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During the 2016 election, terms such as “fake news” and “post-truth” became commonplace as well as talks of “two Americas,” suggesting that truth and reality were relative to one’s perspective. Trust in foundational institutions like church, school, and government has become shaky at best, leading many scholars to believe we have entered a post-truth age. In my dissertation, I attempt to tackle the question of truth by examining people whose job it is to uncover the truth: detectives. I trace a philosophical history of detective novels through three different time periods described as modern, postmodern, and contemporary in order to argue that truth is located in intersubjectivity, explaining that successful detectives, through their ability to identify another’s perspectives, can discover motive and belief in order to bring cases to closure, where others cannot.

In the modern period, I examine ways in which Edgar Allan Poe’s detective August C. Dupin and Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes solve mysteries by assuming a rational world where everything is neatly ordered. This allows truth to be a function of rationality and solvable by applying logic. Following this analysis, I turn to the hard-boiled novels of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett to examine the way order and meaning became increasingly elusive after two world wars and the atomic bomb, leading to an existential crisis and the postmodern era.

The postmodern era is characterized by the endless deferral of meaning, making it impossible for the detectives in this section to reach closure. I begin with Jorge Louis Borges and Samuel Beckett, transitional authors associated with late modernism, who

laid the groundwork for an upheaval of traditional Cartesian rationality by pushing its boundaries to the limits. Following these late modernist examples, I turn to the postmodern novels *Libra* by Don DeLillo and *The Crying of Lot 49* by Thomas Pynchon to exemplify the problem of knowledge construction in a world that has become increasingly paranoid. The rise of paranoia has been caused by both philosophical and historical reasons. From modernist critiques of transcendental meaning to the rising distrust in the state after the Vietnam war, there became a lack of faith in a common background from which to build knowledge. In both cases, the lack of agreement on the nature of reality renders the detectives unable to discover truth and achieve closure.

In the contemporary era, I explore the ways in which globalization and the rise of digital technology have increased the speed and density of information networks, further complicating the idea of discovering the truth regarding any complex event. In this chapter, I examine Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* as a representative case of the problem of closure in a hypermodern world that is connected by a blending of physical and digital networks. I do find a hopeful example in HBO's drama *The Wire* where detectives are able to stabilize a network by limiting their environment and narrowing their scope, albeit temporarily. In so doing, the detectives show that it is possible to discover the truth, if one can "triangulate" in Donald Davidson's sense.

Finally, I conclude by showing the dangers of believing that these critiques of truth and closure have resulted in a "post-truth" era, where people live in diverse *worlds* based on preexisting categories such as culture, or language. Through the works of philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, and Donald Davidson, I argue

for a way out of the problems of relativism through a phenomenological perspective grounded in being-in-the-world. This approach results in the conclusion that objectivity *is* intersubjective.

SEARCHING FOR TRUTH IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA: AN EXAMINATION OF DETECTIVE FICTION FROM POE TO PRESENT

by

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_____
Committee Chair

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This dissertation written by David Riddle Watson has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

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Date of Acceptance by Committee

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Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:
FROM CLEAR SPEAKING TO MISUNDERSTANDING

People make true statements all the time, but rarely does anyone then demand a theory of truth. If one were to make such a demand, problems would immediately arise, for essential concepts, like "truth" and "meaning," possess an elusive quality. One can feel the pressure start to form in the temples of the forehead upon hearing questions like "what is the *meaning* of meaning," or "what is the *true* definition of truth." However, painful as they may be, these questions are at the core of what is often referred to as "the human condition," and thus unavoidable. By the equally elusive phrase "the human condition," I mean, as Martin Heidegger explains in *Being and Time*, that we are the beings that inquire about our being, and not simply in idle reflection; rather, this questioning stance towards the world we find ourselves in is fundamental to who we are as a species. We *care* that the world has meaning. As another existential writer, Albert Camus, says, "Man demands meaning" (3).

Though few would disagree that people make true statements all the time about everyday events, there has been a rising fear that no consensus exists regarding what *makes* something true in the first place and thus what to do when people disagree. While people may agree that the snow is white or it is raining outside, they can, when it comes

to questions regarding the political climate, for example, appear to live in two separate worlds. Critics have seen the election of Donald J. Trump in 2016, as well as the growth of nationalist movements elsewhere, as evidence that truth has become irrelevant to the success of popular discourse. Alison Flood, writing in *The Guardian*, explains, "In the era of Donald Trump and Brexit, Oxford Dictionaries has declared 'post-truth' to be its international word of the year," which it defined as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief."[1] Flood then explains "the term 'post-truth' had increased by around 2,000% in 2016 compared to last year. The spike in usage, it [Oxford Dictionaries] said, is 'in the context of the EU referendum in the United Kingdom and the presidential election in the United States.'" Critics from diverse fields, also aware something has gone awry, began publishing books addressing the issue. Examples include *New York Times* Book Critic Michiko Kakutani's *The Death of Truth* as well as *Post-Truth* and *Hermeneutics and Meaning in a World without Facts* by philosophers Lee McIntyre and John Caputo respectively. In contemporary literature, novels *ShadowBahn* and *The Feral Detective* by Steve Erickson and Jonathan Lethem have been dubbed "post-Trump" novels, each depicting societies that have become divided into enclaves of ontologically relative worlds.[2]

These recent works on the relativization of knowledge and the exponential rise in usage of "post-truth" demand an examination of epistemology.[4] The specific event that led to my concerns about truth as they relate to this dissertation occurred when White House Press Secretary Kellyanne Conway, in an interview defending Sean Spicer's

statements regarding the size of Trump's inauguration crowd, referred to Spicer's comments, objectively false by any metric, as "alternative facts." Reality was being discussed as though it were simply a matter of opinion. No evidence seems strong enough in this divided time to pull opposing sides towards a common world. Even issues previously thought of as scientific and hence outside the realm of opinion, like climate and vaccine efficacy, have been turned into matters for political debate, and thus matters requiring no expertise. Does this mean that truth is no longer a useful concept? If truth has become thought of as only a "matter of opinion," when and how did *that* opinion establish itself as truth?

In attempting to address these questions, I turn to figures who have been obsessed with finding the truth: detectives. Detectives are useful in this analysis as they must provide answers to solve cases and bring closure. A detective cannot achieve closure by proclaiming Aristotle's law of excluded middle to be bunk and the suspect both guilty and innocent of the crime. Detectives, to be successful, must produce answers that eliminate other possibilities in order to allow their case to be closed. This is the process of "abduction," described by C.S. Pierce, often called the "father of pragmatism." The private eye must be pragmatic in order to follow clues on the ground, for they will fail by following ideologies floating groundlessly. Thus, I argue, we can learn much about truth, order, and the possibility of closure by examining detectives, successful and not, from Poe to present. The reasons for the failures, particularly in the postmodern and contemporary era, are as revealing as the reasons for neat and tidy successes of Poe's August C. Dupin and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. This project attempts

to trace the understanding of truth throughout 20th- and 21st-century American fiction, thought, and political history by studying detectives, both real and imagined, in hopes of establishing an oblique history whereby historical and philosophical forces can be mapped and their implications followed. Specifically, I examine how some detectives are able to discover the truth, garner consensus and achieve closure, while others remain awash in a sea of data, a problem that has proliferated in what Gilles Lipovetsky refers to as our "Hypermodern Times," characterized by

> people who are both better informed and more destructured, more adult and more unstable, less ideological and more enthralled to changing fashions, more open and easy to influence, more critical and more superficial, more skeptical and less profound. (12)

Lipovetsky explains that these conflicting tensions are a result of the highly technological, globalized world we now find ourselves trying to make meaning *of* so we can live meaningfully *in*.

The threat to living meaningfully in the world, I argue, is the belief that there is not one world, but that we live in "our own little realities," an illusion the digitization of our lives exacerbates. The hypermodern world creates conflicting beliefs about truth, often wavering from the relative to the absolute. For example, on one hand there is a consensus that consensus is no longer possible in the Contemporary Age, which would seem to produce a live-and-let-live variety of moral relativism. *You stay in your world and I'll stay in mine, and the better we will both be for it*. On the other hand, across the "cultural divide" both sides of the divide tend to view those who they disagree with as not

only being wrong, but complicitous with evil, a position that takes as its viewpoint the entire scope of being, meaning there is nothing relative about it.

In order to address the fear, in its current complexity, that we are now in a world without truth, I provide an oblique philosophical history of truth, moving quickly through philosophers and philosophical problems that are always in the background of this dissertation. This will provide a template for understanding two moves that simultaneously lead to a fissure to the possibility of consensus. The first move happens as truth becomes located more and more internally in the mind. If truth is a product of an isolated mind, there is nothing outside of the self to which the idea can be tested. Truth in this case can only mean the use of rationality to see if one's mental representations line up with ideas about these mental representations. The other major event is the decline in a shared faith in foundational institutions, which previously had stabilized a background with which to interpret subject's actions in the foreground. Without a stable background, the foreground becomes a motley collection of foolish inconsistency. Philosopher Charles Taylor addresses the decline in the power of Sacred institutions in *A Secular Age*, his opus dedicated to addressing a question tangential to my own. Taylor asks how we went from a society where in the 1500's it would have been all but unthinkable to not believe in God, to the present era where belief, even by believers, is seen as one option among many. My question is how we went from Enlightenment Rationalism to the Relativistic "worldviews" leading to the post-truth moniker christened upon the current age.[5] Taylor's explanation overlaps with mine in the sense that he sees the interiorization of individuals, based on the Cartesian *cogito*, leading to what he refers to as a "buffered

self," which stood as distinct and separate from the world, leading to subjectivist worldviews that could not reach outside of themselves. This interiorization fails to provide space for the intersubjectivity that I will argue is essential for locating the truth of any matter.

If truth is relative to one's subjective mental representations, skepticism is both unavoidable and unanswerable. This has led many to believe that truth can only be true relative to some conceptual system, which in turn leads to ideas of linguistic and cultural relativism, ideas equally unhelpful for the detective who must find the killer, so to speak, no matter what the linguistic and cultural practices happen to be. This level of skepticism, due to the lack of center, makes it impossible for any institution to have the structural integrity to support society's beliefs.

However – and this is essential – the decline in shared belief is not simply the result of philosophical arguments; rather, on-the-ground historical realities caused faith in governing bodies, like the celestial ones, to crumble. One example that I take up in Chapter 3 comes from scholar H. Bruce Franklin, who shows that the Vietnam War was central to Americans losing faith in the government as a moral institution. In popular movies and television, particularly in the 1980s, the central lesson that was learned was that government was inefficient; only clandestine organizations (A-Team, Knight Rider) or, better yet, individuals (John Rambo) could get anything done. In this view, the failure of Vietnam was not a moral failure, but a procedural failure – the fault was that the government wouldn't let the military win.

Without central institutions like the Church and the State acting foundationally to support social order, the center could not hold, and some things have indeed fallen apart. Chief among them is our belief in a shared background. Usually the shared background of a society stays unnoticed because it is *in the background*. However, like anything else, it becomes most noticeable the moment it stops functioning. The background is held in place by the repetitious practices of the foreground, which includes everything from deep rituals that constitute social myths to the general everydayness of social and work life.

Before moving into chapter summaries where I discuss the rise of doubt that comes from the lack of a common background with which to ground interpretations, I will now provide a brief and focused philosophical history of truth that will be useful as this dissertation will challenge and upset many assumptions that have been foundational to this history, such as the split between subjects and objects, minds and bodies, people and worlds.

An Oblique History of Truth

Classical philosophy begins with Plato's writings.[6] Upset that the Sophists were not sufficiently interested in wisdom and virtue, but only in winning arguments, he set out to establish truth as something permanent and unchanging. The most famous example of this attempt comes from Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," in which he locates the Real in the Idea (eidos) as opposed to the illusory physical world of representations that we mistakenly believe are real. In Plato's Allegory, we learn that most people will go through life only living in the world of representations. In fact, according to Plato, most

people will kill for this illusion.[7] For Plato, what is real are the forms (the ideas) because they are permanent. While this can sound peculiar, the argument has force as it is easy to see that if one does not have a concept of "beauty" beforehand, how could one ever identify individual instantiations of beauty? Or less abstract, it is only because I have an idea of "chair" that I can go into a room that may contain chairs unlike any I have previously seen and still figure out where to sit. In this sense, one can see that the idea transcends every instantiation of it.

Plato's split between the world of ideas and their representations is taken up in the Christian world as the split between heaven and earth. The metaphysical divide between appearance and reality is relevant as it denies the importance of place in determining truth. Truth is the kind of thing that happens in the mind when ideas line up with representations. For Christianity this means that Heaven is "more real" than earth and for Plato it means the psyche is "more real" than the body. These examples show how deep our metaphysical biases run. Nearly 2000 years later, as Modern philosophy gives birth to the belief that clear and distinct ideas will lead us to truth, the divide that began with Plato takes a slightly different form, but the metaphysical split that denies direct access to the world remains.

In modern philosophy the figure most significant for providing the framework used to think about truth is Rene Descartes, who postulates *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am, locating the move from skepticism to certainty, ironically, in doubt. Descartes realizes that even if he doubts his existence, he must exist in the moment of doubt in order to doubt in the first place. Thus, Descartes anchors existence with the

mind, which can, through learning to think "clear and distinct" ideas, achieve certainty about the world at hand. Following Descartes, empiricists such as John Locke and David Hume questioned Descartes' assumption that the origin of knowledge could be found in clear and distinct ideas, but still relied on the Cartesian assumption that knowledge came from the mind, and the body was merely a vehicle for transporting the mind. Locke believes we are born "blank slates" which are soon scribbled with experience. This experience is analyzed through rules of rationality, and knowledge is accumulated.

The belief in a rational, ordered world continues through Kant, who makes one important complication that will become essential to this dissertation. Kant believes that one only has access to knowledge through categories of the mind. These categories organize experience and make it meaningful in the same way that rules in a card game allow the cards to have significance and thus meaning. This revelation that the mind is active in the meaning-making process, known as Kant's Copernican Revolution, will problematize the previous belief that truth was stable, locatable, and permanent. While it will take a couple centuries for the implications of these beliefs to manifest and produce modern and postmodern philosophy, Kant lays the groundwork for the belief that reality is always-already transfigured by the individual experiencing it.

While Kant's philosophical move is the most radical by far, each of these movements (rationalism, empiricism, idealism) share the assumption that direct access to reality is not possible. Reality is believed to be accessed through mental representations of some form or another. A further assumption is that even though this access is not possible, one can build clear and distinct ideas through rationality. This tradition,

however, is complicated by a group of disruptive thinkers from the 19th century that Paul Ricoeur would refer to as "the masters of suspicion," consisting of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, to which I would add Charles Darwin. In each case, assumptions about self-consciousness as well as the self's place in the world are upturned, leading to a shift from the 19th century fascination with "consciousness" to the "linguistic turn" of the 20th century.

Marx locates religious belief in the suffering of the masses, Nietzsche in *ressentiment*, and Freud in the child's paternal relationship. Finally, Darwin, perhaps the most disruptive, argues that it was not the world that was shaped for people; rather, people through evolutionary processes were shaped for the world. After these critiques, the idea of certainty or closure becomes seemingly untenable. If not in God, where could the center which would provide for a rational, ordered world be located? Even more paranoia-inducing is the possibility that the world is not ordered in the first place; perhaps order and the desire for it are simply desires to have a grand narrative which gives one the illusion they have mastery over the world. In the 20th century, philosophy would go through "the linguistic turn," after the "masters of suspicion" rendered "consciousness" problematic.

However, this would lead to problems in its own right, as studying "Language" with language provides the same inherent paradoxes as examining "Consciousness" by way of people's individual "consciousness;" namely one cannot get outside of the thing to be studied to view it "objectively." The inability to get outside of the "medium" of consciousness or language led Structuralists and Poststructuralists to question the

possibility of ever accessing reality and thus causality, leading to what critic Timothy Melley refers to as “agency panic.” Agency panic results from the belief that consciousness and language determine the scope of one’s world and limit the interactive possibilities with those who do not share the same culture and language prior to communication. The simplest explanation of this idea is expressed by Edward Sapir:

> Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood, but are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits of the group. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached. (209)

The crux of this dissertation’s argument is that we, in fact, do not need to share a language or any other conceptual system beforehand to communicate and that we do live in the same world. However, this is not as obvious as it may seem, for if we examine the stance implied in being able to make truth claims in the first place, it is obvious that one is caught in a precarious position regarding truth. Phenomenologists Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty both illustrated that a person is caught in a between-space that is neither subjective, determining the world, nor objective, regarding the world, but is instead Being-in-the-world, which produces an intertwining of the seer and the seen.

In discussing the general term for all existence, Being, Philosopher Martin Heidegger describes this between-space as it relates to this dissertation's themes of knowledge, certainty, and closure:

> The word "being" is indefinite in meaning and yet we understand it definitely. "Being proves to be totally indeterminate and at the same time highly determinate. From the standpoint of the usual logic, we have here an obvious contradiction. Something that contradicts itself cannot be. There is no such thing as a square circle. And yet we have this contradiction: determinate, wholly indeterminate being. If we decline to delude ourselves, and if we have a moment's time to spare amid all the activities and diversions of the day, we find ourselves standing in the very middle of this contradiction. And this "stand" of ours is more real than just about anything else that we call real; it is more real than dogs and cats, automobiles and newspapers. (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 78)

Heidegger's point here is that because of our "stance" in the world, what he refers to as "being-in-the-world," we have a contradiction that is caused by our desire to speak of the world with certainty and the impossibility of ever getting an appropriate perspective from which to do so. This situation we find ourselves in, what Albert Camus calls *the absurd*, puts one in a precarious nature regarding truth. As with "being," it would be impossible to get along without the concept of truth, for "man demands meaning," and it seems spurious that a world devoid of truth could sustain the kind of meaning humans need to live *authentic* lives, in Heidegger's sense of the term.

Heidegger, in locating the starting point of thinking as being-in-the-world, upset all previous modern concepts of truth from Descartes's *cogito*, through Locke's *tabula Rasa*, as well as Kant's *transcendental idealism*. This occurs because Heidegger rejects the divided world implied in all three – a subject divided from the objective world who

possessed a mind that was separate from the body. Following Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty works out the implications of Heidegger's philosophy for the body, which had previously been thought inessential, a housing for the all-important "mind."

Doubt, Detection, and Closure

In examining the different ways truth is thought of in the modern, postmodern, and contemporary worlds, it becomes necessary to talk about what causes all this "talk about" in the first place: doubt. Another point of connection between pragmatism and phenomenology is that both agree there is no cause to think about the nature of reality or communication until something stops working as expected. If the world behaves according to our expectations, we have little cause to think much about it. In a famous example from *Being and Time*, Heidegger discusses the way a skilled carpenter interacts with a hammer in order to express this point, saying that "the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unveiledly is it encountered as that which it is – as equipment" (98). He elaborates on the distinction between the hammer as an object (present-at-hand) and the hammer in use as equipment (ready-at-hand),

> No matter how sharply we just *look* at the 'outward appearance' of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just 'theoretically' we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided from and which it acquires its specific Thingly character (98).

The issue for Heidegger is if the hammer is being wielded, the object is ready-at-hand and falls into the background as part of the network implied in "hammering." For example, if we are nailing up boards to cover windows because a hurricane is coming, the hammer, as long as it continues to work, disappears into the background of the task. Only when we stare at the hammer as though it has no relationship to the network of involvement we find ourselves in does it become present-at-hand, Heidegger's term for the stance taken when an object is removed from its network, and thus becomes the kind of object that can fall under the scrutiny of Cartesian doubt. Only when the object is assumed to be the kind of thing that has no relationship to the humans who produced it and use it in their activities can it be doubted. It is not difficult to see the absurdity in asking a person who was boarding up their windows in preparation for a life-threatening disaster whether they believed the hammer that they were using was real. Only when put in abstracted contexts, like classrooms, do people question the very reality they depend on to make it to places like classrooms in the first place. The significance for Heidegger is that if we start from being-in-the-world certain problems, such as the mind/body and self/world divide, are no longer problems.[8] Both phenomenologists and pragmatists agree that the idea of a world that exists in isolation from the practices and discourse about it is, to quote the title of Richard Rorty's essay on the matter, "A World Well Lost." However, the world may be well lost for other reasons, as I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 2: Closed Worlds and Cold Detectives

In Chapter 2 of the dissertation, in the works I discuss, the world is discoverable. It is discoverable because it is ordered and orderable. Doubt arises in this world from disorder, and disorder brings about the discomfort that is the cause of inquiry. As Pierce writes, "doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief," and he continues, "Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into the condition that we shall behave in a certain way, when the occasion arises. Doubt has not the least effect of this sort, but stimulates us to action until it is destroyed" (13). In this definition of doubt, it is possible to see the function of the detective in this dissertation: the detective's job, if he is to be successful, is to eliminate doubt and bring the world back into homeostasis. This happens in Poe when Dupin produces the purloined letter and is also able to account for the path that it took on the way to his locating it.

In Chapter 2, Dupin, Holmes, Spade, and Marlowe all benefit from a relatively stable background from which to operate. An illustrative example, again from Poe, comes in the solution to the "Murders in the Rue Morgue," where Dupin puts an ad in the local newspaper as a way to discover the owner of the missing gorilla. In doing this, Dupin is assuming that everyone reads the paper, which is something he can assume in his world. Holmes makes the same productive assumption regarding readership in *The Study in Scarlet*. Holmes, even more logical than Dupin, treats his mind like a computer, programming it with only the knowledge he needs to solve cases. Watson becomes alarmed by what Holmes does not know as much as he is excited by his ability to reason.

However, his lack of knowledge never hinders Holmes, for in his world, the knowledge one needs - how to reason - can be known beforehand. Since he is logical and inductive, he can take his "loaded" brain into any situation and unload it. However, this assumption will become problematic and then untenable as we move into the postmodern and contemporary.

While both Dupin and Holmes seem invigorated by their cases, Sam Spade and Phillip Marlow, creations of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler respectively, have a world-weariness to them; an existential ennui looms over them as they explore the dirty streets of the modern world. What they doubt is a meaningful teleology behind the day-to-day communal practices; the doubt is epistemological, and it begins to upset the stability of the background that had been beneficial and exploitable in Poe. The doubt they are experiencing is the doubt Nietzsche brings in "The Madman," when the madman comes telling of the death of God, only to realize his message has come too early. One could argue that after two world wars and the deployment of two atomic bombs at the end of the second, the message had finally arrived that the human species no longer needed a god for an apocalypse. This shift in doubt produced the Modernist fascination with the inner workings of consciousness. If we can only conceptualize the outside world representationally, and if there is no central purpose or truth to ascertain, the most obvious object of study is the relationship among one's thoughts, and the most obvious question is to what degree can we find a center in the middle of all of those thoughts?

Chapter 3: The Bleak and the Dread: From Existential Angst to Postmodern Paranoia

Leading into the postmodernists, I discuss Jorge Luis Borges and Samuel Beckett, most often referred to as "high modernists," because while they still rely on and believe in a structured experience of reality, they push those structures hard enough for the next group of postmodernists to knock them over. Both authors address the paradoxes of infinity one gets tangled when attempting to grapple with Cartesian doubt and self-consciousness. Like Zeno's paradoxes, one may feel like the end is near, but he or she will always be an equal and impossible distance from closure. In Beckett's novel *Watt*, the eponymous character tries to achieve certainty through clear and distinct ideas of everything, and the harder he tries, the less certain he becomes. Possibilities, even unlikely ones, are still possibilities and can add up endlessly; further, Beckett completely upsets any desire for closure when in the last sentence, he forces us to doubt everything by suggesting "No symbols where none intended" (254). Since now we must assume the conscious intentions of the author behind the text, our hopes of completion are the same as Didi and Gogo's chances of meeting Godot.

The shift in doubt is existential and has been caused by World War I and II, both of which helped render Nietzsche's prophecy of the coming Death of the Gods true. In the postmodern world, a majority still "have the same paper;" however. with the decline in trust in the meaning-bearing institutions like the Church and State, the stance one takes towards information becomes more increasingly cynical. In the Postmodern world, distrust in "official" stories leads to the rise of the counternarrative. I roughly

define the Postmodern period as coexisting with the Cold War, an age defined by intelligence agencies and spies on both sides of The Berlin Wall seeking to both find and disrupt information networks. With clandestine possibilities lurking in the background, every statement carries with it the possibility of its undoing, creating an ironic worldview, which has grown in power right up to the present post-truth world we find ourselves today. This leads to a paranoid environment that becomes increasingly conspiratorial, and it is this world of paranoids and conspirators that fill the pages of Don DeLillo's *Libra* and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*, the two novels I discuss as postmodern.

Both novels deal with similar problems of doubt in official narratives and the problems of a world where competing narratives seem to pile up endlessly but refuse to be pared down, as without a ground to start from, there is no way to figure out what counts as knowledge in the first place. DeLillo represents this problem in the figure of Nicholas Branch whose job it is to reconstruct the history of the JFK assassination. While new information constantly comes in, he gets no closer to the truth of the matter. What is significant about Branch's inability to reconstruct a history is that it presents a new problem for the detective in the form of information overload. Previously, our detectives were always one clue away from completing the puzzle and solving the mystery, which allowed them to be finished. The point of all inquiry is to end inquiry, and so it is not hard to tell which detectives are successful. When Pynchon's Oedipa Maas famously wonders, "Do I project a world," she is pointing to the same problem that Branch deals. Neither will ever know to what degree the solution they believe they have *found* has

actually been *created* by them in their search. This harkens back to the problems of infinity that Beckett and Borges explored earlier. Oedipa's fear also connects the Postmodern beliefs in language and Kant's belief in the categories of the mind in the sense that neither believed access to reality was possible. In the Postmodern world, this lack of access to the real, along with the belief that there has to be some mediation between the person and the world, has produced a skepticism towards traditional centers of knowledge, and in the contemporary environment, this skepticism will grow as information begins to flow through networks not merely *on* television networks.

Chapter 4: The Flat-Earth Society

I begin Chapter 4 by referencing Thomas Friedman's claim that "The World is Flat," his claim about the state of global capital and trade in the beginning of the 20th century. Friedman claims that end of the Cold War has globalized the world, ushering in a new global imaginary. This is important for my dissertation because information, once localized to an environment, has moved into hyperspace. The digitization of the world has made distances shrink, allowing people to find solace in camps of knowledge. If Pierce is right and the goal of inquiry is to rid doubt, it would seem one way to do that is to only be surrounded by like-minded people. Pierce makes the point, writing,

> When an ostrich buries its head in the sand as danger approaches, it very likely takes the happiest course. It hides the danger, and then calmly says there is no danger; and, if it feels perfectly sure there is none, why should it raise its head to see? A man may go through life, systematically keeping out of view all that might cause a change in his opinions. (16)

However, this strategy is doomed to fail because,

> it will be apt to occur to him, in some saner moment, that their opinions are quite as good as his own, and this will shake his confidence in his belief. This conception, that another man's thought or sentiment may be equivalent to one's own, is a distinctly new step, and a highly important one. It arises from an impulse too strong in man to be suppressed, without danger of destroying the human species. Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other's opinions; so that the problem becomes how to fix belief, not in the individual merely, but in the community. (16)

While the strategy may fail in the final analysis, the networked world of the contemporary has allowed groups, particularly those deemed extremist, to exist in camps, where everyone in the community reinforces the standards, so much like the ostrich, one can bury their head today in ways unthought of in a physical *agora*.

