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## WIERED TO A MAZE: PIXEL SATURNALIA AND REFACEMENT

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**ABSTRACT** Reading Jeff Noon's and Stewart Home's novels as manifestations of postfuturist writing is here presented in the form of a critique of the world of commoditized emotionality, vulgarized sexuality, afflicted playfulness, and bewildering spirituality. The analysis outlines a vision of writing and activism of singularized humans, galvanized by and fertilizing solidarity and creation. The term postfuture symbolizes oscillations between melancholy and hope at the intersection of time axes. Jan Jagodzinski's ideas from *Youth Fantasies: The Perverse Landscape of the Media* (2004) are deployed to elucidate cultural and emotional dynamism in the novels, questioning the levels/kinds of reality and the notion of alterity. Additionally, the analysis is contextualized within McKenzie Wark's *Gamer Theory* (2007), problematizing living under the spectacle and questioning boundaries of freedom. Depersonalization and dehumanization in a profit-based, media-saturated mass culture is thematized through the lenses of Jean Baudrillard's *America* (1988), while Felix Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (1999) provides the context for rethinking individuality and communality. Svetlana Boym's thought provides guidelines for a vision of rethinking subjectivity. The work focuses on the potential of cultural constructiveness as a basis for remixing reading-writing tactics and cultural reality.

**Key words:** Remix, Refacement, Postfuture

### RE-FACE

Imagine a life without dreams, without a human face - the world of genetically programmed babies, peculiar journeys, shadowy reading, unfathomable powers, petals of time, tradition retold, soul searching, scientific visionaries,

exiles reunited with the dead and the beloved, magical-erotic mathematics, games eating the gamers, compulsory (compulsive) domino (players), researchers on a mission of the Truth, academics on the quest, and corporate monsters. Imagine a dream. The picture you have created is the world of Jeff Noon's novels *Pollen* (1995) and *Nymphomation* (1997).

Imagine a world of wicked pimps and zombie "johns." Imagine a ghost town whose settlers are tormented by their own ravaged, sold souls. Imagine a community on the social margins being purged from the face of the city in the name of the newly established order, which only confirms its own existence by replicating crime differently packaged. Try to picture criminalization of the wretched as a means of spreading the kingdom of Mammon. Think of a pilgrimage to the shrines where saturnalian deities are worshipped through a Babylonian randomness of pornographic semantics. Envision a society in which junkies are not addicted to drugs, but to the hollowness of their own dehumanization. Imagine carnality robbed of the bodily - an individual devoid of one's substantiality. Imagine a city as an abyss, wide open, devouring the detritus of what used to be the definition of a human being. Attempt envisioning enslavement by a belief that the wonder of meaning is not that it is. The portrait thus created is the necrophilic agony in Stewart Home's *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess* (2002) and *Down and out in Shoreditch and Hoxton* (2004).

Exploring the un verbalized, this work shows how a social commentary is delivered on the level of affect through the tone and characterization. While acknowledging overt socio-political references in the novels, I choose to emphasize the tacit layers to show the paths of reawakening cultural activism and reclaiming human dignity. Subversive, playful literary and theoretical vernaculars are read as forms of resistance to socio-political, spiritual, and emotional control. New horizons appearing from the remixed vocabularies address the problem of cultural exclusion, simultaneously delineating the possibilities of thinking, writing, and living differently from the imposed patterns. The critique includes the issues such as the misconceived absolute power of discourse, commoditized emotionality, vulgarized sexuality, afflicted playfulness, blinding noise, bewildering spirituality, oscillations



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between melancholy and hope, singularity and communality, reactionary and transformative vocabularies and practice. The reflections outline the vision of refacement--rebirth through silence and solidarity of resingularized, selfless fellow-humans, engaged in enduring creation of a free culture based on trust and love.

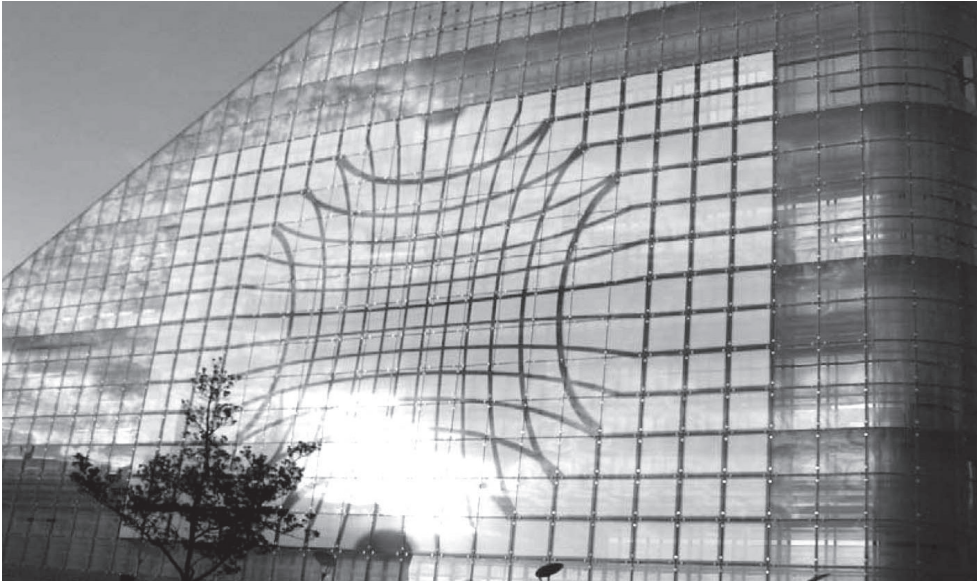
## WI(E)RED

Once upon a time in the postfuturist wild, wild Manchester, the city exists more on the virtual maps of xcab drivers - the system run by shady powers - than in actual lives of its dwellers. When one is expelled from the map, his, her, or its existence is uncertain. Breathing is virulent due to hay fever sent from Juniper Suction, a virtual land of recorded dreams, a replica, looking down and rendering the notion of reality ridiculously redundant. The sneezing bomb launched from Vurt is about to explode. The pandemic vurtuality is conquering the zones of temporarily safe breathing. Tiny traces of the human are mercilessly marginalized.

