout his work this reasoning makes sense as he revisits cultural institutions and concepts like commodities and universities. He illustrates how the "Logic of Late Capitalism" has intensified into, what he calls, the "Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism." This change is explicitly framed as an intensification rather than an overcoming of the capitalist structures once set forth by Jameson to favor postmodernism as the cultural dominant.

However, the historicist, logical reasoning halts at some point when Nealon visits the concept of literature. He begins his consideration by stating that postmodernism in itself was a linguistic turn, echoing Jameson's concern of a dominant schizophrenia after Lacan as a "breakdown in the signifying chain" (*Postmodernism* 26). Therefore, according to Nealon, "language and literature were king in the postmodern era precisely because they were the most economical markers for the experience of a social world where essentialism had lost its explanatory focus, and the mediations of social construction were the questions du jour" (149). Yet, under the intensified capitalist logic,

this linguistic stress has faded (Nealon 147), and thereby literature, Nealon implies here, has lost its favorable position of the postmodern era. This assessment of the position of literature as “king in the postmodern era” is already questionable (149). Coming from Jameson, the privileged medium of that era has been clearly defined as video, respectively VHS tapes (*Postmodernism* 67). Yet, the tension between literature and video in the question of the dominant medium will be first revisited in my chapter two. Here, I continue to lay out Nealon's position: Under his proposed intensified capitalist conditions, Nealon views “the ‘disentanglement’ function of literature (the interruptive hermeneutic power of reading's hesitating slowness—its questioning of ‘meaning’),” through which literature thereby expressed a critique of the late capitalist world in the past, “becom[ing] increasingly less useful as a way to engage the superfast post-postmodern world,” literature needs to find a changed mode (150).

Nealon then tries to set forth a conception of post-postmodern literature that retrieves the power of critique he sees as central for its postmodern predecessor. He distills from Don DeLillo's *Mao II* and *White Noise* that “literature is outmoded, on this reading, not so much because it's prisonered by old-fashioned sentences and language rather than visual images, and thereby can't produce anything relevant or ‘new’; but the problem is much more that literature can't produce interruption of the same (anymore)” (155). And while I want my reader to sustain the notion of literature's inability to become intertwined with the visual image for the next chapter of this thesis, too, I continue with Nealon's sense that the purpose of literature is “interruption.” The interruptive power of literature in postmodernism was expressed in the “‘weak’ or ‘postmodern’ power of the false, which consists in subverting the true, thereby bringing about a neodeconstructive

‘indecision between true and false',” according to Nealon (162). In post-postmodern literature, this is then substituted for a “‘strong’ power of the false,” which is post-postmodern “based on a ‘decision of non-truth’ that nevertheless ‘produces effects of truth’ in an alternative fashion” (162).

Two problems arise from this conceptualization of post-postmodern literature, though. For once, it is unclear why literature has to primarily retain its purpose of critique and interruption. Part of Nealon's mistake here might be due to repeating Jameson's terminological practice, which Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* considered “confusing” (25). To Jameson, in “Hans Haacke and the Cultural Logic of Postmodernism,” postmodernism is “a whole set of aesthetic and cultural features and procedures” as well as “the socio-economic organization of our society commonly called late capitalism” (38-39). However, as Hutcheon expands, while the two things are naturally related, by terminologically equating them, one is “relinquishing [cultural practices’] power or will to intervene critically in [a systematic form of capitalism]” (25). Nealon continues in Jameson's tradition and uses “post-postmodernism” marking a socio-economic organization *and* cultural and aesthetic procedures as well.

Coming from Hutcheon's observations on terminology, the sticking point relating to Nealon is that the relationship between the two “must be *argued*, not *assumed* by some verbal sleight of hand” (*Politics* 25). Nealon fails to *argue* for critique and interruption as the relational marker from aesthetic to socio-economic organization. While the lack of argument does not necessarily mean Nealon is wrong, his assumption is striking because there is no precedent in literary history and periodization that warrants his assumption: an intensification of socio-economic conditions, which is what post-postmodernism is

according to him, leading to re-stabilization of literature's relationship to it as critique and interruption, which is what post-postmodern literature is in his view. Looking at the root of Hutcheon's earlier solution to the terminological sleight of hand, it is in fact helpful to distinguish between postmodern*ism*, as “cultural practices”, and postmodern*ity*, as “the philosophical and socio-economic realities” (*Politics* 25).

The distinction Hutcheon suggests, marking postmodernity as a philosophical and socio-economic concept, “seems to have begun with the exchange on the topic of modernity between Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard” (*Politics* 23). In that debate, the one thing both agreed upon is that, philosophically, modernity is formed by strong “notions of unity and universality” (23). Jameson's idea of postmodernism then, influenced by Ernst Mandel's periodization in *Late Capitalism*, is “an attempt to theorize the specific logic of the cultural production of that third stage” (400), which Mandel calls post-industrial, but Jameson rather marks as multinational capitalism (35). Beyond the idea of cultural production, postmodernism became the marker for literature's aesthetic representation of that cultural production under multinational capitalism. From that we can distill a view that sees the whole of literary history under capitalism as a combination of Mandel's stages and the aesthetic expression of corresponding logics of cultural production. It is a thought brought up by Jameson before, in his foreword to Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* [*La Condition Postmoderne*], reprinted in Jameson's collection *The Ideologies of Theory*, as “no satisfactory model of a given mode of production can exist without a theory of the historically and dialectically specific and *unique* role of ‘culture’ within it” (*Ideologies* 250, emphasis supplied). The technocratic, bureaucratic, information, media-age modifications leading to multinational capitalism,

which Jameson describes and sees affirmed by Jürgen Habermas, Lyotard, Daniel Bell, and others, is accompanied by "some equivalent modification in the very role and dynamic of cultural production itself" (252).

The arc of literature under capitalism, which I narrow down here to literary fiction, follows roughly the following schematic trajectory, according to Jameson and other critics: From realism to modernism to postmodernism as theorized so far, corresponding to market capitalism, monopoly capitalism, multinational capitalism. Coming back to Habermas and Lyotard now, a thought I elaborate in Chapter Two should be simply taken as a given here: both market and monopoly capitalism follow the same logic and notions of universality and unity, which here can be summarized as modernity (but I will later call "The Logic of Capitalism"). Therefore, when modernity did not have one unique aesthetic answer but two, I suppose postmodernity, as it continues even when intensified, should at least be viewed as possibly containing another aesthetic answer than just literary postmodernism, too. By taking a close look at the relationship between realism and modernism now, I want to illustrate how Nealon's proposition, that under the intensification of the socio-economic and philosophical plane literature has to change its mode to primarily retain its character of critique, should not be viewed as the only possible course of history.

## How to Build a Literary History

What follows here is obviously a simplification of the literary historical narrative, but I see it justified in this context by acknowledging that Mandel's periodization is simplified, too. Just by mathematical fact, between market capitalism and monopoly

capitalism must lie at least a duopoly capitalism. Simplification is necessary to make ideas graspable. So, Henry James, Theodore Dreiser, and Mark Twain are realists, to me, because they wrote under market capitalism. The differences between romanticism and naturalism are explored by Jameson (*Postmodernism* 200 - 210), but they are not helping in this specific discussion—no matter how differently they are nuanced, each is just expressing a different understanding of the relation between the "self" and the "market." And thereby, they all share a supra-personal viewpoint as an aesthetic within the relation of cultural production, the representation of what is perceived as reality.

In that sense, every aesthetic mode corresponding with the cultural production under Mandel's capitalist stages creates its own "mimetic effect." I prefer "mimetic effect" over "mimesis" because this relationship is universal to all aesthetics, while too often "mimesis" is understood as inherent only to realism. For example, in "Contingency and Construction: From Mimesis to Postmodernism," Peter V. Zima observed that "in the first half of the nineteenth century *many philosophers and realist writers believed or tacitly assumed that their discourses actually represented reality and truth.* Only modernist and postmodernist philosophy and literature began to systematically challenge this 'representational,' 'realist' or 'mimetic' point of view" (100, emphasis in original). Zima's assessment shows how the matter is often inconclusively simplified to a certain degree because he repeats the mistake, which he accuses the realist writers of the nineteenth century of and deems mimesis and realism the same. *Realism* as an aesthetic is merely one way to achieve mimesis, or the mimetic effect.

But just the fact that Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis* includes mainly chapters on writers neither considered realist or naturalist, romanticist, or similar, should relativize a

too close relationship between mimesis and realism. Mimesis is the representation of reality. In the end, literature finds an aesthetic position within the logics of cultural production to represent an understanding of reality thereby. The aesthetic used for this representation of reality is just a way to illustrate to the reader how the respective the logics of cultural production do relate to reality, since literature itself is a form of cultural production. The point is, not only realists represent reality. A modernist still believes in being about to represent the modern reality by the aesthetic means of heightened subjectivity: subjectivity is the focus of cultural production under monopoly capitalism, reflected for example, by monopoly theory itself, which sets the price of the good according to the subjective necessities of the one supplier, instead of finding the objective equilibrium price calibrated between supply and demand. Similarly, Jameson states about postmodernism that its attempts of "newer cultural production [...] must then also, in their own fashion, be considered as so many approaches to the representation of (a new) reality" (49).

### *Realism*

In dialectical fashion, I begin with the thesis of literature's history under capitalism. Realism is the first aesthetic expression of the logics of cultural production under market capitalism regarding literary fiction. The mimetic effect of realism is something not often considered because, as shown above, its aesthetics is often conflated as mimesis itself. In his evaluations of Georg Lukács, Jameson states, "the principal characteristic of literary realism is seen to be its antisymbolic quality; realism itself comes to be distinguished by its movement, its storytelling and dramatization of its

content; comes, following the title of one of Lukács' finest essays, to be characterized by narration rather than description" (*Marxism* 196). So, the logic of this aesthetic cultural production is antisymbolic narration.

Or, considering the further definition of symbolism by Jameson as a "recourse" because "some original, objective meaning in objects is henceforth inaccessible to [the writer], that he must invent a new and fictive one" (*Marxism* 197), the logics are objective narration. Lukács himself writes that "the serious realists want to reproduce the social life of their times ruthlessly truthful and in their artistic goals they do without any humanistic harmony or any beauty of the harmonious human character" ("Ideal" 15, my translation). The artistic goal becomes to show how capitalism destroys the past imagined harmony, how capitalism is simply a "cemetery" of human greatness (16). What is exemplified in Lukács's descriptions is a tendency to view realism as a fruitful discourse to critique market capitalism. That, as part of the cultural production under market capitalism, any form of critique formulated by realism has to answer to the problematic of "how one can impute critical value to works that are ideologically or representationally complicitous with the 'system'" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 201) is something I will discuss under modernism. At this moment, note that "human character" and "social life" are entities a reader can find in any aesthetic form—just constituted differently. It is the small verbs and adjectives in this quote that can more lead to closer understanding of what objective narration entails: to "reproduce ruthlessly truthful."

In the cultural production of realism, objective narration reproduces truthfully. This carries an underlying assumption, which then reveals the specific mimetic effect of realism. To illustrate that, I want to turn to another form of reproduction shortly. Kurt

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* can very much be viewed as a work of objective narration. The narrator, a fictionalized version of Kurt Vonnegut himself, does not interject with any subjectivities but narrates in a detached fashion the life of Billy Pilgrim. Vonnegut's detached narration also actually carries a claim of truth to a certain degree. The novel begins, “All this happened, more or less” (1). The fact that still no one concluded that Vonnegut is a supreme realist reveals that to reproduce truthfully in realism means something different than in postmodernism. To reproduce truthfully in realism means to respect what is considered universal truth at the time. This includes, for example, the linearity of time—the central aspect that *Slaughterhouse-Five* disregards, making it distinctively not realist.

Realism's mimetic effect reflects a logic of cultural production that views the concept of universal truth as objective, and thereby views reality overall as objective. In realism the objects of reality are reproduced, or rather mirrored as they are reflections of it. They are not actually there, but through the aesthetic they appear to be present, ordered by the adherence to concepts of universal truths. However, at this point, it is time to question if realism then actually can realize its full potential of critique of market capitalism that Lukács sees, when it is just a reproduction of what is portrayed as universal truths within that system. The answer of postmodernist criticism is “no,” simply because the concept of universal truths is rather indicative of totalizing metanarratives (see Lyotard). And to those theorists that view the market system as totalizing “all local revolts, let alone ‘revolutionary’ impulses, remained inside that and were in reality a function of its immanent dynamic” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 203).

*Modernism*

With the beginning of the twentieth century market capitalism intensified into monopoly capitalism, according to Mandel's periodization. We can understand this as an intensification because market capitalism was originally viewed as removing the means of production from the workers themselves into the hands of a ruling class that lives from the generating surplus of selling the products on a market. Monopoly capitalism intensified this condition, as on the market the worker who is also consumer can at least influence the surplus or generate their own surplus in the form of consumer's rent by affecting the demand side. In monopoly capitalism, the price of a product, and therefore the surplus, is solely a maximizing function of the supply side. The exploitation of workers continues, and the belief in objective universal truths has given birth to totalitarian ideologies like Nazism and Fascism. Even worse, the oppressed are not suffering due to subpar working conditions solely, but the twentieth century brings the first world war, having soldiers die in unprecedented numbers (in the West). In crude terms, market capitalism intensified into an imperialistic war machine. Because intensification is a process, one can assume this movement began earlier than the beginning of the twentieth century. Only in the first half of the twentieth century its results are impossible to ignore anymore.

And here, remembering the source of this tangent, one cannot observe the modernist mode that arises as a way to solely pertain to the critique of the capitalist stage. Modernism as an aesthetic procedure was as occupied with left Marxist ideologies and it was implied in fascist and totalitarian regimes. Ezra Pound is just one example of this paradoxical development. What modernism primarily critiqued in its mimetic effect is the

previous representational mode, realism. That is not to say that modernism was inherently apolitical, but the form of modernism alone was not clearly levered against monopoly capitalism as an intensification of market capitalism, but rather the decision to solely reproduce objective universal truths.

