

# The Dark Arts Journal

Gothic Capitalism

Volume 3 Issue 2

AUTUMN 2017 [darkartsjournal.wordpress.com](http://darkartsjournal.wordpress.com)

**The Dark Arts Journal: Vol 3.2**

ISSN 2397-107X

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## **Editor's Introduction**

*Amy Bride*

At first glance, the Gothic and the capitalist are not an immediately obvious pairing; the former is a consciously fictional creative output intended to entertain, to teach, or to reflect upon the world around us, whereas the latter is frequently considered part of the 'real world', something that has a tangible and measurable effect on people's lives, and which influences almost every element of contemporary society in some form or another. Yet it is becoming increasingly clear how intertwined these disciplines are in both social and cultural, as well as academic, circles. From the designation of the financial institutions bailed out following the 2008 crash as 'zombie banks' to studies of death drive in the market, and discussions of the vampiric nature of corporations that continue to bleed the average worker dry, the vernacular of the Gothic has well and truly infiltrated the logic of capitalism.

Whilst this invasion of the body of capitalist language by the conventions and characters of Gothic literature has, in fact, an established legacy – Marx, after all, noted the haunted nature of capitalism as early as 1848 — it is only in the recent post-crash era that scholars are starting to take note of this phenomena as worthy of substantial recognition and study. A *Journal of American Studies* special issue entitled 'Fictions of Speculation' presents, from a number of perspectives, the argument that rather than looking to realist fiction for a method of encapsulating and articulating the intricacies of capitalism and the financial market, as is Katy Shaw's approach in *Crunch Lit* (2015), cultural scholars should instead look to genre fiction as the most appropriate mode through which these intricacies can and should be explored. Hamilton Carroll and Annie McClanahan argue that, as forms that already deal with monstrous beings that live on after death, with futures that are tangibly malleable in the present moment, and with global crises that bring on the apocalypse, gothic, science fiction, dystopian writing, and other genre fictions are pre-equipped with both the language and the intellectual concepts required for an understanding of the capitalist market as it stands in the twenty-first century. Moreover, New Economic Critics are now starting to apply this same logic retrospectively to older texts in which the capitalist context of their creation has been canonically overlooked. Andrew Smith, Gail Turley Houston, and Peter Jaros, among others, are at the forefront of this application in a specifically gothic context, with focuses on Ebenezer Scrooge as being haunted by his financial partner, to Dracula bleeding money, to Edgar Allan Poe's fictional doubles signifying emerging understandings of corporate personhood.

With this in mind, *The Dark Arts Journal's* publication of this special issue on Gothic Capitalism is particularly exciting, given the spotlight it intends to shine not only on this still very emergent sub-formation of gothic study, but to showcase the voices of emerging scholars in this field and postgraduate work in particular. Louise Benson James's piece presents tackles the capitalist commodification of the female body as a consumer good in Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*, an article with particular poignancy given the contemporary movement towards female empowerment in light of the

Weinstein scandal and #MeToo #TimesUp movements. Dr. Jon Greenaway explores the scope for Marxist readings of horror films produced after the 2008 financial crash, and the influence of recession horror on contemporary Gothic studies. Finally, I explore the definition of Gothic doubling and its prominence and effects in capitalist settings in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Pit*, and *American Psycho*, three texts that whilst seemingly unconnected, in fact provide a literary blueprint for the intensification of capitalist second selves in an increasingly financialized world. Together, these articles provide new and challenging readings that make great contributions to the growing field of capitalist study of the gothic genre.

This special edition is produced with thanks and gratitude to Richard Gough Thomas for giving me the opportunity to be guest editor, to Edward Jackson and Alexander Moran for their assistance and expertise, and to the whole team at the Dark Arts Journal for their continued support.

## **'Desire Turned Bestial': Metamorphosis and Consumerism in Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales***

Louise Benson James

Marie Darrieussecq's *Truismes* (1996), translated into English as *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation* (1997), is a first person narrative account of a woman-to-pig metamorphosis. Against the backdrop of a dystopian France in which unchecked consumer capitalism and corrupt political systems have led to a breakdown of social stability and morality, the narrator's body fluctuates between human and porcine forms. The novel depicts a dark vision of patriarchal consumer culture at its most extreme. Violent male sexual desires are the norm against which 'other' bodies – female, black, and animal – are disposable objects. Darrieussecq draws comparisons between consumerism and bestial, monstrous appetites; from the cosmetic products the narrator sells her body to obtain, to the worm-infested flesh of dead psychiatrists that she later happily devours while in pig form. The unnamed protagonist relates the experiences of her strange transformation in retrospect, from the first signs of her bodily changes, through the grotesque hybrid stages when she is part woman part pig, to her eventual complete transformation.

The novel is a political satire, set a few years on from its publication, at the turn of the millennium. Michel Lantelme praises this novel as capturing the atmosphere in France at the end of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Darrieussecq draws on anxieties about the rise of far-right politics in France; the Front National became the third most influential party the year after this book was published, and in the character of totalitarian dictator Edgar, Lantelme perceives a satire of Jean-Marie Le Pen. Darrieussecq's Paris is ruled by an openly fascist and corrupt government promoting anti-immigration rhetoric, enforced deportation, anti-Muslim sentiment, social cleansing, and censorship. Other contemporary anxieties of the mid-nineties are also present: climate change, nuclear power, the pro-life movement. The narrator provides us with details of the bleak social landscape only dismissively, as incidental. Instead, the focus is on her personal experiences: her search for employment, relationships with various men, and the daily inconveniences of her piggy transformation. She does not vocalise any political critique, nor any critique of her personal objectification, as a woman or as a pig. She has internalised a patriarchal logic which defines her as disposable object with no thoughts or desires. Instead, her transforming body reflects the instability of the political situation and increasingly apocalyptic scenario.

Shirly Jordan attests that this novel 'satirises right-wing extremism, repressive state mechanisms, new-age fanaticisms and political correctness gone mad'.<sup>2</sup> This article will look instead at how *Pig Tales* satirises consumerism, through its depiction of

<sup>1</sup> Michel Lantelme, 'Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales*: Marianne's Misfortunes at the Turn of the Millennium', *The Romantic Review*, 90:4 (2009), 527.

<sup>2</sup> Shirley Jordan, 'Saying the Unsayable: Identities in Crisis in the Early Novels of Marie Darrieussecq', *Women's Writing in Contemporary France: New Writers, New Literatures in the 1990s*, eds. Gill Rye, Michael Worton (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.142.

extreme consumer capitalism, commodity fetishism, and a crumbling capitalist structure. I identify acts of consumerism and consuming in this novel in relation to the female body, the pig body, and the body politic. The protagonist begins as devotee of consumer capitalism, and herself a commodity in the patriarchal structure of desire. Against her will, her metamorphosis leads to new desires and appetites, which function satirically in taking consuming to extremes, but concurrently enact an inadvertent rebellion against capitalist logic by placing her outside established structures of consumerism. The hybrid figure of the pig and use of the grotesque enact a carnivalesque subversion, destabilising hierarchies and ideological binaries. While animalism present metaphors for the dehumanisation of the body politic, bestial transformation is also liberating for the protagonist, prompting an awakening of sexual desire, the realisation of a form of consuming which renders her a subject rather than an object, and a return to nature.

### The Female Body

The narrator of this confessional *journal intime* is something of an antiheroine, making no conscious effort to resist or disturb the equilibrium of the systems which oppress her. In fact, she is an embodiment of the hyper-consumerist and misogynistic society that Darrieussecq satirises: vain, materialistic, self-absorbed, sociopathic. Her chief aims in life are to obtain clothes, perfumes and cosmetics, and be kept by a wealthy man; she is the ideal female consumer. Furthermore, she has internalised the hierarchical logic of patriarchal consumerism, that her female body is an object for male consumption. Accordingly, she uses her body as currency.

The protagonist locates the start of her transformation, and her story, at a time of financial insecurity and search for employment: 'I remember that I was out of work when it all began'.<sup>3</sup> Landing an interview at 'Perfumes Plus', she is unfazed and compliant when the director of the company gropes her and demands oral sex. The method of exchange is visually presented: 'the director of Perfumes Plus was holding my right breast in one hand, the job contract in the other' (p.2). She remains docile as he unclasps her buttons, reading the contract over his shoulder: 'the contract specifically said that during the annual inventory clearance, I would be entitled to some cosmetics. I'd have a chance at getting the most famous brands, the most expensive perfumes!' (p.3). Each moment in the scene elaborates on this contrast between her apathy in the face of his advances and her excitement at the prospect of material reward. She then recounts: 'the director had me get down on my knees in front of him, and while I was hard at work, I daydreamed about these beauty preparations, about how good I was going to smell, about the glowing complexion I'd have' (p.3). Her dual status as ideal consumer and consumed woman is clear; sexual acts are tradable as a standard exchange for even a precarious job with a salary of 'almost the minimum wage' (p.3), and the perk of free products, her objects of desire.

She is given her own boutique, and the Perfumes Plus job segues seamlessly into prostitution, which she welcomes, because it increases her salary. She recounts her

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<sup>3</sup> Marie Darrieussecq, *Pig Tales: A Novel of Lust and Transformation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1997), p.2. English translation by Linda Coverdale. All further references provided in the text.

success in this role, boasting to the reader about the rate at which her client base grew: 'the boutique started doing a bang-up business with me on board' (p.8). Her male clients pay well, and 'the director came by almost every day to pick up the money, and he was increasingly pleased with me' (p.9). In this wage labour arrangement, her earnings go to the company: 'my clients knew there was no question of money between us, that everything went directly to the chain and that I received my percentage, nothing more' (p.24). She is appeased with recognition and products: 'I was awarded a medal, a Moonlight Madness compact, and a selection of Gilda skin creams with *Suractivated DNA for cellular renewal and macromolecular recombination*' (p.22). There is discernible exploitation of the female workers for the gains of the company, as they are told that, despite evidence to the contrary, 'the chain was on the brink of disaster, that there wasn't any money. We salesgirls made big financial sacrifices, fearing that the firm would go under and we'd lose our jobs' (p.24). When her clients become violent and abusive, her response is disturbingly passive: 'I kept quiet of course, and I submitted, that's what I was paid to do' (p.16). Her paltry wage is directly linked to her silence and acquiescence in the face of sexual abuse, delineating her social and economic role as a woman within this system.

Susan Bordo states: 'through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity [...] female bodies become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, "improvement"'.<sup>4</sup> Darrieussecq gothicises this pursuit of an impossible ideal by transforming the female body in an uncontrollable metamorphosis, whose changes characterise the antithesis of society's beauty standards of thinness, smoothness, and uniformity. She comments on the expectations placed on women by men, by capitalism, by consumer culture, by magazines – 'the constant refrain of *Gilda Mag* and *My Beauty, My Health*' (p.35) – to regulate their physical appearance: 'the director told me that in the boutique the important thing was to look lovely and well groomed at all times' (p.3). The early stages of the narrator's transformation increase her attractiveness according to this ideal, and thus her value: 'now I understand that this extra weight and the wonderful quality of my flesh must have been the very first symptoms' (p.2). She assesses her own flesh by its quality, like meat, in accordance with the way society has taught her to view herself: human capital corporealized. She understands that this is an asset that increases her value, and uses it to her advantage, to obtain a job and her boyfriend Honoré, and increase her client base: 'men in general had begun finding me marvellously elastic' (p.2). She is constantly looking in mirrors: 'in the flattering reflection of the gilded mirror, I thought I looked – forgive me for saying so – incredibly gorgeous, like a fashion model, but more voluptuous' (p.4). As she becomes more pig-like, her worth diminishes. Her body no longer accords with society's standards, and the reflection in the mirror is no longer that of a fashion model: 'I began to disgust myself. I'd look in the mirror and see actual folds at my waist, almost rolls of flesh! [...] I was haunted by the models in the photos at the boutique' (pp.16-17). As Shirley Jordan comments, 'she consents to a view of her body as a currency which is plummeting in value [...] what comes to the fore are an increasingly acute sense of shame, negative self-perception and lack of autonomy as

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<sup>4</sup> Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, (London: University of California Press, 1993), p.166.

her body deviates from society's exacting gold standard of sexual desirability'.<sup>5</sup> The heroine states: 'my only asset was my *pneumatic* aspect, and I must admit that I was slowly losing it' (p.19), satirising the tightrope line of transformation and improvement according to the elusive ideal of femininity.

However, negative self-perception does not 'come to the fore' in a linear fashion. Her transformation does not comprise one single transition from woman to pig, but fluctuates; she moves uncontrollably back and forth between human and porcine forms throughout. Likewise, her feelings about her transforming body do not evolve from narcissism to disgust, but vacillate; while engaged in S&M typing up of her customers up at the boutique, her reflection no longer disgusts her. 'I thought I looked beautiful in the mirrors: somewhat flushed, true, a little chunky, but savage – I don't know quite how to put it. You could see something like pride in my eyes and in my body' (p.28). This is largely due to the awakening of sexual desire: 'something curious and absolutely unseemly happened, and once again I beg any impressionable readers to skip these pages. Bluntly put, I began really wanting sex' (P.27). Her metamorphosis sees her acquire a porcine oestrus cycle and go into heat: 'I got my period about every four months, following a short phase of *sexual excitement*, not to mince words' (p.35). The transformation into a pig redefines what it means to be female, allows a physical escape from the trappings of the human female form, and a psychological escape which enables her to discover sexuality in a way prohibited to human women. She is no longer a compliant female body: 'the director thought he'd cured me for ever of my taste for fooling around. He thought our former clients would be able once again to put a well-behaved, docile, demure *little girl* through her paces without hearing a single peep from her. Well, he was wrong' (p.29). This is satisfying for the reader; the protagonist is no longer silent and passive, but embracing her own sexual desire, perhaps more consciously beginning to resist the oppressive social order. In this system of extreme patriarchal capitalism, men alone are supposed to have sexual desires, while female libido is channelled onto products. Her body defies the status quo by developing sexual desire, and rendering her, however involuntarily, a subject rather than an object.

Yet the freeing of her sexual and mental faculties is tempered by the social and economic limitations keeping her a submissive, consumed body. Female sexual desire is strange and taboo. Men's lust for the narrator increases during the hybrid stages of her transformation, and when their lust turns to disgust it is not because of her bodily changes. As Katie Jones argues, in *Pig Tales*, 'the tipping-point at which the men's lust is overwhelmed by disgust is connected less with the narrator's physical changes than with her new-found pleasure in her sexuality [...] women's sexual desire is presented as disgusting in itself'.<sup>6</sup> Paramount to this story is the disgust at and fear of autonomous female desire, which does not comply with the logic of consumer capitalism: she cannot be a female consumer and passively consumed body if she develops and acts on independent desires rather than those dictated by patriarchy and industry. The Perfumes Plus director tells her 'there was no room in the firm for *bitches in heat*.

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<sup>5</sup> Shirley Jordan, 'Saying the Unsayable', p.144.

<sup>6</sup> Katie Jones, 'Apolitical Animals? The Politics of Disgust in Novels by Monika Maron and Marie Darrieussecq', *German Life and Letters*, 64:1 (2011), 156-168, (p.164).



Customers had complained' (p.29). Her 'curious and unseemly' development of sexuality, corporeal desires which challenge the dominant narrative that women are merely objects, renders prior forms of economic exchange impossible. Indeed, as a result she loses her job, her boyfriend, and her clients: an economic fall occasioned simply by the taboo of female sexuality.