Jeff Noon's phantasmagoric cityscape is a hybrid of cultures, myths, species, and emotions. For example, John Barleycorn, one of the Vurt bosses, is an invocation of the old English pagan saint of crops and harvest sacrificed to ensure the next year's fertility. Crossed with the ancient Greek Cronus and Hades, this divinity from the replica world envies humans their mortality and steals reality from the representation-resisters. He is the demon husband of Persephone, the refigured Greek goddess of the Underworld, a flower-tongued assassin, and the seed of the Vurt hayfever, infecting the off-Vurt crossbreeds such as robodogs, doghumans, robocops, dodos, shadowcops, and zombies. The novel draws forbidden, guerilla quest paths. It portrays search for one's missing half, shadow-tracking the memories of tragic romances, smoke-seeking a dead lover's last thoughts, rebirth of mothers through a reunion with daughters, reanimated after suicide attempts. It also inspires the reinvention of humanity through the life contested between the hypercontrolled Vurt zones and scarce pockets of temporary freedom.

The fictitious ghetto echoes the real Music City's (Manchester) heyday. It gives away the smell of beautiful flowers of creation, emerging from the soil of economic recession and social turmoil. Although the legacy could be traced to a more distant past, it is during the period between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s that Manchester saw its bloom as the epicenter of lowkey creative responses to the maniacal rat race. It was a haven for lyrical, cynical, fun-loving, taciturn, flamboyant, freedom-and-experiment-starved outcasts. The performers include Joy Division, The Smiths, The Fall, New Order, Quando Quango, The Stone Roses, Happy Mondays, Inspiral Carpets, Oasis, and the acid house scene. Anchored in Anthony Wilson's Factory Records and the Fac 51 Haçienda (a.k.a. the Haçienda) nightclub, new aural blood was, at least temporarily, reconfiguring the center-periphery relationship in the U.K. Originally an indie music sanctuary, the scene turned into a selfconsuming empire - a party Titanic disappearing in a merciless mixture of unfortunate circumstances including corporate mismanagement, criminalization, conformism, and wrecked private lives.

After the business closed, the building changed the owner. Today the Haçienda is transformed into the Haçienda Apartments, breeding the real



Urbis, Manchester 2008

estate property instead of music. In memory of the Madchester days, in 2007 Urbis center hosted the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary exhibition dedicated to the Hacienda. Curated by Andy Brydon, it showed original objects from the club, rare video recordings, and facilitated talks and lectures revisiting the life of the community. Ironically, the exhibition center itself is a cultural yesteryear. Further, the part of the city called Hulme, the club's afterparty zone, underwent a radical transformation as well. In the 1960s it was an innovative urban architectural project. The Crescents were designed to modernize the area and ensure good standard of living and quality of life for the predominantly working class demographics. However, contrary to the initial ideas, the housing soon proved not to be as affordable as originally planned. During the decades of 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the neighborhood was transformed into an infamous squatter community that was going to be gentrified in the following years. Fortunately, some neighborhoods in Manchester today are negotiating the new aesthetic in a slightly different way. For example the Northern Quarter, balancing between a tourist attraction and the authentic groove: cozy, smoke-free staleness of the previous night's evaporations in a secluded pub welcomes a passer-by, protecting him or her from afternoon drizzle.<sup>1</sup>

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1. The account of the historical Manchester and that of the novels analyzed is based on the information found in the interviews with Andy Brydon, Gonnie Rietveld, and Jeff Noon (June 2008).

Outside of such pockets, the city is transforming into another “massage” in the global spectacle - a glossy surface, a battlefield for designer capitalist conquerors, and the arena of ecstasy.<sup>2</sup> It is also a place on the map of the giant dreamer, contesting its postcolonial identity between the imperial myth of an unrivaled power and an Orwellian neocolonial reality. In the global power ring the U.K. participates in creating the culture that urges one to choose the postfuture one wants to live. Jon Savage observes the empire’s anticlimactic moment at the time of the Queen’s Silver Jubilee: “Here was the blind superiority that had characterized the English world-view after the Second World War; here was a concentrated doze of all the unappealing traits – snobbery, insularity, xenophobia – that rendered England’s continued claim to be a world power meaningless” (Savage 2001, 352). Like the pagan divinity, sacrificed to ensure the next year’s harvest, the eroding imperial myth is expected to catalyze the emergence of new, preferably myth-free, realities. Meanwhile, it resembles Singland in *Pollen*, agonizing between Columbus’s maps and the Unbeknownst.

Remixing history through history, the participants in contemporary culture resemble Boda, the shadowcop in the novel. She dies to be reborn to her daughter’s soul. However, the prerequisite for this reunion is defeating John Barleycorn and Columbus, the ruler of the city maps. Having untied these “knots,” she breaks the pollen spell and makes the city breathe again. This act can be read as a redescription – emptying of self, the much needed act in the culture of megalomaniacal power addicts. It is the subject’s realization and acceptance of human limits, implying humility in some, but not all the gamizens. Vurt does something qualitatively different from the self-cancellation through the sublime:

“Dialectically, in the conscious sublime, it is the self that touches the limit; here it is the body that is touching its limits, ‘volatilized,’ in this experience of images, to the point of being outside itself, or losing itself. What you get is the reduction of time to an instant in a most intense final punctual experience of all these things, but it is no longer subjective in the older sense in which a personality

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2. “Mass(age) is the message” (Baudrillard 1983, 44).



is standing in front of the Alps knowing the limits of the individual subject and the human ego. On the contrary, it is a kind of nonhumanist experience of limits beyond which you get dissolved” (Jameson 2007, 46).