As stated before, modernists like realists both endeavor to represent reality. But, since the mode in between changed, it becomes obvious that the modernists seem to believe that the aesthetic procedure of the realists is no adequate aesthetic of dominant cultural production. One can draw parallels to how the way to understand reality shifts at that time as well. Philosophers like Edmund Husserl "sought to develop a new philosophical method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization" (Eagleton 47). He and others believed objectively universal truths are questioned from a phenomenological standpoint, and they concluded that "although we cannot be sure of the independent existence of things, [...], we can be certain of how they appear to us immediately in consciousness" (48). There is no fixed objectivity anymore. Instead, the objects are integrated into the subject's consciousness.

In line with that, the modernist aesthetics as a form of cultural production is expressed through subjectivity. The realist focus on narration is waning. An example of this are the ways in which thoughts are no longer represented indirectly through an omniscient or limited-personal narrator, framing them perceivable as an object from the outside. Instead, literature tries to imagine the thought as formed within the subject through techniques of idiosyncratic syntax and punctuation, like Molly's soliloquy in *Ulysses*. Another example is the representation of time, which can be extremely slowed down. When humans perceive other objects outside of themselves, time is passing, like

watching bread mold or a child grow. But when one shifts the focus on oneself, time stretches or can feel accelerated. What this subjectivity further questions is the idea of reproduction inherent to realism. Modernism certainly believes to be truthful to reality by shifting the subject to the center. But as its aesthetic is thereby not adhering to universal truths outside of the subject, again using for example the linear understanding of time, the aesthetic becomes a productive rather than reproductive act. Jameson describes this process as a "'monadic relativism'": "toward the end of the nineteenth century [...] what we begin to see is the sense that each consciousness is a closed world, so that the representation of the social totality now must take the (impossible) form of a coexistence of those sealed subjective worlds" (*Postmodernism* 412). Truths are still universal, but not to an objective world anymore, only to a subjective one. And these truths are produced in the modernist representation of the subjective realities.

This productive nature is what made modernism so attractive on a broad ideological spectrum. It carries an "utopian compensation" (Jameson, *Political Unconscious* 41), which makes it so easily integrable into Marxist thought. But Hutcheon also quotes Andreas Huyssen to remind the reader that modernism can be viewed as an "elitist, arrogant, mystifying master-code of bourgeois culture" as well (*Politics* 26). Central to this analysis of modernism is that its aesthetic expression of the logics of cultural production under the intensified market capitalism that is monopoly capitalism does not create a mimetic effect that functions directly as a critique of monopoly capitalism. Rather, its mimetic effect is directly adjusting the previous mode of representation, realism, to be believably more truthful to reality.

Shifting back to Nealon's post-postmodern literature, this excursion has illustrated

that, when postmodern cultural production in its literary aesthetic realization does not adequately represent the intensified capitalist reality anymore, it is not necessarily likely that literature adjusts in a way where it continues the same mimetic effect. Rather, post-postmodern literature will adjust in the ways in which its predecessor does not appear truthful to reality anymore, creating a new mimetic effect altogether.

## After Postmodernism?

The second problem that suggests itself in Nealon's assessment of post-postmodern literature lies in the examples he uses to illustrate his point of change from postmodern literature. Nealon states that "in the end, what's 'subverted' in virtually all postmodern notions of 'subversion' is the desire for totalized 'meaning'" (163). However, after assessing a chunk of Bruce Andrew's *I Don't Have Any Paper So Shut Up*, Nealon comes to the conclusion that "the one thing [post-postmodern poetry] doesn't do—or even really attempt—is to 'mean' something" (165). Nealon, though, stays rather obscure in the details of how the subversion of meaning in postmodernism can now be distinguished from a lack of meaning in post-postmodernism. Nealon offers another "sharper" example: the work of Kenneth Goldsmith. Looking at the trilogy of *The Weather*, *Sports*, and *Traffic*, Nealon quotes Goldsmith on his writing practices: "I've come to embrace [Douglas] Huebler's ideas, though it might be retooled as, 'The world is full of texts, more or less interesting; I do not wish to add any more'" (Goldsmith qtd. in Nealon 166). Nealon sees this attitude as the appropriate answer to writing in the internet age— "what does 'writing' look like when a searchable database of nearly everything ever written is easily within reach of anyone with an Internet connection?" (166). It is yet

unclear how this answer is excitingly different to the one postmodernism would have had. It is hard to read Goldsmith's quote and not immediately think of Barth's “Literature of Exhaustion” (1967), describing the, at this point in time, new literature as an expression of “a used-upness of certain forms or the felt exhaustion of certain possibilities” (64). Overall, the examples rather work against Nealon's central claim that literature has changed under the intensification of postmodernity.

The choice of examples by Nealon is surprising, since the beginning of the chapter illustrates the issue of a changed position of literature along the lines of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), *Mao II* (1991), and *Underworld* (1997). DeLillo is often referred to when scholarship tries to theorize on the transition of postmodernism to … the next thing. Either as the last bastion of postmodernism (Hoberek 243) or in his later works as an indication of the changed mode of the novel. T. Savvas and C.K. Coffman, in their introduction to *Textual Practice*'s special issue on American fiction after postmodernism, want to refresh the views and problems set forth in Hoberek's introduction on the matter twelve years earlier. Referring to *Underworld* as well, Savvas and Coffman argue that “these and other American novels of the decade displayed a shift with regard to the import of historical consciousness, mixing critiques of the historical past such as those Hutcheon describes [in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*] with explorations of the possible terms of contemporary community informed by an understanding of that past” (201). This shift will be central to my following chapter.

In conclusion, I agree with Nealon in most parts, namely that the capitalist conditions defining postmodernity have intensified over the last decades and literature's answer therefore is changing. Nevertheless, I do not see the new answer in what Nealon

sets forth as post-postmodern literature. Instead, I stand with those who take Nealon's argumentative beginnings in DeLillo's earlier work from the 80s and early 90s and logical continue with DeLillo's later aesthetics—the aesthetics that seem, like modernism to realism, not primarily concerned with a critique of postmodernity but instead show utopian impulses to fix shortcomings of the previous aesthetic mode. This thesis focuses on one specific way that the literary fiction following postmodernism is creating a new aesthetic expression to the logics of cultural production in the early 2000s. As I will elaborate in the next chapter, that specific way is an attempt to overcome inherent problems of literary postmodernism. Therefore, to me, it seems terminologically more appropriate to denote this procedure after postmodernism, in accordance with Hoberek, Savvas, and Coffman, and morphologically seeing postmodernism as a closed unity and still mentioned entity at the same time.

## III. LIVE FROM BETWEEN TWO DEATHS

### The Problem of the Subject

Beginning with postmodernism as Jameson's "Logic of Late Capitalism," what he signifies with this marker of "late" is "that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization" (xxi). So, if "late" is the marker of change, what has been transformed must be the "Logic of Capitalism." The term "late capitalism" in Jameson's usage is related to, among others, Ernst Mandel's periodization (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 35). In *Late Capitalism*, Mandel identifies three periods of capitalism: market capitalism, monopoly capitalism, and postindustrial capitalism. Regarding my remarks in Chapter One, though, if we just focus on the "logic" aspect, market capitalism and monopoly capitalism both adhere to the same. Logic is in its simplest sense an application of mathematical principles to determine validity. And the mathematical principles to determine validity in both phases are the same, meaning that the economic model of monopoly is just a market model where the variable "n" for competing suppliers is set to "n=1."

What I am trying to foreground again is that the "Logic of Capitalism" is just one aspect to signify the whole of modernity, including realism and modernism as aesthetic instances. Therefore, it is likely to view the "Logic of Late Capitalism," in Jameson's sense, rather as postmodernity than solely postmodernism. The reason why Jameson nevertheless avoids any distinctions between planes, or structures, is "a prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to the point at which everything in our social life—from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of

the psyche itself—can be said to have become 'cultural' in some original and untheorized sense" (48). So, what seems to mark the new "The Logic of Late Capitalism" as a new historic phase different from modernity is, for once, a reorganization of the life world in different spheres, planes, or structures. In postmodernism, according to Jameson, there is only one plane. Culture has swallowed all structures. Jameson describes this all-maneuvering culture in detail—often resembling and referencing Baudrillard's theory of "simulacra"—in short images that have (no longer) a true referent in reality. For example, postmodernism's problematic relationship with History as presented in Lawrence Kasdan's *Body Heat* approaches the, to Jameson, postmodern present "by way of art language of the simulacrum, or the pastiche of the stereotypical past," which "endows present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage" (21). In the end, to Jameson, postmodernism is a spatial matter, which includes the "new spatial logic of the simulacrum" (18). As a spatial matter, the issue of postmodernism is ultimately a "mutation in the object" (38).

But here the problem arises to me, reading Jameson's remarks thirty years later: He continues that the mutation in the object is "unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject" (38). He concludes that "[w]e do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as [he calls] it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space [he has called] the space of high modernism" (38-39). His observation leaves the possibility open for our perceptual habits to adjust, for us as subjects in this space to change accordingly. Myself, being born after Jameson's points have been made, cannot claim in any way that my perceptions are formed in the space of high modernism. I am at least willing to ask: Are these images that

surround us truly “simulacra,” signifiers without signifieds, references without referents, or is Jameson in his spatial logic as an unadjusted subject just not able to find the plane where these image's referents lie?

## The Fourth Machine Age

Going hand-in-hand with Mandel's periodization, Jameson's postmodernism is also conceptualized as the “Third Machine Age” (36). This third machine, a progression from steam-driven and nuclear-powered machines, is the computer, “whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power, or even the casings of various media themselves, as with that home appliances called television which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself” (37). The description of television and computer “shells” are the first thing that dates Jameson here. By now, one cannot speak of an implosion of either television or computer. Today, the flattened screen is basically all that is left as a shell. The computer he can speak of in 1991 is today in its functionality not even comparable to our “smart” televisions anymore. The internet as the world wide web only began to develop at Jameson's time, but from today's point of view can be considered as a seminal economic shift that inclines me to actually speak of a “Fourth Machine Age.”

Of course, it is still computers that drive the advancement of capital, but it is not the machines the consumer owns at home. Those machines that the production of the dominant players in our current markets rely on are big, black squares without any image surface and far removed from our daily lives in server farms around the world. It is important to also note I used the word “production” here, as it stresses another difference

to Jameson's observations. To him, computers are "machines of reproduction rather than of production" (37). But by now, we can say that those servers, or more specifically the abstract space which technology stores inside of them, are the majority of *products* that the large revenue companies like Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft sell.

I want to illustrate my point here, by looking closer at one of these companies. On the first glance, one might still believe that what Amazon sells is books, clothes, decorations, etc., one can order from a computer comparable to what Jameson speaks about; the computer just reproduces the familiar, in-person goods and money exchanges. So, the judgement that computers are solely "machines of reproduction" might seem fair. But considering Jeff Bezos is stepping down as the company's CEO, giving the position to Andrew Jassy, one can infer that those reproduction via home computers are not supposed to be the driving generator of capital for Amazon anymore. Apparently, a specific expertise is needed to lead this company into the future, which Jeff Bezos, who built Amazon in its reproductive capacity, knows he does not have. He stays involved in the company but does not make the executive decision of the Chief Executive Officer anymore. Those are now Andrew Jassy's to make, who was Bezos' chief-of-staff when Amazon tried to expand business outside of retail. The result was AWS (Amazon Web Services), the invention of a new industry: Cloud Computing. Andrew Jassy has been responsible for growing this endeavor into the most profitable arm of the company by now. This is what qualifies him to be the CEO at a point where Amazon shifts from the kind of computer that is used to reproduce something to the computers that produce something, namely servers that generate abstract digital space. I conclude the "evolution of machinery under capital" (Jameson 35) has advanced since Jameson's *Postmodernism*.

Reproductive power computers have made way to the capitalist dominance of productive power computers, even though this productive power continues to operate solely on the plane of reproductions—the product is only perceivable in the realm of signifiers; the signified itself is abstract, not graspable, not touchable, not visible to humans. We store images or movies in the cloud, but we never see the cloud or the file itself.

Nevertheless, closing this consideration of a "Fourth Machine Age," I want to point out again how market capitalism with its steam-driven machines and monopoly capitalism with its nuclear-powered machines both follow the "Logic of Capitalism" in the end. And so, the shift I have shown here, from multinational capitalism with the reproductive power of computers to the next phase—which, as I am neither an economist nor a historicist, am loath to name myself—with the productive power of computers, still follows the "Logic of Late Capitalism." These logics suggest themselves to be economic network theories, as they have been applied to multinational conglomerates and the world wide web companies. But as the focus of this thesis—and my realm of knowledge, too—is literature, I want to redirect towards my goals.

### The Passivity Trap

In the realm of art, Jameson sees the "Third Machine Age" "make[s] very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery" (37). Those demands are represented in "weaker productions of postmodernism" as a mere "thematic representation of content—into narratives which are *about* the processes of reproduction and include movie cameras, video, tape recorders, the whole technology of production and reproduction of the

simulacrum" (37). Here, we can see one of the many examples of my introductory remarks to this thesis that intermediality is certainly not a new invention. The point is that these instances of intermediality Jameson references, like integrating the likeness of cassettes into architecture, are not the driving force to Jameson's postmodernism as an aesthetic. To him, the "most energetic postmodernist texts" carry the "sense that beyond all thematics or content the work seems somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process" (37). In one sense, we can see that in the aesthetic procedure most closely associated with literary postmodernism's mimetic effect, namely metafiction. Metafiction is the overt thematization of the reproductive process of writing. One can find it expressed, for example, in the many different techniques of postmodern literature, like Vonnegut's and Fowles' tendency for metalepsis, foregrounding authorship, or the general dominance of irony. Irony is foregrounding the discrepancies between what is and what is said, therefore stressing a faulty reproduction process.