The narrator's futile attempts to control her transforming body parody the endless expectations placed on women to regulate their own bodies, for example the war women are expected to wage on body hair: 'the worst was the hair. It was growing on my legs, even on my back: long, thin hairs, tough and translucent, that no depilatory could remove. I had to use Honoré's razor on the sly, but by the end of the day I was prickly all over' (p.38). She increases her consumption of lotions, cosmetics, and perfumes as her transformation progresses, trusting them to reverse, or at least conceal, her increasingly piggish features; lotions to soften her hardening skin, perfumes to cover the piggy smell, cosmetics to cover grey blotches, serums to slow down the sprouting of thick black hairs. In *Feminism and the Biological Body*, Lynda Birke states: 'the body surface [...] has in the West become a project to be worked upon [...] this body is always superficially transformable'.<sup>7</sup> Consumer products and expensive procedures promise to transform the exterior, and Birke points out that this is only superficial transformation. Darrieussecq literalises the transformable potential of the body, subverting and parodying the promises of consumer products. The narrator's uncontrollable fluctuation between human and pig form is an embodied critique of the unrealistic promises of the beauty industry. She attempts to make herself more human through using these products on her animal body, but they fail to halt or disguise her transformation: 'my skin was becoming allergic to everything, even the most expensive preparations. It was thickening disgracefully and became hypersensitive, which was delightful when I was *in heat*, to put it baldly, but a real handicap when it came to makeup, perfumes, and household products' (p.36). This evokes debates about testing cosmetic products on animals. Marion Gymnich & Alexandre Segao point out that the painful allergic reactions suffered by the protagonist recall the abuse of animals by the beauty industry, suggesting that her physical dehumanisation reflects the lack of humanity inherent in using ethically questionable products.<sup>8</sup> There is even a suggestion in the novel that her metamorphosis could be attributed to her overuse of cosmetics. Not being able to use these products results in further economic struggles: 'the director forced me to lower my prices, and in order not to reduce the firm's earnings I had to cut my percentage' (p.38). Satirising a lack of industrial accountability, her body's rejection of cosmetics decreases her value, at her expense, while the businesses whose products are causing allergic reactions are not held accountable.

If consuming products as conditioned by consumer capitalism loses its appeal for the increasingly piggy narrator, consuming of a different sort becomes paramount. Food

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<sup>7</sup> Lynda Birke, *Feminism and the Biological Body* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp.137-8.

<sup>8</sup> Marion Gymnich and Alexandre Segao Costa, 'Of Humans, Pigs, Fish and Apes: The Literary Motif of Human-Animal Metamorphosis and its Multiple Functions in Contemporary Fiction', *L'Esprit Createur*, 46:2 (2006), 68-88.

and eating chart the protagonist's transformation from woman to pig; consuming for survival, dictated by the body's needs and wants. Prominent symptoms are hunger: 'my appetite kept getting bigger' (p.11); 'I kept getting hungrier' (p.12). Bordo points out that 'hunger has always been a potent cultural metaphor for female sexuality, power and desire'.<sup>9</sup> While lotions, cosmetics, serums, and 'all those handy luncheon meats' (p.40) begin to irritate the narrator's skin and to make her feel ill, she develops a voracious appetite for raw potatoes, flowers, apples, horse chestnuts, 'peelings, over-ripe fruit, acorns, earthworms' (p.40). This impulse to consume non-commodities places her outside the system of money-product-exchange, freeing her from desires dictated by industry. As her interests turn away from consumer goods and towards nature, an 'intense desire to go stick my nose into everything, roll around on the grass, sniff it, nibble it' (p.13), she attempts to continue to exchange her body, for proximity to nature and its produce rather than consumer products. However, she fails; this is not an acceptable economic transaction: no one understands this form of desire, which circumvents the norms and values of consumer capitalism.

### The Pig Body

Why does Darrieussecq choose a pig, specifically a sow or *truie* (the titular pun), as the form for her protagonist's transformation? Pigs are a symbol of hybridity. The etymology of the word 'hybrid' in fact comes from pigs, the Latin 'hybrida' meaning the offspring of a wild boar and a tame sow. Katharine Swarbrick states: 'edible, impure, the site of potentially unrestrained gluttony and sexual excess, the pig is the very image of the negativized other which femininity is called on to represent'.<sup>10</sup> This is certainly true, yet there is more to the pig than a metonym for the paradoxical demands placed on women. For example, the ethical significance of the mass-production of pork, the uncanny similarity between pigs and humans and resultant abjection and taboo, and the carnivalesque symbolism of the pig, which suggests the disruption of social hierarchy.

The industrial farming of animals is described by Yuval Noah Harari as 'the worst crime in history [...] tens of billions of sentient beings, each with complex sensations and emotions, live and die on a production line'.<sup>11</sup> This is a stark visualisation of the questionable ethics of mass meat production, and by extension consumer culture. An anthropocentric economy produces an industry wantonly destroying resources and abandoning ethics to meet the highest ever consumer demand for meat. Significant within this narrative, the pig is the only domesticated animal raised solely for butchering. Unlike other slaughter animals who produce milk, eggs or wool during their lifetime, a pig's value is only realised once it is dead. According to Edmund

<sup>9</sup> Susan Bordo, 'Reading the Slender Body', in *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*, eds. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, Sally Shuttleworth (London: Routledge, 1990), p.101.

<sup>10</sup> Katharine Swarbrick, 'Truismes and Truths', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol 46.1 (2009), 58-70 (p.60).

<sup>11</sup> Yuval Noah Harari, 'Industrial Farming is one of the Worst Crimes in History', *The Guardian*, accessed on 03/05/2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/25/industrial-farming-one-worst-crimes-history-ethical-question>

Leach, this engenders a sense of guilt which is then projected onto the animal: 'we rear pigs for the sole purpose of killing and eating them, and this is a rather shameful thing, a shame which quickly attaches to the pig itself.'<sup>12</sup> In Darrieussecq's novel, paralleling her inability to wear cosmetics, the narrator is increasingly unable to eat processed meat products: 'the only thing I still couldn't stomach was ham, which also meant pâté, sausages, and salami – all those handy luncheon meats. Even chicken sandwiches didn't taste as good as they once had' (p.40). These processed meat products, transformed into 'handy luncheon meats', create distance from the gory realities of meat production. Her own transformation brings her into closer contact with these brutal truths. Being in the same room as 'potted minced pork' turns her into a 'nervous wreck', 'shaking' and having 'cold sweats' (p.40). The smell of it prompts nightmares of 'blood and butchery' and evokes 'images of slaughter' (p.41). In these dreams, she becomes the meat, men's teeth tearing at her flesh. Her distance from the killing of animals as a consumer is reduced through her increasing connection to nature as a pig: 'now I often chew up one of nature's little creatures without the slightest twinge of either pride or disgust. We all need to get our dose of protein' (p.43). The guilt or disgust attached to eating meat is thus displaced by increased proximity to the initial act of killing.

Pigs have remarkable biological, physiological and anatomical similarities to human beings. As such they are used for human medical research, and are thought to be the best animal candidates for human organ transplant. Their skin is eerily similar to human skin. The eating of pork can feel wrong due to the uncomfortable sense that it is much like consuming human flesh. Pigs are perceived as unclean, filthy, reared on household waste, greedy and gluttonous. Yet they live in close proximity to humans, are renowned for their intelligence, and are fellow omnivores; they will eat anything, including humans remains. They are uncanny, simultaneously familiar and other. They are likewise abject creatures; repulsive but consumed, embodying simultaneous desire and disgust, the draw toward that which should repel us. *Pig Tales*' narrator experiences abjection as defined by Julia Kristeva towards blood and flesh: 'on the one hand, I was dreaming about blood night after night and had these vague impulses to hack up some plump flesh. On the other hand, flesh was exactly what repelled me the most' (p.42). An enhanced state of transformation allows the protagonist to dispel this abjection and overcome her disgust. While locked in an asylum, she happily devours the rotting flesh of dead psychiatrists:

The problem was that the gates were chained shut, and we'd run out of food. Some of us had begun to be seriously hungry. Me, with my reserves, I was ok, but I saw some of the others ogling me with that same look I'd got from the piranhas in the sewers. That put some fear into me. So I was the one who led the way. I went out to sniff the bodies in the courtyard and decided they were just the thing: warm, tender, with big white worms bursting with sweet juice. Almost everyone joined in. As for myself, every morning I stuck my snout into the bellies, that was the best part – it seethed and teemed in my mouth. Then I'd go roast myself in the sunshine (pp.83-4).

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<sup>12</sup> Edmund Leach, 'Anthropological Aspects of Language: Animal Categories and Verbal Abuse', *New Directions in the Study of Language* Ed. Eric H. Lenneberg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1964), 23- 63 (p.51).

This devouring of rotting and infested flesh displaces abjection onto the reader; the narrator's sickened reaction to potted minced pork and handy luncheon meats is echoed in the reader's likely reaction to this description of consuming human flesh. It mirrors the protagonist's earlier assessment of her own flesh as her strongest asset, taking a concept of human capital to corporeal extremes. This act of monstrous consumption satirises the meat industry, and points to extreme consuming as a potentially Gothic activity.

The narrator's survival instinct is no longer related to her value as object commodity in the hierarchy of consumerism, but the simpler task of finding food, however gory the source. Kristeva sees the corpse as 'the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life'.<sup>13</sup> Here, the corpse becomes nourishment, and the narrator protects herself from being eaten by the other inmates, bargaining for her own survival with a trade. This indicates a progressive view of her transformation. However, we can alternatively view this act as regressive, as her monstrous appetites are exacerbated by the states of increasing degradation in which she finds herself. The less humane her surroundings and treatment at the hands of others, the more bestial her instincts. In this asylum, the insane have been abandoned, locked in, are perceived as a '*source of infection*' (p.87), subjects of the social cleansing agenda of the totalitarian regime. Notably these human inmates also 'join in' devouring the corpses, closing the imaginary gap between pigs and humans through their shared degradation and omnivorous diet. As Kristeva notes, 'the abject confronts us, on the one hand, with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of animal'.<sup>14</sup> Darrieussecq seems to indicate a moral: if you treat a woman like a pig, she will become one. If you treat humans like monsters, they become them.

This inversion of the hierarchy of man and beast indicates the centrality of the carnivalesque to the novel. The function of carnival as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin is to subvert the dominant social order through humour, chaos, and the grotesque. The ruling ideology and hierarchy are – temporarily – abolished, and the lowest members of society stand as equals to the elite. Benton Jay Komins examines the pig 'as a carnival figure or emblem' of this inversion of the natural order.<sup>15</sup> Chased, stoned and sacrificed, eaten at the centre of the feast table, yet considered the image of greed and slovenliness, the abject nature of the pig harks back to this tradition. Pigs came to symbolise both the joys of carnival and the suffering of lower classes and marginalised groups: 'in medieval carnivals, for example, the pig played the literal role of the delicious, festively squealing main course and the metaphorical role of the vilified other'.<sup>16</sup> The pig continues to symbolise the inversion of social hierarchies, perhaps influencing Darrieussecq's choice of animal form. Transformations, specifically unfinished transformations, are the epitome of the grotesque, which Bakhtin attests is central to carnival: 'the grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an

<sup>13</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p.12.

<sup>15</sup> Benton Jay Komins, 'Western Culture and the Ambiguous Legacies of the Pig', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 3:4 (2001), p.4. Accessed 10/01/17 via <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1137>

<sup>16</sup> Komins, 'Western Culture', p.9.

as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming'.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the novel does not present the pig body as inherently grotesque; as a fully formed pig, her body is in a state of stable, comfortable equilibrium, and the language of grotesquery subsides. It is the hybrid stages of her transformation, when she is part-woman, part-pig, which are described in monstrous and disturbing terms. The carnivalesque also extends to the narrative of *Pig Tales*. An impulse to restore order or seek structure is evoked in the reader, who attempts to impose a sense of unity on the narrator's metamorphosis from woman into pig. Yet the narrative actively resists this, presenting a fluctuating hybridity and in-between state throughout, an irresolvable state of carnival.

The hybrid stages of the narrator's metamorphosis are described using familiar and clichéd language of grotesquery and body horror, satirising the concept of the abject body through hyperbole. Her transformation is divided into different body parts, focusing separately on her breasts, her thighs, her skin, her cheeks, like jointed meat. She describes the sensation of metamorphosis 'as though my vitals – guts, tripes, bowels – were turning inside out like a glove' (p.41). The listing of body parts continues with the sporadic growing of extra parts: six teats, a corkscrew tail, tough bristly hairs, a 'big snout and long ears' (p.83), a 'thick layer of subcutaneous fat' (p.36), skin that is 'thickening disgracefully' (p.36), a 'mass of cellulite' that is strangely 'droopy and stringy' (p.44), a vulva 'dangling rather strangely' with 'hanging' labia (p.47). In her analysis of contemporary Gothic writing by women, Clare Kahane focus on the proliferation of grotesque bodies and images of deformity, 'physical images of the body as vulnerable and impaired'.<sup>18</sup> She argues that these reflect women's own self-hatred of their body image, the internalised logic of 'a patriarchal culture which valorises the visible phallus as the image of autonomous power'.<sup>19</sup> However, in *Pig Tales*, the narrator's visual monstrosity is not defined by lack, loss, impairment and vulnerability, but rather growth, addition, excess and resilience, subverting this model of diminution and victimhood. Her transformation is a return to the grotesque of Bakhtin's carnival, characterised by bodily protrusions and excess. However absurd and uncomfortable, this is an experience defined by growth and gain. Her 'thick layer of subcutaneous fat' and skin that is 'thickening disgracefully' (p.35) are signs of a less malleable, less vulnerable boundary, and this literal hardness extends to her emotional resilience, 'I'd acquired a thick hide' (95). The description 'turning the vitals inside out like a glove' is grotesque, but could be read as a metaphoric 'revitalisation'. By the end of the story, the narrator is able to morph between human and pig form at will, in control of the metamorphosis. To return to Bakhtin, while there is fear in the process of transformation, there is also power in the grotesque body, in its visual, bodily and social significance, and potential for growth and becoming.

### The Body Politic

<sup>17</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Helene Iswolsky (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.24.

<sup>18</sup> Clare Kahane, 'The Maternal Legacy: The Grotesque Tradition in Flannery O'Connor's Female Gothic', in *The Female Gothic*, ed Juliann E Fleenor (Montreal & London: Eden Press, 1983), p.244.

<sup>19</sup> Clare Kahane, 'The Maternal Legacy', p.244.

Darrieussecq's dystopia suggests that the ultimate outcome of consumer capitalism is the objectification of bodies. Violent male sexual desires are the norm against which these bodies – especially the 'others' of female, black, child, and animal – are disposable objects. The value of human life has depreciated, but the members of this hyper-consumerist society are desensitised. Abuse, mutilation and murder of humans and animals has become a form of entertainment for the rich. At a hedonistic millennium party, hosted by dictator Edgar, the narrator in full porcine form is put on a leash, paraded and ridden around. There is a lavish feast and champagne. While this might seem like the apotheosis of the carnival theme, the event is violent and disturbing, and does not end with a restoration of order. The crowd are soon bored by the pig, so Edgar 'brought in the second major attraction' (p.94), a whimpering child for the men at the party to abuse: 'when they had finished having their fun with her she started wandering around the room on her hands and knees with her eyes completely rolled back in her head, probably from being tuckered out and new to this sort of thing' (p.94). This child is shot in the head by one of Edgar's 'gorillas'. The narrator continues: 'other girls and even boys were brought in to party with us. The slippery parquet began to get sticky with all that blood [...] I felt sorry for the boys – they're not so used to it' (p.95). This passage is chilling evidence that for the narrator, this kind of abuse and violence are unremarkable, it is 'fun', a 'party'. Her description is matter-of-fact, she shows no reproach towards Edgar, and minimal empathy for the children, commenting that the bloody floor 'sort of helped me regain my feet', and that the screams of a girl hanging from a chandelier by her hair whose 'insides were hanging out, bowels and all – they'd had a fine time with her' (p.96), helped cover the embarrassing growling of her own stomach. This is commodification and objectification taken to extremes, those in power enjoying the suffering of the most vulnerable. The narrator's desensitisation evidences her internalisation of the logic of this violent social hierarchy.