The webbed world of the hypermodern crosses physical and digital spaces. Reflecting this movement textually is problematic, but Mark Z. Danielewksi's inventive *House of Leaves*, which I analyze as being representative of the contemporary, achieves this by rethinking the traditional distinction between a book form and its content. In *House of Leaves*, the reader is turned into the detective, searching for meaning in the analysis of a film that may not exist in the first place. The novel is layered, and each layer adds additional complications, mirroring the search for truth one experiences in the hypermodern world. For example, in the novel, the reader learns of a film that was written about extensively by a blind man named Zampano. The reader is to believe that Johnny Truant has found Zampano's notes and used them to create the text being read. Furthermore, the work is annotated by a mysterious editor or editors whose identity or

intentions remain unknown. This layering of reality replicates the search for truth on the internet where one is sent spinning from hyperlink to hyperlink as opposed to going deeper into a subject, the way a traditional library was structured. To be only slightly facetious it's the difference between going from *mammal*, to *dog*, to *Lassie*, and going from *mammal*, *dog*, *dogfighting, Michael Vick, Bret Favre, Painkillers*. It's not that there are no connections, but the connections have no internal logic. In *House of Leaves*, upon investigating the footnotes, the reader learns some are real and can be verified on the internet and others are as fictionalized as the novel itself. The issue for the detective is how to solve a mystery when one can no longer tell what counts as a clue.

Resulting from the endless flows of knowledge curated for selected audiences, there has been a rise of conspiratorial thinking. While the groundwork for distrust in official explanations had been laid during the Vietnam era, after 9/11 the internet allowed paranoia to move faster and farther than ever before. In the aftermath, documentaries such as *Loose Change* and *In Plane Sight* suggest that the Bush administration was intimately involved with the attack, either through perpetrating it or allowing it to happen. Much like Pierce discusses, what allowed for the rise of this speculation was the ability to produce doubt in a world that had an unstable background from which to build consensus.

While finding the consensus necessary for closure is increasingly problematic in the contemporary era, David Simon's *HBO*-produced drama *The Wire* gives a sense of how this can be achieved. In chapter 3, I illustrate how detectives Jimmy McNulty and "Bunk" Moreland achieve closure by performing what Donald Davidson will refer to as

"triangulation." Davidson explains that if two interlocuters have a common cause of their discourse, it is possible to stabilize a background and allow for consensus. In the scene, the two detectives realize the truth about a murder by following a bullet's trajectory. Throughout the scene, they exchange only profanity; there is nothing like a representational language that is referring to anything that would make any sense in this context. However, because they are both directed to the same cause, each realizes that the other is *also* having a revelation. Since the cause is common and they are the same kind of organism, it makes since to believe the revelation is shared by each. This confirmation of the situation by both detectives allows them to establish truth by eliminating the doubt and replacing it with the new belief supported by the new evidence. Chapter 3 also argues against contemporary works *Post-Truth* and *The Death of Truth* which make the case that postmodern philosophy is responsible for the lack of consensus. I argue that the readings provided are reductive and do not account for historical events of the period that I believe eroded the public's faith in the intentions and desires of powerful institutions, causing the public to have an increasingly ironic stance to official rhetoric. I find more evidence to support the thesis that the lack of consensus in the contemporary world is explained by the lack of faith in stabilizing institutions like the Church, State, Schools, and Marriage combined with ability to surround oneself with only like-minded individuals in the digital age. After camps are formed there becomes the belief that there exists an uncrossable ontological divide which in turn creates the conditions for a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Conclusion: Living in Two Separate Worlds: *The Feral Detective, The City and The City*, and the Problem of Relativism

As I turn to the conclusion, I briefly address the novels *The Feral Detective,* and *The City and The City* before returning to Poe's "The Purloined Letter" in order to argue that what sustains our "multiple worlds," our "Two Americas," and our concerns about relativism are, in fact, our beliefs in multiple worlds. If we can alter this belief, I wish to suggest that we can realize that we in fact live in one world where a good detective can, by being a good ANT[9], locate truths and solve cases. Finally, I conclude by dealing with the concept of truth directly, attempting to ground truth in our being-in-the-world-with-others to finally close the case, in hoping, like all good detectives, to finally be done.

In bringing this work to a close, I examine *The Feral Detective* and *The City and The City*, showing how Davidson's theories of radical interpretation and triangulation not only explain the success of detectives able to traverse seemingly infinite ontological distance, but they also retroactively explain the success of all of our detectives who have achieved closure. I examine Poe's "The Purloined Letter" as a case study illustrating Davidson's theories at work. Davidson's distinction between "prior theories" and "passing theories" explains how Dupin (and by proxy all successful sleuths) can solve the case that befuddles the Prefect because he is able to move productively from "prior theories" to "passing theories" where the Prefect cannot move beyond the latter.

After showing the success of Davidson's work, I discuss the 2016 election to illustrate what is at stake in the debate around truth: if truth is relative or there is no possibility of consensus, it will create the conditions for a population to turn someone or

something, undeserving of the position, into a totem for Truth.[10] As Pierce points out, the danger in alleviating doubt is in the manner it is achieved. Burying our heads in the sand may not work forever, but it can work long enough to cause real problems. For this reason, it is necessary to ground our opinions not from a metaphysical position, but from our pre-ontological grounding of being-in-the-world.

I ground intersubjectivity in what Heidegger refers to as Being-in-the-world. Heidegger points out that Dasein[11] is always-already a detective in that fundamentally what humans do is disclose worlds. This is possible because humans have freedom in this process. Further, Dasein can also choose not to exercise the freedom essential for locating truth. One can get stuck in what Heidegger calls the "they-self." What is fundamental, however, is that there is a choice, and if we are open and honest with ourselves, according to the phenomenological account of existence, there is a demand for a common world, not an experience that works out to "my world" plus "the other's world" where we debate which one is the real world. To illustrate this, I turn to Merleau-Ponty who elaborated the implications of being-in-the-world for embodied existence. Merleau-Ponty points out that if I ask my friend to see also what I see on the horizon, I will never accept that it is only in my world if he cannot see it. To say this in Davidson's terms, I will not accept that the cause of my discourse cannot become the cause of the other's, that the cause is somehow mental and private. On this point, both American Pragmatism and Phenomenology overlap in the agreement that there is a demand for a common world. Locating that common world in being-in-the-world is key as it eliminates the problem caused by Cartesian subjectivism. Namely, things that cannot be commonly perceived do

not exist, so we don't have to believe in them. Both philosophical schools, in rejecting the idea that a *medium* stands between humans in the world – a medium that must be shared in advance to understand each other and hence the world – make it possible to establish a common world and allow for closure, for there is no "world" to understand that does not include the comments made about it by others. In the final analysis, it will be shown that these "others" and their comments are in fact the only path we have to objectivity. As Donald Davidson will say, "objectivity is intersubjectivity." By connecting this insight to Pierce's, this concept can be seen in practice as going something like the following: during discourse someone says something with which I do not agree, and both of us, being open minded and serious, begin to debate the matter. What causes the debate? The answer is that we both have a desire to continue the common world. Since both of us realize the other is rational, we each have created doubt. The only way to resolve the doubt is for something to change. Either one of us must be wrong or the issue must be reframed in such a way that the situation is reconceived. In the case of the detective, there is an effect without a sensible cause. Until that doubt is assuaged, the work cannot be done. The detective will not know the case is solved until the audience sees what he or she has shown them, the common cause that allows for that common world we all demand. Because there is one world, it is possible to practice the freedom necessary to live an authentic life, in Heidegger's sense, which of course means always living in the world with others, for without others "there" co-substantiating the world, there can be no "there-being" (Da-Sein) in the first place.

Notes

[1] It is notable that this is not the first time in recent history that political discourse has done violence to the concept of "truth." In 2006, *Merriam-Webster*, declared Stephen Colbert's "truthiness" it's word of the year.

[2] In Erickson's novel, the Twin Towers mysteriously reappear in the South Dakota badlands. However, everyone cannot see them. And for those who cannot see them, the towers literally are not there. The novel depicts a world where perception *is* reality, and the distance between realities is not bridgeable.

[3] As well as Ontology as the foundation of empirical knowledge, as I argue in the conclusion, is our being-in-the-world.

[4] In no way will this become an argument where the solution is to return to "Enlightenment Rationalism," nor should it be thought that people in the 18th century were all walking around acting sensibly and only today have people become confused about the concept of truth.

[5] While this origin, as all origins, can be contested, I mean this in the sense Alfred North Whitehead did when he declared philosophy to be a footnote to Plato. Whitehead writes, "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (*Process and Reality* 39).

[6] Nietzsche makes a similar point in "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense" that people, in general, do not mind the lie if the effects are positive.

[7] Heidegger writes that "With the 'cogito sum' Descartes had claimed that he was putting philosophy on a new and firm footing. But what he left undetermined when he began in

this ‘radical’ way, was the kind of Being which belongs to the *res cogitans*, or – more precisely – the *meaning of the Being of the ‘sum.’* That is to say, Descartes’ failure, which was taken over by Kant, was that he ‘failed to provide an ontology of Dasein’ as being-in-the-world” (46).

[8] That is to say, a practitioner of actor-network-theory.

[9] Traditionally metaphysics does this by its onto-theo-logic nature, meaning that it attempts to interpret existence in terms of an existent. For example, interpreting existence through Jesus in Christianity, History in Hegel, Economics in Marx, childhood in Freud. In each case all facets of existence are reduced to one “real” cause.

[10] Heidegger’s term meant to show that humans are always-already in the world primordially before the world can become an object of reflection. In using this term, Heidegger attempts to bypass the dualities that arise from distinctions such as mind vs. body and self vs. world

CHAPTER II

CLOSED WORLDS AND COLD DETECTIVES

Scholars tend to agree that detective fiction began with Edgar Alan Poe.[1] His three Dupin stories along with "A Man of the Crowd" created conventions that have literally never gone out of style. Thus, the cold, rational detective born with Poe and perfected with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes become useful models to examine in order to reveal assumptions about truth, the world, and basic human ontology during the time periods their authors inhabited. A major premise of this dissertation is that we can trace these assumptions about truth, world, and ontology through three distinct periods that, in line with recent efforts to rethink US literary history, are referred to as "modern," "postmodern," and "contemporary." Through this tracing, I contend we are able to see how ideas of truth have changed throughout the twentieth century, moving from one end of the spectrum where truth is conceived of as certainty, to the other end, where truth is considered relative to the interpreter's desires and "alternative facts" come into play. Through this examination, I bring to the fore not only distinctions but also points of overlap and foresight with regard to truth and these three historical intervals, for, to be sure, the modern, for example, may contain within it traces of the postmodern at the margins. First and foremost, however, I wish to outline the unique way worlds disclose themselves to our first detectives, Dupin and Holmes. As I argue, such fictional worlds appear to the characters and more importantly the reader as "closable." What I

mean by a "closable" world is echoed in the phrase "case closed." In a closable world, after the case is solved, there is nothing left to wonder, no accidents lying in need of explanation. The closed world is one where every character has a purpose and every object that is noticed is relevant. The closed world is self-contained and can be returned from disorder back to order. Catherine Ross Nickerson argues that this ability to achieve closure and restore order allowed for the success of the genre: "The enormous popularity of mystery and crime writing can be attributed to the way it structures our reading experience," and she continues, "A mystery story makes a very clear pact with the reader: 'if you will endure confusion, obfuscation and false leads, I will reveal all in the end. Read me and you will be enlightened.'" This is satisfying because "while the identity of the killer may truly be a cipher in the real world, within the confines of a detective novel, the perpetrator is known to us" (1). We as readers get to experience the certainty that the world rarely achieves. Following this discussion of early, rationalist and empiricist detectives, I examine a shift towards existentialism that occurs after World War I, with the birth of what is known as "hard-boiled" fiction by writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler.

Beginning with Poe's first story, "A Man of the Crowd," we see the idea that a person with a certain perceptual prowess can by mere observation reveal an entire reality buried right in front of the faces of others. Essentially the detective is in the business of a kind of world-disclosure where one small clue, viewed from the proper perspective, does not simply tell us a fact, but reveals a world. For example, our man of the crowd observes, "The tribe of clerks was an obvious one and here I discerned two remarkable

divisions. There were the junior clerks of flash houses, young gentlemen with tight coats, bright boots, well-oiled hair, and supercilious lips. Setting aside a certain dapperness of carriage, which may be termed *deskism*" (426). The certainty of the observation is what is most relevant to this study. In Poe's world there is a certainty of signification – the world does not contain accidents. If the detective notices a particular thing out of place, there is always a logical explanation. That is to say, everything appears as a clue and all clues are genuine; they take only a rationalist to interpret. From this point of view, what the detective does is restore order. The detective is able to restore order because the social world is as fixed as the natural order. After his first story, Poe continues to create conventions that will define the genre until the present, such as the logical detective, the incapable police, and the locked room.

Following the initial invention of a character whose ability to understand signification is borderline superhuman, allowing him to reveal an entire world upon seeing the slightest detail, Poe adds shape to this with the character of Dupin, a detective who occurs in three stories: "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "The Mystery of Marie Roget," and most famously "The Purloined Letter." These new "tales of ratiocination," he explained, "owe most of their popularity to being something in a new key" (qtd. in Rachman 17). The new key becomes the modern detective story, and Dupin becomes the first detective who has the ability through the use of logic and observation to consistently arrive at certainty:

> Such are Dupin's powers that not only can he seemingly read the narrator's thoughts at the very instant he is thinking them, but he can explain the whole

> chain of reasoning that had led to his thoughts merely by observing the sequence of expressions on his face. (17)

Poe's first detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" allows us to witness Dupin's feats of observation. Like Holmes and Watson later, Dupin lives with his partner and it is that partner who will take us through the tale. Our first indication that Dupin is something of a savant is when he agrees out loud with something his companion is only thinking. Dupin walks him through the steps of this process whereby he is able to tell by one's outer expression what one is thinking internally. For Dupin, the inside and the outside are irrevocably linked and the problem of other minds is, in fact, no problem at all for him. We learn that "he had an unusual reasoning power. Using it gave him great pleasure. He told me once…that most men have windows over their hearts; through these he could see into their souls" (39). Dupin "seemed to be not one, but two people – one who coldly put things together, and one who just as coldly took them apart" (42). This picture of the cold, rationalist detective who uses cold, rationalist logic to arrive at certainty is our first model of world disclosure, i.e., our first understanding of truth.

"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" brings us to the first locked-room mystery, which will also come to be a convention. There have been two murders and seemingly no way for a killer to enter or exit the room. The clueless police, another convention of the genre that Poe establishes, need someone with a superior intellect. Dupin provides this ability, and throughout the story we watch him put together clues rationally without ever falling into error until he comes to the conclusion, absurd but correct, that the murder has been committed not by a person but by an orangutan. Even after uncovering the answer

for himself he tells his company, “What the answer is, I will not say… not yet. But I want you to keep in mind that this much was enough to tell me what I must look for when we were in that house on the Rue Morgue. And I found it” (50). Poe consistently shows us that Dupin has no peer – he is even able to deduce the profession of the person who lost the orangutan. By the end of the story our cold detective has explained everything in full and the case is closed. That is to say, we have both truth as certainty and it has led to closure. However, the tale itself is not the most satisfying of detective stories in that it constantly reveals information to the readers that is new, thus making it impossible for the readers to follow along and attempt to solve the crime themselves, something that will become a convention in later detective stories. In examining the particular reasoning Dupin employs to discover both how the orangutan escaped and the profession of its owner, I wish to establish how the story achieves closure in two senses: the case is closed in that it is solved, and the solution is closed from the reader in that the reader is never able to participate in the solution – he can only follow the logic of Dupin after the fact. In this sense, early detective stories from Poe and later Doyle are very much “writerly” texts in that they leave little space for the reader to do interpretive work in order to attempt to solve the mystery before the end. So, in part four of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” Poe takes us through Dupin’s thought process: “At first I saw no way out…There was no other door. The opening above the fireplace is not big enough, near the top for even a small animal. The murderers therefore must have escaped through of the windows. This may not seem possible. We must prove it is possible” (52). Of course, our detective proves that it is possible, but a lot has to fall in place for him to do this: “I went back to

the first window. With great effort I pulled out the nail. Then I again tried to raise the window. It was still firmly closed. This did not surprise me. There *had to be a hidden lock*, I thought, inside the window. I felt the window carefully with my fingers. Indeed, I found a button which, when I pressed it, opened an inner lock" (53) (emphasis mine). Dupin realizes that the first window cannot be correct because of a nail that keeps the window closed. But not to worry, immediately Dupin deduces that it must be the other window, locates a similar secret button and shows that "What seemed to be not possible we have proved to be possible" (53). What is paramount here is that his deductions are certain – *there had to be a hidden lock* – and convenient. Why would a window have a secret button? This is not an important question because Poe has set up a puzzle that must be solved, and without a secret button Poe cannot provide us with a solution. However, there is no way for a reader to preemptively guess that the most logical answer to the problem is a hidden way to open a window, and thus the solution remains closed to the reader. A similar solution is provided when Dupin deduces the fact that the owner of the orangutan was a sailor. Dupin explains to the narrator that he has put an ad in the paper about the orangutan. The ad claims, "the owner…is known to be a sailor" (*Murders* 58). When asked how Dupin can know the profession of the owner he claims, for the first time, to be capable of error: "I do not know it. I am not sure of it. I think the man is a sailor. A sailor could go up that pole on the side of the house. Sailors travel to strange, faraway places where such things as orangutans can be got" (58). However, far from uncertain, Dupin continues to show his power of reasoning:

> Think for a moment! The sailor will say to himself: 'The animal is valuable. Why shouldn't I go and get it? The police do not know the animal killed two women. And clearly somebody knows I am in Paris. If I do not go to get the animal, they will ask why. I don't want anyone to start asking questions about the animal. So I will go and get the orangutan and keep it where no one will see it, until this trouble has passed.' This, I believe, is how the sailor will think. (58)

Immediately after this explanation, steps are heard and who should come in the front door but the sailor. Through this we see that even when Dupin knows that he is not certain, he is capable of this knowledge only because he understands what it is possible to be certain. Rather than a flaw, this shows another level of Dupin's discernment: Dupin knows the difference between pure knowledge in the Kantian sense and speculation. However, because of his powers of observation and deduction, we know that Dupin's "guesses" are going to turn out to be correct. At the end the case is closed – the reader needs no more information, order has been restored, and doubt has been alleviated.

While "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" establishes conventions such as the locked room, the detective who can outsmart the police, and the ability of logic alone to provide truth and closure, the story's resolution is forced by the introduction of an orangutan we previously had no idea existed. However, there is another tale that I believe represents the pinnacle of the closed world of Poe: "The Purloined Letter." In this tale, we notice the same characteristics of Poe's previous detective stories unfold but with a far more satisfying conclusion: we have the logical detective, the defective prefect, and the friend of the detective who will recount the story for us. By now we have already learned that the detective is seemingly incapable of observational error. Dupin illustrates to the reader that she is in good and capable hands by his ability to think in ways that

others cannot, and he is quite aware of his superiority, which is additionally reassuring. He retells a story that introduces us to the origin: “I knew one about eight years of age who had great success in the game of ‘even or odd,’” recounts Dupin, telling us that this boy could outwit all of his opponents by measuring their intellect and using this against them. For example, we are told:

> Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton in his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, boy “are they even or odd?” Our schoolboy replies “odd,” and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself: “the simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess “odd.” (191)

We are taken through further, more complex permutations, so we are assured that the boy, and by proxy Dupin, can well measure any intelligence that comes his way and react appropriately. What will become interesting by way of comparison to later detectives is the degree to which Dupin’s powers of observation, like the schoolboy’s, are always accurate. One would well ask how the boy or Dupin can merely look at someone and measure intelligence. “Intelligence” in this story is hidden behind physical appearances and is experienced in totality. That is to say, intelligence is not something that unfolds or grows or is in any sense of becoming. Seemingly Dupin was merely born with a larger portion than the others in these tales. Metaphorically, Dupin and Holmes who follows are minds whose bodies are irrelevant to their success. In fact, Dupin, through the schoolboy example, introduces us to his principle of “identification,” whereby he can outthink his opponents by being able to essentially occupy the mind of another, the same feat he

performed to impress the narrator in "The Murders at Rue Morgue." And through this power of identification, he is able to retrieve the stolen letter. The problem, Dupin explains, is that they [the police] cannot think of the other's intellect. They can only assume the other acts as they would have acted if they had been in the same situation. Resulting from this they are not able to appreciate the differences inherent in the other. In this sense, through his principle of identification, Dupin is able to establish difference, whereas the prefect can only see his own world projected. In this sense we may say that Dupin has not only superior rationality but imagination as well. We see this in the way in which he takes the small detail of the thief being a poet and uses it to resolve the entire problem. The solution to the case is more satisfying than "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" because Dupin's solution does not involve a *deus ex machina* to bring about resolution. In this case, the solution, from the reader's point of view, follows logically if we accept Dupin's ability to measure intelligence in absolute values. The action is explained if the possibility that one can learn a lot about one's actions from one's beliefs *about* other's beliefs is considered. Dupin knows that the Minister believes the prefect can only look places that a prefect would look, which means the item must be hidden. The item cannot be in plain sight according to Dupin, however, because a skilled thief would know that the police believe items to be hid must be hidden from sight. Since Dupin knows not simply what the thief believes, but what the thief believes *about* what the detectives believe,[2] Dupin is able to deduce that the item is hidden in plain sight and retrieve the document. In doing so, order has been restored and both Dupin and the reader can end their task. Dupin is appealing because he reveals to the reader what was right in

front of her. The detective's observations often make the reader realize that she has in fact noticed something but has not noticed its significance. In this sense, Dupin and the reader inhabit the same world. The difference is that Dupin can observe better and calculate more quickly.

For Dupin, much like the observer in "The Man in the Crowd," small details, e.g., being a poet, or assuming a particular gait, are not minor, but rather the keys to unlocking the interior lives of others. However, because of the certainty that Poe wishes Dupin to be able to obtain, a mystery has opened about Dupin: what kind of self does he possess? It seems, perhaps inadvertently, Dupin anticipates the postmodern self that will contain nothing except possibilities. One is right to inquire about the reality of being able to understand a mind that is not one's own; however, we are assured Dupin is chameleon-like in his ability to adopt any personality at will. Aside from these powers of observation and adaptation, the characters in these stories have very little in the way of complex personalities. As critic John T. Irwin points out, "Precisely because it is a genre that grows out of an interest in deductions and solutions rather than in love and drama, the analytic detective story shows little interest in character, managing at best to produce caricatures" (28). Characters like Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, to whom I now turn, are essentially presented as human calculating machines. However, whereas Dupin was able to literally occupy the mind of the other, Holmes is closer to a strict empiricist, relying more directly on clues and observations to uncover the truth of the matter.

Our initial introduction to Holmes is in the work *A Study in Scarlet*. Before we meet the detective himself, we are told, "I believe he [Holmes] is well up in anatomy, and

he is a first-class chemist; but as far as I know, he has never taken out any systematic medical classes. His studies are desultory and eccentric, but he amassed a lot of out-of-the-way knowledge which would astonish most professors" (3). This description puts him in a class of a detectives that began with Dupin before him: his intelligence is superior to the professionals, and because of this he will not only outsmart them; they will need him. This is illustrated nicely in Holmes' strange job description as a special counsel to the police. His skills are so exceptional as to require a special job.

In the ensuing few chapters, a character emerges that comes naturally after Dupin. They are so related that Dupin is mentioned. This intertextual allusion is the earliest moment in this study where the empirically-minded detective intimates towards the postmodern fascination with words referring not to objects, but to other words. When Watson tells Holmes that "You remind me of Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories," we have one story's character assuring himself of his reality by denying the reality of another textual creation (12). However, Holmes assures Watson that he is incorrect in his comparison; Dupin is not as good of a detective as Poe thought. Holmes's opinion of "Poe" is actually similar to Poe's own stated opinion that "people think them [Poe's detectives] more ingenious than they are – on account of their method and *air* of method" (qtd. in Rachman 18). Instead, Poe accounts for their success by claiming, as previously mentioned, "these tales of ratiocination owe most of their popularity to being something in a new key."

We learn that indeed Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is a superior detective. When Holmes stares at the world, the world discloses truth for him in ways that remind us of

Dupin, but his powers of observation and deduction go farther. Resulting from his total rationalistic stance towards the world, Holmes comes across as alien to others. Watson notices this strangeness: "His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing . . . My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found incidentally that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory of the composition of the Solar System" (7-8). The exchange that follows is relevant in understanding the structure of Holmes' ontology. Holmes explains,

> I consider a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out…Now the skillful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones. (8)

With this exchange we are introduced to a figure who seems to view himself as a programmable computer. He starts with Locke's "tabula rasa" and then with the help of Cartesian logic deduces truth based on careful empirical observation. In both the cases of Dupin and Holmes, these early detectives are presented as characters who seem more machine than human – they seem devoid of basic human sentiments. To be fair, Holmes is given imperfections, e.g., drug addiction in order to make him seem more like a flesh and blood person, and Dupin respects poetry and takes issue with pure abstract mathematical knowledge in "The Purloined Letter," but at the end of the day the appeal

of Dupin and Holmes is that they do not appear like most humans – they appear as heroes who because of their cold, calculating behavior – and only because of this – are able to decipher what others cannot.

In examining a couple deductions of Holmes, it will be shown how logically thorough and impossibly precise he can be, something that will be parodied by Samuel Beckett in particular and the postmodern movement in general. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes is invited by the police to examine a crime scene that they find bewildering. Upon moving the deceased body, later identified as Drebber's, a wedding ring is discovered, leading Holmes to suggest that the ring makes the case easier, not harder, as Gregson, an inferior sleuth, has suggested. Then in the same fashion as Dupin, Holmes is able to deduce that the killer would "rather risk anything than lose the ring. According to my notion he dropped it as he stooped over Drebber's body, and did not miss it at the time" (38). What follows is a scene that mirrors one of Poe's in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Just as Dupin, Holmes believes the key to catching the killer will involve using the newspaper. It should be noted that both Dupin and Holmes use text as much as anything to solve crimes and command action.[3] This point will become of paramount importance to this dissertation, as "the urban newspaper helped to constitute 'imagined communities' of the nineteenth century…then the detective tale was a second-order operation within that community, a viral form in which readers recognized a new fictive expression of a social order" (Rachman 20). This is important because the newspaper creates a shared "background" from which the culture can operate in common, something that is fractured in the postmodern and contemporary period. The newspaper becomes

important in two senses: First, inside the plot the paper holds together the characters and allows the plot to resolve. Additionally, the newspaper creates a similarly shared cultural space for the readers of the detective fiction, all able to participate in idle chatter about the news of the day, resulting in what Heidegger refers to as the "they-self" and Kierkagaard more pejoratively as "The Public." In the case at hand, Holmes explains to Watson,

> Put yourself in that man's place. On thinking the matter over, it must have occurred to him that it was possible that he has lost the ring in the road after leaving the house. What would he do then? He would eagerly look out for the evening papers in the hope seeing it among the articles found. His eye, of course, would light upon this. He would be overjoyed. Why should he fear a trap? There would be no reason in his eyes why the finding of the ring should be connected with the murder. He would come. He will come. You shall see him within an hour. (39)

Of course, Holmes is correct. What is relevant is the certainty he is able to establish regarding what thoughts are inside other minds and what actions these thoughts must entail. There is no room for accident or irrationality. Holmes even tells us what kind of cigar has been smoked at the crime scene and assures us of his knowledge as he has "written a monograph on the subject" (32). The novel consistently attempts to achieve closure, by constantly attempting to account for all details logically. This comes across in the strange section that explains the motives of our murderer Jefferson Hope. The novel cannot accept action without rational explanation, so the novel must account for murderer's rationality as well as Holmes. Nobody acts on passion alone in the detective stories of Poe and Doyle; rather, actions are calculated, predictable, and reverse-

engineerable. Holmes points out the importance of this last quality to Watson at the conclusion of *A Study in Scarlet*, explaining to him that "In solving a problem of this sort, the grand thing is to be able to reason backwards. That is a very useful accomplishment, and a very easy, but people do not practice it much." Of course, Watson, being of inferior intellect has to reply, "I confess that I do not quite follow you" (106). After this, Holmes, meticulously walks Watson through the line of reasoning, pointing out such clues as the fact that

> Men who die from heart disease, or any sudden natural cause, *never*, *by any chance* exhibit agitation upon their features. Having sniffed the dead man's lips I detected a slightly sour smell, and I came to the conclusion that he had poison forced upon him. Again, I argued that it had been forced upon him from the hatred and fear expressed on his face. By the method of exclusion, I had arrived at this result, for no other hypothesis would meet the facts. (107-8) (italics mine)

Again, there is nothing that cannot be accounted for and no room for accidents. We are not to inquire how a smell only "slightly" sour indicates beyond all doubt that there was poison and similarly we should not question that Holmes exhaustively knows how all faces appear in death. We refrain from asking these questions because we are left in a state of satisfaction. Asking questions would only upset the doubt of which Doyle has taken much care to rid us of. In the attempt to achieve closure, however, the novel reveals a mystery that it seems incapable of addressing. Who is the narrator of Part II of the novel? We know we can account for the other sections because the novel has explained to us that Watson has written the account in his journal. The novel even accounts for its own creation in this sense. However, in the attempt to account for the past, to bring us total

and complete closure, the novel has left us with an additional mystery. This is the kind of critique that postmodernism addresses. However, I think it fair to say that most readers of Dupin and Holmes' mysteries left the reading experience feeling satisfied that all loose ends had been tied. Martin A. Kayman comments on this satisfaction: "Doyle expertly achieved the right balance of elements to provide the male middle-class with relaxing reading which flattered them by providing an intellectual adventure, while assuaging their anxieties about the modern world" (48). Just as Dupin and Holmes are satisfied with themselves at the end of their respective cases, so too the readers share in the satisfaction of closure.

