Crisis of the Novel and the Novel of Crisis*

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This essay has three more or less discrete parts; that is, no firm linear argument is developed across them. Each part informs the next, but the arguments taken up in each could also be contemplated separately. The first responds to the thrust of this special issue, and considers the relationship of the novel to the nation; the second focuses on a worldly concern of the present, the 2007-08 financial crisis, and how it features in the contemporary novel; and the third moves toward a possible project of exploring the contemporary novel in terms of the prevailing neoliberal lifeworld. Together, these parts try to accentuate some of the general features of the contemporary novel.

Nation

Insofar as the unwritten agreement between general readers (interpretive communities) and producers (authors, editors, publishers) go, or insofar as the structuring principles of book circulations/markets go, it is doubtful whether there was ever a *necessary* relationship between the novel as genre and the concept of nation. No doubt social consensus on national community, and its co-optation into professional practices and state apparatuses, has meant that novel and nation have often been evoked together. Novels have sometimes been archived or shelved according to national grids; equally, at times they have not, and have blurred or neglected such grids instead. In professional criticism, the political economy of novels is habitually ledgered in nation-state account books (to use René Wellek's metaphor; see Wellek 153); but that is more due to the predisposition of the account book than to the substance of the novel. None of this has constituted a necessary relationship between

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novel and nation. Undeniably, though, philologists and latter day humanities critics have occasionally presumed that such a necessary—or at least deep—relationship exists, and the institutional setup of academia still presumes it.

The general philological approach can be quickly described (and put aside) by recourse to Franco Moretti's strategy of examining the nineteenth-century European novel via geographical mappings. From the philological perspective, dominant through the nineteenth century and especially in Europe, the domains of human (racial), cultural, linguistic, physical, and political geography had an inextricable cohesiveness—an organic togetherness (this rationale of organicity is laid out cogently in Part I in Cheah). The cohesion was derived from traces of origins through the historical process, and the concept of the nation was grounded in the overlaps within these descriptors of geographical domain. The novel was accordingly understood as a manifestation of the nation thus conceived. In fact, little could escape national grounding once the philological approach was accepted. That idea of cohesion is now untenable, as much as a historicist conception of the nation as one that applies to the present (especially in the present). That each geographical descriptor for a putative national domain slips against others, and destabilizes presumptions of cohesion, is largely regarded as a foregone conclusion. The prevailing understanding is that nations have been *conceived and constructed* according to (often recent) historical and political contingency, which naturally releases cultural artefacts of all kinds, including the novel, from any necessary national predicate. Nonetheless, this might appear to be a somewhat summary way of putting philological scholarship aside, and no doubt the growing numbers of returners to philology nowadays will quibble with it (I have discussed this elsewhere: see Chapter 2 in Gupta). This is so especially since philology undergirded the institutional structure of modern humanities, so that the study of literature—and novels—is pre-organized as national: literary history, canons, curricula, archival records, university departments, research centers, and so on are still largely ordered according to given national categories. Consequently, the nation as a categorical predicate for literary scholarship has proven to be remarkably sticky. No amount of reconceptualizing literary history in terms of world literature, colonialism/postcolonialism, first/second/third worlds, directional geopolitics (Orient-Occident, East-West, North-South), globalization, trans- or post-nationality, planetary literature, world republic of letters, area studies, translation zones, and so on has quite dislodged the habit of predicating literary study on nation. It yet seems meaningful to ask what happens *beyond* the point where everything is predicated on the nation, which in a way reiterates the nation's pre-ascribed philological eminence and ongoing consequence.

Moretti's atlas itself was obviously circumspect in this regard, and when Moretti observed that "the nation-state [...] found the novel. And vice versa: the novel found the nation-state" (17), he marked a historical contingency, a convenience of (geographical and literary) imagining, and an ideological confluence ("found," not "founded") in which the genre is *not* predicated on the nation. Moretti's atlas is exem-