Transformation, from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to modern day horror films, is often caused when the body is 'under the threat of external or internal forces'.<sup>20</sup> The novel posits various environmental reasons as to why the narrator transforms: Edgar's nuclear power plant Goliath, her exposure to chemicals through working at a perfume store: 'perhaps caused by Goliath, or maybe a cocktail of toxic effects' (p.97). The protagonist herself considers at one point 'that's it, it's cancer, I'm suffering from an *anarchic growth of cells* because I haven't lived enough *in tune with my body*' (p.90). The italicised phrases are regurgitations from women's magazines *Gilda Mag* and *My Beauty, My Health*, satirising the culture of blame that condemns women for incorrect management of their own bodies. Jones asserts that the protagonist's transformation is due to disgust, a physical rejection of the corrupt social system: 'her metamorphosis itself may be read as a somatic manifestation of her own disgust with society'.<sup>21</sup> I disagree; her transformation is very much against her will and her profound lack of disgust is her most prominent and disturbing characteristic as a narrator. Katharine Swarbrick states: 'the collapse of interpersonal relations into sexual exploitation and violence and the ultimate disintegration of law and order present themselves as

<sup>20</sup> Xavier Aldana Reyes, *Body Gothic: Corporeal Transgression in Contemporary Literature and Horror Film* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), p.58.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, 'Apolitical Animals?', p.164.

overwhelming reasons for the protagonist's defensive psychological transformation into an animal'.<sup>22</sup> That her transformation is an involuntary defensive reaction is a more compelling argument. However, both disgust and defence are unlikely stimuli, taking into account the fact that others also transform into animals, in particular men, who are thriving in the environment of chaos and corruption. I contend that the transformations are the result of a widespread social malaise, an apocalyptic outbreak of atavism and therianthropy. The metamorphoses corporealize the dehumanising force of consumerism, resulting in a physical loss of humanity on a social scale.

Linda Coverdale's translation of *Truismes* invokes the term 'animal spirits' in the final passage: 'I write whenever my animal spirits subside a little' (p.135).<sup>23</sup> An established term in behavioural economics, George Akerlof and Robert Shiller describe 'animal spirits' as indicating 'a restless and inconsistent element within the economy. It refers to our peculiar relationship with ambiguity or uncertainty. Sometimes we are paralysed by it. Yet at other times it refreshes and energises us, overcoming our fears and indecisions'.<sup>24</sup> The narrator, the embodiment of ambiguity in her hybrid condition, is alternately paralysed by her animal condition – literally 'paralysed in the hindquarters' (p.43) – and liberated by it. She spends the novel struggling for her place in the economic system. What drives her decision making is the aim to improve her assets and social worth, invariably monetary or status-based throughout. Even as a pig she continues to view herself through an economic lens, the value of her body and flesh: 'I'd have brought five thousand euros a pound on the black market, easy, no bones about it' (p.102). Paul Crosthwaite notes the progression from mechanical metaphors to animal metaphors to describe financial players (bulls, wolves, sheep, vultures), and fluctuating markets (skittish, herding, flocking).<sup>25</sup> He describes a 'mutation' or 'metamorphosis' which occurs in the figure of the economic man when compared to animals instead of machines. Crosthwaite argues that economics has turned to this language of animality due to 'an ideological imperative to ground economic phenomena not in a dynamic field of social, political, and symbolic antagonisms, but rather in a set of innate, inherited biological characteristics'.<sup>26</sup> In other words, capitalism is failing in the wake of the global financial crisis, when it can no longer be perceived as a flawless mechanical system, and its failures, requiring rationalisation, are explained by animal spirits. In the society of *Pig Tales*, where everyone's decisions are economic, individualistic, materialistic, competitive and selfish, the animal spirits that are perceived as responsible for economic decisions and failings have become literal and biological, breaking the bounds of metaphor to take possession of bodies: 'their desire turned bestial, so to speak' (p.23).

The narrator makes a point of stating her lack of interest or opinions in politics repeatedly and offers no vocal political critique. Yet as Swarbrick comments, 'the

<sup>22</sup> Swarbrick, 'Truismes and Truths', p.59

<sup>23</sup> The original French text states: 'J'écris dès que la sève retombe un peu en moi', which translates more directly as 'I write as soon as the sap falls back a little in me'.

<sup>24</sup> George A. Akerlof and Robert J. Shiller, *Animal Spirits: How Human Psychology Drives the Economy, and Why it Matters for Global Capitalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), p.4

<sup>25</sup> Paul Crosthwaite, 'Animality and Ideology in Contemporary Economic Discourse', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 6:1 (2013), 94-109.

<sup>26</sup> Crosthwaite, 'Animality and Ideology', p.99.

degradation of the narrator's body unfolds against the radical depiction of an apocalyptic dismantling of the social structures'.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the political subtext in Darrieussecq's novel charts the downfall of capitalism. The reader is made aware only via the narrator's throwaway comments of the huge political upheavals occurring as a backdrop to her transformation. Her work at Perfumes Plus brings her into contact with the leading corporations: Gilda, Moonlight Madness, and Yerling. These all-powerful, multifaceted conglomerates hold sway in society, and their products – each company produces ranges of skincare, makeup, magazines, cosmetics, clothes, perfumes – are the ultimate symbols of success and wealth. Out of this materialistic and hyper-consumerist society rises the totalitarian dictator Edgar, whom Lantelme believes to be a caricature of Le Pen. Edgar's demise is effected by his transformation into a horse, 'neighing and eating nothing but grass, down on all fours. Poor Edgar' (p.102). This is followed by total social and environmental collapse, flippantly summarised: 'well you know about the rest. War broke out and so forth, there was the Epidemic, and then that series of famines' (p.102). In the wake of this come the New Citizens, a new social order clamping down on those who profited from the corrupt capitalist system. The narrator meets and falls in love with Yvan, the prior owner of corporation Moonlight Madness, who also happens to be a werewolf. As a business tycoon, 'the Citizens were after his hide' (p.119). Yvan has all his assets seized, but 'by some good fortune, Yvan had kept enough cash squirrelled away to grease everyone's paws, or we'd have been dead ducks' (p.112). The multiple animal metaphors here are reminiscent of those used in the discourse of financial traders and markets. The Citizens eventually catch up with them both in their animal forms: 'the newspapers the next day said that Yvan, the former owner of Moonlight Madness, had left wild animals alone in his home in the heart of Paris – thereby offering a prime example of the depravity of the rich' (p.123). They shoot Yvan, stuff him, and exhibit him in the natural history museum. As a symbol of the capitalist regime which objectified so many, he is reduced to an object by the new social order.

Patricia Ferrer-Medina states that 'the political and social atmosphere of the novel is one of dystopia: chaos, degeneration, and sickness. There is no room for a hybrid character in this scenario; her life is in danger. So she needs to flee from society'.<sup>28</sup> Jones also views her transformation as an escape attempt: 'the reversion to animal nature also represents a utopian flight from politically constructive action'.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, I maintain that her hybridity, her malleability, her transforming monstrous and abject body, internalise and reflect the dystopian chaos: her body is a synthesis of the body politic. In a shifting, chaotic and transforming social environment, poised on the brink of an uncertain new century, bodies are entities which reflect instability and disorder. In her analysis of disordered female bodies, Bordo defines 'images of unwanted bulges and erupting stomachs' as 'a metaphor for anxiety about internal processes out of control – uncontained desire, unrestrained hunger, uncontrolled impulse. Images of bodily eruption frequently function symbolically in this way in

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<sup>27</sup> Swarbrick, 'Truismes and Truths', p.59.

<sup>28</sup> Patricia Ferrer-Medina, 'Wild Humans: The Culture/Nature Duality in Marie Darrieussecq's *Pig Tales* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*', *The Comparatist*, 31 (2007), 67-87 (p.83).

<sup>29</sup> Jones, 'Apolitical Animals?', p.156.



contemporary horror movies'.<sup>30</sup> The society of *Pig Tales* is one of uncontained moneylust, unrestrained appetites, uncontrolled 'animal spirits'. Its socio-political processes and economic systems are out of control. This is physicalized in the eruptions and growths of the narrator's body. That she is 'fleeing' also undermines the Gothic nature of this story, in which transgressing, and subverting established political and moral situations is made possible by the monstrous, grotesque, and transforming body.

## Conclusion

Darrieussecq's dystopian social structure is a patriarchal hierarchy where female sexuality is taboo, women function as object-commodities, their own desires directed only towards consumer products. The protagonist's involuntary and unwelcome transformation enables her to experience sexual desire and redefines her habits of consuming. The pig, an abject creature, embodies the contradictions of an anthropocentric world system, and her transformation into this animal form symbolises carnival subversion. Darrieussecq aims to destabilise the boundaries between desire and disgust, pigs and humans, the body and the body politic, and the real world and the potential realisation of the disturbingly familiar dystopian consumerist society she depicts. The gaps are closed between these seemingly oppositional concepts as the narrator's body grows, expands, fills out, protrudes and erupts. As the narrator comments: 'at the time I didn't understand these contradictions very well. Now I know that nature abounds in them, that opposites meet constantly in this world' (p.42). One such contradiction may be perceived in the fact that the narrator's involuntary embodied critique of consumerism is seemingly enacted through more consumption: acts of desire, appetite, even greed. Yet she develops a form of consuming which exists outside the failing system of consumer capitalism, dictated instead by the body, enabling her transformation from object to subject.

While it may be misogyny, consumer products or dystopian surroundings that are responsible for provoking her transformation, her new body ultimately liberates her from these oppressive forces. When fully transformed into a pig, she experiences a profound connection to the primal, natural world, an accessing of the sublime:

With my entire body I felt once again the spinning of the planet. I breathed with the shifting winds, my heart beat with the surging tides, and my blood flower like a torrent of melting snows. I flexed my muscles in communion with trees, odours, mosses, ferns, and rotting leaves. I felt the rallying cry of the animal kingdom course through my body – the ritual combats of the mating season, the musky aroma of my race in a rut. A craving for life sent shivers through me, engulfed me, it was like wild boars galloping in my brain, lightning streaking through my sinews, something that came from the depths of the wind, from the most ancient of bloodlines (pp.127-8).

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<sup>30</sup> Bordo, 'Reading the Slender Body', *Body Politics*, p.89.

This 'craving for life' provides a positive counterpart to the conditioned cravings of consumerism and allows her to see her body as other than object, as connected to a strong, natural, ancient multiplicity. Transgressing the corrupt political system, rejecting the moral void of dystopian Paris, and overcoming the internalised doctrines of misogyny and consumerism, are made possible by her bestial transformation. This is an ancient theme: *Pig Tales* is reminiscent of the Greek myth of Circe turning Odysseus's men into pigs. In Plutarch's humorous rewriting of this tale, one of these pigs, Gryllus, is granted the power of speech long enough to explain to Odysseus why his entire crew do not wish to turn back into men, but would rather remain pigs, content with natural pleasures and with an instinctive knowledge of simpler, superior notions of equality. Darrieussecq's narrator, similarly, is happy living as a pig: 'now I'm a sow most of the time. It's more convenient for life in the forest. I've taken up with a very handsome, very virile wild boar' (p.134). As the downfall of capitalism is played out in the background, the protagonist forges her own utopian society in a natural environment.

The narrator chooses to transform back into a human occasionally and for brief periods, in order to record her story, to write it down. The act of writing she says is painful, 'simply holding a pen gives me terrible cramps' (p.1). Perhaps with lingering economic motives, she hopes her manuscript will be discovered and published by: 'any publisher patient enough to decipher these piggie-squiggles' (p.1). Jones believes that 'aside from the physical ability to hold a pen, the urge towards self-expression and communication seems to be the only positive value associated with existence as a human by contrast with the simpler, survival-oriented life of a wild sow'.<sup>31</sup> This misses the connection between the ability gained by the protagonist to control her transformations, to turn back into a human at will through some effort, and the power that writing represents, especially for a hybrid figure. Karen Stein writes: 'monsters are particularly prevalent in the work of women writers, because for women the roles of rebel, outcast, seeker of truth, are monstrous in themselves'.<sup>32</sup> The act of writing is an act of rebellion, for which the narrator crosses back over the border between her porcine and human forms. As an embodiment of the abject, grotesque and monstrous, and as a female writer, she is a destabilising hybrid element which allows transgression of the limits of human and animal and enacts a carnivalesque satire of patriarchal consumer culture.

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<sup>31</sup> Jones, 'Apolitical Animals?', p.167.

<sup>32</sup> Stein, 'Monsters and Madwomen', p.123.

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## Your Home May Be Repossessed if You Do Not Keep Up With Your Payments: A Marxist Approach to Post-Recession Horror Film

Jonathan Greenaway

As the sustained growth of critical work in recent years has compelling proven, the Gothic has been increasingly theorized as not merely an aesthetic category or a particular kind of cultural production but also as a form that both responds to and critiques political structures. The relationship between Gothic horror and politics has always been contested and far from straight forward, which makes any political reading of the Gothic potentially uncertain. However, despite this ambiguity, the aim of this paper is to begin clearing some of the conceptual ground for a Marxist approach to horror films, specifically horror films that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 sub-prime mortgage crisis in the United States. There has been much work done on the re-emergent gothic and horrific nature of capitalism (triggered by work such as David McNally's *Monsters of the Market*)<sup>33</sup> often focused through neoliberal subjectivity and the rise of the zombie.<sup>34</sup>

However, one aspect that remains somewhat under-explored is the ways in which recession horror from the US has been so influenced by the sub-prime mortgage crises and the ways in which that because of this, the home has become a reinvented site of cultural anxiety.<sup>35</sup> The company that best exemplifies this kind of post-recession horror is Blumhouse Productions. Founded by Jason Blum in 2000, Blumhouse specializes in the production of micro-budget horror, often focused around the home – home possession, haunting, demonic infiltration, alien abduction and so on. Its films are generally cheap in terms of budget, often (albeit not always) poorly regarded, critically speaking, and enormously profitable. One of the first major successes for the company was *Paranormal Activity*, (dir. Orin Pelli, 2009) which was made for \$15,000 before grossing \$193.4 million dollars in total in the global box office and spawning four sequels, the most recent of which was released in 2015. Just four years later, *Insidious Chapter Two* was made for \$5 million before grossing nearly \$162 million.<sup>36</sup> Given the vast sums involved, the wide reach of the cultural form and the

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<sup>33</sup> David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*, (London, Brill, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> For an excellent contemporary example that covers a wider variety of differing types of engagement with the political nature of Gothic horror, see Linnie Blake and Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet, ed. *Neoliberal Gothic: International Gothic in the Neoliberal Age*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017). For a fascinating non-Western example of the ways in which horror film responds to contemporary capitalism, see *Train to Busan* (dir. Yeon Sang-ho, 2016).

<sup>35</sup> For a recent examination of the ways in which capitalism, debt and culture have intersected in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, see Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2016) as well as Jeff Kinkle and Alberto Toscano, *Cartographies of the Absolute*, (London, Zero Books, 2015).

<sup>36</sup> All figures on budget and profit of Blumhouse films taken from <http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/production-company/Blumhouse>

ubiquity of these texts over the past decade, it is worth questioning what use there may be within them for Marxist thinking.

Before proceeding any further, it is worth pointing out that Marxist criticism has always had a somewhat ambiguous relationship with non-realist forms. Despite the recent resurgence in explicitly political work on Gothic and Horror texts, there is a well-established genealogy in Marxist thought that views the defiantly non-realist with a degree of suspicion. China Mieville tells the story of Nadezhda Krupskaya – Lenin’s widow and a vital figure in the history of Soviet literary culture – when she famously delivered a stern critique of a Russian children’s story, “The Crocodile”, claiming it was bourgeois fog, guilty of distorting the facts about animals and plants, and thus unfit for children because crocodiles do not walk on two legs or smoke cigarettes.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps most famously, György Lukács, philosopher of Bolshevism, spoke out against non-mimetic art and writing.<sup>38</sup> Whilst there is no real need to rehearse what are by now somewhat old-fashioned debates about the role of art and culture, especially on the political left, it should be acknowledged that these suspicions are somewhat understandable if ultimately misguided. After all, the science of historical materialism should concern itself with what is and has been, not what most certainly is *not*.<sup>39</sup> Yet, this leaves Marxist thought prone to a kind of vulgar materialism and in the wake of the worst recession of the century and a decade of politically motivated austerity, it seems prudent and necessary to acknowledge the spectral, immaterial, even ghostly nature of the current political situation. For this, Marxist thought can turn to another tradition within its history – a Marxism that draws from movements such as surrealism and other fantastic elements in culture. By contrast, an overly materialistic and rather arid Marxism, with its stubborn insistence upon just what *is* could only echo the sense of the cancelled future so hauntingly written about by the late Mark Fisher in his work such as *Capitalist Realism*. As with all general criticism there is an element to which I may be being somewhat unfair, but rather than spend any more time rehashing older theoretical skirmishes, insisting upon a Marxist criticism that is open to the possibilities of the non-realist seems both historically pertinent and necessary.

