The Republic of Cthulhu: Lovecraft, the Weird Tale, and Conspiracy Theory

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Conclusion: The Doom that Came to Humanism

Nor is it thought that man is either the oldest or the last of earth’s masters, or that the common bulk of life and substance walks alone. The Old Ones were, the Old Ones are, and the Old Ones shall be. Not in the spaces we know, but between them, they walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen. — H.P. Lovecraft

Real power begins where secrecy begins. — Hannah Arendt

What has become unraveled since Dallas is not the plot, of course, not the dense mass of character and events, but the sense of a coherent reality. — Don DeLillo

The singularity of Lovecraft’s literary achievement is as simple in design as it is daemonic in intent: the single-minded reification of the abject through utilizing the motifs of the weird tale to stage an unspeakable encounter between the rational self and the Wholly Other, culminating in a primal scream that is in equal parts ontological and epistemological. Unfortunately, however, after the scream nothing more can be said, as the presence of the scream is the absence of the very grounds of the possibility of being-human-within-the-world — which would necessarily preclude the possibility of any future writing. Hence Lovecraft’s
central aesthetic dilemma: is an artistically truthful representation of the world possible if it has been scientifically proven that the universe is meaningless? If, to paraphrase Nietzsche, “there is no Cosmos, only Chaos,” is not the anthropocentric discursive framework of humanism rendered permanently irretrievable? Viewed in parapolitical terms — the central concern of this text — the Lovecraftian scream is the “vocalization” of the existential terror of the (eternal) suspension of the false-consciousness of liberalism. And the final, fatal question: after Lovecraft is it possible to continue to conceptualize the state as a specifically liberal entity, as liberalism is the classic expression of humanist realism applied to the ratio of political speech?

What both Eugene Thacker\(^1\) and Graham Harman\(^2\) have shown in their recent works on Lovecraft, albeit in slightly different ways, is that there is no artistic reason, other than personal preference, for Lovecraft to have written the weird tale. His signature literary effect of discursively migrating between oblique re-presentation and sublimity of substance is, in principle, exportable to virtually any literary genre. The implicit, or even “unconscious” political dimensions of the Mythos have been usefully treated by Thacker in his interesting work \textit{In the Dust of This Planet} (2010). Broadly operating within the current philosophical school of speculative realism, which seeks to problematize both the “object” and the “event” as the central pillars of a post-humanist phenomenology,\(^3\) Thacker opines that the world “is increasingly unthinkable […]. To confront this idea is to confront an absolute limit to our ability to adequately understand the world at all — an idea that has been a central motif of the horror genre for some time.”\(^4\) It is this crypto-Lovecraftian “unthinkable world”\(^5\) that forms the key issue for

\(^1\) Thacker, \textit{In the Dust of This Planet}.
\(^2\) Harman, \textit{Weird Realism}.
\(^3\) That is, the subject–self is ontologically subordinate to the object–thing. As in Lovecraft’s fiction, the protagonists of speculative realist writing are always phenomena.
\(^4\) Thacker, \textit{In the Dust of This Planet}, 1.
\(^5\) Ibid.
Thacker: we “cannot help but to think of the world as a human world, by virtue of the fact that it is we human beings that think it.” Yet, the sublime nature of increasingly imminent “planetary disasters” (climate change, global extinction) creates a parallel *horror of philosophy*, “the thought of the unthinkable that philosophy cannot pronounce [for to do so would be tantamount to philosophy un-saying itself] but via a non-philosophical language.” To paraphrase the good burghers of Munich, when we can no longer have religion (or philosophy, or even science), we can still have art. And the form of art that is most germane to a horror of philosophy is the weird tale; the genre of “supernatural horror is a privileged site in which this paradoxical thought of the unthinkable takes place. What an earlier era would have described through the language of darkness, mysticism or negative theology, our contemporary era thinks of in terms of supernatural horror.” Lovecraft, through his deployment of the abject in the service of the weird tale of the un-human provides the aesthetic key for a new and contemporary form of literature: the assaying of *the-world-without-us*, that nebulous and liminal concept that lies between the everyday and common-sense anthropocentric world-for-us and the un-human, world-in-itself, that which is the indescribable signifier of absolute cosmic disinterestism. Poetics becomes indispensable at precisely this point, as Schopenhauer realized, because it is only through signification, metaphor, analogy, and allegory that the inconceivably sublime can be conveyed into a human (albeit non-linear) pattern of meaning; such a thing as the-world-without-us (“nothingness” for Schopenhauer) “should not really be called cognizance, because it no longer has the form of subject and object [nothingness being relative to an existent which is now absent], and is in any case available only to one’s own, not further communicable, experience.” Horror, therefore, “is about

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6 Ibid.
7 For Thacker on extinction, including that of *Homo sapiens*, see ibid., 120–26.
8 Ibid., 2.
9 Ibid.
10 Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, 476.
the paradoxical thought of the unthinkable”—the abolition of
the possibility of being-human.¹¹

What I find most useful in Thacker’s account is his discussion
of the notion of paradox, which, when

pursued for the sake of wordless truths [...] can rend veils
and even, like the grotesque, approach the holy.” Because it
breaks the rules, paradox can penetrate to new and unex-
pected realms of experience, discovering relationships syn-
tax generally obscures. This sense of revelation accompany-
ing a sudden enrichment of our symbolic repertory accounts
for our experience of depth: it is very nearly synonymous
with profound. But while we are in the paradox, before we
have either dismissed it as meaningless or broken through to
that wordless knowledge (which the meaninglessness of the
grotesque image parodies), we are ourselves in “para,” on the
margin itself.¹²

With this caveat in mind, I would argue that the proper aesthetic
question to ask is not whether Lovecraft’s writing is good or bad,
but whether it is appropriate: whether authentic self-knowledge
as the necessary prelude to irreparable psychic disintegration
may also be artistically appropriated to serve as an aesthetic
treatment of a complementary political disintegration. It is not
without significance that “para,” the root of paradox, is also the
pre-fix to para-political, classes of political phenomena that may
be translated into the literary terms of both the grotesque and
the holy—or, at least, the darkly numinous.

