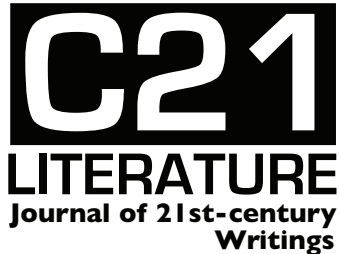




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## Article

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ARTICLE

## Catatonic Cultural Dominant: "Losing the Moments of the World" in Jeff Noon's *Falling out of Cars* (2002)

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What does late capitalism's mode of temporality reveal about the logic linked to its mode of production? This article establishes a dialogue between theoretical works concerned with this question and Jeff Noon's speculative fiction novel *Falling out of Cars* (2002). Drawing on Marxist criticism in the works of Fredric Jameson and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the article proposes that *Falling out of Cars* develops a catatonic mode of temporality which critically challenges these authors' diagnoses of schizophrenia as the cultural logic of late capitalism. Noon's novel offers a dystopian version of the future in which catatonic subjects function as the norm for the system's optimal operation. The catatonic temporality of the novel emerges as the logic underlying this transformation, namely, as the passive assimilation of the individual to the system's economic rationale, which no longer needs any active human agency in order to operate. Jeff Noon's novel follows a catatonic temporal structure comprising a negative reaction to an overwhelming and chaotic experience of time. It entails a state of disorientation caused by indistinct temporal layers and manifold time leaps. *Falling out of Cars* does not only deploy these narrative techniques on a purely aesthetic basis, but explicitly links them to the objective conditions of the world they aim to represent. This article suggests that Noon's novel argues that catatonia is the dominant logic leading to capitalism's terminal stage in which individuals no longer possess any active agency to take control over their lives.

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**Keywords:** catatonia; cultural dominant; postmodernism; speculative fiction; schizophrenia

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What is the present cultural dominant in global capitalism? Can this be described according to clinical accounts of schizophrenia as 'postmodern' cultural theorists have argued or, perhaps, something slightly different? These questions are at the core of Jeff Noon's 2002 dystopian novel *Falling out of Cars*; an experimental work of

speculative fiction that poses several challenges to postmodern accounts of cultural schizophrenia. Noon's speculative narrative is suggestive, both at the level of content and form, of a sensibility more akin to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of catatonia rather than postmodern models of schizophrenia. Noon's dystopian narrative renders catatonia as a cultural dominant, but also, through its speculative tropes and experimental narrative, exposes some of the inconsistencies found in cultural theories of schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia is a term that, within the field of cultural studies, has been continuously deployed beyond its clinical meaning to describe the dominant mode of experience in global capitalism. The scholarship on this subject has appropriated this term in order to describe how capitalism's mode of production organises everyday life experience according to spatial and temporal coordinates which can be interpreted as schizophrenic. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2013), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, by elaborating on psychoanalysis and Marxist criticism, draw attention to the mode of production's role in the organisation of psychic energies or, in their vocabulary, desiring production. As Angela Woods (2011) remarks, by 'capitalizing on the momentum of the antipsychiatry movement,' *Anti-Oedipus* 'played a decisive role in promoting schizophrenia as a paradigm through which to understand subjectivity in the late capitalist era' (146). Schizophrenia, for them, is the deterritorializing component of capitalism, that is, the force representing the "continual revolution of the means of production" and generating a demystification of symbolic values – custom, beliefs and codes of behaviour – in favour of economic speculation and axiomatisation; a liberation of desire from established codes that they see embodied in schizophrenic subjectivity (Holland 80–1). This 'nomadic' subjectivity involves a decentred subject with no fixed identity, constantly transitioning between metastable states and consuming the intensities produced by them; a desiring production which is not delirious, but which always remains connected to material and historical reality: 'he is not from another world: even when he is displacing himself in space, he is a journey in intensity, around the desiring-machine that is erected here and remains here' (156). For Deleuze and Guattari '[o]ur society produces schizos the same way it produces Prell shampoo or Ford cars,' but, conversely,

'he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfilment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel' (282; 49). Schizophrenia is thus simultaneously a social tendency found in capitalism as a whole – the paradigm of its deterritorializing components – and its potentially revolutionary subject – the schizo – expressing its internal logic at the level of subjectivity.

