Re-run and Re-read
Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* as an Archeology of the Present

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Abstract   Hailed by critics as breaking paths for the direction of British fiction, Tom McCarthy's novel *Remainder* (2005) has been described as a way of re-thinking literature in terms of intermedial spaces, be they installations, performance artworks or a 'remix' of writing and film. The newness of *Remainder* seems to hinge on its imitation of a contemporary mediascape saturated with technical images and simulacra, in which reality is totally metamorphosed into a filmic phantasmagoria that novel writing is striving to mimic. Following McCarthy's refusal of the rhetoric of the 'new', the essay discusses the practice of re-enactment described in *Remainder* as a way of digging up images from the past to read the myth of postmodern hyperreality against its grain. McCarthy's 'archeology of the present' takes the concern with mediation and visual culture back to the unfinished business of modernism and its encounter with cinematic technology, reproposing the materialist aesthetics of embodiment that emerged from the conversation among literature, film and medicine in writers such as Joyce, T.S. Eliot and Samuel Beckett.

Summary   1 Forking Paths. – 2 Stills from a Film Never Made. – 3 History Repeating. – 4 Déjà Vu.

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1   Forking Paths

In a recent forum dedicated to ways of re-thinking literature in the new millenium, media critic Boris Groys put forward the idea that the future of literature may lie in an intermedial crossing between the art installation and the novel. In contemporary installations, Groys claims, the art space "ceases to be simply a neutral stage on which a certain story is staged" (Groys 2018, 55). Rather, space itself becomes a story, narrated by a ghostly presence that holds together the exhibited texts, things or videos, making the relations among the objects more important than the objects themselves. Hence the similarity, even the "homology", which Groys detects between the space of the installation and that of the novel, both compared to an "abandoned, haunted house" (56) in which specific

arrangements of things, texts and images offer its visitors an "inscription of a body into a life context" (61).

The only contemporary literary example picked out by Groys as an instance of the novel's future is Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005), whose protagonist, a traumatized, zombie-like narrator who fits perfectly Groys's ghostly presence haunting the novel's topology, does actually turn narrative space into a series of huge installations, built like complicated film sets that materialise "his visions, dreams, but also real contexts and events that left an indelible impression on his brain" (Groys 2018, 61). Written between 1998 and 2001, *Remainder* first came out in 2005 with a small, underground French art publisher, Metronome Press, before achieving international fame and even cult status in Britain, where it was hailed, especially after an influential essay by Zadie Smith (2008), as breaking new ground for the direction of fiction. Asked about the gestation of his novel, McCarthy confirmed that he had entertained the idea that *Remainder* "could have been an art piece" rather than a novel (Morgan 2010, 171), while, in several interviews, he has been expounding his idea of interfacing literature, cinema and the visual arts to create a narrative space that no longer hinges on the traditional, humanistic features of the novel: plot, character, psychological depth, and the expression of an individual, authentic self. To less enthusiastic commentators, such as Joyce Carol Oates, *Remainder*'s self-reflexive turn to the realms of film, installation and the performing arts is the outcome of a "Quentin Tarantinoesque" postmodern world, the symptom of the "politically debased, media-hypnotized culture" (Oates 2007, 50) that has bred McCarthy (born in 1969) and his generation. To corroborate her view, Oates mentions McCarthy's role as the founder, in 1999, of the International Necronautical Society, a semi-fictitious avant-garde network dedicated to interventions in the space of art, fiction, philosophy and media. The irreverent spirit of this "twenty-first century Collège de Pataphysique" (Oates 2007, 48) may thus explain McCarthy's own forays into the arts and into cinema: for instance, with *Greenwich Degree Zero*, an art installation based on Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* that he created with British artist Rod Dickinson in 2006. Another instance would be *Double Take*, a 2009 film-novel co-scripted with Belgian director Johan Grimonprez, perhaps the most telling example of how McCarthy's experiments in intermedial fusion challenge the conventional idea of literature, re-thinking its role in the contemporary media environment.

Yet, for all its vaunted experimentalism and forward-lookingness, McCarthy's project speaks of a future past. Describing it as an "archeology of the present" (Hart, Jaffe 2013, 671), McCarthy has often listed James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett and, in more general terms, the culture of Modernism as a springboard for his anti-humanism and intermedial experiments. At the 2009 Tate Modern exhibition on Futurism, he contemplated the possibility of a Marinettian contemporary literature (Nieland

2012, 570), while in his programmatic pamphlet *Trasmission and the Individual Remix* (2012), whose very title echoes T.S. Eliot's essay *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), he stated that "we should perhaps stop looking for the radically new and start seeking the radically old instead" (McCarthy 2012, 2). In his 2010 novel *C*, Modernism's ghostly return appears under the guise of a historical Bildungrsoman that tracks the life of a young Englishman, named Serge Carrefax, from the 1890s to 1922, Modernism's *annus mirabilis*. It is a life enmeshed with emerging technological media, from telegraphy and radio to cinema, with Serge appearing less as character than as a lens to be passed over in a series of historical dioramas of our networked present (Kirsch 2010). Thus the title "C", which stands, among other things, for 'communication', is also a reminder of the modernist, Conradian, fictional imperative: *See*. Likewise, what resonates in *Remainder*, especially in the narrator's desire to inscribe his body in aesthetic spaces and live, as McCarthy puts it, "in a movie without there being any movie" (Hart, Jaffe 2013, 668), is Modernism's reinvention of the bodily sensorium through the newborn visual technology of perception and inscription. In his excision of human psychology from the novel, phenomenology and embodiment are what McCarthy's archeology is after.