Thacker’s own thinking on the political implications of the-
world-without-us broadly correspond to my own: “Arguably,
one of the greatest challenges that philosophy faces today lies in
comprehending the world in which we live as both a human and
a non-human world—and of comprehending this politically.”¹³

¹¹ Thacker, In the Dust of This Planet, 9.
¹³ Thacker, In the Dust of This Planet, 2.
The basis for any sort of manifesto of parapolitical literature would be the revisiting of the foundational principles of classical occult philosophy, the uncovering of a local or particular truth that signifies an encompassing unknown world that remains hidden throughout the disquisition.

This idea—of the occulted world which both makes its presence known and that in doing so reveals to us the unknown—this idea is the dark underside of occult philosophy and its humanist claims [esoterica = enlightenment; empowerment]. Against the humanist world-for-us, a human-centric world made in our image, there is the notion of the world as occulted, not in a relative but in an absolute sense. Etymologically speaking, that which is “occult” (occultus; occulere) is something hidden, concealed, and surrounded by shadows. However, that which is hidden implies that which is revealed (revelare), just as that which is already apparent may, by some twist, suddenly become obscure and occult.¹⁴

“Occulted” possesses two meanings. The banal one is the jouissance of secrecy, and is wholly social in nature.

That which is occulted can be hidden in a number of ways: something can intentionally be hidden, as when a precious object or important piece of information is stored away or withheld (buried treasure or best-kept secrets). In this case we enter the human world of hide-and-seek, of giving and withholding, of all the micro-exchanges of power that constitute human social networks. We as human beings actively hide and reveal things that, by virtue of this hiding and revealing activity, obtain a certain value for us as knowledge.¹⁵

The second, and more profound sense is the ontological, the world-without-us.

¹⁴ Ibid., 52.
¹⁵ Ibid.
This second type of hiddenness — which may be cataclysmic or everyday — is the hiddenness of the world that we find ourselves thrown into, a hidden world which, regardless of how much knowledge we produce about it, always retains some remainder that lies beyond the scope of our capacity to reveal its hiddenness. In some cases the hidden world is simply the world that does not bend to our will or to our desires, the differential between the world as the world-for-us and the world as the world-in-itself [cosmic disinterestism]. In other cases the hidden world may be something like the “unsolved mysteries” that percolate in our popular culture fascination of [sic] the paranormal.16

Parapolitics, as I have defined it, clearly unifies both senses of Thacker’s “hiddenness of the world.” Parapolitical realities, precisely because they are in some sense “formless” or “unbound-ed,” correspond perfectly to the literary tropes of the sublime and the grotesque. Yet, precisely because the liminally macroscopic networks of covert agency supersede the conventional anthropocentric reference points of community and state, the parapolitically embedded human subject is effectively reduced to the condition of the abject, at least in terms of orthodox liberal humanism. The Dual/Deep State is the politically unnameable not because it hides so much but because its borders are unknown — and unknowable. It is literally “no-thing” that cannot be situated within any orthodox set of political philosophy.

When the world-in-itself becomes occulted, or “hidden,” a strange and paradoxical movement takes place whereby the world-in-itself presents itself to us, but without ever becoming fully accessible or completely knowable. The world-in-itself presents itself to us, but without simply becoming the world-for-us; it is, to borrow from Schopenhauer, “the world-in-itself-for-us.”17

16 Ibid., 53.
17 Ibid.
The four signs of the parapolitical (the occluded microscopic revelations which points to the macroscopic hiddenness)—governance, duality, nomadicism, the irrational— are the manifestations of a politics-without-form, which is the Deep State’s version of the world-without-us. Not the quantum of its occlusion but the sublimity of its hyper-extension renders the Deep State monstrum. Therefore, horror fiction—“a non-philosophical attempt to think about the world-without-us philosophically”— ideally lends itself to parapolitical uses. The problem now becomes—exactly how do we make this jump from the weird tale to a specifically parapolitical form of writing?

As the great idiot-savant of horror fiction himself, Stephen King, memorably put it in his pseudo-“reflective” work Danse Macabre:

Terror—what Hunter S. Thompson calls “fear and loathing”— often arises from a pervasive sense of disestablishment: that things are in the un-making. If that sense of unmaking is sudden and seems personal—if it hits you around the heart—then it lodges in the memory as a complete set. Just the fact that almost everyone remembers where he/she was at the instant he/she heard the news of the Kennedy assassination is something almost as interesting as the fact that one nerd with a mail-order gun was able to change the entire course of world history in just fourteen seconds or so.

King’s reference to both Oswald and the assassination of JFK is instructive and I will return to it later. For the moment, I want to un-package and render more explicit that which King only elliptically hints at: a natural aesthetic convergence between the

18 See above.
19 Thacker, In the Dust of This Planet, 9.
20 A really hip variation of Lovecraft’s terror and the abject.
21 King, Danse Macabre, 8.
horror novel and crime fiction, both of which are in some sense twinned with conspiracy theory. Throughout this text, I have made frequent reference to the strong literary similitudes between the protagonist of the horror story and the much wider-ranging cultural archetype of the detective. In one sense, this relationship is wholly obvious as ratiocination or the uncovering and identification of the Monster serve as one of the main seductions of the horror genre. But on a deeper level, supernatural literature replicates the central ontological premise of all detective fiction: the reestablishment of orthodox cultural and social categories of meaning. The strongest treatment of this theme of ratiocination as metaphysical thriller, from the perspective of detective fiction, is the one presented by Nicole Rafter in her seminal *Shots in the Mirror: Crime Films and Society*. The basic pattern of the detective film is the search.

These tales have […] “goal-oriented plots,” patterns of action to which investigation is key. Mysteries and detective films often mete out clues in small, progressive portions, so that the viewer’s process of discovery parallels the investigators. […] Sometimes […] they conceal the object of the search, such as the villain’s identity, as long as possible. […] At other

Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror*, 178–95. Which obviously links it with horror, at least thematically: “The play of discovery and confirmation, supported by ratiocination, can be found in detective thrillers.” Ibid., 186.