### (THE) NOISE



*The Hacienda Apartments. Manchester, 2008*

On Friday nights in Manchester, some time now in the future of the past, gamers do not face the Alps. Instead, they stare at screens. Their personalities are dissolved in the nonhumanist experience, but such a sacrifice does not relieve them from craving the intensities of flashy surface: ”The people of good Mazechester, wild-eyed and lost” (Noon 1997, 319). There are moments of uncontested unity, undivided commitment, and unquestioning determinacy. Only the cohesion has nothing to do with fellowship. Also, the integrity is temporary, it lasts for a couple of hours. The magical hour of the “absolute” is when the lottery, a domino game called nymphomation, is played. Hypnotized, Mazechester’s gamizens dive into a computer screen, TV, or radio. Strangely, the fact that each of them is simultaneously focused on similar objects does not make the game a communal experience. It is all about scoring, actually.

However, such a singular goal by no means informs a sense of individuality. It is not so much about choosing to participate in the game. It is, in fact, being thrown in it:

“Ever get the feeling you’re playing some vast and useless game whose goal you don’t know and whose rules you can’t remember? Ever get the fierce desire to quit, to resign, to forfeit, only to discover there is no umpire, no referee, no regulator to whom you can announce your capitulation? Ever get the vague dread that while you have no choice but to play the game, you can’t win it, can’t know the score, or who keeps it? Ever get mad over obvious fact that the dice are loaded, the deck stacked, the table rigged and the fix – in? Welcome to gamespace” (Wark 2007, [1]).<sup>3</sup>

Welcome to the nymphomation – the bone-domino world of reversed gazes, hyperreal horizons of (dis)appearance, organic adverts throwing gamers into the gameweb, magical-erotic mathematicians of a maze. The cyberpunk aspect of Noon’s envisioning lifespace colonized by Vurt, resonates with Wark’s (2007) portraying computer games conquering the gamers’ world (Wark 2007, [015]) and causing harsh ontological redescriptions. Wark uses Plato’s concept of the cave to present the inversion of realities and the impasses entailed by such shifts. The main difficulty of living in the world that has repudiated the distinction between the original and the replica is that the disappearance of the division does not bring relief. Quite the opposite. The reason for this is that the proliferation of realities is suspended at the expense of everything else. As a result, nothing is real enough. More precisely, having experienced the reality of gamespace, the world outside of it doesn’t appear to be more real. Simultaneously, the game does feel real enough to keep the gamers captive, but offers nothing more than ecstasy and euphoria.

Wark criticizes the military-entertainment complex that redesigns humans according to the logic of computer games. What makes such a world specific is: (a) that it transforms play into a game, thereby rendering freedom, spontaneity,

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3. McKenzie Wark’s *Gamer Theory* is not paginated. Instead, the text is divided into numbered paragraphs. I provide the paragraph numbers in square brackets, the way they appear in the original.



and creation robotic, manipulated, competitive, and goal-oriented; (b) that it is everywhere:

“Play becomes everything to which it was once opposed ... The utopian dream of liberating play from the game, of a pure play beyond the game, merely opened the way for the extension of gamespace into every aspect of everyday life. While the counter-culture wanted worlds of play outside the game, the military – entertainment complex countered in turn by expending the game to the whole world, containing play forever within it” (Wark 2007, [011-6]).

The invasion of everyday by gamespace is Wark’s vision of global capitalism depriving individuals of nothing less but life: one’s existence is turned into scoring instantaneous gratifications, denying the importance of the process itself. The gamers’ blind chase of the goal is a life of the living dead. The phenomenon is described in Jean Baudrillard’s *America* (1986), depicting purposelessness of stunningly challenging, self-perpetuating/consuming endeavors, aimed at justifying one’s existence: “Do we continually have to prove to ourselves that we exist? A strange sign of weakness, harbinger of a new fanaticism for a faceless performance, endlessly self-evident” (Baudrillard 1986, 21).

It is small wonder that such futile activities make an individual feel displaced and overwhelmingly bored. Thus, gamizens find themselves in atopia – Manchester in *Nymphomation*. Reality as nonplace characterizes Noon’s novels and short stories, frequently causing a categorization of his prose as dystopian science fiction. However, I look at the genre through the lenses of Fredric Jameson’s thought: “That particular Utopian future has in other words turned out to have been merely the future of one moment of what is now our own past” (Jameson 2005, 286). Choosing the genre in this case is an act of choosing what type of postfuturist one wants to be. It implies a transformative approach: imagining a future through a revision of the past as a social critique of the present, rather than as a nostalgic lionization of the previous eras, or, a somnambulist image of the future: “Ontologies of the present demand archaeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past” (Jameson 2002, 215). It means to excavate the future, revisiting the past, simultaneously updating it

(jagodzinski 2004, 120). This perspective disrupts dystopian logic with a ray of hope.

In *Pollen* and *Nymphomation* the postfuture is hibernated in the present uncertainties. Disaffection is a part of the content of the “vurtbomb.” Although, while engaged with the game, the nymphomation gamers feel hyperexcited, the sentiment is controlled through suspense and focuses on anticipating the outcome of the game - the flash, the climax of euphoric fantasies. This also means that anything anywhere outside that Friday night hardly exists. Such are the troublesome affective responses of these “hyperorgasm junkies.”