Quentin Tarantino or Georges Méliès? Why not Quentin Tarantino *and* Georges Méliès?

The present essay probes this conjoint option and suggests that McCarthy's forking paths perform a Borgesian loop. *Remainder*'s hyper-mediated present re-enacts Modernism and actualises one of its virtual futures, the road not taken of a nexus between cinema and literature.

2 Stills from a Film Never Made

We may start by looking more closely at *Remainder*'s postmodernist path and futuristic projections. The protagonist and narrator of the novel, a young man left appropriately nameless and underspecified so as to fit the role of Everyman, falls for cinematic reality out of a sense of his own inauthenticity. The paradox is brilliantly put to work by McCarthy through the paradigm of trauma. A disastrous accident, about which we will be told almost nothing except that "it involved something falling from the sky. Technology. Parts, bits" (Mc Carthy 2005, 5), has severely damaged the narrator's brain functions, obliging him to re-learn even the most basic bodily movements, such as walking or lifting food to his mouth. This leaves him the distressing feeling that everything in his life has become unnatural, "inauthentic and second-hand" (23): his stilted movements have turned into a mere mechanical "jerking back and forth like paused video images" (15), while even his memories come back to him "in moving images, like a film run in instalments, a soap-opera, one five-year episode each week or so"

(22). Film is for fake, or at least so it seems. Watching Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets* (1972) at the cinema, the narrator is, in fact, captivated by Robert De Niro's seamless, gliding movements, the way his bodily gestures are choreographed on the screen so unreflexively as to look fully natural and spontaneous. The actor's celluloid body is "Perfect. Real" (McCarthy 2005, 24), and mediation is a blueprint for authentic reality.

The protagonist's telescoping together of life and cinema is McCarthy's more-than-obvious nod to the mechanisms of the contemporary society of the spectacle, which punctuate the narrator's description of the London street crowd as a "performance" of theatrical "media people" (McCarthy 2005, 51), whose "stylized postures" and "camp gestures" (27, 51) he comments on from the window of a coffee shop, as if updating Edgar Allan Poe's *The Man of the Crowd* (1840) and the emergence of modernity's conflation between life and the cinema screen. Literature's reference to visual culture in this key is such a well-trodden postmodernist *topos* as to be almost a cliché. As Julian Murphet and Lydia Rainford observe, the postmodern novel, for instance with Rushdie or De Lillo, has frequently investigated the impact of visual technologies on notions of identity and authenticity, most often to account for the "'post-subjective' landscapes of the media ecology" (Murphet, Rainford 2003, 6), though sometimes also taking cinema's superficial visuality to task for dissolving all notions of subjective depth:

> Literalness, perhaps the dominant aspect of film, has come to occupy, largely because of film's popularity, a hegemonic place in all the arts. Its chief feature is the abandonment of subjectivity in the work. In place of interiority, which presupposed the individual who was distinguished from the object outside of her or himself by consciousness, even if socially determined or conditioned, literalism dissolves the subject-object split into object relations. (Aronowitz 1994, 54)

McCarthy's deliberate choice of a literal, flat character dissolved 'into object relations', thus seems an ideal candidate for an update on postmodernism, the 'novel as installation' described by Groys. Unlike all the fake and second-hand people around him, who simply mimic media images, the narrator's quest for authenticity involves not simply copying but *being* an image, becoming as 'real' as Robert de Niro. The occasion that triggers his experiments occurs fairly early in the novel. One night, at a friend's party, he has an epiphany. A crack in a wall suddenly conjures the vision of a whole building inhabited by people performing ordinary gestures: frying some liver, playing the piano, fixing a motorbike, delivering the rubbish. The building exudes nothing but affect images, feelings, sounds, and smells from the past, the *déjà vu* of a moment when, he says, he felt *real* (McCarthy 2005, 62). Now he knows what to do with the enormous cash settlement – eight and a half million pounds – that he received in compensation

for his traumatic accident. Helped by a company of 'facilitators' called *Time Control UK*, he invests part of his capital (the rest buys him shares in tele-communication companies) in re-enacting that very moment exactly as it was perceived through the crack: "I was going to recreate it: build it up again and live inside it" (McCarthy 2005, 64). The doubling of his vision, itself made of "various things all rolled together: memories, imagining, films" (76), involves no filming at all; he, in fact, insists that no cameras be used (120, 182). Rather, the *déjà vu* is painstakingly reproduced as an elaborately baroque film set, complete with re-enactors endlessly replaying those remembered gestures, in a life-sized, late nineteenth-century twin building called 'Madlyin Mansion' (99). A name that ironically hints both at Marcel Proust's famed 'madelaine' and at Alfred Hitchcock's rehashing of its myth in *Vertigo* (1958), whose female protagonist, named Madelaine, is the emblem of a life lived twice through ghostly repetitions, aesthetic copies and fake doubles. Once he inhabits this stage set, and in the hope of becoming as real as a filmic body, the narrator practices gestures and manoeuvres, from brushing past his kitchen unit to lighting a cigarette or exchanging words with the other re-enactors. Here, for instance, is how the kitchen scene is rehearsed:

> I worked hard on certain actions, certain gestures. Brushing past my kitchen unit, for example. I hadn't been satisfied with the way it had gone on the first day. I hadn't moved past it properly, and my shirt had dragged across its edge for too long. The shirt was supposed to brush the woodwork – kiss it, not more. It was all in the way I half turned so that I was sideways as I passed it. A pretty difficult manoeuvre: I ran through it again and again – at half speed, almost no speed at all, working out how each muscle had to act, each ball and socket turn. (150)

All his gestures get broken down in their "constituent parts" (151) and repeated, rewound, paused, replayed at half speed, as if he himself were a kind of recording device or a "deranged filmmaker" (Colombino 2013, 154) re-playing Fellini's staged film sets in *Otto e Mezzo* (*8 1/2*). Or rather, following the double-looped pattern of a flattened eight (8 = ∞) that turns his financial capital (the eight million pounds) into the symbol of an infinite investment into a real, authentic connection with life, equally guaranteed by a flow of money and of images. Except that, as in Fellini's film, the perfection of the looped 8 is always marred by an unruly remainder, the residual *1/2* that spoils the repetition and obliges him to re-run the whole process from scratch.

From this moment on, the narrative space of *Remainder* is made to coincide with the narrator's frenzied repetitions of past or real life events. After the memory palace, his absurdly complicated installations – the "re-enactment zones" as he prefers to call them – re-enact the banal episode of

a tyre change in a garage and a crime scene in the street, to culminate with the "pre-enactment" (McCarthy 2005, 230) of a bank hold-up, which is then turned into an actual heist, producing murderous, 'Tarantinoesque' consequences. Someone gets killed for real, and in hasty (literal) flight he ends up hovering in the air while looking at the world from above: "Reconstructions, everywhere. I looked down at the interlocking, hemmed-in fields, and had a vision of the whole world's surface cordoned off, demarcated, broken into grids in which self duplicating patterns endlessly repeated" (282). His plane, which is running out of petrol, performs endless loops in the sky, announcing the imminent disaster of "something falling from the sky. Technology. Parts, bits" (5). This ending obviously sends us back to the beginning of the book, intimating a similar loop of readerly repetitions.

As Pieter Vermuelen has pointed out, "trauma, far from registering as a psychological event, is merely mobilized as a structural plot element […]; by indirectly funding the events that make up the story of the novel, [it] provides the novel with the narrative capital it needs to keep going for some 280 pages" (Vermuelen 2012, 551). Yet, what trauma seems to entail in *Remainder* is also an almost-literal 'fall' from an unmediated experience of reality into technological mediation and simulation, where the individual and authentic, incorporated into a limitless series of technological reproductions and duplicates, loses its claim to primacy.

This position finds a theoretical buttress in Jean Baudrillard's account of the rise of the age of simulation, in which the hyperreality of simulacra governs visual culture. The French philosopher's name almost invariably pops up in critical comments on *Remainder* (Nieland 2012, 578; Vermuelen 2012, 560) as providing a gloss on the practice of re-enactment, in particular on the episode of the simulated bank heist "slotted back into the world" (McCarthy 2005, 265) and turned into a real event: in Baudrillard's classic essay *Simulacra and Simulation* (1987) a simulated hold-up is indeed chosen as a test case to illustrate the postmodern inability to distinguish between reality and its artificial duplicates. To some, *Remainder* should thus been regarded as a paradigmatic novel of the contemporary 'media a priori'. Its obsessive repetitions, Mark Seltzer notes, are meant to foreground that both the world and its copies "consist in the zoned reenactments with the properties of the intensely staged" (Seltzer 2016, 159); or, as McCarthy's narrator differently phrases it: "the re-enactment zone was non-existent, or […] it was infinite, which amounted in this case to the same thing" (McCarthy 2005, 283). *Remainder* thus corroborates Baudrillard's view concerning the cinematic quality of life today: we are all cast as extras in a "global installation. […] We are all, from a global and interactive point of view, actors in this total world event" (Baudrillard 2005, 94).

3 History Repeating

The trope of a life-sized representation of the real seems to have a particular resonance in contemporary culture. A telling case is that of Charlie Kauffmann's film *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), an uncanny double of *Remainder* that features a neurologically damaged protagonist who receives a large sum of money, which he then invests in constructing a stage set the size of a city to re-enact his own life. Although released after *Remainder*, the similarities between the film and the novel are so striking as to insinuate that the logic of the simulacrum no longer needs to distinguish between original and copy, 'before' and 'after'. Jill Partington observes that both could be "copies of one another: the film of the book is simultaneously the book of the film"; and again, given that in both the re-enactment project fails because it bleeds into real life, this further instantiates "the impossibility of locating authenticity in a world of simulations" (Partington 2016, 51).