The continued appeal of these characters is in their ability to bring closure by rationally tying up loose ends. In other words, detectives are fascinating because they eliminate doubt in their stories and provide a satisfying ending – a phenomenon the world refuses. Critic Patricia Merivale comments on this, saying

> the classical detective will reason, ingeniously, from the clues to the solution, revealing the criminal from the pool of available suspects. Logical deduction (or perhaps, courtesy of C.S. Pierce and Umberto Eco), 'abduction' leads to a solution, which equals the restoring through the power of reasoning, of a criminally disrupted but inherently viable Order, which equals Narrative Closure.

C.S. Pierce explains this desire for closure as a desire to eliminate doubt. In his essay "A Fixation of Belief," he says, "The irritation of doubt causes a struggle to attain a state of belief. I shall term this struggle *inquiry*" (13). Doubt becomes the chief motivator according to Pierce, and detective fiction supports his claim. In each novel and story mentioned in this chapter, plots all move towards their conclusion by eliminating

possibilities until we have one actuality, something quite satisfying psychologically. Chandler himself claimed that the psychological importance of detective fiction had been neglected: "The psychological foundation for the immense popularity with all sorts of people of the novel about murder or crime or mystery hasn't been scratched" (qtd. in Porter 103). Pierce elaborates on the phenomenon of doubt:

> Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief . . . Belief does not make us act at once but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in a certain way, when the occasion arises. Doubt has not the least effect of this sort, but stimulates action until it is destroyed (13).

In a sense this study is about the different ways people, both real and imagined, work to eliminate doubt. When doubt is eliminated and belief is established, we return to equilibrium – that is to say, we feel secure because we feel like we are in possession of the "truth of the matter." This feeling of being in possession of the "truth of the matter" allows one to feel as though as though he or she has obtained what Hubert Dreyfus will call an "optimal grip" on the world. A metaphor that I believe is helpful to understand what Pierce is getting at is the gyroscope. A gyroscope is constantly moving in order to establish equilibrium. Humans, I argue, are similar. We wish to throw off doubt and discomfort, which can be of either the mental or physical variety. In either case, when discomfort arises we change until we can find balance. One question that will arise throughout this study is to what degree truth and belief are needed to establish equilibrium. That is to say, can doubt only be eliminated by belief as the tales of Poe and Doyle suggest? Moving into the post-war era, detectives will be represented differently as

the traditional values that sustained the society come into question most clearly after World War I. Writers such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler will complicate the belief that truth is discoverable simply by thinking clearly. These new, modernist detectives uncover clues and solve cases by getting involved in the world; their world is not simply a container of clues for our detectives to uncover. This new world carries with it an existential anxiety. Whereas Dupin and Holmes see the world as laboratory, using Enlightenment ideas of logic and reason to discover truth, our new characters Sam Spade and Phillip Marlowe exist in a world that pushes back, that begins to resist a certain kind of closure, caused by a generalized anxiety that occurs when, as Nietzsche anticipated back in 1882, our highest values begin to devalue themselves.

To the Street: Closed without Closure

Both Poe and Doyle created detectives that resembled characters out of the Enlightenment. Their respective detectives' powers were in their ability to follow one clue through a logical deduction until it revealed a hidden reality. Importantly, at the conclusion of their stories we have belief – the problem is solved and doubt has been eliminated. As we move forward into our next set of detectives, we must briefly address the historical conditions that lead to the rise of a different kind of detective novel.

After World War I, literature changes – there is a profound sense that something big has been lost; there may be no order to deduce. The philosopher who anticipated this condition in the end of the 19th century is Friedrich Nietzsche, and he expresses it most clearly in "The Madman," where Nietzsche has his character, a seeker of God, claim that

"*We have killed him* [God] – you and I. All of us are his murderers," and he continues, "Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing… Gods, too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him." However, at the end the Madman realizes that he has come too early with his message: "I have come too early… This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not reached the ears of men" (181-2). I wish to suggest that after World War I the message had arrived: the days of simple beliefs are over. The world will now be one full of chance and contingency. After the war, we would get a new kind of detective and a new kind of mystery. What does God have to do with Truth? If the society could believe in a world ordered by a creator containing within it a central teleology, then the world would contain within it as a condition of its creation both meaning and truth. One would discover truth, and it was discoverable because an omnipotent, omnibenevolent created the world according to a master plan that, by definition, could not be faulty. According to Enlightenment values the world was organized by a God, thought of as the Watchmaker of Deism, and the world could be deciphered using math, science, reason and logic. One may well ask, if Doyle is writing after Nietzsche, how come Doyle has not absorbed Nietzsche's critique? It is important to establish the difference between the literal time one lives in, for example, 2019, and one's relation to one's own age. In our common parlance, we discuss people being "ahead of" and "behind the times;" similarly, certain figures like poets, philosophers, novelists or artists are capable of being prophetic, not indicating a magical psychic ability but an awareness and openness to being that allows them to see trajectories others do not. Figures such as Nietzsche along with other 19th century

thinkers such as Marx and Freud, those that Paul Riceour will call "protagonists of suspicion," critique consciousness in such a way as to make false consciousness a suspicion that can never be put to rest. Put simply, how do I know what I believe is what *I* actually believe or whether it's a reaction to class, or Oedipal struggles, or resentment?

The two writers most associated with the genre that emerges out of the new post-war consciousness full of uncertainty and anxiety, and that will come to be known as "hard-boiled" detective fiction, are Dashiell Hammett, who publishes six novels between 1929-1934, including *The Maltese Falcon* in 1930, and Raymond Chandler, whose first novel *The Big Sleep* is published in 1939, followed by six more from 1940-1958. The new detective is grittier and finds truth by going out to the streets. Rather than resembling a human calculation machine, detectives Sam Spade and Phillip Marlowe will be led as much by passion and desire as the need to solve mysteries. And whereas Dupin and Holmes were able to satisfy our desire for belief and alleviate our nagging doubt, something different happens in these works: we achieve closure in that by the end there is no more mystery; however, there is the implication that there is a larger mystery at work, an existential directive, manifested most eloquently in Phillip Marlow as "care," in the Heideggerian sense of being oriented with a disposition towards the world, or more in the vernacular of Marlow, "giving a damn." Care thought of in this sense suggests that the modern detective is compelled not simply by abstractions such as "Justice" or "Truth" but by an internal desire to do right. With our new detectives we can see a trajectory from the rationalist Dupin, to Holmes the empiricist and finally to the existential realities of Spade and Marlowe.

The best explanation of the new, hard-boiled genre comes from Chandler himself in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder." In examining a few points, we can mark out lines of demarcation between Poe and Doyle and this new detective – the private eye – that will emerge. Chandler's essay is a critique of the classical form as being "too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world" (2). He acknowledges that Conan Doyle was a "pioneer," but then says, "Sherlock Holmes after all is mostly an attitude and a few dozen lines of unforgettable dialogue" (2). In saying this, I believe Chandler is drawing attention to the same basic idea that I wish to point out as well: Holmes and Dupin do not seem like real people. This may very well account for the appeal, as Sherlock Holmes is as popular now as ever. However, he has been turned into a character that appears superhuman in recent adaptations, even at times an action hero.

Chandler, instead, wishes to praise Dashiell Hammett for creating a new genre: "Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not with handwrought dueling pistols, curare, and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes" (3). Chandler ends his manifesto by defining the world and the detectives who will inhabit it:

> It is not a very fragrant world, but it is the world you live in, and certain writers with tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment can make you very interesting and even amusing patterns out of it. It is not funny that a man should be killed, but it is sometimes funny that he should be killed for little, and that his death should be the coin of what we call civilization…But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such an unusual man. He must be…a man of honour, by 'instinct,' by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly

> without saying it. He must be the best man in his world; a good enough man for any world. I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr: I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honour in one thing, he is in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. (4)

We see that Chandler's description of the modern detective has very little to do with that has come before. Our new detective lives in a city and that city is not clean. However, our new detective, while being capable of interacting and even thinking like the dregs of society, never himself becomes one.

In examining *The Maltese Falcon* by Hammett and *The Big Sleep* by Chandler, I show a trajectory that will move away from a world where doubt can be removed. In the *Maltese Falcon*, detective Sam Spade is a fallible character prone to womanizing and capable of error, something we have not previously encountered in Poe or Doyle. In the novel, the scope has become international and the characters have become more complex. Spade's partner Archer is murdered after being hired by a convention of the genre, the femme fatale, first introduced as Miss Wonderly, later discovered to be Bridgette O'Shaughnessy, and this leads to Spade going deeper and deeper into the search for the mythical Falcon. What I wish to look at in reference to the work is the end where the Falcon is finally obtained by Casper Gutman, our loquacious villain obsessed with the black bird.

The chapter titled "The Russian's Hand" is the climax where the falcon is finally obtained. Gutman checks to make sure the bird is authentic only to find "the inside of the shaving, and the narrow plane its removal had left, had the soft grey sheen of lead,"

forcing him to conclude that "it's a fake" (172-3). However, instead of admitting defeat Gutman explains, "Yes, that is the Russian's hand, there's no doubt of it. Well sir, what do you suggest? Shall we stand here and shed tears and call each other names? Or shall we…go to Constantinople?" He continues, "For seventeen years I have wanted that little item and have been trying to get it. If I must spend another year on the quest – well sir, that will be an additional expenditure in time of only… five and fifteen-seventeenths percent" (174). A very important shift has been made between now between our earlier detectives like Sherlock Holmes, who solved mysteries with certainty of conclusion, reestablishing order and relinquishing doubt, essentially bringing the reader back to homeostasis. The shift that has occurred is ontological: the classical detective arrives at an end because the world is rational and truth can be disclosed. The modernist detective must reckon with a world that is not rational but rather contains within it the absurd. In one sense, it could be argued that Gutman, in embracing the absurdity of the quest, is attempting to act heroically.

Philosophically speaking, the notion of "the absurd" is central to understanding the ways in which world-making altered after World War I. Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus*, written in 1942, explains the sense of despair the modern detectives Spade and Marlowe experience. Camus asks us to imagine that it is not only Sisyphus but all of humanity that is engaged in a task that upon reflection appears devoid of meaning. Camus argues that while Sisyphus pushes his rock, he is basically okay, unaware of the tragedy of his ultimate condition. However, when he becomes tired, turns and rests the rock on his back – then and only then – does the absurdity of his condition come into the

forefront. Another way to say this is that when you're involved in goal-oriented action, the world appears meaningful; however, when we wish to examine our existence by cold, rational logic we may well feel hopeless.[4] This means that for Gutman his choice is to forever chase something he will never obtain. The idea that finding what you are seeking is a curse that leads to chaos rather than establishing closure is a theme that runs through modernism. When the *Maltese Falcon* became a film it was directed by John Huston, who also made the *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and the film adaptation of *Moby Dick*, both stories that contain within them the same theme that finding "the ultimate," however it is defined, is an exercise in endlessness as opposed to a process that can lead to closure. This concept – to put it crudely – that meaning is more important than truth – is still common today in postmodern detective films such as *Memento*, where at the end (also the beginning) of the film we see our hero choose to destroy evidence because if he actually achieves closure, he will have nothing to do and thus no purpose. As McCann states: "But the most important purpose of the central symbol in Hammett's novel is to show that even people who conceive of themselves as ruthlessly calculating pursuers of self-interest will gladly submit themselves to the most outlandish fantasies so long as they provide a sense of meaning" (32). To return to Sisyphus, the process of pushing the rock *is* part of the way the human condition discloses itself: there is always something to be done, which is why Sophocles says in *Oedipus The King* "call no man happy until he's dead." That is to say, only in death do we get to view someone's life in totality – until then there is no closure.

Whereas Poe and Doyle's worlds are closed in the sense that they provide an absolute ending that allows the reader to put down the book and feel satisfied, having eliminated all doubt, Hammett doesn't quite provide that. We have an ending, but we still are left wondering if there is or ever was a falcon at all? Additionally, there is the sense that Hammett's novel deals not simply with the science of deduction but also with human psychology, providing a more complex picture of human ontology and the world itself. However, one important aspect remains in place: every person and scene is relevant to the solution. The world of Hammett, and Chandler to come, is closed in the sense that there is nothing that cannot be taken into account. An example of this phenomenon is in how we encounter the character of Wilmer Cook. Wilmer is introduced in a chapter 6 which is titled "The Undersized Shadow." What's important here is the title of the chapter gives us a roadmap to interpret the chapter. We know, even before we know of him, that a character will be "shadowing" Spade and that we too should be paying attention. However, without this signal, there could be room for ambiguity and invitation to a more "readerly," by which I mean multifaceted and ambiguous, text. We are first introduced to Wilmer when Marlowe notices "An undersized youth of twenty or twenty-one in neat grey cap and overcoat was standing idly on the corner below Spade's building" (43). The repetition of the word "undersized" makes it impossible for the reader to think, even for an instant, that this is just a random person who could be on the street. In the world of Hammett, like Poe and Doyle, clues are genuine and they bring with them a certainty of signification. Once the character is mentioned, we know that he will play an important role in the story, for there can be nothing random. If a person or an object, a

gun as is usually the case, is shown or introduced, it will be relevant to the outcome of the plot. In the case of Wilmer, by the end of the novel he will have been shown to have committed the murder of Thursby as well as having killed Gutman. In short, this "undersized shadow" turns out to be the key to discovering the plot. In postmodern fiction, the idea that every signifier points clearly to a sign will be challenged. For example, in a Pynchon novel, we can imagine a character showing up constantly yet serving no function in the plot, a character whose sole purpose is to complicate and cover up rather than elucidate and clarify

Following Hammett, the next writer important to the history I wish to establish is Raymond Chandler. In Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, we see a similar process of circularity that Sisyphus introduces in that our story ends exactly where it begins. Dennis Porter points out that

> the complex plot itself is characterized by a kind of aesthetic wit, since it takes the form of *an unnecessary journey*. It opens and closes with a scene on the Sternwood estate that implies Philip Marlowe, Chandler's Private Eye, need have looked no further for his first murderer than the first character he meets after the butler, Colonel Sternwood's disturbed younger daughter, Carmen…The difference between the end and the beginning is that by then not only have a series of violent crimes been solved but the story told has also revealed satisfying truths about life only hinted at in the hidden metaphor of the title. (104) (emphasis mine)

This quotation goes a long way toward explaining how unique Chandler's voice is to the genre as well as how he changes the scope of how we think about closure and disclosure. With Chandler, as with Hammett, the idea of closure is challenged. We get an ending, but we do not get an ending that suggests all is solved or all will be well in the future. With

Chandler we get a new interest in human psychology and language itself that reminds us of the bleakest of existentialists. For example, at the end of the novel Marlowe waxes philosophical:

> What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead, you were sleeping the big sleep, you were not bothered by things like that. Oil and water were the same as wind and air to you. You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell. Me, I was part of the nastiness now. (219)

Marlowe's speech reeks of the existential angst so associated with modernism, the modern city, and humanity's potential for morality. Commenting on the difference between Hammett and Chandler's characterization of their respective detectives, McCann explains, "Caring, by contrast, was the key ingredient that Chandler brought to the detective story. Where Hammett's detectives were cool professionals, Chandler's heroes are men who feel things intensely – who act on personal impulse, find their way by intuition, and pursue their cases . . . out of profound emotional commitment" (52). Chandler's detective sees himself as a moral character coming face to face with a cold, careless world. Marlowe "is almost explicitly a reinvention of the courtly knight of medieval romance…struggling desperately to hold the grail of justice and love above the seas of corruption that surround him" (53). Marlowe, unlike Dupin, Holmes, or even Spade, is attempting to bring truth back into a relationship with an old morality no longer the norm in the modern world. On the first page of the novel, Marlowe walks to the Sternwood house and notices "there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but

some very long and convenient hair" (1). Marlow, like the statue, must wear "dark armor" because in the modern corrupt world he inhabits there are no white knights. Marlowe reinforces this point later when Carmen Sternwood has snuck into his apartment and he glances at his chessboard noting, "The move with the knight was wrong. I put it back where I had moved it from. Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights" (147).

The reason that Hammett but especially Chandler is so important is that he established a character who was not simply a calculating machine, but a person who could be driven by desire, namely, a character with an interior life that could affect the way the exterior world appeared. To put it another way, truth will become more relative to the subject. To be sure, Chandler is not suggesting there is no such thing as truth or that it is impossible to discover, but he does suggest that truth must be disclosed to an individual and that individual's morality will decide the appropriate action. Chandler's detective is pragmatic in a way that previous detectives were not. Chandler's ways of finding the truth always involve an embodied detective, capable of error, who may fall prey to his passions but will retain his morality. The relationship between truth and morality was first established with Plato and remained intact through our modernist heroes. As we turn to the postmodern world, we will see that this relationship, like all relationships, is tenuous.

As this study seeks to trace different ways characters, either real or imagined, for I make no relevant distinctions between them in this study, attempt to discover the truth of the matter, we notice important implications about what truth is and how it can be

located. Starting with Poe and following with Doyle, we see characters that are able to disclose the truth by logic, both deductive and abductive, as well as superior observation. These detectives notice clues that others do not, but more importantly every clue functions as a signifier that always unveils the reality hidden right behind observation. In this way, our early detectives Dupin and Holmes seem like the hero of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," the ones who are able to see the light of truth, and thus see the "real" behind the "apparent." These tales become satisfying to the reader because they bring closure and the reader is satisfied that truth has been found and we can be done with the matter, i.e., alleviate doubt.

Following Holmes and Dupin, we move into a world where our detectives do not appear as floating minds solving problems; rather with Sam Spade and Phillip Marlowe we have characters who must get down in the muck to find out the truth of the matter. These characters needed bodies to solve crimes – they had to get down among the people and the people they moved among were different, meant to represent the kind of people who actually commit murders. Whereas our earlier detectives could provide certainty and closure, we get something different here – we get characters who can solve the crime, they can close the case, but in the hard-boiled world of fiction, there is no closure in totality, not simply because there will always be another case, which is true of all detectives in fiction, but rather because they care about more than the mystery – they care even when the world is at its coldest. The world of Spade, and especially Marlowe, is the world of the existential hero, whose hope is to stay moral in a corrupted world. Whereas Holmes or Dupin could solve a crime and bring the whole world back to a place of

stability and homeostasis, in the modern world that simply is no longer possible. The central reason that homeostasis is no longer possible is that the world is no longer seen as created by God, deciphered by mathematicians, operating logically. This logical world is no longer believable not only because of existential arguments but because of the historical force of World War I. The relationship between history and the understanding of truth will continue to be of heightened importance. The characters encountered by Dupin and Holmes always behave logically. Everything is solved because people are predictable if you only know how to decipher them. Every puzzle must contain a solution. Dupin and Holmes are the last vestiges from the bygone Enlightenment era, a world where rational thinking could rid the world of all its problems. In the modern world, the very idea of a loving god creating a rational world is absurd. Where the world *was* solvable from the right perspective, now the world is no longer a puzzle but rather a series of mysteries, contained inside the existential realization that meaning may be fleeting and permanence may be illusory.

As we now turn to the postmodern world, we will encounter a world where signifier and signified will come apart, truth and morality will separate, and the reader as much as any character will be responsible for detecting the truth of the text. To explore this period, I now look to the works of Samuel Beckett, Jose Louis Borges, Thomas Pynchon, and Don DeLillo, as well as the historical effects of the atomic bomb, the rise of visual media and the Kennedy assassination as relevant contexts to the discuss

Notes

[1] Critic John Irwin names the genre Poe invented "Analytic detective fiction" (27). Martin Priestman similarly claims, "The detective story was invented in 1841 by Edgar Allen Poe" (2). In the essay, "the Games Afoot" critic Patrcia Melvile and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney point out "Indeed, Poe may well have invented not only classical detective fiction and its offshoot, the metaphysical detective story but also the kind of playfully self-reflexive storytelling that we now call 'postmodernist' (6).

[2] It should be noted that Poe's principal of identification is a variation of Adam Smith's concept of sympathy as developed in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). Smith defines sympathy as the effect that is produced when we imagine that another person's circumstances are our own circumstances.

[3] In later chapters, I will discuss the ways a functioning "public," in the sense of both Kierkegaard and Habermas, which was sustained with the press is complicated by the rise of television and later the internet. For this chapter, what is important is that the newspaper is useful in Poe and Doyle because there is the assumption of one coherent world, where everyone reads a newspaper, there are only a handful, and thus a worldview is sustained.

[4] Even in the modernist fictions covered in this chapter, the world may be absurd, but there must be a rational explanation for murder. In *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep* plans can go wrong, but all action is planned. Murders happen for reasons.

CHAPTER III

THE BLEAK AND THE DREAD: FROM EXISTENTIAL ANGST TO POSTMODERN PARANOIA

To Infinity and Beyond: Beckett, Borges, and Closure

Dupin, Holmes, Spade, and Marlow, the detectives we met in the previous chapter, could all restore order because the social world was thought of as ordered as the natural world. Only because the worlds are ordered can anything appear to be out of place requiring restoration. Their respective worlds were accessed through observation and expressed through language, which referred indirectly to the world. Ordered as well, language was a substructure within the larger world, and through "plain speaking and clear understanding" any mystery could be solved (Hammett 89). However, an opposing school of thought emerges after two world wars and the atomic bomb with which humanity showed its power to end its own existence, a characteristic previously allocated only to god: the belief that existence has no ultimate purpose and no absolute end, that, as Camus says, it is "absurd." There has been a persistent and frustrating suspicion since Zeno that inquiry into the structure of reality is endless, an infinite regression, with no possibility of closure, no truth with which to establish a foundation. It was not Derrida, after all, but the Greek Sophists whose text the *Dissoi Logoi* first proposed to Western metaphysics that the world was indecipherable. In the twentieth century, this critique of closure became revitalized and came from many fields: Gödel with his incompleteness proof in math, Heisenberg with his uncertainty claims in physics, and Heidegger, Derrida,

and Foucault with their anti-foundational critiques in philosophy all helped show that humans were situated in history, and that, accordingly, history shaped the subject which would in turn inquire about its own history. Now, if one's claims are always relative to the historical situation one lives in, does this mean that establishing truth is impossible? Whereas previously philosophers like John Locke had thought language the appropriate tool for ordering the world, postmodern writers and philosophers will try to persuade that disorder, not order, is the prevalent state, that language itself is unstable, and order is simply an attempt at mastery, covering the discomfort of uncertainty beneath the blanket of grand narratives. To examine closure and its possibilities as we move into the postmodern, I will once again lead off with Poe, who is suggested by at least one critic to also be the father of the postmodern detective story.[1] After that I will examine Jorge Louis Borges and Samuel Beckett, specifically the ways in which these authors would exhaust the limits of orderability, often performing a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* to illustrate the problems of fixing the world into a state that can be objectively observed as an object of scientific inquiry. After establishing the limits of orderability, I will turn to Don DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon to show what happens in the absence of a master narrative, when traditional institutions thought to provide a stable background for truth to unfold become unreliable: the rise of a cultural paranoia that projects possible worlds in an attempt to avoid uncertainty and to bring the world back into some kind of order, so the subject can move and act with purpose and meaning.

Poe influenced basically all writers of detective fiction that would follow, but two are of importance to this dissertation because of their respective abilities to complicate

Poe's "analytic detective stories" by pushing the logic of order and orderability to the limit. The writers forming the bleeding edge between high modernism and postmodernism are Jorge Louis Borges and Samuel Beckett. I examine these writers because (while Borges keeps the classic detective-fiction structure, and Beckett is ultimately interested in modernist problems of epistemology[2]) they both write stories that exhaust the conventions of the genre as previously understood. After their respective contributions in outlining the limits of epistemology, the detective genre would turn to new problems of ontology. It is this sense of moving from epistemological to ontological problems that Brian McHale argues constitutes the move into "PostmodernIsm." Borges and Beckett wrote texts that contain detectives, but they also created texts that forced the reader to become a detective in the reading process. Their labyrinthine stories lay the groundwork for a new kind of difficult, encyclopedic text that will become popular in early postmodernism and sparse during the 1980s, only to make a resurgence in the post-Cold War era, texts I will discuss in Chapter 3.

Borges not only writes three detective stories as Poe did[3], but his stories are rewritings of Poe's tales. As critic John Irwin explains,

> he [Borges] set out to double Poe's detective stories – but with this difference: where Poe's detective solves the mystery and outwits the culprit, Borges's detectives, at least in the first two stories, are outwitted by the people they pursue, trapped in a labyrinth fashioned from the pursuer's ability to follow a trail until he arrives at the chosen spot at the expected moment. (37)

Borges's three detective stories, "The Garden of Forking Paths," "Death and the Compass," and "Ibn al-Bokhari, Dead in his Labyrinth," all contain multiple allusions to

and reworkings of Poe's detective stories, a technique commonly thought of as postmodern. Borges does not rewrite them in any kind of one-to-one relationship, but rather uses Poe's stories as a starting point with which to show the limits of analytic thinking that Poe had championed.[4] In doing so, Borges complicates the belief that logic leads to closure and that the world's disruptions are in fact restorable. By closure, I mean simply that discourse can end because doubt has been resolved. Whereas Poe believes all mysteries can be solved by re-establishing order, Borges challenges orderability. For example, in "Ibn al-Bokhari," we come across a conversation between Unwin, the mathematician, and Dunraven, the poet, during which Unwin says, "Please let's not multiply mysteries. Mysteries ought be simple. Remember Poe's purloined letter, remember Zangill's locked room," to which the poet replies, "or complex. Remember the universe" (256). This statement harkens back to the conversation Dupin has with the Prefect in "The Purloined Letter" where Dupin says of the case at hand: "Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault" (186). In Borges, possible explanations do not eventually resolve into an actual explanation, preventing closure and suspending belief. The passage from "Ibn al-Bokhari" also contains other important allusions to Poe's writing; as with Doyle's, Poe's literature exists inside the imaginary worlds our characters inhabit. There is also the allusion to the famous poem in the name of "Dun*raven*." Finally, in "The Purloined Letter," one person was both poet and mathematician, whereas Borges has divided them, or doubled them.

Borges is particularly interested in doubling within these stories that are themselves doubles of Poe's. In "Death and The Compass," Lonnrott and Scharlach "are,

of course, doubles of one another, as their names indicate. In a note to the English translation of the tale Borges explains that "The end syllable of Lonnrot means red in German, and Red Scharlach is also translatable, in German, as Red Scarlet." (qtd in Irwin 42). Irwin explains that,

> elsewhere Borges tells us that Lonnrot is Swedish, but neglects to add that in Swedish the word *lonn* is a prefit meaning 'secret,' 'hidden,' or 'elicit.' Thus Lonnrot, *the secret red*, pursues and is pursued by his double, Red Scharlach (Red Scarlet), *the double red*. (Irwin 42)

Scharlach can trick Lonnrott because he is able to double his [Lonnrott's] chain of thought and anticipate what Lonnrott will think in order to know how the messages he leaves will be interpreted. This of course reminds us of the child in "The Purloined Letter" who tricks his opponents at odds and evens. Multiplying out from a center or dividing forever both lead to similar philosophical and mathematical problems of infinity. Infinity is the antithesis of closure, for if problems are infinite, they are never done. In Borges, infinity doesn't have to go in a circle; it can also be found in a straight line, like Zeno's paradoxes of movement. At the conclusion of "Death and The Compass," Scharlach tells Lonnrot, "The next time I kill you . . . I promise you the labyrinth that consists of a single straight line that is invisible and endless" (156).

