

Against the Lure of Immediacy: W. G. Sebald and Tom McCarthy[❖]

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ABSTRACT

This article reads W. G. Sebald's *Vertigo* and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* against the backdrop of a perceived obsession with immediacy or unmediated experience in the contemporary cultural logic. Noteworthy examples of this lure of immediacy include the prevalence of affect discourse in cultural theory, the privileging of unmediated sensibility in art practice and criticism, and the return of realism on the literary scene. While neither novel addresses these cultural instantiations thematically, they each gesture toward a creative process that contravenes the primacy of immediacy. *Vertigo* exhibits a recognition of the problematic of mediality as constitutive of the novel's search for form, whereas *Remainder* stages and critiques the contemporary preoccupation with an immediacy riding on hypermediacy. To a great extent immediacy as a cultural dominant evidences the sweeping power of neoliberalism as accounts of affect and unmediated experience prove amenable to the neoliberal enterprise. However, this article seeks not so much to dovetail its argument to periodizing terms as to call attention to a sustained cultural rationale whose intelligibility demands more than chronological bookending.

KEYWORDS: W. G. Sebald, Tom McCarthy, immediacy, mediation, neoliberalism, affect theory

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This article asks how literary critics should make sense of the marked obsession with immediacy or direct experience in the cultural logic today. While this logic manifests variedly, particularly telling examples include the prevalence of affect discourse in cultural theory and the primacy given to images or unmediated sensibility in art practice and criticism. An attendant phenomenon is a new realism taking hold on the literary scene.

Immediacy demands attention as a cultural dominant in that it is revealing of the extensive influence of neoliberalism: narratives of affect and of unmediated experience prove highly compatible with, if not outright susceptible to, the neoliberal mechanism. To broach this issue, this article proposes to read two novels against this backdrop, or what we may call the contemporary lure of immediacy: W. G. Sebald's *Vertigo* (1999 [German 1990]) and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005). *Vertigo* employs a multi-layered enframing: historical investigation under the guise of ominous encounters under the guise of random journeying, to the effect that historical truth surfaces as the semblance of destiny. Sebald's fiction is crafted in a narrative mode attentive to mediality, departing from the realist bind (but not resorting to the metafictional or any other ostensibly antirealist scheme). *Remainder*, on the other hand, features a protagonist fixated on living an authentic life. The novel stages and at the same time critiques the contemporary preoccupation with immediacy, not least an immediacy riding on hypermediacy. Neither fiction addresses thematically the currency of the affect rhetoric or the artistic valence of directness and realness, yet their novelistic architectures each point to a creative vision running counter to the primacy of immediacy.

In what follows, the lure of immediacy will be first conceptualized through a look at critical work that has attempted to broach the celebratory foregrounding of unmediated experience in recent cultural theory. The citations will be anything but comprehensive, and some of the writings cited may take the form of compendia instead of thorough surveys. The point, however, is to show how these critiques combine to problematize a scenario where a specific critical vocabulary is being promoted, and to ponder what is at stake. Next, the question of immediacy will be complicated by a consideration of the affective turn, especially to its relationship with neoliberalism. There, immediacy will be understood chiefly as the interfacing of different realms in the neoliberal network of connectivity. It refers to the ways in which the same ethos (freedom from regulation, freedom from boundaries) cuts through different vectors via

affect: a mediation that is nevertheless rendered as mediation-free owing to distinct attributes of affect. Then, before turning to discussion of Sebald's and McCarthy's works, I examine the problem of immediacy in conjunction with the contemporary novel.

While the neoliberalism reference will serve as the critical framework for my argument in the main, the article is not aimed at dovetailing its claims to periodization thinking. Insofar as the scope of the discussion spans different spheres (the affective turn, paradigm shifts in the contemporary art scene, literary history, etc.), each presumably furnished with its own timepiece, a study of two novels set apart from each other by fifteen years—specifically, the fifteen years traversing the millennium signpost and other watershed incidents—seems patently time-insensitive. This awkwardness could be avoided, to be sure, by selecting a later novel by Sebald, who many critics would concur had been consistent in his creative sensibility. But that is a gratuitous connection this study would readily reject, for the kind of critical intervention the article intends, namely the unpacking of a cultural rationale that by various accounts was decades in the making and that is still impacting us, involves more than chronological demarcations.¹

I.

The key phrase is borrowed from art sociologist Janet Wolff. In an essay published in 2012, “After Cultural Theory: The Power of Images, the Lure of Immediacy,” Wolff takes issue with the emergence of a new animism in art history which establishes the unqualified agency of visual images. Wolff situates her observations within a broad cultural and discursive landscape where concern with “the social,” she contends, is noticeably vanishing. Some of the significant indicators of this general shift include:

¹ Sebald's *Vertigo* was first published in German in 1990. Admittedly, a much more life-saving approach for my project is to choose works published after the mid-1990s, so as to sync the discussion with some of the obvious temporal markers, not least of which the publication of groundbreaking theories of affect in the humanities: the preface that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank wrote for the Silvan Tomkins reader they co-edited (1995), where they adumbrated the difference between affects and drives; and Brian Massumi's exposition on affect published as a journal article, “The Autonomy of Affect” (1995), where he contended the difference between affect and emotion. I hope that, as the argument unfolds in the following pages, the reason for not opting for the convenient route will become clear.

the turn to “affect”; the (re)turn to phenomenology (and post-phenomenology); actor-network theory in sociology and science studies; theories of the post-human (human/animal, human/nature, human/technology); theories of materiality; emphasis on the agency of objects; the turn to neuroscience in the humanities and social sciences; the insistence on “presence” as an unmediated encounter . . . ; the foregrounding of the embodied nature of any act (Wolff 4)

Whether or not Janet Wolff speaks from an adamantly conservative stance is beside the point; someone looking from the other end of the ideological spectrum, someone sympathetic to all these methodological alignments above, is likely to note the same development. For the purposes of this article, though, what merits attention in particular is that Wolff lodges her critique of the disappearance of the social in light of a drift in visual theory toward immediacy, which she defines as “a view of experience unmediated by culture or language” (8). Referencing prominent thinkers in the field, including Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, W. J. T. Mitchell, Frank Ankersmit, and Georges Didi-Huberman, Wolff singles out and interrogates proposals that either affirm the inherent capacity of images to *mean* or call for abandoning interpretation altogether.