McKenzie Wark and jan jagodzinski present their respective approaches to ambivalent feelings and oscillations on the activity-passivity scale of the gamers. Jagodzinski devises “the inverted gaZe” to emphasize the paradox of being “totally caught by the game *despite being active*” (jagodzinski 2004, 191). The objects (primarily the screen) gaZe back at gamers, sucking them into interpassivity and elongate their fascination through fabricated desire (jagodzinski 2004, 193). This Lacanian media analysis understands the situation as a mirror experience. According to jagodzinski, the mirroring reflects the perception of an individual by others, which helps one cope with neurotic experiences. Most importantly, the gaZe inspires the making a crucial choice between death and life (jagodzinski 2004, 194).

From a slightly different angle, Wark’s analysis looks at how culture colonizes and commoditizes the private. He tells a story about the travesty of the game, simultaneously transfiguring the gamers. Within such dynamic, inverted worlds emerge from the interaction between the game and the gamer:

“The problem is that in gamespace things target people, rather than the other way around. It is not that the digital is a technology that cuts into *the world* and presents it to the human as if it were always and already cut to suit us. It is that the digital cuts into *us*, rendering us as bits, and presents those bits to the world made over as a gamespace in which we are the targets” (Wark 2007, [174]).

That is the story of how a game, mimicking play, penetrates all aspects of life. In effect, it seduces and coerces the gamers to participate in something decisively different from play. Put differently, it is a make-believe situation in which the gamers live under the impression that all aspects of their lives are creative, while in fact they are repetitive, unimaginative, tiring, mechanical: "No wonder people find their leisure as dull as their work - leisure *is* work" (Wark 2007, [156]). Not only is it deadly boring, but it's also lethal in the way that makes the gamers, confronted with the question the inverted gaZe generates, face difficult choices.

So do the gamizens, wild-eyed walkers through nymphomation, named after the lottery game designed around "a new kind of mathematics based on sex" (Noon 1997, 257). It was initiated in the 1960s by Max Hackle and developed during the following decade by a circle of co-researchers, friends, and lovers. One of the collaborators was James Love, father of Daisy Love. Hackle's student at the University of Manchester, she is a gifted researcher, whose inquiring mind is intrigued by mysterious knowledge, allegedly coded in Professor's theory. Thus, she focuses her research on Hackle's writings, but gets the secret science partially disclosed. Most of the material is inaccessible. Yet the titles do spur scientific imagination:

"'Twisted Hackle Paths and Other Such Wanderings', 'The Trickster Virus, its Effect Upon Play', 'Maze Dynamics and DNA Codings, a Special Theory of Nymphomation', 'Sealing the Maze, the theseus Equation', 'Lost in the Love Labyrinth', 'Becoming a Maze, a Topology of Virgin Curves', and even 'Four Dimensional Orgasms and the Casanova Effect'" (Noon 1997, 119).

Among the available texts is the article "The Bifurcation Less Travelled" published in 1979 in *Number Gumbo*, a journal specializing in the Black Math Ritual. In a conversation with Max Daisy learns about the postulates of Mathematica Magica, from which the nymphomation emerged only to be coopted by Anno Domino Co. that used it to turn Manchester into Mazechester - gamespace. The Professor reveals to Daisy the secret about the character of the project, the spirit of the time when it was developed, and the odd clue about how the scenario has been transformed into the original design's opposite. Or,

was it just an inevitable outcome of experimenting with such rituals? Hackle confesses that he created the maze, challenging the boundaries of science with specific enthusiasm: "It was a special time to be a scientist, the Sixties into the Seventies. Bliss to be alive. Lateral thinking, chaos theory, fractal dimensions, the unraveling of the double helix, cellular automata, complexity theory, the game of life. Each of these we could incorporate into the thinking of the maze" (Noon 1997, 254). Thus, the researchers kept working on the maze, making it ever more complex. The basic motive was essentially the quest:

"Why did I build the maze? To prove something to myself, I suppose. You know that the ancients built labyrinths not to get lost in, but to find themselves. Not all mazes contain a monster, some contain treasures. It was a spiritual quest, a tool of the mystics. So maybe I was picking up on that feeling. You've read my early work, *Daisy*. You'll know what the Sixties were like then; we were the mathematicians of the soul" (Noon 1997, 253).

He goes on to clarify that in the Sixties many activities were sexually based and ritualistic. Thus, the esoteric science of probability led the researchers to literally incorporate their ideas into the maze. It was an experiment that launched the virtual turn. Hackle illustrates this by telling the story about Georgie's experience, the turning point in ontological reshifting, darkly redirecting the flow and purpose of the maze:

"Over the next few months we experimented more and more with the Georgie-maze loop, creating ever-more-complex pathways. Georgie would always find his way through. He was becoming the maze. He took to spend all night linked to the machine, sometimes falling asleep while connected. Amazingly, even asleep he could still affect the outcome. His dreams were wandering the labyrinth, working the wanderers, breeding, multiplying, succumbing to the nymphomaniac. This had a parallel effect on his waking life. It was a two-way process" (Noon 1997, 260).

This undoubtedly indicated innumerable possibilities. Unfortunately, one of them was the transformation of the maze into a self-regulated system, disabling the designers' control over the processes. As a result, fellow-wanderers were

getting lost. The system was spreading the viral code, infecting the path and the walkers, injecting into them dangerous knowledge, turning self-breeding of data into an orgy of information. The less controllable the maze was becoming, the more vehemently it was sucking the gamers in. Some of them never returned from the labyrinth. Finally, the maze itself got lost. Or, rather was won over by the quazi-omnipotent corporate deity Anno Domino Co. Thereafter the corporation would run the business until the finale of Professor Hackle's team fighting against the corporate monster. The climax of the war is the overthrow of Mr. Million, grey eminence, and, bizzarely, one of cofounders of the maze.