But infinity can be represented yet again another way, as an impossible totality - a totality that is always on the way to completion but can never quite catch up with itself. In "The Library of Babel," which is, if not exactly a detective story, an epistemological conundrum for sure, illustrates this problem of creating a set that will contain all possibilities. In Borges's story, the reader is told in the first sentence that "The universe

(which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries" (112). The protagonist states, "Like all men of the library, in my younger days I traveled; I have journeyed in a quest of a book, perhaps a catalog of catalogues" (112). This library is imagined to be infinite, a limitless combination of possible texts, only one providing the solution to all problems: Heidegger's onto-theo-logic solution realized. However, the reader understands that the story is about the impossible quest for knowledge, this knowledge that would ultimately end the very possibility of knowledge, in that knowledge is always-already becoming more/different knowledge, so if knowledge ended, it could only mean that there is no more Time. The relationship of Time to Beckett and Borges is what pulls them back into the camp of the modernists and structuralists: there is no sense of time as being-towards-death, even as characters make endless philosophical comments about that exact subject. One feels, for example, that Didi and Gogo are somehow still, to this very day, waiting for Godot, much as the impossible search for the magical book in Borges' library must still go on. The way in which Borges and Beckett revel in the relentless, endless proliferations of possibilities illustrates a new way that closure is challenged, different from previous writers examined. In Borges and Beckett, we have a hint of a new problem, complexity that will not reduce through abduction. If all books are different, and there is no text that explains to us what counts as a "real" text, how do we know what to base knowledge on in order to build more knowledge? In a sense, the problem of knowledge is a problem of philology: what texts count as the right texts? The fruitlessness of the quest for ultimate meaning has already been thematically important in the history of literature, but Borges

adds a new twist: he has now rendered the problem textual. If it cannot be certain where knowledge begins, on what foundations it can rest, it is hard to imagine establishing a place where knowledge could be held firm. The library suggests a kind of mathematical problem that reoccurs in Borges. If there could be a master text, once it was established "X is the master text," the textual history of X would immediately grow. Essentially, this is the problem where inquiry cannot ever quite catch up to itself in order to fully stabilize, which as a problem of logic exists even in a world where time does "move," in the Heideggerian sense again of being-towards-death.

While Borges pushes the limits of orderability, his work still retains the formal structures of storytelling and character. This belief in the stability of narrative to represent his epistemological problems is why Borges exists at the limit between the modern and postmodern, or the structuralists and post-structuralists. For as much as "Death and the Compass" plays with Poe's conventions, at the end, the world is still ordered. How else could Red Scharlach trap Lonnrott? Further, Lonnrott's understanding of the clues were correct. However, the fact that it is the detective that dies at the end and will continue to die in the future suggests that the seeker of truth may be doomed.

In Borges, the seekers are doomed because they will never be able to find "the master text" in a world where every possibility is available. In Samuel Beckett, to whom I will now turn, the characters are stuck in time – they cannot move forward because they do not believe their world has a grounding from which to build, so the characters instead of moving forward are involved in repetition. Samuel Beckett, much like Borges, plays with the idea of repetition and doubling throughout his canon. Famously, *Waiting for*

Godot is a play where nothing happens twice, and the implication is that it would continue to happen on into infinity because of the nature of the problem, again one of motion. Godot is always on the way, and much like the arrow in one of Zeno's paradoxes, it can never actually hit the target. David Hesla explains the relevant issue with Godot and our present study: "Godot can then be summed up in phrases such as 'the Future Ground' or 'Possible Absolute.' But as either Future or Possible, he is not and cannot be Present and Actual; and if he cannot be Present and Actual, then he who waits for him can never have that sure and certain Ground which he is waiting and longing for as the authorization of his being and the validation of his time" (135). In Beckett as with Borges, there is no piece of knowledge that is capable of grounding Knowledge, and therefore the question of establishing belief, of knowing the truth, is highly suspicious. Like Borges's, Beckett's worlds can be complicated by negation as well as addition, as infinity moves equally well in both directions. For example, in *Watt* (a work like "The Library of Babel" that is more of a puzzle than a classic detective novel, in that there is no detective, except for the reader) one simple fact, the feeding of a dog, becomes an insurmountable problem. The character of Watt is a Cartesian parody. He attempts to have clear and distinct ideas of everything, but his ideas bring no foundation with which to establish belief: "If *Murphy* offers us a vision of the cogito gone mad, *Watt* offers us a vision of the cogito come to nothing" (Begam 66). In the relevant example, Watt is trying to figure out the feeding habits of the dog that Mr. Knott feeds. The problem is that Mr. Knott leaves his scraps of food, if he has any, for a dog, who always eats them, when they

are available. After attempting four solutions and finding multiple errors in all of them Watt comes to this conclusion:

> That a local dogowner, that is to say a needy man with a famished dog, should be sought out, and on him settled a handsome annuity of fifty pounds payable monthly, in consideration of his calling at Mr. Knott's house every evening between eight and ten, accompanied by his dog in a famished condition and on those days on which there was food for his dog of his standing over his dog, with a stock, before witness, until the dog had eat all the food until not an atom remained, and of his then taking himself and his dog off the premises without delay; and that a younger famished dog should by this man at Mr. Knott's expense be acquired and held in reserve, against the day when the first famished dog should die, and that then again another famished dog should in the same way be procured and held in readiness, against the inevitable hour when the second famished dog should pay nature's debt. (98)

In the example, Beckett shows how relentless the process of trying to order the world can become. Additionally, there is always the suspicion that there is one more solution, one more possibility, just out of reach. For example, the fact that every dog, with food in front of it, is apt to be a hungry dog. Frederik N. Smith comments on the relationship between the novel *Watt* and Sherlock Holmes' deductions:

> Beckett as a boy read Sir Conan Doyle's stories, and *Molloy* has been said to reflect this reading. Several years earlier, however, *Watt* mocks syllogistic thinking but likewise toys with the inductive investigations of Holmes. Although during the war people may have wanted to be assured that rational meaning still existed, Beckett shows quite the reverse; in advance of *Molloy* he hails the genre of detective fiction, but writes a sort of anti-detective novel. (299)

The rationalistic approach so prized in previous private eyes has now been turned into something horrific: an endless, groundless, world. Watt ends up having very little in the way of knowledge according to Beckett's logic because he can only understand things

that he can be clear and certain about. The problem with this, as we can see in this work particularly and what points Beckett towards the postmodern, is his rooting of the problem in language. This is obvious from the word games played with the names of the characters "Watt" and "Knott," constantly playing off the dichotomy between presence and absence. Play itself is an important theme in the postmodern world, illustrated succinctly in the concluding line of *Watt*: "no symbols where none intended" (254). Of course, there may be symbols, if the author intended, but the reader can never know for certain. Perhaps, better and more apropos of the postmodern that is just around the bend, everything is always-already symbolic, and intention has nothing to do with the matter.

The works of Borges and Beckett can often feel like structuralist games, but I would argue that both writers push the boundaries of structuralism to the limits, and at least in the case of Beckett's later works, he moves into the postmodern. However, one difference between these writers and our textbook cases of postmodern detectives is paramount. The characters of Borges and Beckett are caught in mazes and labyrinths, in worlds where clear and distinct ideas do not yield the results the characters believe they should, but they exist as isolated existential subjects, still the world of the book, as reading is a linear, isolated experience. However, the postmodern world is the world of television, a world that will be more fragmented and reflected back to the viewer in images. The isolated subject of existentialism and structuralism will become multiple unstable selves in the postmodern. Brian McHale argues that the move away from the isolated existential subject into the decentered self is central to whatever we mean when

we use the word postmodernism. In fact, one of the greatest examples of postmodern complexity is with the attempt to define what the word "postmodern" means.

The Paranoids or All the Facts You Will Ever Need: *Libra* and the Rise of Conspiracy Theory

Postmodernism brings a radical shift away from truth as a stabilizing force to the belief that all truths are contingent. Contingency breeds uncertainty. In chapter 1, we noticed that the worlds explored were monistic, containing one truth, locatable through inquiry. As we will see here, the postmodern is pluralistic, containing multiple truths, that are always-already slipping from conceptual control. With the realization of possible worlds, the notion of a "correct" or "true" world will be complicated, or to use the parlance of postmodernism, deconstructed. With this deconstruction comes the rise of a new cultural paranoia. If God is not providing the superstructure, perhaps there is no order, or ever worse maybe some other nebulous system is behind it all, constituting the world, while moving clandestinely from within and without? Two quotations, both attributed to William Burroughs, provide a good insight into the world of the paranoid. 1) "A paranoid is a someone who has all the facts and 2) "a paranoid is someone who knows a little of what's going on."[5] On the one hand Burroughs seems to be saying that if one knew the totality of what there was to know, the logical response would be fear and trembling. On the other hand, he seems to suggest that if the paranoid just knew more, perhaps having a larger context, then that which is frightening would be explainable. I believe we will see through examining *Libra* and *The Crying of Lot* 49 that Burroughs may be correct in both senses. However, simply saying "the postmodern brought

contingency" because of a shift from epistemology to ontology or away from grand narratives begs the question of how all of this happened. What did the history that caused this shift look like? What were the events and inventions that caused the shift? For the purpose of this dissertation, the *how* is as important as the *what*, so before moving on, I want to discuss the changing landscape of America beginning after World War II and continuing throughout the long 50s and then through the Vietnam War.

The biggest technological shift emerged with the invention of the television set to be placed in the living room of every suburban and urban family household. As Marshall McLuhan has noted at length "the medium is the message,"[6] meaning that a technology becomes pivotal (rather than what it is supposed to convey) and so is best described by the way it reorganizes an environment. Technology in this sense is understood as an ecology, a way of being with and in an environment. A television causes the living room to center around it. The architecture of the living space changes. Worlds are not deciphered from the newspaper; rather, they are projected from a screen. The shift from a Public created by a newspaper, which is what we see in the work of Poe and Doyle as well as Hammett and Chandler, to a public created by the television and radio will have profound impacts on the imaginary not only of the nation but of the Other and a nefarious kind of Big Other, often conceived of as The System. If the postmodern had to be explained using one historical example, the assassination of President John. F Kennedy would be a fitting contender. The Kennedy assassination was the first historical assassination that was also a television event; the whole family could experience the event together – previously assassinations, such as the one of Archbishop Ferdinand

which is credited as being the cause of World War I, were read about and imagined, not witnessed and certainly not witnessed over and over again. Because Kennedy's assassination was recorded, it was viewed more than any previous event had ever been. Resulting from the recording, a new phenomenon was experienced: where seeing used to be believing, we now have an event, one which we all see, yet none of us are certain as to what has happened, what to believe. While previously our detectives, Holmes or Dupin, Marlow or Spade, would have been initially perplexed, by the end of the story the possible suspects would be systematically eliminated until there was only one actuality. However, with the Kennedy assassination we enter a new postmodern condition: information overload. The problem of solving the Kennedy assassination is not that there are too few clues; rather, there are too many clues, too many possibilities, too many narratives that do not coalesce into a coherent story. Was it the CIA? The mafia? Lyndon Johnson? Or just Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone? The possibilities multiply and create permutations of themselves until the idea of a satisfying conclusion seems impossible. To be only slightly hyperbolic, the only solution that would be remotely satisfying is if Oliver Stone's film *JFK* was itself part of the cover up and Oliver Stone himself was the assassin.

The new cultural imaginary taking shape did not go unnoticed. In his influential essay from the November 1964 issue of *Harper's* magazine, Richard Hofstadter described what he called "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." Hofstadter's essay is as relevant today as it was when it was published; his examination of the paranoid mind is illuminating. He states, "American politics has often been an arena for angry minds. In

recent years we have seen angry minds at work mainly among extreme right wingers, who have demonstrated in the Goldwater movement how much political leverage can be got out of the animosities and passions of a small minority." And Hofstadter continues:

> But behind this I believe there is a style of mind that is far from new and that is not necessarily right wing. I call it the paranoid style simply because no other word adequately evokes the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy that I have in mind. (77)

After naming the neurosis, he goes to great length to show us that this paranoid mind is not a new American phenomenon; rather, this mindset has been with us, at the margins, since our origin. While he initially quotes Joseph McCarthy's statement from 1951, arguing "How can we account for our present situation unless we believe that men high in this government are concerting to deliver us to disaster? This must be the product of a great conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man," he shows us that American mind has reached for such explanations as far back as 1797 when Americans "first learned of Illuminism with a volume titled *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies*" (77-78). After inductively illustrating his argument through examples, perhaps Hofstadter's most useful comment for this study comes when he analyzes the framework within which the conspiracy theorist operates, discussing anti-Masonic conspiracies specifically:

> What must be emphasized here, however, is the apocalyptic and absolutistic framework in which this hostility was commonly expressed. Anti-Masons were not content simply to say secret societies were rather a bad idea. The author of the standard exposition of anti-Masonry declared that Free-masonry was 'not only the

> most abominable but also most dangerous institution that ever was imposed on man…It may truly be said to be HELL'S MASTER PIECE (sic). (79)

This polarization and xenophobic approach to The Other prevents the normal course of political compromise, since one's opponent is not simply wrong, but evil. Also, once the ideological polarization takes place, ideas reify and the believers essentially live in what postmodernists may think of as different worlds, for who is to say what world is the correct world? We may not even be sure which world we are inhabiting, so establishing belief is quite difficult. This move to thinking of co-existing worlds, represented well in the Zone of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, leads to a problem of ontology – which world am I in? – but also a problem of epistemology from the opposite end: if I cannot be sure what world I am in or how many worlds there are, how can I be certain of much of anything? This uncertainty, I contend, is combated by establishing firm, rigid ideas as a resistance to the feeling that there is no ground beneath our feet, what some refer to as "relativism[7]." Multiple worlds could become established because information could now be shared from great distances and in essentially real time. If, as Kant argues in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, space and time are our must fundamental relationships, changing our relationship to space and time will clearly have disruptive ontological implications. I believe the emergence and subsequent dominance of the radio and television led to a change in the speed of information. With information speeding up and becoming more accessible, a different kind of society emerged.

Philosophers and critics from Martin Heidegger to Marshall McLuhan observed the emergence of the new "global village"[8] created by the television, radio, and the

emerging "world-picture" causing a rift in our previous ontological understanding of existence. My contention is the connection of the masses by way of media, causing our scope of influence and knowledge to decenter and destabilize, will exacerbate the cultural conditions that give rise to paranoia and usher in the popularity of the conspiracy theory, the most fashionable epistemology of the popular culture. While the notion of conspiracy harkens back to the foundation of Western culture, both Jesus Christ and Julius Caesar falling victim, the term "conspiracy theory" as we currently use the term is quite recent. According to Lance deHaven-Smith

> the term 'conspiracy theory' did not exist as a phrase in everyday American conversation before 1964. The conspiracy-theory label entered the American lexicon of political speech as a catchall for criticisms of the Warren Commission's conclusion that president Kennedy was assassinated by a lone gunman with no assistance from or foreknowledge by, any element of the United States government. (3)

He continues,

> In 1964, the year the Warren Commission issued its report, the *New York Times* published five stories in which 'conspiracy theory' appeared. In recent years, the phrase has occurred in over 140 *New York Times* stories annually. A Google search for the phrase (in 2012) yielded more than 21 million hits. (3-4).

The argument made by deHaven-Smith is that the label "conspiracy theory" is often used to dismiss critics of government actions when in fact, as the author points out, there have been lots of examples that should give us reason to question "official" stories wherever we find they are supportive of the status quo and power structures already in place. In fact there seems to be a connection between the rise of the conspiracy theory and the

systematic distrust of the American government that grew out of the 1960s because of many factors, including the Civil Rights movement, the feminist movement, the Kennedy assassination, Watergate, and most importantly The Vietnam War, which did more to create the background of paranoia within which all other movements and events played out.

In his book *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, H. Bruce Franklin shows how Americans' trust in their government had been diminished resulting from the Vietnam War. Over several decades, Franklin examines how the question of whether the government is out for the good of all citizens or whether it cares more about the rich was answered with consistently more skepticism:

> When and why did this distrust of the U.S. government become rampant? It is easy to determine *when*: The way may also have something to do with *why*. The American people's opinion of their government underwent a dizzying reversal, chronicled in a poll taken every two years since 1959 by the University of Michigan's Center for Political studies. In 1958, on the eve of direct U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, over three fourths (76.3 percent) of the American people believed that the government was run for the benefit of all, while only 17.6 percent believed that it was run by a few big interests. In 1964, as thousands of American 'advisors' were engaged in combat, and after the Gulf of Tonkin incidents, 64 percent still believed that the government was run for the benefit of all, while the number who believed that it was run by a few big interests had jumped to 28.6 percent. This shift continued inexorably. Just before the 1972 elections for the first time a plurality (48.8 percent) believed that the government was run by a few big interests, while only 43.7 percent still maintained the prewar faith. Then within a few months the numbers shifted even more dramatically. By late 1972, well over half of those polled believed that the government was run by a few by interests, and just slightly over one third (37.7 percent) still thoughts that the government was run for the benefit of all. So during the years of active U.S warfare in Vietnam, the almost unchallenged prewar belief that America was truly a representative democracy had evidently become the opinion of a relatively small minority of Americans. (45-6)

This lack of faith in institutions, limited not only to the government but extending to present day criticisms of the education system, criminal justice system, and the family unit itself, has led to a decline in a shared social fabric. When the field was smaller, the area of concern limited to the local population who read local newspapers about local issues, it is not that there was a monolithic opinion; in fact, there may have been more diversity of mainstream opinions, but the field had a geography grounded by shared local concerns. As Neil Postman points out, by 1730, there were seven newspapers published regularly in four colonies, and by 1800 there were more than 180" (37). Postman then quotes de Tocqueville: "In America parties do not write books to combat each other's opinions, but pamphlets, which are circulated for a day with incredible rapidity and then expire" (39). Postman is pointing out two important points: the society was a society based on the printed word (for those that were literate of course), and there were many diverse words in the society. The social world was never monolithic. After the invention and adoption of the television, the shared geography became cultural iconography and ideology, rather than a locatable "place" as traditionally understood. Another way to say this is that our understanding of our "neighbors" is becoming more culturally significant while at the same time becoming more abstract. This process changes the properties of a "public," the formation of and influence being central to understanding the paranoid American mind and its politics. Beginning with Kierkagaard's essay from 1787 "The Public Age," philosophers have connected the public mind to the mediums of information that informed it. Nietzsche notices the typewriter causes his thinking to become sparser and sharper; Lewis Mumford explains how human beings' experience of time changes

with the advent of the clock. Only after the mechanical clock is it possible to truly be "on time" (Carr). Because television will be the dominant technology to represent the postmodern world, it is convenient that televisions literally project a world, a fitting metaphor for postmodernism.

Moving into our postmodern texts, the emphasis changes from finding the truth, to producing the truth, from finding the truth about the world you inhabit to projecting a world. Brian McHale writes,

> My thesis is that postmodernism is subject to a different dominant than modernism. Modernist narrative fiction is dominated by issues that could be grouped under the heading of epistemology (theory of knowledge). Its techniques and devices are generally geared toward investigating human perception and cognition, differences in perspectives, the subjective experience of time, the circulation and (un)reliability of knowledge, and so on. Postmodernist fiction, by contrast, is dominated by ontology (theory of being). Its characteristic techniques and devices are designed to explore issues of fictionality, modes of being and the differences among them, the nature and plurality of worlds, how such worlds are made and unmade, and so on. In shorthand: whereas modernism was a poetics of epistemology, postmodernism is a poetics of ontology. (103)

The implications for our detectives will be profound. If we cannot be certain of the world we are in or even the rules of the world, how will we ever project a world to inhabit?

It is exactly this problem of constructing a world that DeLillo interrogates in *Libra*, where he takes on our prototypical postmodern event, the JFK assassination, and creates a possible world to account for the event. DeLillo's novel is a paradigm case of the problem of building knowledge in order to form a causal explanation of systematic complexity. In exploring DeLillo and postmodernism, it is helpful to make a comparison between his work and the work of Beckett in order to show an important difference in

trajectory. As Beckett's career continues after *Watt* and *Waiting for Godot*, his writing becomes more sparse. Beckett wishes to eliminate excess until there is "nothing left to express." However, DeLillo will do something quite different: "Rather than deleting words, rather than striving for the kind of minimalism that Beckett sees as literature's highest aspiration . . . DeLillo uses words to make a world, to build an American edifice" (Boxall 43). In *Libra* one character in one room – a room that has already undergone expansion – is charged with constructing an edifice, which in turn will produce a reality that can allow, at least in theory, the public to return to a state of order after settling upon a stable belief.

In the novel, the character Nicholas Branch is the "detective" whose job this is. However, this has proven to be an unending process with no end in sight. There's even a clue in the name "branch," in that knowledge does not lead in a straight line as with our previous detectives. Rather, knowledge branches, moving in different, often counter, directions. DeLillo himself expresses the problem in a 1983 interview, "We are not agreed on the number of gunmen, the number of shots, the origin of the shots, the time span between the shots, the paths the bullets took, the number of wounds on the president's body, the size and shape of the wounds" (*Conversations* 22). This problem is amplified because we have the film of the event. We can watch it. The Zapruder film, a film never intentionally crafted, becomes the source of the "seven seconds that broke the back of the American century" (*Libra* 181). The sections of the novel that contain Branch are most useful to this study, as it is his job to produce a world through narrative that will do what all good answers do, namely, end inquiry. He is also the character outside the

assassination plot in the sense that his sections are distinct from the multiple plots the novel contains. Our previous rationalists would have suggested this gives him a more "objective" stance that should bring clarity. However, that's not what happens. Rather,

> He sits in the data-spew of hundreds of lives. There's no end in sight. When he needs something, a report or transcript, anything, any level of difficulty, he simply has to ask. The Curator is quick to respond, firm in his insistence on forwarding precisely the right document in an area of research marked by ambiguity and error, by political bias, systematic fantasy. But not just the right document, not just an obscure footnote from an open source. The Curator sends him material not seen by anyone outside the headquarters complex at Langley, material that includes the Agency's own Office of Security. Branch hasn't met the current Curator and doubts if he ever will. They talk on the telephone, terse as snowbirds but unfailingly polite, fellow bookmen after all. (15)

In this passage DeLillo gets down to the problem of knowledge(s). The detective is meant to construct the *real* history based on the documents The Curator sends. The fact that DeLillo capitalizes "Curator" as well as "Agency" helps communicate the clandestine manner in which information now moves. How can we trust this information? What do we know of the Agency that produces it? Also, Branch is the only one outside of The Agency who has ever seen this material. In a classic deconstructive move, DeLillo has shown that by limiting the flow of data, by trying to have absolute control over the narrative, one actually participates in the creation of the counter narrative. The novel suggests, particularly with the repetition of the word "secret" that what the postmodern American mind loves more than information is its absence, for the "secret" suggests that reality is artifice, a simulacrum, but behind the artifice there is a system, some Agency that is in control. The Agency in this case becomes a kind of perverse panacea; it may be hidden because of course the truth is hidden, but at least there is a truth, an order. The

lack of transparency regarding information coupled with the collapse of belief in institutions such as government, the press, and the church gives rise to new cultural paranoia. The appeal of the paranoid conspiracy theory is that it is a way to grapple with uncertainty and maintain belief: "I know what *they* don't want you to know." This appeal is so common now that it has become a boilerplate marketing technique for books claiming to have cures for cancer and other diseases.

While paranoia is usually thought of as a condition that affects particular paranoid individuals who with treatment may once again be brought back into the fold, akin to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Patrick O'Donnell argues that

> the classic, universalized symptoms of an individual pathological condition can be seen as symptomatic of a collective identity when we regard those contemporary events and narratives that reveal paranoia as a kind of narrative work or operation that articulates the 'individual's' relation to the symbolic order: the stories that emerge from this are narratives of identification with the cultural imaginary. (14)

The problem is not isolated to the individual subject anymore, as the subject is itself a formation from the culture infected with the symptoms of paranoia:

> megalomania; a sense of impending doom; racist, homophobic, or gynophobic fear and hatred of those marked out as other deployed as a means of externalizing certain internal conflicts and desires; delusions of persecution instigated by these others or their agents; feelings of being under constant observation; an obsession with order; and a fantasizing of the reviled, abjected self as at the center of intersecting social and historical plot. (13)

What this means for our study is that the culture is reproducing itself, establishing order while at the same time becoming highly suspicious of any order as being part of an agenda. In the paranoid society, not believing in the paranoid society is a sure sign one is

a part of the production of paranoia; the critique cannot get outside of itself, essentially becoming the snake eating its tail. In the same manner, Oswald himself becomes a narrative construction, compiled through documents and second-hand accounts; we can also imagine the process where history itself becomes a process of narrative construction, again complicating the belief that we can establish a base stable enough with which to construct knowledge. Hayden White argues in his essay, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," that historical narratives are "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much *invented* as *found* and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences" (82). Even White's implication that the sciences are *found* is hard to sustain with critiques coming from theoretical models such as Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, which argues that science is biased towards popular narratives of the day. Additionally, recent examples such as Theranos and Elizabeth Holmes have shown how credibility, even in the sciences, can be manufactured through narrative.

The Crying of Lot 49 and The Problem of Consensus

Both DeLillo and Thomas Pynchon, who I will now include to widen the conversation about the paranoid cultural imaginary that arises out of postmodernism, express a common problem of world-formation. To understand the signs of the world, one needs to know something about the agency and intentionality behind the signal, the messenger. However, both *Libra* and *Crying of Lot* 49 deal with a problem where the

meaning of signs is obfuscated: are the signs parts of actual plots or are plots concoctions built on coincidence? O'Donnell expresses the issue:

> "coincidence" is a slippery code word for chance in *Libra*, but it is not the chance of pure randomness or stray accident; rather, the fabrication of Oswald by many parties those intentions are at odds might be thought of as a fractal equation: something that empty in itself – a mere cipher – fathers to itself seemingly random elements reconstituting into fluid patterns typified by the phrase "orderly disorder." (52)

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas stumbles upon a similar merging of plot and chance to the point where neither she nor the reader is sure what to believe about one such "fractal equation," *The Trystero*, a secret society that possibly operates an underground postal system. Postal systems are systems that distribute information across a wide network; that is to say, the postal system is the analog equivalent that predates the digital Internet. In a sense, with The Trystero Pynchon has hypothesized the deep web, a subject he takes up in his novel *Bleeding Edge*.

Pynchon's detective novel anticipates a quality later associated with David Lynch (*Lynchian* being an adjective used to describe the combination of the banal with the grotesque) whereby we open with a very clichéd picture of a housewife coming back from a Tupperware party, only to be sucked into an ever-evolving mystery that at a certain point has a force of its own. Pynchon's choice of a female, a housewife, as a protagonist is telling regarding the detective genre. Before now, outside of very few exceptions, detectives were associated with logic and reason, which was in turn connected with males. Pynchon challenges this narrative. Inside of Pynchon's narratives no one is ever certain of their knowledge, to the point where Oedipa can never achieve a

consensus that would eliminate some of the ontological relativity she is caught in. Thomas Hill Shaub points out that

> every use of the word 'consensus' in *The Crying of Lot 49* occurs in chapter five, which provides several fantasies of consensus: the Nefastis Machine, the anarchist miracle, the children in Golden Gate Park, the dance of the deaf mutes, and the coinciding spectra of the human voice in Mucho's 'vision of consensus.' (34)

Shaub argues that the Trystero is "Oedipa's biggest, most lushly blooming fantasy, the metaphor combining her isolated encounters into the idea of an alternative society 'congruent with the cheered land'" (34).