In her book on Walter Benjamin and surrealism, *Profane Illuminations*, Margaret Cohen offers a long and substantive definition of what a Gothic Marxism may look like. Cohen defines Gothic Marxism in a great deal of detail, a part of which I quote here:

The valorization of the realm of a culture’s ghosts and phantasms as a significant and rich field of social production rather than a mirage to be

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<sup>37</sup> China Miéville, Marxism and Halloween talk given at Socialism 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paCqiYjwqc>

<sup>38</sup> György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1971).

<sup>39</sup> As Marxist thinkers such as Fredric Jameson have pointed out however, the non-material and that which is yet to come is decidedly a political issue. See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, (London, Verso Books, 2005).

dispelled; (2) the valorization of a culture's detritus and trivia as well as its strange and marginal practices.<sup>40</sup>

For Cohen, the aim of Gothic Marxist criticism is to chart the contours of a genealogy that, 'both investigates how the irrational pervades existing society and dreams of using it to effect social change.'<sup>41</sup> For Cohen, one of the foundational texts of Gothic Marxism is Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* in which he sought to uncover the sensual, irrational and even trivial aspects of life during the expansion of industrial capitalism. As Cohen points out, 'monolithic Marxist categories as base and superstructure tend to obscure'<sup>42</sup> these aspects to existence and so Benjamin was forced to bring Marxist theory into dialogue with other techniques and models of thought, such as mass cultural studies, Jewish mysticism and his interest in surrealism.

Philosopher Michael Löwy, whilst disagreeing with Cohen in a few respects, particularly around the issue of rationality, writes of the Gothic Marxism of Andre Breton, the so-called Pope of Surrealism, that it was a 'historical materialism that is sensitive to the magical dimension ... to the "black moment of revolt, and to the illumination that rends the sky of revolutionary action like a bolt of lightning.'<sup>43</sup> It is a Marxism influenced by Arthur Rimbaud, Comte de Lautréamont and the English Gothic novel, drawn to and fascinated with 'enchantment and the marvellous.'<sup>44</sup> Space, of course, precludes developing all of these provocative points but what is clear is that Gothic Marxism is a Marxism that stands against class exploitation as well as material reductionism. By supplementing Marxist categories with other modes of analysis, it is possible to consider the horror film as not simply a low cultural form but an area of cultural expression where material anxieties find expression in often non-material forms. As China Mieville points out, a kind of balancing-act is required, to at once avoid falling into nostalgia for a lost past (something for which criticises William Morris) and at the same time resist falling into a kind of boosterish irrationalism that celebrates the irrational for its own sake.<sup>45</sup>

The idea of the irrational may seem something of an anathema to the era of hyper-rationalised, networked global capitalism, but in the wake of the American mortgage crises one of the striking features is the extent to which the official discourse of mainstream economics was so taken aback. This is itself is not necessarily a surprise – as Chris Harman notes, neoclassical models of economics have always struggled to explain the crises of capitalism, with Ben Bernanke going so far as to call an explanation for the great Depression 'the Holy Grail of macroeconomics.'<sup>46</sup> When the

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<sup>40</sup> Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illumination: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995) For the full five theses which Cohen uses, see p.6

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 1-2.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Löwy, 'Walter Benjamin and Surrealism: The Story of a Revolutionary Spell,' *Radical Philosophy* 80 (Nov/Dec 1996) pp 17-23, p.18

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> See China Mieville, 'Marxism and Halloween' delivered at Socialism 2013 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paCqiYjwqc>

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Chris Harman, *Zombie Capitalism: Global Crises and the Relevance of Marx*, (Edinburgh, Haymarket Books, 2010) p. 9

subprime mortgage crises began unfolding the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac) were placed into a conservatorship by the U.S. Treasury in September 2008 after it was revealed that the two bodies had more than \$5 trillion in mortgage-backed securities (MBS) and debt; the debt portion alone was \$1.6 trillion.<sup>47</sup> The conservatorship was estimated by the CBO to increase US government liabilities by some \$230 billion. That same month Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy<sup>48</sup> while the insurance giant AIG had its credit rating downgraded, an act which led to an \$85 billion rescue package from the Federal Reserve Bank.<sup>49</sup> Alan Greenspan, chair of the Federal Reserve, admitted to the US Congress that he still did ‘not fully understand what went wrong in what he thought were self-governing markets.’<sup>50</sup> The presumed autonomy of the market coupled with an economic model and ideology that had discounted the insights of Marx’s critique of classical models of capitalism (as well as the historical experiences of previous crises!) resulted in an expectation that the market would essentially manage itself.<sup>51</sup> This point about self-governing, almost autonomous markets ties into a wider point raised by Jameson in his famous essay, ‘The End of Temporality’:

Finance capital suggests a new type of abstraction, in which on the one hand money is sublimated into sheer number, and on the other hand a new kind of value emerges, which seems to have little enough to do with the old-fashioned value of firms and factories or of their products and their marketability.<sup>52</sup>

The home then become more than merely a dwelling, but is abstracted from material reality, into the realm of sheer number – divorced from the material existence of those who may live in it, or even from the issue of trying to pay off a mortgage. After all, what kind of ownership can one take in paying off a mortgage if the mortgage lender itself is vulnerable to the abstract demands of the market and requires the infusion of billions of government dollars simply to maintain its business?<sup>53</sup> The home is doubly possessed – by those who are the ostensible owners, but also by the immaterial force of sheer numbers where the home as space has little to do with its presence as a

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<sup>47</sup> Dawn Kopecki, “U.S. Considers Bringing Fannie, Freddie on to Budget”. Bloomberg Sept 2008.

<sup>48</sup> For a good outline of the subprime crisis, see Robin Blackburn, ‘The Subprime Crisis,’ New Left Review 50 March-April 2008. <https://newleftreview.org/II/50/robin-blackburn-the-subprime-crisis> (first accessed 30/11/2017)

<sup>49</sup> See the reports on the meeting here:

<https://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/pressreleases/other20080916a.htm> (First accessed 30/11/2017)

<sup>50</sup> Reported in the Washington Times, 24 October 2008.

<sup>51</sup> As Gordon Brown, the UK Chancellor of the time put it, this model of neoliberal economics has supposedly ended the cycles of boom and bust. See <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/sep/11/gordonbrown.economy>

<sup>52</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘The End of Temporality,’ *The Ideologies of Theory*, (London, Verso Books, 2008) p. 642.

<sup>53</sup> A 2011 Levy Institute analysis counting the week-by-week extension of credit from the Fed came up with a total of \$29 trillion in cash and loans. See L. Randall Wray, “\$29,000,000,000,000: A Detailed Look at the Fed’s Bailout of the Financial System.” Levy Economics Institute of Bard College (December 2011). <http://www.levyinstitute.org/publications/2900000000000-a-detailed-look-at-the-feds-bailout-of-the-financial-system>



numerical contributor to either debt or asset on a digital balance sheet. It is for this reason that the post-recession horror film lends itself to a kind of Gothic Marxist reading, embodying as it does both the subjective fear and anxieties of the individual faced with the spectral forces of abstracted capitalism as well as the contingency, fragility and volatility of what 'the market,' that most ineffable and powerful force, demands.

The home, then, is a fundamentally divided site – through the machinations of the market it is no longer functions as something with utility, as residence, but expresses value in multiple senses of the word; it is both a commodity which possesses certain economic value and a location bound up in certain ideological *values* too. To put it another way, it expresses both the correct kind of middle class aspiration as well as the correct spatial environment for the family unit. There is a common rhetorical theme in conservative economics that emphasizes and idealizes homeownership on precisely these grounds. For example, Ronald Regan argued that 'a husband and wife that own their home are apt to save ... after all; the love of home is one of the finest ideals of our people.'<sup>54</sup> To own one's home then is bound up within a wider set of values that are distinct to the contemporary American capitalist system — both storing up capital reserves and financially and ideologically investing in the wider political and economic system. As Jameson writes, what is most pressing now is the ways in which these kinds of financial abstractions fundamentally alter the nature of subjective temporal experience, as the evolving capitalist mode of production fundamentally changes how we experience the rhythms of individual life.

For the dynamics of the stock market need to be disentangled from the older cyclical rhythms of capitalism generally: boom and bust, accumulation of inventory, liquidation, and so forth, a process with which everyone is familiar and that imprints a kind of generational rhythm on individual life ... From both these temporal cycles, then, is to be distinguished the newer process of the consumption of investment as such ...<sup>55</sup>

A long-standing trend in these films that are concerned with the notion of possession is for the process to be begun through moving into a new home, occasioned by the need to move for some material reasons, like a new baby or for the sake of children and their quality of life. This process is at once an activity with a certain amount of utility or use value and something that generally expresses a kind of middle class bourgeois progress – the property ladder, is after all, something one moves UP. Important to note is that these films often attempt to establish a sense of universal identification, generalising outward to resonant with an imagined audience. In the case of *Paranormal Activity*, Micah (played by Micah Sloat), is a day trader and Katie, (Katie Featherston) is a student, who move into a fashionable starter home in San Diego – theirs is a tract house, a bland cookie cutter environment bought with cheap credit. The house could be anywhere, furnished with the same 'universalised' bland aesthetics of all middle class suburbs. The demonic possession is a kind of 'negative

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<sup>54</sup> Quoted in Amos Kiewe, Davis W. Houck, *A Shining City on a Hill: Ronald Reagan's Economic Rhetoric, 1951-1989*, (New York, Prager Publishing, 1991) p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> Jameson, p. 643.

energy' which has been following Katie her entire life. The plot is basic to the point of reductionist as the tropes and clichés of the horror genre are so well known as to not necessarily require detailed explication. However, the film serves as a paradigmatic example of the ways in which home ownership is not just merely a middle class dream but also an exercise in asserting a certain degree of socio-economic control and an act of participation within capitalist society – literally investing in the societal and economic status quo. When confronted with the evidence of demonic possession, Micah's first instincts are to document it – using his seemingly ever present camera and using baby powder to record demonic footprints – and then call in experts. This is typical behaviour for someone in possession (!) of a home, which functions as both a dwelling as well as asset and an expression of his own middle-class subjectivity, competence and control.

**Micah:** Hey, hey hey hey hey! Let's talk about this first. It's just, I'm in control, I'm making progress.

**Katie:** No, you haven't been having any progress, and you're \*not\* in control. \*It\* is in control, and if you think you're in control, then you're being an idiot! Not a single thing you've done has helped, and I'm sorry, I don't mean to burst your bubble, but the camera hasn't helped and the stupid footprints haven't helped ... It wanted you to find my photo, it can be anywhere, it hears what we're saying right now.

**Micah:** Hey! How the fuck do you know?

**Katie:** You are absolutely powerless!

Aside from showcasing Micah's chauvinistic dismissal of Katie's perfectly understandable and completely justified concerns as well as his blithe confidence in his own ability to remain 'in control', the quoted dialogue is a useful insight into the contemporary subjectivity that is forced to respond to the spectral forces made manifest within the private sphere of the home. After 2011's *Insidious* refined the paradigm established in *Paranormal Activity*, adding possession and astral projection to the demonic presence inside the middle class utopia of suburban living, the Blumhouse films increasingly became aware of the generic clichés of the horror movie. Despite this awareness, the later films keep the underlying preoccupation with the home as fundamentally divided between asset and space of utility, between a material necessity and a spatial configuration of various immaterial forces. In *Sinister* (dir. Scott Derrickson, 2012) Ethan Hawke's true crime writer character Ellison Oswalt moves his family into a home infamous for being the site of a particularly grisly murder. A mix of economic necessity (as a true crime writer his career is increasingly unpopular and precarious) and greed prompts the move – the new book he plans on the past murders will, as the film puts it, 'make him famous again.' The cheap credit of 2007 has, at this point, begun to bite and even the skilled intelligentsia are forced to move to less reputable areas in the hope of managing to upgrade their career and economic prospects. However, in the course of the research for his book he realises that by

moving his family into the house he has placed them in the timeline of murders he is investigating.

In economic terms, the house is a toxic asset, possessed in more ways than one. Understandably, he moves his family out of the house in a neat inversion of the old cliché of discovering demonic possession (how many of us have yelled at the screen for characters to just move out!), but the move out is not the solution, but rather is what ultimately gets him and his family killed by his own daughter, Ashley, under the influence of the demon Bughuul. It seems homes cannot be flipped without consequence in a world where intangible forces such as credit scores, property history and economic necessity are increasingly exerting real physical consequences. In a telling nod to the economies at play here, the film revolves around murders committed by children upon their parents and then recorded under asinine home movie titles. The final one, wherein Tracey, Trevor and Ellison are murdered is entitled 'House Painting, 12' – satirising the need to add value to a home that's in need of some renovation. Scott Stewart's *Dark Skies*, from 2013, makes the case more explicit with one of the main characters employed as realtor, fending off both the reorganization of their own living space and an eventual abduction of their child by alien invaders. At the end of the film the family is forced to move out of their comfortable suburban home into a small apartment – downsizing due to forces that are, quite literally, other-worldly.

In 2013 Blumhouse released another film with similar themes, and one that in many ways forms the inverse of *Sinister* from a thematic and economic perspective. Rather than show the middle class figure as experiencing a kind of economic precarity that leaves them open to (re)possession, *The Purge* (dir. James DeMonaco, 2013) details the economic opportunities in the volatile housing market created by economic anxieties. Ethan Hawke is once again the star, and here he plays James Sandin, a home-security specialist who makes a comfortable enough living to afford property in an exclusive gated community in Los Angeles. His market are his neighbors, the cash-rich bourgeoisie who use his products to defend themselves on the night of the purge where all crime is legal. In the course of the film, a bloodied black man seeks sanctuary within the house and the home is surrounded by an assortment of young white yuppies who try to break in to murder the man. The family, acting out of a rather paternalistic sense of middle class liberal guilt try to defend themselves and the injured man from the violent intruders. Yet despite the best efforts of the family, the group break in – the middle class home is revealed as far too vulnerable and, despite their sophisticated security system, the house is easily infiltrated. This is thanks to the empathetic response of the young Charlie (played by Max Burkholder) who, in a moment of sympathy turns off the system to allow the man into the house. His father, James, confronted with the gang outside the family home goes so far as to admit that the security systems the house is equipped with, manufactured by his own company and presumably sold at a high price, won't stop a truly determined siege. His capitalist success has brought economic security, but the products that have made his fortune cannot ultimately secure his own home. At the film's climax, the true threat is not the poor bloodied stranger, the figure of the proletariat who exists outside of the gated community, but rather the neighbors who break in to the Sandin home seeking to

murder them out of jealousy for the wealth they have accumulated through selling security systems.

Whilst a rather heavy-handed example of the ways in which capitalism depends upon antagonistic relationships between members of the same social class, it also highlights the extent to which that property ownership is invested with certain affective and ideological notions. Ownership and possession, when housing is seen as both a commodity and a product of commodity exchange, can only lead to a sense of futile rage, an inchoate jealousy that finds expression in the middle class turning against itself. Tellingly, the film's finale includes the line that this year's purge has been the most successful on record and that thanks to the sales of weapons and home security systems the stock market is higher than ever. This suggests the possibility of reading the film as more than simply a low rent political screed, but rather an exploration of the ways in which the economisation of the home and the home as asset is a feature of middle class antagonisms. These antagonisms are, as a result directed inward, between individuals and family groups within the same class layer, rather than outward, towards the material conditions that produce murder, exploitation and housing shortages in the first place.

A film with far more interesting ideas around the nature of material relations between people and the most profitable and critically successful Blumhouse film to date is *Get Out* (dir. Jordan Peele 2017). Once again, the film is set in the milieu of the successful middle classes suburbs, full of comfortable aging white liberals who proudly proclaim they would have been happy to vote for Obama for a third time if they could, and who spend their time in secluded privacy enjoying the rewards of a lifetime of accumulation. Neurosurgeon Dean, and psychiatrist turned hypnotherapist Missy are enjoying the benefits of a career working in highly paid professions coupled with the security of their racial privileges and their investments in real estate and land. Telling here are the scenes on their arrival to the house, where Dean insists upon showing the home to Chris. Chris, a photographer with a real artistic talent but a beat-up, aging camera is immediately nervous due to the racial tensions within the meeting – 'I don't wanna get chased off the lawn with a shotgun' he quips – but this racial discomfort is also linked to the realm of economics. On their drive up to the Armitage estate, the camera sweeps over the verdant gardens and the home itself seems unaccountably large, bright and sunlit. Impeccably furnished, the Armitage home is a model of contemporary American middle-class aspirations; however, at the same time the film also makes clear the extent to which this kind of material success is a product of the historical and material conditions of American society more widely. Specifically, in its shots of an ornate, plantation like home, *Get Out* points to the systematic exploitation of black people and their unwaged forced labour through slavery.

