

Bodies in Space: Intensity, Representation, and the Posthuman in Tom McCarthy's *The Making of Incarnation*

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Abstract

The present paper aims to problematize the issues of representation and accessing reality in *The Making of Incarnation*, the latest novel by Tom McCarthy, a prominent contemporary British writer. An engagement with contemporary theoretical discourses is made through the lenses of both posthumanism and post-structuralism. Through an analysis of Deleuze, Guattari and Lyotard's post-structuralist philosophy, I aim to present the manner in which reality can be accessed precisely through representation and artificiality, and not by inventing manners of bypassing the latter. This feat is possible, as the aforementioned authors' theory states, owing to the particular nature of representation which entails intensity and energy as a potential of encountering the real. Additionally, by bringing into discussion Land's more contemporary notion of accelerationism, this paper argues that representation and intensity are only available in a posthuman environment which sidelines the primacy of the human subject. At the core of this essay lies the argument that all of the previous theoretical aspects can be shown to be quintessential in McCarthy's novel. The latter, I will argue, initially presents the struggles of encountering unmediated reality, to then gradually affirm the potential of representation in and of itself, and then finally to reach the powerful and tantalizing conclusion that the only possible environment which may facilitate such



an access of noumenal reality is one which precludes the human altogether, centralizing instead the machinic and technological.

Keywords: representation, intensity, posthumanism, poststructuralism, accelerationism

Introduction

Tom McCarthy, born in 1969, is one of the most prominent contemporary authors within the British scene. His artistic activity is diverse, including visual art projects, radio broadcasts, theoretical writing, criticism and, of course, literature. So far, he has published five novels – *Remainder* (2005), *Men in Space* (2007), *C* (2010), *Satin Island* (2015) and lastly *The Making of Incarnation* (2021). The first of these novels represented McCarthy's breakthrough, bringing him widespread recognition and critical acclaim both in England and in the United States. Since then, McCarthy has been twice shortlisted for the Booker Prize, won the Believer Book Award as well as the Windham-Campbell Literature Prize. Criticism such as Zadie Smith's has gone as far as to claim that McCarthy's fiction represents a brand new direction for the novel in general, arguing that *Remainder* is "one of the great English novels of the past ten years" (Smith, -). Throughout all of his fiction, McCarthy sticks to his own literary and theoretical influences, inserting and developing on recurring themes of inauthenticity, repetition and the impossible, paradoxical longing for a real way being. In one interview, McCarthy claimed that "in all my books, there are all these characters in search of an absolute present tense that they can never quite find. They're always in the space of deferral." (Huber, 180). This is perhaps the clearest way to summarize the author's work. Yet clarity is never something feasible in McCarthy - as some have noticed, his work is close to what contemporaneity would term theory-fiction: "[McCarthy] flaunts his deep investment in that body of speculative thought often identified by the dread label "theory"" (Jaffe, Hart, Eburne 659-660). Thus, his novels can be described as a peculiar yet fascinating mix of post-

structuralist theory and experimental modernist fiction. Tom McCarthy writes, I argue, to answer a simple yet infinitely complex question: how can one gain access to reality? Both from the perspective of a subject tormented by their own artificiality and from the perspective of a posthuman desire to do justice to materiality, McCarthy's novels describe the contemporary status of both the human and the inhuman, with a particular emphasis on the interaction between the two. Crucially, however, McCarthy assumes this materialist stance which seems to be prevalent in contemporary art without abandoning the post-structuralist distancing from reality and affirmation of artificiality.

To the purposes of my paper, which aims to discuss precisely the very same question of engaging with reality, McCarthy represents the perfect combination of postmodernism and post-postmodernism, and it is for this reason that I have selected his latest novel - *The Making of Incarnation* – for close analysis. Unlike other works emerging from the contemporary literary scene, McCarthy's not only allow for post-structuralist readings, but virtually demand them, while also being open to more recent concerns emerging in the wake of postmodernism. It could seem paradoxical to claim that post-structuralism is a necessary prerequisite for an engagement with contemporary concerns such as materialism or speculative realism, yet it is my argument that a negotiation of what reality entails in the 21st century not only has to deal with post-structuralist analyses, but can also benefit greatly from such a position's tenets. In the following paragraphs, before turning to McCarthy's *The Making of Incarnation*, I will attempt to sketch a post-structuralist framework which includes Deleuze, Lyotard, as well as the more contemporary thought of Nick Land. In briefly surfacing the scope of their works, I will attempt to highlight the way in which their post-structuralist and decidedly anti-positivist stance can contribute to a better understanding of the vague notion of 'reality'.