By the end of the book, neither the reader nor Oedipa is sure of the existence of the society; it remains a fantasy. What Pynchon has done is to confuse us with signs that point in multiple directions. The names in Pynchon go a long way to explaining the joke. From the beginning we have Oedipa, referred to as "Oed," pointing to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and the character Pierce Invararity, which connects the text back to C.S. Pierce and the origin of semiotics, the study of signs. As readers of the text, we too become detectives following the signs in hopes of finding closure, but Pynchon, more so than any writer up to this point, flat out refuses the possibility of closure or endings altogether. In the reading of a DeLillo novel, there are various interpretations of the manner at hand, but the suspicion that one interpretation, if we could only arrive at it, would be correct. Pynchon does not even grant that we exist on the same plane. In Pynchon the ontological problems of postmodernism run deep to the point where, like Borges, Pynchon created the need for his own criticism. As McHale points out, in

Pynchon's world the literal and the figurative often bleed into each other to the point where the reader has trouble distinguishing worlds:

> Metaphors and related figures of speech normally involve one element that belongs to the text's real world and another that does not; but works of postmodern fiction, including Pynchon's novels, often trouble the hierarchy of presence and absence in figurative language, making it difficult to distinguish what is literally there from what is merely figurative. (107)

McHale points to the specific example from chapter five:

> This difficulty arises for Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot* when she encounters John Nefastis's thermodynamically impossible machine, which literalizes Maxwell's Demon, a thought experiment (a species of metaphor): 'The Demon' makes the metaphor not only verbally useful, Nefastis explains, 'but also objectively true.'" (107)

The idea of indistinguishable worlds is at the center of *Crying of Lot 49*, for Oedipa is never sure what world she is occupying.[9]

Perhaps Oedipa is not exactly inhabiting any world that has been pre-established with order. Perhaps she is projecting worlds, hallucinating. The endless possibilities Pynchon gives us make it impossible to add up clues until we can solve the mystery. As the character Driblette informs Oedipa,

> You can hide a tape recorder, see what I talk about from wherever I am when I sleep. You want to do that? You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. (63)

The possible worlds will never fall by the wayside to reveal the actual. The signs point in too many directions. As O'Donnell explains, "In the paranoid epistemology of *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon shows the reach of the complicitous relation between semiotic play and the obsessive quest for discursive mastery" (97).

In the quest for mastery, what gets produced in DeLillo and Pynchon are "camps of knowledge." We see small groups grappling with big issues but never achieving consensus, producing a world of competing narratives. The Peter Penguid Society in *The Crying of Lot* serves as one such example. The society, distinct from the "left-leaning" Birchers, "was named for the commanding officer of the confederate . . . who early in 1863 had set sail . . . around Cape Horn to attack San Francisco and thus open a second front in the war for Southern Independence" (35). Mike Fallopian explains that this was the origin of America's confrontation with Russia, seemingly locating the beginning of the Cold War in the Civil War. We learn that the Peter Penguid[10] Society is opposed to the monopoly that the United States has over the mail system; thus, the society has set up an alternative system of information distribution. This underground system creates a camp of knowledge that is at odds with the larger society. Mail delivery is an important system to attack because it is the system that we use to distribute information. If there are alternative systems distributing different kinds of information, what gets produced is conspiratorial thinking, consisting of the belief that there is always some invisible other out there most likely doing something nefarious.

In *Libra* another such camp produces a plan that will require a fall guy, planted evidence, and an unsuccessful attempt on the president's life. Win explains the plan to Mackey and Parmenter:

> We want to set up an attempt on the president's life. We plan every step, design every incident leading up to the event. We put together a team, leave a dim trail. The evidence is ambiguous but it points to the Cuban Intelligence Directorate. Inherent in the plan is a second set of clues, even more unclear, more intriguing. (28)

However, whereas in Borges it was possible for Red Scharlach to reverse engineer clues in order to capture Lonnrot, the reader knows that this plan will inevitably fail because the reader also knows that Kennedy will be assassinated. In Libra, essentially the reader attempts to trace the relationships of the various clandestine groups. Tracing this relationship produces a network of actors with differing motivations and beliefs about the nature of the work they are involved in, particularly Oswald. Resulting from the clandestine nature of the various camps of knowledge, it becomes unclear which clues are "found" and which are "invented." In a conversation between David Ferrie and Oswald, Ferrie tells Lee, "I've studied the patterns of coincidence. Coincidence is a science waiting to be discovered. How patterns emerge" (44). Networks are harder to trace and navigate than traditional top-down systems because in a network every point can be a starting a point, whereas in a top-down structure, one is aware of positionality within the structure as well as directionality. What happens when there is no up or down? It is like asking how one orients oneself in space.

A similar problem of orientation occurs in *The Crying of Lot 49*, when Oedipa starts to become paranoid about the possibilities of the trystero/tristero. Oedipa becomes exhausted tracing the network, finding each new clue

> no more disquieting than previous revelations, which now seemed to come crowding in exponentially, as if the more she collected the more would come to her, until everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven in The Tristero. (64)

Of course, the idea that the network can be traced to a conclusion, which would grant closure, is the fallacy. In a classic detective story like Poe's, one follows a singular line to the end. The clues are followed in a clear direction to the killer and thus order is restored. The network will not provide a fundamental ground from which to build a case, leading Oedipa to make the most famous pronouncement in the novel, the move that places the issues of the novel clearly within the ontological concerns of the postmodern: "Shall I project a world" (64). In both *Libra* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, to return to Burroughs, there is the sense that 1) there are too many disparate clues, narratives, and counter-narratives to ever add up to a coherency, and 2) if one were able to know all of the facts at once, one would be so overloaded with data, like Nicholas Branch, as to make a coherent novel impossible to construct simply because of the conventions of narrative, plot, and basic functions of linear storytelling.

In *A Thousand Plateaus,* Deleuze and Guattari offer a way to think about this new, networked society and the new ontology it produces in their concept *the rhizome*. The rhizome is contrasted with the arborescent. Whereas, a traditional detective novel is built around the top-down logic of a tree-structure (*arbor*escent), the rhizome produces a

network. In a rhizomic structure, any point can immediately function as a center, again making directionality appear arbitrary, as in space. As the network that is being mapped in DeLillo and Pynchon will become the central metaphor to understand the internet age of Chapter 3, the Internet offers a useful example to introduce and explore the rhizome. The internet is a network of connections of which one is a part; however, if one's personal computer breaks, the internet does not break. So, whereas a tree has roots and if those connection are severed the entire tree-structure is doomed, power within the Internet is distributed, so there is no central point that will take down the entire network. At the same time, if one took one's personal computer and added content to the Internet, one would have altered, to vastly varying degrees, the network. One is a part of a network, but the network does not require any particular node to function; rather, it requires connections. These connections change and the network is forever being altered and recreated anew. Because the network changes in time, any concept of truth that will be useful in analyzing a networked society must account for time. What we see emerging in DeLillo and Pynchon, something that will be further explored in Chapter 3, is that truth itself is no longer a thing that is found or discovered but rather created through discourse, competed for through narrative and counternarrative, and ultimately decided by communities who may not all agree with each other. Because the "conversation" around any topic within a network never resolves, in practice rarely does the best idea just win. Truth can never crystallize for very long. Anything that at one minute resembles order at the next can turn back on itself. Branch can never construct a history, and Oedipa can never tell whether she has found a world or projected one. In either case, there is a fear

that maybe one's personal, subjective opinion may be the only standard for truth in a network society increasingly moving deeper into paranoia. Perhaps truth really is relative to one's personal projections, leading to multiple incommensurable worlds. There is a seductive appeal to the belief in multiple worlds that should be noted because one thing that multiple, incommensurable worlds does is solve the problem of truth by resolving all disputes, ultimately allowing one who holds the belief to be done with inquiry; that is to say, if everything is relative, the problem of truth has been mastered. I would argue, however, that multiple, incommensurable worlds is unsatisfying for the detective who wishes to act in order to solve a case. In Chapter 3, I will work to show through Deleuze and Guattari's inventive concepts from *A Thousand Plateaus* as well as Actor-Network-Theory and Object-Oriented Ontology ways to think about networks that can hopefully allow a detective to move closer to closure

The quest for closure, essentially the quest to arrive at a stable belief in order to be done with one's quest, is challenged by all four writers in this chapter from various directions. While Borges and Beckett show the inexhaustibility of possibilities, DeLillo and Pynchon give us a picture of what happens to our ability to form coherent worlds in a highly technological culture where information moves quickly and we are always one new "fact" away from destabilizing a structure previously thought to be foundational. Furthermore, DeLillo and Pynchon illustrate that destabilizing structures produce a cultural paranoia as a response to uncertainty. Whereas our detectives from Chapter 1 could reduce possibilities through abduction until the correct theory was discovered and all other false theories fell by the wayside, Branch and Maas can only speculate more

possibilities. The proliferation and popularity of the conspiracy theory from postmodernism into the contemporary suggests the culture at large would rather have order than disorder, even if that means granting agency to a nebulous system such as *Trystero*. This new cultural paranoia will become even more pronounced in Chapter 3, as we move into the Age of the Internet against the backdrop of three salient historical events: the fall of the Berlin Wall (11/9), the fall of the Twin Towers (9/11), and the day Americans woke to the election of Donald J. Trump.

Notes

[1] See "The Game's Afoot" from *Detecting Texts*: *The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*: "Indeed Poe may well have invented not only the classical detective fiction and its offshoot, the metaphysical detective story, but also the kind of playfully self-reflexive offshoot, the metaphysical detective story" (6).

[2] At this era. In Beckett's later works such as *Worstward Ho*, Beckett's work has crossed into the postmodern.

[3] Of course, one could argue that Borges wrote more than three detective stories, depending on how literally one defines the genre.

[4] The act of rewriting itself is one of postmodernism's salient features. For a thorough discussion of rewriting and postmodernism see Christian Moraru's *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*. SUNY Press, 2001.

[5] The first quotation is cited in Lucy Fisher's *The Body-Double: The Author Incarnate in the Cinema*, Rutger's UP, 2013, pg. 33. The second quotation is from *Friend Magazine* from 1970.

[6] See McLuhan's *Understanding Media*: *The Extensions of Man* and *The Medium is the Massage* with Quentin Fiore

[7] When I speak of "relativism" and its appeal, I do not mean the idea that every idea is as good as every other idea, but rather that more than one conceptual scheme may explain the same phenomenon equally well. So, while some ideas may fall by the wayside, there may never be one idea that simply wins forever and always.

[8] See McLuhan's *Understanding Media* and Heidegger's "The Age of the World-Picture."

[9] Pynchon performs a similar literalizing of physics problems and construction of incompatible worlds in the short-story "Entropy."

[10] Martin Paul Eve argues that Pynchon's history is not completely invented, basing some of its facts on F. A. Golder's essay "The Russian Fleet and the Civil War." *The American Historical Review* 20.3 (1915): 801-812.

CHAPTER IV

THE FLAT-EARTH SOCIETY: TRACING NETWORKS IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

In *The World is Flat*, Thomas Friedman argues that the date 11/9, not 9/11, should be viewed as the date when the world became "flat." By the date"11/9," Friedman is referring to the fall of the Berlin Wall, which marked the end of the Cold War and made Francis Fukayama famously declare "the end of history," a phrase by which he meant that the ideological system of democratic capitalism has proven to be the best of all available systems for organizing a technological, open, and free society. In his turn, by "flat" Friedman designates "globalized," a world reality brought about through neo-liberal flows of goods and capital. Now, we are also told, trade would have fewer boundaries while corporations could extend their reach of capital, and the networks of money as well as information would become boundless. Whereas the postmodern world—for many, a Cold War-era phenomenon—had questioned the implication of individuals inhabiting different ontological spaces by projecting worlds, the contemporary asks what happens to the individual when all those different ontological spaces become networked. There is an implied tension to work out here: if all worlds can be networked, are they ontologically relative in the first place? Like Latour, I agree that the term "network" is problematic to the degree that it implies something that occurs only in cyberspace. Rather, the world being networked is the acknowledgement that the

context of any event has global reach in the contemporary society. The network includes both local and non-local actors, and both humans and objects, from the people who manufacture the products to the webpage designed to sell them. While these networks are not limited to cyberspace, it is impossible to underestimate the effect of this new medium. Whereas the television had been the dominant medium for understanding the postmodern world, the Internet would become the salient technology for the contemporary. The Internet has allowed the population to move in two directions simultaneously, inward and outward. The world is connected via social media platforms, but those participating in the "social" do so in isolation, at least geographically. Psychologist Sherry Turkle has dubbed this phenomenon "being alone together."[1]

This merging of opposites, of the connected and the isolated, is part and parcel of this new networked environment. Traditional understandings of time and space are no longer efficient and demand a new philosophy to conceptualize the networked world, especially after Web 2.0 where every consumer could also become a creator of content. YouTube and Facebook have allowed anyone with an Internet connection to alter the flow of information throughout the network. While this has granted access to information previously unavailable, giving citizens more power to take active parts in their political lives, at the same time, "bad actors" and conspiracy theorists have done so much damage to the concept of truth that the term "post-truth" is in vogue. Gilles Lipovetsky refers to this contemporary period, from the end of the Cold War to present, as the "hypermodern." "Hypermodern individuals," he says, "are both better informed and more destructured, more adult and more unstable, less ideological and more enthralled to

changing fashions, more open and easy to influence, more critical and more superficial, more skeptical and less profound" (12). It is this merging of tensions, the disruption of normative or traditional connections, the forging of new relationships, that best explains the "worlding" of the contemporary. Along with Lipovetsky, there have been many other attempts to articulate this new networked existence after postmodernism. As Timotheus Vermuelen and Robin Van den Akker note in their essay "Notes on Metamodernism,"

> New Generations of artists increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche, in favor of *aesth-ethical* notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis. These trends and tendencies can no longer be explained in terms of the postmodern. They express a (often guarded) hopefulness and (at times feigned) sincerity that hint at another structure of feeling, intimating another discourse. History, it seems, is moving rapidly beyond its all too hastily proclaimed end. (309-10)

They continue by articulating a point like Lipovetsky's regarding the co-existence of conflicting tensions. "We will argue," they specify, "that this [new] modernism is characterized by the oscillation between a typically modern commitment and a markedly postmodern detachment" (310).

While there are many competing monikers such as digimodernism, altermodernism, or metamodernism to name but a few, the commonality in these new attempts to conceptualize the contemporary lies in trying to articulate what happens to basic concepts such as truth and interpretation in a world that is populated by people who came of age in an always-already ironic, self-aware, meta *this* and post *that* world. For example, in the *Looney Tunes*[2] episode "Duck Amuck" from 1953 as well as "Rabbit Rampage" from 1955, Warner Bros animators were calling attention to the artificiality of

the medium of television by having the animator come into the fore and sadistically torment his creations, showing the power of his pencil to both bring in and out of existence, a postmodern Krishna years before *Lost in the Funhouse* would become famous for just such moves and *Pale Fire* would begin to interrogate authorship and origin in a way that reaches a pinnacle in *House of Leaves*, which I will examine momentarily as a paradigm case of a contemporary detective work. It is important to remember the generations coming to maturity on this kind of material were always-already postmodern and their understandings of their world, truth, and ontology reflect those sensibilities.

Contemporary individuals simultaneously assemble and respond to their environments, often feeling "close" to individuals not in physical proximity and "distant" from their physical neighbors, especially if those neighbors are thought as some kind of "other." The central point is not simply that distances are shrinking[3] but that new assemblages are always occurring. While the Internet may have seemed like the logical manifestation of postmodernism, what with everyone living in self-projected worlds, the events of 9/11, as well as the continued, documented destruction of the environment have reminded all serious thinkers that our problems are connected and while we may feel like we "live in our own little world," we are only all able to feel that way because we inhabit the planet in such a way as to be able to imagine the world differently from what it is. Resulting from the globalizing of events and concerns, we became a networked world, where "everything is connected" as DeLillo says in his 1997 *Underworld*, over and over, and no account of the contemporary can be complete without an analysis of this mode of

existence. As Patrick Jagoda states, “the problem of connectedness cannot be understood, in our historical present, independently of the formal features of a network imaginary,” defining network imaginary as “a complex of material infrastructures and metaphorical figures that inform our experience with and our thinking about contemporary social world” (3). Jagoda continues with a historical point that relates this contemporary network analysis with the emerging networks in *Libra* and *The Crying of Lot 49*: “The word ‘network’ is certainly not new . . . . It was not until the mid-twentieth century, however, that scientists, humanistic scholars, and artists alike began to use a more generalized network vocabulary to describe new visions of a post-World War II world” (3). Pynchon himself has commented on this history in the *New York Times Review of Books*:

> Since 1959, we have come to live among flows of data more vast than anything the world has seen. Demystification is the order of our day, all the cats are jumping out of all the bags and even beginning to mingle. We immediately suspect ego insecurity in people who may still try to hide behind the jargon of a specialty or pretend to some data base forever “beyond"” the reach of a layman. Anybody with the time, literacy and access fee these days can get together with just about any piece of specialized knowledge s/he may need. So, to that extent, the two-cultures quarrel can no longer be sustained. As a visit to any local library or magazine rack will easily confirm, there are now so many more than two cultures that the problem has really become how to find the time to read anything outside one's own specialty.

While the network imaginary was emerging as Oedipa and Branch attempted to trace clues, the network is always-already the grounding metaphor of the contemporary world. Whether we refer to the contemporary as the “information age,” the “digital age,” the “Internet age,” and whether we are “cosmopolitan” or “planetary,” the titles all imply

something similar: we trade in information and that information travels through vast networks at speeds previously unthought, leading philosophers such as Paul Virilio to suggest that to study the modern *is* to study the speed of it – its "dromoscopy." To study society now, one must study relationships and relationality:

> The world is characterized by *relationality* at two levels. One is systemic. Here, the relational structure ensures that the majority if not all of this world's ingredients, places, and forms of life and expression thereof are, can be, or are likely to become one day interconnected and interdependent. The other is sub-systemic. At this level, everything or almost everything in this world is, can be, or is likely to become connected to and dependent on the broader world-system in terms of function and meaning. (Moraru 23)

Whereas in the postmodern we could say the "real" is that which can be simulated, in the contemporary the "real" is that which can be related; it is the sum of these relationships and nothing more. When the previous understanding of hierarchy became "uprooted" with the concept of the rhizome, learning to trace networks became the hallmark of every good detective. In this chapter, I turn to two examples to show the conflicting nature of networked existence. First, *House of Leaves* by Mark Z. Danielewski forces the reader to become a detective through curating textual clues which ultimately fail to stabilize. The detective can trace a network, but the process can produce strange, unpredictable connections. Just as the Internet is organized by a never-ending web of links, Danielweski's work is a connection of relationships rather than anything like a linear story; the book produces the sensation of living in a networked existence. The second example, providing counterpoint, is HBO's drama *The Wire,* in which detectives expose and follow networks in order to solve cases and achieve closure, albeit briefly. What

makes *The Wire* particularly relevant is that even with the density of the networks that are revealed, detectives can solve cases and achieve a temporary kind of closure. Following the analysis of *House of Leaves* and *The Wire*, this chapter's third section explores the rise of the amateur detective after 9/11 as conspiracy theories proliferate across the web, allowing anyone with spare time to "investigate." I conclude the chapter outlining concerns that with the election of Donald J. Trump we have planted our feet firmly in a post-truth age where "detection" has been replaced with "production" of truth, leading to a renewal of charges of relativism from critics such as Michiko Kakutani and Lee McIntyre.

The Endless Hallways of *House of Leaves*

Mark Z. Danielewksi's endlessly inventive *House of Leaves* not only represents what it feels like to try to make sense of life in a networked society; it also performs its argument. *House of Leaves* is layered in levels, and each level is another complication requiring another level of detection. At one level there are The Navidson's trying to explore the mysteries of a house that is larger on the inside than the outside and even more alarming, the dimensions are changing. On top of this level is Zampano who seemingly spent his life analyzing the film *The Navidson Record*. However, we are told by Johnny Truant that Zampano was blind and that the film does not actually exist. Truant is our third layer, attempting to construct Zampano's notes into a coherent text that becomes *House of Leaves*. On a fourth level there is a mysterious editor (or editors) who have annotated the text with both real and fictional texts. And finally, the reader,

whose job it is to construct meaning out of this textual creation – the one written by Mark Z. Danielewski. However, the problem does not end there, for *House of Leaves* is a networked novel connected intentionally to *The Whalestone Letters*, which is both included in *House of Leaves* and published separately as a volume itself. Finally, Danielewski's sister, conveniently named Poe, composed a musical album that is part of the *House of Leaves* network. The text shows, through the experience of its reading, the problem of reconstructing an accurate history from records—the impossibility of getting to the territory from the map—which in the context of a detective means the problem of building a case. If a coherent history cannot be established, there is no way to establish motive, and without motive we cannot know the *why*, which is the fundamental question: there is nothing more disturbing than horrendous acts committed for no apparent reason beyond themselves, that is to say, the actions of the sociopath. What makes Danielewski's book ultimately a work of speculative horror-fiction is in fact that we are left without any clear lines of causality, not only because of the multiple narratives, but also because the book itself is designed to be part of the puzzle.

Danielewski's book is a physical object of investigation, not simply the container for a story. The book *House of Leaves*, on one level, is a story about a family trying to figure out how the house they live in could be bigger on the inside than the outside. To literalize this problem of space, much like Pynchon literalizes Maxwell's demon in *Crying of Lot 49*, Danielewski makes the actual book in such a way that if one tries to use the flap on the cover as a bookmark the way often done with hardback books, one finds that the bookmark will not quite fit – the inside of the book is bigger than the outside.[4]

And inside this book, text appears in many different fonts and configurations. Some pages have no words at all on them. Some pages are full. Some pages have blocks of text that are upside down or in a mirror-image. The experience of reading the novel feels like surfing the web. Some references seem logically connected to others while some pages are blank or filled with only a word or a piece of punctuation. The novel, in reducing the time the reader spends on each page, is also commenting on the speed of this new globally networked, neo-liberal society. Mark C. Taylor points out "Today's students *live* online and in the cloud. Far from a mere tool they occasionally utilize, the Web is a space they inhabit and that inhabits them" (109). Taylor makes a salient point about the generational differences he notices when attempting to teach *House of Leaves* to his students:

> The length and complexity of *House of Leaves* made me hesitant to assign it to undergraduates and lifetime learners. But I was intrigued by the work and wanted to experiment with it. As I prepared for the first class, I had no idea what to expect, so I decided to begin the discussion by asking them what they thought of the book. Predictably, the adults in the class threw up their hands and declared they were unable to make any sense of it, but the reaction of the students was completely unexpected. Far from being daunted, they were completely absorbed by the text. In almost four decades of teaching, I have never been so surprised by the response of a book I had assigned. It was as if the students had been waiting to read this book their whole lives. (113-114)

The text, in mirroring their tangled existence inside the Web, had made the students feel at home, while those who had come of age during the postmodern era of the screen, felt equally alien towards the text. Characteristically of the hypermodern, the implications of tracing of networks in hyperspace has diverging implications: information is available in

mass and anyone can access it, but it has not necessarily been curated or peer-reviewed in the manner that still makes the book the preferred medium for scholarly research. And when this information is communicated in online groups, it is done so without the presence that a physical body brings, through what Maurice Merleau-Ponty would refer to as "the flesh."[5] Philosopher Hubert Dreyfus makes an important point regarding this disparity. Starting his analysis with Søren Kierkagaard, who critiqued the press for creating "the public," which in turn caused every issue to be reduced to idle chatter, passionless reflection and inaction, Dreyfus believes there is a danger in the imaginary that comes to understand itself as being formed and informed by tele-presence. This leveling, according to Dreyfus, leads to despair because while it may be wonderful that everything is now connected, what does one do? Every choice can now appear as equally good or bad, plausible or impossible; every idea is praised as both obviously right and clearly insane. Furthermore, the absence of order creates confusion as to what one should be paying attention, what is most important. Any quick scan of any major news network's online content will prove the point. Look at the stories and try to discern the meaning of the order. Every story seems both equally important and irrelevant. How does one know what to care about? If care (*Sorge*) is the fundamental constitution of *Dasein* as Heidegger claims in *Being and Time*, losing one's orientation is an existential threat to *Dasein's* ability to stabilize by feeling at-home in the world.[6] For example, in *House of Leaves* there is an unknown editor who has provided footnotes and references. However, not all references are "real." To find out, however, one must leave the text and go explore on the Internet. When one does this, one is quickly directed to online forums with

Talmudic-like commentary on commentary, revealing the infinite-like quality of the text. One such example occurs with a quotation attributed to David Conte: "God for all intents and purposes is an equal sign, and at least up until now, something humanity has always been able to believe in is that the universe adds up" (32). This quotation appears significant for understanding the nature of the problem of the house being bigger on the inside than the outside; that is to say, the house denies the equality demanded of mathematics. This quotation is linked to a footnote that informs the reader to "Look at David Conte's 'All Things Being Equal" in *Maclean's* v. 107, n 14, 1994, p. 102. Also see Martin Gardner's 'The Vanishing Area Paradox" which appeared in his 'Mathematical Games' column in *Scientific American,* May 1961" (32). However, if one looks up the name "David Conte," on Google, one is directed to webpages of an American Composer, and if one searches the phrase "David Conte All Things Being Equal," one is directed to forums for the novel *House of Leaves*, where others are already involved in searching for meaning of the invented footnote. To make matters even more oblique, the next reference to Martin Gardner's column in *Scientific American* is real. The sensation reminds the reader of broken links on the Internet as well as the endlessness involved in following hyperlinks. That hyperlinks move without regard to importance produces a sense of directionless-ness on the Internet. This new sense of directionless-ness is referenced inside the novel during the exploration of the hallway: "No matter what room she stands in, whether in the back or the front, upstairs or downstairs, the needle never stays still. North it seems has no authority there" (90). This lack of direction – the fact that all things connect or could connect – leads to endless

possibilities, which is useful for all kinds of creative acts. However, it runs contrary to the desire of the detective: the desire for closure.