Yet this framework, that the contemporary world is locked up in a perpetual present where the 'fallen' human is doomed to technological repetitions, does not need to be set nostalgically against a now-lost condition of authenticity. Opposing this self-defeating narrative, re-enactments have been recently valorized as a critical and historical practice in exhibitions like 'A Little Bit of History Repeated' (Kunstwerke, Berlin, 2001), 'Life, Once More' (Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2004), 'Re-' (Site Gallery, Sheffield, 2007), and 'History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-Enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance' (Hartware Medienkunstverein, Dortmund and Kunstwerke, Berlin, 2007). Opening the catalogue of 'History Will Repeat Itself' with a reference to McCarthy's *Remainder* (in which *History Repeating* is a song's title and iterated refrain; McCarthy 2005, 122), curator Inke Arns recasts artistic re-enactments as a way to re-examine and question passive consumptions of images and historical narratives. Because the re-enactment "transforms representation into embodiment", readers or viewers become witnesses or participants in a mediated action, while being encouraged to interrogate how memory and experience are continuously being restructured "not only by filmmakers and re-enactors but also by us personally, as mediated and mediating subjects" (Arns, Horn 2007, 63). The uncanny re-staging of situations and events, either by performance or through art installation, thus plays with doubles and spectral simulacra in the conviction that there is no umediated, original/originary reality to recover once the spell of the spectacle is broken. As McCarthy apodictically puts it: "We are always not just (to use a dramatic term) in *medias res*, i.e. in the middle of events, but also simply in media. In the beginning is the signal" (McCarthy 2012, 2).

Mediality and duplication in visual artists' re-enactments do not, then, simply point to a fake world shorn of authenticity. Consider, for instance, the looped repetitions and staged film sets that appear in Pierre Huyghe's

The Third Memory (1999) or Omer Fast's *Spielberg's List* (2003). Huyghe's re-enactment, which may well have been the background to McCarthy's final episode in *Remainder*, is inspired by Sidney Lumet's 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon*, a fictionalised account of a bank robbery that had taken place in Brooklyn in August 1972. The installation consists in a two-channel video projection in which images of the robber's character in the film (played by Al Pacino) are juxtaposed with images filmed by Huyghe of the real robber, John Wojtowicz, as he now, twenty-five years after the fact, re-stages the heist in a reconstructed set. The looped double videos seem to oppose fact to fake, and we would expect 'reality' to take its revenge on 'fiction'. What is most striking, however, in Huyghe's re-enactment, is not only how Wojtowicz's recounting of the 1972 heist is now thoroughly mediated by the memory of Lumet's film. At one point in the video, Wojtowicz mentions that the day before the actual robbery, he and his gang watched *The Godfather* (starring Al Pacino) for inspiration, which suggests that even the 'original' unmediated fact was, in the first instance, already the spectral double of a filmic image. Huyghe's notion of re-enactment as a 'third memory' thus cuts across the divide between original and copy, past and present, while also rejecting the notion of an eternal, simulacral present unstuck in time. Rather, what comes to matter is the two-way traffic between an unattainable original event and its medial representation: the past is retroactively grasped only through a later repetition in the present, a present that is itself haunted by spectral returns. In Omer Fast's re-enactments, this disturbance of linear time is put to the test with particularly traumatic moments of history. *Spielberg's List* interrogates the Hollywood memory of the Holocaust by setting the filmed remnants of the set of the Plaszow concentration camp that was built for Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) against the remnants of the original camp, as well as the inhabitants of the region who had been working as extras in the film. Again the two-channel video installation raises the trope of doubling and the expectation that original and replica, past and present, may be sifted apart. Instead, in the interviews that Fast conducted with the Polish extras, the distinction between personal experience and acted role blurs, as one respondent abruptly shifts from a discussion of her own life in wartime Poland to some fifty years later when she acted in Spielberg's film. Given these spiraling interactions, and their connections with trauma and its aftermath, it comes perhaps as no surprise that it should have been Omer Fast to direct the filmic adaptation of McCarthy's *Remainder* (released in 2015), marking his debut in a feature film which can be regarded as an extension of his ongoing artistic explorations in authenticity, temporality and causality.

This disloyalty of re-enactments to the point of origin does not amount to historical relativism. In fact, it debunks the cult of newness and presentism. Asked in an interview about his affiliations with artistic re-enactments and whether these entail postmodern simulation, McCarthy replies:

I've read Baudrillard, but Plato said it all. The idea of the simulacra being a copy without an original, which is Baudrillard's big selling point – it's in the *Sophist* by Plato. Lots of people described *Remainder* as a very postmodern book, because there is this guy reenacting very stylized moments in a bid for authenticity, and in the postmodern era, they say, we don't have authenticity. But I was thinking as much of *Don Quixote*, the first novel, or one of the first novels, which is exactly the same. It is about a guy feeling inauthentic in 1605 and in a bid to acquire, to accede to authenticity, he reenacts moments from penny novels, the kind of TV of its day. So I think you have to be a bit careful about this cult of newness, the idea that somehow, post-about-1962, we're suddenly postmodern – It just ain't so. (Alizar 2008)