Care must be taken to observe a clear distinction between the two dominant genres of detective fiction, the classical “who-done-it” and the more contemporary “hard-boiled.” Literary criticism ordinarily subsumes the whole of detective literature under the former category, relegating hard-boiled to a sort of grotesque hybrid of the detective and the crime novel. The primary differences between classical and hard-boiled can be largely explained through their respective literary landscapes: who-done-it is English while hard-boiled is American, each genre reflecting the social consciousness of their respective national cultures — social harmony versus alienated individualism. What unites them, however, and which serves as my justification for treating the genre as homogenous, is the dramatic centrality of the figure of the detective whose signature trait is ratiocination. See Grella, “The Formal Detective Novel” and “The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel.”
times the goal of the search is clear from the start, and the investigator's job is to find the thing that is missing.²⁴

Detective fiction strictly adheres to a realist epistemology (and ontology) premised upon the intensely optimistic representational theory of language; the final solution of the problem is the establishment of the correct correlation between word and thing. The detective reassures us of “a benevolent and knowable universe […] a world that can be interpreted by human reason, embodied in the superior intellect of the detective.”²⁵ The detective employs a “practical semiotics,” his goal “to consider data of all kinds as potential signifiers and to link them, however disparate and incoherent they seem, to a coherent set of signifieds, that is, to turn them into signs of the hidden order behind the manifest conclusion, of the solution to the mystery, of the truth.”²⁶ Therefore, as the successful art of detection is nothing else than the metaphysical validation of the rationality of the cosmos acted out through dramatic means, the function of “the detective hero is to guarantee the readers’ absolution from guilt. This is basic to the genre’s form of wish fulfilment […] What matters is the detective’s revelation, not the murders’ punishment, for in this myth of rationality truth takes priority over justice.”²⁷ As I have already argued in Chapter Three, the detective, as the “twin” of the conspiracy theorist, is a harbinger of modernity. Ratiocination is the hallmark of the detective, the investigator of secret truths who re-arranges reality into the semblance of order; ergo, the sleuth, as well as the conspiracy theorist, is a supremely Cartesian being. Here, I define “Cartesian being” as the personification of the “framework of modernity,” identified by Stephen Toulmin as the legacy of the Cartesian Revolution (1618–55).²⁸ Both secular humanism and liberalism

²⁴ Rafter, Shots in the Mirror, 190.
²⁸ Toulmin, COSMOPOLIS, 98 and 108.
are specifically bourgeois variants of modernity, the “evolution of a new [post-medieval] Cosmopolis, in which the divinely created Order of Nature and the humanly created Order of Society were once again seen as illuminating each other” following the genocidal sectarianism of the Thirty Years War (1618–48). The phrase “illuminating each other” is directly evocative of Heidegger’s triptych of ratio, reor, and veritas, which is only appropriate; as Heidegger’s sometime accomplice Carl Schmitt famously argued, metaphysics “is the most intensive and the clearest expression of an epoch.” For Schmitt, the “metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world has the same structure as what the world immediately understands to be appropriate as a form of political organization.” Accordingly, the “chief girder” of the framework of modernity “to which all the other parts were connected” was the Cartesian dichotomy; the “more the extent to which natural phenomena were explained in mechanical terms, as produced by cosmic clockwork, the more (by contrast) the affairs of humanity were allotted to a distinct sphere.” The master trope of the Cartesian dichotomy

was taken to justify a dozen further dichotomies. To summarize: human actions and experiences were mental or spontaneous outcomes of reasoning; they were performed, willingly and creatively; and they were active and productive. Physical phenomena and natural processes, by contrast, involved brute matter and were material: they were mechanical, repetitive, predictable effects of causes; they merely happened; and matter in itself was passive and inert. Thus the contrast between reasons and causes turned into an outright divorce, and other dichotomies—mental vs. material, actions vs. phenomena, performances vs. happenings, thoughts vs. ob-

29 Ibid., 98.
30 Schmitt, Political Theology, 46.
31 Ibid.
32 Toulmin, COSMOPOLIS, 108.
jects, voluntary vs. mechanical, active vs. passive, creative vs. repetitive — followed easily enough.33

As Georges Bataille, a great connoisseur of both the horrific and the abject, declared, “human knowledge becomes the calculation of possibility when it orders the totality of things for itself, the calculation of possibility seized as a foundation.”34 The Cartesian dichotomy is premised upon a separation of Being into two parallel but non-interactive domains: nature and humanity, each consisting of its own series of localized antinomies.35 Nature is governed by fixed laws established during Creation; the objects of physical nature are composed of inert matter; at Creation, Providence arranged natural objects into stable and hierarchical systems of “higher” and “lower” things (“The Great Chain of Being”); as with social “action,” natural “motion” flows downwards, from the “higher” creatures towards the “lower” ones.36 Rational thought and action is the unique signifier of “the human”; rationality (human) and causality (nature) follow different rules, but since thought and action are not governed by natural causality, human actions cannot be explained by strictly scientific means, which yields us the somewhat messy residue of “freedom.” Human beings can establish stable systems in society, analogous to the physical systems of nature. As a result, men live “mixed lives,” partly rational, partly causal; “as creatures of

33 Ibid. Toulmin’s account may be the basis for Thacker’s similar estimation: “The human is always relating either to itself or the world. And these two types of relations overlap with each other: the human can only understand the human by transforming it into an object to relate to (psychology, sociology), while the human can only relate to the objective world itself by transforming the world into something familiar, accessible, or intuited in human terms (biology, geology, cosmology).” Thacker, In the Dust of This Planet, 30.
34 Bataille, The Unfinished System of Nonknowledge, 222.
36 This is clearly reminiscent of Schmitt: “All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development — in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver — but also because of their systematic structure.” Schmitt, Political Theology, 36.
Reason [i.e., the high], their lives are intellectual or spiritual, as creatures of Emotion [i.e., the low], they are bodily or carnal.” The hierarchical subordination of emotion/body to reason/freedom is the capstone of Cartesian ontology.