The remedy that Wolff prescribes, which begins by acknowledging that any agency an image is said to have is *given* to it culturally and socially (6), is not entirely in line with the positioning of my project. I would argue that mediality is not confined merely to the cultural or the linguistically conveyed meaning, and that there *is* power in the non-discursive. An encounter with the transcendental (or the supernatural, for that matter) may very well be mediated; on the other hand, the non-discursive can indeed allure and affect the recipient forcefully. The intention of this article is rather to inquire into the stakes of art theorists tapping into such power and sanctifying particular discursive formulations accordingly.

It is overviews like the one offered by Wolff that help to punctuate episodes of discursive paradigm transition, but there are also critical engagements that voice similar concerns through cases studies. What Wolff enumerates here are mostly propositions on visual images. Other art critics have taken note of the same valorization of immediacy manifest in other sensory realms. Eyal Amiran, for instance, makes a strong case in his analysis of

Stelarc's high-profile performance art. Amiran notes that some of the Australian artist's projects (teletactile communication, prostheses, etc.) are emphatically predicated on the sense of touch, on the diminishing of distance between self and other. Utopian as it may be, the wish to tear down boundaries and gain intersubjective transparency, Amiran argues, bespeaks nothing other than the wish of an autotelic self, a version of the self that echoes the Enlightenment, imperialist model where one "acts for another, and sees another's acts as his own" (205). Louise Hornby, in a recent essay, writes about the work of the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson in resonant terms. Popular among curators and museum goers, Eliasson's installations are questionable for Hornby in that they promote proximity, on-site experiencing, and feeling as the backbone of political and environmental activism. Hornby finds this artistic agenda limiting, for its emphasis on phenomenological presence is human-addressed through and through, and falls short of proffering much critical edge: it stages political engagement by designing artificial participatory environments, and yet these are nothing more than enclosed spaces that "center the subject at a remove from an inhuman or unsensed externality," thus "foreclos[ing] on the possibility that there would be anything beyond the terms set by such anthropocentrism" (64).

These are renowned artists with big followings and institutional purchase in the art world. The critical convergence centered on them is worth marking: their critics, writing at different junctures, are all concerned with the same thing, that is, the celebration of direct bodily sensation.²

II.

Sensation, feeling—these are now cognates of a conceptual package enjoying much traction in academia: affect theory. This is another front where the discursive inclination toward unmediated experience comes to the fore.

² The urgency of this inquiry is even more palpable if we take into account the fact that critics were already writing about Stelarc's appeal to auto-affection in the 1990s (see, for instance, Claudia Benthien, whom Amiran also cites and whose monograph on skin was first published in German in 1998). Moreover, the concern that Hornby's critique was published rather recently and would pose an anachronism for my project is superfluous. To the opposite, it only drives home the poignancy of examining the impact of the zeitgeist-ish immediacy.

What happened to the earlier conversations on the goods and ills of the affective turn—*that* we already know: the Spinozian- and Deleuzian-inspired strand of affect theory was found to be *not* that different from the “basic emotions” paradigm advanced by psychologists Silvan Tomkins and Paul Ekman, even though the former had made a point of distinguishing the pre-individual affect from the subject-based intentionalist emotions; moreover, some of the champions of the affect group, notably Brian Massumi, were said to have been mistaken about the mind in their conception of the mind as a disembodied, abstracted consciousness.

This is a shorthand depiction of one famous debate.³ Yet it is only half of the truth—the lesser half, even. Affect theory has not suffered; on the contrary, it has been flourishing. Today, the gamut of affect is in fact wide and varied, encompassing erstwhile incompatible categories: subject-ful and subject-less, neurological and philosophical, commonplace and virtual, pro-Deleuze and Deleuze-immune.

Amid all the action, one line of thought has not been afforded due attention: the connection between affect theory and neoliberalism. To be sure, critics have long detected the manipulation of affect and immaterial labor in the current version of capitalism.⁴ However, there has not been substantial discussion of the possibility that the affective turn itself, or the wave of theorizations of affect productively advanced by thinkers, may have been coterminous with neoliberalism. This oversight may very well have to do with the liberatory power so decidedly ascribed to affect in affect discourse, making the correlation between the shift to affect and the evolution of a governing and managing machinery unthinkable.⁵ Or, we may also say that the extent to which

³ I am referring to Ruth Leys’s long, detailed dissection of the turn to affect published in *Critical Inquiry* in spring 2011, which would provoke a series of retorts from her critics, followed by her responses.

⁴ For thinkers who broach affect specifically in terms of labor, see, for instance, Hardt; Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labor.” Beyond this measure, discussion of the manipulation of affect under post-Fordist capitalism abounds in cultural criticism. What is significant is that some of these thinkers would also advocate an immanent form of resistance predicated on a generative view of affect—for instance, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who famously argued for the potentiality of immaterial labor (see Hardt and Negri 53, 289-94).

⁵ This emancipatory attribute is generally imparted to affect regardless of where the interlocutor stands on the conceptual spectrum. Sedgwick believes that Tomkins’s affect proposition furnishes more freedom than the psychoanalytical model of drive in terms of the duration of an affect, the range of objects an affect may have, and the fact that affects may be autotelic (17-20). New media theorist Mark B. N. Hansen, building on the research of neuroscientist Francisco Varela, conceives of affectivity as

such an association is unthinkable probably bespeaks the extent to which the task of pinning down the cultural or immaterial ramifications of neoliberalism is unthinkable.

Of those who have engaged in the “neoliberal affect” thread of thinking, Patricia T. Clough detects the “resonance” of the rise of the affect rhetoric in cultural criticism in the early- and mid-1990s with the intensification of financial capitalism (15). She also notes the consequences of the post-Fordist capitalist control of affect, that is, the transitioning from formal subsumption to real subsumption, from overdetermined processes of reproduction of laborers to the general incorporation of life into capital facilitated by state-of-the-art biotechnologies and biomedica (15-19). To be sure, Clough did not name the connection between neoliberalism and the affective turn a complicity or a cause-effect chain. She has nevertheless pinpointed those narratives of affect that render affect susceptible to post-Fordism, particularly “the affective turn’s privileging of movement, emergence and potentiality in relationship to the body” (15). She also posits that, precisely in moments of intense biopolitical control, “the political, economic and cultural relevance of taking the affective turn” has an urgency (15).⁶

In an account that does not shy away from causal connectivity, Dierdra Reber makes a thought-provoking argument about how affect, now practically assuming an epistemic status, has always been a constitutive part of capitalism ever since the inception of free-market capitalism—in other words, it has been around for over two hundred years. According to Reber, if we are at present witnessing the booming of “affect-as-episteme,” the affective foundation of capital has gone through ups and downs in the arc of modern world history:

[I]n its revolutionary genesis, capitalism—together with liberal democracy—validates the bourgeois body public as the new site and source of economic and political power that is always already

an embodied (hence affirmative) temporal experience (ch. 7). As for the cohort of Deleuzian scholars, affect helps them break free from constrictions of thought, especially boundaries of various kinds (between self and other, the subjective and the objective, etc.).