plary in analyzing the novel according to the constructedness of nation, and also of province and city, of empire and colony, of book circulation territories—indeed, of the various dimensions of geography itself. But there is that stickiness of nation as predicate for humanistic study, and scholars contemplating the novel have seized eagerly upon conceptions of nations, while fully cognizant of imagined communities and imaginary geographies, as if it has a superlative significance—as if the nation *did* have a necessary relationship to the emergence and existence of the genre, even though it evidently does not now. The nation still seems an eternal point of departure for, and often a condition-setting trope in thinking about, the novel. Thus, against all odds, Fredric Jameson gave the nation a new lease of life for conceptualizing the novel—by translating the politics of first world/third world, *and* of east/west, *and* of colony/postcolony into the following breath-taking generalization (while adjoining caution about generalizing): "All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" (Jameson 69)—though, virtuously, in order to expose "the primordial crime of capitalism" in "displacing older forms of collective life" (84), and to befuddle "first world" and particularly American complacence. The contradictions in this argument have been strenuously criticized (notably in Ahmad) and need not be regurgitated. But the characterization of nation as "allegory" offers an opportunity (without conceding to philology) for bringing it back as predicate (so nonetheless philological albeit with a postmodern sensibility) for thinking about the novel—at least *all* those non-western and not-first-world novels—and for pinning the novel down. Unsurprisingly, Caren Irr finds this ploy being returned in reverse: "in the early twenty-first century, a revival of the political novel has begun in the US," and "[t]his first-world version of the political novel—or, more properly, the geopolitical novel—draws directly on the tradition of the national allegory at least as completely as the more cosmopolitan postcolonial writing subverted that form" ("Postmodernism" 517). But this presents a contradiction with which Irr struggles valiantly in her longer treatment of the matter: the contradiction of wedding the fluidity of "geopolitical novel" with the specificity of "US fiction." Her gloss over this lies in deciding: "More important than biographical markers for my purposes is an explicit effort to address a North American audience. I view internal evidence such as voice, style, and narrative frame as more reliable indicators of a particular work's having an American reference point than authorial biography" (Irr, *Toward* 11). The caution about not grounding the US in the biography of the author is really caution about philological conceptions, about presuming that the nation authors the author by birth and that the author thereby authors the nation in his or her fiction. But caution is thrown to the winds in presuming that the North American audience is *necessarily* addressed simply by evoking a voice, style, narrative frame—that is, that *referring* to North America is the same as *addressing* North Americans—which offers a basis for characterizing 'US fiction' as

coterminous with its first-world national allegory.

Somewhat more challenging contradictions appear when Benedict Anderson's study of nation formation—the most influential formulation of the nation's constructedness and politico-historical contingency—is recruited to suggest a deep erstwhile relation to the novel. I mention this because the opening lines of the introduction to this special issue seem to gesture in that direction (referencing Chapter 1 of Anderson, *Imagined*):

> According to Benedict Anderson [...], the national community is imagined by two forms: the novel and the newspaper. The novel turns the pre-modern cyclical time into the Benjaminian empty, homogenous time of the calendar (Anderson 24), which means that newspapers are novels without plot, "one-day best-sellers" (35) [....] However, while nationalism is being increasingly replaced by post-nationalist identity politics, the novel is not being sublated by any new form.

This provocation to consider the matter, for which I am grateful, is merely reflective of an over-determination of the novel in Anderson's schema that is familiar in literary critical circles. It is a line glibly drawn in, for example, a passing observation such as: "Novels not only mirror the *Bildung* of nations but also have a direct causal role in mapping their social spaces. For Anderson, the novel is an analogue of the nation and represents synchronically its bounded, intrahistorical, and emergent society" (Mukherjee 550—summarising Pheng Cheah, who did not quite say that: see Cheah). It's a simple matter of replacing Anderson's "book" with "novel" (newspapers are like a gigantic one-day bestseller *book*, not *novel*; the *book* and the newspaper, not the *novel* and the newspaper); and of generalizing Anderson's carefully chosen references to nationalist novels describing reading practices at specific historical junctures as "*the* novel" per se, the genre itself. But the replacement of "book" with "novel," and certain chosen novels by "*the* novel," undermines the rationale of Anderson's argument. The materiality of the "book" rather than the immateriality of the "novel" is material to his argument; the logic of print circulations is not specifically novelistic in Anderson's reasoning; the "logic of seriality" (as Anderson put it in *Spectre* 29-45) that materializes nationalism is with regard to *text in print* (newspapers are Anderson's preferred example) rather than a specific literary genre (all print partakes of that seriality, including the novel). Possibly, even the focus on print culture ascribed to Anderson's argument within literary critical circles is an over-determination: linguistic philology (vernacularization and setting vernaculars as official standards), the existence of colonial administrative units, and the ideological co-optations of emerging secular states in Europe have their unavoidable and determinative place in this picture. And, along with the book and newspapers in print culture, also demography, cartography, and museography (albeit only as an afterthought in Chapter 10 of Anderson, *Imagined*)—all themselves rooted in philological scholarship (as Turner shows)—and other spaces of "bound seriality" (see Anderson, *Spectre* 29-45) are all inextricably woven together. All of which is to say that Anderson's argument, at any rate, offers no basis for any deep historical relationship between specifically the novel