Emotion typically frustrates and distorts the work of Reason; so the human reason is to be trusted and encouraged, while the emotions are to be distrusted and restrained […]. Nature presumably developed as a result of causal, material or mechanical processes: human history was a record of the practical aims, moral decisions and rational methods of human agents. The rational history of humanity and the causal history of nature thus remained, in crucial respects, distinct topics of inquiry until well into the 20th century.37

In holding that the “essence of Humanity is the capacity for rational thought and action,” Cartesianism implies that all rational deliberation — the totality of “logical operations” performed upon sensory data — takes place within “an ‘un-extended’ [non-corporeal] realm of thought, locally associated with, but not causally dependent on, physiological mechanisms in the brain.”38 Modernity’s universalization of Cartesian rationalism yields a political ontology characterized by Schmitt as one of absolute transparency and equivalence: “[T]he democratic thesis of the identity of the ruler and the ruled, the organic theory of the state with the identity of the state and sovereignty […] the identity of sovereignty and the legal order […] the identity of the state and the legal order.”39 In this regard, the statist dimension of the Cartesian framework represents the culmination of the onto-political project of the earlier Renaissance with the deployment of linear perspective as a paradigm for good governance.

37 Toulmin, COSMOPOLIS, 111.
38 Ibid., 113.
39 Schmitt, Political Theology, 50.
Painting won its noble imprimatur, was ranked as a fine art, and was awarded almost princely privileges during the Quattrocento. In the centuries that followed it contributed its share toward realizing the metaphysical and political programme of visual and social order. Optical geometry, the ordering of colors and values according to a hierarchy of Neoplatonic inspiration, and the pictorial rules that captured and crystallized the heydays of religious or historical legend helped instill a sense of identity in the new political communities—the City, the State, the Nation—by allotting them the fate of seeing all through reason and thus making the world transparent (clear and distinct). The narrative, urban, architectural, religious and ethical components of these communities were given order on the pictorial plane by the painter’s eye, [...] *costruzione legittima* (broadly, the laws of perspective). In turn, the eye of the monarch registered a well-ordered universe all the way to the vanishing point. Exhibited in the churches and the great halls of seigniorial or civic palaces, these representations allowed every member of the community the same possibility as the monarch or the painter for an identity within and mastery over that universe.\(^{40}\)

In 15th-century Venice, for example, “the ducal procession was the constitution,”\(^{41}\) whereas in Florence public processions “were used after aborted conspiracies and when illegitimate governments were toppled.”\(^{42}\) In both city-states the onto-political principle was the same: the legitimacy (*legittima*) of *Il Stato* was inseparable from both its capacity to see and to be seen.

The modern concept of the state—the republic or the democracy—is foreshadowed by this commoner, who in perceptual union with the monarch is a “virtual prince” and

\(^{40}\) Lyotard, “Presenting the Unpresentable,” 130.
\(^{41}\) Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, 190.
\(^{42}\) Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, 337.
who will later become the citizen. The modern concept of culture stems from this public access to historical-political identifying signs and to their collective interpretation. Museums perpetuate this tradition; but more pointedly, a glance into the halls of Congress in Washington or into the Chambres des députes in Paris, attests to the fact that this classical spatial organization is not limited to museum paintings, but structures the representation of the body politic itself.43

Rational thought and human freedom are the repository of all forms of value and agency, tantamount to the ontological real and the moral good. From this, it follows that: (i) everything which is irrational is un-real (and evil); and (ii) that which does not accord with human freedom cannot be considered “rational” (or good).

There is a daemonic fly in the ointment, however.

The literary status of the detective as a Cartesian being is wholly dependent upon the stability of the assumed hierarchical order between reason and emotion, the very demarcation that so much of modern literature seeks to invert, a specifically aesthetic incident within the wider philosophical and scientific subversion of the primacy of soul over body that was pictorially announced with the rise of the grottesche. In other words, the repressed double of detective fiction is crime fiction, which is premised in an equally but opposite epistemological manner upon the anti-representational nature of language, the ineradicable arbitrariness of the relationship between word and thing. Rafter has brought out the latent “nebulosity” of the crime film brilliantly which, as genre, encapsulates all other genres in which a tension-laden encounter with a paradoxical meaning is dramatically central.

Crime films do not constitute a genre (a group of films with similar themes, settings and characters) as Westerns and war films do. Rather, crime films constitute a category that

43 Lyotard, “Presenting the Unpresentable,” 130.
encompasses a number of genres—detective movies, gangster films, cop and prison movies, courtroom dramas, and the many offerings for which there may be no better generic label than, simply, crime stories. Like the terms *dramas* and *romances*, *crime film* is an umbrella term that covers several smaller and more coherent groups.44

Tony Hilfer has explicitly stressed anti-Cartesian epistemological pessimism as the central literary conceit of all forms of crime fiction. “The central and defining feature of the crime novel [or film] is that in it Self and World, guilt and innocence are problematic [unknowable?]. The world of the crime novel is constituted by what is problematic in it,” thereby operating to subvert the Cartesian complacency of the detective novel.45 In contrast, the metaphysical landscape of the crime novel, no less than that of the horror novel, is a wasteland of collapsed categories, what Hilfer denotes as an “ontologically pathological world.”

