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William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* and the Return of History

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The world of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* is a world of consumer objects that seem to both evoke and deny the realities of history, suggesting a crisis of historicity in keeping with Francis Fukuyama's argument that with the end of the Cold War, history itself had come to an end. However, this novel is also deeply concerned with historical trauma, and centrally with the terrorist attacks of 9/11. In light of this, Cayce Pollard's quest for the mysterious footage may be read, not as a desire for the seeming neutrality that the footage offers, but rather for something deeper: for the acknowledgement of historical trauma, and the possibility of mourning.

William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* is a book substantially concerned with history, time, the past, present and future.[1] 'How do you think we look,' Hubertus Bigend asks Cayce Pollard, 'to the future?' (55). A couple of pages further into the same conversation, Bernard Stonestreet asks a related question: 'Do we have a past, then?' (57). Gibson's novel poses direct questions about the nature of history, but *Pattern Recognition* is also a novel filled with descriptions of contemporary consumer objects that seem (but only seem) to reference an absent past. This article argues that a dual concern with consumer capitalism and the nature of history means that Gibson's novel may be read as a response to Francis Fukuyama's politically influential argument that the end of the Cold War also marked an endpoint for history itself, a view of history profoundly destabilized by the 9/11 attacks that sit at the heart of Gibson's narrative.

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[1] For a discussion of various historicisms and their relevance to Gibson's novel, see Easterbrook 2006.

1. Francis Fukuyama and the Ends of History

The end of the Cold War seemed to bring with it a yearning for history itself to be over. The desire for history to have an end has a rich history of its own, a reflection of what Frank Kermode describes as 'our deep need for intelligible Ends' (8). This particular iteration of that long-standing desire was influentially expressed by Francis Fukuyama, in an essay, 'The End of History?,' published just prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, and at greater length in his subsequent book *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama suggested that with the end of the Cold War, humankind had reached the end of history: 'end' is used here in the dual senses of conclusion and objective. This version of the end of history was the triumph of the West: a combination of liberal democracy with capitalist prosperity.

Fukuyama's argument spoke to and from its historical moment, but also had deep roots in the work of Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and Alexandre Kojève. In Fukuyama's view, Hegel, though not the first philosopher to write about history, was nonetheless 'the first *historicist* philosopher – that is, a philosopher who believed in the essential historical relativity of truth' (Fukuyama 1992: 62). Hegel's historical relativism, said Fukuyama, was not absolute:

> Unlike later historicists whose historical relativism degenerated into relativism *tout court*, however, Hegel believed that history culminated in an absolute moment – a moment in which a final, rational form of society and state became victorious. (Fukuyama 1989: 4)

Hegel's teleological historicism, Fukuyama tells us, was itself indebted to an essay by Kant speculating on the possibility of a universal history. For Kant, as for Fukuyama, such a history would likely discover 'a regular gradation of improvement in civil polity as it has grown up in our quarter of the globe, which quarter is in all probability destined to give laws to all the rest' (Kant 392). For Kant, then, as for Fukuyama, a universal history would have the triumph of the West as an endpoint.

For Fukuyama, this triumph of Western culture was a victory not just of political ideas, but of consumer objects:

> [...] This phenomenon extends beyond high politics and it can be seen also in the ineluctable spread of consumerist Western culture in such diverse contexts as the peasants' markets and colour television sets now omnipresent throughout China, the cooperative restaurants and clothing stores opened in the past year in Moscow, the Beethoven piped into Japanese department stores, and the rock music enjoyed alike in Prague, Rangoon, and Tehran. (Fukuyama 1989: 3)

A fundamental desire of the post-Cold War West, then, was for history to end, and to be replaced by consumer capitalism: shopping, going to restaurants, and listening to music. For Perry Anderson, Fukuyama's synthesis of Hegel and Kojève was an original one, 'tying liberal democracy and capitalist prosperity together in an emphatic terminal knot' (332). Anderson suggested, however, that this pairing of political democracy and capitalist prosperity was also the fundamental weakness in Fukuyama's case, as the two do not necessarily proceed in tandem (332, 336–41, 350–51). In reality, this was exactly how things played out in the years immediately after Fukuyama's argument. While Western consumer culture continued to spread, it did not necessarily do so in partnership with liberal democracy (China is the obvious example), and history emphatically did not arrive at a happy ending.