and the nation to be mooted. But Anderson did at every point remind the reader that national solidarities and discourses are extremely sticky. That was the impetus for formulating "imagined communities" by way of historicist exploration: the shock of the China-Vietnam War of 1979, the first "world-historical" conflict (as Anderson saw it: *Imagined* 1) arising from persistent nationalism within revolutionary socialism. Perhaps, the literary critical tendency to over-determine the historical relation between novel and nation is a manifestation of that stickiness.

If there has never been a *necessary* relation between the novel *and* the nation, then there is no meaningful question to be answered about the novel *beyond* the nation. The novel does not need to be transformed from its inside, in its formal genetics, if political and cultural discourses shifted away from being nation-centered in the way they have been through much of the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. It is questionable whether such a shift is really taking place now in the twenty-first—and it is arguable that the nation is ideologically as centered as ever, perhaps increasingly so.

Equally, it is arguable that concepts and even experiences of cosmopolitanism and universal humanism have been constantly in circulation through the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.

The questions that arise, then, are somewhat different from what happens to the novel beyond the nation. These could be: What discourses other than those centered on nation are of moment now? How does the novel negotiate its passages apropos them? Does that bring the genre into question in any way?

Crisis

Insofar as the unwritten agreement between general readers and producers go, or insofar as the structuring principles of book markets/circulations go, it is doubtful whether the novel has ever faced a crisis—whether it has ever really been expedient to write obituaries of the genre. However, the idea has a certain sensationalist appeal and has been repeatedly proposed, influentially for a postmodernist ethos by John Barth. In a way, the shock of the idea—still—testifies to how habituated readers are with the novel as always in the present, reflexive and constitutive of the present (and the past of the present). Barth's 1967 account of this seems to have a renewed currency of late: "Whether historically the novel expires or persists as a major art form seems immaterial to me; if enough writers and critics *feel* apocalyptic about it, their feeling becomes a considerable cultural fact, like *feeling* that Western civilization, or the world, is going to end rather soon" (72). It is a testament, as I have said, to the habituation of the idea of the novel as world; but also that this state of exhaustion, this crisis and apprehension of imminent demise, rest in an inward turn in novelistic representation and its critical analysis: the Borgesian turn when "characters in a work of fiction become readers or authors of the fiction they're in," so that "we're reminded of the fictitious aspect of our own existence" (73). The imminent death of the novel

is still being revolved, and I do not mean because the electronic book has arrived (book, not novel, so all genres are in mortal danger from that perspective). What I have in mind is that the death or end of the novel, the trope of a crisis of the novel, is in Barth's sense a resonant "cultural fact," and more: it is a cultural fact that spawns its own sub-genre of the novel, novels about the end of the novel, while knowing that the novel is but perpetuating itself thereby. So, the death or end of the novel rumbles on, pondered in essays occasionally by novelists (such as Young or Self), and given its due by literary critics. A most fulsome treatment appears in Pieter Vermeulen's study, whose approach to the matter sums the situation succinctly:

> These [post-2000 or contemporary] novels ascribe to the novel (as) genre the now obsolete power to choreograph the distribution of modern life into individuals, families, communities, nations, and empires; their declarations of the demise of that cultural power serve as so many scaffolds for their explorations of different forms of affect and life and for their interrogation of the ethics and politics of form. By evoking a particular understanding of the novel genre in order to measure their difference from it, these fictions in a sense conspire with criticism and theory of the novel to construct a genre they declare defunct. (4)

Concern about this inward turn is at the same time anxiety about the novel's relationship with the world (wherein the nation is but one erstwhile way of distributing modern life). The inward turn is both a putative lack of a relationship and a reflexive relationship itself: in Barth's words, it reminds us of "the fictitious aspect of our own existence." There are moments when Irr's account of the contemporary political (geopolitical) novel chimes with Vermeulen's account of novels bouncing off the end of the novel. And that leads me to wonder, apropos the questions raised above, how the novel and world (including the nation, despite the nation) negotiate with each other now, with regard to some concrete manifestation of worldliness and worldly concern in the present (I do have Edward Said's sense of worldliness in mind).