Such is the pathway from idealist revolutionary science to the soul-crushing beat of the Anno Domino gamespace. The seed of the sinister turn can be tracked down to the original axioms. One of them reads as follows: "To play to win a Hackle maze, all the various wanderers must actively fall in love with the puzzle. Every player is dependent on every other" (Noon 1997, 119). This would later be transformed into pure dependency, integrated into the controlling viral addiction - the bloodflow of the gamespace. In the game the participants' relating to each other does not imply intimacy. Nor is it soul-enriching. Instead, it brings hardly redeemable alienation: "That was it, wasn't it? They were, all five of them, lost in their own little worlds, their own little mazes. Only the games had brought them together" (Noon 1997, 328-9). This signals that the group activity in question has no communal bearings. It has no life-generating energy, no capacity to invigorate genuine intimacy and friendship. The corporation operates in a sophisticated fashion: it does not allow the gamers to be aware of the actual condition. What is more, it makes the world look contrary to what it really is, as evidenced in some of its rules:

- 5a. Anno Domino will not permit the players to become addicted to the game.
- 5b. The players of the game will not give themselves up to addiction.
- 6a. We cannot allow society to be threatened by addiction.
- 6b. We must always be searching for profit.
- 6c. Rules 6a. and 6b. must never come into conflict with each other (Noon 1997, 37).

It seems that the only proper rule is the 6b., while the 6c. combines the previous two simply to ensure the efficiency of the 6b. Similarly, the 5a., 5b.,



and 6a. merely introduce the rest. The travesty in question becomes more obvious once Noon discloses the role of the Government:

“Keen for the game taxes, but fearful of the populace becoming too addicted, the Government had specified that the nation’s dominoes must contain a rare chance of losing, and losing badly... Of course the Government got it completely wrong: the chance of losing so badly only made the punters play to win even harder. That being the nature of the human soul” (Noon 1997, 244).

The Government surely got it “wrong.” It is precisely the human corruptible nature on which they counted to create the ever increasing desire in gamers. Fortunately, it is not all what the human soul is about. There is more to it. But in the profit-driven culture, only fear of loss inspires gamers. It is, at the same time, the most desirable type of desire, because it ensures a sense of “communality.” The absence of love provides space for desire run on the urge to compensate for the lack. Supposedly, the hole that cannot be filled because the missing part is forever elusive. This allegedly condemns one to living with an ongoing feeling of longing. At least in a culture that defines the word love in terms of possession.

## TOWARDS THE REMIX

If the Vurt sneeze bomb has been sent to our world, it came in the form of a bewildering massage. Its facelessness is being impressed on the human face. Its noise mutes the human voice. The system is preserved through the assumption that corruption is what constitutes human nature. It certainly is a part of who we are. Svetlana Boym portrays the dilemma in “Nostalgic Technology: Notes for an Off-Modern Manifesto,”<sup>4</sup> theorizing erroneousness of technology as a parallel to human fallibility. The frustration and constraints we - the consumers/producers of technology - experience on a daily basis, confronted with technological dysfunctioning, in a way proves the fact that to err is human. In other words, technological is remindful of our own imperfection and, as such, shows us the ways in which defects might affect our lives. However, as

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4. <http://www.svetlanaboym.com/manifesto.htm>

much as it forces us to encounter the corruptible, malfunctioning aspects of our existence, the flawness of technology, paradoxically, provides a platform for thinking and living differently. It informs our capacities to take advantage of what is typically perceived as a weakness and turn it into a potent device for walking the alternative, lateral paths.

In Boym's parlance, it opens an off-modern avenue for neither quixotically fighting the technological Goliath, nor sheepishly following its commandments. Put differently, it presents us with a possibility to see the reality afresh if we opt for off-modern alleys, instead of "modern," "postmodern," "antimodern," "hypermodern," or any other variant to signify the discourse and culture in the delayed aftermath of the linguistic turn. According to Boym, choosing the off-modern mode, one is free to reclaim the uniqueness of the cities, threatened by the global homogenizing atomization. It also enables one to see the human face again. By extension, this expands the understanding of what it means to be human. Boym's off-modern thinking about moving laterally, through the "exploration of the side alleys" (Boym, without date, without page number), can entail that "it's only human to err" should not be confusedly equated with "to be human is to err." Because to simply be - to resist the mindless "progress" rush - is human, as well.

For that reason, one finds novels like *Nymphomation*, *Pollen*, *69 Thing to Do with a Dead Princess*, and *Down and Out in Shoreditch and Hoxton* inspiring for imagining different living conditions and sentiment. This includes love freed from the need to obtain, contain, and possess - because it is not about having. Such an understanding and experience of love does not necessitate reaching out in order to find the missing part. Paradoxically, it is about reaching out to give (because it is not meant to be had in the first place) and to receive (not take) because "Love is receiving what one does not have and giving that of what one has no power."<sup>5</sup>

Theorizing about it makes one a potential hypocrite and a pornographer of "pixel saturnalia." More precisely, Wark claims that in gamespace critical theory

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5. Simon Critchley in the panel discussion *Is This a Secular Age?* 2009. Graduate Center, City University of New York.

is, like sports or porno, yet another specialized, precisely regulated vocabulary. It becomes “pornography of the concept’[...] a mere subset of gamespace, a hypocritical theory, with different specialists, playing by different rules - equally worthy of the Marquis de Sade” (Wark 2007, [151]). Perhaps. But the critic too is a dweller of the gamespace. The absolute power of gamespace is a misconception parallel to that about the totality of discourse. Notwithstanding being thrown into a maze, gamers can look for the channels to reclaim playing. What Wark describes as a hypocritical position comes as a result of trying to step out of the game in order to confront it. It entails further multiplication of (un)realities and keeps a gamer captive. Conversely, playing within, yet making choices through the cracks, lateral alleys of gamespace, means negotiating its totalizing tendencies. It means to “be ludic, but also lucid” (Wark 2007, [151]). And it translates into the following:

“Allow them play [...] All the underachievers, the desperate and the wild; the users, the losers, the self-abusers; the closet queens, the wardrobe kings; the mix-masters, the fixers, the mix 'n' matchers; dead-enders, big spenders, low enders, pretenders to the bone; the pros and the knows and the job-blows; the drunks and the skunks and the hunks; the survivors, the suiciders; the morticians, the mathematicians; bimbos and criminals; rich men, poor men, beggar men, thieves; the nameless and the gameless [...] All citizens, good and bad. Allow them play. Allow them numbers” (Noon 1997, 320).