Deleuze and Guattari's diagnosis, as Angela Woods points out, is reformulated by cultural studies on postmodernism which define schizophrenia 'not as a rebellious, counter-cultural, transcendent, or even bizarre, but as historically specific form of subjective disintegration, a final flattening of psychic depth' (186). Jean Baudrillard's (1988) analysis of cultural schizophrenia is a clear example of this: '[w]e have entered into a new form of schizophrenia – with the emergence of an immanent promiscuity and the perpetual interconnection of all information and communication networks' ('The Ecstasy of Communication' 21). Similarly, for Fredric Jameson (1991), cultural schizophrenia, as manifested in postmodern cultural products, is indicative of the pervasive commodification and reification of all domains of social life, including even Nature and the Unconscious (49). Jameson's analysis focuses on how capitalism's economic rationale affects manifold cultural spheres: a waning of affect in art and literature; a flattening of depth and interiority models in post-structural theory; a waning of historicity brought by a consumerist society 'whose own putative past is little more than a vast collection of images and dusty spectacles;' and the exhilarant consumption and production of 'the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and aleatory' (15; 18; 26). These critical readers posit schizophrenia as the cultural outcome of capitalism's financial logic and as the dominant mode of experience emerging from its organisation of social relations and productive economic forces.

The relevance of literature within this debate pertains to the relationship between cultural dominant and cultural products and, more specifically, to the way in which these latter render sensible capitalism's organisation of living conditions. Jameson's Lacanian analysis of cultural production as another component and expression of late capitalism's schizophrenic dominant mode of experience augments this point. Jameson remarks that his use of this clinical term is for 'description rather than diagnosis' as a 'suggestive aesthetic model' (26). Schizophrenic *écriture* works

through the exercise of emphasising the discontinuity and heterogeneity among disjointed fragments, raw materials and aleatory impulses; a procedure which Jameson sums up under the paradoxical slogan: 'difference relates' (31). The pure materiality of the sentence in isolation is highlighted to the detriment of its syntagmatic relation to the signifying chain: 'reading proceeds by differentiation rather than unification' and the text is 'reduced to an experience of pure material signifiers... a series of pure and unrelated presents in time' (31; 27). The breakdown of the signifying chain, thus, entails a breakdown of temporality in which the present is released 'from all the activities and intentionalities that might focus it and make it a space of praxis' (27). William S. Burrough's cut-up technique is a useful example of this method: an aleatory assemblage of disjointed signifiers breaking down the syntagmatic unity of the poem. The present, here, following Jacques Lacan's clinical account of schizophrenia, becomes isolated, 'engulf[ing] the subject with undescrivable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material – or better still, the literal – signifier in isolation' (27). What differentiates schizophrenic writing from previous stylistic tendencies is that it is dominated by joyous and impersonal intensities, such as euphoria and hallucinatory highs, displacing the older modernist affects of anxiety and alienation (28–9). J.G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973) offers a helpful illustration of this schizophrenic subjectivity; a highly influential science fiction novel describing the car-crash sexual fetishism of a London collective. This perverse desire is pursued through both real and elaborately staged car accidents which are impassively described by the narrator. In this text, Ballard claims, affects reveal an absolute lack of interiority of the subject: 'no psychology, no ambivalence or desire, no libido or death-drive' (*Crash* 112).

### **Jeff Noon's *Falling out of Cars*: Catatonia or Schizophrenia?**

*Falling out of Cars* is more aptly described according to the obscurer concept of catatonia rather than schizophrenia as developed by Deleuze and Guattari. It should be noted that many postmodern authors, such as Ballard and Burroughs, have been cited as influential figures in Noon's narrative corpus (Butler 61; Wenaus 'Fractal Narrative' 262). The same influence applies to the cyberpunk writing of William Gibson

and Bruce Sterling. This movement emerging at the end of the 1980s is, according to Jameson, one of the primary literary examples of schizophrenic culture (320). In Jameson's view, cyberpunk embodies, through its 'orgy of language' and 'excess of representational consumption,' the complete reification and 'institutional collectivisation of contemporary life' (321; 320). Cyberpunk displaces the modernist experiences of alienation and anxiety in favour of 'heightened intensit[ies]' resulting from 'a genuine pleasure and jouissance out of necessity' which 'turns resignation into excitement... a high and an addiction' (321). Noon's narrative corpus shares with this schizophrenic canon its thematic exploration of drug addiction and hallucination – *Vurt* (1993), *Pollen* (1995) and *Nymphomation* (1997) – but also, in stylistic terms, its disjointed prose undermining and breaking down the syntagmatic unity of the signifying chain, as seen in *Automated Alice* (1996) and *Needle in the Groove* (2000). However, while sharing many features with this schizophrenic canon, Noon's novels, such as *Vurt* and *Falling out of Cars*, differ from this tradition in that they reflect a melancholy interiority – a constellation of loss and abandonment – which is completely absent in the aforementioned postmodern works. As Andrew Wenaus remarks, in *Falling out of Cars*, 'the reader gets the sense that the journey is progressing through a diseased England and, at once, the stages of loss and mourning' ('The Chaotics of Memory' 261). Moreover, as Andrew M. Butler has noted, in opposition to cyberpunk's obsession with cyberspace and the global scope of financial markets, Noon's novels are firmly located in one location (66). In addition to this, technology has only a subsidiary role in his narrative world (67). Noon's speculative fiction, in opposition to classical postmodern narratives, does not maintain an affirmative stance towards the cultural dominant but, rather, an aporetic one in which subjective interiority is at odds with the consumerist and flattening collectivisation of contemporary life.