Elsewhere he includes *Tristram Shandy* among re-enactments, pointing to uncle Toby's re-staging of his trauma at Namur in 'installations' made on a bowling green (McCarthy 2017a, 94); and, of course, Hamlet's play within the play. What is at stake is not so much a question of literary lineage, or of gauging the impact of the past on (as Robert Hughes would put it) the 'shock of the new'. Renouncing the idea of an origin and originality implies, instead, reconsidering a presentist notion of the 'contemporary' and its concomitant fetish of newness. Steven Connor has, for instance, proposed that the contemporary would be best grasped as "con-temporal", a mixing of times together or "polytemporality", in which progression and recurrence are coiled together, and "the thread of one duration is pulled constantly through the loop formed by another, one temporality is strained through another's mesh" (Connor 2014, 31). Within this framework, a historical moment is never new, but riven through by spectral returns, anachronisms and an uncanny sense of *déjà vu*: the past is not surpassed, but revisited, repeated, reinterpreted and reshuffled. Similarly, in his essay *The Signature of All Things* (2009), Giorgio Agamben draws on Freud and on Walter Benjamin's anti-historicist stance to suggest that the looped temporality of trauma, made of repetitions, latencies and ghostly returns, is also a way of reactivating in the present what the past had left "non-lived and unexperienced". "Archeology", Agamben claims, "is the only way to gain access to the present" (Agamben 2009, 101-2), a claim that recalls what Benjamin, in *Excavation and Memory* (1932), had described as an archeological site which yields the past's secrets only by "returning again and again to the same matter":

He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. Above all, he must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter. […] For the 'matter itself' is no more than the strata which yield their long-sought secrets only to the most meticulous investigation. That is to say, they yield those images that, severed from

all earlier associations, reside as treasures in the sober rooms of our later insights––like torsos in a collector's gallery. (Benjamin 2005, 576)

It is through this lens that we begin to grasp the contours of McCarthy's "archeology of the present" (Hart and Jaffe 2013, 671). Many of the programmatic statements in his manifestoes for the International Necronautical Society sound equally suspicious of positivist historicism and of "the Enlightenment's version of time as progress, a line growing stronger and clearer as it runs from past to future" (McCarthy and Critchley 2012, 269), Instead, McCarthy continues, "historically speaking, we advance not into new ground but over old ground in new ways: more consciously, with deeper, more nuanced understanding" (McCarthy and Critchley 2012, 271). His privileging of surfaces, flatness and spectral repetitions, most obvious in the rejection of psychological depth in favour of empty, traumatized subjectivity, matches his rejection of *historical* depth in favour of an "archeology of the present moment which goes back into the past through a series of interconnecting surfaces" (Hart and Jaffe 2013, 671). Indeed, one reason behind McCarthy's penchant for cinema is that, as he says, it is "about sequences crossing a flat surface" (Hart and Jaffe 2013, 670), which implicitly suggests that the media of cinema and of the novel, the screen and the written page, may be less far apart than we might think. Reading the new, postmodern, world against the grain of the past thus involves some reshuffling of medial history, a juxtaposition of Tarantino and Georges Méliès and a return to (and of) the terrain of emergence of 'inhuman' visual technologies in Modernism.

4 Déjà Vu

Remainder's traumatic encounter with technology is described as producing a reconfiguration of the human neuro-physiological makeup. Because of the accident, and the damage to the part of the brain that controls the motor functions of his body, the narrator is obliged to "rerout[e]" (McCarthy 2005, 19) his brain for commands to run along. Put more simply, even a banal gesture like lifting a carrot to his mouth has to be first visualized in all its complicated anatomical details ("which tendon does what, how each joint rotates, how angles, upward forces and gravity contend with and counterbalance each other"; McCarthy 2005, 20) and then enacted in his brain again and again and again until the brain learns how to perform the act itself. However, when the actual "twenty seven manoeuvres" involved in the gesture are enacted on a real carrot, the latter turns out to be, as he puts it, "more active" than him: "I'd thought of my hand, my fingers, my rerouted brain as active agents, and the carrot as a no-thing, a carved space for me to grasp and move" (McCarthy 2005, 20). Instead,

the carrot bumps, and wrinkles and crawls, while "the surge of active car-
rot input scrambling the communication between brain and arm, firing off
false contractions" (McCarthy 2005, 21) obliges him to repeat the whole
protocol *n* times before he gets it right.

While obviously re-enacting Beckettian comedy (think of Vladimir's car-
rot in *Waiting for Godot* – Beckett is the only author mentioned in the
novel; McCarthy 2005, 110) this episode introduces several important
points. By showing the human as primordially permeable and mediated, it
foregrounds that bodily gestures are not a 'natural', authentic state or way
of life prior to mediation: immediacy and spontaneity are indeed the sedi-
mented result of myriad repetitive practices. They are learnt through body
techniques or technologies such as, for instance, the cinematic, through
which the narrator will train his gestures in the re-enactments. The nar-
rative of a 'fall' outside the authenticity of the human body into technol-
ogy can thus be re-written in terms of a mutual engagement between the
human and the material world. Indeed, the narrator cannot produce in
his imagination the visual idea of a gesture and then act on it. Rather, he
approaches a material world which affects the neural patterns of his brain:
the active carrot's "input" information shows that the human and the world
are engaged in a relationship of co-constitutivity, wherein as the human
works on the world, the world works on the human as well.