For Dean and Missy, the recent economic crash is no longer exerting such a powerful influence. Rather, white wealth has stabilised – and the film makes explicit the fundamentally racialized nature of American middle-class capitalist success. The Armitage family has both a black groundskeeper, Walter, and housekeeper Georgina (played by Marcus Henderson and Betty Gabriel, respectively) but both seem by turns hostile and oddly compliant. Chris, in the passenger seat for their arrival to the house,

notices Walter hard at work on the grounds. As he puts it to Walter, ‘they working you good out here, huh?’ By contrast, Walter’s reply tries to naturalise the black man’s position as a manual laborer and reinforce a kind of economic hierarchy that places the black man as subordinate to the white homeowners. All of this manual labour is ‘nothing I don’t want to be doing.’ This is explained by the fact that Walter is, in reality, the Armitage’s grandfather, enjoying the benefits of the mysterious coagula procedure, that placed his mind and consciousness into the body of a black man. With this in mind, Walter’s attitude is an attempt to both reinforce systemic racial discrimination and provide economic benefit for the white Armitage family. Some contemporary economic data seems to correspond to this idea that the labour of black people has been valued less and has been of benefit to richer whites. In 2009, the median wealth for white households was \$113,149; for black households, it was a mere \$5677. Moreover, the effects of the crash fell disproportionately on black Americans; from 2005 to 2009, the net worth of black households declined by 53 percent, while the net worth of white households declined by only 16 percent.<sup>56</sup> As Matt Breunig from the People’s Policy Project points out, the era of the Obama Presidency was hugely destructive to black wealth – a move the latest PPP paper specifically links to Obama’s housing policies.<sup>57</sup> Jordan Peele has said himself that the script was developed in the apparently post-racial era of the election of America’s first black president. As he jokingly remarked to an audience, ‘we were past race, guys, what happened? Race caught up.’<sup>58</sup>

Historically, the wealth gap between whites and blacks can be traced back to the ability to own land; for a number of years black people were prohibited from owning land, and once homeownership became the primary way to own property black people were often barred from that, too.<sup>59</sup> The alienated labor of black people built the nation – and indeed built the very symbols of American imperial political power, such as the White House. Depriving them of the economic gains of the housing market through systemic, ingrained political racism, the good white liberal seeks to possess the very bodies of black folk to prolong their own existence and further solidify their own supremacy. Here then, the idea of ownership is revealed to be not just a concern with property but with subjectivity – the logical extension of the capitalist idea that to own a commodity carries with it an articulation of the kind of person who gets to obtain ownership. Capitalism, particularly white capitalism, seeks immortality within the subjectivity of those who have been long exploited, shifting the site own ownership

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<sup>56</sup> See Rakesh Kochhar, Richard Fry and Paul Taylor, ‘Wealth Gaps Rise to Record Highs Between Whites, Blacks, Hispanics,’ <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-blacks-hispanics/> (first accessed 06/12/17).

<sup>57</sup> See Ryan Cooper and Matt Breunig, ‘Foreclosed, Destruction of Black Wealth During the Obama Presidency,’ People’s Policy Project, Dec, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Brandon Harris, ‘The Giant Leap Forward of Jordan Peele’s Get Out’ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/review-the-giant-leap-forward-of-jordan-peeles-get-out> (first accessed 06/12/17).

<sup>59</sup> This has most notably been discussed by Ta-Nehisi Coates’s work on the case for reparations. See Ta-Nehisi Coates, ‘The Case For Reparations,’ *The Atlantic*, June 2014 Issue, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/> (first accessed 28/11/17).

from external property to internal reality, from the realm of economics to that of Being.<sup>60</sup>

Gothic Marxism then allows for these texts to be interpreted as sites of social production rather than a mirage to be dispelled but solutions to the concerns and material anxieties to which they respond and draw from seem far less evident. The shadow of the crash earlier this century is still haunting popular culture as the development and persistence of these films concerned with the issue of housing goes to prove. Furthermore, these cultural expressions of anxiety reflect the persisting material and political issues still plaguing the ways in which capitalist society handles the question of housing. As reported recently by CNBC, the US housing market is still plagued by various material issues which are driving process ever higher, whilst inventory remains low and rates of construction lags behind demand<sup>61</sup> So, it seems that the home as a haunted, contested and economically anxious site will persist for some time to come. Perhaps to find solutions for the present moment, we should turn back to the theory of the past and realise that the problem of the home is in fact bound up in the wider patterns and logics of capitalism more broadly. To close with a quote from Engels, and his pamphlet from 1872, “On the Housing Question” –

the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely shifted elsewhere! The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place, produces them in the next place also. As long as the capitalist mode of production continues to exist, it is folly to hope for an isolated solution of the housing question or of any Other social question affecting the fate of the workers. The solution lies in the abolition of the capitalist mode of production and the appropriation of all the means of life and labour by the working class itself.<sup>62</sup>

Engels point here is, in many ways, eerily prophetic, critiquing the liberal idea of simply ameliorating the worst excesses of market forces. The home as an asset is a microcosm of the wider capitalist system that thrives upon the exploitation of the labour of the individual and the expropriation of the wealth that belongs to them. To phrase the issue in somewhat more Gothic terminology, the ghosts and demons possessing the American home cannot be easily exorcised or externalised as they are signs of a far broader and more complex issue – namely the interaction of the individual and spectral capitalism. In an era of increasing housing precarity, as labour is forced into ever greater mobility, low wage employment and exploitative conditions, it becomes unsurprising that the ghosts within the site of the home have proliferated. As shown throughout this paper, a Gothic Marxism allows for an understanding of the source of these ghostly apparitions as well as highlighting the paucity of contemporary

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<sup>60</sup> For more on this connection between the ways in which the human body becomes a site for political power, see Foucault’s concept of biopower, discussed in *Security, Territory, Population* Lectures at the College De France, 1977 – 78, (London, Palgrave, 2009).

<sup>61</sup> See <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/08/29/the-us-housing-market-still-has-a-serious-hangover-commentary.html>

<sup>62</sup> Fredrick Engels, ‘On The Housing Question,’ (London, 1872)  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1872/housing-question/>

capitalism's ability to deal with its spectres. Rather, what a Gothic Marxist reading of the films shows is the necessity for returning to that most famous of ghostly apparitions – the spectre of communism that still haunts both the political and cultural imagination of the present neoliberal age.

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## **Filmography**

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## **'Because I'm Gripped by an Existential Panic': Gothic Doubling, Market Hysteria, and the 'Third Self' of Late Capitalism**

*Amy Bride*

Doubled identities, split selves, and doppelgängers: the tendency in gothic studies to group these three variances of subjective manipulation together as the same phenomenon is understandable but, unfortunately, inaccurate. Whilst the difference between the doppelgänger, as a near-identical but physically and spiritually separate being from its counterpart, and a split self, as the unnatural separation of various elements of the same being, is fairly self-explanatory, the notion of a doubled identity is complex. In different contexts the doubled identity could be interpreted as ontologically similar to either the doppelgänger or the split self; if one understands *The Monster* as the immoral equivalent of Dr Frankenstein, then the two are doppelgängers; if one instead reads *The Monster* as the psychological projection of Frankenstein's own inner demons made physical in order to relieve or expunge the sins of the Doctor, then *The Monster* is a fragment of the splitting of Dr Frankenstein's formerly cohesive self. Yet to qualify as a doubled identity, a crucial dynamic of expulsion and retraction is required. The doubling of an identity by necessity dictates that an initially singular whole has been, in its entirety, replicated outside of the initial identity, so that both are intact at the same time that they coexist. The doubled identity is therefore a direct spawn of its original, expelled from the sovereign body as a replicate of that which produced it, existing as a whole in its own right without creating damage to or fragmenting the original. In reverse, the doubled identity must also have the capacity to be retracted back into the sovereign body. Unlike the doppelgänger, whose uncanny impression stems from the fact that it is identical to its original despite coming from a completely separate source, and the split self who acts as a mere piece of its original and is therefore never fully capable as an individual being, the doubled identity can be absorbed back into the sovereign self and therefore erased from existence, at least until the next episode of expulsion during which it may burst forth from the sovereign self once more. With this cycle of expulsion and retraction in mind, it becomes clear that Dr Frankenstein and *The Monster* do not in fact qualify for categorization as doubled identities, despite numerous studies defining them as such. With the existence of and potential for split selves and doppelgängers in real life, from dissociative identity disorder to identical twins, doubled identities stand as the only variant of gothic doubling that is truly fictional within the human existence.

This acknowledgement of the inherent fictitiousness of the doubled identity, rather than bringing clarity to understandings of human interaction, replication, and splitting, instead highlights an anomaly of logic within a key element of human knowledge, culture, and interaction. The ontology of money, and with it economics, finance, and capitalism as a whole, has rightly been under question for centuries. Whilst gold, bullion or coin have held an accepted material value and are therefore seen as an adequately authentic exchange substance, the legitimacy of paper notes as representatives of gold has been repeatedly interrogated by economists, philosophers,

and artists alike. This interrogation is rooted in the unspoken conundrum surrounding the relationship between paper notes and gold specie, which is the capitalist equivalent of the gothic doubled identity; the existence of paper money is an expulsion of the value of gold coin, which is accepted as the sovereign body of exchangeable value. Both paper currency and specie coexist without damaging or depleting the existence of the other, yet specie is always considered the original embodiment; at no point is this hierarchy of expulsion confused. Paper notes are then dually presented as equal to specie and of ultimately lower value. Crucially, the value of gold coin has the ability to retract or erase the existence of paper money; given the promissory nature of paper currency, these notes act as slips of entitlement, meaning that when the bearer wished to 'cash in' their promise, paper notes can be exchanged for their equivalent in gold, restoring the sovereign body of value to its original singular status. This was, at least, until Richard Nixon's 1971 eradication of the gold standard, a move which simultaneously liberated and obscured global finance. In abolishing the practice of backing paper dollars – the international standardizing currency since the Second World War – with an equivalent value in gold, Nixon on one hand legitimized the mass printing of bank notes beyond the value held in national gold stores. On the other, he undermined the note's status as a promissory representative of 'actual' value via gold specie: after 1971, banks were no longer obliged to 'back' their notes with gold; these notes were then only exchangeable for replicas of themselves.<sup>63</sup> In gothic terms, Nixon effectively destroyed the original body from which the doubled identity materializes. The expelled identity subsequently has nowhere in which to retract, and is no longer supported by the sovereign self to which it is a replica; as a result, the doubled identity, in its designification, becomes erratic.

This is precisely what happened with paper money and capitalist value. Fredric Jameson defines the 'strange new landscape' that surfaces after the abolishment of the gold standard as 'late capitalism.'<sup>64</sup> This new era of globalization is characterized by the computerization of the banking sector and the 'emergence of yuppies'; in Jameson's view, this is simultaneously the moment when "culture" ...become[s] a product in its own right...'<sup>65</sup> For Jameson, the rise of postmodern culture – in which life is constructed of commodified representations and nothing is of 'true' value – occurs alongside and in communication with the abstraction of late capitalist finance from any sense of material value. After 1971, electronic financial data is representative of paper money, which no longer represents anything at all, making it an empty symbol or un-signified signifier. It is from this environment that Patrick Bateman, the Wall Street trader-come-psychopath protagonist of Bret Easton Ellis's 1991 novel *American Psycho*, emerges. As psychologically unsettled, culturally alienated, and elaborately violent misogynist, Bateman is, according to James Annesley, 'unaware of the difference between commodities and human life.'<sup>66</sup> He is also a modern vision of what the gothic double looks like in the age of horror-desensitization; a playboy banker by

<sup>63</sup> Brian Rotman, *Signifying Nothing: The Semantics of Zero* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp.88-89

<sup>64</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991), pp.xx-xxi)

<sup>65</sup> Jameson, p.x, xviii-xix

<sup>66</sup> James Annesley, *Blank Fictions: Consumerism, Culture and the Contemporary American Novel*. (London: Pluto Press, 1998), p.13

day and a maniac murderer by night, Bateman's lurid and detailed descriptions of his hyper-violence merge seamlessly with the mundane lists of brand names and tech equipment through which Ellis submerses his reader into the contemporary world of overstimulation and commodification. In an attempt to examine the violence of this commodification itself, this paper proposes that Bateman is a gothic embodiment of his capitalist environment of designification and therefore a key example of the gothic doubled identity released unto erraticism as a result of his disconnection from his sovereign self. However, in order to demonstrate the progression of both the gothic and financial doubling that merges within Bateman's character, I will first examine the gothic doubled identity in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and its capitalist equivalent in Frank Norris's *The Pit* (1903), which sees commodities trader Curtis Jadwin expel a doubled self in response to his dealings in the futures market. I will argue that Jadwin's extra identity not only follows the model of gothic doubling established in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, but that it is directly correlative to Jadwin's relationship with capitalism and arguments surrounding representative currency contemporary to the publication of *The Pit*. In doing so, I intend to explicate three main points: first, I will clarify Jekyll/Hyde's status as a doubled identity, as opposed to a split self or set of doppelgängers. Second, I outline how gothic doubling has infiltrated our relationship with capitalism and specifically financial fiction that would otherwise appear polarized to fantastical genre fictions. Finally, I analyse how the progressive abstraction of finance capitalism expands and manipulates the reach of gothic doubled identities to the point where any previous potential for control or containment of the double is eradicated, as embodied by the psychopathic tendencies of Bateman in *American Psycho*.

### **The Doubled Identity as 'Not Truly One, But Truly Two' in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***

To say that *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* was a late-birth of the juxtapositions facing the Romantic construction of the self is a truism that, ironically, demands further reconsideration in light of the inaccurate interchangeable use of doppelgänger, split self, and doubled identity in the gothic. As Diane Long Hoeveler summarises, the Romantics were torn in their pursuit of 'individual rights' and 'the battle cry of the revolutionary spirit, [that] was sweeping America and Europe' by a simultaneous 'desire to escape individuality.'<sup>67</sup> Hoeveler evidences these conflicting aspirations via Keats's 'dreams of merging into a nightingale's song or the figures on an ancient urn' versus the dream of 'nations composed not of amorphous or interchangeable members of classes, but of unique individuals, bringing their particular talents to the increasingly specialized capitalistic community.'<sup>68</sup> In other words, the Romantic self wants both to be part of a crowd, and to blend into that crowd, at the same time that it stands out. To be both an individual and part of a larger collection of similar identities is, one might argue, the precursor of family life, community, or even national belonging. Yet for the gothic, this need to assimilate is taken to a literal extent in the replication of the individual self via a process of doubling, and is only a

<sup>67</sup> Diane Lone Hoeveler, 'The Secularization of Suffering: Toward a Theory of Gothic Subjectivity' *Wordsworth Circle*, 35.3, 2004, 113-117, (p.114)

<sup>68</sup> Hoeveler, p.114

viable option through the embodiment of a doubled identity as opposed to a doppelgänger or a split self, as shall be demonstrated in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

That said, the reader's initial encounters of Jekyll/Hyde, in following the investigative trail of Dr Lanyon, Mr Poole, and the lawyer Utterson, do indicate a false diagnosis of doppelgängers to explain the mystery of the novel, a thesis which turns out to be false. The account of Hyde trampling over a little girl, which constitutes the reader's first description of the novel's villain, immediately positions Hyde as the stark opposite of the man later revealed to be Jekyll, whilst underlining their connection through the shared chequebook:

where do you think he carried us but to that place with the door? – whipped out a key, went in, and presently came back with the matter of ten pounds in gold and a cheque for the balance on Coutts's, drawn payable to bearer and signed with a name that I can't mention, though it's one of the points of my story, but it was a name at least very well known and often printed. [...] Yes, it's a bad story. For my man was a fellow that nobody could have to do with, a really damnable man; and the person that drew the cheque is the very pink of the proprieties, celebrated too, and (what makes it worse) one of your fellows who do what they call good.<sup>69</sup>

It is not until Lanyon's explanatory letter that Jekyll and Hyde are revealed as explicitly the same person; the reader spends much of the text in the belief that the two are separate, albeit intimately connected, entities. The alternatively sloping handwriting, the double-fronted townhouse with designated entrances for each character, and the polarization of appearance, morals, and amicability, attempt to posit Jekyll/Hyde as yin and yang: connected opposites that, in their contrast, can be read allegorically as part of a balanced whole despite remaining entirely individual. The presence of a doppelgänger, however, does not fulfil the conflicting demands of the Romantic construction of self, as the doppelgänger by definition is a separately sourced entity. Whilst two men born of different parents may look identical, and therefore mimic the sense of replicated community desired by Keats and others wishing to blend into the non-descript figures that decorate a vase, the two will always remain entirely individual, and cannot therefore fully comply with both elements of the Romantic self. The doppelgänger is simply too separate from its counterpart.