Noon's narrative corpus has been surprisingly overlooked in the field of British literary studies. One of the reasons for this neglect is that his corpus does not neatly fit into the scheme of postmodern aesthetics and schizophrenic subjectivity. This is a situation which demands the creation of a different technical vocabulary and theoretical framework for its analysis. Catatonia, likewise, is an understudied concept within Deleuze and Guattari scholarship and cultural studies. This is mostly

due to the fact that they themselves never dealt with this psychopathology in any systematic and thorough manner. The scattered mentions across their corpus are, nonetheless, more than enough to develop a general characterisation of catatonia as a cultural dominant, which is the better suited concept to describe *Falling out of Cars*. For Deleuze and Guattari, catatonia is a subcategory of schizophrenia and emerges as the most radical form reterritorialization bringing to a halt the latter's dynamic mobilization of desire, that is, as a total arrest of the schizophrenic process set in motion by the social field (161). This kind of repression entails a state of absolute immobility in which the subject silences its drives and repels its own corporality (375). While the schizophrenic adapts to this mode of temporality and transitions from one state to the other, the catatonic reaches a state of absolute stasis:

[a]s the authors of horror stories have understood so well, it is not death that serves as the model for catatonia, it is catatonic schizophrenia that gives its model to death. Zero intensity. The death model appears when the body without organs repels the organs and lays them aside: no mouth, no tongue, no teeth—to the point of self-mutilation, to the point of suicide. (375)

The reference to horror fiction here is specifically associated with zombies. As the authors claim, the 'only modern myth is the myth of zombies – mortified schizos, good for work, brought back to reason' (382). Catatonics, as Deleuze and Guattari point out, have a place in capitalism as zombified 'schizos' reincorporated into the system's economic rationale. As a subcategory of schizophrenia, catatonia also entails the breakdown of temporality: the isolation of the present from past determinations and future intentions. In opposition to schizophrenia, catatonic temporality does not lead to a vivid experience of the present's materiality, but to a death of subjectivity culminating in temporal stasis. Positing catatonia, a negative reaction to schizophrenia's underlying experience of time and materiality, as capitalism's cultural dominant would assume that is a limited extent to which the subject can adapt to this fragmented mode of temporality, let alone embrace it. The main consequence of positing catatonia as the cultural dominant of global capitalism is that there is an

integral discordancy between the system's organisation of everyday life experience and the subject's mental abilities to cope with it.

Jeff Noon's *Falling out of Cars* explores this catatonic version of the future in its dystopian alternative universe. One of the peculiarities of Noon's novel is that its narrative structure, representing the protagonist's diary entries, is explicitly presented as a symptomatic manifestation of the social and supernatural powers shaping its fictional universe. The crew travels across an alternative version of England polluted by a plague referred to as 'the noise' that has spread across the entire globe. Similar to cultural schizophrenia, the noise deterritorializes the population's perception of the world by distorting their experience of temporality, erasing their memories and orientation towards the future. Marlene reflects on how her diary entries are influenced and threatened by the noise: 'as I flick through the book, I see only the mess I have made. Words, sentences, paragraphs, whole pages, scoured with black marks. The noise gets everywhere' (11). Noon's *Falling Out of Cars* encourages readers to understand the significance of catatonia as a strategic response to this noise. The novel's metafictional exercise entails providing a textual form suited for the catatonic cultural dominant represented within its narrative, that is, a writing that explicitly grapples with the conflict between cultural dominant and subjectivity.