Metafiction is certainly an exploration in regard to art, form, and genre. But the belief that "every age is dominated by a privileged form or genre, which seems by its structure the fittest to express its secret truths" is already outdated to Jameson in postmodernism (67). Since in contemporary capitalism "fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but quite inescapable," "genres and forms" have been displaced by the word "*medium*" (67). And here literary fiction for Jameson must be lacking, considering that the first serialized world wide web novel *Delirium* (1994) postdates the publication of *Postmodernism* (1991). The material side of literary fiction's reproduction is limited. It is not a network to be tapped, but a relic from the "First Machine Age:" print. And so, it is not surprising that, to Jameson, the novel is not the privileged medium

to express postmodernism's secret truths. The *medium* that takes the privileged position in postmodernism is video. It clearly ups any print in its ability to juxtapose image, sound, music, film, text, etc. in one frame, just to repeat it in another. This ability makes video best suited to express “a structure or sign flow which resists meaning [...], which systematically sets out to short-circuit traditional interpretive temptations” (91-92). Ultimately, the secret truth that video seems to express better than any other medium at that time is that “now reference and reality disappear altogether and even meaning—the signified—is problematized” (97). From there on, the referent, the objective world, and reality only “entertain a feeble existence on the horizon like a shrunken star or red dwarf” (97)

In “E Unibus Pluram,” published two years after Jameson's *Postmodernism*, David Foster Wallace comes to a similar result: literary fiction is certainly not the top contender anymore to speak meaningfully on the secret truths of the time. Yet, as a fiction writer himself, Wallace cannot view videos' privileged position as neutral and given like Jameson. He sees postmodern literary fiction, and its late eighties intensification, which he calls image-fiction, doomed by videos’ dominance. Taking a less theory-heavy approach than Jameson, who focused on video mainly in the sense of art installation, Wallace looks at commercial television, a version of video, and tries to imagine a new way for literary fiction to compete with it. At his moment in time, to Wallace there is the attempt of “re-imagining what human life might truly be like over there across the chasm of illusion, mediation, demographics, marketing, image and appearance” (173), values set forth through television's risen relevance in human life. Interestingly, this re-imagining implies in a way that Jameson's conceptions of

postmodernism might be gradually passing, which would put video maybe at a disadvantage again and would open space for literary fiction to rise again.

Yet, Wallace must contend that imagist-fiction cannot be the “rescue from a passive addictive TV-psychology” (173), because of the difficulty “to cull any meaning from the seas of signal” (188). Imagist-fiction renders material “with the same tone of irony and self-consciousness that their ancestors, the literary insurgents of [...] postmodernism, used to rebel against their own world and context” (173). The problem is that this approach has been paradoxically used-up because television has employed exactly those techniques by “re-presenting the very cynical postmodern aesthetic that was once the best alternative to the appeal of low, over-easy, mass-marketed narrative” (173). In short, television made the techniques of literary postmodernism, namely metafiction, into its primary aesthetic to criticize itself in its function of selling and illusion, being the ultimate simulacrum. To be at least able to comment on it, literary fiction, like the consumer, is caught up in the passive position of a watcher.

We can see passivity, Wallace’s issue with literary fiction in the late eighties and very early nineties, as the central problem resulting from the postmodernism described by Jameson. One of the features of Jameson's postmodernism I have not discussed so far is the “waning of affect" (10). Jameson observes that this reaction to modernism is “not only a liberation of anxiety but a liberation of any other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling” (15). Feelings, in postmodernism, are “free-floating and impersonal” (16). We can see how Jameson frames feelings originally as productive, something for a subject “to do.” But in a postmodernist world culture has swallowed everything, creating (the impression) of one plane. Since that omni-culture is

then mostly focused on reproductive processes, no one can be surprised that the unadjusted subject in this world cannot see ways to be productive anymore and is seduced into a passive position.

### The Two Deaths

And yet, critical works written after Jameson's *Postmodernism*, indicate that despite the stasis that logically results from postmodernism, culture has moved on—affirming Wallace's sense of a necessary shift. In *Life Between Two Deaths, 1989 - 2001*, Phillip Wegner argues that “the 1990s are the strange space between an ending (the Cold war) and a beginning (our post-September 11 world)” (9). Borrowing from Slavoy Žižek, Wegner calls the two events “two deaths” and explains,

> The toppling of the World Trade Center buildings can be understood as a form of second death, an incident that repeats an earlier ‘fall,’ that of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. This first fall was a true Event: unexpected and unplanned for, an encounter with a traumatic Real, [...]; 9/11, on the other hand, was a violent, premeditated action, and the ultimate consequences of an emerging global order [...]. (24)

While, to Wegner, the mirroring between the two events happens on a geopolitical level, I want to foreground their relation to postmodernism's privileged medium: video. Both events, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, are highly associated with their mediation on live television. For Wallace, “watching a Soviet-satellite newscast of the Berlin Wall's fall” just supports his point that image-fiction should be seen as an atavistic recurrence of realism (172). To me, this supports the

“two deaths” theory insofar that Wallace cannot see the crucial centrality of the Berlin Wall's fall for his wish of rebellion against the aura of television yet. As Wegner put it, “every death, every ending point in history, must happen a second time before its import can be grasped” (24). The Fall of the Berlin Wall was an act of watchers finally becoming active producers—by reinforcing a connection between the signifier on television and the signified on another plane, a real one.

The Berlin Wall came down on the day and in the way it did when the newly appointed press secretary of the GDR, Günter Schabowski, gave a live-television press conference on changes in emigration law. Because the historical processes earlier on November 9, 1989, which surround the notes that Schabowski was given, are heavily debated and highly complicated, I cannot definitely dive into those. The important matter, though, is: The GDR did not intend to open the Wall that night. However, when Schabowski, apparently confused by his notes and unaware of earlier party consensus, was asked when the new laws would be in place, he answered in front of the eyes of GDR citizens watching live on their televisions, “Sofort, unverzüglich” [now, immediately]. Instead of passively taking this in and waiting until another council member's injection, “Das muss der Ministerrat beschließen” [The Ministers Council must decide on it] (Chronik), is further mediated, the watchers immediately became active and left their living rooms towards the Wall.

Until now, the Wall as a signifier on GDR television has been surely free-floating. Hailed as an anti-fascist protective wall, it had been far removed from its signified, which was in fact an armed border keeping citizens from fleeing a repressive one-party system. But the citizens of the GDR required that signifier and signified become one again, that

what had been said on television becomes reality. The leadership had to give in under the pressure of masses demanding to leave East Berlin and the GDR that night. The subjects here finally seem to have perceptually adjusted to the “mutation of the object” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 38), being able to productively navigate a space that still has two planes at least: the one of reproductions and the one of productions, mediation versus reality. In this act, “meaning” and “affect” have been recovered in a certain sense.

As Wegner already formulates, even though 9/11 is a mirroring of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in some philosophical sense, these two events are very different in nature, nevertheless. One was a peaceful protest while the other was a terrorist attack. So, the relations between the two are very complex. For once, we have a mirroring in the sense of parallelism: besides for the people directly present in Berlin or New York, the event we think of when we remember those happenings are actually watching their images on live television.

Also, while the two events are mirroring each other, suggesting the parallels, the space in between is still a transitional space, indicating a change or intensification that is manifested by the second fall. While the Fall of the Berlin Wall can be understood as a story of live television being unprepared for the case of evoking real reactions from their viewer, 9/11 signals a shift of live television never being unprepared again. On the night of November 9, 1989, there was a significant gap in mediation. Looking at the chronology of that night, after the miscommunication at the press conference, the first press agency to spread the confusing news was Reuters three minutes later. The first broadcast television mention of the events and its possible consequences happens 17 minutes later on the West German news show *heute* (Chronik). From there on begins a

struggle for interpretation, as the GDR television news try to reframe Schabowski's statement in the sense of the party that wanted to reform the travel freedom of their citizen but did not intend to open the border that night. Their attempts of mediation were obsolete, though. People had already collected at the Berlin border and at train stations in Leipzig to make their way West. They were not watching television anymore. When the GDR television made their last attempt to mediate the information in their sense, stressing that border crossing still need to be applied for, at 10.28 p.m., the first GDR-citizen had left through the Helmstedt-Marienborn control station more than an hour ago (Chronik).

On the day of September 11, it took broadcast television (WNYW) less than two minutes to send out the first live pictures. Less than three minutes after Flight 11 had crashed into the North Tower, CNN was reporting live as well. As the mediation of the event is uninterrupted from that point on, the beginning confusion is actually solved through live television. All three major US networks are reporting live from the scene when the second airplane crashes into the North Tower. Looking at montages of the different networks reacting to Flight 175, while 9/11 itself unfolds on television the postmodern space is also illuminated in new ways.

There are few things imaginable as having a greater effect on our current global reality than more than a million US viewers seeing the images of the second crash and hearing anchors seconds later discuss that what we see must be happening on purpose. From a geopolitical point of view, a new world order was created, ensuing wars and conflicts that are still fought 20 years later. But also, with a focus on media, “9/11 altered our sense ratios in a profound way,” as Richard Grusin states in *Premediation* (9).

Describing the shift of medial practice after 9/11, Grusin theorizes that remediation, a concept to describe a double logic of media between hypermediacy and immediacy in the nineties, which I will refer to later in this chapter, has intensified into an act of premediation. Premediation is “the cultural desire to make sure that the future has already been pre-mediated before it turns into the present (or the past)—in large part to try to prevent the media, and hence the American public, from being caught unawares as it was on the morning of 11 September 2001” (4). It functions as “a means of mobilizing collective affect in order to protect us from the impending threat of global terrorism” (9) which also entails “remediating the past” (8).

We can understand this new medial dominant of premediation as an extension of the passivity trap already described by Wallace, almost two decades earlier. The idea with which media after 9/11 becomes infatuated is that the future is dangerous, and that it can only be limited in its potential by never going unmediated again, not even for a second. However, without morally equating the events of 9/11 with the Fall of the Berlin Wall, gaps in mediation have been the sphere of productive action in reality. While Grusin speaks of affect, too, he is not necessarily implying the productive affect that Jameson described as something “to do,” to me also a potential to incite engagement with reality as the co-embodied plane of postmodern space. Grusin warns against “collaps[ing] affect into individual emotion or feeling” and ultimately “reduc[ing] bodily and autonomic affect to a synonym for human emotion” (118), which is implied in Jameson's usage of affect as developed from Munch's *The Scream* (*Postmodernism* 14). The affect created via premediation is an “affectivity of anticipation” (120); ergo, here, media conditions us to wait for action rather than to commit to any action ourselves.

Whereas the Fall of the Berlin Wall had illustrated how gaps of mediation give room for productive action on the plane of reality, 9/11 has illustrated that productive action on the plane of reality is dangerous, can constitute horror, can cost lives, and can cause collective trauma. Further, when the Fall of the Berlin Wall expressed a desire to actively unite the signifier from the plane of reproduction with their signifieds on the productive plane, the logics of premediation after 9/11 wants the opposite: it produces an excess of signifiers on the plane of reproduction so that any future occurrence on the productive plane does not require an active act but is already automatically signified. Premediation in a way expresses a collective trend of viewing emotional affect and productivity as a risk whose price after 9/11 feels too high to pay, and therefore anticipatory affect and passivity is preferred. The reproductive plane is trying to prevent the productive plane of reality from unfolding to its full potential, which includes hurt, trauma, and pain.

This logic of premediation is a trend that Grusin foremost describes as an issue of new media, which also became the mass media of the twenty-first century. Yet, at one point, he turns to a novel to illustrate the new affectivity of anticipation after 9/11. In Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, “the comfort [the protagonist] finds in the Las Vegas poker tournaments is the comfort offered by premediation, the embodied knowledge that there will always be another hand after the *coup* of the previous one” (Grusin 109). The point to keep in mind here is that this representation of premeditation is not necessarily an adherence to its logic in the novel as a whole, though. In *Falling Man*, the acting out of a premediative belief through the protagonist does not lead to a happy end in the novel. The title itself, *Falling Man*, is a reminder that the infinite repetition of actions one can

anticipate is solely illusional. Any falling man hits the ground at some point. Solely the representations of it, be it the famous photograph from 9/11 or the artist mentioned in the novel who would fix himself with gear in the air, seem infinite.

In the context of the media competition that Wallace described, the crisis of literary fiction resulted from the dominance of television as a mass medium and its aesthetic and representational advantages in addressing the collective mind. So literary fiction would be ill advised to attempt beating mass media in their own game. Instead, what the example of *Falling Man* here alludes to is the novel trying to find an antagonistic position to the ideas in which mass media and collective sensibilities converge, in this case premediation. In the next subsection, I want to discuss how this counter-position of the novel could be formally expressed in writing.

### The Intermedial Way Out

The changes in form and aesthetic of the novel that I supposed earlier root in the possibility for a subject to adjust to the space of postmodernism, letting the space exist on, but changing its own perspective on it from when Jameson theorized the condition last. I think it is important here to distinguish between a subject, being an individual, and the collective, being a mass. A mass can build out of subjects, but there are still different potentials between addressing people as subjects and addressing people as a mass: Let us note that any organized mass protest in the GDR had comparatively less effect than hundreds of splintered individuals, each in front a television of their own, reacting spontaneously. In a collective effort, we can see how the medial logics of premediation, for example, are just an intensification of previous trends, like remediation. And the

“waning of affect” that Jameson describes is intensified into a whole new idea about affect, that takes the emotional and productive side out of the picture. But even though the “Logic of Late Capitalism” prevails, after the “two deaths” one can find proof of a new subject being out there, which is in need of an aesthetic alternative to the old ways. A collective always builds from the smallest common denominator, and that is what mass media and premediation addresses. But beyond that, an adjusted subject as an individual can even have contradictory ideas and desires. And here lies literary fiction's great chance to become the medium to express those and counter the dominant medial discourse forms.