Perhaps it is simply fortuitous that the ongoing crisis of the novel (the end of the genre as a novelistic trope) is being pondered amidst worldly concerns about a (recent or ongoing, depending where one is) financial crisis—the so-called 2007-08 financial crisis—and its results—austerity policies. One wonders whether the one crisis is antithetical to the other: whether the inward turn that is the crisis (as trope) of the novel has worked against the novel's engagement with the worldly crisis. Or has this conjunction of crises perhaps rejuvenated the worldliness of the novel (as a novelistic trope, too) beyond the end of the novel (a now foregone trope). Either the contemporary novel is securely enmeshed in its own fictional crisis, or it apprehends the worldly crisis within itself—or some interesting version of both: very different political commitments are involved in these positions. These different positions are unlikely to be uniformly awash in the lukewarm sort of authorial commitment that Caren Irr describes: "authors of geopolitical fiction tend to support pro-global ideals in combination with liberal individualism or moderate collectivism in political action" (*Toward* 22). But then, how the novel negotiates through the worldly crisis is

possibly not a matter of what authors think they are doing; perhaps it is about what readers find in novels, what interpretive strategies are deployed in the receptive field. However fortuitous the connection between fictional and worldly crises, it seems to have some mileage for thinking about the contemporary novel.

The 2007-08 financial crisis has to be one of the most intensively narrativized and verbally mediated 'events' in this age of information and communication. In print alone, the indicative numbers are daunting: a keyword search with "financial crisis" in late 2014 on the British Library's online catalogue yielded well over 10,000 possibly relevant entries: for the period 2007-08: 972 items; 2009-10: 4020; 2011-13: 5285; January-October 2014: 1088. That excludes newspaper reports, broadcasts, and online publications. With the preceding part in mind and by way of an impressionistic observation: the financial crisis as a field naturally has a geopolitical dimension. On the one hand, the field is denoted as a global one—consistent with the character of contemporary capitalism—so a *global* financial crisis. It was, of course, immediately understood that the global financial crisis had not really been particularly manifested, for example, in China, India, Canada, Australia, and some other states, and that crises in the so-called Asian Tiger Economies and in Mexico, Argentina, Japan, and a few other states pre-dated this one, but those were not 'global.' The financial crisis in this instance has mainly concerned the USA and EU member states, and it is their geopolitical centrality in the current capitalist—neoimperialist—order that confers a global air to this one. On the other hand, and at the same time, within crisis-struck zones the evidence, responsibilities, and solutions were relentlessly tracked state-by-state, especially within the transnational EU. And in the latter especially that sticky discourse of nationalism, at the blurred conjunction of nation-state, surfaced. This was not so much to do with a boost to various far-right nationalist formations (of course that has happened); rather, it was to do with the structuring of narrative—with the rhetorical strategies of exposition. National stereotyping in news coverage of, for example, the crisis in Spain (see Soto), Iceland (see Chartier), Greece (much here; see, for example, Tzogopoulos; Touri and Rogers; Kaitatzi-Whitlock), and other countries have received some academic attention. Nationalist prickliness simmers strongly here; as one commentator put it regarding media coverage of Greece: "Representations of the Greek crisis constitute particular cases of an institutional 'intra-European racism'" (Kaitatzi-Whitlock 35).

The question that this discussion faces then is: where does the novel fit into this enormous and burgeoning flow of worldly narratives and communicative mediations of the 2007-08 financial crisis? This seems a very natural question to raise, and not merely because we habitually anticipate a relation between novel and world, and are still taken aback by the possibility that it does not exist and that the genre has consequently become defunct. The prevailing political economy of texts, of books, automatically suggests this question: the novel, like all areas of cultural production, is hostage to market drives. Superlative production of news narratives about an 'event' spurs book production alluding to that 'event'—it makes good market sense, and

producers of novels could be expected to capitalize on it. It is as natural to anticipate the 'financial crisis novel' as to anticipate the '9/11 novel,' the 'Iraq invasion novel,' or the 'Arab Spring novel.' The answer to the above question is, interestingly, that the novel has made indifferent inroads into print productions about the financial crisis.