Indeed, Stevenson eliminates the possibility of a doppelgänger reading of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* during Jekyll's confessional letter which forms the conclusion of the novel. Jekyll explains the motives of his experiments as a desire to split his personality into two beings so that one may indulge in immorality without damaging the professional reputation or social standing of the other. Jekyll's description of the experiment's success does not highlight an encounter with a similar but separate person through which he can direct his desires, but the extraction of such a person from the very being of Jekyll himself:

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, The Merry Men, and Other Tales*. (New York: Everyman, 1886) p.6.

I not only recognised my natural body from the mere aura and effulgence of certain of the powers that made up my spirit, but managed to compound a drug by which these powers should be dethroned from their supremacy, and a second form and countenance substituted, none the less natural to me.<sup>70</sup>

The apparent separation of the conflicting traits of Jekyll's personality into two alternate bodies implies that Jekyll/Hyde is actually a split self; this reading is enforced throughout Jekyll's confession and seemingly evidenced by the concentration of goodness and immorality in each respective body: 'And hence, as I think, it came about the Edward Hyde was so much smaller, slighter and younger than Henry Jekyll. Even as good shone upon the countenance of the one, evil was written broadly and plainly on the face of the other.'<sup>71</sup> Jekyll tries to convince his reader that he and Hyde are two halves of the same whole and therefore constitute incomplete identities when taken as individuals, but that as an incomplete version of himself, Hyde's actions should not be attributed to Jekyll. This is played upon through Jekyll's 'lacing [of] his "confession" with the language of disease,' and assurances that Hyde's strength is a direct result of his own weakness, positing Hyde as a demon possessing and draining its host: 'The powers of Hyde seemed to have grown with the sickness of Jekyll.'<sup>72</sup> Jekyll likens his experiment and transformations into Hyde to 'racking pangs [...] a grinding in the bones, deadly nausea, and a horror of the spirit that cannot be exceeded at the hour of birth or death.'<sup>73</sup> Later, as M. J. Ganz recognizes, the conclusion of Jekyll's statement 'describes his desperate efforts to obtain a certain "drug" – a "medicine" – that would heal his psychic division.'<sup>74</sup> In this light, it is particularly easy to see how a contemporary reading might interpret Jekyll as a split self and therefore a reflection of dissociative identity disorder or indeed drug addiction.

However, this splitting of self is as much an inadequate response to the Romantic self as the doppelgänger, for whilst it certainly complies with the requirement of a community in which to blend, the split self is not truly a separate individual but merely a fragmented part of a broken persona. As a split self, Jekyll would remain unable to obtain the fulfilment of self outlined by the Romantics. What Jekyll stands to gain from convincing the reader of such a split is an excusal of and distance from Hyde's behaviour. The reader who believes that Jekyll/Hyde is actually split into Jekyll *and* Hyde, views Jekyll as a sufferer, the victim, and therefore not compliant in the moral degeneracy of his worse half. Yet in trying to separate himself from Hyde, Jekyll trips himself up time and again. He repeatedly uses the wrong pronoun when referring to himself as Jekyll or Hyde, to either as identities alternate to himself, and to himself as equally both, thus making his insistence that he is not responsible for Hyde's monstrosity increasingly dubious: 'This too was myself'; 'Jekyll was no worse; he woke again to his good qualities seemingly unimpaired'; 'I had gone to bed Henry

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<sup>70</sup> Stevenson, pp.49-50.

<sup>71</sup> Stevenson, p. 51.

<sup>72</sup> M. J. Ganz, 'Carrying on Like a Madman: Insanity and Responsibility in Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 70(3), 2015, 363-397 (p.385); Stevenson, p.60.

<sup>73</sup> Stevenson, p. 50.

<sup>74</sup> Ganz, p.385.

Jekyll, I had awakened Edward Hyde'; 'He, I say – I cannot say I.'<sup>75</sup> What is more, Hyde has already been confirmed as a subjective rather than fragmented entity since his first scene in the novel. For Utterson, as for Mr. Enfield who recounts the trampling of the child and is later witness to Hyde's payment of compensation, the ability to enact credit with an established bank by issuing a cheque solidifies Hyde's status as corporeal. As Gail Turley Houston argues, the bank's recognition of Hyde as a customer worthy of trust via credit 'provides him with the economic sign of legitimacy – cultural and economic capital.'<sup>76</sup> Despite Enfield's surprise at Hyde's ability to draw cash, a feat in apparent contrast to the expected standing of a man so repulsive in appearance and manner, this economic legitimacy confirms Hyde's status in the novel as an individual body in his own right, as opposed to a projection of Jekyll's psyche. Yet the reader is explicitly told that Hyde emanates from Jekyll. How then are these conflicting ontologies reconciled?

The answer lies in Jekyll/Hyde's status as a doubled identity. Anne Stiles argues that Stevenson's novel follows the Victorian pseudoscientific theory of the 'Double Brain' which claims that 'the left and right hemispheres of the brain could function independently; according to this theory, everyone has two perfectly formed brains, each of which can substitute for the other in cases of unilateral brain injury.'<sup>77</sup> In accordance with Jekyll's insistence that he has always been a double rather than singular entity – 'I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both' – Stiles insists that 'Stevenson explores the potentially heretical possibility that human beings are inherently double even in a healthy state.'<sup>78</sup> Rather than his doubling being a symptom of mental disease or addiction, it seems here that Jekyll's troubles, however they are categorized, are merely the impetus that allows the emergence of a doubled identity that already lay dormant within his character. This is further evidenced in the connection between Jekyll and Hyde that remains even after Hyde has been expelled from Jekyll as the original self. Despite the novel's claims that Jekyll is the epitome of goodness and Hyde his evil foil, Hyde is still able to discern right from wrong, hence his running away from the scene following his murder of Sir Danvers Carew. Conversely, upon learning of Hyde's crime, Jekyll delights in the fact that, in Jekyll's body, he cannot be found guilty for Carew's murder, leaving the crime unpunished: 'I was glad to have my better impulses thus buttressed and guarded by the terrors of the scaffold. Jekyll was now my city of refuge.'<sup>79</sup> Add to this the initial desire of Jekyll to act immorally through Hyde in the first place, Jekyll's enabling of Hyde's violent activities, and Hyde's ability to commit suicide and therefore end his reign of monstrosity, and it becomes apparent that Jekyll was never wholly good, just as Hyde is not always wholly bad. Rather, the morality of each character is nowhere

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<sup>75</sup> Stevenson, p.51, 53, 54, 59.

<sup>76</sup> Gail Turley Houston, *From Dickens to Dracula: Gothic, Economics, and Victorian Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.101.

<sup>77</sup> Anne Stiles, 'Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll and Hyde and the Double Brain.' *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 46(4), 2006, 879-900, no page number provided.

<sup>78</sup> Stevenson, p.49; Stiles, no page number provided.

<sup>79</sup> Stevenson, p.57.

near as clear cut as Jekyll would have us believe. Instead, the already questionable motives of Jekyll are merely replicated in Hyde.

Add to this the fact that Jekyll/Hyde forgets which handwriting he is supposed to designate for each identity – ‘Hence the ape-like tricks that [Hyde] would play me, crawling in my own hand blasphemies on the pages of my books’ – and Jekyll’s feeling of coming ‘to myself’ upon his first transformation into Hyde, and what emerges is a vision of two beings, one born from the other, who are at once identical and entirely individual, who share the same origin and are therefore part of an assimilative community, whilst also able to move, think, and behave entirely under their own will.<sup>80</sup> Jekyll is always also Hyde, just as Hyde is always also Jekyll, despite the fact that they are inarguably separate entities. What Stevenson portrays is the literal doubling of identity, the multiplication of the original self of Jekyll, expelled into the being of Hyde, which can also be retracted back into the central body of Jekyll at any given time, and hence the attainment of the Romantic construction of self. The gothic doubled identity, as embodied by Jekyll/Hyde, is indeed ‘not truly one, but truly two’ and always is so even before the additional self of Jekyll, known as Hyde, is expelled from the sovereign body.<sup>81</sup>

### Market Hysteria, the ‘Second Self,’ and *The Pit*

If the gothic doubled identity is the product of identity eruption and extraction, given the dormant duality of Jekyll’s character even before his experiments, any examination of the capitalist inflection of the gothic doubled identity must surely start with the cause or trigger for this eruption in the capitalist context. Whilst Patrick Bateman certainly utilizes drugs when embodying his doubled self, the transformation is not brought on as a direct result of drug use as it is for Jekyll, nor is there mention of any such reliance in *The Pit*. What is true for the eruptions of both Curtis Jadwin and Bateman is that they occur during the character’s interaction with the future’s market. Here, commodities are exchanged months before they come into physical existence, at a volume greatly exceeding the maximum possible rate of production. The gap between the reality of material goods available and the trading of a surplus that cannot possibly become real – and is therefore only imagined into existence by commodities traders – is a gap of substance. What does not and cannot physically exist, that which is created by the human mind, can only be thought of as a fictional entity, hence Jonathan Ira Levy’s discussion of the ‘fictitious’ nature of the futures exchange.<sup>82</sup> The subsequent problem for Jadwin and Bateman is that both the futures market and late capitalist financial systems operate on the acceptance of symbolic representations in place of material value. Levy identifies the juxtaposition between commodities traded on the market and actual available produce as the ‘fundamental conceptual problem of futures trading’; in exchanging imagined commodities, futures traders treat ‘conceptual entities as if they were corporeal goods.’<sup>83</sup> These imagined

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<sup>80</sup> Stevenson, p.61

<sup>81</sup> Stevenson, pp.48-49

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Ira Levy, ‘Contemplating Delivery: Futures Trading and the Problem of Commodity Exchange in the United States, 1875-1905’, *The American Historical Review*, 111(2), 2006, 307-335, (p.308).

<sup>83</sup> Levy, p.308.

goods, already disassociated from reality, are additionally abstracted by the use of paper contracts to represent both actual and non-existent commodities. Just as the millions managed by Bateman are represented by a handful of pixels on a computer screen, futures contracts allow a trader to buy and sell all the wheat produced the following year, whilst never coming into physical contact with that wheat. This blurring of boundaries between physical substance and imaginary entity, between the idea of a product and the representation of the future ownership of that product, raises questions of the relationship between the market and the mind of the speculator. How does the commodities trader, dealing with 'conceptual entities' in realistic terms, conceptualize himself within this environment of intercommunicating fiction and reality?

The question of the financier's self-conceptualization is articulated by Walter Benn Michaels as the 'connection between the economic primacy of work and the philosophical problem of personal identity.'<sup>84</sup> He raises this issue in economic, therapeutic and epistemological terms as 'How do I produce myself?', 'How do I stay myself?' and 'How do I know myself?'<sup>85</sup> The conceptualization of the self in an economic environment can then be understood as a balancing act between production, stability and recognition. Michaels foregrounds his questions in a discussion of hysteria that he defines as 'the threat of losing self-control, of sometimes becoming someone else.'<sup>86</sup> Both Alex Preda and Marieke De Goede comment on the experience of speculators in terms commonly associated with hysteria, specifically the 'uncontrollable emotions' of 'euphoria, fear, or panic' and 'insanity' that 'took hold of those who gambled on the [Chicago Board of Trade].'<sup>87</sup> The blurring of boundaries between reality and imagination produced by the futures market can thus be seen as an inducement of hysteria. The market's interplay between fiction and reality causes the trader to question his sense of self, to lose control of that self through heightened emotions or, through the experience of insanity, to temporarily become someone else, a condition described in the same terms as the affliction that engulfs Jekyll/Hyde: 'I could see, in spite of his collected manner, that [Hyde] was wrestling against the approaches of the hysteria.'<sup>88</sup> Returning to Michaels's argument, the production, stability and recognition of the economic self can be understood as a reaction against the experience of hysteria produced by the market. If market hysteria means that the self is lost or transformed into a different self, then a new, stable self must be produced in order to re-establish one's identity. The subsequent recognition of this newly produced self is then a process of legitimization, a confirmation that the new self is readable and relevant, and to a certain extent, 'real,' to those who encounter it.

David A. Zimmerman calls this process the production of a 'second self' – as does Jekyll/Hyde – and locates its presence equally between the hysterical mind and the

<sup>84</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*. (London: University of California Press, 1987) p.7

<sup>85</sup> Michaels, p. 7.

<sup>86</sup> Michaels, p.7.

<sup>87</sup> Alex Preda, *Framing Finance: The Boundaries of Markets and Modern Capitalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) pp.201-202; Marieke De Goede, *Virtue, Fortune, and Faith: A Genealogy of Finance*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.63,

<sup>88</sup> Stevenson, p.46.



market in panic.<sup>89</sup> He argues that the influence of ‘social suggestion’ on crowds is similar to that of hypnosis on ‘hysterical patients’; in both cases, an additional self is awakened that ‘abandon[s] itself to mimicry and ... automatistic imperatives.’<sup>90</sup> The case for the suggestibility of the financial market is clear. The trader, acting on external information, makes a sudden move to buy or sell, which triggers surrounding traders to follow suit, the impulse to do so coming from the suggestion of someone else in the crowd. Traders then mimic each other with an automated action that bypasses internal thought processes. The automation of the second self within the market echoes the concept of *homo economicus* that, as Paul Crosthwaite recognises is frequently portrayed as either mechanical or animalistic.<sup>91</sup> This ‘economic man,’ as an offshoot identity of the *homo sapien*, mirrors the creation of the second self by commodities traders. Crosthwaite’s discussion of *homo economicus* as either ‘a stimulus-response machine,’ or driven by ‘impulsions that are instinctive, bodily, and precognitive’ presents the actions of the economic identity as either mechanically or reflexively bypassing thought process.<sup>92</sup> Plotting the effects of this automation in the market, Zimmerman subsequently defines the financial panic as a ‘pathological consequence of hypnotization, occasions when the second self of the market burst uncontrollably, hysterically forth.’<sup>93</sup> The automated actions of the trader, based purely on the suggestion of the surrounding crowd, are in fact performed by the mimicking second self, the created identity *homo economicus*. This creates a swarm effect and eventually, market panic. There is therefore an interrelationship between the fictitious nature of the futures market; hysteria and the production of a “second self”; and the influence of social suggestion in triggering market panics, during which, the second self – *homo economicus* – becomes automated, mimicking the other second selves acting within the market.

This process is the subject of Frank Norris’s 1903 panic novel, *The Pit*. Curtis Jadwin becomes obsessed with the idea of cornering the market, and subsequently finds himself disassociated from both his physical body and the world around him. Jadwin’s position within the realm of imagined commodities identified by Levy, is evident in the repeated references to ‘May wheat’ and the increasing millions of future – and hence, non-existent – bushels in Jadwin’s possession. Jadwin’s explanation of the situation to Laura demonstrates the obscured line between the ownership of a physical commodity and the trading of a fictional entity:

“Now in August this year, while we were up at the lake, I bought three million bushels.”

“Three – million – bushels!” she murmured. “Why, what do you do with it? Where do you put it?”

<sup>89</sup> David A. Zimmerman, *Panic! Markets, Crises, & Crowds in American Fiction*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p.30; Stevenson, p.54)

<sup>90</sup> Zimmerman, p.30

<sup>91</sup> Paul Crosthwaite, ‘Animality and ideology in contemporary economic discourse: taxonomizing *Homo economicus*’, *Journal of cultural economy*, 6(1), 2013, 94-109 (pp.94-95).