### **Dystopia as a Metaphor for the Present**

*Falling out of Cars* is Noon's sixth novel and, in many regards, follows the themes explored by its preceding work: marginal characters, dystopian landscapes and surreal paraspaces. The novel depicts the journey of ex-journalist Marlene Moore, the narrator and protagonist of the novel, and three other characters: Peacock, an ex-war veteran running from a debt; Henderson, the decisive leader of the group; and Tupelo, a teenager hitchhiking across the country. The plot of Noon's novel is driven by the crew's job to retrieve the shards of a magical mirror that is to be mended by Kingsley – a collector of Victorian oddities obsessed with the metaphysics of reflections. In spite of its crucial role in the narrative, the purpose of this quest is never fully disclosed by either Kingsley or Marlene. All that is revealed is that each of the glass pieces brings strange consequences that vary with each case and owner: 'people



are paying for the effect, what it might be. In pain, or in pleasure' (53). Due to the effects of the noise, all specular surfaces and mirrors have become deadly artefacts which heighten the symptoms of the disease by immediately triggering catatonia. As Jon Coutenay points out, these mirrors are deeply connected to a collective state of loss in society: 'No sufferer from the virus may look in a mirror, so looking glasses are painted over or turned to the wall, as though the whole country had gone into high-Victorian mourning for a lost way of life' ('Behind the Mirror'). This collective disposition towards loss is closer to that of melancholia rather than mourning. As Freud notes in his essay 'Mourning and Melancholia', whereas in mourning the subject is conscious of the loss of the object and goes through a piecemeal process in order to accept its absence; in melancholia, the loss of the object is internalized in the subject's psyche (205–6). This distinction is crucial to understand the lack of narrative motive driving the novel. While Marlene's narrative is motivated by her attempt to hold on to Angela's memories, this loss is never intended to be worked through a piecemeal process as in the case of mourning. Marlene remains attached to the memory of her daughter. This situation is what provides the novel with its interiority model: the noise's flattening effects on subjectivity are constantly counteracted by the influence of loss and melancholia.

Speculative fiction elements in *Falling out of Cars* – the 'noise,' the magical mirror and surreal spaces – engage in a metaphoric manner with the cultural dominant of late capitalism. *Falling out of Cars* is a non-allegorical narrative which does not allude to any external interpretative framework to complete its meaning. Noon's speculative elements and tropes maintain a complex polysemy which overtly rejects any mimetic reference to historical events or states of affairs. Literature's potential, as Noon insists in his Post-Futurist manifesto, is based on the 'liquidity of its medium' and only a polysemic narrative can aim to represent the complexity of our 'fluid society' ('How to Make a Modern Novel'). Realist novels aiming to 'draw a single narrative thread' in this 'complex world' will inevitably fail in this representative attempt ('How to Make a Modern Novel'). The polysemy and 'liquidity' of speculative elements of *Falling out of Cars* articulate the complexity of capitalism's radical colonisation of all domains of everyday life. Metaphors, such as the 'noise' or Kingsley's mirrors shards,

operate in a literalised and non-figurative manner in which meaning is embedded within the totality of the text and its internal realism. Their meaning must be interpreted according to the world-building at work in its narrative space. Speculative fiction narratives, such as *Falling out of Cars*, can be interpreted as following James Bridle's (2018) call for 'new metaphors: a metalanguage for describing the world that complex systems have wrought' (5). Rather than drawing a single narrative thread across this complexity, *Falling out of Cars* presents a catatonic textuality at the verge of breakdown and stasis.

Reading Jeff Noon to argue against Jameson and Deleuze and Guattari makes us reassess contemporary tendencies in late capitalism. Speculative elements like the noise make evident the fact that the use of clinical studies in cultural studies is inherently metaphorical. Schizophrenia, in Wood's view, has been 'used and abused' as a metaphor in cultural theory to describe the everyday experience of modern and post-modern standing 'for a *general* mode of Western late twentieth-century subjectivity' (184; italics in original). This implementation of schizophrenia, nonetheless, does not necessarily 'render the term virtually empty' by redefining the 'disorder as quotidian [...] no longer pathological' and simply serving as an 'illustrative of contemporary subjectivity per se' (184). On the contrary, these cultural studies elaborate on clinical accounts in order to analyse the relationship between private and social phenomena from the broader scope of capitalism as a shared mode of experience. This does not necessarily imply an appropriation of serious mental illnesses to explain peripheral social tendencies, but, rather, to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between subjectivity and culture as historically contingent dimensions of global capitalism. The metaphorical use of clinical terms emphasises the commonality of these seemingly unrelated phenomena. Likewise, fantastic elements in Noon's *Falling out of Cars* articulate a visible and substantial shared causality between subjectivity and cultural dominant; an imperceptible link which would otherwise go unnoticed by a mimetic or realist approach.