In […] crime novels the everyday world of normal perceptions loses its taken-for-granted secure status. In an ontologically pathological world, those under threat must become phenomenologically hyper-acute. The crime novel presents a phenomenologically upside-down world, inverting or intensifying to the point of breakdown the normative structures of perception so brilliantly analyzed in Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *The Phenomenology of Perception*.46

Merleau-Ponty’s work suffuses the entirety of Hilfer’s analysis of the crime novel, of which two points are most germane to my own text. The first is the conspicuous similarity between the schizophrenic and the protagonist of crime fiction, one who bears an uncanny resemblance to the Lovecraftian un-hero: “ev-

44 Rafter, *Shots in the Mirror*, 5. I would also add boxing films to the list, a personal favorite of mine. Martin Scorsese’s *Raging Bull* (1980) is an outstanding example.
46 Ibid., 34.
erything is amazing, absurd, or unreal, because the movement of existence towards things no longer has its energy, because it appears to itself in all its contingency, and because the world is no longer self-evident.” 47 The crime protagonist is a radically de-centered Self who is forced to inhabit a metaphysical cataclysm; when “life has become de-centered” the subject loses all sense of reor, objects becoming both “too short and too wide: the majority of events cease to count for me, whereas the nearest ones consume me. They enshroud me like night, and they rob me of individuality and freedom. I can literally no longer breathe: I am possessed.” 48 The second is the radically anti-Cartesian Existenz of crime’s anti-hero: he or she viscerally embodies the paramount error of classical epistemology, which is to reduce awareness to transparency, a metaphysical fallacy masquerading as an epistemological conceit; the cogito “teaches us that the existence of consciousness merges with the consciousness of existing, that there can thus be nothing in it of which it is unaware, [and] that reciprocally, everything that it knows with certainty it finds within itself.” 49 The deeper paradox at work here is that the recognized pioneer of detective fiction is also one of the God(-less) fathers of horror fiction: Edgar Allan Poe. Just as with those reversible Monster–Gods who eternally move between cosmogony and chaography, the conveyor of order is the instigator of chaos, once stood on his or her head. It is a matter of no little import that the detective writer, such as Poe, who could move from law to horror effortlessly, does so most commonly through the intermediate medium of crime fiction. We are, then, faced with not one but two sets of doubles, each binary pair playing on a slightly different variant of epistemological uncertainty: detective/crime and crime/horror. The elucidation of the epistemic framework of the “irrational” (or anti-modernity, pace Toulmin) necessarily carries with it a subversive political

47 Merleau-Ponty, The Phenomenology of Perception, 300.
48 Ibid., 299. For an historical materialist account of de-centering that also focuses upon schizophrenia, see Jameson, Postmodernism, Chapter One, 1–54.
49 Ibid., 351.
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subtext, one that disrupts political reason no less than it does moral, scientific, or aesthetic ratio. Our question now becomes: what would a specifically political form of horror-crime fiction actually look like?

My recent thinking on parapolitics—in part occasioned by my simultaneous return to the writings of Lovecraft—has been very much influenced by the situationist theorist Guy Debord and his notion of the “Society of the Spectacle.”

It is precisely here that we can see the profound truth of the Sicilian Mafia’s maxim, so well appreciated throughout Italy: “When you’ve got money and friends, you can laugh at the law.” In the integrated spectacle, the laws are asleep; because they were not made for the new production techniques, and because they are evaded in distribution by new types of agreement. What the public thinks, or prefers to think, is of no importance. This is what is hidden by all these opinion polls, elections, modernizing restructurings. No matter who the winners are, the faithful customers will get the worst of it, because that is exactly what has been produced for them.

A veritable double of criminal sovereignty, spectacular power constitutes “the autocratic reign of the market economy which had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty and the totality of new techniques of government which accompanied this reign.” The hegemony of the Society of the Spectacle, in turn, is signified by the integrated spectacle, the cultural reification of mass media as the sole medium and arbiter of “truth”; the “whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere

50 See Wilson, The Spectacle of the False Flag.
51 Debord, Comments, 69–70.
52 Ibid., 2.
representation.” As a result, the overall relationship between the social and the visual is governed by a radical functionality.

If the spectacle — understood in the limited sense of those “mass media” that are its most stultifying superficial manifestation — seems at times to be invading society in the shape of a mere apparatus, it should be remembered that this apparatus has nothing neutral about it, and that it answers precisely to the needs of the spectacle’s internal dynamics. If the social requirements of the age which develops such techniques can be met only through their mediation, if the administration of society and all content between people now depends on the intervention of such “instant” communication, it is because this “communication” is essentially one-way; the concentration of the media thus amounts to the monopolization by the administrators of the existing system of the means to pursue their particular form of administration.

Once defined as integrated, the spectacle is understood to be socially (and politically) unifying precisely because “the spectacle is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship among people that is mediated by images.” But the spectacle, while unifying in effect, is totalitarian in nature.

For what is communicated are orders; and with perfect harmony, those who give them are also those who tell us what they think of them. […] A virtually infinite number of supposed differences within the media thus serve to screen what is in fact the result of a spectacular convergence, pursued with remarkable tenacity. Just as the logic of the commodity reigns over capitalist’s competing ambitions, and the logic of war always dominates the frequent modifications in weapon-

53 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 12.
54 Ibid., 19–20.
55 Ibid., 12.
ry, so the harsh logic of the spectacle controls the abundant diversity of media extravagances.56

The effective collapse of media into spectacular power “means quite simply that the spectacle’s domination has succeeded in raising a whole generation molded to its laws.”57 Spectacular government,

which now possesses all the means necessary to falsify the whole of production and perception, is the absolute master of memories just as it is the unfettered master of plans which will shape the most distant future. It reigns unchecked; it executes its summary judgments.58

The spectacle, therefore, is mediated through its primal political form, spectacular power, which, not at all coincidentally, is “the historical moment by which we happen to be governed.”59 And, within this unbroken social procession of mediating images dwells the hegemony of the clandestine: “At the root of the spectacle lies that oldest of all social divisions of labor, the specialization of power.”60 And with this comes the operational hegemony of covert agency: “Secrecy dominates this world, and first and foremost as the secret of domination.”61

We should expect, as a logical possibility, that the state’s security services intend to use all the advantages they find in the realm of the spectacle, which has indeed been organized with that in mind for some considerable time; on the contrary, it is

56 Debord, Comments, 6–7.
57 Ibid., 7. The parallels with contemporary social media are obvious and do not require comment.
58 Ibid., 10.
59 Debord, Society of the Spectacle, 15.
60 Ibid., 18.
61 Debord, Comments, 60.
a difficulty in perceiving this which is astonishing and rings false.\textsuperscript{62}

Accordingly,

[n]etworks of promotion/control slide imperceptibly into networks of surveillance/disinformation. Formerly one only conspired against an established order. Today, \textit{conspiring in its favor} is a new and flourishing profession. Under spectacular domination people conspire to maintain it, and to guarantee what it alone would call its well-being. This conspiracy \textit{is a part} of its very functioning.\textsuperscript{63}

What we are confronted with is nothing less than a \textit{horror sens-sorium} — not the media of horror but a horrific media-as-the-parapolitical-sublime. Just as for Jameson, postmodernism is nothing other than “the consumption of sheer commodification as a process,”\textsuperscript{64} for Debord spectacular power is nothing other than the wholesale collapse of politics into media. The crypto-Burkean corporeal sensorium is a form of the kinesthetic, “a touching experience of feeling through the eye,”\textsuperscript{65} suggesting a subtle interplay between touching and being touched.