⁶ Clough’s diagnosis of the current biomedial regime (treatment of the body as biomediated information) is gloomy. She also has reservations about the claims of some of the prominent affect proponents, such as Massumi’s pronouncement that affect enjoys an autonomy owing to its indeterminacy and virtuality. Yet, surprisingly, Clough concludes her important essay on the affective turn on a modestly uplifting note, casting her hopes in “the virtual at the threshold” on the grounds that beyond the threshold there is “always a chance for something else, unexpected, new” (19).

self-contained and autonomically self-governing within its own limits, and it constructs itself epistemologically in the model of immanent and foundationally affective homeostasis. When liberal democracy and free-market capitalism move beyond their revolutionary inception to become players in a world theater dominated by imperialism, the rational and expansionist discourse of outward growth overshadows the discourse of harmonious equilibrium—though it could also be argued that the two discourses of growth and homeostasis are complementary in that episodic expansionist growth is balanced by a continual return to a necessarily contingent state of homeostatic equilibrium. Whether we view growth and homeostasis as competing or complementary discourses, what I wish to argue is that once the imperialist world system comes to an end along with the Cold War, the discourse of capitalist-democratic homeostasis markedly eclipses that of growth, and with this shift affective logic begins to supersede its rational counterpart. (“Headless Capitalism” 63)

On Reber’s reading, the epistemic affect constitutes the homeostatic equilibrium in the free-market apparatus. She calls it a “feeling soma,” a “headless body that ‘thinks’ by feeling” (*Coming* xx). This headless capitalism is grounded in a principle of immanence which “self-governs through harmonious and automatic (nonrational) organic flow” and whose ideal status quo is well-being instead of neutrality—the well-being of “a singular collective . . . of diverse and even infinite composition” (“Headless Capitalism” 92). It is also this logic of immanence that manages “organically equitable networked distribution of resources and wealth” (92).

While this operation has been the basis of free-market capitalism, Reber maintains, it is in the neoliberal era that the “affectively oriented homeostasis” (*Coming* xx) reaches its apex. Here, the figure of well-being is played out to its fullest, expected to be embodied locally in anyone or anything that can feel and whose health in turn figures some sort of collective success:

Having lost its head—its monarch, its rule by fiat—that headless but perfectly harmonious soma now self-regulates (instead of having regulation imposed from on high) and self-sustains

(dictating the terms of its own existence) through the laws of internal equilibrium in which the notion of well-being—represented through the concept of health and, more specifically, *through the flow of emotions*—becomes a metaphorical analogue for the distribution of resources (capital) and power.

(xviii; emphasis added)

In a way, what Reber is saying here echoes what Clough considers to be “the political, economic and cultural relevance of taking the affective turn.” But in Reber’s account neoliberalism and affect (more accurately, discursive configurations of affect) are positively conceived of as mutually informing each other, with affects being imbricated with a nexus of connections: the figurative and the literal, theory and actualization. Taken this way, neoliberalism is nothing less than the materialization of what Reber calls a “horizontal happiness” (“Tale” 190). It is a hierarchy-free collectivity characterized by a “perfectly horizontal—perfectly democratic—relationship between constituents” and by a “perfectly equitable flow of power (politics) and resources (economics) . . . represented as one guided without intervention—without regulation, without dictates” (*Coming* xviii).

Moreover, this horizontal happiness promised is also at play on a different front, defining the contemporary life in a forceful way. As new media theorist Lev Manovich puts it pithily, which Reber seconds, the digital world has fulfilled “a radically horizontal, non-hierarchical model of human existence in which no idea, no ideology, and no value system can dominate the rest—thus providing a perfect metaphor for a new post-Cold-War sensibility” (qtd. in Reber, “Headless Capitalism” 81).

With the figures of well-being, health, equitable flow, and democratic happiness, Reber’s rendition of the latest form of capitalism is compelling as it exposes the true status of neoliberalism: it is less a biopolitical control over life than a desirable life. It is not forever static; on the contrary, its “shifting contours reveal the political exigencies of the forces behind these representations” (*Coming* xx). Yet precisely the homeostasis guideline will balance off the political exigencies of the forces by meting out rewards that amount to well-being. The ideal status quo is thus a state of metastability. In Clough’s paraphrasis of Massumi’s paradigm of affect, affect is effectively “the metastability of a body” (4). If affect plays a role in the neoliberal mechanism,

it serves as an interface, as it were. It interfaces different orders and realms: the metaphorical and the practical; the transcendental and the empirical; the subjective and the objective; prefiguration and fulfillment; the economic, the sociopolitical, the institutional, and the cultural. However, with its texture of indeterminacy, its capacity for dissolving boundaries, and its stated intimacy with the virtual, affect as mediation always appears to be working *free of mediation*. If affect is the contemporary episteme, it is so not because emotions are put to use extensively today—in empowerment movements, in public opinion measurement, in critical work intent on rewriting a history of thought that has been ponderously dominated by the dictum of reason. Affect is the contemporary episteme, I would argue, in the sense that the affective turn is an inflection of something far more crucial and influential: positive stripping of mediality. The life and experience celebrated as desirable today is one that proclaims to be *not* in need of mediation, and the wealth of affect discourse in recent years exercises that ethos of *immediacy* without measure.

III.