On the left, different endings for history would eventually be resurrected. Slavoj Žižek, writing in 2010, claimed that 'the global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero-point' (x), a reminder that even in the West, Fukuyama's is only one of a number of mooted ends to history, in dialogue and in competition with variants from the Marxist and Christian traditions. Jacques Derrida's reading of Fukuyama recalled the long history of apocalyptic thought, asking if it was possible to be late to the end of history, while suggesting that Fukuyama's Hegelianism was also a form of neo-evangelism indebted to Christian teleology (14–15, 56–61).

However much we might disagree with Fukuyama's suggestion that history was arriving at an endpoint in the late 1980s, his argument reflects not only a long tradition of Western apocalypticism, but also a contemporary sense of a crisis in historical understanding, something visible in the writings of a range of very different thinkers.

Hence the crisis of historicity that Fredric Jameson identifies in postmodern culture (Jameson 1991: x). So too Derrida's constant repetition in his post-Cold War reflections on Marx (and Fukuyama) of a phrase from Hamlet: 'the time is out of joint' (1 and *passim*). That sense of crisis is an enduring one. In arguing that twenty-first-century culture is marked by 'anachronism and inertia,' Mark Fisher cites Franco Berardi on the disappearance of various futures we imagined during the twentieth century:

> The Hegelian-Marxist mythology of *Aufhebung* and founding of the new totality of Communism; the bourgeois mythology of a linear development of welfare and democracy; the technocratic mythology of the all-encompassing power of scientific knowledge; and so on. (Berardi 18–19)

The disappearance of these previously imagined futures, Fisher says, together with what he identifies as the rise of a formal nostalgia in contemporary culture and the dominance of the internet as a means of cultural delivery, has led to 'the slow cancellation of the future' (6–7). It is just such a crisis of historical understanding that Gibson seems to invoke when Bigend suggests, in lines that give this book its title, that we have no future, only pattern recognition (57).

2. 9/11 and the Return of History

If history ever went away, it made a telling return in the early years of the twenty-first century. History had never really ended, of course. To suggest it had would require us to ignore substantial historical events of the late twentieth century such as warfare in the former Yugoslavia, the Rwandan genocide, and the subsequent Congo wars. However the Al Qaeda attacks on the United States on September 11th 2001 and the subsequent 'War on Terror' saw the return of large-scale Cold-War style geopolitical tension between Western nations and a new globally dispersed opponent: Islamic terrorism. Ironically, Fukuyama and his text played a supporting role in bringing history back from its reported death at this point. If Fukuyama's arguments for the end of history suggested that the spread of democracy and capitalism was history's inevitable direction, his fellow neoconservatives at the Project for the New American Century think tank would seek to move this argument from theory into practice by advocating a US policy of regime change in Iraq (Ehrenberg 19–25). That neocon-

servative project would be enabled by the violent and unequivocal return of history to the West on 9/11, but the Al Qaeda attacks on the US also exposed fault-lines in Fukuyama's original argument. Fukuyama had recognised that Islamic notions of a theocratic state posed an ideology that could challenge Western liberalism but dismissed the idea's potency (Fukuyama 1989: 14). Fukuyama's dismissal is in line with ongoing rhetorical descriptions of Al Qaeda and Islamic State as 'medieval': as Bettina Bildhauer and Chris Jones note, such rhetoric makes an implicit argument about the pre-modernity of these groups, implicitly 'less advanced on the perceived linear scale of historical evolution' than the West (10–11). Fukuyama conceded too that terrorism and wars of national liberation would continue to be important, but argued that 'large-scale conflict must involve large states still caught in the grip of history, and they are what appear to be passing from the scene' (Fukuyama 1989: 18). What Fukuyama's thesis failed to recognise was the potential link between these phenomena. As Al Qaeda realised, and as 9/11 showed us (we might even say as history tells us), terrorism can provoke powerful states into history's grasp. Nor did Fukuyama or anyone else in 1989 foresee the eventual resurgence of a far-right politics that then seemed, as Fukuyama suggested, to have been entirely destroyed both materially and ideologically by World War II (Fukuyama 1989: 9), but has since made an unsettling return in our current historical moment.