Indifferent inroads, but still some alleyways have been laid out. A tracking of novels in English that have been packaged and marketed or reviewed and received as 'crisis novels' include the following authors: Geraint Anderson (thrillers featuring ruthless bankers: *Just Business*, 2011, and *Payback Time*, 2012); Sebastian Faulks (on sundry London characters including a hedge-fund manager in late 2007: *A Week in December,* 2009); Cyrus Moore (*City of Thieves*, 2009: a thriller about an investment banker who finds himself implicated in an insider-trading ring); Jess Walter (on the travails of a financial journalist after the Great Crash: *The Financial Lives of Poets*, 2009); Tilly Bagshawe (shadowing another bestselling author in Sidney Sheldon's *After the Darkness*, 2010, a story about intrigues and revelations following a hedge-fund manager's demise); Jonathan Dee (on the family life of an affluent private equity fund manager: *The Privileges*, 2010); Ben Elton (on a group of friends in London during the crash: *Meltdown*, 2010); Adam Haslett (*Union Atlantic*, 2010, with a successful Wall Street banker as a main protagonist); Sophie Kinsella (*Mini Shopaholic*, 2010: part of a light-hearted chicklit series featuring a mother and daughter during the recession, who, to put it mildly, like shopping); Alexandra Lebenthal (on the schemes of a hedge-fund manager and a Lehman Brothers investment banker: *The Recessionistas*, 2010); Alex Preston (on traders in the City on the eve of the crisis: *This Bleeding City*, 2010); Justin Cartwright (*Other People's Money*, 2011, set around the collapse of a British merchant bank); Felix Riley (thrillers featuring a maverick US secret service agent talking about corrupt bankers: *The Set Up*, 2011, and *Inside Job*, 2012); Robert Harris (*The Fear Index*, 2011: a CERN physicist sets up a hedge-fund with a program to manipulate markets and gets into trouble); Cristina Alger (on the dodgy financial dealings of elite New Yorkers: *The Darlings*, 2012); Dave Eggers (on an American businessman in Saudi Arabia during the crisis: *A Hologram for the King*, 2012); John Gapper (*A Fatal Debt*, 2012, a murder mystery involving investment bankers and Wall Street intrigues); John Lanchester (following sundry characters in London, including an affluent banker made redundant as the crisis hits: *Capital*, 2012); and Darin Bradley (*Chimpanzee*, 2014: a dystopian fantasy set in a near-future Great Depression America).

This is a modest list of novels that refer explicitly to the financial crisis, produced and received as 'crisis novels,' and no doubt a few more could be added—but not many more. Highbrow literary critics would struggle to allow some of these into the sacralized (canonized) precincts of '*the* novel,' and would consign them to the non-committal category of 'fiction,' but that says more about critical norms than about the objects of analysis. However, such qualms give a useful sense of territorial prerogatives: many of these texts have their relevance to the financial crisis foregrounded—their status as 'crisis novels' claimed—through market imperatives

(topicality, publicity, 'genre fiction' formulae, and so on) in which critics have little purchase. And literary critics have generally expressed very little interest in such crisis novels: apart from a few review essays, three useful essays in Kirk Boyle and Daniel Mrozowski's edited volume (see Chapters 4-6 in Boyle and Mrozowski) come to mind, which also deal with novels implicated in more tangential readings of crisis.

Insofar as the above list goes, a few immediate observations are relevant to the preceding discussion. First, in terms of unpacking thematic concerns à la the 2007-2008 crisis, these concerns present zeitgeist pictures, which are only circumstantially related to this crisis; in other words, they reiterate the features of a considerable lineage already—recalling William Gaddis' *JR* (1975), Arthur Hayley's *Moneychangers* (1975), Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), Don DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003), and numerous more or less sensational accounts of insider-experiences and exposés and formulaic 'genre fiction,' and their modernist and Victorian predecessors (for a useful listing, see Davies). Second, the novels listed above largely bypass attention to national integrities or, for that matter, inter-national boundaries, and tend to draw a line from vividly evoked localities (offices, homes, cities) to hazily or abstractly grasped global determinations and repercussions. The impression they make is of strong localization of narrative, accentuated by concerns that radiate seamlessly away from and outside (perfunctorily registered) nation-states. Third, the financial crisis is largely presented in terms of key agents (especially those involved in financial operations and institutions) and predominantly pinned upon a specific class (broadly the so-called high-net-worth individuals, the top 1% against which the Occupy Movement defined itself, the so-called super-rich and their functionaries, along with political elites). This is apt to place such novels as coterminous with the framing and scapegoating that was widely evidenced in reportage on the crisis (see, for example, Davidson; Kelsey; O'Flynn, Monaghan, and Power).