<sup>92</sup> Crosthwaite, citing Jennifer Roback Morse, pp.95-97.

<sup>93</sup> Zimmerman, p.31.

He tried to explain that he had merely bought the right to call for the grain on a certain date, but she could not understand this very clearly.<sup>94</sup>

Here, Jadwin appears equally confused about the nature of his trading as his inexperienced wife. Although he later qualifies his statement by explaining he has purchased a futures contract, Jadwin initially implies that he has bought 'three million bushels' of actual wheat. For Jadwin, the act of buying futures contracts is so similar to the purchase of material goods he initially feels it does not require further explanation. The discussion of Jadwin's 'paper profits' which are, in accountant Samuel Gretry's words 'into the millions' despite Jadwin running out of money, further confuses the distinction between actual and fictional in the novel (Norris, ch.X). Jadwin is simultaneously rich in paper – and therefore, fictional – stocks, and financially ruined. The world of material goods is abstracted both physically and temporally, making the distinction between reality and fiction even more ambiguous.

Norris then replicates the conditions of the futures market that Michaels identifies as producing hysteria in the minds of commodities traders. Jadwin demonstrates the extremes of emotion that would, in Preda and De Goede's view, classify him as a financial hysteric; Jadwin's euphoria at being able to 'corner the market!' is undermined by the 'horror' he feels when forced to ask himself if 'his wits [were] leaving him.'<sup>95</sup> Additionally, Zimmerman recognises Jadwin's obsession with the corner as 'signal[ing] the tell-tale irruptions of hysteria.'<sup>96</sup> Norris's speculator is then an embodiment of the insanity of financial hysteria that leads to the creation of the second self. For Jadwin, this second self materializes under the title of the 'Unknown,' or 'Great Bull,' and sees his financial identity inflated almost to the size of the market itself: 'an Unknown Bull has invaded the Chicago wheat market ... and is now dominating the entire situation.'<sup>97</sup> Just as Hyde emerges as the more brutal and animalistic expulsion of Jekyll, so too does the Great Bull erupt and forcibly take over the market in place of the otherwise civilized Jadwin. The recognition of this Bull as a genuine threat to the market confirms the legitimacy of Jadwin's second self and allows it to act on behalf of his rational self throughout the novel. As Zimmerman describes, 'Jadwin is a textbook example of a man...in whom "a new and superior personality comes to the surface and takes control."<sup>98</sup>

Despite the apparent superiority of Jadwin's Bull identity, however, the actions of his second self eventually lead to the detriment of his health and the destruction of his corner. Jadwin suffers from insomnia and is described as having no 'nerves left at all' corresponding with De Goede's discussion of the 'fidgety dreams' experienced by 'maniac' speculators.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, Jadwin's second self is so abstracted from his original identity that he becomes disassociated from his physical body:

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<sup>94</sup> Frank Norris, *The Pit*. 1903. Project Gutenberg [Online]. Available at: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4382/4382-h/4382-h.htm> (Accessed: 15/12/13), ch. xxi

<sup>95</sup> Norris, ch.iiv, ix

<sup>96</sup> Zimmerman, p.139.

<sup>97</sup> Norris, ch.vii

<sup>98</sup> Zimmerman, p.139.

<sup>99</sup> Norris, ch.ix; De Goede, p. 63.

His body felt strange and unfamiliar to him. It seemed to have no weight, and at times his hands would appear to swell swiftly to the size of mammoth boxing-gloves, so that he must rub them together to feel that they were his own.<sup>100</sup>

The apparent disconnection of Jadwin's hands shows the extremity of his second self in that, in acting through this second self, Jadwin becomes alienated from his own body, just as Jekyll learns to relate to Hyde as a separate entity. Furthermore, the swelling of Jadwin's 'unfamiliar' and weightless hands is reminiscent of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' of the market.<sup>101</sup> This allusion simultaneously demonstrates the power of Jadwin's second self – in that it has inflated to the size of capitalist supply and demand – and, as Zimmerman argues, 'signals a repossession of the market by the hand that normally determines how the wheat moves.'<sup>102</sup> Jadwin's hands are thus metonymic of both his second self working to corner the market and the force of the market fighting back against the 'Great Bull' identity.

Ironically, it is the second self's automation that eventually undermines the corner it has fought so hard to create. By the end of the novel, Jadwin is unable to hear about selling contracts without experiencing an automatic reaction: 'Instantly the jaded nerves braced taut again; instantly the tiny machinery of the brain spun again at its fullest limit.'<sup>103</sup> That Jadwin first experiences this reaction through his nerves rather than his mind indicates that this response is reflexive and therefore automatic. His second self subsequently becomes reminiscent of the mechanistic view of *homo economicus*. The irrepressible impulse of Jadwin's second self to 'keep on buying' despite having no more money, creates the panic that sees him ruined by the end of the novel.<sup>104</sup> Jadwin's 'Great Bull,' acting hysterically and uncontrollably, satisfies Zimmerman's definition of financial panics as instigated by the second self. Once Jadwin has lost everything, he confirms he is 'all right,' that he has, in effect, returned back to normal.<sup>105</sup> In other words, only when Jadwin is physically – and financially – unable to continue within the hysterical sphere of the futures market, does his true identity become re-stabilized. The survival of Jadwin's original self despite the trauma he has undergone is testament to Zimmerman's notion that the second self, as a construction, acts to 'preserve the [sovereign] Self ... against the threats ... represented in market panics and hysteria.'<sup>106</sup> It also demonstrates Jadwin's retraction of the 'Great Bull' identity back into his original self, as per the requirements of the gothic doubled identity. In allowing the second self to act within the ambiguous reality of the futures exchange, the commodities trader protects his true identity from the psychologically

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<sup>100</sup> Norris, ch.ix

<sup>101</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. 2nd edn. *The Making of the Modern World*, 1761

[Online]. Available at:

<<http://find.galegroup.com/mome/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=MOME&userGroupName=jryca15&tabID=Too1&docId=U106605584&type=multipage&contentSet=MOMEArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE&gt;>; (accessed: 8/12/13), pp.237-374

<sup>102</sup> Zimmerman, p.130.

<sup>103</sup> Norris, ch.ix.

<sup>104</sup> Norris, ch.x.

<sup>105</sup> Norris, conclusion.

<sup>106</sup> Zimmerman, p.144.

damaging effects of the hysterical market. Rather than using the doubled self as a means to act immorally, as in Stevenson's text, in Norris's novel *Jadwin* utilises his doubled self as a protective barrier from the hysterical market.

### The Gold Standard, Late Capitalism and Patrick Bateman's Second Self

This notion of the capitalist sovereign self as present beneath the abstracted entity of the second self recalls the gold standard debate contemporary to *The Pit*'s publication. Michaels's discussion links market hysteria to common dismissals of paper money as a 'mere fiction': "it could no more be money than "a shadow could be the substance..."<sup>107</sup> As with the futures market, paper money was understood as a fictional abstraction of actual value represented by the gold standard. That paper money was the equivalent 'shadow' claiming to represent the 'substance' of gold corresponds with Norris's depiction of *Jadwin*'s second self as acting on behalf of his sovereign self. *Jadwin*'s original identity, which survives after the Great Bull has been destroyed or retracted back into the sovereign self, is therefore reflective of gold specie backing the apparently phantom paper currency circulating in place of actual value. *Jadwin* is able to recover by the end of the novel because his sovereign self – protected from market hysteria by his second self – acts as the gold standard against which he is able to stabilize his identity once the second self is removed from circulation. In moving away from the imagined commodities of the futures market, *Jadwin* returns to a structure of exchange backed by the gold standard which then aids the re-establishment of his true self.

However, the stability of the capitalist sovereign self must then become problematic following Nixon's closing of the gold window in 1971. The late capitalist age defined by Jameson as following this closure is the point at which, in Annesley's words, 'the abstract valuations represented by money are taken to an even higher level of abstraction.'<sup>108</sup> This abstraction reflects the 'automation' of the banking sector that, for Jameson, is a result of the computerization of financial systems.<sup>109</sup> Paper money, which used to represent gold, is consequently replaced by electronic data. This extended chain of signifiers exemplifies Mark Poster's summary of the 'arbitrary' relationship between 'the word "money"' and the 'oxides on a tape' that constitute the modern banking system, in which symbols are traded for other symbols.<sup>110</sup> Returning to Jameson, the late capitalist age can be understood as a general breakdown in the chain of signifiers that form both economic and socio-cultural structures in the late twentieth century.

In light of Jameson's views, Annesley's discussion of 'blank fictions' can be seen as a product of the late capitalist age. Annesley argues for the relationship between novels on extremism and marginality in the 1980s and the 'material structures' of late twentieth century American society.<sup>111</sup> These material structures, which trigger

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<sup>107</sup> Michaels, p.146.

<sup>108</sup> Annesley, p.17.

<sup>109</sup> Jameson, p.xix.

<sup>110</sup> Annesley, citing Mark Poster, p.17.

<sup>111</sup> Annesley, p.3.

articulations of ‘anxieties about subjectivity, representation and the relationship between text and context’ are the same chains of floating signifiers identified by Jameson; material in their intense commodification, subjective in their lack of distinct definition or referent.<sup>112</sup> What Annesley defines as ‘blank fictions’ are novels that reflect how late capitalism and its resulting environment of referential culture ‘can be defined by its ever intensifying levels of commodification.’<sup>113</sup> Annesley gives *American Psycho* as a prime example of both blank fictions preoccupation with the late capitalist period and also the use of ‘commodified language’ in its depiction of the era.<sup>114</sup> Patrick Bateman’s appropriation of advertising rhetoric when cataloguing his various electrical goods, and his descriptions of life through cinematic transitions – ‘A slow dissolve and Price is bounding up the steps’; ‘Like a smash cut ... Luis Carruthers appears’ – is testament to Ellis’s use of commodified language, and indeed locates the novel directly within the brand-driven culture of the middle and upper classes of 1980s America.<sup>115</sup> Ellis’s most famous and controversial novel is also, in its own right, highly gothic. Bateman occupies Ellis’s novel and 1980s New York as a Byronic villain for the modern age; his physical attractiveness, sexual promiscuity, and thirst for violence align him with the monster-protagonist of John William Polidori’s *The Vampyre* (1919), whilst his superficiality embodies the emphasis on surface décor and depthless extravagance understood as a central convention of the gothic mode.<sup>116</sup> *American Psycho* therefore stands as the intersection between the financial doubling of *The Pit* and the gothic doubling of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

For Bateman, the ‘fictitious’ nature of finance is intensified through the digitalisation of financial systems. Unlike Jadwin, who trades pieces of paper, Bateman’s relationship with finance is dictated by technology; he receives his financial information from the screens of his office computer and the various ATMs he visits throughout the novel. These electronic depictions, already abstractions of ‘real’ paper money, become further mystified by the closing of the gold window. Post-gold standard, the gap of substance that problematized the futures exchange becomes suddenly wider; the bank note, a symbol of value, is exchanged for an identical symbol without any prospect of reaching what it supposedly symbolizes. The electronic information that Bateman receives is therefore merely a signifier of signifiers; his access to any sense of real value is restricted physically by the barrier of the screen in front of him and epistemologically by the late capitalist system of electronic finance. His dealing with purely representational electronic data and his subsequent distance from materiality puts Bateman in a more precarious position than Jadwin. Bateman is not only dealing with finance as a fictional entity, but does so without the safety net of the gold standard against which the realm of fictitious finance is stabilized.

This pattern of financial abstraction is extended to Bateman’s surrounding culture, further complicating his relationship to reality. The novel’s fetishization of brand

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<sup>112</sup> Annesley, p.4.

<sup>113</sup> Annesley, p.8.

<sup>114</sup> Annesley, p.7

<sup>115</sup> Bret Easton Ellis, *American Psycho*. London: Picador, 1991, p.8, 292.

<sup>116</sup> Amy Bride, ‘Byronic Bateman: the Commodity Vampire, Surplus Value, and the Hyper-Gothic in *American Psycho* (1991)’ *Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* (14), 2015, 3-18, (p.9)

names, demonstrated by Bateman's repeated reference to labels and limited companies is, according to Richard Godden, the fetishization of a fetish. Brands in themselves do not constitute a product or value but are, in Godden's words, merely 'a promissory "life style" or "attitude" available through possession of the brand become logo.'<sup>117</sup> In this sense, the brand becomes another signifier of signifiers, a representation of an image of wealth and influence that is itself abstracted from the original product. From the lists of designers that constitute character descriptions in the novel to the repeated name-dropping of beauty products, electronics and fashionable restaurants, the 'reality' that surrounds Bateman is constructed of abstracted signifiers and is therefore not a reality at all. While in *The Pit* fiction and reality have become blurred, in *American Psycho* they have actually merged into a single, indistinguishable representation of economic and cultural reality, behind which no 'true' value is present. For Bateman, both the realm of finance and the supposedly 'real' world have become fictionalized through computer screens and extreme commodification. That Bateman does not even view this constructed reality directly complicates matters further. From glimpses of New York through non-prescription Oliver Peoples glasses and the tinted windows of limousines, to 'staring at [his] monitor with [his] Ray-Bans on,' Bateman constantly views the world through a protective lens.<sup>118</sup> He is therefore unable to access and assess the real value of what he sees; in Annesley's words, 'Bateman is, in a very literal sense, screened off from reality.'<sup>119</sup>

Bateman, so distanced from reality, is consequently unable to conceptualize himself and, like Jadwin and Jekyll/Hyde, demonstrates symptoms of hysteria. His being 'on the verge of tears' at not being seated in Pastels and almost attacking Craig McDermott because Scott Montgomery has a better business card, demonstrates the heightened emotions and loss of self-control experienced by market hysterics.<sup>120</sup> Indeed, when read against what Zimmerman describes as the 'anarchic manifestations' of the hysterical mind, it is difficult to see Bateman's behaviour as anything but exemplary of financial hysteria.<sup>121</sup> Certainly Zimmerman's condition of 'violent fluctuations' is satisfied by the numerous murders Bateman commits throughout the text.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, his questions of unnatural dependency and 'catastrophic rupture of reference' are answered by Bateman's reliance on the Zagat for his culinary opinions, and his use of 'commodified language' when describing his electrical products, grooming regime and musical tastes.<sup>123</sup> Bateman is therefore, much like Jadwin, an embodiment of hysteria as caused by the lack of distinction between fiction and reality within the surrounding financial – and, in Bateman's case, cultural – environment.

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<sup>117</sup> Richard Godden, 'Fictions of Fictitious Capital: American Psycho and the Poetics of Deregulation', *Textual Practice*, 25(5), 2011, 853-866 (p.856).

<sup>118</sup> Ellis, p.105.

<sup>119</sup> Annesley, p.18.

<sup>120</sup> Ellis, p.39, 46.

<sup>121</sup> Zimmerman, p.135.

<sup>122</sup> Zimmerman, p.7.

<sup>123</sup> Zimmerman, p.135; Annesley, p.7.

Moreover, just as market hysteria turns Jadwin into a mimic, it is quickly apparent that Bateman is a replica of the other characters of the novel. The 'plasticity and imitativeness' that Zimmerman associates with the hysterical market crowd is embodied by Bateman and his colleagues, all of whom eat at the same restaurants, date the same women and dress identically, to the extent that they are repeatedly misrecognised throughout the narrative: 'Charles Simpson – or someone who looks remarkably like him, slicked-back hair, suspenders, Oliver Peoples glasses – shakes my hand, [and] shouts "Hey Williams."' <sup>124</sup> In the late capitalist world, as Annesley identifies, 'personal wealth and personal identity are one and the same thing'; 'people are measured by the amount they earn, the clothes they wear and the places they eat.' <sup>125</sup> That the interchangeable identities in *American Psycho* are measured in terms of designer brands problematizes the individual's ability to maintain a secure self-identity when, at least superficially, they are just an imitation of someone else. Bateman's assertion that he is experiencing an 'existential panic' is then key to his position within late capitalism. <sup>126</sup> Identity has become so commodified that it has itself become a commodity, for which everyone in the market is vying; in doing so, they become subject to mimicry and therefore fail to demonstrate any sense of individuality. Whereas Jadwin's panic concerned wheat, *American Psycho* sees Bateman attempt to corner the identity market, to distinguish himself against those around him by staking his claim on the shared identity of the crowd. It is in this environment of identity crisis, this panic of existence, that Bateman is forced to produce a second self in the form of murderous psychopath.