The sensorium refers both to the sensory mechanics of the human body and to the intellectual and cognitive functions connected to it: it’s integral to the process of perceiving,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 25. This neatly dovetails with the statement provided by CIA Director Richard Helms to the Church Committee (1975–76), the Senate body investigating the assassination operations (or “wet work”) undertaken by the CIA during the 1950s and 60s: “When you establish a clandestine service [like] the Central Intelligence Service, you established [sic] something totally different from anything else in the United States government. Whether it’s right that you should have it, or wrong that you should have it, it works under different rules […] than any other part of the government.” Cited in Talbot, \textit{Brothers}, 112.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Debord, \textit{Comments}, 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Jameson, \textit{Postmodernism}, x.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Bruno, \textit{Atlas of Emotion}, 219.
\end{itemize}
and to processing the gamut of sensory stimuli individuals may experience in order to make sense of the world around them.\textsuperscript{66}

In the sensorium we face nothing less than the grotesque hybrid of the spectacle and the abject: “Understood on its own terms, the spectacle proclaims the predominance of appearances and asserts that all human life, which is to say all social life, is mere appearance.”\textsuperscript{67} Viewed through radical criminological lenses, contemporary onto-politics reveals a perpetual migration between antinomies: the public (political) and the private (covert) forms of power. And it is precisely within this eternally unstable double movement that the clandestine power of the spectacle resides.

Although he is notoriously imprecise concerning the historical evolution of the spectacle, in his \textit{Comments} Debord writes that the society of the spectacle had been in existence for “barely forty years” when he first wrote about in in 1967: this would place its genesis sometime during the 1920s, during which time the intensive colonization of social space by late industrial capitalism would have been completed.\textsuperscript{68} Jonathan Crary has offered

\textsuperscript{66} Ndalinis, \textit{The Horror Sensorium}, 1. Jameson makes a similar point when discussing postmodern architecture which, for him, “stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible dimensions.” The architecture of the 1990s, the time of Jameson’s ruminations, suggested “a mutation in built space itself” requiring a traumatic (self-induced?) vivisection of our own “perceptual equipment” to facilitate our adaptation to the inhuman “hyperspace” of the postmodern, an “object unaccompanied as yet [1991] by any equivalent mutation in the subject.” Jameson, \textit{Postmodernism}, 38 and 39. Re-reading Jameson’s neo-Marxist text for this essay forcibly impressed upon me how, and to just what degree, everything that is valuable in Jameson’s account was anticipated by Debord. Debord haunts Jameson’s text and at one point the latter, when attempting to come up with a more “precise” nomenclature for our anti-revolutionary times, even suggested “spectacle or image society.” Ibid., xviii. Perhaps the term that he was looking for was the “post-society of the sublime spectacle.”

\textsuperscript{67} Debord, \textit{Society of the Spectacle}, 14.

\textsuperscript{68} Debord, \textit{Comments}, 3.
a fascinating explanation for this startling assertion: 1927 was the year of both the perfection of the television by Vladimir Zworkin and the release of Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*, the first film that completely synchronized the cinematic image with recorded sound, an event that signalled not only a new cinematic technique but an unprecedented industrial and financial conglomereration as well, the record industry largely subsidizing Hollywood's transition to “talking” films; “as with television, the nascent institutional and economic infrastructure of the spectacle was set in place.”69 The late 1920s was also the period when both Stalinism and fascism grasped the revolutionary potential of the new media technologies for political propaganda. By sheer coincidence, it was also the time of Lovecraft's sojourn in New York.

In other words: wherever you have the occlusion of spectacular power, you must also have the abject. The parapolitically telling words of Lovecraft bear repeating here. Against the emotional primacy of horror “are discharged all the shafts of a materialistic sophistication which clings to frequently felt emotions and external events, and of a naively insipid idealism which deprecates the aesthetic motive and calls for a didactic literature to ‘uplift’ the reader towards a suitable degree of smirking optimism.”70

I would like to conclude my essay by revisiting Stephen King's mercifully brief discursus on the assassination of John F. Kennedy and how it relates to the relevance of a literary fusion of parapolitical scholarship with horror fiction; specifically, how Oswald “was able to change the entire course of world history in just fourteen seconds or so.” In a moment of profundity rare for an analytic philosopher, Noel Carroll offers the following observation upon the coincidental re-emergence of the horror film and political trauma in the United States during the 1970s.

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Since the horror genre is, in a matter of speaking, founded upon the disturbance of cultural norms, both conceptual and moral, it provides a repertory of symbolism for those times in which the cultural order—albeit at a lower level of generality—has collapsed or is perceived to be in a state of dissolution. [...] As a consequence of the Vietnam War and the parade of disillusionments that followed in its trail, Americans have recently and continuously—often for good reason—been disabused of their Dream. Understandably, commentators have traded on the suggestive verbal substitutability of the American Dream with the American Nightmare. The sense of paralysis, engendered not only by massive historical shocks, but by an unrelenting inability to come to terms practically with situations, which persistently seem inconceivable and unbelievable, finds a ready, though not a total, analogue in the recurrent psychic demoralization of the fictional victims left dumbfounded by horrific monsters. For better or for worse, Americans have been irreparably shaken by “incredible” events and changes for nearly two decades. And horror has been their genre.71

One thing that should be evident by now is that horror, both as phenomenology and as aesthetics, has something to do with a preceding cognitive shock of some kind that is either the cause or effect of a wider collapse of cultural categories. The correlation between horror and trauma is argued most persuasively by Thacker.