If the 9/11 terror attacks marked, in a sense, the return of history to the West in the twenty-first century, it is perhaps unsurprising that a number of fictional works published in the immediate years following the attacks collectively grapple with the implications of these events via a turn to the past. Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), for instance, is primarily a meditation on survival and its consequences; a narrative set for the most part in the long aftermath of the attacks, it is a story that looks at the differing ways in which a small group of related characters might or might not have coped with what happened. It also touches on geopolitics, on the motivations of the hijackers, on ways of reading the events of 9/11 historically, and on how art and artists might seek to respond to what happened. The novel's representation of a hijacker has been seen as inadequate: 'less a character,' writes Sascha Pöhlmann, 'than a narrative device that is too obviously introduced for the single purpose of committing a terrorist act' (59–60). However this character, Hammad, is counterpointed with

another, the former terrorist Martin Ridnour. Martin is an international art dealer, but in the 1960s, when his name was Ernst Hechinger, he was a member of a German radical group, Kommune One. Martin Ridnour's history makes it impossible for 9/11 to be regarded as simply a matter of 'us and them,' for, as Lianne Glenn thinks while talking with him on the day of her mother's memorial:

> Maybe he was a terrorist but he was one of ours, she thought, and the thought chilled her, shamed her – one of ours, which meant godless, Western, white. (DeLillo 2007: 195)

The presence of this character in *Falling Man* means that the events of 9/11 are read in DeLillo's novel as history, as a specific event within a longer history of terrorism in the West. Such contextualization is not unique to DeLillo. As Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn write:

> [...] While the initial experience of 9/11 seemed unprecedented and cataclysmic, the experience of incommensurability generated a culture-wide need for explanatory narratives, not simply as a means for countering the trauma, but as a means for refusing incommensurability, prompting attempts to place 9/11 into an historical framework. We might say, then, that the history of literary representations of 9/11 can be characterized by the *transition* from narratives of rupture to narratives of continuity. (3)

If William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003) is both explicitly about 9/11 and substantially concerned with history, then, it is also one of several 9/11 novels that seek to navigate a sense of rupture through a renewed focus on the past.

3. *Pattern Recognition*, Commodification, and Buried History

Pattern Recognition has been seen as both a departure from and a continuation of Gibson's earlier work. *Pattern Recognition* and the two novels that follow it, collectively known as the 'Blue Ant' trilogy, so named from the marketing agency featured in all three books, differs from much of Gibson's preceding work in that it is not explicitly science fiction, and is not set in the future (*The Difference Engine* (co-authored with Bruce Sterling and published in 1990), is set in an alternate past). Notwithstanding

its setting in a temporal present, however, *Pattern Recognition* shares a great deal with Gibson's earlier work, including a range of details and effects, large and small (Easterbrook 'Recognizing Patterns' 49). We learn that the name of *Pattern Recognition*'s protagonist, Cayce Pollard, is pronounced like the name of *Neuromancer*'s protagonist, 'Case' (31). This Cayce, a 'coolhunter' rather than a hacker, with an acute sensitivity to 'the semiotics of the marketplace,' also explores a parallel world, though this 'mirror-world' is a physical place, London, rather than the virtual world of cyberspace (2), and cyberspace itself has, in any case, 'everted,' to use Gibson's term. The cyborgs of science fiction recur here almost without comment, as Alex Link observes, because they are everywhere: '*Pattern Recognition* gives us a conflation of bodies and technologies so ubiquitous as to empty the cyborg of any special significance' (212). Hence Fredric Jameson's opening questions in discussing the novel – has the author of *Neuromancer* really changed his style, or really stopped writing science fiction? (Jameson 2003: 105).

A brief conversation on the nature of history early in *Pattern Recognition* is interesting in part for Hubertus Bigend's articulation of the thesis that we no longer really have a future, that fully imagined cultural futures were a luxury of the past, and that the volatility of the present means all we have left is pattern recognition (57). Bigend's suggestion might seem a rejection of the predictive possibility of science fiction, somewhat at odds perhaps with Gibson's endlessly-quoted line that the future is already here, just not evenly distributed.[2] As Robert Briggs argues, though, we might have seen this coming from Gibson's previous trilogy: 'if images of prediction can be read as metonymic of the generic work of SF,' Briggs writes, 'then Gibson's Bridge narratives would appear to call into question many influential accounts of SF's relations not just to the future (SF-as-predictive) or to the world (SF-as-descriptive), but to literature as well (SF-as-generic)' (684). Any singular idea of history-as-narrative is already dead by *All Tomorrow's Parties*, replaced by a much more fluid sense of history-as-interpretation (165); by *The Peripheral*, a sense of history-as-possibility will have materialised into a narrative that spreads across alternate parallel futures.