Immediacy has been posited as a constitutive and operational logic of neoliberal capitalism. It is the meeting point of diverse theses and hypotheses on neoliberalism: however varied and even clashing these propositions may be with regard to periodization, degree of social subsumption, and so on, many of them agree on looking at the relationship between capitalism and its social and cultural dimensions along the analytical axis of immediacy.⁷ One revealing example is in the anatomy of financial capitalism's turning workers into investors in the securities market, thus binding their fate with the risks of the market. This marks a significant departure from Fordism, since in industrial

⁷ For a critical examination of this immediacy thesis, championed by prominent thinkers including Pierre Bourdieu, Christian Marazzi, Maurizio Lazzarato, Franco "Bifo" Berardi, and Bernard Stiegler, see Nilges, "Neoliberalism." My references on this thesis are largely inspired by Nilges's essay. But this line of thought also underlies the work of other critics proposing to consider neoliberalism beyond the economic domain, among whom notably Wendy Brown and Randy Martin. This study is intended as a broad assessment of the cultural logic of immediacy. If debates on the historical and structural conditions of possibility of neoliberalism (or post-Fordism or financial capitalism) have yet to be settled, this article proposes an intervention in the form of metacommentary, on the grounds that the debates themselves have evolved and come to a point where the key concern is less whether there is such a thing as neoliberalism than its across-the-board manifestations. That numerous critics are focusing their attention on the cultural and social ramifications of the current economic apparatus evinces the significance of such theoretical engagement.

capitalism the worker was separated from capital and the relationship between the two was mediated via the salary system, whereas in financial capitalism that mediation was stripped away (Marazzi, ch. 1). What is more, as Mathias Nilges acutely notes, the determining role of the logic of immediacy in neoliberalism is instantiated particularly tellingly in the new temporality it introduces and sustains (“Neoliberalism”). It can materialize as an extreme compression of time, a kind of “hypercomplexity” derived from the “disproportion between the arrival rate of new information and the limited time available for conscious processing” (Berardi 10). It can be a deprivation of the future, which amounts to a deprivation of time altogether: “time as decision-making, choice, and possibility” (Lazzarato, *Making* 8). Or it can be “*a systemic stupidity that structurally prevents the reconstitution of a long-term horizon*” (Stiegler 5). Nilges suggests that, in view of this context, the popularity of the fantasy and post-apocalyptic genres in recent years makes perfect sense (“Neoliberalism” 368-69).

What does all this have to do with reading the contemporary novel?

Around the mid-2010s, the literary community saw a surging interest in ruminating about the relationship between neoliberalism and the novel, with special issues put out by prominent journals and collections and monographs published in the space of five years or so. All the masterminds behind the concerted projects are keen to tackle the meaning of an era dictated by the free-market logic.⁸ Their cogent position statements aside, these editors are less definitive about how to properly unpack “the contemporary” when it enters the novel. At times, the staple terms and concepts of literary criticism seem inadequate: for instance, while these critics stipulate that such a study should not be merely thematic, they are mostly hesitant to name the neoliberal form and, by extension, a proper approach to the contemporary novel.

⁸ One editing team provides a decade-oriented sketch of the phases of neoliberalism and the corresponding shifts in the novel in terms of subject matter and genre (Huehls and Smith, “Four Phases”); another refrains from investigating the mutual imbrication of the neoliberal logic and cultural aesthetics as neatly coextensive (Elliott and Harkins). Some editors try to understand the neoliberal novel by way of negativity, concretizing its contours by opposing it to the globalization novel and the cosmopolitan novel (Johansen and Karl), whereas others hold that there is much to be gained from looking back to the earlier formations of capitalism for a possible prehistory of the current variation (Marx and Armstrong).

Nonetheless, some astute observations have been established in this body of critical work and, combined, can shed an interesting light on the prospect of a feasible method. At the heart of these insights is the question of time: not periodization based on external empirical parameters, but temporality as instantiated in the novel.

As mentioned above, in his examination of the contemporary novel, Nilges singles out the fantastic and post-apocalyptic genres as inflections of the neoliberal market temporality, that is, of a time robbed of the future. Elsewhere, Nilges has pointed out that the neoliberal novel is predominantly registered by its inability to end the story, a symptom of the future constantly folded into the present (“Fictions” 114-18). This sense of the “perpetual present” (“Neoliberalism” 373) is palpable in other critics’ reflections on the topic as well. Commenting on the keynote address Tom McCarthy gave at a conference they organized, where the novelist shared his bleak view on how there is no way out of the market apparatus (McCarthy, “Vanity’s Residue”), co-editors John Marx and Nancy Armstrong spell out the Kafkaesque situation that twenty-first-century novelists seem to keep putting themselves in, where they are forever faced with a neither/nor dilemma (Marx and Armstrong 160). Expanding on Walter Benn Michaels’s famous rendition of the neoliberal aesthetic as a “refusal of form” (Michaels, ch. 2), Paul Stasi reiterates the general account of neoliberalism’s tendency “to efface all notions of relation and containment, to suggest a kind of unbounded fluidity of experience that transcends the coherence of literary form and the determinations of social ground” (Stasi 316). He goes on to understand this refusal of form as “the desire to remain within the affective register of the work,” by which he means that our affective response to the text is not so much channeled into a desire to know the world as directed at “the feeling that we have taken the proper attitude in relation to it” (320).

From the pathos of the perpetual present to the affective feedback loop, the linkage is telling. The problem with the neoliberal time, namely its lack of time proper, turns out to be our own doing—the doing of our feeling soma. (What Stasi describes as a sense of fluidity and the effacement of all semblance of relation and confinement evokes Reber’s figure of the horizontal world.)

IV.

More accurately, the stripping of time on a large scale is the doing of the neoliberal mechanism. Yet a reader granting too much weight to the affective register of the work may be contributing to the reinforcement of this mechanism's aesthetic preferences, which likely inflect its political orientation. In the introduction to their edited volume, Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith define the literature of the 1990s (for them, the third phase of neoliberalism) exactly as a site that "reiterate[s] neoliberal capital's expanding investment in consumer affect and sentiment" (8).