However, Bateman's created identity is not recognised as a legitimate second self and is problematic in terms of Michaels's formulaic conceptualization of the economic self. He is still mistaken for other people, his violent actions and absurd outbursts often ignored, and the things he says are repeatedly misheard, disbelieved or simply not taken seriously:

"I'm into, oh, murders and executions mostly. It depends." I shrug.

"Do you like it?" she asks, unfazed.

"Um...It depends. Why?" I take a bite of sorbet.

"Well, most guys I know who work in mergers and acquisitions don't really like it," she says.

"That's not what I said." <sup>127</sup>

Here, the distinction between Wall Street trading and psychopathic violence is lost. Despite his best efforts, the second self of Bateman does not come across any differently than his sovereign self and is therefore not a legitimate identity. In other

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<sup>124</sup> Zimmerman, p.30; Ellis, p.127.

<sup>125</sup> Annesley, p.14.

<sup>126</sup> Ellis, p.321.

<sup>127</sup> Ellis, p.206.

words, people do not ‘buy’ Bateman’s psychopathic self, a distinct problem in an environment where people are measured in terms of their value as a commodity. He is, in Leigh Claire La Berge’s words, ‘a misrecognized’ and therefore ‘failed brand.’<sup>128</sup> As such, *American Psycho* demonstrates Bateman’s inability to create a secure second self in the late capitalist age. Rather than creating a double of only himself, Bateman appears to have expelled a doubled identity that acts as a stand in for everyone else in his social circle as well, putting a perverse spin on the Romantic desire to blend into a crowd of identicals. In doing so, Bateman appears to have been successful where Jekyll failed: his doubled identity is indeed able to commit horrific and immoral acts without being caught, precisely because no one believes in him. Returning to *The Pit*, if Jadwin’s sovereign self is akin to the gold standard in its representation of true value, then his Great Bull identity is symbolic of paper money, in its abstraction from that true value. The instability of Bateman’s violent second self may then be explained in relation to late capitalist electronic finance as an abstraction of abstractions. Bateman, as a post-gold window financier, cannot represent the gold standard but must be understood as an equivalent paper currency; his identity is a constructed signifier of the commodified culture around him, and is thus an abstraction of material value.

### **Bateman, Tim Price and the Late Capitalist ‘Third Self’**

This abstracted identity raises questions of the source of value in Ellis’s text; where is the equivalent gold standard of Patrick Bateman’s identity? Georgina Colby, decoding the abstractions of Bateman’s identity, discusses the role of Tim Price as Bateman’s doppelgänger. For Colby, this doubling is first made apparent through the identical descriptions of Bateman and Price arriving at Evelyn’s dinner party; both give over Armani coats and receive air kisses from the hostess, who performs ‘the same exact movements’ on both characters.<sup>129</sup> Moments later, Bateman attempts to take Price’s place in conversation, highlighting their interchangeability, at least from Bateman’s perspective:

“I have to talk to you,” Evelyn says.

“What about?” I come up to her.

“No,” she says and then pointing at Tim, “to Price.”<sup>130</sup>

Colby notes that ‘Patrick, shadow-like, continuously follows Price in these opening scenes.’<sup>131</sup> Understood as interchangeable representations of each other, Price and Bateman mirror the relationship between the gold standard and the paper contracts Jadwin deals with in *The Pit*. Price, whose value is so esteemed that he is frequently

<sup>128</sup> Leigh Claire La Berge, ‘The Men Who Make the Killings: American Psycho, Financial Masculinity, and 1980s Financial Print Culture’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 37(2), 2010 273-296 (pp.291-292).

<sup>129</sup> Georgina Colby, *Bret Easton Ellis: Underwriting the Contemporary*. (London: Macmillan, 2011), p.73; Ellis, p.8.

<sup>130</sup> Ellis, pp.11-12.

<sup>131</sup> Colby, p.75.



described as 'priceless' embodies the inherent value held by gold specie; conversely, Bateman's commodified identity is exchangeable for others within the group.<sup>132</sup>

Colby notes that, at the beginning of the novel, 'Patrick appears as the rational counterpart to his antagonistic double, Timothy Price.'<sup>133</sup> The sexism, drug abuse and vocalised violent tendencies of Price are, for Colby, evidence of his irrationality when read against Bateman as 'the voice of reason,' correcting the racism of his friends.<sup>134</sup> However, whereas Colby concludes that 'Price is Patrick's alter ego,' and defines Price objectively against Bateman as subject, the reverse appears true when this partnership is read against financial hysteria.<sup>135</sup> Price's heated outbursts are again symptomatic of Preda and Zimmerman's definitions of market hysteria. Bateman, as the rational double of Price's irrational identity is therefore Price's second self, mirroring Hyde as expelled from Jekyll, and the Great Bull identity that protects the hysterical Jadwin from the pressures of the market. Price's role as the sovereign self is predicted in the opening chapter of the novel, where he is presented as the main character: 'just as Tim Price notices the words a bus pulls up, the advertisement for *Les Misérables* on its side blocking his view...'<sup>136</sup> It is not until later that the narrator's voice is revealed to be Bateman, and only when Price and Bateman are treated identically by Evelyn that the first person pronoun is used: 'I shiver and hand her my black wool Giorgio Armani overcoat...'<sup>137</sup> Both the narrative focus and Bateman's ability to self-identify are dependent on Price as a central anchor. Price, as literal and metaphorical measurement of value within the novel, becomes both the gold standard and the sovereign self, subsequently defining the 'shadow-like' Bateman as Price's second self, and representative of the paper currency dismissed as a mere 'shadow' of real value.

If Bateman is understood as the second self of Price, then the violent second self of Bateman is actually a third self, replicating the late capitalist abstraction of electronic finance from the original source of gold-value absent by 1971. The various selves of Price and Bateman are therefore proof of the theory proposed by Jekyll in response to his initial experiments:

Man is not truly one but two. I say two, because the state of my own knowledge does not pass beyond that point. Others will follow, others will outstrip me on the same lines; and I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens.<sup>138</sup>

Following Jekyll's predictions, Bateman has indeed outstripped Stevenson's doctor by extending the power of the gothic double one stage further, to the point where Tim Price is the sovereign self, the banker Bateman is the second self, and the murder Bateman is a third self. Bateman as third self also evidences the accelerative effect of capitalism on gothic convention; in the era of unsignified finance, the gothic doubling

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<sup>132</sup> Ellis, p.32.

<sup>133</sup> Colby, p.74.

<sup>134</sup> Colby, p.73.

<sup>135</sup> Colby, p.75.

<sup>136</sup> Ellis, p.3

<sup>137</sup> Ellis, p.8.

<sup>138</sup> Stevenson, pp.48-49.

that occurs between Jekyll/Hyde is not enough. Rather, this gothic doubling merges with the capitalist doubling demonstrated in *The Pit* to form not just an additional expulsion, but the expulsion of an expulsion, the doubling of a double. This multiplier effect also magnifies the gothic threat of the doubled identity. Whilst Hyde's monetary compensation of violence towards a female body and his murder of Carew are seen as the height of monstrosity in Stevenson's text, Bateman takes the process of paying for and destroying bodies to the absolute extreme, mutilating, dismembering, and even eating his female victims who are a mixture of prostitutes he has hired and wealthy socialites attracted to Bateman's Wall Street status: 'I spend the next fifteen minutes beside myself, pulling out a bluish rope of intestines, most of it still connected to the body, and shoving it into my mouth.'<sup>139</sup> The combination of gothic and capitalist doubling, as embodied in Bateman as third self, is a deadly one.

This is particularly true in light of the context of financial designification that surround *American Psycho*, and evident when Price's disappearance in 'Tunnel' consequently problematizes the stability of Bateman as expelled second self. Following Price's 'disappearing into blackness,' Bateman is instantly congratulated for Price's actions, implying that, in his absence, Bateman has become a substitute for Price: 'Madison is standing nearby and sticks his hand out as if to congratulate me for something. "That guy's a riot."'<sup>140</sup> Bateman is subsequently uncomfortable when recognised as an independent identity: 'Denton looks over at our table, at me, one last time, and he seems panicked, convinced of something by my presence, as if he recognized me from somewhere, and this in turn, freaks me out.'<sup>141</sup> Despite the recognition of the second self being conducive to its legitimization, as it is with both Hyde and the Great Bull, without the sovereignty of Price to fall back on, Bateman feels as though his existence is under scrutiny. This instability is a product of Price's absence and constitutes Jameson's presentation of Lacan's definition of schizophrenia, understood as 'a breakdown in the signifying chain,' that produces 'distinct and unrelated signifiers.'<sup>142</sup> Price's disappearance breaks the signifying chain between sovereign and second selves, making Bateman the unrelated signifier of an absent sovereign self. The resulting schizophrenia experienced by Bateman is akin to the hysterical feeling of 'becoming someone else' identified by Michaels, and leads the already unstable Bateman to create his own second self – which is, then, the third self of Tim Price – a doubly unstable psychopath.<sup>143</sup>

Bateman's violent persona, the third self of Tim Price, therefore satisfies Plato's concept of the 'simulacrum,' defined in Jameson's words as 'the identical copy for which no original has ever existed.'<sup>144</sup> That Bateman experiences his second self as a separate entity is clear in his references to 'Patrick Bateman' as a detached identity towards the end of the novel: 'Patrick's mind is out of sync...'<sup>145</sup> That Jekyll performs

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<sup>139</sup> Ellis, p.344.

<sup>140</sup> Ellis, p.62.

<sup>141</sup> Ellis, p.90

<sup>142</sup> Jameson, citing Lacan, p.26

<sup>143</sup> Michaels, p.7

<sup>144</sup> Jameson, p.18.

<sup>145</sup> Ellis, p.351

the same verbal distancing with Hyde – ‘I swear to God I will never set eyes on him again’ – indicates that Bateman does indeed, at least in his own view, assume the role of the sovereign self for a portion of the novel.<sup>146</sup> However, the fact that Bateman’s violent self is not bought by society, that it is not recognised independently from his original identity, means that, as far as his colleagues are concerned, the sovereign and second selves of Bateman are in fact identical. Bateman as a third self is therefore precisely an identical copy of the ‘sovereign’ Bateman, for whom there is no original as he is in fact an abstraction of Tim Price. Hence Jameson’s connection of the simulacrum with ‘a society where exchange value has been generalized to the point at which the very memory of value is effaced.’<sup>147</sup> Bateman as third self is abstracted from the sovereign Bateman who signifies the absent Tim Price, removed from circulation in the novel. Similarly, electronic finance is an abstraction of paper money that supposedly represents a gold standard that no longer exists. This concept is reinforced by Bateman’s recognition of the fictitiousness of his own identity: ‘...there is an idea of Patrick Bateman, some kind of abstraction, but there is no real me, only an entity...’<sup>148</sup> The problem of Bateman’s identity is neatly summarised by his Onica artwork; ‘purposefully mock-superficial’ the Onica is, like Bateman as third self, a consciously false representation of falseness, substantial in its physical presence but, in being hung upside down, unreadable to the wider public.<sup>149</sup>

Both the instability of Bateman’s second self and the question of the true value of identity within the novel are therefore explained through the absence of Tim Price as the sovereign self, and his representation of the gold standard similarly absent from late capitalist finance. Bateman’s awareness of this absence is evident in the evocation of his relationship with Price during moments of anxiety: ‘The only thing that calmed me was the satisfying sound of ice being dropped into a glass of J&B.’<sup>150</sup> That Bateman is calmed by the idea of the drink he first orders with Price in the opening chapter of the novel – “Bateman. Drink?” Price sighs. “J&B rocks,” I tell him’ – indicates the compliance of Bateman’s constructed identities with Michaels’s theory of the ownership of past selves.<sup>151</sup> Michaels, discussing of the psychology of William James, claims the link between true and created selves is evident in the ‘feelings of “warmth and intimacy” we experience when thinking about them.’<sup>152</sup> That Bateman is soothed by the memory of being with Price suggests his violent identity is in need of stabilizing, and acts as a parody of Hyde’s desperation for the transformative drug and therefore longing to return back to Jekyll: “Have you got it?” he cried. “Have you got it?” And so lively was his impatience that he even laid his hand upon my arm and sought to shake me.’<sup>153</sup> The stabilization of Bateman’s trebled identity can only be achieved by the return of Price and subsequent redefinition of Bateman as the second self rather than abstracted third self. Colby reads the smudge on Price’s face during his reappearance as symbolic of the threat of erasure to Bateman’s identity following

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<sup>146</sup> Stevenson, p.22.

<sup>147</sup> Jameson, p.18.

<sup>148</sup> Ellis, p.376.

<sup>149</sup> Ellis, p.99.

<sup>150</sup> Ellis, p.282.

<sup>151</sup> Ellis, p.9.

<sup>152</sup> Michaels, pp.7-8.

<sup>153</sup> Stevenson, p.45.

Price's return.<sup>154</sup> With the reinstatement of Price as the true sovereign self, this is the erasure of Bateman's unstable violent identity, the third self no longer required now that the 'true' identity has returned. Colby subsequently reads Price's parting speech as a 'reinstat[ement] of Patrick's serial killer persona.'<sup>155</sup> However, in light of Price's return and therefore the return of an equivalent gold standard within the novel, Price's claim that Bateman is 'an animal' realigns Bateman with Crosthwaite's view of *homo economicus* as animalistic, and therefore reaffirms Bateman as the second self.<sup>156</sup> By the end of the novel, and only through the return of Price as symbolic of material value, Bateman's identity becomes re-stabilized through redefinition, albeit as an affirmed created persona rather than an original identity.

## Conclusion

The 'existential panic' experienced by Bateman is thus a crisis of missing sovereignty of identity, the product of an extension of Gothic doubling that is inseparable from the simultaneous panic of late capitalist finance and its ongoing abstraction from material value. With Curtis Jadwin and Tim Price representing the gold standard in their respective texts, both *The Pit* and *American Psycho* appear to align the mental and social stability of the financier with the presence of 'actual' value. That Patrick Bateman and Jadwin's 'Great Bull' are unable to exist securely and independently without their rational identities to support them, complies with the demands of expulsion and retraction that define the Gothic double as well as echoing the dismissal of paper money by 'gold-bugs,' who believed that such representational currency could not operate successfully without gold specie underwriting its claim to value. Furthermore, the complete disconnectedness of Bateman's violent persona confirms Jameson's concerns regarding the extended abstraction of late capitalist electronic finance from materiality; this subsequently highlights the conceptual problems of the purely-self-referential nature of post-1971 finance, postmodern culture, and the gothic double allowed to run awry.

Hence Annesley's assertion that 'Bateman's murders are crimes for which an increasingly commercial and materialistic society must take ultimate responsibility.'<sup>157</sup> If Bateman were a contemporary of Jadwin's, he would be operating within a financial system that, although abstracted by the futures market, was eventually supported by the gold standard. Whilst this would not have prevented the creation of a second self, it would have allowed him to eventually re-stabilize his identity against a form of actual value once outside of the realm of market hysteria. Existing as he does within *American Psycho* as part of late capitalism, Bateman is only able to conceptualize himself when in the presence of his sovereign self, Tim Price. Bateman is therefore condemned to an inescapable existential panic as, even when his self is conceptualized, it is as a projection of someone else. Whilst the contradictory Romantic self is something that Jekyll strives for in his creation of Hyde, for Bateman, there is no true sense of self as he is not the 'true' identity of the novel. As such, the

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<sup>154</sup> Colby, p.76.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid

<sup>156</sup> Ellis, p.387.

<sup>157</sup> Annesley, p.13.

final words of the text – ‘THIS IS NOT AN EXIT’ – encapsulate the fate of Patrick Bateman and all other third selves created through the combination of late capitalism and Gothic doubling.<sup>158</sup> For Bateman, there is no escape from the fact of his own abstraction; subsequently, the legitimization of his identity and the question of his very existence will always be disputed.

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