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[2] As Kennedy (2012) noted, while this line is regularly quoted as Gibson's, there is no agreement on when or if he might have actually said it.

Such questioning of science-fiction's supposed prescience is also entirely in keeping with Gibson's long-standing insistence that, in his fiction, 'upon arriving in the capital-F Future, we discover it, invariably, to be the lower-case now' (Gibson 2012: 45). For the Sprawl trilogy, that 'now' was the world of the Cold War. As Gibson says in an interview, from the perspective of the early 1980s, any projected future that did not end in nuclear apocalypse seemed an optimistic one:

> In 1981, it was pretty much every intelligent person's assumption that on any given day the world could end horribly and pretty well permanently. […] So one of the things I wanted to do with *Neuromancer* was to write a novel in which the world didn't end in a nuclear war. (Wallace-Wells 220)

The future envisaged in *Neuromancer*, while not the post-nuclear apocalypse that might have seemed dangerously imminent in the early 1980s, was nonetheless an explicitly post-Cold War future.[3] By the time Gibson writes *Pattern Recognition*, set in the approximate-present of the early twenty-first century, present and future may have caught up with one another in his work, but this novel's sense that the future is now is also accompanied by a surprising interest in the past.[4]

Cayce and Bigend largely agree that historical change means both past and future are constantly open to ongoing reinterpretation (again, a motif visible in the previous trilogy).[5] Their discussion also touches on the simultaneous presence and absence of the past. Cayce suggests that people in the future will think of our culture as iconography, as we think of Victoriana, but no-one will think of 'the ordinary actual living souls' (56). This sense of the past as absent, counterpointed with Bigend's suggestion that we no longer really have a future, conveys a broader sense

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[3] For the rise of Cold War tensions in the early 1980s, see Fischer.

[4] Williams 101 discusses the way in which the term history 'loses its exclusive association with the past and becomes connected not only to the present but also to the future,' and notes a verbal distinction in German between Historie, which refers mainly to the past, and Geschichte, which can refer to a process including past, present and future.

[5] Some additional dialogue for this scene, present in the book's proofs but not the final text, would have offered a different perspective on the present moment: Easterbrook 2006: 495–96.

of a crisis of historical understanding, one that is significant for our interpretation of what Gibson is doing here. Cayce's observation in particular will turn out to be an important motif in this novel, dwelling as it does on the relationship, or lack of it, between the icons of history, commodified in the present day, and the realities of an absent past.

A view of history as endless reinterpretation, as iconography, as reducible to commodified artefacts or abstract discourses, as fundamentally *over* as an active, dynamic process, is one that is both articulated and challenged in *Pattern Recognition*. The extent to which the novel's landscape is both globalised and brand-saturated has been particularly well-mapped and analysed by Brian Jarvis and by Lee Konstantinou. But the horrors of history are also repeatedly evoked. The central trauma is 9/11: Cayce, a New Yorker, was in the city on the morning of the attacks. So, unexpectedly, was her father, Wingrove Pollard, 'a man so thoroughly and quietly missing that it might be impossible to prove him dead' (187). There are other traumas, too: like DeLillo's *Falling Man* and other 9/11 novels, *Pattern Recognition* insists that one of our responses to 9/11 must be to view it historically. Cayce's friend Damien is filming a documentary about the excavation of 'the site of some of the largest, longest-running, and most bitterly contested firefights of WWII' in a swamp outside Stalingrad (72). The Curta calculators that Hobbs-Baranov trades in are the work of Curt Herzstark, who developed the design in Buchenwald (29; Morse 330–31). In Tokyo, Cayce finds herself in one of the few prewar apartment buildings to survive the city's wartime firebombing (161). Parking at Primrose Hill in London, she recalls its premodern status as 'a place of worship, of sacrifice, of executions' (69).