In his discussion of the return of realism to the literary scene, Nilges makes a strong case on why the novel can illuminate the temporal exigency of the neoliberal era. Taking his cue from Pierre Bourdieu, who once suggested that neoliberalism is better understood as a utopia crystallizing into reality in the hands of economic theorists and policy makers who benefit from it, Nilges ventures that this can be matched up with the transition in literary history from postmodernism to the neoliberal novel. The experimental forms of postmodern fiction of the 1960s and 1970s, with its pronounced antirealist contours, have faded away. But this does not mean it has disappeared. It has not. It has instead materialized in today's cultural reality: "[T]he fictions of postmodernism of the sixties and seventies have become the reality of the neoliberal present. . . . Postmodernism is no longer a vehicle for current literature . . . because postmodernism's fictions have become the dominant language of the neoliberal present" (Nilges, "Fictions" 111-12). That is to say, if we look closely at the configurations of time manifest in a contemporary novel, we often find an actualization of those formal experiments that were once characteristic of the postmodern fiction. On Nilges's reading, the ontology of postmodernism was chiefly anti-teleological and hence did not rely on an ordinary sense of time for its expression. For the neoliberal novel, however, time is very often the problem that drives the plot, on the one hand, and the formal device the novel proffers to solve the problem, on the other. It is thus a critical arena where the contemporary writers respond to the time question. Taken this way, the zombie genre is an awkward response to the neoliberal time, energetically engaged in the game without being aware of it. McCarthy's *Remainder*, as I hope to show in what follows, illustrates a response that critiques the impossible temporality

we are invited into by rehearsing that temporality as if it could work—until things are proved otherwise.⁹

Remainder expressly stages an anxiety over the loss of authenticity. After recovering from a months-long coma caused by some (unspecified) objects falling from the sky, the unnamed narrator-protagonist receives eight and a half million pounds as a settlement from the corporation that caused his injury. Undecided about what to do with the money, one day at a friend's party, washing his hands in the bathroom, he notices a crack on the wall. All of a sudden a sense of *déjà vu* hits him. He believes that he has been in a space like this before: the interior, the view across the yard with cats on the roofs, the entire building this space is a part of, and even the sounds and smells made by people living in the building. The only problem is that he cannot locate the memory correctly; he does not recall the physical locale of this experience. So he decides to use a big chunk of his settlement sum to hire people to recreate the place. The project involves buying out an entire apartment building and having it remodeled, putting "re-enactors" in every apartment unit and asking them to do specific things at specific times during the day, repeated over and over every day, such as frying liver, taking out the garbage, and playing the piano. The cats are of course also essential props in this massive project. And the narrator himself is to move into one of the apartments in the building, with this hope: "I wanted to reconstruct that space and enter it so that I could feel real again" (McCarthy, *Remainder* 67).

The narrator is constantly obsessed about whether his and other people's lives are genuine. When he is people-watching in a coffee shop, for example, the young people walking by strike him as inauthentic, as imitating characters from an advertisement: "Just like me: completely second-hand" (McCarthy, *Remainder* 54). And who embodies realness? Robert De Niro. "Every move he made, each gesture was perfect, seamless," says our protagonist (23). Mr. De Niro in those movie characters he has portrayed is the quintessence of human authenticity.

⁹ This novel has been productively discussed by scholars in light of the thematic of mediation. See Franklin; Hensley; and Nieland. They focus mostly on specific technological media and the implications of the exchange between the human and the nonhuman or of the pervasiveness of the nonhuman actor-network. McCarthy himself is versed in theories of media and contemporary thought in general. In his prose collection, *Typewriters, Bombs, Jellyfish*, for instance, he would use the idiom of cybernetics and concepts of medium and mediation to address literary relationships.

As the project proceeds, however, it starts to go adrift. He becomes progressively maniacal with details, insisting on scenes being repeatedly redone. He also begins to request more and more reenactments, of situations that he himself has witnessed in life, or that he has heard of in the news. He even requests pre-enactments—or simulations—of things he has not experienced. Eventually the project gets out of hand, leading to the death of two crew members, when the narrator decides to turn the simulation of a bank robbery into a real heist. The project falls apart when our protagonist is no longer content with reenactments; he wants to see them brought to another level—not from reenactment to enactment, but to reality. In reality, things have material consequences.

The reference to neoliberalism in the novel is unmistakable. There are episodes that literalize the “perpetual present” or attenuated sense of the future Nilges draws our attention to. In the stock market, where the buying game is premised on what shares “*might* be worth, in an imaginary future,” that future in effect never happens. As the narrator’s investment manager explains to him, “[b]y the time one future’s there, there’s another one being imagined. The collective imagination of all the investors keeps projecting futures, keeping the shares buoyant . . .” (McCarthy, *Remainder* 46). Even more noteworthy in the neoliberalism motif is how experience is heavily mediated in the neoliberal reality. The narrator’s project is implemented smoothly thanks to the corporate-minded “facilitators” he has hired from a company called Time Control, and to the “logistics” put in place (McCarthy, *Remainder* 77, 81, 196). Additionally, our reborn guy is constantly fascinated with Starbucks’s “Buy 10, Get 1 Free” loyalty cards, the perfect mediator of horizontal happiness (52-54, 115-17).

All this, however, is a mechanism of mediation carried out in such a way as to assume a feel of immediacy. The logistics team makes life appear effortless, and the chain coffee shop’s rewards system succeeds in selling people an acquired lifestyle that seems all too natural. The reason for our protagonist’s initiating the project is the desire for realness: he wishes “to become fluent, natural, to cut out the detour that sweeps us around what’s fundamental to events, preventing us from touching their core: the detour that makes us all second-hand and second-rate” (McCarthy, *Remainder* 264).

This is where our hero is tricked and doomed: he has mistaken immediacy for authenticity, and cheesy authenticity for ontological authenticity.¹⁰ But to fix the problem for him is not to linger on the proxy-kind of mediation—neither to enjoy a happy ride with the unmediated phantasmagoria it builds, nor to resist it categorically. To focus on that kind of mediation is a misplaced effort, for underlying that program is a robust representationalism, in both senses of being spoken for by an intermediary and of transmitting a meaning through an intermediary. Even if either option affords sanity and does not lead to any disaster, this is a political and aesthetic program that conforms. It may provide local contentment, at most, but it hardly promises anything radical.

The protagonist might have a chance for difference. Because of his post-accident condition, he has numerous occasions to encounter the extra-ordinary time. He wants to see recreated things he has (or might have) experienced the way he has remembered them; he feels real, “first-hand” if those reenactments are executed well. Interestingly, that kind of realness, for him, feels like a spatialized time. When the lady living downstairs greets him in exactly the way he has wanted to hear it, he feels a thrill: “The moment I was in seemed to expand and become a pool—a still, clear pool that swallowed everything up in its calm contentedness” (McCarthy, *Remainder* 147). Yet because that thrill fades away quickly, he begins to make the re-enactors slow down their performance: “I want you to be performing them, but to be performing them so slowly that each instant . . . that each instant . . . as though it could expand—you understand?” (223; ellipses in original).