Intensity: from Deleuze to Lyotard, to Land

In their quintessential work, *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to lay the foundations of a new manner of dealing with the real-fake binary. Their ontology, in an overtly and affirmed metaphysical perspective, chooses the notion of ‘intensity’ or ‘flow’ as the core of both reality and the representation there-of. To them, the real state of the world assumes the non-form of a so-called Body Without Organs, that is, a deterritorialized state in which the only thing that exists is uninhibited, pure intensity, travelling through every body and object. In a Kantian fashion, Deleuze and Guattari decidedly reject any possibility of ever entering this noumenal state of reality. Instead, D&G focus their inquiries on what they term “desiring-machines”. Understood in its most general sense, the term ‘desiring-machine’ points to any given construct or representation. It is an inscription on the BwO which models and channels intensity in a specific way: a line drawn on an empty canvas in a certain way, an established pattern directing the flow of intensity - “Machines attach themselves to the BwO as so many points of disjunction [difference]” (Deleuze, Guattari 35). To the concept of desiring-machine, Deleuze and Guattari associate ideas such as territorialization and neurosis, or stability. Whatever makes the world intelligible, navigable, constitutes a desiring-machine, and it is with them we deal with constantly. In short, a desiring-machine is a representation traversed by intensity.

What is essential about Deleuze and Guattari’s understanding of desiring-machines is their functionality: “Desiring-machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down” (Deleuze, Guattari 31). Fundamentally, the intensity which is channeled when an inscription is constructed has only one function – to destroy the very machine which differentiates them. To illustrate this concept, their argumentation relies on analogies of fluidity. A river’s banks are delimited by the water flowing within them, yet the fluid’s tendency is always to erode, to do

away with those borders. There is, then, a constant tension between content and form, in that the content, differentiated by the form, strives to annihilate the latter. The intensity which a desiring-machine channels will always, in other words, tend towards the destruction of the desiring-machine. Thus, territorialized entities, neurotically organized objects and representations will always strive to revert to the schizoid state of the BwO. In other words, if one's purpose is to attempt to attain a better understanding of reality, the way to obtain such knowledge is to intensify representation – that is, to indulge in the artificiality of it all, and to experience the intensity desiring-machines afford, since, it is through this experience of intensity and not through avoiding it that reality may be appropriated. To obtain the real is to affirm the artificial.

Much like Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard bases his own analysis on an ontological notion of energy. In his *Libidinal Economy*, Lyotard theorizes the existence of libidinal-dispositifs, a concept more or less synonymous with that of desiring-machines, in that both are structures that modulate and transmit intensity, or, in this case, libidinal energy. To the purposes of my inquiry, however, Lyotard provides a crucial detachment from Deleuze and Guattari's theory. In his work, Lyotard argues that "... it is in no way a matter of determining a new domain, another field, a beyond representation which would be immune to the effects of theatricality". Further yet, "The first thing to avoid, comrades, is pretending that we are situated elsewhere, we evacuate nothing, we stay in the same place, we occupy the terrain of signs" (Lyotard, 50). In other words, where Deleuzian lines of thought would advocate for an oriented attitude towards desiring-machines, in the attempt to intensify them to the point of destruction, Lyotard somewhat cynically affirms that there is no point in doing that, because one will always be surrounded and encroached upon by representations. Yet, if optimism is shut down, this does not imply, by any means, that the stance one assumes is pessimistic. Quite the opposite is true – any structure, any libidinal dispositif has

intensities which should be fully acknowledged: "... isn't fetishism an opportunity for intensities? Were not Einstein's most artistic inventions also driven by this desire, by the conviction the God, as he said, certainly does not play at dice? And what is lost in this? Nothing at all" (Lyotard, 111). For Lyotard, the way to approach notions such as reality is to completely indulge in the artificiality and fetishism of representations, since every fake construct, every ideology and every phenomenal perception is already permeated by a maximum of intensity. Instead of intensifying, for Lyotard it is a matter of discovering and affirming the intensity already present around us.

Writing in the late 90's, a period permeated by an emerging cyberculture, Nick Land develops the thought of both Lyotard and Deleuze in his accelerationist work. Land's implications and arguments are controversial, and most of them are not within the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, there is one crucial element to Land's work which I argue lies at the core of McCarthy's own novels. Namely, I refer here to the decidedly antihumanist stance assumed by Land. Heavily influenced by Deleuze's deterritorialization as well as by Lyotard's controversially anti-Marxist, neo-liberal position, Land's purpose is that of completing the liberation of intensity. For him, however, this requires a complete sidelining of the human element. The opposition, for Land, is not between representation and reality, or between the artificial and the natural, but rather between the noumena and the human. Whenever the system tends towards a dissolution, towards an entropy, it is the human element which holds it back, holds it intact. And since, as previously mentioned, representations are nothing but their breaking down, the human cannot be said to project a representation of reality, as traditional philosophical thought has seemed to argue. Instead, the human works against the intensive unfolding of representation by clinging to its notion of a fixed, stable existence – a frozen, even more artificial artificiality. For Land, then, the solution is to indulge in the process of deterritorialization which any representation necessarily entails, and