If *Pattern Recognition* repeatedly evokes the horrors of history, however, these horrors are flattened out by commodity aesthetics that are simultaneously both an evocation and a denial of history.[6] Some examples: Cayce's purse is 'if not actual Stasi issue, then well in the ballpark'; Ben Sherman clothing carries 'the RAF roundel that marked the wings of Spitfires' (8). Cayce wears a Japanese reproduction of a US flying

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[6] For the treatment of past objects in Gibson's earlier novels, see Sponsler 630 and n. 3. I owe the term 'commodity aesthetics' to Haug.

jacket, 'an imitation more real somehow than that which it emulates' (11). Hubertus Bigend drives a Hummer (Youngquist 209–10). A Vietnam war themed restaurant in London is called 'Charlie Don't Surf,' a reference not to Vietnam, but to the Vietnam war movie *Apocalypse Now*, whilst the restaurant walls are decorated with enormous photographs of contemporary Zippo lighters 'which remind Cayce of photographs of tombstones in Confederate graveyards,' 'the Zippo tombstones,' 'the Zippo grave-yard' (14, 15). If some of *Pattern Recognition*'s allusions to historical trauma are made directly, many others appear in the context of consumer consumption – via the logos on clothing, or the décor in restaurants.

Notionally, all of these commodities are cultural markers which reference the past, but in a consumer society the past experiences they might evoke are elided, their potential historical meaning is flattened out, and they become, simply, con-sumer items. In the consumer culture of the early twenty-first-century West, the past is referenced, but its reality is simultaneously erased. Fukuyama had suggested that the end of history would see art replaced by a museum culture: 'In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history' (Fukuyama 1989: 18). If anything, this seems nostalgic: George Steiner had suggested (rightly or wrongly) that American culture was already a museum culture long before the Cold War was over. In *Pattern Recognition*'s rep-resentation of a consumerist present that seeks simultaneously to acknowledge and avoid history, icons of the past are important not for preservation in museums, but rather for mass reproduction and endless resale.

The world of *Pattern Recognition* is a world of consumer culture that evokes a his-tory that, as Fukuyama would have it, should now be over, replaced by consumption. These objects seem to be emblems of a posthistorical consumerism, the iconography of a buried, absent history. We might think of them in relation to Walter Benjamin's conception of the souvenir: 'the relic derives from the corpse, the souvenir from deceased experience' (49).[7] We are given an explicit reminder of what has been buried in the novel's descriptions of what might be seen either as an exercise in archaeology

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[7] Cf. the discussion in Leslie 115–16. I owe this point to Deidre Brollo.

or an enormous grave-robbery outside Stalingrad, with drunken youngsters digging through bones and mud to find weapons, watches, and other artefacts, in one scene pulling apart a pilot's corpse in the process (72–73, 297–98). As Katharina Donn puts it, in bringing various traumata together with their cultural signs, the novel stages the problem of commodotised trauma (Donn 199–207). Or, as both Gibson and Fredric Jameson remind us, 'the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror' (Jameson 1991: 5).

History cannot really be avoided. When it erupts violently into the narrative, it is, at first, impossible to grasp. Cayce, though acutely sensitive to nuances of culture that are imperceptible to others, is unable to interpret the sound of a plane flying loud and low overhead, something glimpsed briefly over West Broadway, the sound of a crash, the ubiquitous urban sound of sirens, the anomaly of smoke, the sight of a fire in the World Trade Centre. The attacks are 'an experience outside of culture,' and under their impact, the web of cultural signifiers to which Cayce is so attuned simply collapses. Arriving at her appointment, still unaware of quite what is happening, she finds the designer she is meeting in a state of disarray, unable to construct a coherent sentence in either of his languages. Cayce sees the impact of the second plane firstly on television, then, a moment later, through the hotel window (135–37). She experiences the attacks as simulacrum in the first instance: only then do they also manifest as a reality that will be impossible to remember or describe with any accuracy.

4. 'To mourn is to be alive': *Pattern Recognition*'s Quest for the Footage

Gibson's previous work features a multitude of characters seeking to escape, augment or transcend their reality via prosthesis or metamorphosis: whether that be the cyborg hackers of *Neuromancer* seeking to escape into the virtual world of the matrix, the billionaire villain of *Count Zero* seeking, vampire-like, to escape the prison of his flesh, or the Artificial Intelligences across various novels who seek either sentience or physical form. In *Pattern Recognition*, in a variation on this theme, we seem to find an entire society seeking to avoid historical reality by employing commodities as talismans against it. 'History,' says James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus in a famous line, 'is a

nightmare from which I am trying to awake' (28). A present without history, without either past or future, is another sort of nightmare. As Neil Easterbrook writes of *Pattern Recognition*:

> […] To exist fully in the now means to exist without past or future, sliding laterally; the present, perhaps, is the nightmare we are trying to escape. This double orientation of the present – the state we are trying to capture, the state we are trying to evade – constitutes the first of the novel's profound ambivalences. (Easterbrook 2006: 486–87)

This historical ambivalence is one to which our protagonist seems intensely attuned.