This spatially expanded time delivers its power most intensely when the first killing happens, during the simulation-turned-real robbery: “Once again I was weightless; once again the moment spread its edges out, became a still,

¹⁰ McCarthy and philosopher Simon Critchley have co-penned “declarations” for a mock organization founded by McCarthy, the International Necronautical Society. These manifesto-ish statements are parodic in form but are in effect making serious propositions, and one of the prominent themes they try to tackle is authenticity. They call into question the Western conception of subjectivity as authenticity or autarkic selfhood and argue that being has always been inauthentic. Their view of originary inauthenticity, they acknowledge, is partly modeled on Heidegger’s formulation of the material facticity of existence, but they depart distinctly from Heidegger in their conception of a split self. See International Necronautical Society, “Declaration” and “New York Declaration.” In fact, many passages in their “New York Declaration on Inauthenticity” can serve as apt descriptions of *Remainder*: the undoing of the protagonist, we may say, lies in his inability to “let matter matter” or to “celebrate the imperfection of matter and somatize that imperfection on a daily basis”; he fails to recognize that there is always a remainder left over from matter and that “[t]he attempt to coincide with reality is always undone by the material mark of an event, an accident of which we remember very little . . . almost nothing” (“New York Declaration”; ellipsis in original).

clear pool swallowing everything else up in its contentedness” (McCarthy, *Remainder* 293).

He yearns for a temporal sensibility that goes beyond—or perhaps below—the threshold of human perception. This extra-liminal encounter with the physical world could be a gateway to epiphany. Once he feels he has witnessed a “miracle” rendered by matter when the windshield wiper liquid the auto mechanics have just poured into his windshield washer reservoir does not come out and is said to have vaporized: “a miracle of transubstantiation—in contravention of the very laws of physics, laws that make swings stop swinging and fridge doors catch and large, unsuspected objects fall out of the sky” (McCarthy, *Remainder* 174).

Yet he tries too hard to triumph over physics and refuses to subject himself to the power of matter. Insofar as the nature of matter is chance, the narrator-protagonist’s undoing, we may say, is his rejection of chance. A couple of liberating moments take place when he can observe in tranquility, without any particular purpose, the movement of the sunlight across the staircase of his building—moments when time as it is mediates pure mediality, so to speak. Yet this bliss is denied once he becomes particular about the exactitude of the duration of the sun’s passing every single day (McCarthy, *Remainder* 227-28). Once he sets his mind to manipulating time, that is when no world can hold up.

Nilges once proposed to examine the ending of the contemporary novel to see how the contemporary temporal problem is interrogated: “Once neoliberalism’s omnipresent contemporaneity and absorption of the future into the present not only become the structural logic of capitalism but also are woven into the sociocultural fabric, how do novels’ endings engage with the problem of the end of time?” (“Fictions” 116). In the case of the character in *Remainder*, how to end it is indeed a problem.

After causing two deaths in the bank, he takes off in a private jet, his shotgun with him, but before long gets interrupted when his pilot is ordered by the Civil Aviation Authority to turn back. To defy the order, our hero simulates a kidnapping scene so that his plane can stay in the air. His pilot needs his instructions on what to do next:

“Where do you want to go?”

“Go?” I said. “Nowhere. Just keep doing this.”

“Doing what?” he asked.

“Turning back, then turning out. Then turning back again. The way we’re doing it right now.” (McCarthy, *Remainder* 307)

While the pilot is following his command, the narrator looks out of the window and feels “really happy.” He has just told the pilot that as long as they keep the same pattern, “[i]t will all be fine” (308).

This is how the novel ends—once more, from our hero’s point of view:

Eventually the sun would set for ever—burn out, *pop*, extinguish—and the universe would run down like a Fisher Price toy whose spring has unwound to its very end. Then there’d be no more music, no more loops. Or, maybe, before that, we’d just run out of fuel. For now, though, the clouds tilted and the weightlessness set in once more as we banked, turning, heading back, again. (McCarthy, *Remainder* 308)

Perhaps nothing pronounces more definitively than that closing word the favored doctrine of our time.

V.

The story in *Remainder* exemplifies the social and existential condition geared toward the logic of immediacy—its Kafkaesque setting. To conclude the article, I read Sebald’s *Vertigo* as a work that demonstrates a sagacious attentiveness to mediality. The novel does not touch upon any “neoliberalism” motif thematically, nor condemn the impetus for immediacy in any fashion. My argument is that to read *Vertigo* within the context of the cultural climate and prevailing discursive practices today is to appreciate the critical thrust of a way of thinking more conducive to reflexivity and self-critique than the rationale of immediacy. The mediality in *Vertigo* manifests not as metafictional novelistic mechanics or the functioning of technical media in the human world in its plotline, but as an aesthetic sensibility which, I argue, is indicative of a particular epistemological horizon.

Vertigo, Sebald’s first novel, is illuminating in gesturing toward a distinctive artistic vision for the contemporary novelist. Literary critics have taken note of a revitalization of realism in the course of the last three decades

or so. The strong presence of realism can be detected in the popularity of the memoir genre and New Journalism since the 1990s (Huehls and Smith, “Four Phases”; Worden). It is also palpable in the upsurge of fictions which appear to follow the realist format but which in effect suffer from the wrong sense of time (such as *Remainder*).¹¹ In addition, lyrical realism is also going strong. Zadie Smith’s famous review essay written for *The New York Review of Books* in 2008 has already identified the dominance of the lyrical realism tradition in the first decade of the twenty-first century. (In the same essay, Smith praises McCarthy’s *Remainder* for promising an exciting alternative path, the avant-garde vein.) The principles of lyrical realism, as Smith summarizes it, include “transcendent importance of form, the incantatory power of language to reveal truth, the essential fullness and continuity of the self.” Reviewing Joseph O’Neill’s award-winning *Netherland*, Smith comments that while the novel explores the fragility of selfhood and the vicissitudes of life entangled in a greater historical chain, as well as the suspicion that language may not be an adequate vehicle with which to access the world, at the end of the day the novel chooses to reassure us “of our beautiful plenitude.” Since other established novelists active today may fit into this profile,¹² it is tantalizing to identify a compatibility between this lyrical realism and the neoliberal program: the former’s affirmation of the self through a well-wrought verbal construction, and the latter’s valorization parameters and promise of quick comprehension and prompt solution (exemplified in the corporation culture, service sector management, and even higher education curricula today). Even if this claim is ungrounded, it is not too implausible to say that contemporary lyrical realism falls short of offering much help with the immediacy problem: it may answer questions posed by the real world, but it treats itself by and large as a reflective mirror to that reality and hardly stops to interrogate the very medium that constitutes the novelistic architecture or the stakes of mediation between the novelistic world and the world beyond.