The episode of the carrot's agency offers, on the one hand, a model for
the narrator's enmeshment with other technological and medial networks,
such as internet, bureaucracy, logistics, transport, and communication,
which guarantee the smooth flow of life through the larger body of the
metropolis: Naz, the Indian boss of the big company of 'facilitators' which
help with the re-enactments, is described as prosthesis, "an extra set of
limbs – eight extra sets of limbs, tentacles spreading out, in all directions,
coordinating projects, issuing instructions, executing commands" (McCa-
rthy 2004, 73). On the other hand, the carrot's resistance introduces the
novel's innumerable images of matter, surplus matter, formless mess or
clutter whose vibrant life continuously disrupts human schemes, as well
as the very pattern/design of the self-enclosed human body. If the latter
is turned into an automatic machine, the world itself turns into active
animated matter: a bit of wiring unplugged from the wall looks like "a dis-
gusting something that's come out of something", the disarticulated steps
of an escalator are "lying messily like beached fish", the earth is "spilling
a hundred bits all rolling around and staining things" (McCarthy 2005,
9, 17, 214). Lying on the street pavement as he re-enacts a crime scene
in the victim's role, the narrator observes the street's surfaces "dripping
layers of oil painting" like an old Dutch masterpiece, their faded markings
"worn by time and light into faint echoes of the instructions they had once
pronounced so boldly":

Chewing gum, cigarette butts and bottle tops had been distributed ran-
domly across the area and sunk into its outer membrane, become one with
tarmac, stone, dirt, water mud. If you were to cut ten square centimeters
of it […] you'd find so much to analyse, so many layers, just so much *mat-
ter* – that your study of it would branch out and become endless, until,
finally, you threw your hands up in despair and announced to whatever
authority it was you were reporting to: *There's too much here, too much
to process, just too much*. (McCarthy 2005, 187-8; italics in the original)

Remainder's mattering of matter is McCarthy's re-enactment of Modern-
ism, in particular of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a novel that to him "matters
most, because it makes matter of everything" (McCarthy 2017b, 33). In
McCarthy's view, those who praise Joyce's experimental interior monologue
wholly miss the point. In fact, *Ulysses*'s "base materialism" renders "im-
possible a certain model of subjective, cognitive or literary mastery" (35),
celebrating instead "exterior consciousness, embodied, or encorpsed – con-
sciousness that has erupted conventional syntax's membrane, prolapsed"
(38). What we have, in *Ulysses*, is therefore not 'humanist' literature at all.
Rather, this is writing as *medium*, material marks inscribing on the space of
the page a "recirculation of detritus in the form of things, images, events,
its main instances of 'history repeating itself', as Bloom puts, it 'with a dif-
ference'" (47). Textuality is therefore reconfigured as visual and material
re-enactment. Steven Dedalus's reflections on the flat screen of the visible
world, and his walk on the beach to read "signatures of all things" as he
treads on "a damp crackling mass, razorshells, squeaking pebbles" (Joyce
1986, 31, 34), is thus more than an echo in *Remainder*'s infinite layers of
matter in the street's tarmac. And, as Laura Marcus has pointed out, this is
something that Joyce and modernist literature got from Georges Méliès's
trick films and the infancy of cinema (Marcus 2007, 92-3).

Whereas most studies of the dialogue between cinema and literature
have insisted on narrativity and montage as their most obvious point of
connection, recent interdisciplinary histories have emphasised, instead,
the impact on the modernist imaginary of the neutral, anonymous record-
ing of material life found in early trick films, chronophotography, and the
actualities that dealt with familiar, everyday activities or incidents of gen-
eral interest. These cinematic images eluded representation as they were
not yet bound up with and into narrative (Trotter 2007, 5). What mattered
was not the content, but rather the sheer filmability of movement and life
itself, mimesis over meaning: the images were registered instantly, appar-
ently without intermediary, and conveyed a sense of the immediacy of the
real by means of "a minute examination of the realm of the contingent,
persistently displaying the camera's aptitude for recording" (Doane 2002,
142). The teeming flatness of the screen offered an overwhelming flow
of sense data where the physical world looked involved in protean defor-

mations and unprecedented object-relations. Méliès's films, for instance, which were based on magic tricks of pure perception, elaborated "the instability of the phenomenal world" (Doane 2002, 135) in which objects and human beings had difficulty retaining their identity: inanimate materials, from objects to natural landscapes, were brought to life and endowed with agency and movement, while the human appeared mechanized, as bodily gestures were broken down into their component parts and either zoomed in through a physiologism of detail, or suspended in mid-air through stop-motion (Marcus 2007, 92). The visual technology of cinema exposed the inhuman within human experience, while revealing, as Tommaso Marinetti wrote in his *Technical Manifesto for Futurist Literature* (1912), "the movements of matter which are beyond the laws of human intelligence, and hence of an essence which is more significant" (Marinetti 2009, 122).

According to Thomas Trotter, what fascinated modernist writers about the technology of cinema was therefore "film as medium before film as art" (Trotter 2007, 4), a recorded image of life made automatically by a seemingly neutral, impersonal device, on a flat screen. Filmic images actually seemed to convey a novel techno-primitive language of the material world, which bizarely combined the flat, haptic visuality of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs with modern technologies of perception, inviting writers to take a new angle on language and the human as thus far constituted in the archive of representations (Trotter 2007, 10). It was this example of cinema that provoked, in some modernist writers, a similar "will to automatism" in the linguistic machine, "a stimulus to the reintroduction or re-enactment of the neutrality of literature, or in some cases of writing itself, as a medium"; in other words, a material notion of "literature as (recording) medium *before* literature as (representational) art" (Trotter 2007, 9, 5). What immediately comes to mind is the notion of impersonality most typically formulated by T.S. Eliot in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*. But this is also (anti-humanist) literature as the spacing of material marks on the page that McCarthy detects in *Ulysses*, or indeed in Mallarmé's celebrated constellation of typographic signs on the blank pages of *Un Coup de dés* (1897). McCarthy sees Mallarmé's "pacing out poetry as spacing" (McCarthy 2017b, 42) re-enacted in the text of *Ulysses*; he re-stages it in *Remainder*'s installations as well as in the whole book: a medium which, at the very end, invites us to replay it, to go back to the beginning and revisit its narrative space as we would, to recall Groys's metaphor of the 'novel as installation', an abandoned house haunted by a ghostly presence.