In another footnote to a long tangent by Johnny Truant, the editor, whose identity remains a mystery, tells the reader,

> Though Mr. Truant's asides often seem impenetrable, they are not without rhyme or reason. The reader who wishes to interpret Mr. Truant on his or her own may disregard this note. Those, however, who feel they would profit from a better understanding of his past may wish to proceed ahead and read his father's obituary in Appendix II-D as well as those letters written by his institutionalized mother in Appendix II-E – Ed. (72)

Essentially, this footnote leads us to a kind of choose-your-own-adventure scenario. The reader may interpret Johnny as they like, or they can follow the clues left by the editor. Of course, because the identity of the editor is unknown, how can we trust the accuracy? How can we know the editor's motivations? Because directionality becomes lost in a flattened world, the text of *House of Leaves* is constantly turning back on itself. If the reader follows the advice and reads the Appendixes, there is another clue that puts the reader back on a journey, this time through the entire book in search of one little mark: a small check. Johnny's mother writes to him,

> As I indicated in my last letter, I've grown increasingly suspicious about the staff here, especially where my personal care is concerned. I need to feel we can correspond without interference. For now all you need to do is place in your next letter a check mark in the lower right hand corner. That way I'll know you received this letter. Don't make the check mark too big or too small or else the New Director will know something's afoot. He is an exceedingly sly man and will be able to grasp any effort to exclude him. So just make it a simple check mark--our little code, so effortless yet so rich in communication. (609)

This message sends the reader back on a journey for this little check mark and sure enough on page 97, in the bottom right hand corner is a little black check mark. What does the reader make of this clue? Does it imply that Johnny has written *House of Leaves*? Does that explain that contradictory notion of a film being written about a blind man? Of course, in this work, much like the Internet, certainty and closure do not occur. What becomes interesting regarding networks and *House of Leaves* is to what degree fans of the book are interested in the question. Scholars do not tend to speculate one direction or the other in hopes of resolving ambiguities. By and large, we are trained to believe the point *is* the ambiguity. However, fans, much like detectives, want answers and resolution. Because of this commonality, there is an endless amount of non-professional commentary on the work that by any account is as thorough as professional scholarship.[7]

Networks in *The Wire*

Whereas *House of Leaves* explores the abyss of endless connections lying behind networked existence, *HBO's* drama *The Wire*, while also showing the complexity of contemporary existence, provides us with detectives who must establish closure by following a network of clues. What separates *The Wire* from other cop shows is its ability to examine the force of networks rather than the will of individual subjects. Jagoda states, "the development of narrative complexity in television serials, especially since the 1990's, has enabled the medium to engage in unique ways with what I have been calling the network imaginary," and goes on to explain, following McLuhan and Fiore, that television "puts people in touch with a collective and global life based on

interconnection" (104). While following drug networks, other networks emerge. For example, the failure of the school and family systems are shown to be deeply related to drug networks and vice versa. The intricateness in which these networks interconnect illustrates the problem of trying to isolate single causes. That is to say, the show does not allow the viewer to ever reach the conclusion that things would be better if only X were accomplished. Jagoda cites a very useful example for this study, to explain how networks emerge in the contemporary world. In season 4 of *The Wire,* there is a mayoral debate on television. What is relevant about this scene is that

> the visual focus of this linear sequence, however, is not on the debate itself but on the massive ensemble of characters either watching or not watching this episode of political theater. To a few of Baltimore's citizens it is a central event, but to most this contest is entirely peripheral. During a series of short scenes that takes the debate as its nexus, members of the Royce and Carcetti camps scrutinize with distant interest, listening selectively for issues that pertain to their daily criminal investigations. The ex-con Dennis "Cutty" Wise, in another vignette, notices the debate on his screen before immediately switching the channel to a football game. Even further at the edges, Namond Brice, a young aspiring drug dealer, turns off the debate as if it were televisual static and beings to play *Halo 2*, a first-person shooter videogame. In this series, plotting is subordinated to the detailed mapping of Baltimore's intersecting social worlds. Rather than compressing time – a common function of cinematic montage – the sequence enlarges connections that bind together the story lines and life-worlds of vastly different, though overlapping, Baltimores. (107)

However, even though the complexity of urban problems is tangled in networks as complicated as *House of Leaves*, working detectives still have to solve cases. In examining one such example from the show, I show that networked existence in no way eliminates the possibility of a kind of closure, albeit temporary.

In Season 1, episode 4, detectives Jimmy McNulty and "Bunk" Moreland re-examine a crime scene. During the investigation, what they do is trace the trajectory of a bullet. In doing so, a network of connections opens, leading to the realization that the victim was shot from outside the window, not from inside as previously thought, and establishing that the killing was intentional; it was a murder. What is memorable about this scene, however, is not that they manage to trace a network. It is the dialogue that occurs during this discovery. The entire scene is composed of slight variations of the word "Fuck" being said back and forth between the two detectives. Through gesture, volume, syllabic emphasis and variation (Fuck, Fuckin-A, Motherfuck), each instantiation of the curse brings with it a revelation that is shared between the detectives. How are the detectives able to make and communicate meaning in this scene? Why doesn't the ambiguity overtake intentionality as happened so often in *House of Leaves*? In this case, it is because of the relative stability of the network the detectives inhabit. Whereas, in *House of Leaves* the actual object, the house itself, is unstable, in *The Wire*, they are able to stabilize a network of connections by using basically one word because they also share one world. Every time the same word is uttered it is in relationship to a new object – a hole, a window, a bullet casing. Because they share this third thing in common, they can understand the meaning of the word even though that meaning is shifting through processes Donald Davidson calls "interpretive charity" and "triangulation."[8]

Davidson explains that

> The principle of charity says that in interpreting others you've got to make their thoughts hold together to a certain extent if you're going to see them as thoughts at all, because that's what thoughts are like. They have logical relations to one another. Although people can certainly be irrational – they can have thoughts that don't go together – we can only recognize them as irrational because their thoughts lack rational coherence. You can't make sense of total irrationality. (Kent 7)

And of "triangulation" he says, "the basic idea is that our concept of objectivity – our idea that our thoughts may or may not correspond to the truth – is an idea that we would not have if it weren't for interpersonal relations. In other words, the source of objectivity is intersubjectivity: the triangle consists of two people and the world" (8). While this may sound complicated, it is how one understands what the phrase "damn it" means when you see a person holding their foot and hopping up and down. The phrase has meaning only in relation to a network, which at minimum requires two interlocuters and something in common from the world, be it physical or not.

In one final example from the show, in Season 5, detective Jimmy McNulty with the help of detective Lester Freamon create a serial killer. Clues are planted to make dead bodies appear connected. Specifically, McNulty plants a red ribbon around the wrist of the bodies. Then he takes advantage of an unethical reporter by pretending to be the serial killer, which gets the story in the press. Later he adds bite marks to bodies to escalate the excitement over the case. Because Freamon and McNulty know how the reporter will interpret clues, because they understand how reporters as well as cops typically think, they are able to operate clandestinely. The reason the detectives engage in this deception

is that they need funds diverted to the department, which they intend to use not for the invented serial killer, but for a real drug case that has lost relevance to the officials in city hall. In this example, McNulty and Freamon are operating much like our old friend August C. Dupin from *The Purloined Letter*. In both cases the detectives have realized what may be the fundamental insight to this dissertation: detectives, the good ones at least, understand that there is one world – not the world of the criminal and the world of the cop, not the world of law and the world of the street. The criminals believe in this dual reality and act to exploit it; however, when the detective collapses the apparent ontological relativity, there is no place for the criminal to hide. I will return to this idea during the discussion of the election of Donald J. Trump and the post-truth era.

The philosophical movement that has done the most to address networks and how they function is Actor-Network-Theory and its leading proponent is Bruno Latour. Additionally, Graham Harman's Heidegger-inspired object-oriented ontology (OOO) has also helped conquer the subject/object divide especially when it comes to the issue of agency, a complex and misunderstood concept thanks to modernist and postmodernist baggage. From the vantage point of modernism, the autonomous individual would face off against the faceless "masses" of "society."[9] From the postmodern perspective, agency was compromised by mediation. The subject was a creation of language as well as culture and "language" and "culture" were mediums that stood in the way of the subject accessing "the real." After the deterministic analysis of B. F. Skinner in psychology and the structural analysis by Foucault in philosophy, there became what Timothy Melley refers to as "agency panic," namely a confusion about the degree of autonomy possessed

by individuals. As opposed to either choosing a passive world against an active subject or a passive subject formed by an active world, object-oriented ontology (OOO) and actor-network theory grant agency to both human and non-human entities alike. In doing so, they attempt to "flatten" out networks as to see the relationships, which are never stable for very long, as the world is always becoming, but are nonetheless useful for providing a causal nexus. As Latour writes,

> Interactions do not resemble a picnic where all the food is gathered on the spot by participants, but rather a reception given by some unknown sponsors who have staged everything down to the last detail—even the place to sit might be already pre-inscribed by some attentive keeper. (166)

In other words, there are elements that subjects bring with them, but there are also elements which determine the way that subjectivity unfolds. Traditionally, the myriad elements determining and being determined would be explained in social sciences under the category of "context." However, as Latour shows, claiming "context" as a causal explanation is question-begging:

> At Context, there is no place to park. From the infant speech act is it really possible to go to the 'structure' of language? From the plaintiff case is there any way to go to a 'system' of language? From the plaintiff case is there any way to go to a 'system' of law? From the floor of the sweatshop is there any canal that goes to a 'capitalist mode of production' or to an 'empire'? From the strained ankle of the patient is there a pathway to lead to the 'nature' of the body? From the ethnographer's notebook is it likely that one will reach the 'culture' of this specific people? As soon as those questions are raised, the answer is an embarrassed 'no, yes, maybe.' (167)

Latour shows that we've been using concepts that are generalized to the point that they conceal as much as they reveal. While I think Latour is correct in this analysis, he makes one comment with which I take slight issue: "Capitalism is certainly the dominant mode of production but no one imagines that there is some *homunculus* CEO in command, despite the fact that many events look like they obey some implacable strategy" (167). I want to contend that there are ways in which networks have been reckoned, particularly in the post 9/11 inter-webbed world, to convince large amounts of people that something like a "homunculus CEO" is absolutely in charge. To be fair, it may not be literally one CEO, but the Internet is full of speculation about New World Orders, flat-earth theories, and 9/11 conspiracies, which postulate there is a small group of actors that are essentially removing agency from the larger population through propaganda and various other means of "thought-control." What is useful about actor-network-theory is it asks a simple but incredibly deconstructive question: in what room does this take place? The absurdity of such a simple question immediately gives way to the absurdity of the original claim: that a group of people could sit down in a room, presumably with a set of PowerPoint slides, dictating the script for the "world" for the next year. There are many problems with such theories, but for this purpose the essential contradiction lies in a paradox of agency: if everyone is being controlled, how can anyone ever know if what they believe is reality is just a symptom of a simulacra? To say this another way, from a phenomenological perspective, how is B.F. Skinner free enough to meaningfully write,

> The hypothesis that man is not free is essential to the application of scientific method to the study of human behavior. The free man who is held responsible for

> the behavior of the external biological organism is only a prescientific substitute for the kinds of causes which are discovered in the course of a scientific analysis (447).

If that statement is itself caused absent of freewill, it has no meaning. For any statement can only have meaning if we believe there is intentionality on both sides of the speech-act, on the parts of both the sender and receiver of the message. The fact that we can choose to believe it suggests that we are not fully determined. For there is an unescapable paradox when the *Atlantic Monthly* claims in the title of an article on free will from June 2016 that "There's No Such Thing as Free Will But We're Better off Believing in it Anyway." Citing work in neuroscience as well as philosophical work by Saul Smilanksy, the article shows that belief in the concept of free will affects the actions of the believers. The article implies that this means free will is a matter of choice. One wonders how one could have the choice of belief if there is no such thing as free will. If free will is an illusion, there is no choice to begin with. What the article is correct about is the fact that beliefs have real consequences, regardless of whether those beliefs are true. For example, as a society, if we choose to believe in a completely deterministic account of agency, the implications to the criminal justice system would be massive. If we think of the criminal justice system as either a system of punishment or rehabilitation, in either sense, we assume that an agent has acted out of accord with the law and this action is something that could, at least potentially, be corrected. However, rather than get burdened with the inside/outside distinction that the free will vs determinism arguments assume, we can navigate the problem by "flattening" the environment and tracing networks. In his book

Object Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything, Graham Harman gives a powerful account that agency is even more complicated than previously thought. Where determinists attempt to reduce agency in order to establish causality, Harman, like Deleuze and Guattari as well as Latour, multiply causality by ascribing agency to all points in the network. Harman lists the first basic principle of OOO: "All objects must be given equal attention, whether they be human, non-human, natural, cultural, real or fictional" (9). Under the subheading "Flat Ontology" Harman, like Friedman and Latour, has changed the central metaphor for thinking about the contemporary world.

Once the decision is made to not ascribe agency to "society" but rather trace relationships, what unfolds is more complicated but also more informative. If we refer to *House of Leaves* and *The Wire*, it is obvious how fruitful this brand of analysis is. *House of Leaves* forces the reader to be an "ANT." For example, the text forces the reader to turn the book in various ways at times, showing the agency of the work itself. The text reveals a story of a house that's bigger on the inside than the outside and as the reader tries to use the book-flap as a bookmark, immediately the realization that the form of the book coincides with the content in the book. After all, a "house of leaves" in reference to Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* is in fact a book. As previously shown, the book forces the reader to constantly turn back and forward to check references as well as to go online to search the references. And when this happens, one is immediately in another network of fans of the novel discussing all the apparent complications. After releasing, *House of Leaves, Only Revolutions, The Fifty Year Sword,* and *The Familiar Vol 1-5*, it is evident that no writer has done as much as Danielewski to overcome the idea that a book is a

"container" for content.[10] Only a theory like Latour's ANT or Harman's OOO can adequately express the power of the objects that Danielewski has constructed.

In a similar fashion, *The Wire* often lets the audience follow an object and in doing so exposes the complexity of the network the show attempts to illuminate. Jagoda writes of the show,

> Agency in this series does not belong to exaggerated melodramatic characters, especially a sovereign protagonist and a corresponding villain. Instead, it becomes distributed among assemblages of distinct actors (both human and nonhuman), unknowable histories, institutions, accidents, and contingencies. Agency is neither celebrated nor romanticized as individual will, for example as the capacity of the exceptional detective to crack open the 'whodunit' that remains a popular television genre. (117)

This assessment of the show explains why actor-network theory and OOO provide a useful framework in refiguring power relationships by not locating all power inside or outside the subject; rather, relationships are gathered from temporal, subjective positions. In other words, standing in a particular place at some specific time brings us into a relationship with a lot of other goings on. As Jagoda writes, "ANT resonates with the project of *The Wire*, which contains an implicit critique of what Latour calls a 'sociological of the social'" (109). Jagoda provides a salient example of the show allowing us to trace an object's path in order to assemble relationships throughout the network in which the characters exist. He discusses a subplot in Season 4, where a ring is followed through Baltimore. What becomes most relevant in the analysis is that "the ring circulates . . . accruing meaning not through some ultimate revelation about its significance but rather because of its role as a facilitator of human associations" (120).

Through the circulation (who gets the ring, who has the power to take it), power relationships are established and the ring "provides the viewer with a stable marker that can be traced across an otherwise changing postindustrial topology" (120).

Just as Detectives Bunk and McNulty traced the path of the bullet in Season 1 to uncover a mystery, the ability to trace networks is the way the viewer establishes meaning in the show. Like *House of Leaves,* the show refuses closure as the last episode could have just as easily been the first episode. However, much like the experience of working through *House of Leaves*, a good detective can solve individual mysteries, but the network in totality remains beyond the purview of any actors. Resulting from this lack of closure and inability to see in total, there has been a continued rising suspicion, since at least Nietzsche's *On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense*, that truth itself was merely a fiction. As we move on to the events of 9/11, I wish to show how this event brings the contemporary anxiety that we are living in a post-truth era.

Amateur Sleuths in the Post-Truth Era: Conspiracy Theories after 9/11

If the Kennedy Assassination is the central event by which we can understand the world of the postmodern detective, 9/11 provides the backdrop for our contemporary sleuth. Whereas our detectives have gradually broadened in type, moving from logical male observers (Dupin, Holmes) to the non-professional housewife Oedipa Maas, the contemporary takes the next logical step after Pynchon: *You* are the detective, or at least *you* could be. In 2006, *Time* magazine put out its annual person-of-the-year edition. This time the cover had a reflective sticker on the cover and the viewer was told that the

person in the reflection was the award winner. Resulting from the fact that hypermodern individuals are "more open and easy to influence, more critical and more superficial, more skeptical and less profound" (Lipovetsky 12), 9/11 becomes a paradigm case in the ways in which truth has become increasingly unstable in the contemporary world, leading to recent works such as Kakutani's *The Death of Truth* and Lee Mcintyre's *The Post Truth Age*. While I do not agree with the conclusions of either work, since both put far too much blame on postmodern philosophy (which says a lot about the networks with which academics often move), I do believe that there has been a decline in a shared, localized background, which stabilized truth through shared practices. Because the Internet exists in a space without directionality, connections form for psychological and sociological reasons, as opposed to geographical reasons, and rarely for purely epistemological reasons.

Perhaps no other event has caused as many various associations across as many networks as 9/11. What I focus on is the way the Internet has proliferated conspiracy theories by allowing participants to attempt to gain autonomy in response to "agency panic." *Time* magazine was correct to point out the power of this new inter-webbed existence, and the way it altered and disrupted traditional pathways of learning is hard to overstate. The library with its logical structure rooted in the Dewey Decimal system would be replaced by the seemingly arbitrary connections of the hyperlink. This created collaborations and an endless amount of content. And simultaneously because of the barrage of content it turned the Internet user into a new kind of detective – one that was free to trace clues along networks in any direction. Regarding 9/11 specifically, new

content creation in the form of documentaries like *Loose Change* and *9/11 In Plane Site* helped revitalize the paranoid, conspiracy-minded underbelly that had been percolating since the Kennedy Assassination. As both DeLillo and Pynchon have shown, conspiratorial thinking leads to camps of knowledge whose networks do not often extend meaningfully into other camps, at least for very long. For this reason, the Internet has exacerbated the rise of camps of knowledge who use the camp as a reinforcement mechanism as opposed to the peer-reviewed process that academics have used for criticism of their work.[11]

While Kennedy Assassination theories were spread along physical networks – people talking to people, sharing writings, and collectively watching the Zapruder film – 9/11 conspiracy theories could move faster along virtual networks. As Martin Randell writes, "One could argue that rather than a collective 'hunger for literature' there has in fact been quite plainly a 'hunger for conspiracy'" (10). He points out that

> the main areas of 9/11 conspiracy theories are: first, the alleged controlled demolition of the towers, including the collapse of WTC Seven that occurred later on September 11; second, the alleged inconsistencies surrounding the attack on the Pentagon fueled largely by the inconclusive CCTV frames released by the FBI; and three, the alleged lacunae in events surrounding the hijack and crash-landing of Flight 93 – in particular the lack of photographic evidence of the plane's fuselage in the impact area. There are many others involving the identities of the hijackers, alleged cover-ups surrounding the American government's involvement and official theories have developed thanks to the growth of Internet forums, blogs and non-mainstream sites but there is also literature of conspiracy that includes works by David Ray Griffin, Jim Marrs, Ian Henshall and Roland Morgan. (10)

David Ray Griffin is a characteristic example of the problem of trying to acquire knowledge from scratch on the Internet. Griffin was a scholar of theology, so despite his degree, he was an amateur. Many others with no background in structural engineering believed that through Google searches they could discover truth that was being hidden from the public. The irony, of course, is that these amateur detectives do not engage in original research; rather, they start from material they have found that is available to anyone. This paradox of agency runs throughout conspiracy theories: on one hand, everyone is being controlled, and on the other hand a group of people can uncover everything. To state this as simply as possible, conspiracy theorists never assume they are affected by "thought-control," "chemtrails," or "the fluoridation of water," often sounding like Colonel Jack Ripper in *Dr. Strangelove*.

Of all the 9/11 conspiracy content that emerged in the years following, none had the impact of Dylan Avery's *Loose Change*. As Randell points out, "it is undoubtedly this film more than any other that has contributed to what has been referred to as the "9/11 Truth Movement" (11). The film argues for a right-wing conspiracy based on a document titled "Project for a New American Century," and culminating in the argument that 9/11 "was essentially an 'inside job'" (11). The film "despite a relatively small budget . . . is extremely well made, utilizing found footage, interview, persuasive music and animation" (11). This is characteristic of the hypermodern amateur. Much like the fan pages of *House of Leaves*, it would be a mistake to think the amateur is a know-nothing. Indeed, these amateurs have an endless amount of facts and have done an endless amount of research. The fault comes in an inability to meaningfully navigate a network as big as

the Internet. As opposed to the vastness of the Internet, the conspiracy theory proposes a solution. George Monbiot claims,

> People believe *Loose Change* because it proposes a closed world: comprehensible, controllable, small. Despite the great evil which runs it, it is more companionable than the chaos which really governs our lives, a world without destination or purpose. (qtd. in Randell 12)

Again, we come back to the desire for closure and are reminded that the point of inquiry is to end inquiry. This is done, as Pierce has shown, by eliminating doubt. One doubt is eliminated, the world no longer resists our understanding and conspiracy theories tend to have the quality of being totalizing explanatory forces. Conspiracy theorists are rarely without a ready-made response for any possible objection. Again, the thoroughness of the amateur detective cannot be underestimated; from the online forums on Danielewski, Wallace, and Pynchon to all matter of conspiracy theories, there is no lack of time and effort. However, because of the popularity of conspiracy theory, along with the viral nature of the Internet, misinformation, whether outright lies or bad research, spreads at an alarming rate. And it turns out, once a story has gained a certain amount of traction, it is simply part of the conversation. For example, because of one deceptive study published in the *Lancet* proclaiming a connection between vaccines and autism, we now have outbreaks of diseases that were thought eradicated. In a networked environment, "truth" does not defeat "fiction;" rather, both narratives form their own assemblages as they move throughout the network, collecting members. As opposed to these two narratives

combating until the most productive story wins out, tribes of members form around competing theories, often unfamiliar with the each other's actual viewpoints.

The belief that truth is now a matter of viewpoint has led to the charge that we are living in a post-truth environment. *The Death of Truth: Notes on Falsehood in the Age of Trump* by *N.Y. Times* book critic Michiko Kakutani and M.I.T's Press's *Post-Truth* by Lee McIntyre are recent examples of books trying to reckon with the 2016 election, which they clearly see as evidence of something going terribly wrong regarding the distribution of credible information. McInyre explains, "the phenomenon of 'post-truth' rocketed to public attention in November 2016 when the Oxford Dictionary named it 2016's word of the year. After seeing a 2,000 percent spike in usage over 2015, the choice seemed obvious" (1). Kakutani points out something similar when she points out,

> Nationalism, tribalism, dislocation, fears of social change, and the hatred of outsiders are on the rise again as people, locked in their partisan silos and filter bubbles, are losing a sense of shared reality and the ability to communicate across social and sectarian lines. (15)

Kakutani's statement that we are losing a "a *sense* of shared reality" is correct in my view; however, I want to stress that we are *not* losing a shared reality. We cannot lose the world even if we tried. What we are losing is the *belief* that we exist in the same world, and the effects of this belief are powerful even though the belief itself is incorrect. Both McIntyre and Kakutani believe that the election of Donald Trump is evidence that something has gone wrong with our understanding of truth, and both lay the blame squarely on the feet of postmodernism, which they view as a position that promotes an

(anti)-epistemology called “relativism” that denies “objective truth.” Kakutani explains that

> relativism has been ascendant since the culture wars began in the 1960s. Back then it was embraced by the New Left eager to expose the biases of Western, bourgeois, male-dominated thinking. . . . Since then, relativistic arguments have been hijacked by the populist Right, including creationists and climate change deniers. (24)

McIntyre goes even further saying, “Some have proposed that the solution to post-truth is to turn to academics. . . . [It] is therefore embarrassing to admit that one of the saddest roots of the post-truth phenomenon seems to have come directly out of the colleges and universities” (6). He concludes the chapter by claiming, “Thus is postmodernism the godfather of post-truth” (150).

When Kakutani connects relativism to the New Left’s attempt to reckon with the realization that history had been written by and for certain groups in power, an idea located a century before in Marx, she misses the point. The New Left was arguing for what Kakutani would call an “objective fact”: that history did not fall out of the sky into a history book. Rather, it was the result of a *history* of interactions and some of those interactions involved the recording of yet other interactions. The argument was based on the scientific method if by method one means to propose a hypothesis--“History has been written in such a way as to favor upper-class, white males”-- and test it by reading a large enough section of the available literature to provide a reasonable test case. After that, see if one finds the bias suggested in the hypothesis. If so, provide evidence to the reader and

publish so others could review the work. “Science” is not an object – it is a way to reckon with objects in particular environments.

McIntyre comes across as, at best, uncertain of the history he is critiquing. McIntyre claims that “the concept of postmodernism has been around for more than a century, and has been applied to art, architecture, music, literature, and a host of other creative endeavors,” but then quotes philosopher Michael Lynch as saying, “pretty much everyone admits that it is impossible to define postmodernism” (124). Following this, he states that when one talks of postmodernism, one is usually referring to “a movement over the last thirty years . . . that grew out of literary criticism in many colleges and universities in the 1980s, as a result of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s influential 1979 book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,*” then locating Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida as part of “postmodernist thought” (124). While Heidegger is without a doubt influential to the postmodern movement, he was not himself postmodernist, and the inclusion without qualification is questionable, but worse is when the timeline of postmodernism gets more confusing when McIntyre states that Nietzsche “wrote one hundred years before postmodernism” (125). If the concept of postmodernism is over a century old, then he’s locating it in the 1910s. However, Nietzsche died in 1900 and his publishing career, excluding the posthumous *The Will to Power*, ended in 1888. If Nietzsche wrote 100 years before postmodernism, now he’s locating postmodernism back to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. This timeline is arbitrary and messy even under the most generous reading.

What I believe McIntyre is trying to establish is that postmodernism denies that there is a world separate from the things we say about the world. To locate that origin with Heidegger is to acknowledge that Heidegger was the first to locate the ontology of the human as always-already *being-in-the-world-towards-death-with-others*. Again, I see nothing relative about that perspective. It is a clear, defensible argument that has unfortunate consequences for people who believe "objective truth" is easy and that perspectives can all resolve into some meta-position that is itself from no perspective. In my estimation, the people who are calling that "relativism" are in fact denying a fact of existence that is as real, if not more real, than things we call "facts": we exist within a certain ontological horizon that is part and parcel of our *Dasein*.

As opposed to arguing for a mythic, simpler time when there was some kind of consensus around truth, as if there were some time when everyone was literally an "enlightenment rationalist" -- a time from which we have all fallen because some bad thoughts were floating around the culture[12], I find it more instructive to look at on-the-ground historical realities that have vehemently challenged the public's ability to believe in standard-bearing institutions such as government, family, the church, and schools. As H. Bruce Franklin pointed out in Chapter 3, it was after Watergate and the Vietnam war that the public trust in government started to erode, not after "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences" was presented at Johns Hopkins in 1966. Works that came out in the 1990s such as Seymour Hersh's *The Dark Side of Camelot* and Noam Chomsky's *Rethinking Camelot: JFK, The Vietnam War, and Political Culture* unmasked

the Kennedy myth, exposing rampant amphetamine use as well as hidden health problems and a sex-addiction much more complicated than the ladies' man myth.

Not only had the political culture led to a decline in trust, but the television media, particularly in the 1980s, started to bring to fore a critique of government as inept as well as a rewriting of the Vietnam era where the protestor and antiwar activist were the impediment to victory. David Sirota details this progression at length:

> In 1975, a Democratic Party emboldened by civil rights, environmental, antiwar, and post-Watergate electoral successes was on the verge of seizing the presidency and a filibuster-proof congressional majority. That year, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* were two of the three top grossing films. . . . Meanwhile, three of the top-rated seven television shows were liberal-themed programs produced by progressive icon Norman Lear. . . . A mere ten years later, Republican Ronald Reagan had just been reelected by one of the largest landslides in history. . . . Two of the top three grossing films were *Back to the Future*, which eulogized the fifties, and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, which blamed sixties antiwar activism for losing the Vietnam conflict. Most telling, *All in the Family's* formula of using sixties-motivated youth and progressivism to ridicule fifties-rooted parents and their traditionalism had been replaced atop the television charts by its antithesis: a *Family Ties*, whose fifties-inspired youth ridicules his parents sixties spirit. (7-8)

Sirota points out other popular shows like *A-Team* and *Knight Rider* both promote a popular theme throughout the period: governments are not useful, and only clandestine individuals who are free to move without the binds of bureaucracy can get things done. This idea reaches its nexus in the show *24*, premiering less than two months after 9/11, showing Kiefer Sutherland as Agent Jack Bauer, who could single-handedly bring down entire terrorist networks, but often having to bypass "the law" in order to get things done.

Again, a single agent, making willful choices, is the antidote to getting around bureaucrats.

On top of our popular entertainments attempting to reckon with a Vietnam syndrome, I wish to interrogate two direct quotations from political figures that have done much to undermine the public's faith. These statements are often taken as "right-wing" postmodernism and evidence that the fault lies in our philosophers. However, I wish to argue, that something much simpler is at hand: we are listening to what Henry Frankfurt refers to as *bullshit* and we are trying to pretend that it is philosophy. To use a colloquial expression from World War II, we don't know how to tell shit from Shinola.

The first, a conversation between *New York Times* reported Ron Suskind and an anonymous aid believed to be Karl Rove:

> The aide said that guys like me were "in what we call the reality-based community," which he defined as people who "believe that solutions emerge from your judicious study of discernible reality." I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. "That's not the way the world really works anymore," he continued. "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you're studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do."