¹¹ See Nilges, “Fictions” for his analysis of other contemporary novels which he argues have trouble ending the story, evincing a literary form typical of the neoliberal age.

¹² A good example is perhaps Ian McEwan, especially if we narrow down the scope of comparison to works that expressly respond to the same post-9/11 world condition as *Netherland* does. McEwan’s *Saturday*, a story about personal and collective disruption, too, ends with reassurance.

Vertigo begins with the first-person narrator, someone resembling Sebald in appearance and life experience,¹³ traveling from England to central and southern Europe on two trips in the 1980s to visit historical sites connected to writers (including Stendhal, Franz Kafka, and Giacomo Casanova) and artists (such as Pisanello and Giotto), followed by a trip back to his childhood home in a small village in the Alps, which he had not visited in thirty years; the novel ends with the narrator returning to London, the city of his residence. With its travelogue/essayist prose style, *Vertigo* may seem akin to the lyrical realist fiction at a cursory glance, but it is decidedly not. The thematic concern can be summed up as a quest for historical truth—especially that revolving around “the long list of terrible events” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 240) in European history, including wars, blazes, outbursts of plague, natural disasters—and the sentiment of melancholy thus effected.¹⁴ What is significant for our purposes is that, the thematic construct aside, the novel constantly tests out the limits and possibilities of novel writing; mediality constitutes the very creative endeavor of the work. The entire novel, we may say, is structured as a process of the novel in search of form.

That search materializes in having as the central character a “writer figure” who is avidly studying artworks and writers’ lives, perusing historical documents, and writing up notes, but who does not know exactly what the purpose is. During his stay at a hotel in Limone, Italy, for instance, one day the narrator is working on his writing in the hotel’s café, rather gratified with the progress: “I wrote with an ease that astonished me” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 94). The proprietress of the hotel gets curious and inquires.

On one occasion she asked if I was a journalist or writer. When I said that neither the one nor the other was quite right, she asked what it was that I was working on, to which I replied that I did not

¹³ One of the images inserted into the book is a picture of the narrator’s replaced passport after he has been robbed (Sebald, *Vertigo* 114). The passport holder in the photo looks very much like the real-life author, and the signature looks very much like the name *Sebald*.

¹⁴ A prominent theme running through Sebald’s writings, fictional and nonfictional, is the ostensible inevitability of human-caused catastrophes—so inevitable that these incidents of massive destruction eventually assume the status of natural history. For his extensive reflections on this question, see Sebald, “Between” and *On the Natural History*. Critics have noted the motif of melancholy as a historical mood Sebald inherits from Walter Benjamin, though they differ on whether Sebald is overly pessimistic (and has possibly misread Benjamin; see Kaufmann) or whether such melancholy expresses an ethical vista (see Santner, ch. 2; Ward).

know for certain myself, but had a growing suspicion that it might turn into a crime story . . . (94-95)

Purpose tinged with aimlessness constitutes the overall feel of *Vertigo*. What is noteworthy is that this aimless purposefulness is figured in a writerly persona on a mission to look for the right approach to historical truth. At first, we see him taking note of coincidences between historical events: for instance, the convergence of destinies of Kafka and Ernst Herbeck in the Austrian town of Klosterneuburg (the former died at a nursing home there, whereas the latter, the mentally afflicted poet, spent most of his life at a psychiatric hospital in the town), a coincidence evocative of the link between artistic genius and illness, physical or mental (Sebald, *Vertigo* 38-39, 136, 163). The narrator also repeatedly thinks he sees historical look-alikes on the street such as Dante, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, and Elizabeth I (35, 53, 254); and the words *vertigo* and *vertiginous* often accompany accounts of these encounters. He also has a keen interest in the topic of doppelgängers in literature and inserts comments on it here and there. The motif of coincidence cannot be more evident than when the narrator notices a Hertz ad at Piazza Savoia in Milan that reads, “LA PROSSIMA COINCIDENZA,” denoting “the next coincidence” (108).

Soon, connections in a broad sense (similarities, analogies, crossing of paths of historical figures) amass to become the primary plot device of the novel. Connections among episodes in history can be the result of selective association on the part of the historian/critic as much as they can be pure chance. It soon becomes clear that a great number of the “complex interdependencies” (Sebald, *Vertigo* 157) of things in the world are rendered as such by the narrator. For instance, references to the year 1913 recur in the story, linking Kafka’s time in Italy; the changing atmosphere in Verona, Italy reflecting a changing national political climate; the narrator’s remote and tranquil hometown; and his acquisition of an India Everyman’s Library edition of Samuel Pepys’s diary published in that year, with Pepys’s account of the devastating Great Fire of London to be referenced by the narrator in subsequent passages (84-85, 121, 185, 261).¹⁵ The singling out of this date is specifically purposeful: the date

¹⁵ One critic suspects that the India edition was made up by Sebald because this critic has had no success in retrieving a copy of this edition. This critic has been able to obtain a 1912 Everyman’s Library version, however, and therefore surmises that the author invented the 1913 publication to enhance the symbolic weight of the date in the novel. See “Homage to Everyman.”

juxtaposes the quietude of everydayness in some places and the “sacred and righteous wrath of the nation” (121) in others right before the outbreak of the First World War; it also connotes the randomness of lived experience (getting hold of this particular edition of Pepys) which nevertheless seems fateful as it leads to an important epiphany on historical truth (the citation of the September 1666 calamity in the context of the late twentieth century).¹⁶