thus to “drift. We no longer judge ... we function: machined/machining in eccentric orbits about the technocosm. Humanity recedes like a loathsome dream” (MacKay, Avanessian 261). Where the former thinkers accelerate, where they affirm intensity, they do so with the human still in the picture. Conversely, Land’s accelerationism works without the subject there to experience intensity. The intensity Land writes about belongs to the abstract system of capitalism, and not to the human, and it is for this reason that his work is completely void of any sort of vitalism. Such is the importance of Land’s contribution to Deleuzian thought. One must affirm the functioning of desiring-machines, as Deleuze writes, and one must affirm the potential of any given libidinal dispositif, as Lyotard writes, but crucially, one must also affirm that the machinic future envisioned here does not include the human as a wheel in the machine. It merely includes wheels, cogs in the system.

To summarize the scope of my chosen theoretical frameworks, intensity, the ontological basis of reality, is what creates representations and artificiality, but it is also, crucially, that which destroys them. From Deleuze and Guattari to Lyotard, an analysis of the way in which reality can be attained is developed, entailing the fundamental project of intensification of representations. To this project, Nick Land adds his posthumanist stance – if there is any hope of immersion, any hope of escaping artificiality, such immersion is possible when the human becomes in/posthuman. Intensification entails the disappearance of the human subject: “Nothing human makes it out of the near future” (Land, MacKay, Fisher 8). In the following sections, I will first summarize then analyze McCarthy’s latest novel, *The Making of Incarnation*. Throughout all of the ensuing paragraphs, my purpose will be to emphasize the way in which this novel suggests a merging of the human subject with a machinic object, resulting in a complete but gentle disappearance of

traditional humanism. By the end of my paper, I will have hopefully shown that, through such a process, an immersion in a new type of reality is created, one which avoids the pitfalls of humanism.

The Making of Incarnation - Summary

McCarthy's most recent novel, *The Making of Incarnation*, intricately binds together several narrative threads, all presenting different individuals working for their own companies and purposes. The subtle connection between them is announced by the prolegomenon, in which a researcher from Berlin is working on capturing the motion and flow of waves as they crash into various objects. Right from the start, then, we are told that this novel is about representation in its most contemporary form: technological, virtual motion capture. As the main characters will go about their professions, thus, they will be constantly grappling with both the conditions and implications of capturing representations of matter through technological means. It is important to note that, although I will be summarizing some of the characters and events in a linear, intelligible way, the novel abruptly switches between narrative threads, intercalating and juxtaposing divergent lives as they converge.

One such character is Mark Phocan, who is employed at Pantarey, a company specializing in capturing and rendering bodies in motion for various purposes. Before being shown this, however, the reader is introduced to Mark as a child, in what will become one of his most formative memories. Young Markie is at a museum, where he is entranced by a painting showing a peculiar humanoid being throwing a stone at a bird. What is fascinating about this is the way in which the trajectory seems to be pre-determined, with both entities willing the collision. Markie wants to imitate this motion, and consequently hits the canvas of the painting with his gloves. He is taken to the staff room, where he is shown his actions on the surveillance camera. In this recording, he notices a girl whom he likes, in the corner of the room, quietly slinking away from the camera's

view. The novel then jumps to its present moment, with Mark, now a middle-aged man, is one of the senior specialists in motion-capture at Pantarey. He has become not only proficient at his job, but also almost obsessed with refining motion-capturing techniques so that a deeper understanding of materiality may be accessed. Phocan works on various projects, of which the most important one at the present moment is the making of a movie – “Incarnation” -, by a company called Degree Zero. In the past, however, Phocan and his intern, Diamond, had been employed in various tasks: rendering a gymnast’s routine, capturing the flaws in an impaired patient’s lower body, creating scenes for a video game company, as well as working for a governmental agency specializing in drone warfare. Throughout all of these, Phocan had shown Diamond how to operate the software they are using for rendering motion, warning her about the potential flaws of the system – the way in which it confuses different bodies, drawing connections which result in the creation of non-existent objects they call artefacts. Diamond, though, is completely fascinated by the presence of such glitches. Later in the novel, Phocan and his intern will be travelling to Germany, where they test out a new method of motion-capture for their work with Degree Zero, which does not use physical markers on the surface of the object, but ray-tracing.

At Degree Zero’s headquarters, several episodes are presented in which the movie directors are confronted with various challenges. On the one hand, different scenes in the movie are difficult to render – the technological means of production are imperfect, while the human motion based on which the rendering is difficult to ‘correct’, to alter such as to rid it of any imperfections. Thus, they decide to switch to a completely virtual representation. On the other hand, Briar, an employee at NASA who is there to oversee the veracity of the movie, which is science-fiction, keeps asking for modifications within the plot. In the meantime, the novel juxtaposes these episodes with scenes

from the movie, managing – to McCarthy’s credit – to create a deep sense of complexity in just a few snippets from the final product.