Rove's statement is exactly the sort of thing that the conspiracy minded enjoy. As discussed in Chapter 2, knowledge, to be authentic to the conspiracy-theorist, must be clandestine. Whatever "most" believe, by definition, cannot be the truth. Whatever is printed by "the media," always conceived of as a monolith, is never what's really going on. Mirroring this rhetorical move but without Rove's locution, Kellyanne Conway said

when questioned about Sean Spicer's account of the size of President Trump's inaugural crowd that, "You're saying it's a falsehood. And they're giving -- Sean Spicer, our press secretary -- gave alternative facts." So, are we back in our postmodern world or worlds? Absolutely not. There is a difference between a serious position and "bullshit."

Frankfurt says of the bullshitter,

> [He] may not deceive us, or even intend to do so, either about facts or about what he takes the facts to be. What he does necessarily attempt to deceive us about is his enterprise. His only indispensably distinctive characteristic is that in a certain way he misrepresents what he is up to. This is the crux of the distinction between him and the liar. Both he and the liar represent themselves falsely as endeavoring to communicate the truth. The success of each depends upon deceiving us about that. But the fact about himself that the liar hides is that he is attempting to lead us away from a correct apprehension of reality; we are not to know that he wants us to believe something he believes to be false. The fact about himself that the bullshitter hides . . . is that the truth-values of his statements are of no central interest to him. (53-55)

I believe Frankfurt's account explains the Bush administration's statements about WMD's and torture, wiretapping, and danger inherent to us in America as well as the Trump administration's constant efforts to hijack news cycles, constantly confusing the signal and the noise until there is no distinction.

However, it is important to remember that the post-truth movement, as it plays out in the popular culture, is real in the sense that people act and talk like there are "Two Americas." People talk in such a way as to confuse the concept of belief and truth. For example, people often say things like "Well that's your truth, but it's not mine," which is exactly the sort of statement that leads one to believe we are in a relativistic nightmare. However, blaming statements like that on postmodernism, is exactly like blaming them

on string-theory, or other multiple-world theories in speculative physics. No one seems to blame physics for any of these ambiguities vis a vis reality, yet even a cursory glance at Brian Green's *The Fabric of The Cosmos* or *The Elegant Universe* are clear indications that physics is no longer certain of what is "out there" any more than philosophy or religion.

To sum up, the contemporary world is a world where both objects and subjects have agency along networks. These networks must be traced as opposed to explained by generalized concepts if there is any hope in understanding the worlding of the contemporary. While the concept of truth is not static, it is traceable; however, like everything else, time prevents any concept from working permanently in an impermanent world. *House of Leaves* shows the problem of trying to find knowledge in a networked world where origins and expertise are hard to define, leading to fears of an unknowable world. However, *The Wire* illustrates that it is in fact possible to solve cases as long as one behaves like an ANT. Resulting from the confusion in how networks function, many critics have become concerned that there is a lack of belief in truth. While I agree that these sentiments are articulating a sense of loss in the culture, I believe that loss is in the faith we placed in institutions, knowingly or not, to make us feel stable and at-home in the world. Without a stable, localized environment, grounded in localized practices, we mortals are losing a sense of meaning once promised by presence of the gods, who, as Heidegger has pointed out, have fled.

As I turn to the conclusion, I briefly address the novels *The Feral Detective* and *The City and The City* before returning to Poe's "The Purloined Letter" in order to argue

that what sustains our “multiple worlds,” our “Two Americas,” and our concerns about relativism are, in fact, our beliefs in multiple worlds. If we can alter this belief, I wish to suggest that we can realize that we in fact live in one world where a good detective can, by being a good ANT, locate truths and solve cases. Finally, I conclude by dealing with the concept of truth directly, ground truth in our being-in-the-world-with-others to finally close the case, in hoping, like all good detectives, to finally be done.

Notes

[1] See Sherry Turkle's *Being Alone Together*: *Why We Expect More Out of Technology and Less Out of Each Other.* Basic Books, 2011.

[2] I would argue that *Looney Tunes* is the most culturally significant piece of postmodernism in the 20th century whose widespread effects have yet to be taken seriously critically. Most people do not read Barth and Derrida. Everyone knows Bugs Bunny.

[3] See Heidegger's "The Thing," from *Poetry, Language, and Thought* for an analysis of the shrinking of distances and times in the postmodern world.

[4] Danielewski performs a similar task in his follow up novel *Only Revolutions* in which the book itself, a road story told from alternating perspectives, causes the reader to turn the book over to the point where it symbolically becomes the steering wheel of the car.

[5] For Merleau-Ponty "the flesh" is not the same as one's physical body. "The flesh" is the way in which bodies come to assemble and extend themselves in networks.

[6] *Dasein* is Heidegger's term for what human beings fundamentally are. They are there-beings – always-already situated in a world with an orientation towards what one cares about.

[7] It is worth noting that three of the most significant "systems novels" of this period *Mason and Dixon*, *Infinite Jest*, and *House of Leaves* all have endless amounts of commentary from fan pages. The fiction of Pynchon, Wallace, and Danielweski more so than other writers have produced huge networks of amateurs and professionals working together to solve mysteries within the texts.

[8] I'm indebted to Donald Davidson's principle of triangulation throughout this analysis.

[9] For a detailed account of the rise of paranoia regarding loss of subjective power by the autonomous "masses" or "public," see Timothy Melley's *Empire of Conspiracy* pp. 1-45.

[10] Thought he is not the only writer to make significant contributions in this area, David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* with the use of endnotes and Jonathan Safran Foer's cut-up *Tree of Codes* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* with the flip book of the "falling man" falling upwards come to mind.

[11] Often "The Sokal Hoax" is mentioned as proof that postmodern philosophy is nonsensical, but it should be noted that the journal in which the paper was published, *Social Text*, did not peer-review it.

[12] The fact that these ideas could move around the culture would only prove that the world is networked. In trying to stabilize truth, critics of post-war philosophy often end up proving their case more than they realize.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: LIVING IN TWO SEPARATE WORLDS: *THE FERAL DETECTIVE, THE CITY AND THE CITY*, AND THE PROBLEM OF RELATIVISM

In writing about detective fiction, one becomes a detective, constantly on the hunt for texts revealing something fundamentally instructive about the nature of truth. Jonathan Lethem's *The Feral Detective* and China Mieville's *The City and the City* prove essential in leading to the understanding that "objectivity is intersubjectivity," allowing the problem of relativism to be solved and this work to reach closure. Much like the possible worlds of the postmodern and the "cultural divide" that produces "Two Americas," leading to conversations about "post-truth," "fake news," and relativism, these novels present worlds divided by seemingly insurmountable ontological differences. The *Feral Detective* is about present-day America, specifically the post-2016 world after the election of President Trump. Chapter 4 begins with Phoebe Siegler, the protagonist, claiming as much:

> Blame the election. I'd been working for the Great Gray News organization, in a hard-won, lowly position meant to guarantee me a life spent rising securely through the ranks. This was the way it was supposed to go, before I'd bugged out. I'd done everything right, even my male friends who hated her, as a cap on the barking madness of the world. Now she took walks in the hills around Chappaqua, and I'd checked into the Doubletree a mile west of Upland California. (1)

After the election, Phoebe quits her job, saying "I blamed my city for producing and being unable to defeat the monster in the tower" (20). The book presents "The Cultural Divide" or "The Two Americas" through two opposing groups of people who have decided to live off-the-grid in the desert near Los Angeles: the Bears, hypermasculine and containing only men, and the Rabbits, nurturing, consisting mostly of women and children. Phoebe's adventure begins when her friend disappears, forcing her to hire feral detective Charles Heist, who was the first-born of the Bears, to search for her friend who has potentially been abducted by The Bears. While the two groups live in seemingly incommensurate worlds, one character, Detective Heist, moves productively between the worlds, suggesting the distance "between" them may be more imagined than real. Resulting from his ability to shift ethical relationships depending on his situation, Heist finds Phoebe's friend and brings the case to closure.

In *The City and The City*, physical and metaphysical distinctions between worlds are even more pronounced than in *The Feral Detective*, where everyone at least agrees on the physical space they occupy. In Mieville's novel, twin cities are "crosshatched" at places, meaning they occupy the same geophysical space but not the same existential reality. Inhabitants of the two cities Beszel and Ul-Quomo are not even allowed to see into the other city. Rather, each must actively "unsee" their neighbors, a law impossible to conform to perfectly, suggesting again that the "space" between these worlds, like the space between the Bears and Rabbits, may not be as big as imagined. Everyone in both cities is aware that the two cities are not *actually* different places geophysically; in fact, at certain points both cities occupy the same "grosstopic" space, the term the novel uses to

mean physical location. What they do not *seem* to share is culture or language, and for this reason, it *seems* as though they exist independently. There are consequences if the spaces are attempted to be traversed. If a person from Beszel even stares at Ul-Quomo (or vice versa) they can be abducted by a seemingly supernatural force called "Breach." Breach are a police force that maintain the separation between the two cities. Their power, much like Big Brother from *1984*, is in the surveillance state they create. Signs around both cities say of Breach, "They look exactly like you." Like Pynchon's Oedipa Mass, the detective ends up among paranoid, conspiracy-minded people. In creating a surveillance state, the belief that there are in fact two metaphysically different cities is reinforced because there are serious consequences for not believing in the separation. Once the inhabitants of the cities believe in the separation, they will act as though they are separate and essentially create the conditions for the outcome: a cultural divide. What is essential here is that "belief about belief" is not simply another postmodern "meta" move among others. Belief about belief is at the center of all communicative acts in the first place, as the point of communication is to understand what is being said now so that I will be able to understand what is said in the future. However, if I "believe" the other with whom I speak is radically other, I will not grant the rationality necessary to be able to understand what he or she is getting at when speaking. Essentially, I "understand" another when I can anticipate their response. This is, of course, like the boy from "The Purloined Letter" Poe tells us about in the game of odds and evens, who is key to understanding why Dupin succeeds where the Prefect fails. While this may sound highly theoretical, anyone who ever played baseball is thoroughly familiar with this

psychological conundrum: “He thinks I think he’s going to throw a fastball, so I’ll bet he throws a curveball,” and so forth. When involved in this kind of thinking, the *only* thing that is important is what is going to happen next. The past is only useful to the extent that it can be predictive about the future.

In both Lethem and Mieville’s novels, the detective can productively exist in radically different contexts because he understands that while locations and contexts may be relative to a situation, all situations take place in one world people simultaneously share and produce. In both novels, the detectives solve cases by meaningfully traversing “worlds” where others fail. In order to make sense of situations, the detectives practice what Donald Davidson will call “interpretive charity,” which entails starting from the assumption that people are all responding to the same world, as opposed to believing the world is made up of diverse groups living in incommensurate “worlds.” Those with the latter beliefs are unsuccessful in their interpretations because they cannot properly interpret clues. Both novels work through the problems with the belief, so common today and central to this conclusion, that reality is divided into two worlds.

These novels are the final clues revealing the essential point regarding the works analyzed in this dissertation: the reason certain detectives have been successful while others have failed is that successful detectives are able to move in and out of different ethical and rhetorical contexts to take into account what others think of as different

worlds, shifting their relationships in order to obtain equilibrium, much like a gyroscope, whereas the characters who are unable to do this are unable to decipher what is really going on. The result is our most unsuccessful detectives are only able to pile up possibilities, but these possible worlds never translate to an actual world where planned and meaningful action can be taken. For example, DeLillo's Nicholas Branch, as opposed to producing a history of the JFK assassination, has, instead, produced something more akin to Borges's library where the problem of knowledge is not too little information but too much. This is the same problem the reader encounters when trying to decipher meaning in *House of Leaves* by following footnotes in hopes of coming up with a coherent, cohesive reading. This process mirrors the daily of life of those surfing the Internet in hopes of finding the definitive answer to any question.

However, in looking at detectives who were successful at bringing a case to closure, there is a commonality that has profound implications for how we continue to think about truth and meaning in the world at large. The successful detectives operate off what Davidson refers to as "triangulation" and "interpretative charity." In doing so, the successful detectives are able not only to understand the past, but to anticipate the future, much like a successful hitter in baseball. Thus, our unsuccessful detectives are rendered ineffective because they assume insurmountable ontological problems, which because of their assumptions create the conditions for the impossibility of finding a solution.

Davidson explains triangulation by specifying that

> The basic idea is that our concept of objectivity – our idea that our thoughts may or may not correspond to the truth – is an idea that we would not have if it weren't

> for interpersonal relations. In other words, objectivity is intersubjectivity. (Kent 7-8)

To clarify, he notes that "the idea of triangulation is this: if you have two people both reacting to stimuli in the world and to each other – that is, to each other's reactions to the stimuli – you've completed a triangle which locates the common stimulus" (8). This idea of triangulation is paramount to the work of our successful sleuths, as they understand events unfolding in a world that is made up of ever-shifting relationships. The ability to stabilize their field of concern around a common stimulus allows them to act in the moment, as opposed to acting on preconceived stereotypes as our most unsuccessful detectives fall prey. To use Davidson's language again, the successful detective can shift meaningfully from "prior theories" to "passing theories." As Davidson explains in an interview with Thomas Kent,

> the distinction between prior and passing theories is just the difference between what one anticipates that somebody will mean by something he or she says and what one decides was meant after one is exposed to an utterance. Whenever you talk to somebody, you have an unformulated theory of what that person would mean if he or she were to utter certain words. For example, you would know roughly what you yourself would mean if you were to utter these same words. However, plenty of things may tip you off that your interpretation is not the right interpretation. On occasion, someone's words don't mean what you would have meant by those words. (Kent 8)

In order to move between prior and passing theories, one must practice what Davidson calls "interpretive charity," which has nothing to do with being nice, but rather in assuming a basic ontological standing of one's interlocuter. Most importantly, one must believe the person one is talking to is rational and that, in general, most of his or her ideas

hold together logically. While of course some ideas will be inconsistent, the point is that we are only able to notice inconsistencies because of the background of consistency. This attitude forms an incredibly productive relationship between beliefs, desires, and actions, as well as between meaning, belief, and referent. If one can stabilize two of the three figures, the other can be solved. For example, as we turn to "The Purloined Letter" as a case study, we will see how Dupin locates the letter because he knows the desires of the Minister as well as the Minister's beliefs about the Prefect's beliefs and vice versa.

Case Study: "The Purloined Letter"

Poe's "The Purloined Letter" provides an excellent platform to test Davidson's theories. In doing so, I will show how Poe's original creation, the overly-rational August C. Dupin is actually able to reveal the essential relationship between (inter)subjectivity and objectivity which will be key in bypassing the central fear of the contemporary age regarding truth – that it no longer exists. This is accomplished through comparing Dupin with his foil, the Prefect, whose failure at solving the case reveals barriers causing him to fail to see what is right in front of him.

In Poe's text there is a lot of thinking in order to produce little action. But the thinking reveals much. The thinking centers around the purloined letter, which serves as the common object that allows for us to triangulate in Davidson's sense. Because actions are related to the beliefs that cause them, it is possible to examine the way beliefs, true or false, have real consequences. When the prefect first informs Dupin of the case, Dupin suggests perhaps the problem is that the case is too simple, rather than too complex as the

Prefect supposes. The Prefect will not hear of this. He believes that the letter must be well hidden, so when the holder of the letter goes out at night, he meticulously searches every inch of the Minister's residence where he believes something could be hidden because that is the only action his beliefs allow.

Dupin's insight that is lost on the Prefect is his ability to imagine the world from perspectives other than his own – to identify with another's perspective. Dupin understands that other's beliefs are related to their actions and desires, a point I will elaborate on momentarily. Another factor at work is that Dupin can judge a situation on its individual merits, being more in tuned with the Greek notion of kairos, while the Prefect thinks rigidly and wants a solution to apply to all situations. I do not want to suggest that Poe has simply been correct regarding truth the whole time, for he assumes a rationality to the world that is contested in Chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation; however, his insight regarding the identification of other's beliefs in order to understand their actions is essential to this conclusion.

When the Prefect first mentions the case to Dupin, he claims, "The fact is, the business is *very* simple indeed and I make no doubt that we manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively *odd*" (185). Dupin replies that "Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," to which the Prefect exclaims, "What nonsense you *do* talk," dismissing the viewpoint out of hand (186). What happens is the Prefect's belief in complexity leads to his attempting a very complex and repeated search of the Minister's house when he leaves regularly at night. However, the Prefect cannot imagine the

solution being anything other than an ordinary theft where the goal would be to go to the greatest depths possible to conceal the letter in question by hiding it out of the way, somewhere no one would think to look.[1] This is evident when the detective explains "We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police-agent, such a thing as a *'secret'* drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a *'secret'* drawer to escape him in a search of this kind" (188). The Prefect is operating off a platonic notion of "Criminal" where this class of people behaves in a regular and predictable way that can be known in advance from the fact that they are criminals in the first place. The prefect has a "prior theory" but it cannot turn into a "passing theory." However, Dupin sees the flaw, claiming "The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it" (191). And he continues, "The measures, then were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case and to the man" (191). Dupin understands that he must address the man in his specific circumstances, not simply as a criminal.

The Greek notion of *kairos* helps us understand an event in its specific, unique context. Thomas Rickert points out that in classical discourse, kairos is defined dozens of ways; however, he argues "that in most of the scholarship . . . kairos is understood more or less in line with the customary meaning taken from ancient Greeks: 'the right or opportune time to do something'" (75). This concept differentiates Dupin from the Prefect in explaining why the Prefect, with his pre-conceived notions of how criminals

must act, is blind to the importance of context. By understanding the context in which he finds himself, Dupin can identify with the motives of the Minister, much like the boy playing odds and evens, and thus solve the case. As Rickert says, "A context or situation is crucial to the appearance of kairos, and this understanding of context must in turn be simultaneously entwined with and transcendent to the rhetor" (75). To use a musical example, this is why a good jazz musician must take into account not only the tune, but the interpretations of the tune by the other players as well as the ambience in the room simultaneously in order to respond in the moment, that is to say, to play jazz. Thus "*Kairos* is . . . a concept integral for understanding subjectivity not as something individual, strictly speaking, but rather as something fundamentally dispersed and connected to various aspects of the external environment" (77). This rethinking of subjectivity will be key in overcoming the fear that we are living in a post-truth age.

In the original explanation of how the letter was stolen, we can observe how the letter serves as the third point in the triangle, the common cause, between any two observers, allowing each to understand the motives of others, even though no words are spoken. In examining this interaction, it can be shown how intersubjectivity is what allows for meaningful and productive action. In the original scene described, there are three characters interacting around the letter. The Prefect explains that a lady in the royal apartments receives a letter which has information that will be detrimental if a man, presumably her husband, finds out about it. (The letter appears to relate to a romantic affair, though it is not stated.) When the man enters the room, the lady quickly puts down the letter. Now the Minister, who will steal the letter, notices that she is concealing the

letter from the man. He then assumes the contents of the letter and takes the document in plain sight without fear of recourse. The Prefect explains that "Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage, who stood at her elbow" (187). Dupin sees the importance of belief in understanding the scenario saying, "You have precisely what you demand to make the ascendency complete – the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber" (187). If not for the actual letter, the entire network that leads to understanding would collapse. The letter and its placement on the table upon the entrance of the man are the common "cause" to use Davidson's phrase, which is useful here as it implies both the physical letter and the web of ideas around the letter that both the Minister and the Lady share. Since the Minister sees that what caused her to put the letter down was the appearance of the man who entered, he knows that there must be a motivation to hide the contents of the letter from her husband. This means that he now knows attention cannot be drawn to the letter. Even without having full knowledge of the contents of the letter, the Minister knows enough to know that it is valuable. He can thus take the letter even though "Its rightful owner saw, but of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage who stood at her elbow" (187). Now both her and the robber know about the beliefs of each other. Because the robber believed she needed to conceal, he knew he could take it without consequence. This knowledge can only be accumulated because both the Minister and the lady assume each are acting as rational agents according to their best interests, allowing for both to make accurate assumptions about each's motives. What

allows for this is neither subjective nor objective; rather, it is the relationship between the subjects and the object.

The Prefect is the one who originally establishes these relationships. He further deduces that since no consequences that would have occurred had the letter gotten out occurred, the letter must be in the Prefect's quarters as the letter only has value to the degree that it can be produced as needed. The Prefect is very good at deduction through triangulation; however, what he fails at is interpretative charity and this is the difference that allows Dupin to succeed ultimately. The Prefect has a filter that will not allow him to see the Minister as a unique locus of desires, beliefs, and actions. Instead he must work to erase the particularities so he can address him as a class, "Criminal," as opposed to an individual interacting with the world for specific, not generalized reasons. This appreciation of context and the ability to move from a "prior" to a "passing" theory of communication is the key to Dupin's success, allowing him to discover truth by appreciating intersubjectivity.

Intersubjectivity: Towards a Rooted Cosmopolitism

Traditionally, subjectivity has been opposed to objectivity, and in most cases the former is associated with "opinions," things that come from subjects, and the latter with "the way things are," as in *the table is there whether or not you believe in it*. However, after the rise of postmodernism and the belief that reality was mediated through language, how could anyone be sure exactly what was there in common for everyone? Perhaps as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis had suggested, there was a linguistic relativity that could not

be overcome? We see present-day conversations everywhere about "cultural appropriation," and "inclusive language," as well as discussions of "privilege," regarding who should be allowed to render what complaints. These examples suggest that rather than inhabiting one shared world, we live in enclaves, perhaps sharing "grosstopic" space, to use the term from *The City and The City*, but not ontological reality. How many students upon learning about some of these ideas posit a form of this question: maybe what you see as red is not what I see as red, thus falling prey to a skepticism that often leads to the perverse truth-claims, "There are no absolutes," and "Everything is relative." However, these objections to a shared reality have been answered similarly by two different and often opposing philosophical schools – schools themselves that often see the other as living in an alternative world – Continental philosophy and American pragmaticism. From the continental side, existential phenomenologists like Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty have done much to combat the theory that we are isolated Cartesian subjects who bump up against objects in the world. On the other side of the pond, American Pragmatists, from William James to Donald Davidson[2] also refuted the Cartesian *cogito* as foundational for rational thought, similarly challenging the traditional split between self and world, subject and object.

In his essay, "The Primacy of Perception," Merleau-Ponty explains the intersubjective nature of perception through his phenomenological account of being-in-the-world. He begins with concepts Heidegger outlined in his analytic analysis of *Dasein* in *Being and Time* and applies it more specifically to one's body:

> This subject, which takes a point of view, is my body as the field of perception and action [*pratique*] – in so far as my gestures have certain reach and circumscribe as my domain the whole group of objects familiar to me. Perception is here understood as a reference to a whole which can be grasped, in principle, only through certain of its parts or aspects. The perceived thing is not an ideal unit in the possession of the intellect, like a geometrical notion, for example; it is rather a totality open to a horizon of an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another according to a given style, which defines the object in question. (16)

The idea of views blending and defining the object in question is very much what Davidson means when he suggests "communication begins where causes converge" ("Coherence" 318). Merleau-Ponty provides an example to illustrate this point:

> If a friend and I are standing before a landscape, and if I attempt to show my friend something which I see and which he does not yet see, we cannot account for the situation by saying that I see something in my own world and that I attempt, by sending verbal messages, to give rise to an analogous perception in the world of my friend. There are not two numerically distinct worlds plus a mediating language which alone would bring us together. (17)

The idea that there neither is nor need be a mediating language to connect separate worlds is key to resolving the apparent ontological disparities discussed in *The Feral Detective* and *The City and City* specifically and the problem of relativism generally. In his interview with Thomas Kent, Davidson says, "it's only because we share a world with others that we can get the hang of what they're talking about" (7), the implications of which result in the logical conclusion that Merleau-Ponty comes to when he claims, "There is – and I know it very well if I become impatient with him – a kind of demand that what I see be seen him by him also" (17). Existential phenomenology and American pragmatism both share the insight that there is a demand for a common world. While to

many, and this is obvious when you talk to someone not familiar with the idea of "world*s*" in the first place, it goes without saying that there is one world, the implications are often lost as to what this would really mean:

> For if we have but one world, then all the familiar divisions that imply the existence of *more* than one world operating according to one set of laws are obviously false. When we add these divisions up – heaven and earth, nature and culture, space and existential space, factual world and fictional world, scientific world and life world, noumenal world and phenomenal world, Ideal world and real world, and so forth – it seems more obvious that people have seldom truly accepted there being one reality. In fact, to most people, once the claim's ramifications are spelled out, the belief that there is but one world seems positively strange. (Yarbrough 170)

As Yarbrough points out, "Certainly, people who accept the divisions listed above and other divisions like them tend to believe there is one 'true' world lying beneath if not beyond the 'appearances' of a world we actually deal with" (170). Perhaps no better linguistic evidence of our metaphysical predilections is the way the word "real" is used to modify words that need no help. For example, in expressions like "the real truth," "the real issue," or "the real problem," the Platonic residue in our thoughts comes to the fore. In each case, the suggestion is the "real" exists behind or beyond the appearance. Believing that locating meaning is itself an exercise in detective work, one that requires a sophisticated decoding system in advance, creates the conditions that allow for the divisions disruptive to sharing a common world.

One excellent example of the difference between the platonic beliefs people have *about* the world and the way they exist *in* the world occurred to Bruno Latour, who, as

explained in Chapter 3, has often been held accountable as one of the principle architects of the post-truth world people often presuppose today.

As I showed in the last chapter, the most popular recent accusations concerning the "post-truth" phenomenon are directed at academics, like Latour, who let this whole "let-everyone-get-into-the-conversation thing" get a little too out of hand, trading quality for quantity regarding arguments. I've shown why the argument that postmodern philosophers are somehow to blame for this is intellectually lazy and unsatisfying as a conclusion. Nonetheless, something is awry and Kakutani is correct to suggest that there has been a rise of nationalism and that rise has led to camps of knowledge that are seemingly incommensurate. These "incommensurable worlds," represented so well in *The Feral Detective* and *The City and The City,* have led to the charge of relativism. A story in the *New York Times* magazine is telling of the degree that Kakutani and McIntyre's beliefs vis-a-vis postmodernism have been well networked themselves:

> In the summer of 1996, during an international anthropology conference in southeastern Brazil, Bruno Latour, France's most famous and misunderstood philosopher, was approached by an anxious-looking developmental psychologist. The psychologist had a delicate question, and for this reason he requested that Latour meet him in a secluded spot — beside a lake at the Swiss-style resort where they were staying. Removing from his pocket a piece of paper on which he'd scribbled some notes, the psychologist hesitated before asking, "Do you believe in reality?"

To be clear, the psychologist believed he could ask a question and be understood by Latour. He believed he could arrange a meeting in a secluded spot, which assumes a boatload about a shared sense of space and time, and yet he could still ask earnestly if

Latour believes in the reality that has clearly been assumed to arrange the meeting in the first place. From a phenomenological or pragmatic point of view, the question is absurd the moment it is uttered. Latour himself realizes the seriousness of the problem and addresses it in his work *Down to Earth*. Far from sounding like a relativist, Latour writes "the absence of a common world we can share is driving us crazy" (10).

Rather than seeing the 2016 election as a postmodern "event" like Kakutani and McIntyre, Latour believes it is rather the logical outgrowth of the lack of a common world. Believing that this can be located in the effects of changing climate, Latour argues,

> Without the idea that we have entered into a New Climatic Regime, we cannot understand the explosion of inequalities, the scope of deregulation, the critique of globalization, or, more importantly, the panicky desire to return to the old protections of the nation-state – a desire that is identified, quite inaccurately, with the "rise of populism." (*Down to Earth* 10)

Finally, Latour says, "to resist this loss of a common orientation, we shall have to come down to earth; we shall have to *land* somewhere" (10). Making a similar point regarding 9/11, Art Spiegelman, in an autobiographical panel from *In The Shadows of No Towers*, says, "Y'know how I've called myself a 'rootless cosmopolitan,' equally homeless anywhere on the planet? I was wrong . . . 'rooted' cosmopolitan" (4). I suggest that this notion of a "rooted cosmopolitanism" is one we should adopt as we strive for productive thinking in a tension filled, hypermodern environment. "Rooted" suggests having an environment; there is no such thing as having a "worldview" in the sense that it would be a view from nowhere, a view nobody has. Of course, people certainly construct

worldviews in the sense of ideologies, but these worldviews often become more predictive than descriptive. That is to say, what I believe in advance of an interaction can and often does determine the possibilities of the interaction.