The “purpose” of the story in *Vertigo*, we may say, concerns how someone who takes on the role of writer can verify historical facts—not so much what historical facts are, for they are often irretrievable or indeterminate, as what he says of history. It turns out that what matters is the form in which the writer frames his historical investigation. Hence, we see the aspiring writer figure constantly exercising different options. He examines historical archives on specific subject matter, he browses newspapers guided by random leads (such as famous murder cases that have happened in the town where he is staying on his trip), he observes tiny details, and he takes notes. Studying, documenting, and identifying connections—all this, as it turns out, is nothing other than the task of crime investigation. As shown above, when the narrator is unsure of the direction of his writerly engagement, he somehow anticipates it to be a crime story. Moreover, some of the pivotal episodes in the novel are indeed centered on crimes. The account of Casanova’s prison escape, for instance, serves as a commentary on the positive outcome of conjoining one’s intellect with the unknown (Casanova picked the time of his escape by selecting specific words from an Ariosto poem based on a system of divination) (Sebald, *Vertigo* 54-60). This episode reiterates the novel’s foregrounding of the working—or the “law” (58)—of coincidence in history. Or, one recurring image in the novel is of two men carrying a bier or of people walking in a funeral procession: these moments include the narrator’s own witnessing, though he becomes aware of this scene most probably prompted by his reading of an account of such a scene in Stendhal’s writing; the bier and cortège image would also become an evocative figure weaving his reflections on Kafka’s work (25, 93, 125, 152, 164). At one point in Verona, he has to flee the town overnight because he believes two suspicious men are to do him harm—he later admits that it is the

¹⁶ In fact, the year 1813 is also a recurring date in the novel, a date that marks an important moment in Stendhal’s life and which also signals the beginning of Napoleon’s downfall. Connectivity, whether historical, epistemological, or literary, is an important topic in Sebald’s work in general that many scholars have engaged with. See, for example, Bewes; Gray; Kaup; and Theisen.

bier image he has in mind when he senses the imminent menace. On a later trip, in Milan, he does get mugged by two men, right after his attention has been drawn to the car rental company's slogan "LA PROSSIMA COINCIDENZA" (108-09).

Using crime investigation as a frame/figure of novel writing is significant. The task of the contemporary writer shown in *Vertigo* is not to give reassurance "of our beautiful plenitude" in moments of disruption or to resort to the reader's affective response. The task of the contemporary writer is instead to make connections in the man-made world and beyond. Sometimes there is too much evidence—hence the feeling of vertigo, in experiences with doppelgängers, for instance, as these doubles figure nothing other than the burden of evidence. At other times, there is little or practically no evidence of any sort (Sebald, *Vertigo* 148, 150).

When uncertainty grows overwhelming, the narrator would be distressed and would opt for proof mundanely construed. On a bus trip to Limone sul Garda, he comes across a pair of twins who look like Kafka as a schoolboy. In order to obtain "evidence whatsoever to document this most improbable coincidence," the narrator goes up to the parents of the boys to ask for a photo of them, to no avail (Sebald, *Vertigo* 90).

However, even at moments of limbo, he never tries to manipulate the material world as the character in *Remainder* does. Sebald's narrator lets chance play its part, and what he does is to play his part as an inquirer and documenter. For the hero in *Remainder*, coincidences and analogies would be "patterns" that help to keep him sane; for the writer persona in *Vertigo*, these are traces left behind by history which take the mindset and proactive determination of a detective to make sense of. In sharp contrast to McCarthy's narrator-protagonist, whose (post-traumatic) life is intensely centered on his self-centralization project, Sebald's narrator allows for form to come to him.¹⁷ With its multiple enframing, the way *Vertigo* engages with the problem of immediacy is to *not* surrender to the convenience of the realist program and to *not* take the

¹⁷ Intriguingly, there is an episode in *Remainder* where the narrator-protagonist elaborates approvingly on forensic investigation, first calling it an "art form" committed to the identification and analysis of "patterns" and then ratifying its importance for being "real" (McCarthy, *Remainder* 185-88). His ruin lies in the fact that he likes to take the position of God; he wants to take the perspective "from above, a landing field for elevated, more enlightened beings" (199).

novel's relationship with reality for granted—that is, to *not* take that relationship as something unmediated.

If McCarthy's theater of the problem of immediacy ends with a whirlpool of self-indulgence spinning out the same mantra of un-ending, how does *Vertigo* as a novel end? It, too, refers to time—however, unlike the fixation on the perpetual present projected in *Remainder*, the ending of *Vertigo* hints at the possible end of it. *Vertigo* closes with the narrator seeing in his dream an apocalyptic scene reminiscent of the London conflagration described in Samuel Pepys's diary. The narrator's account is blended with Pepys's:

We saw the fire grow. It was not bright, it was a gruesome, evil, bloody flame, sweeping, before the wind, through all the City. . . . A crowd of looters roams through Lincoln's Inn. . . . And Bishop Braybrooke's grave is opened up, his body disinterred. Is this the end of time? A muffled, fearful, thudding sound, moving, like waves, throughout the air. The powder house exploded. We flee onto the water. The glare around us everywhere, and yonder, before the darkened skies, in one great arc the jagged wall of fire. And, the day after, a silent rain of ashes, westward, as far as Windsor Park. (Sebald, *Vertigo* 262-63)¹⁸

Immediacy as is laid out in these pages apparently designates different things: the absence of mediation as a socio-economic relationship between the worker and capital, thus precipitating the risk factor in the worker's life; the putative first-hand encounter with the material world which is in actuality supported by excessive mediation via human resources and technology; positive configurations of such direct experiencing in cultural criticism; and the aesthetic, political, and ethical program enabled by the affective turn. The coincidence of these instantiations of immediacy with the neoliberal machinery, I have tried to point out, is an alarming development. If critics have used

¹⁸ For a detailed comparison of the ending of *Vertigo* and Pepys's diary entries, and analysis of where *Vertigo* deviates from Pepys's text, see "A Lateral Reading of W. G. Sebald's Apocalypse." Critics have also pointed out that in the original German edition, *Schwindel. Gefühle*, beneath this closing paragraph there is the date 2013 followed in the next line by the word *Ende*. With the significance of the dates 1813 and 1913 in the novel, we have reason to suspect that 2013 serves as yet another temporal marker, making up a threefold centennial timeline. That the date 2013 follows depictions of the apocalyptic scene is of course telling. See Sutton.

episteme to define the turn to affect, this article proposes to consider immediacy as an episteme-caliber cultural dominant at present. The two novels discussed, I argue, help to bring to light the gravity of the immediacy problem: *Remainder* discloses the trap of the doxa of immediacy, and *Vertigo* cuts a distinctive path in tackling the current juncture alongside reflexive considerations of what novel writing means today.

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