Cayce Pollard's distinguishing talent is that she is 'a "sensitive" of some kind, a dowser in the world of global marketing,' though that sensitivity is also described as something close to allergy, 'a morbid and sometimes violent reactivity to the semiotics of the marketplace' (2). She is 'allergic to fashion' (8). Cayce's 'allergy' might be read straightforwardly in relation to consumer culture, to brands and their logos, as a logophobia of sorts, but some critics have also offered readings that might suggest a possible connection between her condition and commodity culture's attempts at historical erasure. Cayce's condition 'is not a *semiotic allergy*' argues Neil Easterbrook, rather 'it is a *severe nostalgia*' (Easterbrook 2006: 496).[8] 'The majority of the brands to which Cayce feels the greatest aversion,' Alex Link notes, 'share an intimate codependency with twentieth-century warfare' (216). If Cayce is allergic to the semiotics of the marketplace, there are, perhaps, reasons for that allergy that run deeper than the logos on the surface.

Cayce's allergy varies in its intensity, and its most potent trigger is the Michelin Man, first encountered by accident, but then deliberately deployed by Cayce's nemesis Dorotea Benedetti in a series of attempts to unsettle her (34, 97, 98, 315). His name, as Cayce knows, is Bibendum (97). We might read Bibendum as another commodified sign of a buried history, connecting him, as Link does, with the Michelin

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[8] I am indebted to Easterbrook 2006 for the idea that Cayce's condition is past-focused, though my interpretation differs somewhat.

company's role in battlefield tourism during and after World War I (217–18). Alternatively, there is also a literary reference here, to Horace's *Odes*, and the poem in question might seem to have a particular potency when read against a novel so centrally concerned with 9/11.[9] Michelin's Bibendum takes his Latin name from the opening words of Horace's Ode 1.37, *Nunc est bibendum*, 'Now is the time to drink,' words quoted on an 1898 Michelin poster featuring the character (Anonymously, '1898–2018'). In Horace's poem, *nunc est bibendum*, it is time to celebrate, because the threat to Rome from the poem's *regina dementis*, the mad queen, Cleopatra, is past.[10] Such a celebration would have been impossible while the city was endangered. In James Michie's translation of Horace's lines:

> Not long ago it would have been high treason
> To fetch the Caecuban from family store-rooms,
> When the wild Queen was still
> Plotting destruction to our Capitol (85)

If Horace's poem celebrates the passing of danger, Gibson's novel emerges from a very different historical moment. In the novel's 9/11 scene, Cayce watches the second plane hit the south tower on a television that sits beneath an 'unused leatherette ice bucket' (137), suggesting a potential for celebration that does not take place. Gibson's Bibendum, interestingly, also has an Egyptianate quality, resembling 'a mummy with elephantiasis' (97). Bibendum is a figure that explicitly suggests (by way of Horace) that in the aftermath of war, it is time to celebrate. War, and history, are not over, and far from the opportunity to celebrate, in seeking throughout this novel to discover her father's fate, what Cayce seeks is the opportunity to mourn. It may seem appropriate, then, that Bibendum should provoke in her such a powerful response.

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9 For another adaptation of Horace in the aftermath of 9/11, cf. Seamus Heaney's 'Anything Can Happen,' a version of Horace's Ode 1.34, in Heaney 2006: 13.

10 Horace's poem never names Cleopatra, but it alludes to her defeat at Actium and describes her supposed death by suicide: Nisbet and Hubbard 406–11.

By contrast, the mysterious footage that Cayce is following online seems to offer a sort of relief from her condition. This footage is a series of disconnected clips posted anonymously, assumed by most followers to be work-in-progress towards a complete film, and seemingly the work of an unknown auteur (46–48). The footage is intriguing in part because of what seems to be its timelessness – 'he might be a sailor, stepping onto a submarine in 1914, or a jazz musician entering a club in 1957' (23) – its seeming stylistic neutrality suggestive, as Jameson says, of Barthesian 'white writing' (Jameson 2003: 111). This desire for neutrality is in line with Cayce's existing strategies for managing her condition: her provisional response to commodity culture's erasure of history has been to attempt a further erasure, through the physical removal of logos. Such efforts at neutrality also raise questions. Cayce's closing gambit in the novel's early debate on the nature of history sees her thinking of a discussion amongst the footageheads on 'whether the apparently careful lack of period markers might suggest some attitude, on the maker's part, to time and history, and if so, what?' (57).