Like few other media, literature has the capacity to appeal to an individual instead of the masses. For once, it is in its aesthetic capacity produced only by individuals and not like film or television a cumulative effort of writer(s), director, producer(s), costume designer(s), set designer(s), sound engineer(s), etc. Further, thereby it can also easier address the individual because in its artistic production capital is relatively irrelevant. A film needs millions, in its most indie-form maybe thousands, of dollars to be shot in the first place. A book can be written before the publisher has to make judgements on how many editions they will print, or if the novel is worth to be printed at all. Ergo, by not being a mass medium, literary fiction (among others) is already advantageously positioned to be the bearer of a counter-position to the dominant logics. (Of course, capital plays a role in the production of literature as it does in everything. But relatively, literary fiction is less directly dependent than film, television, and even mass media internet.)

When for the adjusted subject there is finally more than one plane in the

postmodern hyperspace visible, there are new ways for literary fiction to describe how those planes relate—the central concern for literary aesthetic as explained in Chapter One. That new relation, from literary fiction's experience is described in Wallace's essay. Literary fiction became an “ultimate union” with U.S. television and thereby mass culture (192). What was intended as critique in the aesthetic of early postmodernists proved to be absorbable by television. Once, in the sixties, postmodernist aesthetic was “difficult and painful, and *productive*” (183, emphasis in original); but with television as the mass medium co-opting exactly these metafictional processes of irony and self-consciousness, “postmodern rebellion becomes a pop-cultural institution” (184). Further, the “two deaths” made exactly this absorbing process as a new relation visible to a subject, even when that process via premediation became a collective desire, too.

In “American Fiction after Postmodernism,” Savvas and Coffman discuss the many different routes literature has taken after Wallace's observations, which in some terms can be “generally seen as an attempt to move beyond the irony of postmodernist fiction, and to counter the ‘waning of affect’ that such fiction effected (at least to the mind of Fredric Jameson)” (199). They conclude as a unifying feature of most twenty-first century fiction “the realist turn must now be taken for granted” (200)—a statement I would not necessarily agree with, though.

On the first look, the resurfacing of realist modes makes sense in the context of my previous observations. One can view realism as the original aesthetic of two planes—there is life and then there is mimesis, let’s go. But I also want to return to my points from Chapter One in the sense of distinguishing between realism as a technique, as a device, and realism as the “dominant” aesthetic to produce a mimetic effect, meaning

realism as a form representing the conception of reality. Realism as a device is representing reality as the objects we perceive through the use of such narrative techniques as fixed focalization of narrators, thereby mirroring the *universal* perceptual apparatus. As a dominant aesthetic it further suggested wholeness and unity, like everything put in front of the mirror is represented in its whole and as one. In realism as a "dominant" the act of representation itself is not problematized, which made it appear naive in certain retrospectives. Modernism as an aesthetic stepped in as a response to assert a more qualified view on representation: what we see in the mirror is just what *we* see; ergo any representation is subjective. My point is, when the "Logic of Late Capitalism" and its culture continue to present simulacra all around, we see, hear, and feel with our universal perceptual apparatus things that do not relate to reality as a mirror. So, if the approximation of that universal perceptual apparatus is then as an aesthetic further presented as wholeness and unity, like a "realist turn" seems to suggest, the one plane of signifiers with disappearing signifieds is just reinforced again. Thereby the subject longing for a re-imagining could not be reached. Those who are tired of postmodern passivity will not find the secret truths of a new time in reinforced realism. While realism as a technique is evident, I suppose here that there are far better candidates for the "dominant" of literature after postmodernism.

I want to quickly turn to one of the advocates of realism for the dominant of the new millennium, Tom Wolfe, to further illustrate the problem with a general realist turn above. In the context of a return to realism, his essay "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast" (1989) is often quoted. Wolfe reacts against the belief that "realism was 'just another formal device, not a permanent method for dealing with experience' (in the words of the

editor of the *Partisan Review*, William Phillips).” He observes, “It was realism that created the ‘absorbing’ or ‘gripping’ quality that is peculiar to the novel, the quality that makes the reader feel that he has been pulled not only into the setting of the story but also into the minds and central nervous systems of the characters.” What he describes is realism's ability to create aesthetic (narrative) illusions, inclining a reader towards immersion into a narrative—absorbing it. But to call this ability “peculiar to the novel” seems endlessly anachronistic. An immersive medium has the purpose to let the act of mediation largely disappear (Grusin 21). Considering that the “camera-perspective” narration is mostly seen as an innovation of modernism, it is fair to state that realism is highly bound up with narrators as instances of mediation. The most covert, objective, reliable narrator at the end of the nineteenth century is probably the least degree of mediation a reader has experienced so far in terms of narratives. But as the “camera” is even from a literary perspective more covert than that, meaning that it offers the lowest degree of mediation between story and reader, we can immediately see how film has the upper hand when it comes to immersive qualities.

Further, it is highly questionable why literature would rely on the immersive techniques that are largely responsible for making the aesthetic illusions of film, video, and other media into illusions in a postmodern sense. The fact that what is seen on television is viewed as real as reality makes it so hard to distinguish the simulacra from reality. Again, literary fiction going solely the same route would be to willingly admit defeat in a media competition, and to ignore the lessons of the late twentieth century by continuing the path that favors the one plane space. Making realism the only point of literary fiction's formation after postmodernism would simply repeat the mistakes that

Wallace identified and would ignore the lessons he described before. To progress, literary fiction has to infuse its aesthetic with something that is actually "peculiar." Within the "Logic of Late Capitalism," literature needs to find an answer in its materiality that can contrast reproductive forces of mass-culture and can thereby criticize the aesthetics of its literary predecessor that have been appropriated in the meantime. Only that way literature can harvest the demand of an adjusted subject.

And here, it is finally time to review the term intermediality more closely to introduce my contender for a "dominant" capable to move literature beyond the problems elaborated above. In its very broadest sense, intermediality is interested in any phenomena that cross the borders of just one medium. Irina O. Rajewsky, who has produced, aside from Werner Wolf and Bolter and Grusin, one of the most used corpi of terminology and distinctions in the field, calls this understanding of intermediality an "umbrella-term" (44). Rajewsky suggests that one way to distinguish between the different approaches and debates is separating "*intermediality as a fundamental condition or category*" and "*intermediality as a critical category for the concrete analysis of specific individual media products or configurations*" (47, emphasis in original). Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation* constitutes itself as the former category in putting forth the sense that "*all* mediation is remediation." Remediation marks a form of intermedial relation (55).

And while in its central concern, describing the vice-versa relationship of old to new media, *Remediation* might appear as the most fitting theoretical framework to integrate my previous ideas into, through its further intensification, premediation, I have already found literature in a rather antagonistic perspective. Additionally, I want to point

out how literature plays only a minimal role in Bolter and Grusin's consideration—obviously, as the focus is new media. Even though "remediation operates in both directions," the older media they mean refers to forms "such as film and television," which "can seek to appropriate and refashion digital graphics, just as digital graphics artists can refashion film and television" (48). The refashioning they speak of cannot be the same for literary fiction. Both, film/television and digital media, are plurimedial per se; that is, they can perfectly integrate each other because film already consists of images among other media like sound, so the integration of a graphic poses no problem itself; respectively, digital media consists of videos among other things like texts already too, so they can easily integrate television's form. That does not mean that every website has a televisual quality, or every television program is evoking forms of the world wide web. But they have the integration of each other's form easily at hand when necessary.

What is understood as literary fiction today, though, is still a monomedial form at large. There are some exceptions in modernist and postmodernist experimentation integrating drawings or hypertexts linking videos, but those never gained a media constituting relevance. Graphic novels have certainly gained attention in the twentieth century, but we still call them "graphic" novels to distinguish them from "novels." Due to this monomedial form, a work of literary fiction cannot simply integrate a video in its text. It can only evoke or imitate a video within its one medium, call it language, text, or print. The remediation Grusin and Bolter speak of has no place for literary fiction in any meaningful ways, at least not yet. In the end, remediation is a form of media competition between only two contestants, "to determine whether broadcast television or the Internet will dominate the American and world markets" (48).

Further, remediation is a reproductive process. It constitutes itself as double logic between immediacy and hypermediacy (5), or in other words, multiple media are reproduced in one medium's effort to actually reproduce a sense of reality that allows for immersion. And in this focus on reproductive powers, Bolter and Grusin reveal their "postmodern (for lack of a better term) ambition" (Johanson 398). Bolter and Grusin's remediation is attached to the "Logic of Late Capitalism," even before its intensifying mutation into premediation. One could even describe remediation as the plurimedial method of Wallace's monomedial image-fiction, where reference to television and rock music were employed most importantly to be "plain realistic" (Wallace 167). But as my central point is to stress how literature wants to change away from the postmodernist mode, I can therefore hardly suppose remediation is the way to go.

Instead, I am arguing for intermediality in the sense of "*a critical category for the concrete analysis of specific individual media products or configurations*" (Rajewsky 47, emphasis in original) as a route to discover literary fiction's "peculiar" potential to relate to the intensified "Logic of Late Capitalism," addressing the condition of an adjusted subject in that space. This category of intermediality in the context of literary fiction, according to Rajewsky, takes the form of intermedial reference. Intermedial references are

> to be understood as meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product's overall signification: the media product uses its own media-specific means, either to refer to a specific, individual work produced in another medium (i.e., what in the German tradition is called *Einzelreferenz*, "individual reference"), or to refer to a specific medial subsystem (such as a certain film

> genre) or to another medium qua system (*Systemreferenz*, “system reference”). The given product thus constitutes itself partly or wholly in relation to the work, system, or subsystem to which it refers. [...] Rather than combining different medial forms of articulation, the given media-product thematizes, evokes, or imitates elements or structures of another, conventionally distinct medium through the use of its own media-specific means. (Rajewsky 52-53, emphasis in original)

Rajewsky precedes this definition of a narrow form of intermediality by stating “that any typology of intermedial practices must be historically grounded” (50). And so, of course, I do not want to ignore that Wallace's concept of image-fiction is very much understood in terms of intermedial reference as well. He states, this “later wave of postmodern lit is a further shift from television images as valid objects of literary allusion, to television and metawatching as themselves valid *subjects*” (169, emphasis in original). This constitutes obviously a literary evocation of another medium's structure in Rajewsky's sense.

But after describing the historical changes of the years after Wallace's observation and how they relate to literary fiction, I point to the decisive difference between the intermedial references as integrated into postmodern literature and intermedial differences as an expression of a literature after postmodernism. Image-fiction has used the intermedial reference to television as another attempt at irony and ridicule, typical devices of postmodern literature. But as Wallace has argued, “irony and ridicule are entertaining and effective, and at the same time they are agents of a great despair and stasis in U.S. culture” (171). The resulting problem is that they have expired their potential to take a counter-position to a dominant medial practice, which “has somehow

evolved to a point where it seems invulnerable to any such transfiguring assault" (171). The literature after postmodernism has found a way to use intermedial reference in a way of criticism towards dominant medial discourse again. The trick is to leave those aspects that have been incorporated by the newer media behind, and to find a discourse that is irreproducible by television, internet, etc. The literature after postmodernism does not use the intermedial reference as a form of postmodern criticism of the "Logic of Late Capitalism", but as a form to criticize postmodernism as an expression of "Logic of Late Capitalism."

To illustrate this point, I will use my following two chapters on Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* (2002) and Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* (2010) to analyze these novels in regard to their intermediality and the relations to the historical observations in this chapter. In reference to my Chapter One, I will show how the two novels from the first decade of the millennium employ intermediality to not only be a continued criticism of the conditions of postmodernity, as Jeffrey Nealon has framed the literary position of those years, but to actually criticize the representational strategies of postmodernism, which includes postmodern literature, as well if not foremost. Thereby the novels enforce a literary tradition *after* postmodernism, and not solely a *post*-postmodern intensification.

# IV. “THINKING ABOUT WHAT WAS NEXT”: WRITING AFTER POSTMODERNISM IN JEFFREY EUGENIDES’S *MIDDLESEX*

## Something is Wrong with the Stephanides Child

In Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex* (2002), Cal Stephanides tells the story of his Greek-American family, starting from his grandparents fleeing from Smyrna during World War I, ending in his narrating present of early 2000s’ Berlin. The novel covers the Ottoman Invasion of Greece, Fordism, the racial history of the city Detroit, World War II, the Vietnam Draft, the sexual revolution, and other historic events through the eyes of Cal telling the stories of the two generations before him. Or is it three generations? The novel begins, “I was born twice” (1). And as the story is separated into four “Books,”—one “Book” per generation?—the reader is under the impression Cal’s childhood is a generation apart from him now, ergo a different life. The reason why the narrator might feel this way is that his grandparents came to the U.S. with a secret. Lefty and Desdemona used to be brother and sister before. Under the anonymity of a ship leaving Greece forever they became husband and wife. This lack of genetic mixing, which is even intensified when their son Milton marries his cousin, Tessie, ultimately culminates in Cal’s body. It takes until her puberty for the family to discover that their youngest child, Calliope, is intersex, or a “hermaphrodite” as the novel terms it in alignment with its references to Greek epics. Confronted with the reality of her body, Calliope decides to become Cal and to live his adult life as a man. The break between “Book Three” and “Book Four” is made after the discovery of Cal's true biology and thereby aligns with this understanding.