Whereas traditional occult philosophy is a hidden knowledge of the open world, occult philosophy today is an open knowledge of the hiddenness of the world.72 [...] The hidden world, which reveals nothing other than its hiddenness, is a blank, anonymous world that is indifferent to human knowledge, much less to our all-too-human wants and desires.

72 Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, 54.
Hence the hiddenness of the world, in its anonymity and indifference, is a world for which the idea of theistic providence or the scientific principle of sufficient reason, are both utterly insufficient.73

As Thacker knows full well, the occluded world is one not merely of ontological but also of political and social abjection.

Today, in an era almost schizophrenically poised between religious fanatacisms and a mania for scientific hegemony, all that remains is the hiddenness of the world, its impersonal “resistance” to the human tout court. Hence, in traditional occult philosophy knowledge is hidden, whereas in occult philosophy today the world is hidden, and, in the last instance, only knowable in its hiddenness. This implies a third shift: whereas traditional occult philosophy is historically rooted in Renaissance humanism, the new occult philosophy is anti-humanist, having as its method the revealing of the non-human as a limit for thought […].74

The conventional, “progressive” secular(-ist) liberal who valorizes the public state — naively understood as the “natural” servant of the liberal conscience — is merely unconsciously replicating, or imitating, the parapolitical logic of the Dual State, this time from the presumably “left” side of the artificially constructed “center.” Neither too hot nor too cold but lukewarm, the liberal shall be spewed out by the apocalyptic dynamic of history. This is fully on display in the most recent “magisterial” work on Dealey Plaza, JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died & Why It Matters (2009), by James W. Douglass. The essence of this truly grandiose work on political conspiracy is that the four outstanding political murders in the U.S. during the 1960s (John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Malcolm X) all constitute examples of what Thomas Merton called “the Un-

73 Ibid., 53–54.
74 Ibid., 54–55.
speakable”: the nihilistic logic and rhetoric of post-Eichmann bureaucratic rationality that underpins a parallel system of clandestine agencies that periodically interfere with the progressive unfolding of social justice. In Douglass’s own words:

Eventually I came to see all four of them together as four versions of the same story. JFK, Malcom, Martin, and RFK were four proponents of change who were murdered by shadowy intelligence agencies using intermediaries and scapegoats under the cover of “plausible deniability.” Beneath their assassinations lay the evil void of responsibility that Merton defined as the unspeakable.75

In fact, Douglass’s entire oeuvre may be usefully understood as an extended exegesis upon Merton’s meditations on “the Unspeakable,” a phrase that Merton coined while contemplating the “banality” of the evil of Adolf Eichmann.

_The Unspeakable._ What is this? Surely, an eschatological image. It is the void that we encounter, you and I, underlying the announced programs, the good intentions, the unexampled and universal aspirations for the best of all possible worlds. It is the void that contradicts everything that is spoken even before the words are said; the void that gets into the language of public and official declarations at the very moment when they are pronounced, and makes them ring dead with the hollowness of the abyss. It is the void out of which Eichmann drew the punctilious exactitude of his obedience. […] It is the emptiness of “the end.” 76

If we were to follow Douglass and agree to view JFK’s death as the parapolitical will of “the Unspeakable” — itself a neat Lovecraftian turn of phrase — then we would understand that the true nature of the conspiracy theorist’s lament over Dallas is

75 Douglass, _JFK_, xvii.
76 Merton, _Raids on the Unspeakable_, 4–5.
not “It couldn’t have happened by chance,” but rather “It was the moment when everything began to go wrong.” As Jefferson Morley has perceptively remarked,

> How we make sense of the assassination of John F. Kennedy is directly related to how we make sense of American public life […]. The events of Nov. 22, 1963, have thus become a kind of national Rorschach test of the American political psyche. Those six seconds of gunfire in Dallas’ Dealey Plaza serve as an enigmatic inkblot into which we read our political concerns.\(^7^7\)

But notice the trap (and the unconscious political conceit of liberalism) laying here: proving that Dallas was a coup d’État will revitalize the anthropocentric strategy of reclaiming history: as what is made by man can be un-made by man, both the coup and its effects can be reversed and history can be saved through a collective act of human will—that is, reason and freedom. Much of the discursive framework of the JFK assassination as a “conspiracy” is premised, implicitly or explicitly, upon another—thoroughly hackneyed—discursive structure widespread throughout the conspiracy community known as “State Crimes Against Democracy” (or SCAD). Broadly situated within the civil libertarian tradition (a phenomenon largely unique to American political culture), SCAD relies upon both an essentialist and an a-historically naïve view of the U.S. Constitution. Its premises include, but are not restricted to: that the Jeffersonian interpretation of the Constitution is the historically correct one; that all of the original Articles concerning the separation of powers and checks and balances must be interpreted literally; that a liberal form of government (the Public State) is both morally optimal and practically achievable; that the U.S. once enjoyed such a system of governance but that it has been under assault from within by “anti-democratic” forces (the Deep State); that this dysfunctional trend has been under way since the creation

\(^7^7\) Jefferson Morley in Stone and Sklar, *JFK*, 231.
of the National Security State by Harry Truman in 1947; and that it is the normative imperative of the self-proclaimed “dissident scholar” to reverse these trends. Within this discursive complex, the political murder that took place in Texas assumes a world-historical significance not dissimilar to that of the Holy Grail. From this it follows that the uncovering of the “truth” of Dallas will constitute a politically restorative event (not unlike Kant’s subordination of the sublime to the concept) in which the irrational forces of a “false” (un-American?) history will be subdued and the true and proper course of the American experience (the democratic, transparent, and egalitarian Public State) may be reclaimed. In essence, SCAD is nothing less than the naïve restatement of the Cartesian dichotomy between nature and humanity wholesale.

“Smirking optimism” with a vengeance.