To allow them numbers means to bear in mind that “If everybody looked the same/ We’d get tired looking at each other” (Groove Armada 1999, 1-2). The question is essentially about coping with the difference-commonality dialectic: “A culture which results from the active participation of all its members is likely to be more mixed and uneven than a uniform culture which admits new members only on its own terms. In this sense, equality generates difference” (Eagleton 2009, 154). The reason for occasional perplexities caused by such tensions of peculiar dialectics often lies in amnesia. We sometimes forget that the deprivation of rights, liberties, and freedom is not limited to one’s own marginalization and exclusion, but is rather a general issue of oppression and dispossession. Consequently, we perpetuate the mechanism against which we originally fought, because such a war disables crossing cultural boundaries

and keeping in mind that one cannot be emancipated at the expense of someone else's liberties. On a global scale, this calls for the reanimation of the Constitution of the United States - resuming the authentic faith in freedom. An important reason for this rests on the global restructuring of hegemony that has ill-redefined heterogeneity as a danger than a wager of solidarity: "Indeed, the evasive meanings of colonial history and its potential value to the multiculturalism of the future are pending inside the new global role of the United States as a successor to the European empires that were defeated and transformed during the twentieth century" (Gilroy 2006, 3).

Those who are inspired by the European spirit and refiguring its invaluable heritage also find invigorating the love for the anti-American dream because it is faithful to the original spirit that conceived America and has disseminated cultural gems from gospel, via jazz and the blues, to rock'n'roll. For such a hybrid, "schizoid" mindset, the transatlantic disenchantment has been a powerful aphrodisiac nourishing an unstoppable impulse for copulating with the abject lover. They say there are no second acts in American lives.<sup>6</sup> Or, was it in Singland? Or, is it wherever war on terror is being waged instead of war on culpability culture? Or, is it whenever love is absent that we find ourselves entrapped in discourse?

Ruminations about such a world can be found in Home's antinovels<sup>7</sup> *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess* (2002) and *Down and Out in Shoreditch and Hoxton* (2004). They illuminate the themes such as restorative capacities and the possibilities of fulfillment in the private sphere colonized by the media and ideology; it is a portraiture of alienation, disaffection, and subjugation of authentic needs, primarily love and freedom, to commoditized superficialities. My reading of *69 Things to Do with a Dead Princess* is centered around the symbolism of the dead princess as a metaphor for an intertextual exchange. It is primarily concerned with an exponential increase in representational vocabularies in the world that offers glamour instead of human relationships, advertisements impersonating an emotional exchange, porn ventriloquizing

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6. In Michael Winterbottom's movie *24 Hour Party People* (2002) Tony Wilson (played by Steve Coogan) references Francis S. Fitzgerald.

7. Classification according to the author.

an erotic experience, games that should pass for spontaneous creativity, celebrities mimicking subjects, and the fetish commodity aiming to compensate for spiritual fulfillment. The problem of discursively defined boundaries of freedom is read in the light of a variety of impositions one faces living in a controlling, media-saturated culture, taking from one that what otherwise makes one alive - the soul.

The book explores mass culture's thriving on the (non)individuals' susceptibility to sensationalism and instantaneous gratifications. Specifically, the death of princess Diana and the spectacle in the aftermath frame a glimpse at the fabrication of desire in a defaced cultural amalgam. Perverse indulgence in the lives and deaths of celebrities is a picture of a displacement, uprootedness of the neglected innermost needs. The novel addresses the conservative aspects of British global policy, implicitly raising questions regarding English supremacy symbolized by the Royal Family. The character of Lady D., bridging the gap between various social strata is a reference to the actual princess' behavior, quite often confronting, denying, and ignoring the strict etiquette regarding the class and private-public divides. At the same time, the critique references the complicity of the social segments across the classes in replicating the politics of exclusion.

The social commentary delivered in this bizarre travelogue leads the reader around Aberdeenshire stone circles. Reportedly, it was based on a non-fiction work by K. L. Callan/Callum. The name varies in different parts of the novel, suggesting the mutability of self – the writing tactics Home customarily applies in order to destabilize fixed cultural categories, thereby questioning relationships based on dominance and hierarchy. The shadowy subtext is supposed to reveal the unknown, “true” story of Lady D.'s end. According to this account, she was strangled and the corpse was taken to sixty-nine stone circles in Aberdeenshire. Evoking the days between Lady Diana's death and the funeral, this necrophilic feast shows the dead body of the princess dismembered and decomposed by the spectacle vultures.

Following the scenario of the princess' gruesome end, the protagonists set out on a journey only to realize that, just like the corpse, their identities cannot



be reanimated. Despite visiting the places of worship and sacrifice, their quest ends in no disclosure - no fulfillment. Such an anticlimax results from a broken intimacy between the word and the world desensitized to revelation. Thus, the sacred stones turn out to be everything but holy. They rather constitute a setting for a depiction of a military-entertainment wasteland in the society of dispirited physicality, discursively determined selves, and insatiable hunger for power.