The novel has been classified as a form of literary fiction after postmodernism

before. Günther Leypoldt's inquiries into the "Recent Realist Fiction and the Idea of Writing 'After Postmodernism'" found that "Jeffrey Eugenides [...] goes to [great length] [...] to demonstrate that despite [his] use of classical realist rhetoric, [he is] not guilty of the naivety that literary theory traditionally sees in realists" (24). Samuel Cohen argues in "The Novel in a Time of Terror" (2007), "Writing the kind of novel that Eugenides wrote after 9/11 does not only make a certain kind of sense, it may also characterize a moment in literary history after postmodernism" (388), accrediting a lack of closure at the end of the novel as its decisive feature. Most importantly, Eugenides himself, in interviews, likes to describe himself in a sense of overcoming the postmodern. In *3:AM Magazine*, Eugenides explained: "I want, in a way, a Classical shape to my books and a pleasing and elegant form to them, which is old-fashioned. But within that, I still have a lot of postmodern play without the continuing sense of relativism that … I got so tired of" (ellipsis in original). The "Classical shape" Eugenides aims for is very much covered by the academic consideration of realism in his writing. The classical ideas of poetics, for example as set forth in Aristotle's *Poetics*, have left their considerable trace onto the form of realism via mimesis, unity, closure, etc. So, for my analysis, I focus on the sense of "postmodern play without the continuing sense of relativism." In this aspect, intermediality is a good starting point as, shown via Wallace, it has been, for one, part of the postmodern play, and secondly, a source of relativism, or in my consideration cynical passivity.

Therefore, in section 3.2, I explore the use of intermedial references in the novel in context of my considerations from Chapter Two. In section 3.3, I illustrate how *Middlesex* expresses a progression from postmodernism, positioning itself as a successor

in the sense of being not just an intensification of its aesthetics but actually existing in a counter-position to it. Lastly, in section 3.4., I summarize my findings to allow some contextualization of after postmodernism in *Middlesex* with literary history in general.

**Creating Unmediated Space**

The linear plot of the story begins with Lefty and Desdemona in a village near Smyrna, 1922. Different uses of intermedial references illustrate their complicated relationship. As I have mentioned in Chapter Two, a strategic approach to reconfigure from the literary crisis of postmodernism would be to find a discourse that is irreproducible by television, internet, etc. The intermedial reference might seem counterintuitive at first and almost reads like another formulation of Bolter and Grusin's hypermediacy from the double-logic of remediation. But I want to repeat my previous observations of the plurimediality of new media and literature's monomediality. When the intermedial reference in a medium is expressed through "the use of its own media-specific means" (Rajewsky 53), then literary fiction in its monomediality has a unique advantage over television and internet. The intermedial reference is a technique neither television nor internet can properly employ because their media-specific means stays unclear to a viewer. The media-specific means contain video, but it is not *just* video. If they want to integrate sound, they just use sound but cannot express that through video. They contain the written word, but no one would claim that to be their medium-specific means either. In all their possible media-combinations a certain essentially material quality is lost. Thereby an important feature of the intermedial reference is closed off to them, which Rajewsky calls the "intermedial gap" (55). It is a material difference

between what is evoked and what is at hand. And this specific quality of the intermedial difference is what I want to foreground in Eugenides's writing first.

The earliest notion of an unnatural attraction between brother and sister, Lefty and Desdemona, is alluded to when Desdemona "understood that her heart operated on its own instructions, that she had no control over it or, indeed, anything else" (22). What caused this realization in her is hearing her brother sing. This appearance of song in the narrative is obvious to the reader as an intermedial reference because "the lyrics meant nothing to [Lefty], either, but the melody was enough" (23)—the melody is the medial specificity impossible to express. The story foregrounds a gap between literary fiction and music that cannot be bridged. Within the narrative this melody also indicates an unbridgeable gap between Desdemona and Lefty. To him, the melody "spoke of jazz-age frivolity, gin cocktails, cigarette girls," while to her it "conjured only the disreputable bars her brother went to down in the city, those hash dens where they played rebetika and American music" (23). These different perceptions of the music foreshadow a crisis in their future marriage when Lefty gambles away their shared savings and ultimately their house in Detroit (204-208). It is the memory of his time in Bursa, their village, and the feelings associated with the melody of his youth that leads him into the addiction: "his blood grew hot with an old excitement, a quickening of the pulse he hadn't felt since descending the mountain to explore the back streets of Bursa" (205).

What brings Desdemona and Lefty finally together in the first place is that reality cannot live up to the representations of it. Trying to arrange his brother's marriage to one of the two other girls in their village, Desdemona seeks for help in the photographs of a French lingerie catalogue, *Lingerie Parisienne*. Every night, she "memoriz[ed] the

pictures so that she could re-create them later" (33). When it is time for Lefty to make his decision, though, neither of the two girls whose waiting poses and positions in their windows was directed by Desdemona from "the photograph of page 8 of *Lingerie Parisienne*" is chosen (35). After paying a visit to both, Lefty rushes home to get with his sister because "what Desdemona hadn't anticipated: her brother, too, had pored over the pages of *Lingerie Parisienne*" (36). Neither available bachelorette had managed to live up to the photographs, and so he turned to the person "he loved more and knew better than any other," his sister (37). The intermedial gap between photography and the novel here constitutes the complicated nature of plot and teleology in the novel. Cal himself inserts himself at that point and wonders: "Was it love or reproduction? Chance or destiny? Crime or nature at work?" (37). As a reader we never saw the original photographs, and so, we cannot compare it to the women in the windows waiting for Lefty, who we never *saw* either. We can never determine if the "distance between [them] and [Lefty's] boyhood ideals" (37) was real or imagined, meaning, did he decide to turn to his sister or did circumstance drive him to her.

Lefty and Desdemona are seldomly happy together. The initial flaw in their relationship, the incest, produces many other gaps between them that are illustrated through the thematization of other media. Desdemona's fear of sexual intercourse, after she learns of the natural consequences of incest, are illustrated in a vaudeville play both watched the night Milton was conceived (107-109). Lefty is aroused by the chorus girls, while Desdemona is aroused by the representation of a minotaur monster acting to kill them. When she decides to never have sex again to Lefty's disappointment, he returns to photography and, "updating an old ideal" (159), he begins to sell erotic shots of scantily

clad women on top of expensive cars. In their late life, shortly after Lefty has gambled away their house and all savings, he suffers from a stroke, which forever takes away his ability to speak. The cooling of their relationship is accompanied with new media finding way into Lefty and Desdemona's life, who are now staying in their son's attic. A television is brought up to their chambers after Lefty returns from the hospital and it "replaced the sound of conversation that was missing from [their] lives" (223). Again, a medium and a quality non-integrable to the novel, sound, manifests an unbridgeable gap between Lefty and Desdemona. Their relationship never recovers.

While one can see the overt thematization of other media as a form of postmodern play in *Middlesex*, it is important to return to Eugenides's wish to overcome postmodern relativism, nevertheless. As I have shown in the previous paragraphs, every single intermedial gap and evocation of other media matters in the context of the story told. They are not only an expression of playfulness, but a way of describing Desdemona's and Lefty's relationship in ways both of them can never really put into words. All these gaps are in themselves productive ways of storytelling in strong relation to events and action in the novel.

To expand on Rajewsky's observation, or at least to add the necessary historical grounding she asks for, I want to explicitly stress a notion in the creation of intermedial gaps that has not been formulated so far. Intermedial gaps ultimately create gaps in the mediation. A novel can reach for a melody, for example, but it can never fully incorporate it. Literary fiction has a way to conceal those gaps, make them less perceivable to the reader by employing an "as if" mode of writing (Rajewsky 55). Eugenides, though, makes no attempt here. So visible to the reader, therefore, this gap of

mediation creates room and also a need for the reader to commit to a productive act of imagination. Thereby, we can view the formal choice of Eugenides here as an expression of the position after postmodernism that I have laid out in the previous chapter. The gaps of mediation are not only the room for productive forces within the plane of narration, but they also extend to the plane of reality of the reader.

The intermedial references from Desdemona and Lefty's love story are echoed at the beginning of their son's relationship. The theme of music reoccurs. Milton serenades Tessie, who lives next door, on his clarinet:

> Artie Shaw's big hit "Begin the Beguine' floats on the humid air. [...] It rustles the leaves of apple trees and sets a rooster on a weather vane spinning. With its fast beat and swirling melody, 'Begin the Beguine' rises over the victory garden and the lawn furniture [...] up and up it soars [...]; but now here it is, finally, coming through Theodora's window, as she fans her toes to dry them. And, hearing it, my mother turns toward the window and smiles. (169-170)

The intermedial difference to music here functions very differently than the melody of Desdemona's and Lefty's past. While there the gap was stressed and the melody stood ungraspable to a reader, here, the media specific methods of the novel evoke the melody in the reader's mind. Describing how the air moves "leaves" and "weather vane" the sound waves of music are represented. As literary fiction approaches music here, Milton is trying to approach Tessie. In further contrast to Lefty and Desdemona, we can see that to Tessie and Milton the melody means the same. The melody is the successful attempt to flirt, bringing the two together for the first time. The melody from Bursa, in contrast, was perceived completely differently between Lefty and Desdemona, foreshadowing events

that would drive them apart in the future.

Yet, at first. Tessie turns Milton down for marriage. As a reaction, he enlists for WWII and leaves Detroit. Tessie stays back and enjoys her free Saturdays at the movies. She is engaged to Father Mike, a respectable fiancé. The film presentations she watches show a complicated combination of reality and representation. A newsreel of the war is followed by a Hollywood movie; ergo, one film is the intentional representation of reality while the other is the representation of a fictional narrative intended to appear like reality. In their materiality, film, both are not to tell apart. And so, it is no surprise that in Tessie's mind the two become mangled into one statement applicable to her reality:

> And out in the audience my mother found herself doing a crazy thing. She was looking for Milton's face. [...] She kept thinking that if something happened to Milton, if he was wounded or, God forbid, if he didn't come back — she would be somehow to blame. [...] She knew he'd done it because of her. It was a little like *Into the Sands*, with Claude Barron, which she'd seen a couple of weeks ago. [After enlisting because Rita Carrol marries another man and when both reunite after her divorce] Claude Barron says, 'I went into the desert to forget about you. But the sand was the color of your hair. [...] There was nowhere I could go that wouldn't be you.' And then he dies. Tessie cried buckets. (Eugenides 188-189)

Months later Tessie is at the cinema again, and the lines between reality and its representations are blurred to avert the projected unhappy ending of Tessie marrying Father Mike instead of Milton. Tessie sees her own plight directly mirrored in the cinema. She sees Milton on film during the newsreel that night and unites that with what she learned from *Into the Sands*. She comes to a final, and for the story which is also

tracking the genetic make-up of their future child, crucial realization. Everything blurs into one and “while the flickering beam of the movie projector slants through the darkness over her head, Tessie admits to herself that she doesn't want to marry Michael Antoniou. [...] As she gazes at Milton in the newsreel, her eyes fill with tears and she says out loud, ‘There was nowhere I could go that wouldn't be you’” (193). That the person in the film was not Milton “doesn't matter, however” (193). In the novel's episode focused on Tessie and Milton, it is observed about their behavior that “Hollywood understood more about human nature than we realized” (236).

Again, we see an intermedial gap. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, by the middle of the twentieth century literary fiction cannot compete with film anymore when it comes to immediacy, the power to create immersive representations. And in the discourse of that decisive scene, the reader can hardly find any traces of the “as if” mode to conceal this media difference. The gap is glaring. While within the story Tessie can feel the immediacy of the movie making it seem close to her lifeworld and leading her to believe that it mirrors her real feelings and directly relates to her, the reader is spared from this effect. In this context, Tessie appears as naive, almost pathetic, when she quotes the romantic end of *Into The Sand*. But the point is not postmodern as the goal is not to ridicule Tessie. While one can view this as a form of naivety on Tessie's side, it pays off. In comparison to Desdemona and Lefty, she and Milton have a happy marriage for most of their life.

We have to remember, though, that *Middlesex* overtly ascribes all its aesthetic choices to its narrator Cal. And as the story progresses, his mother’s and father’s happy relationship with each other and naïve relationship to media become an increasingly

difficult approach for Calliope to carry on. Into their adult life, any form of signifiers, be it abstract in the form of music, or concrete in the form of Hollywood movies, had a direct referent to Tessie and Milton's life, feelings, emotions, etc.—the signs of media have mirrored their life so to say. In Calliope's youth, her parents are happily married, have already been parents to a healthy son, Chapter Eleven, and their business is doing great. They carry on mixing reality with its representation, capturing their children growing up through home movies they film themselves, inserting their subjective perception into production of representations of reality. Yet, their attitudes change when they seem down on their luck. Cal reflects,

> The question remains: Why was this Milton's last movie? Can it be explained by the usual petering out of parents' enthusiasm for documenting their children on film? By the fact that Milton took hundreds of baby photographs of Chapter Eleven and no more than twenty or so of me? To answer, I need to go behind the camera and see things through my father's eyes. The reason Milton was disappearing on us: after ten years in business, the diner was no longer making profit. (227)

This is how "Book Three" of *Middlesex* begins, which will capture Calliope's life up to the point when doctors discover her intersexuality. But going chronologically, first, the Stephanides family quickly recovers from the financial worries of the previous Book. During the 1967 racial riots of Detroit the family's old diner burns down. Milton uses the insurance money to start a fast-food franchise on the other side of town. This begins "the second part" of the family's "upward mobility" and they move to the suburbs outside Detroit (254). This change of space is marked by an intermedial reference to architecture.

The house Milton buys, without consulting anyone else in the family, is called Middlesex.