The ultimate, and most “spectacular,” purveyor of this secularist creed is the neo-adolescent crypto-Wagnerian filmmaker Oliver Stone78; in his masterpiece of disinformation-with-a-good-conscience, JFK (1991), the assassination is relentlessly forced upon the hapless audience as a coup d’état that acts as the signifier of a traumatic but ultimately “containable” historical event: November 22, 196379 was the precise moment of the usurpation of the public/democratic state by the “shadow government” of the military industrial complex. Very much the narcissistic child of the 1960s and a Vietnam War veteran, the personal trauma undergone by Stone while in Vietnam is clearly but self-servingly repeated by Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner) in a scene that was mercifully deleted from the theatrical release.

Jim: Just think… just think. What happened to our country… to the world… because of that murder… Vietnam, racial

79 Or 11/22/63, as it is denoted by Stephen King in his monumentally time-wasting eponymous novel.
conflict, breakdown of law, drugs, thought control, assassinations, secret government, fear of the frontier…

In other words — Oliver Stone sounds just like Stephen King.

To be the stone in Stone’s shoe: although different surveys yield slightly different results, in general it is a fair estimate that up to 70% of Americans believe that “they have not been told the truth about Dallas.” Although it does not logically follow that the majority of this 70% positively believe in a “conspiracy,” these (fairly) regular results clearly indicate a basic, though perhaps inarticulate, scepticism concerning the official report prepared by the Warren Commission — and, by extension, of the “truthfulness” of the U.S. government regarding Dallas. So, it would appear that the primary objective of the JFK conspiracy community has been achieved: the majority of Americans doubt the Warren Report. So where, then, lies the revolutionary transformation to be delivered through the revelation of the Truth? In the anti-Cartesian and post-humanist reality of the parapolitical world-without-us, is it even possible to conceive of the “recovery of History”? Or must we be content with our Lovecraftian jouissance and maliciously play games with an alternative poetics of a darkly numinous kind?

A parapolitical form of literature utilizing the genre of both crime and horror fiction would be centred upon an unsettling of history as a coherent reality — man is the hapless play-thing not of many-tentacled cosmic entities but nomadic, liminal, and multi-identified criminogenic forces, either personified or reified. As the proper referent of the form would be the human, the cosmic expanses of the Mythos would have to be excluded, although free use can be made of Jameson’s disturbing notions of planetary networks. Similarly, the time dimension would have

80 Stone and Sklar, JFK, 183.
81 In technical historical parlance, this would be a reactionary restorative event, as what is being sought is the return to an earlier state of affairs. In truth, it is the clandestine proliferation of spectacular power that is the truly revolutionary occurrence, a somewhat demoralizing thought for the typical American who can never be anything other than a good liberal.
to be restricted to mere decades — centuries at the most — as the narrative focus would be upon the manifestations(s) of criminal sovereignty and criminogenic asymmetries which would require social being. But the overriding motif will be the *political-world-without-us*, and the most effective means of achieving this vision will be the translation of Schopenhauer’s metaphysics into the form of the crime novel. The surest way to accomplish this is to make two highly self-conscious moves in the direction of Schopenhauer’s radically post-Kantian (and anti-Hegelian) post-human ontology. The first is to abandon all liberal hope in the salvific properties of history as a purely secular process. The category mistake at the core of the metaphysical system of Hegel is nothing other than the occlusion of history as noumena — self-grounded and radically free — instead of as phenomena — wholly deterministic, inhumanly governed by the categories of time, space, and causality.82 History as phenomena is chaotic, irrational, contingent, accidental, un-grounded; an “annihilating” determinism that is the ontological foundation of a radically anti-Cartesian epistemology. The parapolitical, by contrast, is analogous to noumena, or the will — absolutely free, out of that extra-judicial boundlessness that enables it to move un-dimensioned between the perceptible planes of political be-

82 “Everything of real significance in Kant’s project […] comes down to Kant’s attempt to ‘make room for’ the moral life of human beings, to work out some way of defending the possibility of such a free life, while admitting the ‘objective reality’ of the modern scientific, essentially determinist conception of all nature, including human nature.” Pippin, *Hegel’s Idealism*, 12. The problem is that you can’t; Schopenhauer proved this by reaffirming the unbridgeable abyss between appearance/presentation and reality/will and then reconstituting the latter as the irrational, or contra-rational. I interpret Pippin’s work on Hegel’s idealism to imply that Hegel attempted to unify noumena with phenomena through the temporal realization of the absolute-as-self-consciousness-and-radical-freedom which is identical with world history. “For Hegel, such a unity [of the whole] could be made out if it could be shown, as he believed he had, that such fundamental human activities were essentially cognitive and that all such attempts at knowledge were, again at some appropriate level, grounded in Absolute subjectivity’s attempt at self-knowledge.” Ibid., 260. In my opinion, Hegelianism works far better as theology rather than philosophy.
ing while rendered “formless” by that fact alone. Here, I will paraphrase Paul Veyne: History teaches us precisely nothing, for within history one can find examples of absolutely anything. History is literally unbounded, and this extends the inhuman magnitude of the parapolitical to the level of both the sublime-in-the-universal and to the grotesque-in-the-particular, two parallel but equally unlimited “sets” of phenomena. The second is to employ Schopenhauer’s anti-Cartesian framework to effect a translation of Otto’s mystérium tremendum into the discursive terms of a secularized version of conspiracy theory. By “secularized,” I mean a conspiratorial text that deploys Lovecraftian motifs but is devoid of the cosmic scale of reference. All of the signature themes of crime writing — the criminality of the everyday (or the “normal”), the multiplicity and duplicity of personal identity, the dissociative nature of the private self, the subversive nature of speech, the internalization of covert strategies of deviance — can, and should, be exploited. But the intended effect should not be the individual concerns (“peasant tragedies”?) of individual transgressions, but the apocalyptic alètheia of parapolitical phenomena as the substance of social being. No longer mere crime but a crypto-Debordean horror sensorium on a planetary scale.

The hoped-for result will be nothing less than a new hybrid aesthetic of horror and crime.

Weird Noir.