Another narrative thread shows Dean, a lawyer, doing research for a project her company’s been employed at. The employer, Company A, is looking for a way to apply copyright law to human motion determined by various technologies – the swiping on the screen of a phone, for example. The latter company claims that one may view such motions as completely determined by the product, and so as part of the product itself. Dean’s research deals with Lilian Gilbreth, a scientist from the first half of the 20th century, who specialized in maximizing efficiency in human motion at the workplace. By attaching a light-reflecting dispositive to the part of the body which moves while working and then photographing the worker’s motion through long-exposure, Gilbreth made photos in which lines of light represented pure motion. Gilbreth would then create physical models of the lines, depicting the motion in three dimensions. As Dean finds out while digging through archives, Gilbreth was obsessed with finding “the one best way”. While, initially, this was supposed to mean the most efficient motion, Gilbreth would subsequently confer more mystical implications to this concept, suggesting the possibility of discovering a universal pattern of motion to which all objects and subjects complied. Together with a soviet scientist, Vanins, Gilbreth had apparently managed to represent such a pattern in one of her physical models, called “Box 808”, modelled on a mysterious “T.T episode”. Dean discovers that the archives do not have this box, and just as she prepares to further investigate this matter, she is mysteriously denied further access.

Garnett, Pantarey’s CEO, is invited to dinner by Pilkinton, who works for a governmental intelligence agency. Pilkinton, as it turns out, had intercepted Dean’s research, and wanted to be the first to uncover Box 808’s secret. He asks Garnett, who had known Vanins, to reach out to him

and inquire further. Thus, Garnett sends Phocan, who is his employee, to the former Soviet Bloc to investigate. While there, Phocan gains Vanins' trust, and begins to uncover the secret of the box. Vanins, however, informs Mark that there is nothing to discover, that the research had been fruitless and overly optimistic. Vanins then hangs himself, and Phocan is left in an inertial, limbo state. The narrative switches perspective, with the author himself speaking as the focus moves from the rope around Vanins' neck to a time-worn object near it: Box 808, which shows a vertical line with a double-helix pattern around it. We delve into Vanins' past as he watches his wife play tether tennis: the T.T episode. This is what the box represents.

The novel ends with the rendering of the movie nearing its completion. Deep underground, in the middle of the night, the servers are roaring loudly, and one lone intern is supervising the rendering – he is meant to spot any artefacts on the screen, and send the specific frames back to production. He falls asleep, though, and the perspective draws back, showing more and more of the world around, permeated by the hypnotizing hum of the machine.

The Frame

In beginning my analysis of this novel, I will first attempt to provide an overview of the framework which grounds the perspective from which the notions of intensity and representation are presented. In *The Making of Incarnation*, McCarthy creates this frame primarily through three elements which format the entire layout and economy of the novel: narrative techniques, surveillance and virtuality. To begin with, then, the formal elements which McCarthy employs in his latest novel differ drastically from his other novels. *The Making of Incarnation* is written in a present-tense, third-person perspective. This style could be taken to signal the presence of an omniscient and omnipresent narrator, who delves into the minds of everyone and mechanisms of everything in a modernist manner. Yet, this is only partially true. In a sense, one does gain access

to everything in the novel, but the perspective from which this access is granted is not that of a privileged narrator-subject who knows all. Instead, the narration is absolutely impersonal. Reading the novel, one gets the impression that they are being presented with a scientific, objective description of machines and their functioning – and this includes all of the characters. Moreover, this style suggests a complete pre-determination of every movement and thought. As if analyzing a photo, the action's course is already inscribed in the text, with no possibility of its altering by a human agency or will. As McCarthy himself points out in a webinar on the novel, "I guess this book kind of totally rejects one kind of heroic, old-fashioned revolutionary version of agency ... there's no autonomy outside of [the] grid" (min. 23). The perspective, thus, is that of a surveillance camera, quietly and indifferently creating the representation of both subject and object.

This leads one to the second element I would like to emphasize: surveillance. Throughout the novel, not only will the narrative suggest a continuous and absolute monitoring, but the presence of the monitoring entity will be repeatedly suggested. From Degree Zero's headquarters, where the employees work relentlessly, supervised by cameras and incapable of accessing their own mobile devices – suggesting a complete lack of agency – , to Pantarey's motion capturing, where the subject's activity is caught and rendered as minutely as possible, to Gilbreth's workers who "seem unaware they're being recorded" (94), and finally to the continuous stealing of information from Dean, Phocan and others by a more complex party, always in control, there is always some sort of technological device which governs the human's activity. Additionally, it is essential to note that the function of the recording device is anything but passive. Aware or not of their being recorded, the human will perform "for real and as a show, put on for post-hoc viewing by an audience" (163). Thus, the surveillance camera actively determines, shapes the way one lives. To more examples of such extensive monitoring I will return in subsequent subsections –

what I wish to emphasize for now is that, regardless of its being mentioned in the text or not, everything that happens is filmed, recorded, by an inhuman entity which seems to merge with the narrative technique I have previously presented. Further yet, by restricting the novel's reach to professional lives alone, devoid of any intimation of events occurring outside of work-related affairs, McCarthy suggests that the possibility of escaping recording by retreating outside the matrix is not present. As he states in the previously mentioned webinar, "I think there's no outside; no outside to the regime of capture" (min. 21).