In the long description of the house, one of the oldest observed intermedial gaps becomes obvious to the reader:

> Stairs represented a teleological view of the universe, of one thing leading to another, whereas now everyone knew that one thing didn't lead to another but often nowhere at all. So neither did our stairs. Oh, they went up, eventually. They took the persistent climber to the second floor, but on the way they took him lots of other places as well. There was a landing, for instance, overhung with a mobile. The stairway walls had peepholes and shelves cut into them. As you climbed, you could see the legs of someone passing along the hallway above. You could spy on someone down in the living room. (258-259)

The description of the space makes minimal sense. It is chaotic and a feeling of disorientation sets in. It was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in 1766 who pointed out that the art forms of poetry and sculpture are not comparable (*Laokoon*). One, poetry, works through time and the other, sculpture, through space. The same can be said here, as the novel cannot fully represent the space of architecture. There are media specific ways how a novel can evoke the modes of architecture creating an illusion of its presence to the reader. But instead, the narrator here makes the unbridgeable gap a point specific to the house Middlesex, stating stairs represent a "teleological view," which is a trait usually assigned to the novel (at least of the past). It is just that the stairs in Middlesex are so different, which also causes the confusion in the reader noticing the intermedial gap in the first place.

Interestingly, in another aspect this intermedial gap is concealed again. Middlesex (the house) is explicitly framed as a high-modernist work by reference to Frank Lloyd Wright, whose principles the designer of it had followed (258). In the realm of architecture high modernism means forms "dependent on an act of radical disjunction from its spatial context" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 63). A reader can perceive the house here, too, in disjunction with its spatial context of embeddedness in a written discourse. In the narrow sense of this subcategory of architecture, what is achieved by the novel is an evocation of its specific medial feature.

I am spending so much effort on this specific intermedial reference, as it is obviously central to the novel bearing this house's name. And at this point, a parallel to my earlier discussions of postmodernism and after postmodernism in Chapter Two illuminates. Postmodernism was described by Jameson as a "mutation of objects" around while "[w]e do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as [he calls] it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space [he has] called the space of high modernism" (38). The space of high modernism is the central aspect of Middlesex (the house) that is integrated here in the novel, describing where the family will spend their next years, and where Calliope as a person growing up will form. The way that one cannot really determine if the intermedial gap is bridged or stressed really, further, carries the notion of ambiguity so characteristic of postmodern play.

While her early childhood "passed, on film and otherwise" (226) with the emergence of Calliope's puberty and the testosterone the mimetic relationship that her parents could build to the representations of reality break. Issues become less ambiguous

and more obviously a problem. Cal puts it that way:

> Consider the yearbook. In the field hockey team photo, taken in the fall, I am on one knee in the front row. With my homeroom in the spring, I am stooping in the back. (Over the years my perpetually perplexed expression would drive photographers to distraction. It ruined class photos and Christmas cards until, in the most widely published pictures of me, the problem was finally solved by blocking out my face altogether.) (Eugenides 304)

Again, the medium of photography is thematized, yet not properly imitated. There are no instances of description for the reader to actually grasp what the problem is. The intermedial gap here reflects an unbridgeable gap between the means of representation and Calliope. Something about her is impossible to capture, which leads to her slowly disappearing from them.

This condition intensifies in “Book Four.” In fact, the mirroring her parents experienced between the representations and reality, subjectively expressed in Milton's home movies, worsen Calliope's situation after her intersexuality is revealed in the plot (—through the discourse, the reader knows from page one). Dr. Luce, a famous sexologist, tries to help her. But as he is from her parents' generation himself, he shows traces of their naivety when it comes to representations of reality. To assign a clear gender identity to Calliope's complicated body, he thinks it "would be helpful if [her parents] could give [him] any childhood photographs and family movies” (414). The result is Dr. Luce wrongly assuming Calliope is a girl and feels like a girl because this is how she is represented in those movies. Calliope runs away from her parents and the final operation, which would mold her body back into what was believed to be the fixed truths

about gender identities at the time. Through the inspection of Calliope's writing and behavior on film and photographs, Dr. Luce inferred she was female, ignoring the hidden complexities invisible in the representations of her but real inside her body.

## Representing the Postmodern/Critiquing the Postmodern

If the previous paragraph on "Book Four" feels rushed, this just reflects a quality of the novel that was at the center of criticism on it before. The development of the intersex narrative takes the smallest portion of this large novel. Only a hundred pages of the book are left—admittedly not enough to solve such a complex issue. Calliope does leave her parents behind but also returns as Cal before the story is over. Samuel Cohen frames this as the central issues of the novel. In "the fact that [the novel's] exploration of [gender and sexuality] issues and the part they play in its hero's life is foreclosed" (377), he sees an expression of a post-9/11 sensibility in literature. According to Cohen it reflects trauma how "the influence of the significant historical 'things' that happen between Cal's return home on the occasion of his father's death and his telling of his story—especially, in my view, the fall of the Wall and the fall of the Towers—must inform the way he tells it. But the book won't tell us how" (380). I am having trouble with Cohen's reasoning at this specific point, though. Is not the way that Cal tells the story, the novel's form, exactly the way in which the novel tells us how to understand what happened between the "fall of the Wall and the fall of the Towers," the "two deaths" I have mentioned in my previous chapter?

The use of intermediality as a productive force in the story's development of the novel is a formal choice reflecting the idea of using the unmediated space to open up the

possibility of productive acts. It carries the lessons of the Fall of the Berlin Wall. In general, having set the discursive situation in post-Wall Berlin, where adult Cal lives and also feels at home, should point towards one of the “two deaths” weighing heavier on the conception of the novel. This leads me to another problem I have with Cohen's argument. His pointed focus on 9/11 is not perfectly conclusive. *Middlesex* was published less than a year after 9/11. Central parts of the novel have been published as multiple short stories by *The New Yorker* and *Granta* since 1996. A reading centered around an event only mentioned once in the novel (Eugenides 512) seems limiting to a certain degree. Overall, the novel appears less as a reaction to 9/11 than a reaction to postmodernism as a whole.

In its historical perspective, the novel clearly carries the markers of postmodernism as a period to frame Calliope's upbringing. In “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” Jameson defines “the 1960s are in many ways the key transitional period” (113) which leads to postmodernism as a social period with “the replacement of the old tension between city and country, center and province, by the suburb and by universal standardization; the growth of the great networks of superhighways and the arrival of automobile culture” (124-125). Jameson has periodized the sixties themselves in another essay, describing it as a phase of revolutionary action in the Third World, which then is reflected in the first world as “terms of a student new left and a mass antiwar movement” (“Periodizing” 180).

All these features are overtly thematized in *Middlesex*. It is the riots, which adult Cal lets his reader know rather constitutes a revolution (251) that bring the Stephanides to the suburbs, as I have mentioned before. This experience in Cal's memory is linked to automobile culture: “The 67’ Fleetwood was my father's first Cadillac, but there were

many more to come. Over the next seven years, Milton traded up almost every year, so it's possible for me to chart my life in relation to the styling features of his long line of Cadillacs" (253). To increase their fortune, Milton Stephanides combines the force of universal standardization and the network of superhighways by franchising a chain of hotdog restaurants, "Hercules Hot Dogs." Cal explains, "If you ever drove along the blue highways anywhere from Michigan to Florida, anytime from 1971 to 1978, you may have seen the bright white neon pillars that flanked my father's chain of hot dog restaurants" (275). The restaurants can be further understood as an allusion to the features of postmodern architecture, which "celebrate their insertion into [...] the motel and fast-food landscape of the postsuperhighway American city," while expressing "a play of allusions and formal echoes ('historicism')" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 63). "Hercules Hot Dogs" was a chain restaurant sporting ancient Greek pillars. The student new left is symbolized in Chapter Eleven's college years. After avoiding the draft for the Vietnam war by sheer luck, Chapter Eleven takes off to Ann Arbor. Returning home for the holidays, he breaks with his parents: "Chapter Eleven declared that he didn't share Milton and Tessie's values. Chapter Eleven said he was against materialism. [...] Chapter Eleven was against our living room, everything we had, everything Milton had worked for. He was against Middlesex!" (317). This phrasing by Cal re-evokes the notions of the house as a high-modernist space, which Chapter Eleven's new political affiliation is directed at.

To Jameson, this space of postmodernism he draws out in all his writing ultimately leads to the "death of the subject" ("Consumer Culture," 114). He observes,

> The great modernisms were, as we have said, predicated on the invention of a personal, private style, as unmistakable as your fingerprint, as incomparable as

> your own body. But this means that the modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world and to forge its own unique, unmistakable style. (114)

A postmodern aesthetic, in contrast, does not account for the individual. But this condition is exactly what *Middlesex* and the story of Calliope, who grew up in a postmodern period, is criticizing beyond the sheer "Logic of Late Capitalism." Trying to determine her "real" gender identity, additionally to the use of home videos, Dr. Luce asks Calliope to write a Psychological Narrative. Yet, from her position, entrenched in postmodernist culture, she can neither achieve any personal truth, think reality, nor aesthetic fulfillment, think artistic representation. Cal states, "Half of the time I wrote like a bad George Eliot, the other half like a bad Salinger. [...] On that Smith Corona I quickly discovered that telling the truth wasn't nearly as much fun as making things up" (418). In itself, "making things up" would not be a problem. But Dr. Luce infers from her writing that Cal is a woman, and he wants to proceed with sex-alignment surgery. The fact that Calliope has no way to express her true self in writing leads to a worsening of her situation to a point where she runs away from her family and Middlesex.

Yet, conclusively, something must have changed. After the main story ends and on the last page, Cal is standing in the doorway of Middlesex, his childhood home, and weeps for his father, "thinking about what was next" (529). If he never found out what that was and nothing moved on from this postmodern state, we would not hold a book in our hands that claims to be written by Cal Stephanides from a later point-of-view. This is the way in which the novel tells us how the "two deaths" must have informed Cal as an

author. He has finally found a personal style, a project “as incomparable as [his] own body” (Jameson, “Consumer Society” 114). The novel frames that form of writing as decidedly subjective and in no way aimed to make a collective statement. Cal admits, “Writing my story isn't the courageous act of liberation I had hoped it would be. Writing is solitary, furtive, and I know all about those things” (319). He wonders, “Is it really my apolitical temperament that makes me keep my distance from the intersexual rights movement? Couldn't it also be fear? Of standing up. Of becoming one of *them*” (319, emphasis in original). At many times, Cal leaves his positions as open questions. And that brings me back to Cohen's position of seeing the novel as a reaction to 9/11. At the point of the novel's publication, the consequences and meanings of 9/11 have not fully unfolded, yet. So, if the “two deaths" mark the transitional space from Calliope's postmodernist understandings to Cal's approach, the events are too recent to be addressed with clarity.

This is why, for example, the negative reflections of premediation practices are absent from the novel. One can find premediation symptomatically, though, represented throughout the discourse of the novel. To solve the problem of beginning his narration in media res when trying to tell a linear narrative, Cal uses filmic writing to begin again in Greece naturally:

> And so now, having been born, I'm going to *rewind the film*, so that my pink blanket flies off, [...]. [...] There's a *quick shot* of my father as a twenty-year-old clarinetist, playing an Artie Shaw number into a phone, and then he's in church, age eight, being scandalized by the price of candles; and next my grandfather is untaping his first U.S. dollar bill over a cash register in 1931. Then we're out of

> America completely; we're in the middle of the ocean, the *sound track sounding funny* in reverse. A steamship appears, and up on deck a lifeboat is curiously rocking; but then the boat docks, stern first, and we're up on dry land again, *where the film unspools*, back at the beginning. (20, emphasis supplied)

The stressed portions of this quote mark the intermedial reference that employ the “as if” mode. Cal's writing is certainly corrupted by the sphere of film and video. While he is using the term film repeatedly here, the ability to “rewind” is rather an expression of video in the sense of VHS and other filmic recordings. The fact that he can “rewind” the film back to 1922, an anachronistic decision, further carries a notion of premediation in Grusin's sense. Cal is mediating a past that has been previously unmediated. I want to point out here that this is an evocation of the practice, but in its illusionary quality, which Rajewsky assigns to this mode (54), it is not a thematization in the sense of Don DeLillo's approach. In *Middlesex* we can find a sense of the dominant medial practice of premediation, yet not a position on it.

## After Postmodernism or Before Again?

I have demonstrated in my observations above how *Middlesex* functions as a conscious, and in some instances unconscious, representation of literature after postmodernism. The use of intermedial reference in the novel illustrates a way for literary fiction to overcome the crisis that Wallace described in “E Unibus Pluram.” For one, the intermedial references are employed in a way that is not as easily appropriated by television and new media in general, as it builds from a peculiar quality of the novel. Secondly, the intermedial references at many points counter a postmodern passivity.

They function as unmediated spaces that allow for a productive development of the story and productive engagement of the reader.

In a larger context, the novel represents the space of postmodernism in Calliope's life. But by explicitly forsaking her the ability of self-expression, the novel criticizes that space and frames its aesthetics as empty. Every writing, video, and photograph taken at that time by or of Calliope lead to a complete misrepresentation she needs to ultimately run away from. The representations have tried to swallow Calliope up, preventing her from becoming her real self, Cal. Recovering the sense of a subject existing outside of the objects of its representation is the final act in the novel for Calliope, thereby becoming Cal. The central condition has not changed, which in the novel is his complicated and complex body. But Cal, in contrast to Calliope, has found an orientation in it which allows him to express himself as a subject again. One can view this as an echo of the "Logic of Late Capitalism" continuing into the new millennium; only, the subject has adjusted to a point where the old postmodern aesthetics become insufficient and even dangerously neglectful.