As the novel progresses, we encounter various theories about the footage, as debated on the Fetish: Footage: Forum website. If these debates contain a degree of scepticism about hermeneutics, Neil Easterbrook argues that this is simply another expression of logophobia: here *Derrida*, *Foucault*, *Lyotard* and *Lacan* are brand names of a different sort (Easterbrook 2010: 56). Comparisons are made: the first, perhaps tellingly, is to Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (3). This serves as an early clue to the footage's Russian provenance, but it may also have further significance. While *Stalker* is never mentioned again after this initial allusion (*Solaris* is briefly mentioned later [146]), Tarkovsky's film has some interesting parallels with *Pattern Recognition*. Adapted from the Strugatsky brothers's science-fiction novel *Roadside Picnic*, *Stalker* too sits on the boundaries of genre. Arkady Strugatsky recalls that after many struggles with the script, the brothers eventually wrote not a science-fiction screenplay, but a parable ('As I Saw Him'). *Stalker* may also be suggestive of the way the footage itself functions within Gibson's novel. The film depicts a small group of people – the Writer, the Professor, and their guide, the Stalker – on a dangerous journey within a mysterious Zone, in search of a Room that will fulfil their deepest desire. One of the things they discover along the

way, as Geoff Dyer's book-length reading of the film makes clear, is that the promise of such fulfilment is also a sort of test: for to have your innermost wish fulfilled is also to understand something fundamental about yourself, something that (as in the case of *Stalker*'s Porcupine, for example) you may prefer not to know (170, 182).

The footage in *Pattern Recognition* seems to promise something similar. Notionally, Cayce's quest in this novel is to find the footage's maker. Already a passionate follower of the material, she is hired for this purpose by this trilogy's billionaire villain, Hubertus Bigend, a vampiric character whose name is reminiscent of Bibendum.[11] Bigend's *modus operandi* here is akin to Josef Virek's with Marly Krushkova in *Count Zero* – both Marly and Cayce are dispatched in pursuit of a work of art, with their billionaire backers harbouring ulterior motives (Youngquist 218). But Cayce's quest is also in large part an effort to discover what has happened to her father, Wingrove Pollard, who went missing in New York on the morning of the 9/11 attacks. Her response to the footage, and her search for its maker, is deeply entwined with this search for the truth of her father's disappearance. When Cayce finally comes upon a way to contact the Volkovas, she mentions her father's disappearance before saying anything about the footage. Stella Volkova's response in turn tells of the loss of her own parents in a bombing (254, 260). The novel's early question, on whether the footage's apparently careful lack of period markers might convey an attitude to time and history (57), is both important and slightly deceptive. For the footage's attitude to time and history is revealed not through its apparent neutrality, but in something concealed beneath that. The intriguing T-shape found as a clue concealed within the footage will turn out to be the shape of a piece of ordinance, part of the arming mechanism of a mine, the shape of a fragment lodged in Nora Volkova's brain, from the attack that killed Stella and Nora's parents (168–70, 274, 288, 305). Far from being neutral, the footage is art that emerges from pain – the characters resemble the Volkovas' murdered parents, although it is not their story, not their world (306). The description of Cayce watching Nora Volkova work concludes with the words: 'Only the wound, speaking wordlessly in the dark' (305).

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[11] For the vampire comparison, see Link 212–13.

The footage, like the Room in *Stalker*, has the effect of exposing Cayce's deepest desire: not as a desire for erasure, but as a desire to mourn. We might remember that for Barthes, too, the desire for the Neutral was caught up with the work of mourning: 'to mourn,' he says, 'is to be alive' (10). If Cayce's initial response to commodity culture's erasure of history has been to attempt further erasure, her eventual solution will be to move in the opposite direction, to try instead to physically immerse herself in the remnants of historical trauma, and in doing so, to allow herself the possibility of mourning. She does so firstly by reading the file supplied by Andrei Volkov (the most comprehensive account of Wingrove Pollard's final morning, though, again, she finds her father is not there) (348–50), and secondly by visiting the site of Damien's archaeological dig outside Stalingrad, 'where she'd found herself, out of some need she hadn't understood, down in one of the trenches, furiously shoveling gray muck and bones, her face streaked with tears' (355).