Finally, another element which governs the entire novel is the notion of virtuality. *The Making of Incarnation* will only describe a virtual reality. This is suggested through the transformation of the means of representation from human ones into machinic ones, which represent the real in terms of pixels on a screen. This passage from subjective reality to machinic virtuality is not only inevitable, but also preferable when it comes to obtaining a more precise representation. As Garnett, the CEO of Pantarey, puts it, "we [humans] all are blind" (137), but the software translating matter into lines and nodes, drawing connections on a screen, is not. This is not to say that the machinic algorithm possesses some transcendental quality, allowing it to immerse itself in the materiality of the world. Instead, it is to say that the programmed machine is capable of surpassing human phenomenology, passing from a state of subjective representation to one of objective virtualization. Unlike the human subject, the machine is cold, indifferent. As Phocan will observe, human notions of ethics, morality and legality are redundant for the software: "skin ... no matter what ethnicity box (optional) its owner might have ticked on Degree Zero's application form, in this room is recast as grey" (200). In other words, the nature of representation is transformed in this novel into an inhuman one – not better, but different –, and as I will be

observing later on, the distinction between the two modes of representation becomes increasingly blurred as virtual scenes from the movie are juxtaposed with those from a material reality.

All of which informs the finalized condition of representation and performance in *The Making of Incarnation*. I use the word ‘finalized’, not only because this text comes latest in McCarthy’s writing – there will certainly, hopefully, be more to come -, but also because the novel itself seems to suggest a sense of an ending when it comes to presenting a contemporary condition for the subject. Reinforced by the narrative style I have mentioned previously, the text presents its characters as being completely resigned, almost satisfied to let themselves be guided and determined by the machinic system they have created. And, in fact, the novel does not even insist on analyzing its subjects. Instead, it seems to glance away from the human, placing instead its emphasis on the virtual, on the software-rendered representations of reality. Within this machinic network, this technological structure, the human is not afforded any privileged attention. One almost gets the sense that the subject is nothing but another object, another part of the algorithm: “one more piece of equipment ...” (94). It is no longer the human’s negotiation of reality and materiality which is central to the text – which had been the case for the previous novels. Instead, the reader’s attention is drawn to the functionality of the system, to the complex ways in which the algorithms perform their tasks. As I will describe in a subsequent section, this will culminate with Vanins’ suicide, which draws as little attention and exerts as little affect as possible. For now, however, it suffices to state that the finalized condition presented in *The Making of Incarnation* is precisely the absence of one, a non-condition engendering non-affects, for a non-subject. As Land puts it, “Humanity recedes like a loathsome dream” (McKay, Snriek 261)”

Motion-capture and its Artefacts

The frame of the novel, as I have previously presented it, suggests a completely dehumanized context, in which whatever dreams and aspirations had been attributed to the human subject are now long gone. Such is the perspective of the machinic gaze we are aligned with in reading the novel. This, however, does not stop the actual characters, still human, still transcendentalist, from attempting to discover reality from their human position. In fact, this longing for a direct access to reality lies at the core of the novel. In spite of such searches, however, it remains nonetheless true that the universal representations they are trying to discover are already there – signaled, once more, through the novel’s frame –, determining their lives. It is this network, and not the search they are conducting, that matters, and, consequently, this novel is not so much focused on the gradual development of a realization of sorts, but rather on the inclusion of all efforts within a larger, inhuman structure. Bearing this in mind, I will now turn to three of the main characters’ desperate attempts to reach a reality of sorts.