Within this framework, language itself is viewed as artificial: it is but another material technology and practice by which to engage with the world and with others in the world: McCarthy's narrator often refers to himself as a sponge in which words plant themselves and grow (McCarthy 2005, 6), in much the same way as the visual details of the remembered *déjà vu* are absorbed by his mind as "though by a worn, patterned sponge" (Mc-

Carthy 2005, 68). Throughout the novel, his obsession with the texture of words and letters (199-200), as well as with the ink that "vibrates" from the white paper in forensic traces (173), equally draws attention to the materiality of writing, the inscription of marks on the page as a form of 'indexical' recording that literature shares with cinema's indexicality: the phrase "everything must leave some kind of mark" is obsessively repeated like a mantra in *Remainder* (11, 94). And it is not by chance that the narrator relies on Naz, his facilitator in the contemporary medial network, to find out about words. Described as descending "from a long line of scribes, recorders, clerks, logging transactions and events, passing on orders and instructions that made new transactions happen" (73), Naz personifies the historical sedimentation of medial inscriptions from ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs down to the present, suggesting not a fall into medial technology and simulacra but, as McCarthy wryly comments, a way of circling back to where we should be: "with the advent of cinema we finally are back where we should be: we've found our way back, after several centuries of annoying humanism and perspectivism, to perfect flatness" (Hart, Jaffe 2013, 670).

The effect of modern technological devices capable of storing, transmitting and reproducing sense data was thus, and most importantly, to produce a "shift from idealist theories of aesthetic experience to materialist ones" (Danius 2002, 2): aesthetics recovered its original, etymological connection with the sensory infrastructure of the human body, and became invested with the notions of physiological immanence. Film, as Walter Benjamin was among the first to point out, was not for a disembodied sense of sight, but constituted a new training for the whole bodily sensorium, especially if one considers that the appeal of early cinema was to bodily rather than narrative identification. Discussing the internalisation of technologies of cinema in modernist fiction, Sara Danius points to a "closer relation between the sensuous and the technological" and to the "new perceptual and epistemic realms" of modernist literature influenced by visual technologies (2, 3). Joyce's epic of the material body in *Ulysses*, a book famously praised by Eisenstein for its training of visuality, is given pride of place as a "record of the modernist reinvention of the human body, particularly of the ways in which sensory habits are reconfigured" (152). But we may just as well consider T.S. Eliot's fascination for the automatic, nervous language of filmic gestures: the lines "It is impossible to say just what I mean! | But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen" in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (Eliot 1969, 16), suggest the desire for a technology that would "efface the inability to mean with words alone" (Parui 2013, 99) through the embodied formula of nervous gestures transcribed in patterns on a screen (Violi 2004).

The importance of filmic and filmed gestures in Modernism guides us to a better understanding of embodied repetition as McCarthy presents it in *Remainder*. The narrator's "rerouting" of his brain by breaking down bod-

ily movements into their constituent parts (McCarthy 2005, 21) has been compared, albeit cursorily, to Eadweard Muybridge's chronophotographies of human locomotion (De Boever 2016, 204), which anticipated cinema by revealing the hidden gestures in movement's flow. But even more than early chronophotography, what gestural repetitions in *Remainder* seem to return us to is the neurophysiological aesthetics brought about in Modernism by the moving images of the cinematographic medium. Indeed, among the most fascinating aspects of cinema was film's exposure of what French filmmaker Jean Epstein described as the "astonishing geometry" of human gestures (Epstein 1926, 127) and of their interrelations with a sentient, animated environment, the gestures of things such as the banal, 'active' carrot we encounter in *Remainder*. To Epstein, the screen offered, on the one hand, myriad "angular interpretations" (127) of bodily movements, as gestures could be enlarged or reduced in size, multiplied or split, deformed or made expressive, foregrounding the kinaesthetic rhythms of sensuous, embodied cognition. Film, he wrote, was "nothing but a relay between this nervous energy and the auditorium which breathes its radiance. That is why the gestures which work better on screen are nervous gestures" (Epstein 1977, 12). On the other hand, this heightened awareness of the sensory texture of bodily movements was extended by film to the whole thing-world: on the screen, Epstein claimed, nothing is still, "objects take on airs. Trees gesticulate. Mountains […] convey meanings. Every prop becomes a character" (Epstein 2012, 289), inducing human bodies to mimic and incorporate these gesticulations, to then re-launch them back as further gestures into the environment. The body was thus shown itself as a medial apparatus fully entangled with the world, and to Epstein, who was trained in medicine and science, cinema offered not some kind of entertainment or a new art form, but rather a mechanical brain, a way for human perception to penetrate into the very life of matter.