Bigend's desires, by contrast, are supremely boring. The footage, its provenance and power notwithstanding, is open to appropriation by consumer culture, something Bigend has known all along.[12] Again, we might recall Barthes, who suggests early in his discussion of the Neutral that while as a general rule, desire is always marketable, this is not the case with desire for the Neutral, which baffles the paradigm (13). Barthes's confidence in this exception, however, is later disturbed when he finds a bottle of ink, labelled 'Neutral,' not only classifiable and marketable, but actually for sale in a shop (48–49). In *Pattern Recognition*, when Bigend finds the maker of the footage, he uses what he has found to sell shoes. Similarly, in *Spook Country*, Bigend's interest in Hollis Henry is not the plot she is entwined in; rather he is interested in re-recording one of her old band's hits to feature in an ad for a Chinese car. The quasi-vampiric billionaire, then, like Marx's history, happens twice – once as tragedy (the monstrous Virek of *Count Zero*, trapped in his vat, craving escape) and the second time as farce (Bigend engaged in elaborate cloak-and-dagger plots whose ultimate result is some marketing campaigns).

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[12] Briggs 685 provides a broader exploration of similar concerns, suggesting that Gibson's Bridge Trilogy offers a metafictional contemplation of the exploitation of SF's predictive possibilities for economic and political purposes.

Some of this novel's best readers have questioned its ending. Fredric Jameson suggested he might have preferred a Pynchon-like conclusion on the threshold of the revelation to come: when he says 'I hate people who tell you the ending,' it seems that in this case he means not only *Pattern Recognition*'s readers, but also its author (Jameson 2003: 111). Neil Easterbrook feels a similar unease, arguing that the last thirty pages, an 'expository info dump' that 'is not only characteristic of contemporary bestsellers but only tolerable within that genre,' must surely to be seen as the deployment of narrative patterns associated with the techno thriller that we are expected to recognise as ironic (Easterbrook 2010: 58). In fact, we should speak of endings in the plural – the final pages of the novel contains a series of layered endings that seek to wrap up the plot's multiple threads. If some of these various endings (Parkaboy rescuing Cayce in the wilderness before they decamp to Paris, for example) seem entirely within the conventional formulas that Easterbrook points to, others (Cayce weeping while digging through a Second World War archaeological site) are very much not.

In dwelling on the traumas of history, *Pattern Recognition* reminds us that, as Seamus Heaney once put it, civilisation's documents have been written in blood and tears (Heaney 1998: 457). This is not the first time in Gibson's work that we find art represented as a response to trauma: in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Slick Henry's artworks are a 'cathartic response to chemo-penal trauma,' his 'slow, sad childlike labor on the plain called Dog Solitude, erecting anew the forms of pain and memory' (286). Something similar is present here in the origins of the footage in Nora Volkova's wound.

Nor does this novel hold any delusions about art transcending its circumstances. The motif of Cayce's repeated erasure of logos in a novel so concerned with global marketing seems to echo the title of Naomi Klein's approximately contemporary book *No Logo*, which documented the realities of sweatshop labour underlying the glamour of global brands. The footage, importantly, has a dual provenance. It is a work of art emerging from the maker's pain, certainly, but it is also surveillance footage rendered in a privately-operated Russian prison.

If the footage in *Pattern Recognition* is a work of mourning, art created as a response to trauma, the same may be true of the novel itself as a response to 9/11. Contemplating the tears she shed while digging through the buried remains of a

twentieth-century battlefield, Cayce thinks she was 'weeping for her century' (356). If she is not clear which century – the century past or the century present – that is because history has not ended in the twenty-first-century. Far from it. *Pattern Recognition*'s concern with time has been read in part as being about the collision of the future and the present. A novel set in the approximately-now that nonetheless intersects with Gibson's futuristic previous works, it explicitly raises questions about whether or not such a thing as a future can even be said to exist. But *Pattern Recognition* is also a work deeply concerned with the past, placing contemporary consumer culture's crisis of historicity (and in particular Fukuyama's suggestion that the spread of western consumer culture heralded an end to history itself) against both the endurance and recurrence of historical trauma. If this is a novel where present and future seem to collide, it is also one where we discover that the future, too, is immersed in history, a history that continues to carry with it the necessity of mourning.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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