Beehive Buzz, 2009

The sound in this antinovel is the beehive buzz of a discursive multitude portrayed through the proliferation of sex games, during which the characters discuss literary and theoretical works. The randomness in the selection of partners parallels the abundance in textual references that Home dubs “the orgy of history” (Home 2002, 22). Similarly, masturbation symbolizes self-

referentiality, a dead end of self-centeredness and circular transformations “from semen to semantics” (Home 2002, 8). Among the symbolic sexual games, the concept of rape is a literary device used to criticize dispossession and violence: “Alan had been raped by those who’d forced him to constitute himself as a bourgeois subject but his tormentors had been similarly abused” (Home 2002, 57). On the other hand, numerous oral sex scenes seem to be a channel of a bilateral exchange. Unlike masturbation and rape, the sixty-nine pose appears to have the capacity to relieve us from the burden of self-referentiality and enslavement by discourse. However, the relief lasts no longer than the sexual act. Did anyone mention copulation? It certainly is constitutive of the versatility of carnal games - a frequency in the deafening buzz, the noise in communicational channels, in which partners, blindfolded, indulge in sexual experiences without much need to actually “talk” to “interlocutors.” Did anyone mention copulation proper?

#### **REFACEMENT: FROM CACOPHONY TO SILENCE**

A genuine exchange and its redemptive impact on vocabularies and life is, essentially, what does not happen in such conversational games. The reason for the failure is the contamination of the communicational channels: life colonized by discourse, dissolving individuality and disabling communality. The recuperation can be imagined through Felix Guattari’s refiguring the notion of subjectivity: “[...] ethico-political articulation – which I call *ecosophy* – between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)” (Guattari 1999, 28). Painstakingly outlining the purifying tactics in the three spheres, Guattari looks at the problem of diluted individuality, polluted morality, distorted political realm, and unwholesome environment: “[...] social ecology, mental ecology and environmental ecology” (Guattari 1999, 41). The tripartite cultural paradigm shift is envisaged through the channels of genuine exchange. One of them is a transnational conversation called rock’n’roll as a means of breaking the spell of fragmented, isolated, and faceless lives in the Integrated World Capitalism:

“As for young people, although they are crushed by the dominant economic relations which make their position increasingly precarious, and although they

are mentally manipulated through the production of a collective, mass-media subjectivity, they are nevertheless developing their own methods of distancing themselves from normalized subjectivity through singularization. In this respect, the transnational character of rock music is extremely significant; it plays the role of a sort of initiatory cult, which confers a cultural pseudo-identity on a considerable mass of young people and allows them to obtain for themselves a bare minimum of existential Territories” (Guattari 1999, 33).

Guattari calls for resingularization, as opposed to individualism, as a means for resuming unique facial features. Such individuality sustains communal cohesion because it is based on a new perception of subjectivity freed from dominance-ridden relationships with others: “[...] heterogenesis, in other words, process of continuous resingularization. Individuals must become both more united and increasingly different” (Guattari 1999, 37). Pseudo as some identities may be, they surely provide an initiatory impetus for further steps towards refacement – rebirth of resingularized, selfless human faces.

It also reverberates with the tension between melancholy caused by the present uncertainties on the one hand and, on the other, hope for the better future and faith that, if necessary, change is possible. This streak of the analysis addresses a misconception of the absolute power of discourse. Taking into account both the limitations and potential of language, this aspect of the remix, celebrating silence, aims to disambiguate a misconception of the discourse exclusive of linguistically addressing experiences ungraspable through language – the unutterable literary tissue, silent disruptions in the narrative, subverting totalizing tendencies of the discursive. By extension, it is reasonable to believe that culturally constructed realities we know are not immune to remixing either and that, consequently, one is free not to accept the life that contemporary culture imposes on one.

In order to reanimate the burning appeal of redemptive silence, it is necessary to remix the noise. Remixing is typically understood to be a part of music-making, just as storytelling is traditionally considered to belong in the world of letters. However, transmedial reconfiguration renders the common distinctions redundant. Thus refigured, the concept implies looking at culture

as a flux of interrelated stories. This approach implies experiencing self as fluid and revisable through an exchange with fellow humans. Baudrillard presents Japanese culture as the epitome of “true exoticism...based on a back and forth between recognizing the Other and returning to oneself” (Baudrillard 2008, 64). Radical alterity, as presented, ensures recognizing in the other what is different from ourselves, accepting, and loving them for who they are. Baudrillard praises Japanese culture for living out the belief that “everything comes from the outside” (Baudrillard 2008, 69). Accordingly, the input received from the outside is appropriated by the host, making Japanese a culture of hospitality, not imitation.

Given that the inside of the host is an appropriation of the input received from the outside, it is worth acknowledging that in each individual case a different remix is created in the output. These remixes are manifestations of refacement. For that reason, I see subversive potential in idiosyncratic, playful literary experiments and their creative capacities. Fusing the quest and activism, these stories contest the traditional cultural boundaries. Stylistically transgressive, speaking from the social margins, such narratives not only address the problem of oppression in an authoritarian culture, but are its concrete manifestations: they are both verbal tools and an actual cultural practice.

The following analysis refocuses on the subversiveness of the implicit. Specifically, the reading of Stewart Home’s novel *Down and Out in Shoreditch and Hoxton* demonstrates the notion of the remixed noise – the unuttered as literary tissue, cracks in the discursive, lateral paths of cultural remixing. Affective sparseness is that what allows for such reshifting. Minimalist emotionality is a sketch of an alienated, disaffected, zombified individual. Brutal, compulsive physicality symbolizes living in a soulless, commoditized world. It is presented in the text and, coupled with the content infused in the subtext, provides not only a reading, but an experience of the contemporary affective predicament.