On the one hand, Mark Phocan is driven in his job by a relentless search for “a whole whose wholeness he would love to somehow hold to him” (65). For Mark, who, as a child, had watched himself on the surveillance camera accidentally throwing a glove-ball at an exhibition, “it’s all happening, and not, in greyscale, here and somewhere else, draining away” (90). His purpose, then, is to capture that which is draining away, to complete a rendering of reality so perfect, that it occludes nothing. All of this informs the way in which he explains the technology of mo-cap to his intern, Diamond. Such technology works by applying numerous markers to the surface of an object, and then shooting beams of light at the object, whose reflections the software picks up, thus creating a virtual representation of the body. The true essence of the object, however, is not within any node corresponding to a marker. Instead, “the spot you’re interested in, the one you really want, from a kinetic point of view ... is what we call the “root” ... The markers serve as stepping

stones or way stations towards unearthing this elusive root” (235). This is quite suggestive of Phocan’s view of representations; it is his strong belief that the software they are using is capable of discovering an abstract point within a body which is the essence of its structure. That which the machine mistakenly renders, representing objects which are not there in reality, Phocan calls “artefacts” – they are “the mirages of our profession”, and it is the employees’ purpose to remove such artefacts from the final product. Thus, Phocan is precisely what Deleuze would have termed a neurotic. Representations, or desiring-machines, are to be refined to the point of perfection, to the point where the intensity of motion flows seamlessly: “Phocan’s job, then, was to ... subjugate all the schizoid carnage [of the software] to the stricture of fixed individual identity” (271).

On the other hand, Diamond, the intern, is much more fascinated by the artefacts themselves than with their elimination. In her work, she would spend “ages staring, captivated, at these glitches. It wasn’t just that they were beautiful; beyond that, in their abstraction, ... they offered her relief, a kind of psychic camouflage” (292). Accordingly, in the Deleuzian theoretical frame, she is the model of a schizophrenic, who feels the intensity which pours through what would traditionally be termed erroneous. She makes no value judgements, instead extending her appreciation of representation far beyond mimesis, or practicality. Further yet, she advances into a Lyotardian frame of mind when she nurtures the suspicion “that some algo’s at work here already, moulding this space’s tempo, orchestrating all its paths and modulations; some source-code” (304). What she gradually begins to comprehend is that artefacts are not errors, but rather parts of a more complex system of representations; and, like Lyotard, she is keen on extending the pervasiveness of representations and intensity to a global scale – that is, not to change representations, but to fully explore their intensity.

Both Phocan and Diamond's intimations of a global representation inform and reflect another narrative thread – the search for Box 808. At the obscure Client A's request, the law company where Dean works is to discover a way to “move ... beyond dichotomy of man/machine, of operator/tool, and begin to view the whole thing instead as a ... kind of constellation ... a uniquely-codified relation ...” (185). In plainer terms, they are to figure out a way of emphasizing a larger structure at play, one which governs both the motions of an individual and those of a machine. The point here is to capture, to render visible a representation of the patterns which shape the way everything moves, acts and thinks in the world: “to apply the same criteria universally” (185). This request launches Dean into her research of Gilbreth's work. Initially, the latter scientist had thought, much like Phocan does, that what is important is refining motion and its representations, in order to maximize efficiency – what Gilbreth called “the One Best Way” (324). Subsequently, though, Gilbreth had come to believe that the best way includes all of the artefacts of existence; that there does exist a universal pattern which determines both Diamond's glitches and Phocan's “roots”. Gilbreth, along with Vanins, managed to discover such a structure, materializing this representation in their Box 808, based on a so-called T.T incident. To the contents of the Box I will return later.

Material Representations: Towards a Future without Us

So far, I have attempted to emphasize the way in which McCarthy's novel presents human attempts to discover reality, all the while the text's perspective suggests the futility of such endeavors. Once more, the reader's gaze is that of the machine, of the computer, which already knows a fundamental truth, a radically inhuman one, never available to the human in the position of the subject. As if to reinforce this view, the novel also presents several instances in which the software employed for motion-capture, far from being a mere tool at the subject's disposal, creates

what Land calls “the sidelining of the human intelligence” (MacKay, Avanesian 256). In *The Making of Incarnation*, a noticeable transfer of intelligence is occurring, one which exponentially develops the computing powers of the machine, while occluding those of the human. For example, while in a wind-tunnel meant to represent the friction generated by a sled’s motion on its track, the participants are told to control not only their physical movements, not only their matter, but also their thoughts. Had the subject been in charge of rendering the motion, thought would not have constituted a factor. For the machine, however, everything it captures is physical: “Just thinking something ... will fire off neurons that will cause changes in muscle tension ... It all forms part of the picture” (387). Indifferent to the phenomenology of mind and spirit – or perhaps more aware of its fuller implications – the rendering software translates everything into virtual pixels. It is capable of bridging the gap between thought and matter – for the machine, there does not exist a post-structuralist interdiction of access to reality. Once more, the human could never represent such a picture of reality: “what we see with the eye will be a sketch, no more. The gold will come to the surface later, when the data’s processed” (412). Observing the software performing its tasks, Phocan feels that it has access to something which he does not: “Somewhere, around the borders of his own dazzled thought-screen, he senses an intuition trying to stake out a provisional ground ... Phocan’s starting to suspect the presence of some other kind – an illogical logic”, a logic which is affirmed by “the pixelated dumb-show, pregnant with itself” (415-416). Evidently, this suspicion will inevitably lead to nowhere. Regardless of his training, Phocan is too much of a human to be able to interact with, to represent matter in such ways.