If this modest list of novels with narratological and ideological structures that replicate/reiterate numerous predecessors, and the above (dearth of) literary criticism addressed to them, were all one could refer to then there might be a good case for anticipating the death of the novel. The tenuous thread that links this worldly crisis with the novel may then become another stitch in the crisis of the novel. However, it seems to me that this approach to the matter is debilitatingly limiting; the problem is in the critical approach rather than in the novel as an object and field. A different approach may be proposed, one that is likely to be productive for exploring the relation of world and novel now—the relation of such "events" as the 2007-08 financial crisis to contemporary novelistic practice. The remainder of this essay briefly makes the proposal, but does not flesh it out: fleshing it out would be a large project.

Neoliberal Lifeworld

What I have in mind is akin to Emily Horton's approach to her study of "crisis fictions," exemplified by the novels of Graham Swift, Ian McEwan, and Kazuo Ishiguro:

> [My] focus is on contemporary crisis, not, or not primarily, in the form of a breakdown of linguistic signification as witnessed by postmodernism, but perhaps more centrally in a mode of everyday social anxiety and unease emphasised in these novels in relation to a context of global neoliberalism. Thus, integral to these fictions is a critique of neoliberal politics and society, which figures the genre of crisis as aesthetically crucial. (3)

As context, Horton delineates the crisis in a broad way in post-consensus Britain, especially concretized around Thatcherism, and the novelists and their work are then presented as active vehicles of dissent contributing "to examining the lie of neoliberal progress and the supposed democracy of free market government, instead putting forward a more critical understanding of cosmopolitan society and politics" (9). The impetus of Horton's project is of our time, with the 2007-08 crisis in the backdrop, but it makes sparing reference to that. That is understandable: this crisis is but a symptom of a larger crisis, and speaks to and of something larger. And yet, the specificity of this crisis is also that it actuates energetic engagement with that something larger, and that push is imbued in the critical moment as in the novelistic moment and calls for some reflection. Such reflection is, however, deterred by the literary critical habit (of philological provenance) of locating its object of analysis firmly in texts and authors—of secluding the critical thrust behind meditations on fetishized texts and iconized authors, the ostensible sources and authorities of critical thought. The world is then presumptively sieved through those, as conditional on their pre-eminence, and that move often renders the connection between world and novel a small thing. I have been doing this myself in a particularly narrow way above in looking for explicit announcements of the 2007-08 crisis within the novel and its circuits. Horton does much better than that; but still, her deference to particular novels and novelists as authors and authorizers of socio-political critique is an unnecessary restriction. The consideration of world and novel is opened up if the *processes* of writing and reading are centered as embedded in the socio-political structures of literary production and circulation and reception, and as construed within the ideological field of intellection and critique itself.

As noted above, the 2007-08 crisis has generated a profusion of texts that chart its symptoms, seek to explain it, and offer remedies. Importantly, in their midst an increasingly coherent articulation has emerged of the ruling ideology, which is now available as the history of the present, is symptomatized in this crisis (and recent and coming crises), and is also paradoxically reified, and crystallized, by this crisis. In other words, the 2007-08 crisis and the intellectual verbosity surrounding it have clarified the pervasive condition that produced it. Arguably, for this effort of clarification to be undertaken in a concerted and cohesive fashion the context of the financial