The intertwining of medicine, filmic technology and the medium of literature was crucial to the emergent aesthetics of gestures, and although this is, in itself, a subject that would take us too far afield, a brief outline of this conversation may give us a taste of the rich interdisciplinary terrain which resurfaces in McCarthy's medial archeology. In *La Poésie d'aujourd'hui, un nouvel état d'intelligence* (*Poetry Today, a New Form of Intelligence*, 1921), Epstein spurred literature to emulate from cinema this embodied form of intelligence. T.S. Eliot referred to Epstein's "brilliant" text in his own 1921 essay *The Metaphysical Poets* (Eliot 1932, 289), in which he famously evoked a "dissociation of sensibility" (288), borrowing from French neuropsychologist Pierre Janet the term 'dissociation', usually referred to the nervous, imitative gestures of hysteria, to describe his own poetry (Crawford 2015, 148). Janet, whose work on neuropathologies and trauma had been a constant reference for Eliot since his years of study in Paris (Marx 2011, 25-9), was a central figure in the elaboration of a novel

materialist aesthetics of automatic gestures. The rhythmical apprehension of bodily motion as embodied cognition – what *Remainder*'s narrator calls a "choreography" (McCarthy 2005, 230) of repeated gestures – was a recurring pursuit in French and American psychological studies of automatic gestures and behaviours. Besides Janet, we may recall the works of William James and Hugo Münstenberg at the Harvard laboratory of psychology (Violi 2004, 177-8), which Eliot became acquainted with in his years at Harvard, and whose impact on Gertrude Stein's poetics of cinematic repetition – "a rose is a rose is a rose" – has been already fully documented (Murphet 2003, 67-81; McCabe 2005, 56-92). In a lecture delivered at the Collège de France in 1923, Pierre Janet put forward the theory that

> what we call thought, or psychological phenomena, is not the function of any organ in particular: it is no more the function of the fingertips than it is a function of a part of the brain. The brain is only a set of switches, a set of devices which alter muscles affected by excitation. What we call 'ideas' or 'psychological phenomena' concern behaviour as a whole, they concern the individual taken as a whole. We think with our hands as well as with our brain, we think with our stomach, we think with everything. (quoted in Jousse 1925, 39)

A student of Janet's, the French anthropologist Marcel Jousse would further elaborate Janet's teachings into a veritable theory of rhythmic, automatic gestures as forms of thought, and of cinema as a mechanical brain that imitated and expanded the embodied cognition of the human medium; the human itself was actually described by Jousse as a "plastic camera which registers, conjugates gestures with his own body, with his hands, with the eye's muscles" (quoted in Grespi 2017, 63). James Joyce, who attended one of Jousse's lectures in late 1926 or early 1927, summarised it thus in *Finnegans Wake*: "In the beginning was the gest he jousstly says" (Joyce [1939] 1964, 468), sharing the anthropologist's idea of a gestural, cinematic matrix of language that *Finnegans Wake* kinetic bodies and writing would perform on the page's screen.

How does all this relate to McCarthy's re-enactor? In the light of this archeological approach, repetition is no longer a passive reiteration of inauthentic simulacra. Rather, repetition becomes an emulation of the cinematic brain in its capacity to penetrate the texture of material life: as the re-enactor puts it, slowing down movements and postures "at half speed" is a way of grasping "what was inside, intimate" (McCarthy 2005, 197). After all, the epitome of embodied modernity was Charlie Chaplin: T.S. Eliot praised the "rhythm" of his neurasthenic gestures (Trotter 2007, 184), Jousse extolled Chaplin's technique of repeating a gesture take after take after take, until it felt like a second nature (Grespi 2017, 50). As Trotter astutely observes, Chaplin's automatic imitation for imitation's sake has

therefore "more life in it than non-mechanical behaviour" (Trotter 2007, 196). In this respect, McCarthy's traumatized narrator seems to belong to a host of Chaplinesque characters that culminate in Samuel Beckett's automatized neurotic bodies, caught in perpetual loops of useless gestures or postures that, as Ulrika Maude has shown (2009), enact Beckett's ongoing concern with embodiment and sensory perception, especially in relation to modern auditory and visual technologies. The re-enactment of the *déjà vu* in *Remainder* may thus be recast as both a repetition of and a visual update on, for instance, *Krapp's Last Tape* (1957), as both Beckett and McCarthy probe the enmeshment between the human medium and the spools or reels of media technologies.

Re-enacting the past is, in McCarthy, the closest we get to experiencing the present. Both in the archeological gesture of digging up history through re-enactments and in *Remainder*'s embodied repetitions, there remain little material left-overs, the residual extra 1⁄2 of the 8 (∞) million that clogs the smooth perfection of the looped duplications. In line with the Beckettian logic of productive failure, this is where repetition also re-activates unlived potentials and the virtuality of future pasts, whether in bodily or in cultural gestures. To *Remainder*'s narrator, these are the unexpected, affective thrills produced by little contingent swerves in the automatisms of re-enactments, when bodily gestures release the unexperienced within their sedimented patterns (see, for instance, McCarthy 2005, 134-5). To us, it is an invitation from McCarthy to re-think the future of the novel by re-enacting the unfulfilled potentials of its intermedial history. Re-run and re-read.

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