Contemporary America is often described[3] like the crosshatched locations in *The City and The City*, geographically proximate but ideologically incommensurable. From a generational point of view, this phenomenon has intensified since 24-hour cable news, during the first Gulf War, through the Tea Party and Occupy movements, and recently into the horrific events at Charlottesville, the Orlando Nightclub, and the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston to name but a few. The predicament can feel hopeless, as communication seems impossible, for it is unclear how to establish a ground that would allow for productive communication. To give a very real example, how can one act to prevent the consequences of climate change if the opposition believes that the science is a hoax and the problem is not real in the first place? There is no common ground between these two positions. However, there is hope, as the actual distance between two interlocuters may be closer than the perceived difference. In two highly influential essays, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" and "On the Very Possibility of a Conceptual Scheme," Davidson explains how the beliefs in perceived ontological differences can in turn cause those divisions that make productive communications impossible.

While I do not believe postmodern philosophers are to blame for the 2016 election or climate denial, at the same time it is essential to understand why postmodern philosophy cannot bridge the gap we so desperately need to close in order to connect

people who define themselves tribally. Whether centered around gender, race, nationality, or sexual orientation, today's identity politics have done much to convince us that unless we share certain traits beforehand, we cannot understand each other. This leads to questions of who has standing to talk about what, which in turn leads to discourse that, like early attempts at flight, simply cannot get off the ground. The conversations cannot get off the ground because of a lack of perceived commonality. While this may feel like a new problem, the belief that reality is always-already filtered by conceptual schemes is a legacy we have from Immanuel Kant's transcendental categories.[4] This belief that we need a shared conceptual scheme to begin communication is itself the belief that prevents communication. Again, beliefs – even if they are false concerning the world – are real in the sense that they have real and predictable consequences. The two grounding concepts that postmodernism believed essential to share beforehand are language and culture, which function in the same way, as a medium between the speakers and the world. If this were the case, the only way to "share a world" would be to "share a framework." However, Davidson points out that a language is not a medium between the speaker and the world. Language is simply a way to gesture in order to get around in the world. Davidson explains,

> Bringing in grammars, theories, or frameworks more general than, and prior to, prior theories, just emphasizes the problem I originally presented in terms of the contrast between prior theories and passing theories. Stated more broadly now, the problem is this: what interpreter and speaker share, to the extent that communication succeeds, is not learned and so is not a language governed by rules or conventions known to speaker and interpreter in advance: but what the speaker and interpreter know in advance is not (necessarily) shared, and so is not

> a language governed by shared rules or conventions. ("A Nice Derangement" 264)

Davidson concludes this line of thinking with a profound announcement and appeal:

> The problem we have been grappling with depends on the assumption that communication by speech requires that speaker and interpreter have learned or somehow acquired a common method or theory of interpretation – as being able to operate on the basis of shared conventions, rules, or regularities. The problem arose when we realized that no method or theory fits the bill. The solution to the problem is clear. In linguistic communication nothing corresponds to a linguistic competence as described . . . I conclude that there is no such thing as a language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. (265)

If we can see that "language," seen as a structure that must be learned in advance in order to achieve successful communication, is not real, it is only a small step before we make the same deconstructive move about conceptual schemes in general, specifically for this conclusion, the conceptual scheme of "Culture."[5] This has productive consequences as

> the chief distinction of this new mode of study is that it does not think of 'language' or 'culture' in distinction from 'things' or 'nature' but erases, as Donald Davidson put it, the distinction between linguistic ability and our 'ability to get around in the world generally.' (Yarbrough 10)

In his essay "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," Davidson addresses what he refers to as the "third dogma of empiricism," namely, the split between form and content. Davidson shows the inherent paradoxes that accompany the belief that experiences are filtered through a scheme. The first two dogmas of empiricism were tackled by W.V.O Quine's highly influential "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in which he

argued against Kant's analytic/synthetic distinction and philosophical reductionism. Through a simple example, it is easy to see how seductive the third dogma of empiricism can be. A former philosophy professor of mine, explaining the difference between David Hume and Kant, provided the following statement. "You can't play poker unless you already know how to make a hand." The point was that according to Hume, one was simply bombarded with sense-data; however, without some mechanism to sort the data, it would be meaningless. Without the conceptual scheme organizing content there would be no meaningful reality. Davidson explains the problem this way,

> Conceptual schemes, we are told, are ways of organizing experience; they are systems of categories that give form to the data of sensation; they are points of view from which individuals, cultures, or periods survey the passing scene. There may be no translating one scheme to another, in which case the beliefs, desires, hopes and bits of knowledge that characterize one person have no true counterparts for the subscriber to another scheme. Reality itself is relative to a scheme: what counts as real in one system may not in another. (Davidson, "On the Very Idea" 185)

The implications of this idea should be terrifying as it would mean we are all imprisoned in little cultural worlds. However,

> the dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claims of dramatic incompatibility. (184)

Much like in Merleau-Ponty's example of two friends staring at the mountain, one friend may enjoy the view and the other may think only of the lurking danger of bears, but this

can only happen if they both agree they are in fact staring at a mountain. As opposed to arguing that shifts in conceptual perspectives lead to shifts in worldviews, Davidson suggests that,

> What sounded at first like a thrilling discovery – that truth is relative to a conceptual scheme – has not so far been shown to be anything more than the pedestrian and familiar fact that the truth of a sentence is relative to (among other things) the language to which it belongs,

and concludes from this that "Instead of living in different worlds, Kuhn's scientists may . . . be only words apart" (189). If people are not divided by "worlds," but only "words" and by "words" we include gestures of any symbolic variety, differences thought insurmountable may turn out to not be problems in the first place.

Since, like Borges' library, there is not a conceptual scheme that gives the correct view to all conceptual schemes, picking the right filter is not the solution; rather, it is the problem in the first place. Davidson refers to his solution as "radical interpretation" and through examining this technique, I will argue for a more stable, productive, and locatable ground than conceptual relativism: being-in-the-world grounded in "the flesh" in Merleau-Ponty's sense. Being-in-the-world is rooted in bodily existence, not the ideas of a floating, decontextualized mind. The "flesh" is the connective tissue between the seer and that which is seen. Merleau-Ponty elaborates,

> We understand then why we see the things themselves, in their places, where they are, according to their being which is indeed more than their being-perceived . . . It is that the thickness of flesh between the seer and the thing is constitutive for the thing of its visibility as for the seer of his corporeity; it is not an obstacle between them, it is their means of communication. (*Visible* 135)

While Merleau-Ponty's concept is illusive as it is centered on the "play" between the seer and seen, he gives an analogy reminiscent of attempts to define God by way of negative theology. I quote this passage at length, as the explanation, common to phenomenological interpretations, resists pithiness:

> The flesh is not matter. . . Nor is the visible (the things as well as my own body) some "psychic" material that would be – God knows how – brought into being by the things factually existing and acting on my factual body. In general, it is not a fact or a sum of facts "material" or "spiritual." Nor is it a representation for a mind: a mind could not be captured by its own representations; it would rebel against this insertion into the visible which is essential to the seer. The flesh is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element," in the sense it was used to speak of water, air, earth, and fire, that is, in the sense of a *general thing*, a midway between the spatio-temporal individual and the idea, a sort of incarnate principle that brings a style of being wherever there is a fragment of being. The flesh is in this sense an "element" of Being. (139).

It follows then, that the flesh, the tissue between seer and world, is also that which allows the world to disclose itself in the first place. Starting from embodied existence allows for a common ground that makes for a path around conceptual relativism.[6]

Because we cannot start with conceptual schemes, we must start where we find ourselves: in the world with others. While we may have "prior theories," there is no theory that can necessarily account in advance for what is about to happen. For this reason, we must take a stance of openness concerning our interlocuter. This involves adopting a principle of charity out of necessity, if we want to understand another person, because "knowledge of beliefs comes only with the ability to interpret words, the only possibility at the start is to assume general agreement on beliefs," so it follows that the

"guiding policy is to do this as far as possible, subject to considerations of simplicity, hunches about the effects of social conditioning, and of course our common-sense, or scientific, knowledge of explicable error" (Davidson, *Inquiries* 196). What is essential about this process is that "the method is not designed to eliminate disagreement, nor can it; its purpose is to make meaningful disagreement possible and this depends entirely on a foundation – *some* foundation – in agreement" (197). This need for a foundation is felt intensely in the contemporary era, and the perceived lack of a common foundation has produced the nationalism feared by Kakutani and discussed in the *The Feral Detective* and *The City and The City*. The camps of knowledge produced, particularly through digital networks, often make it impossible to establish a ground from which a conversation can be had. For example, if I believe 9/11 was an inside job and anyone who argues that it was not is either naïve or involved in the planning, there is no response that will be interpreted meaningfully. Even though the principle of charity is about interpretation and not ethics, there are ethical implications nonetheless. The choice to see the other as rational and capable of being as rational as I am creates what Martin Buber would call an I-Thou relationship – a relationship of reciprocity. I argue that what we need to move forward, out of this post-truth environment, is to stop believing in the reality of conceptual schemes as mediating between us and the world. As soon as that goes, the most problematic beliefs fall by the wayside, the belief in things like "worldviews."

Donald Trump and The Secular Age

Of course, no one is suggesting doing away with what we think of as cultural practices or rituals; rather, we need to stop believing that these practices add up to a world that is only habitable by people involved in the same practices. By creating a "floating culture" that has no "grosstopic" space, the Internet has pushed many to fight the rootlessness of the contemporary imaginary, shaped more by virtual space than physical space, by forming identities around cultural markers such as race, class, or gender. By "floating" I mean that our interactions have become rootless, unlocatable and hence outside the purview of kairos. However, people will find a common cause of communication in as much as people demand meaning from the world. The danger becomes when that cause is wrapped up in the kind of identity politics made present in Charlottesville, for example.

The concern over the groundlessness of contemporary existence has been a popular subject for academic commentary. None being more fully developed in recent years than Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, where he addresses what he sees as the problem of belief in contemporary society: How was it basically impossible to not believe in God in the 1500's, whereas today, belief is seen, even by most believers, as one of many options? This is the crux of the issue I am addressing as I see it. However, I would slightly revise the focus, but would mean something very similar: How did we go from a society that was held together through beliefs that stabilized through the power of institutions in general to one where we have slowly seen that faith evaporate, causing the background with which our lives unfold to become unstable? While it would take a study

as large as Taylor's to address every aspect of this problem, the essential cause has been a rootlessness caused by a belief that humans can exist meaningfully without *place*. Meaning involves an experience of kairos and this all-important concept must have a determinate point in space and time in which to take place. In no way should any of this be read as an argument to go back to a simpler time and start believing fundamentally again. Rather, I believe we must look at how we dwell in the material world of objects if we are to understand what may have gone awry in a networked existence. Without a way to limit our scope, we end up in Borges' library or Danielewski's hallways: a world that won't stabilize long enough for us to find our way about. Taylor's comments on the shift in background do much to explain the modern predicament. In discussing the decline of God as a central source for meaning, he writes,

> To put the point in different terms, belief in God isn't quite the same thing in 1500 and 2000. I am not referring to the fact that even orthodox Christianity has undergone important changes (e.g., the 'decline of Hell,' new understandings of atonement). Even in regard to identical credal prepositions, there is an important difference. This emerges as soon as we take account of the fact that all beliefs are held within a context or framework of the taken-for-granted, which usually remains tacit, and may even be as yet unacknowledged by the agent, because never formulated. This is what philosophers, influenced by Wittgenstein, Heidegger or Polanyi, have called the 'background.' (13)

Taylor quotes Wittgenstein's example to show the manner in which the background recedes:

> My research into rock formations takes as granted that the world didn't start five minutes ago, complete with all the fossils and striations, but it would never occur to me to formulate and acknowledge this, until some crazed philosophers,

> obsessively riding their epistemological hobby-horses, put the proposition to me. (13)

Taylor punctuates this point by saying, "It is this shift in background, in the whole context in which we experience and search for fullness, that I am calling the coming of the secular age" (14).

Though we may exist in a secular age, this does not negate the fact that people have strong impulses to believe in a meta-structure that organizes experiences meaningfully. The lack of faith in institutions has created a vacuum. Without a common cause to act as a third point there is no way to triangulate meaning. This vacuum creates the space for a dangerous kind of discourse that – because of the lack of a stable "world" – exploits the fact that the effects of beliefs are real even if the beliefs are false. This can create a religious fervor whereby the desire for something to believe in supersedes the desire to believe in the truth. This means, bluntly, that people do not mind the lie if it makes their lives better. Without anything to stabilize the background, a reality can be manufactured in the sense that people's beliefs and desires can eventually produce the reality they seek. In the contemporary era, this trend can be seen as progressing from Karl Rove's statements concerning his anti-empiricist model of reality to Donald Trump's ability to lie openly without traditional consequences.

During the run-up to the 2016 presidential election, most observers simply believed it would be impossible for a politician to recover after such "gaffs"[7] as attacking John McCain for being captured during the Vietnam War (the exact action that has garnered him the title "war hero" to others) or the scandalous video where Trump says he

can “grab women by the pussies” because he is rich and famous. It is important to remember that the background for these assumptions has been validated – Howard Dean was deemed unstable in 2004 for a yelling at a campaign rally. Even before his affair disqualified him, John Edwards’ expensive haircut was deemed proof that he was out of touch. More recently, Sarah Palin’s ignorance became a severe liability to John McCain’s hopes in 2008 against Barack Obama. Why then was Trump’s problematic relationship with truth not disqualifying? In examining this question, I will conclude by showing the danger at hand if we cannot accept the common ground of being-in-the-world as a starting point for dwelling meaningfully as rooted cosmopolitans.

The key to understanding Trump’s success as a rhetorician lies in his supporters’ “prior theories” which suggest he is not the kind of person who is capable of lying. This allows his supporters a broad interpretative scope with which to understand his sentences; namely, if something he says is not literally true, it must be metaphorically true. An example of such a rhetorical move is when supporters claimed that they “took him seriously, but not literally.” The origin of this dissertation was the discourse around “post-truth” and “fake news” that accompanied the campaign and election of Donald J. Trump. Trump had a “technique” of calling facts that he did not want to be true “fake news.” In and of itself, there is nothing particularly special about a political figure denying unpleasant realities. However, Trump lied all the time with no repercussions. His method of not apologizing or admitting fault, rather than being a hindrance, is at the center of his followers’ praise; it allows Trump to sustain the illusion that he is the figure who tells it like it is, unlike those real politicians who are all a bunch of phonies, whose

true character he sees and exposes through a series of nicknames (Crooked Hillary, Lying Ted, Sleepy Joe Biden). The interpretative process that allows Trump's supporters to buy into his rhetoric, despite the fact his claims are objectively false, reveals much about the way in which Trump is able to become a symbolic figure for what his supporters think of as "The Real America," who will "Make America Great Again," with the key words being "real" and "again." Yarbrough explains this hermeneutic in detail,

> Thus, when Trump's followers interpret his speech as "authentic," or term him a "non-politician," or claim that his lies are "taken out of context" and that he is a "victim" of an adversarial media, they do not infer this from his discourse. Instead, they have, before he ever speaks or tweets, elevated his words to the realm of transcendental irony, and they interpret his words using the "rules of the game" familiar to them from other, inappropriate, contexts.

He continues, explaining how this process can occur in the first place.

> But how is this possible? After all, transcendental irony is a very sophisticated, complex technique, and although Trump's followers have been labeled by many adjectives, "sophisticated" and "complex" are not among them. Trump's followers are employing a sophisticated technique in an unsophisticated way. The door to the realm of transcendental irony is remarkably easy to open. The interpretation of a literal lie as a transcendentally ironic truth has, historically, required only that the interpreter adopt an attitude in which he or she perceives the speaker as someone who does not or cannot lie. When a speaker who cannot lie—a "plain speaker" in this case—seems to lie, the only possible conclusion must be that the interpreter has misunderstood the speaker. The reader then is responsible for finding a way to interpret the speaker's apparently false words as true, and the usual way is to read the apparent lie as a figure of speech. Western culture, particularly, has through its religious and educational institutions encouraged the global application of such attitudes to its intellectual, sacred, and literary texts. ("Daemonic Invention")

Though Trump's supporters may not by and large be familiar with postmodern philosophical texts, they are intimately familiar with the way to read religious and fictional texts charitably. In this sense, Trump is occupying new kind of space: a secular religious space that has been opened by the collapse of belief in load-bearing institutions such as the church and state. The outcome is that

> before he ever speaks or tweets, they have elevated him to the rank of a speaker who does not or cannot lie[8]—much like a Socrates, a Jesus, a Shakespeare, or Forrest Gump. By doing so they elevate his words to the realm of transcendental irony, and when he speaks or tweets, they interpret his political speech using the "rules of the game" familiar to them from some other, inappropriate, genre. ("Daemonic Invention")

Unfortunately for anyone that sees things differently, these beliefs in the infallibility of a speaker make negotiation impossible. However, and I think this is important to remember, the search for certainty and the quest for closure is not new, and this is not the first time that a figure or idea has been given undeserved onto-theo-logic status.

The reason Taylor's work is important in the post-truth, secular age is that for those who believe in truth, the problem requires a Kierkegaardian leap of faith and charitable stance towards the other. Directly opposing a worldview reinforces it; however, through changing the interpretive situation of the Other, it may be possible, through changing the points of the triangle – either in the way the Other sees the world, the way the Other sees me, or the way the Other sees themselves. And I too must be open to the possibility that these things will be changed from my end as well. In this sense, we

must be in what Heidegger calls "the open," which is the proper space where common ground can be established.

Being-in-the World, The Open, and Freedom

The only ground that we have with which to establish truth is our collective being-in-the-world. Heidegger uses the term being-in-the-world in order to avoid the subject/object divide that he believed had plagued philosophy's ability to think about being. Instead of talking about a "self" or a "consciousness," Heidegger uses the term *Dasein*, the word Kant used to refer to "a thing." The term literally translates as there-being, but to understand the implications, one needs to think more along the lines of "human-being-there-in-the-world-with-others-who-is-going-to-die." For Heidegger, this is the facticity of human existence. Only because of this fact do humans ever have the preconditions necessary to become the being who cares about truth in the first place. Further, it is only because Dasein stands *in* the world that he can take a step back out to view it conceptually in the first place. Though different groups employ different concepts for different reasons, sociologist Robert Bellah explains how the ground of being-in-the-world may be more fruitful than first appears:

> Some ability to use conceptual representation is characteristic of late childhood in every culture. Conceptual representation renders possible a world of objects independent of subjects, a world that is "decontextualized." This is part of the enormous power of conceptual representation, the ability to manipulate objects without being disturbed by subjective impulse, wish or whim. But the independence of the world of objects is also the source of the limitations of conceptual consciousness. (38)

The limitations occur because when everything is viewed conceptually, *everything* becomes an object, including others as well as oneself.[9] Bellah points out that "if conceptual representation is not reintegrated with other forms of representation, then serious distortions may occur," and while this is not often "a problem in the world of daily life, where conceptual representation makes itself felt only momentarily and in fragments," it can be that "in those cultures where conceptual representation has achieved significant spheres of dominance, difficulties can emerge" (39).

Of course, our contemporary society is such a place where conceptual representation has achieved such dominance. The idea that profoundly different and opposing manifestations can rise from the same event is familiar to Heidegger, who at such times has quoted the poet Holderlin's line, "But where danger is, grows the saving power also" ("Question Concerning Technology" 340). Our being-in-the-world provides a common ground, especially at the pre-ontological level before one has the chance to experience the world conceptually; however, the only hope one has to become what one is *as Dasein* is as a conceptual being, to whom truth is disclosed, but who is also capable and prone to fall into error.[10] The essence for Heidegger concerning truth and this danger is the fact that our being-in-the-world grants us freedom to allow beings to appear as what they are, that is to say, in truth.

It is important to unpack what Heidegger means by "in truth," as his translation and the reasons for it appear in many essays and are at the center of his thought. Heidegger believes that our usual understanding of truth, theories like Tarski's disquotationalism, can only arise because of a more original, pre-conceptual experience

of truth. To express this understanding, Heidegger uses the Greek term aletheia, which he translates as "unconcealedness." Heidegger explains that "To let be – that is, to let beings be as the beings which they are – means to engage oneself with the open region and its openness into which every being comes to stand, bringing that openness, as it were, along with itself" (325). He goes on to say,

> Western thinking in its beginning conceived this open region as *ta aletheia*, the unconcealed. If we translate *aletheia* as "unconcealment" rather than "truth," his translation is not merely more literal; it contains the directive to rethink the ordinary concept of truth in the sense of the correctness of statements and to think it back to that still uncomprehended disclosedness and disclosure of beings. To engage oneself with the disclosedness of beings is not to lose oneself in them; rather such engagement withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are, and in order that presentative correspondence might take its standard from them. (125)

What Heidegger is describing is intersubjective in that *Dasein* does not tell beings what they are, but at the same time Being is only disclosed through *Dasein*. Much like Davidson's triangulation, every point is necessary, but none are sufficient for establishing truth. Illustrating the complimentary nature of Continental philosophy and American pragmatism regarding intersubjectivity, Merleau-Ponty explains the triangle of two persons and a shared world required for communication:

> We must abandon the fundamental prejudice according to which the psyche is that which is accessible only to myself and cannot be seen from outside. My 'psyche' is not a series of 'states of consciousness' that are rigorously closed in on themselves and inaccessible to anyone but me. My consciousness is turned primarily toward the world, turned toward things; it is above all a relation to the world. The other's consciousness as well is chiefly a certain way of comporting himself toward the world. This it is in his conduct, in the manner in which the

> other deals with the world, that I will be able to discover his consciousness. ("The Child's Relation" 116-7)

Of course, discarding old correspondence theories of truth is no assurance that one will find the truth, but, like our detective who may or may not decide to take the case, one has the freedom to pursue. Ultimately, this freedom to act one way or another – to find truth or to hide from it, is where Heidegger locates the essence of truth. For Heidegger, though, freedom is no mere absence of constraint. Freedom is the freedom to engage in beings themselves by letting them be what they are in the open. However, "because truth is in essence freedom, historical man can, in letting beings be, also *not* let beings be the beings which they are and as they are" (127). Richard Rojcewicz elaborates

> Being cannot lead unless humans *agree* to be followers. This required assent is, for Heidegger, the *original domain of human freedom*; all other choices depend on this original one, since they depend on an understanding of what it means to be in general – i.e., we cannot choose in favor of something unless we have some sense of its existence and, prior to that, some sense of existence in general. The crucial point is that a sense of existence cannot be forced upon humans and will arise only if it is freely accepted. That acceptance is the original exercise of freedom. (134)

To adopt an unchanging prior theory to the world at large or to not accept the other in their situation, rooted in kairos, is to not let beings be what they are. It is in this way that the Prefect could not solve the case of the purloined letter as he could not let the Minister be himself in his originality; rather, he had to force the minister to be a Criminal, thus making the Prefect blind to kairos and the truth, which was concealed by its very unconcealment, a Heideggerian moment if ever there was one.

Through beginning from the "unground ground" of being-in-the-world, *Dasein* has the possibility to experience truth if he or she can be free in the open region with others. To provide an example of exactly what this would look like, I will return to the experience Latour had with the journalist who asked if the scientist believed in reality. This interaction provides a case study for how an overly-conceptualized world can dissipate if one is able to shift perspectives in real time, moving gyroscopically to sustain the common world in an act of "interpretative charity," which can only happen in the space created by beings *being* in the open. The ethical shift Latour performs happens early in the conversation, and it is essential to Latour's understanding how serious the "post-truth" phenomenon is:

> Of course he believed in reality, he [Latour] initially believed the question was not in earnest. However, from the look of relief on the man's face, however, Latour realized that the question had been posed in earnest. "I had to switch interpretations fast enough to comprehend both the monster he was seeing me as," he later wrote of the encounter, "and his touching openness of mind in daring to address such a monster privately. It must have taken courage for him to meet with one of these creatures that threatened, in his view, the whole establishment of science." (Kofman)

There is much to unpack here. Latour sees his interlocuter as genuine. He does not assume that the question's absurdity suggests that the psychologist was unintelligent. Nor does Latour get offended as so many seem to be by him. Rather, he takes a stance of genuine openness, realizing something has gone wrong, and works to correct this. He can *only* do this because he believes they share the same reality. Though Latour and the psychologist can meet *because* they occupy the same space, they cannot have a "meeting

of the minds" so to speak unless they also *believe* they exist in the same space. To genuinely accept the other as a "thou," to use the language of Martin Buber, is to acknowledge that both share an ontological space, a being-in-the-world.

While it is not possible to ensure the kind of communication required for truth to be detected and closure reached, I have shown throughout this dissertation why certain strategies succeed where others fail. It turns out, most of the work done to ensure that detectives will be successful cannot be done beforehand. The detectives may arrive with all kinds of beliefs and assumptions about the world (prior theories), but unless the detectives can interact with others in what Heidegger calls the "open region," shifting perspectives in order to maintain a common world, they cannot be successful and will only be able to solve cases that fit their preexisting models. The implications are vast for today: surrounded by complex networks of never-ending information, there is always interpretative work to be done. Today, with the rise of concepts like "fake news" and "post-truth," there is an ethical imperative to become rooted cosmopolitans, to realize at once that we must find a ground as we cannot exist only in the spacelessness of our increasingly digitized environment. Since our background has become unstable through lack of faith in institutions[11], it is essential to find a rooted place from which to think. Otherwise, there is a growing danger that a rootless "floating culture" will be able to be moved by the whims of whoever produces the most hot air.

Notes

[1] Which of course the Minister does by hiding it in plain sight.

[2] Davidson would probably take issue with being called a pragmatist, but I include him because of his rejection of the representational models of truth and emphasis on the consequences of beliefs as opposed to their transcendental value.

[3] To be clear, *The City and The City* is not set in America and is not about any place specifically. Further, I do not want to make the mistake of believing every novel of ideas is about America or The West; however, the novel does make important insights regarding physical and existential space that is particularly relevant in 21st-century America.

[4] Robert Bellah quotes Stanley Tambiah who explained that "adjectives such as 'absolute' or ''relative'; 'abstract; or 'concrete'; intentional,' 'inherent,' transcendental'; nouns such as 'causality' and 'regularity' 'concept' and 'criterion'; 'analysis' and 'synthesis'; 'deduction' and 'induction,' 'coordinated' and 'classification' were not in use yet in the sixteenth century. Bellah uses this as evidence to argue that "'Rationalism' itself was not christened till very late in the nineteenth century" (40).

[5] My understanding of Davidson and particularly the implications of his positions regarding culture has been influenced by my reading of Stephen Yarbrough's *After Rhetoric,* Southern Illinois UP, 1999.

[6] Merleau Ponty maneuvers out of the problem by explaining, "It is not *I* who sees, not *he* who sees, because an anonymous visibility inhabits both of us, a vision in general, in virtue of that primordial property that belongs to the flesh, being here and now of

radiating everywhere and forever, being an individual, of being also a dimension and a universal" (*Visible* 142).

[7] Of course, for Donald Trump these weren't perceived as gaffs because he had convinced his base that he wasn't a politician in the first place and only politicians make "gaffs."

[8] Something similar happened with the Mueller investigation. Mueller had decided beforehand that presidents aren't the kinds of people that can be indicted, which led to him being the strangest detective encountered in this work: the detective who knows everything and says nothing (of consequence).

[9] Heidegger points out in "The Question Concerning Technology" that viewing everything as a standing-reserve has led to humans being seen this way, evidenced by the existence of institutions like "human *resource*" departments.

[10] Heidegger's personal life is the example par excellence.

[11] This should not be surprising as it is increasingly popular for people running institutions to not believe in the efficacy of the institutions of which they are in charge. For example, Scott Pruitt running the EPA or Betsy Devos in charge of the Department of Education.

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