crisis and austerity are enabling conditions. This is so because the embedded ruling ideology of the present, in its *general* embrace, is not clearly laid out through consistent economic and political reasoning, and not represented by particular agents and institutions. It has its ideologues, but the ideologues are themselves dispersed across quite different ideological formations and contexts; its tenets work through accretion and co-optation in practice more often than through the application of a firm line of reasoning; its coherence is as much in its decentered character as in its institutional centerings, as much in what is implied and what is concealed or misrepresented as in what is stated. Because of this pervasive diffusion of the neoliberal ideology, the struggle to articulate it is not merely in what is regarded as political and economic common-sense and pragmatism, but within the very grain of subjectivity and self-formation and in penetrating the profusion of acts, perceptions, communications, and affects that constitute everyday life. For want of a better phrase, I think of this intellectual effort as attempting to put into relief the neoliberal lifeworld of the present (with an explicitly political inflection on the Husserlian *Lebenswelt*, a totality of perception, experience, and expression)—which seems so natural and obvious as to be nearly impervious to coherent articulation, only amenable to piecemeal and fragmented noting. By its foregrounding of startling contradictions and disaffections, this crisis has enabled—perhaps only momentarily—the possibility of saying and listening in which some articulation of the coherence of our neoliberal lifeworld seems incumbent. It will not be long before all of it is firmly dismissed as wistful academicism, another narrowly leftist game of intellectuals building castles in the air, clever auto-perpetuation of critical discourse structures; perhaps it is all already being thus dismissed in various circles.

Of course, the 2007-08 crisis and consequent austerity regimes and disinvestments have not been singularly focalized for such articulation; that would be an over-determination of this crisis and an under-determination of both the neoliberal lifeworld and critical perspicacity. But in this context, various prior formulations of the neoliberal lifeworld have seemed to come together. Classical precepts of self and property from Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche have been linked to relatively recent reflections on the diffusion of neoliberalism à la the crisis—calling upon, for example, the situationists' and especially Henri Lefebvre's characterization of everyday life and the need to transform it; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, a study of structuring psychoanalysis for capitalist conformity; Michel Foucault's 1978-79 lectures on neoliberal governmentality, which are also a history of the crisis of liberalism; Christian Marazzi's work from the 1990s on communicative manipulation as the bedrock of financialization; or Randy Martin's observations on financialization infused into domestic economies of daily life. With the 2007-08 financial crisis and austerity measures in view, a range of reflections on various aspects of the neoliberal lifeworld that draw upon those and, importantly, *speak to each other* have appeared; stitching together the fragmentary, and the diffuse, and the unspoken, and the misdirected to—gradually and intercommunicatively, through the compressed

undertaking from various directions—express the coherence of this lifeworld. The effort of articulation is found in the cross-currents between, rather than simply in the discrete formulations of, such studies as Mark Fisher's weaving through numerous cultural products that naturalize an account of capitalist realism; Maurizio Lazzarato's exploration of an ethics of indebtedness that moulds subjectivity and intersubjectivity; Frédéric Lordon on concepts of desire and fulfillment systematized to make subjects of capitalism compliant; Philip Mirowski's description of a plethora of everyday life experiences that serve four broad neoliberal tenets (see Chapter 3); Max Haiven's depiction of the manner in which the financial sector is now woven into the informal sphere of social and cultural life; Marnie Holborow on the presence of neoliberalism in various levels of language usage rather than as a coherent discourse—to mention but a tiny number, which I happen to have recently read, amidst an oceanic flow of such analyses.

If these studies are not dismissed as auto-constructions of empty intellectual discourse, castles in the air, but are instead viewed as searching articulations of the contemporary world with worldly concern, then the novel cannot be outside their remit. If these are valid apprehensions radiating out of the 2007-08 financial crisis, in some sense 'crisis thinking' amidst a neoliberal lifeworld, then *all novels of our time and within this world are 'crisis fiction'*—instead of speaking of *the* contemporary novel we might as well speak of *the* crisis novel. We do not need to look for the crisis being mentioned directly or tangentially in novels. The infusion of neoliberalism in the contemporary lifeworld, within the grain of subjectivity and everyday life, within ordinary language usage and mediated narrative structures, leaves the contemporary novel with no outside—no more than the critical putting-into-perspective of the neoliberal lifeworld can claim to be outside. The very practice of writing and reading, the very structures of production and circulation, the very themes and issues that can be identified as of-this-world in novels are within the embrace of neoliberalism—and the novel is found within or against its grain. This would mean not looking to the novel to tell us about the crisis, but placing the novel within the matrix of the neoliberal lifeworld—by attention to the novel's production and circulation and reception, its textual and paratextual content as well as its textual associations, its assimilations from and manifestation within linguistic and translational fields, its commodity form and its inward turns. It is up to literary critics to chart the relation of novel and world in this context, without fetishizing the text or the author. This requires a lot of detailed analytical work on the novel, which is hopefully imminent.

Note

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