As Phocan and Eldridge, two seniors, experts in their field, observe the new employees working, they realize that “they are old: in this world, forty’s ancient: not having a command of Blender, Topsolid or Tekler wired into your neural system places you in not simply a previous

generation but, beyond that, an entire evolutionary category that new mutations have consigned to oblivion” (205). This is not, I contend, metaphorical speech. As the machine grows stronger, it is the human that radically loses its traditional role, becoming instead a link, a cog in the system. The older generation, clinging to an ancient human-machine distinction, is today simply “navigating their own obsolescence” (205). Thus, repeatedly throughout the novel, expert scientists and researchers will stand idle while the computer does the job for them. And, perhaps even more suggestively, many of them, like Phocan, are launched into awe-inspiring contemplations of the work of the machine, though never being able to fully understand the process. Moreover, even though it may seem that, ultimately, it is the human expert who controls the machine, employing it for complex tasks, the subject itself turns out to be nothing more than a part of the machine. This is suggested, again, through the novel’s framing of the narration. The reader becomes the camera, becomes the indifferent software, as they track the character’s thoughts and actions. It is, thus, a machine which governs the human that controls another part of the machine. Or, as Land puts it, “To be rushed by the phenomenon ... is the phenomenon” (Land, MacKay, Fisher 36). Whatever piece of machinery one thinks they control, in fact controls them. All of which leads to the rendering of the material representations presented again and again in *The Making of Incarnation*. When the CCRU – an organization which Land lead in the late ‘90’s - write of “... a semiotic fragment [rubbing] shoulders with a chemical interaction, an electron [crashing] into a language, a black hole [capturing] a genetic message” (MacKay, Avanessian 319), such a view of reality is obtained and understood not by a subject, but by an object which has gained the intelligence of the subject. The humans, the programmers, “they’re galley slaves ... Beneath their feet, the render farm hums, sending vibrations from the basement up through the whole floor, as though the entire building, ... an inexorable, if opaque, process” (226). Accordingly, when Gilbreth and Vanins

looked to uncover some universal pattern which they would then translate into conceptualizable, human representations, their endeavor was doomed from the onset. As Dean discovers while digging through endless archives, “perhaps this one [this representation] will never have a name, is bound to hover just beyond the edge of legibility, eternally suspended in the act of being composed” (342). It would appear, then, that Box 808 is an impossibility. Yet it exists – what does it contain?

Sent by Garnett, Phocan gets to finally meet Vanins, by the present moment in the novel an old, withered scientist, belonging to a dead generation. Gradually opening up to the younger man, Vanins begins to recount his enthusiastic, optimistic research during the hay-day of Soviet science. Together with Gilbreth, he had dreamed of discovering a universal law, some elusive set of rules which govern all motion, placing it in an immovable, true representation of reality. Vanins’ tone quickly changes, however, when he reenters the present day: “But me, I’m tired,” he says. By this moment, he had already built and long forgotten his Box 808; and still, unintelligibly, he is distraught. When confronted about the Box, Vanins vaguely replies that “you won’t find it ... there’s nothing ... equilibrium, suspension, stasis, all of that. It’s just bodies, in space...” (803). All of the old man’s research had culminated in this realization – that everything is bodies in space. A conclusion so simple, so abrupt, that it is impossible for a human to accept its nihilism, its inhumanism. This is further reinforced by the name of the Box itself – 808 – suggesting two infinities, to challenging complexities of life, which encircle a big, disappointing 0. Vanins will hang himself the very next day. Phocan, left empty-handed, will return to the States, and as he leaves, the reader’s perspective lags behind, stuck on Vanins’ inanimate neck. Next to it:

the bird box closest to him, one of dozens dotted about the aviary, differs from the others in having only two (rather than four) walls and no roof. Inside, a kind of bird-nest shape nest has calcified: a central twig that rises from a brackish mass of smaller ones, droppings and seed-husks and, once

risen, banks into an anticlockwise turn; then, on completing this, reverses its direction to bank back to the other way, clockwise, thereby describing in the air a kind of double-helix before dropping to rejoin its starting point... These lines are old and faded, grey as much as white. As for their constitutive material, their 'medium': it could be paint, or it might just be bird shit (810)