Returning to my Chapter One, I want to foreground how the writing after postmodernism in *Middlesex* sets forth certain similarities with modernism. When Cal finally returns home, and before the primary story ends to pick up again with him as a narrator and author, he reconsiders his family home with new eyes. After having left it for some time, having realized himself as a subject, being able to adjust to the world outside of it, his perception has changed. Cal remembers,

> Middlesex was now almost seventy years old. Though we had ruined it with our colonial furniture, it was still the beacon it was intended to be, a place with few

> interior walls, divested of the formalities of bourgeois life, a place designed for a new type of human being, who would inhabit a new world. I couldn't help feeling, of course, that that person was me, me and all the others like me. (529)

*Middlesex* expresses a wish to recover some of the utopian impulses of modernism again, a nostalgia for the kind of representations like Middlesex, the house that was built for a new world, and new humans. The novel carries the notions of productivity countering the mere reproductive impulses of postmodern aesthetics. It is utopian in its longing to transcend from its own state of subjectivity, of being the testament of an individual, to become a collective effort and including “all the others,” too. The expression of high-modernist sensibilities could become home again.

# V. "A BROKEN SUPERSYMMETRY:" WRITING AFTER POSTMODERNISM IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *SHADOW TAG*

## What is Real?

Louise Erdrich's novel *Shadow Tag* (2010) is the story of Irene and Gil, who have three children: Florian, Riel, and Stony. And even though their upbringing was different, both Gil and Irene feel closely related to their Native American identities. Gil is a painter, who celebrates success for his representation of the Native American experience in portraits of his wife. Irene returns to university to finish her PhD in History with a dissertation on the painter of Native American portraits, George Catlin. After the birth of their last child, Stony, on September 11, 2001, their marriage begins to unravel. Irene begins planting a fake diary, while keeping a personal one, too. In her fake diary, she invents lies to hurt Gil, who believes he is secretly reading Irene's true thoughts. Irene becomes an alcoholic while Gil repeatedly brutalizes the children and her. The story culminates in Gil drowning himself and Irene drowning with him in an attempt to save his life. The three children are left behind, having watched their parents' death.

The novel was widely discussed in reviews for its similarities with the author's life, and specifically her earlier marriage. Yet, in an NPR interview, for example, Erdrich stated that the novel is "constructed in a way that I felt as though I moved it farther and farther from my personal reality" (Neary). She further distorted an autobiographical reading of the novel by ultimately deciding to change a character's name from "Louise" to "May" after publication. These assertions have put scholarly critics certainly in a difficult position, which might explain the little number of academic articles written on *Shadow Tag* compared to other novels by Erdrich. The parallels to her biography are hard

to ignore for the informed reader, but they must be put aside should the word of the author count for anything. To avoid that problem in this paper, I focus on the novel's relationship to the *concept* of reality, not aiming in any way to answer if it is necessarily Erdrich's personal reality. And while biographical similarities are the first pointers towards reading the story of the novel relational to reality, it is the story's intermediality which suggested to me that an inquiry into the novel's position to reality might disclose something about literary fiction in the twenty-first century, the reality author and reader share.

In *Shadow Tag*, the most prominent literary technique identifiable is surely realism. On the discursive level, one can observe the narrative is linear and, in most parts, told from an omniscient narrator's point of view. The story has in its parts a clearly distinguishable plot. There is unity and wholeness. Even the interspersed diary entries do not necessarily point to the contrary. The red diary, the fake diary, is explicitly framed in a way that we can understand epistolary, as it communicates to the husband. Epistolary novels have been used since at least the eighteenth century and are considered in line with the aesthetics of realism (see, for example, *Pamela*). Implicitly, the blue diary can be understood as epistolary, too. It is used to disclose the protagonist Irene's inner thoughts without violating the fixed position of the narrator. It is not the kind of inner monologue characteristic of modernist fiction, focused on reflection. Instead, the blue diary is still used in a communicative way that is aligned with realists' attempt to add an aspect of psychology to their novels.

However, the next point here is not to accuse *Shadow Tag* of literary revisionism by promoting the naivety of the nineteenth century form of realism, which modernism,

and then postmodernism tried to overcome. Rather the opposite is true, since the characteristic quality of the nineteenth century realism is its claim of mimesis, to represent a reality that is *objective,* to represent *truth*. It is the idea that a novel can represent a reality in perfect symmetry, like a mirror. This claim is explicitly denied in *Shadow Tag*. By ending the novel under "Riel," the reader learns that what has been read is not the representation of an objective reality interspersed with insights into the subjective reality of Irene's blue diary. It is Riel's, the daughter's, MFA master's thesis and does not represent only truth. It is true in parts, but Riel admits "[she has] also filled in certain events and connections" (251).

Postmodernism is obviously a pre-existing condition in the way Erdrich ends the novel. The overt thematization of a novel's constructedness, a way of metafiction, is *the* discursive strategy that dominates the techniques of postmodernism as I have explained in previous chapters. Yet, this strategy is used here almost to the opposite effect. Metafiction stresses the constructedness to question the truthfulness of literary representation. For example, its sub-category metalepsis often functions to confront characters with their own fictionality, robbing a sense of meaning and truth from them. But Riel unveiling herself as the author of the story, in comparison, asserts that she has actually lived this story, that she is writing autobiographically, and that she has included actual documents from her childhood. She continues to exist on the next ontological level of the primary story, which the reader believed to have read so far. When readers have finished the whole novel a few pages later, this is a shared quality between readers and Riel, as the readers exist on the next ontological level (reality) to what turned out to be the novel (representation). A kind of symmetry is created, yet not mirror-like. For one, by

including postmodern literary devices, the novel is clearly no attempt to revise postmodernism. It acknowledges it as a past tradition. But, also, the postmodern devices do not function as an intensification. Rather, the novel suggests a progression, a moving-beyond-of literary postmodernism.

Overall, one can even claim that thematizing the constructedness of the novel has a stabilizing effect on the unsure status of truth in representation one is used to from postmodernism. *Shadow Tag* goes against the reader's expectations of a novel after they have learned the lessons of postmodernism, whose “central object of critique [...] is the classical theory of representation, which held that meaning or truth preceded and determined the representation that communicated it” (Ryan 559). Erdrich does not use the revelation of a narrator addressing the constructedness of their work to assert that there is no truth and no meaning. She uses it to assert a grain of truth in the twenty-first century reader's mind against the doubt that postmodernism has spread about the existence of truthful representation of reality. The ideas of truth inherent to this formal choice is carried by the idea of emotional affect. The work is framed as a product of Riel, who was deeply affected by the events to a point where she tries to understand and order them by creating a realist representation of it. In an emotional sense, the overtly fictional portion represents truth and reality.

From my introduction and previous chapters, I want to distill three observations, which then explain why the intermediality in the novel is the straightest line to an understanding of the novel's concept of the relation between reality and its representations. First, the aesthetic form realism is not the only road that leads through mimesis directly to reality. In Chapter One, I illustrated that the realist form expresses the

nineteenth century conception of reality and believes in a certain perfect symmetry. But following forms like modernism believe to represent reality, too, just not in a mirror-sense. In connection to this, my second consideration was that the most prominent technique of the novel, realism, leaves not enough room to fully construct *Shadow Tag*'s relationship to reality. And that is, because my third observation shows that the novel overtly acknowledges its position as a progression from postmodernist ideas. It was not written in total ignorance to the lessons of the “Logic of Late Capitalism” as they were represented in postmodernist literary fiction. This allows us to read *Shadow Tag* as a progression from postmodernism, but from the naive return to realism as well.

In this chapter, I argue that *Shadow Tag*'s intermediality is used, firstly, to portray the twentieth century's different understanding of the relation between representations and reality. Secondly, thereby, the novel itself formulates a new perspective on the representation of reality after postmodernism. Foremost, *Shadow Tag* is the story of the disintegrating marriage between Irene and Gil. And from the novel's beginning other media forms are referenced in this disintegration. The novel is locating the point Irene's love for Gil dies with his attention to the 9/11 television reports. The perception of painting changes, too, as Gil struggles to capture Irene in his art like in the past, and his paintings of her are part of the alienation she feels towards him. Therefore, the largest part of my analysis will focus on how and why the relationship to other media affects the reality of Gil and Irene's marriage in the novel and how this can signify a larger problem with media to overcome. In my conclusion to this chapter, I look at “Riel” again to understand how the relationship to media that affected the marriage formed an understanding of reality portrayed in the next generation.

## The Disintegration

The marriage between Gil and Irene is not happy from the moment the novel begins. Only through flashbacks is the exact point that Irene stopped loving Gil further explained. First, she only alludes to it in her diaries. Irene suspects his inability to understand why she cannot love him anymore is tied to his naive consumption of television and movies. She writes in her red diary, the one she knows Gil is reading, “it must be very difficult for Gil to understand why I cannot simply backspace and fall back in love, the way those parents did [in the movie we watched tonight]” (29). Her love for him died from something “so ordinary, something he does every day,” and which “would suddenly reveal everything about him” (29).

Her evaluation of his action as “ordinary” is important, as when his action is revealed, most people would not consider the circumstances as ordinary at all. Their youngest son, Stoney, is born on September 11, 2001. And just when Irene, in labor, is given a room at the hospital and wonders who would watch television while giving birth, a nurse calls both of them out to witness the Twin Towers collapse on the news (51). And here, the inherent problem of Gil's character in contrast to Irene's is revealed, which neither of both can ever bridge again to find back to each other. Irene begs Gil, “You have to turn off the television now, [...], if you want me to have this baby” (51). But, instead, he continually leaves her alone to check back with the news on television. The difference in attitude here is that, to Irene, the happenings on television have no meaning and only the birth is real. To Gil, what is on television feels as real as the birth of his son, and so he cannot decide for either or.

In contrast to *Middlesex*, *Shadow Tag*'s intermedial references are less evocations, which are used then to stress intermedial gaps; instead, *Shadow Tag* rather thematizes other media, and the intermedial gaps are not specifically considered or concealed. They just stand, which ultimately illustrates the central conflict of the novel, which concerns the gap between reality and representation. Further, it should become clear how this differs from image-fiction's use of "literary allusion, to television and metawatching as themselves valid *subjects*" (Wallace 169). In *Shadow Tag,* these intermedial references rather constitute objects to develop the actual subject, the central conflict, by.

This difference could be explained by the different distance both novels have to 9/11. I observed in *Middlesex* that a productive engagement with 9/11 and its consequences is missing, simply because it was published not even a year later. *Shadow Tag* was published nine years after 9/11. In a way, one can read the whole novel as a discussion of that day and its consequences since the marriage unravels in direct reaction to it. The novel evokes the historical sensibility set forth by Wegner, where 9/11 is the "second death," which functions as an "opening to a new period" (9). In the life of the family in *Shadow Tag*, 9/11 is the beginning of Gil's and Irene's struggle. Something has shifted with 9/11, the event and Stoney's birth, which makes it impossible for them to come together anymore. But since it is not him or her, because, again, he only did "something he does every day," the reader must understand a change of the world as the root of their incompatibility. Their incompatibility is how they understand reality in relation to reproductions of it. A post 9/11-world cannot house both in peace anymore.

Gil's fallacy is a naive understanding of media, which leads to an incapability to distinguish between reality and its representative construction. This is most evident in his

attempted suicide and later successful suicide. First, the reader is presented with Gil's and Irene's medial education in direct contrast: “Gil had grown up watching the TV set his mother had brought home from the church basement. He could quote plots and lines from *The Brady Bunch, The Courtship of Eddie's Father, The Mary Tyler Moore Show, All in the Family,* and *I Love Lucy* reruns. Each episode was full of snappy comebacks, laugh tracks, an ooh-ahh ending.” In contrast, Irene was raised on Shakespeare's history plays, and “endings were of course insane blood baths” (92). She describes the difference between her and Gil as “tragic” versus “sentimental,” which results in “kitsch” (92). In a discussion about kitsch, Irene foreshadows Gil's suicidal tendencies. Echoing how the form of sitcoms, which influenced Gil, had been described earlier, Irene comes back at his claim of him painting death not kitsch, by stating, “Death is a snappy comeback, a neat ending. It has a theme music” (95). 100 pages later, Gil begins to contemplate death—his own—as the only answer to their situation. Yet, it only becomes a graspable option for reality to him after he manifests it in a painting of Irene. Trying to complete what will ultimately be his last painting of Irene, he thinks about killing himself with his tools. And even though “he probably couldn't generate enough force or the right trajectory to kill himself,” he considers it as a “poetic ending” (194). He then manifests his intentions by sharpening his brush, ramming it into his hands, and smearing his bloody hands on the canvas.

In this scene, the reader sees not only his need to imitate reality aligned with sitcoms’ “neat ending” but also aligned with the painting he admires the most. The idea comes to him as he contemplates Rembrandt's *Lucretia* again: “He had looked at the Lucretia so many times that he could feel her heartbreak form on his own face. [...] Yes.

He understood" (194). The painting of Lucretia depicts the mythical figure after stabbing herself due to the guilt felt over her rape and love to her husband. Gil can only model his reality after it. He also wants to stab himself over his own heartbreak. The medial difference between painting and literature weighs heavy here because, obviously, there are differences between Lucretia and Gil in their situations. However, since paintings can never give us objective insight into the thoughts and voices of the people they depict, they always depend on the interpretation of the viewer to insert these aspects. Therefore, Gil can subjectively align his own life with Lucretia's.