Typically, London is a character in Home’s novels. The psychogeographical account of the character of London charts the changes caused by gentrification in the area between Bethnal Green and the City. Focusing on the architectural



Politically Correct, 2010

reconfiguration of the cityscape, accompanied by cultural restructuring, Home underscores how criminalization of the dispossessed has been instrumentalized. Historicizing prostitution, the novel revisits the Jack the Ripper theme, thereby contextualizing a parallel between the nineteenth century and contemporary culture's fascination with conspiracy and sensationalism. This susceptibility to the spectacle thrives on an obsessive, insatiable hunger for the euphoric. Closely related to such sentiment is Home's recurring theme of idolatry projected on celebrities. Thus, among the candidates for the identity of the serial killer (Jack the Ripper) are Henry James and William Burroughs, just as some of the prostitutes' clients are Martin Heidegger, George Sorel, Albert Camus, Gilles Deleuze, and Jim Morrison. Thematizing prostitution this way, Home scrutinizes power relations within the cultural establishment and criticizes institutionalized knowledge. College scenes in the novel show a distorted side of an educational institution. For example, a promiscuous university professor seduces a student and exposes his sexual frustration in a violent erotic act. Images of sexual violence are often used in Home's novels to depict an alienated bodily experience, vulgarized sexuality, and body politics



as a form of socio-political control that disguises questionable morality under the language of political correctness.

Hypocrisy is also problematized through the critique of politics of globalization and the state of affairs in the European Union, based on the Old-New Europe divide. Many of the prostitutes, for example, are from the former Communist Bloc, which emphasizes the problems of inequality and inhumane treatment of degraded demographics in the E.U. Expanding on Marx's critique of alienation and exploitation in capitalist and allegedly socialist/communist societies alike, Home uses prostitution as a metaphor for the social and existential dilemma. For example, the antiheroine in this book is a well-educated, well spoken artist-prostitute-crackhead. Along with a class reference, crack, as the drug of "choice" of the impoverished, also metaphorizes prevalent affective patterns of our time, characterized by addictive, instantaneous gratification and superficiality in encounters with others.

The novel shows an individual in the world today as bewildered, bought, and sold - the living dead. Through this is addressed the question of freedom under a violent intrusion of the entertainment-industry complex in the private sphere. The symbolism of the occult demonstrates the characteristics of such a culture. For example, artistic circles are presented as similar to a mystical order that accepts only carefully selected few to be initiated. Frequently, the soul is the price for that. This is a vision of a vicious circle in which art, consumerism, prostitution, and possession maintain each other. The literary establishment reflects the mechanisms of domination and submission pertinent to the cultural industries. The issue is referenced through the destabilization of the role of the author - uncertainty of narration and mutable characters. By doing so, the novel poses the questions about the problems of ownership and hierarchy as the proponents of the materialist culture sustaining exclusion. Through playfulness, it contests literary and cultural conventions and divides. It determines *how* one resists impositions and limitations, at the same time reconstructing one's communal being and reinventing individuality.

As a representational vocabulary, literature is affected by the limitations of language. Normally, this implies that it is not possible to verbally express what

is outside of language. This is how discourse exercises its power. However, not only the verbalized is what makes literature literature. There are literary elements, such as the tone, characterization, setting – the voice – conveying the message unutterable by and impenetrable through language. It is where silence disrupts discourse. It is where pockets of freedom await: “that reality bullets [...] lodged in [one’s] heart” (Noon 1995, 230). Despite the envious johns.



*Reworkable. London. 2009*

The ways in which affect is emanated through the tone of the narrative, discursive limitations are rendered negotiable, if not surpassed. Also it is the tacit layers through which a social message is conveyed. In this I see the great transformative potential of creation. The silent levels of the narrative reveal literature’s oscillating character. The ambiguity lies in its constructiveness and the double blessing of such a character. In particular, just as cultural constructs restrict one’s freedom, they are also the path for reconfiguring the predicament. In other words, being constructs is what makes them reworkable. The remix can transcend the sea of fragmented, affectless, defaced entities and lead to the unity and union of refaced human beings, radiating life reemerged from the living dead, having been deprived of the vital ingredient for fruitful human relationships.

*Note: All pictures by Nikolina Nedeljkov*

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## Koreni lavirinta: piksel orgije i rekonstituisanje ljudskog lica

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Nikolina NEDELJKOV

**Sažetak:** Rad predstavlja romane Džefa Nuna i Stjuarta Houma kroz kritiku sveta u kome je osećajnost postvarena, seksualnost vulgarna, razigranost ugrožena, a duhovnost zbunjujuća. Takva slika inspiriše viziju reanimirane humanosti i individualnosti kroz sintezu čitanja, pisanja i društvenog aktivizma. Elementi u pomenutoj kombinaciji međusobno su uslovljeni solidarnošću i stvaralaštvom. Termin postfuturizam simboliše osciliranje između melanholije i nade na mestima gde se ukrštaju vremenske ose. U radu su korišćene ideje Jana Jagodzinskog (2004) u cilju oslikavanja kulturološke i emocionalne dinamike u aspektima romana koji ispituju nivoe/vrste stvarnosti i pojam drugosti. Analiza je kontekstualizovana u okvirima kritičke teorije Mekenzija Vorka (2007), koja stavlja akcenat na problem spektakla u društvu i istražuje granice slobode. Kroz prizmu Bodrijarove misli (1988) tematizovana su pitanja depersonalizacije i dehumanizacije u masovnoj kulturi koja je zasnovana na profitu i uticaju medija. Promišljanje i obnavljanje individualnosti i duha zajednice ovde je predstavljeno u svetlu ideja Feliksa Gatarija (1999). U tesnoj povezanosti sa tim je teorija Svetlane Bojm, koja nudi ideje u vezi sa rekonstituisanjem subjektivnosti. Fokus rada je istraživanje potencijala društvenog konstrukta kao osnove za remiks taktika pisanja-čitanja i kulturološke stvarnosti.

**Ključne reči:** remiks, rekonstituisanje, ljudsko lice, postfutura