It is Box 808, suggestively placed next to a dead man's neck. With the optimism of the human withered away, the reader is finally presented with the contents of the sought-after object. Anticlimactically, though, it is faded, and covered with bird shit. Typically for McCarthy, a crucial moment in the novel, one which was supposed to bring us a transcendental epiphany, is bleakly and almost mockingly depicted as a failure, as debris, as a remainder. Nevertheless, where McCarthy's previous novels would have ended on this note, *The Making of Incarnation* pushes further. As I have argued, with its emphasis no longer placed on the subject, and with all characters now far away, disappointed and disillusioned, the machinic gaze is now free to uncover the final secret. In a penetrating chapter, suggestively entitled "The Molecularity of Glass", McCarthy will explain the content of the Box from a perspective which belongs to no one. In this chapter, the focus is on the window in Vanins' now empty study: "it contains bubbles, waves, inclusions, reams and pleats. Looked through from study side, it introduces to the garden little folds, occlusions, doublings ... at once bewildering and quite hypnotic" (837). The narrative non-voice will then go on to shine a light on some of the 20th century forgotten scientific discourses, which argued that objects capture, in their very atoms, sensations of their surroundings. Thus, they argued, it could be possible to read, or to listen to, the past, through the materiality of any object. "Viewed from this perspective", the narration contemplates, "isn't every window a light capturing machine? An event recorder?" (849). Then, the focus is shifted back onto Vanins' window:

if we could spell ... what would this pane divulge? ... somewhere, lodged in the still-shifting contours heat-marked by those billions of levied photons, broken, scattered and kaleidoscope to a

degree no high-speed camera or algorithm yet devised could reverse-engineer, one scene, from 1969: of [Vanins'] wife ... standing in the garden, moving and not moving simultaneously ... She would be planted, feet apart ... playing a novelty game ... in those days referred to as 'tether tennis' ... [she] was playing the tracer's, the path-learner's role, performing movements programmed into and dictated by the core form of the coil, as though she and not the ball were its final extension, gliding in locked orbit (852-55)

It is the atoms, the light particles stuck in the window-pane, which divulge the secret behind Box 808. It contains the representation of Vanins' wife playing tether tennis – the T.T episode -, as seen by him, on a spring day. In performing this motion, in playing tether tennis, the woman is become part of the device. When observing the bird-stained representation, it is absolutely impossible to determine where the motion of the human ends and where that of the machine begins. Both are connected, bound in a shared rhythm, in a shared existence. The revelation behind Box 808 is this – that there is no difference between the subject and the object, and that both are simply bodies in motion. Much more important than this resolution – which had been intimated repeatedly throughout the novel – is the way in which the representation of the box is provided. On one side of the window, there is Vanins, looking at his wife; on the other, she is playing tether tennis. Neither of them, however, are the representing entities. It is the glass, its molecularity, which captures the motion, which keeps embedded in its materiality, the image of the T.T episode. The window is not a medium, and the machine is not an instrument. Instead, they are the monitor, the medium and the surveilling entity all at once. In this configuration, the human is merely the residual of a machinic system. Thus, Box 808 is as much the T.T episode as it is its inscription within that glass pane. And its resolution, in both cases, is Land's – atoms clashing into each other, the human sidelined.

Conclusions

As the novel draws to a close, we are shown the render farm, below Degree Zero's headquarters. It is past the middle of the night, and the gigantic arrangement of servers are working ceaselessly, creating "Incarnation". A lone intern is supervising the operation; quite suggestively, his role is to spot any artefacts the machine had dared to create, and remove the frame from the final product. It is late, though, and the machine is towering, imposing over him – he falls asleep. Outside, two junkies waste their lives, unaware of what is beneath them. The machine encompasses them all: "the farm's noise carries to them, but out here it's less aggressive, its roar muffled, almost lulling. It's still physical, though, a buzz and tremor rolling out in waves, washing their crumpled bodies, holding them in place" – embraced by the machine, part of the machine. In this new formation, the virtual emerges. And the sound of the farm "starts to disintegrate as it heads further in, towards the lower reaches, to a blackness neither rays nor traces penetrate" (893). With the human subject asleep, lulled by the machine, the only thing that is left is the system, the software, and the unmitigated, opaque blackness. Unlike the human, who would have deludedly attempted to penetrate the darkness, to shine a light on its secrets, the machine may coexist with it, may allow it to bloom. All the while, "Incarnation", the movie, the machine's output, is growing, materializing, pixel by pixel, bit by bit. The human recedes, but Incarnation grows.

To conclude, following Deleuzian and Lyotardian lines of thought, I have started this inquiry from the initial argument that it is through intensity and representations, intensity in representations, that reality can be reached. Following this, I have presented Land's antihumanist contribution to this thesis, which argues that intensification entails the disintegration of what is commonly thought of as fundamentally human – agency, control, integrity, affect. In McCarthy's *The Making of Incarnation*, it is precisely this antihuman context that is presented. An inhuman, robotic gaze, gives us access to the characters it surveils, in their futile attempts to understand

reality as a whole. When they all either die, or give up, or cynically resign their transcendentalist dreams, then and only then the secret of reality is revealed – all there is, all there ever was, is bodies in space, captured and determined by machinic systems which include what remains of the human within their networks. In this way, intensity flows freely.

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