However, this is not the moment Gil truly attempts suicide. His actual suicide attempt follows the realization that Irene understands the connection between reality and its representations as fundamentally different. First, he is finally confronted with the fact that Irene's diary which he believed to be a true representation of reality in writing is a construct of lies intended to hurt him (205-206). Then, he must acknowledge the fact that whatever vision of reality he tries to represent in his art will never have an effect on the actual reality he is living. When Irene begs him to finally leave, he tries to defend himself on account of his previously wounded hands, the mediated representation of his heartbreak and will to sacrifice himself like Lucretia. She only answers that "whatever [he] did to [his] hands, [...], [he] still [has] to go" (212). Only after those two realizations, Gil decides to destroy all representations of reality he produced in his paintings of Irene. Then he makes the last representation of him killing himself over her, signified through smearing his blood over the painting of her, into irrevocable reality against Irene's beliefs. He tries to drink himself to death in his studio with vodka, preferring the "poetic" end to the end Irene proposes: an anticlimactic divorce.

Irene's fallible conception of the relation between representation of reality and reality is different from Gil's. For her, the relationship between reality and its reproductions is not symmetrical. Irene's understanding of their relationship as kitsch is an expression of her postmodernist approach to reality and representations. In *The Consumer Society*, Jean Baudrillard states on kitsch that it is “a category which is difficult to define, but which should not be confused with any particular *real* objects” (110). Kitsch is a form of simulation, “a dearth of real signification and a superabundance of signs, of allegorical references, disparate connotations, as a glorification of the detail and a saturation by details” (110). Irene believes that the abundance of representations around her, in Gil's paintings, in Catlin's paintings, in Gil's obsession with television, ultimately swallows up anything real, ultimately leading to a loss of meaning and truth of reality. For example, in her studies of the painter Catlin, it is observed that his “images stole their subjects and, for the rest of the world became more real, until it seemed they were the only things left” (141).

Paintings of a subject do not represent the subject but an unrelated version of it, which then becomes more real, robbing the meaning of reality's version to Irene. After the 9/11-birth episode, Irene realizes this is happening to her through the eyes of Gil. She resents him, because she knows she is not her representation in his paintings, but his attitude towards television reveals that he is unable to distinguish between the two, reality and representation. Thereby she has no meaning to him, only his reproductions of her in paintings. The pressure of abundance in signification, in a certain sense, echoes the idea of premediation after 9/11, as an attempt to remediate beyond the present also the future and the past. Irene exemplifies an understanding of the “The Logic of Late Capitalism” as

I described in Chapter Two. The plane of reproduction tries to swallow the productive plane. But her reaction to it is rather postmodern than anything after. She has not adjusted as a subject but rather lost and disoriented. Her belief in this leads to a waning of affect, in the way her love towards Gil disappears. All she can see is the problematization of meaning, which Jameson had described as a central feature of postmodern representation (*Postmodernism* 96).

Within *Shadow Tag* as a whole, both Gil's and Irene's interpretations are defeated. Gil seems to expect perfect symmetry, and he sees what is represented as reality equal to reality. Irene sees no symmetry, and she believes what is represented as reality is completely separated from actual reality. In her eyes, the representations only rob meaning and truth from reality. From a meta-perspective, Irene's attitude carries the philosophical markers of postmodernity, and her discontents with Gil are the postmodern discontent with modernity. Postmodern literary fiction expressed an idea that "Reality of course is perceived as always, but its very perception makes it incomprehensible" (Zima 110). Therefore, the more Gil paints his perception of Irene as a representation of her, and the more he watches the representations of the world around on television, the more, in her eyes, he robs the world and her of meaning for her to understand. Gil does not agree with Irene, and that is why he does not understand how she stopped loving him. He does not draw her to rob her of anything. One can frame him as a representation of modern*ity*. As such, outlined in my Chapter One, his view is not only connected to the aesthetic form of modernism, but realism, too. In a way his journey even signifies the modern, literary conception of reality which developed over realism into modernism.

At first, he believes in the perfect symmetry between reality and its

representation—the nineteenth century ideas mentioned before. In *Adam Bede*, George Eliot, a supreme realist novelist of the nineteenth century, exemplifies this mirror-like understanding of the relations. The narrator of the novel states the intent of it as "to give no more than a faithful account of men and things as they have *mirrored* themselves in my mind" (221, emphasis supplied). The things Gil saw on television and in paintings are a mirror of reality to him. And so, his reality must look like that to him.

Only when Irene confronts him about perceiving things differently, when she does not care about his bloody hands, he must retreat to the next best thing: subjectivity. He must accept that she feels differently, but that does not change his point-of-view. This situation reflects in a way the modernist problem in Proust's *Recherche*: "Proust's narrator Marcel [...] cannot make sense of the real world as it appears to him" (Zima 107). To solve the issue of a world not making sense anymore, modernists would construct an aesthetically subjective world as their mimetic effect that makes sense again—"the subject as an artist" (Zima 107). Gil constructs and thereby recovers this symmetry between the reality and representation by taking his own life. He represents in the act his subjective reality, which should look like its representations and therefore needs a "neat" or "poetic" end. This central conflict between their two views is created in the intermedial references throughout the novel. The medial differences between literary fiction and other media are a given, though. They should be understood as a symbol for the problem that Gil and Irene cannot grasp: *how* reproductive media is different from reality.

The reader is not invited to agree with Gil or Irene. Both of their notions are proven wrong, which frames the novel as something different from previous tendencies.

Gil is not right, simply represented in the fact that his constructed, neat end in suicide is not the actual end of the novel. A subjectively constructed symmetry does not necessarily result in an objective symmetry. Gil's end is not reality's end just because he ended his life to believe so. Irene dies, too, trying to save Gil. Because Irene, throughout the whole novel, is portrayed as a woman who loves her children, and always just wanted to be left alone with them, the reader cannot expect her to have taken the possibility of her own death lightly. Rather, one can suspect that she truly misjudged the situation and believed she could save Gil. It is the mistake of thinking that a constructed, performative, poetic ending like Gil's suicide is not real enough to have real and meaningful consequences to her; she acts as if the reproductive nature of Gil's suicide, merely copying ideas from television and painting, could not mean real consequence to her life. When we learn that Riel has written this story from “the marriage, the material” as “the stuff of her life” (Erdrich 251), Irene's misjudgment is only stressed further, even though it is a metafictional form of postmodern representation. It was Gil's fallacy to not see the difference between construct and life, representation and reality. It was Irene's fallacy to believe that through the existence of constructs in life, reality's representations, reality and life's meaning itself is disappearing. Only Riel brings both of these conceptions together through the productive act of writing her life.

## What Feels Real?

Erdrich puts Riel's passage at the end. Thereby the constructedness of the story is acknowledged despite the mainly realist style that should achieve the opposite. Still, at the same time, the story appears truer when Riel explains that it is a construct of her *real*

life. (And it is hard to ignore the sound of Riel's name as a homophone to "real.") This proposes not Gil's modern idea of symmetry between reality and representation, as the reader is aware that the novel is written by Louise Erdrich and not Riel. Riel is not true in a sense of reality. She has no neat, symmetrical referent in real life. But Irene's postmodern idea that any representation just devours truth and meaning from reality is not enforced either. The fact that the main story is just a construct, a representation, is only given under the premise that parts of it are true beyond. The Riel from the previous 250 pages must be true beyond—not in perfect symmetry but in a new conception of reality, which she symbolizes.

It is also important to note that by choosing Riel as the narrator, the novel adds further to its historicist quality. The main story focuses on the disintegration of her parents' marriage and Riel could have only written this novel as she progressed from them. She is now in the present, telling a story from the past. This is grammatically and substantially conveyed when she states in contrast to the so far dominant literary past tense, "So you see, I *am* the third person in the writing. I *am* the one with the gift of omniscience, which is something — I don't know if it's generally known — that children develop once they lose their parents" (251, emphasis supplied). Seeing the presence of realism and postmodernism in *Shadow Tag's* form and story then, the point here is to comprehensively position the novel as a whole product *after* postmodernism.

In conclusion, Erdrich's mission is not to save reality from its problematized state in the context of postmodernity. She cannot make Riel reality, and she refuses any attempts of it by refusing the biographic readings from critics. Reality itself continues to be a problem and Erdrich's postmodernist nod through Riel, the chapter, acknowledges

this. What the novel expresses, though, is an aftermath of 9/11 that cannot sustain any of the previous notions on the relationships between reality and its representation. And so, it stands for an expression after postmodernism. The naivety of modern conceptions of the relationship between reality and representation cannot survive in a post 9/11 *Shadow Tag*, but the postmodern ideas of representation cannot survive either. Both symbolically drown together. What they leave behind is Riel, who has been deeply affected by her parents' fights and death and can only cope with it by recovering a productive act. Her mother was never able to finish her dissertation, but Riel wrote her final thesis in the form of this story. It might have been her brother, who solved this issue for Riel. Before she began writing her MFA thesis, he explained to her: "Sometimes in human terms a broken supersymmetry—like his brain, our childhood, or the human face—can be the more elegant or at least more useful solution" (248).

# VI. CONCLUSION

To say in short what I said in long and complicated until now: Looking at modern literary history from a Marxist-historicist standpoint, a dialectical dynamic suggests as likely which goes from the critique of reality to the critique of its previous representation. In this specific case of outlining a transition from postmodernism into after postmodernism, I argue that a logical way of critiquing the predecessor's representation of reality is infusing one's writing with intermedial sensibilities. Intermediality can break open the destabilizing passivity that resulted, according to Wallace and others, from the postmodern aesthetic. Literary fiction after postmodernism has through intermediality the chance to, on the one hand, acknowledge the media age, the reproductive focus, and the saturation of reality with simulacra, in short "The Logics of Late Capitalism," while, on the other hand, not indulge in an aesthetic that reinforces these logics. Novels like Jeffrey Eugenides's *Middlesex* and Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* can be read in those terms as literary fiction after postmodernism.

Of course, my method is faulty in so far that I have looked at two novels from 2002 and 2010. To maneuver a whole literary period, a decade is hardly sufficient. Yet, I would say we can find other literary examples that show intermedial ideas reach into and develop further in the second decade of the twenty-first century. A work like Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) bursts with intermedial references. There are evocations of music in the many concert scenes. The chapter written from a rapist's point of view imitates the forms of editorial journalism, while stressing the gap between what we can imagine in fiction and what can never be done in a magazine. And lastly, there is the infamous PowerPoint chapter, which one can read as a further expansion and

exploration of how to understand intermedial references going forward. On the one hand, the PowerPoint presentation is not evocated or imitated only through the media-specific means of literary fiction. The chapter is printed horizontally. Each page has a clearly marked slide. The textual flow is supported through ClipArt and symbols. But, on the other hand, the PowerPoint is also not fully there. It is a digital, dynamic medium now imitated in static print. So, one of the questions that I have not answered in this thesis—what actually are the media-specific means of literary fiction—gains traction in the second decade of the twenty-first century, too. By publishing her next short story, *Black Box* (2012), 140 words at a time via *The New Yorker* twitter account, Egan definitely continues on that route.

When questioning the media-specific means of literary fiction, though, one runs the risk of annihilating the form itself. This sentiment is expressed in introduction to *Reading Sally Rooney* (2020), an online research cluster from the Post45 collective: “Sally Rooney is the harbinger of a literary world yet to come! Or she is evidence of that world in its crumbling decline. It depends who you ask” (Fisk). Among Rooney's accolades in this introduction, she is defined as “our Jane Austen + J. D. Salinger + Karl Marx as he is read by the light of Instagram” and “the author of novels that look exceptionally good on TV” (Fisk). Looking further ahead one could ask hyperbolically, at what point does an increasing use of intermedial writing “as if” literary fiction was a visual medium just become screenwriting? Is a novel written to look good on television still literary, or only televisual?

Within the media competition of the twenty-first century, literary fiction has definitely reached a renewed level of relevance. Sally Rooney's *Normal People* is just

one of the many examples of recent literary fiction being turned into a series or movie. On the matter of the vastly expanding trend of movie and television adaptations of contemporary literature, a Penguin Random House's Del Rey publisher is quoted stating, "'We are selling more of the books that we now publish: we sell substantially more copies than we were five years ago. We're publishing about the same [number of books], but we're reaching more people.' [...] 'I think Hollywood in general has recognized that books are a great way to bring compelling content to a large audience'" (Liptak, bracketed additions in original, my ellipsis).

While from a sheer economical standpoint the market for adaptations is certainly helpful for literary fiction—the late capitalism trots on, and so money can impossibly ever worsen any situation more than no money—, the utopian potential of an aesthetic after postmodernism crumbles away thereby. In this thesis, I have pointed out how intermedial after postmodernism is so potent in contrasting postmodern aesthetics because it can open up unmediated gaps in a hypermediated space, which then can be filled with productive acts countering ironic passivity of postmodern consumption. In the filmic adaptation of a novel, though, these gaps become mediated. In 2020, *Variety* reported that *Middlesex*'s television rights were sold again (Otterson). (A 2009 deal with HBO never made it to production.) Should the series open, like the novel, on a mountain close to Smyrna and offer us the same content, due to the plurimediality of television series, a viewer will suddenly be able to hear the melody Lefty had picked up from the city. The intermedial gap will be closed. Someone in the production team will write the song, it will be put into the scene there, and instead of opening up a space that leaves

room for foreshadowing the ending of a relationship that has not even begun yet, it will be a passively consumptable piece of the content.

My point here is not to be fatalist and to announce the absolute futility of literary aesthetics in the twenty-first century. I solely wanted to indicate that, like every other aesthetic, what I have described here as an intermedial turn after postmodernism has an easily imaginable expiration date. The problem above is just one speculation of the many different ends we might see. Truth is that what can be observed since the time of postmodernism is an increased speed of development, which therefore makes it difficult to say what is next. Considering the different ages of machines, there lay roughly two-hundred years between the first steam engine and the invention of nuclear power—between computers and the internet, not even fifty years. A new seminal shift in capital and mode of production might happen in the upcoming third decade of the twenty-first century, or has already happened and will only be described retrospectively while we did not realize at the time. Anyways, there will be a unique cultural answer and a literary aesthetic one, too.

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