The dystopian universe of *Falling out of Cars* does not operate as a social prognosis, but as a metaphor to speculate on contemporary tendencies found in its historical moment of publication. Dystopian fiction, as Andrew Milner (2009) argues,

requires for its 'political efficacy an *implied connection with the real*: the whole point of utopia or dystopia is to acquire some positive or negative leverage on the present' (221). The premise of the novel is dystopian in this sense considered by Milner, that is, it provides an implicit commentary on historical conditions at its time of publication. Positing catatonia as the dominant logic of late capitalism means that there is a limited extent to which the subject can adapt to this chaotic mode of experience. Marlene's melancholic attachment to the past is expressed in her writing as a strategic response to the noise breakdown of temporality: '[w]e're losing all the traces, all the moments of the world, one by one. I have to keep writing' (24). Noon's dystopian universe stands as a metaphor for capitalism and its discontents. The text is preoccupied with questions concerning capitalism and subjectivity which reflect its connection to real historical shifts and events. This dystopian narrative can be seen as extrapolating many historical tendencies signalling this new cultural dominant. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi's *Heroes* (2015) is a historical compendium of these events: the sustained erosion of time for sleep to six and a half hours; the worldwide rise of suicide rates by 60 per cent in the last forty-five years; the total estimate of 350 million people worldwide suffer from depression according to the WHO; the emergence of variants of suicide, such as the *Hikikomori* in Japan – individuals who have made the decision to sever all relations with the outside world. These phenomena are not only indicative of a departure from postmodern joyous affects but, more importantly, indicative of a fundamental incompatibility between the individual's cognitive abilities and her abilities to cope with social reality.

Catatonia might seem, at first glance, as an even more debilitating position to postmodern accounts of schizophrenia; one asserting the solipsistic and passive resignation of the subject with regards to its own predicament. This situation is what Marlene describes as a pulling of events: 'I simply feel the pulling of events. The pull, the pulling. Things are happening to me, one by one, and if only I could grab hold of them, as they happen, make something of them, if only...' (98). Michel Foucault's 'Preface' to *Anti-Oedipus* can be an applicable reproach to this political stance: 'Do not think that one has to be sad in order to be militant, even though the thing one is fighting is abominable. It is the connection of desire to reality (and not its retreat

into the forms of representation) that possesses revolutionary force' ('Preface' xiii). However, it is precisely by accounting for this fundamental gap between subjectivity and social experience that catatonia can be interpreted, at the level of political praxis, as a form of resistance against capitalism's deterritorialization logic. *Falling out of Cars* does not embrace capitalism's mode of temporality but articulates an aporetic narrative structure which is constantly at odds with it: 'We all move through the noise, bound by our limits [...] scared of a touch, a word out of place, the sudden desire we can hardly dare to trust. And yet [...] And yet, this connection' (99). Marlene's diary entries are a resilient yet ineffective attempt to reterritorialize her experience of the world; a situation originating from both her melancholy connection to the memory of her dead daughter and the noise's threat to efface the traces of her existence: 'The pen, the body, and all that flows between, not to murder you but to bring desire to you, Angela' (304). Catatonia, in this sense, is a refusal to fully accept social practice and the way in which experience has been socially arranged for the subject.

### **Catatonic Temporality: Deterritorialization and Reterritorialization**

Both catatonia and schizophrenia involve a breakdown of the signifying chain, leading to the isolation of the present from the past and the future. What separates these conditions is the result of this mode of temporality: while in schizophrenia the subject affirmatively embraces the breakdown of the signifying chain by constantly mobilizing her mental energies; in catatonia, the subject experiences the breakdown of the signifying chain as a threat leading to immobility and stasis. While both states involve a certain degree of passiveness, a contemplative experience of the present without any orientation towards future actions, catatonia represents a rejection rather than an affirmation of this mode of temporality. *Falling out of Cars* represents how this mode of temporality is experienced according to negative affects such as loss of reality, anxiety and solipsistic isolation. Noon's liquid fiction, as Andrew Wenaus remarks, does not refer to 'a unified system of knowledge' and is '[m]arked by radical fragmentation of form and narrative strategies that decompose reality' ('Fractal Narrative' 161). This speculative fiction novel remains faithful to the prem-

ise of cultural studies on schizophrenia by expanding its horizon of interpretation to bleaker tendencies and possibilities.

Another contribution that the text makes to cultural studies of schizophrenia is its use of a female narrator. As Woods remarks, most cultural studies about this topic deal, either implicitly or explicitly, with subjectivity as a male-dominated mode of experience (149). Following novels such as Joanne Greenberg's *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden* (1964) and Marge Pierce's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), the narrative explores how this mode of experience is connected to struggles specific to the social experience of women. The melancholy disposition of Marlene is deeply linked to her state as a grieving single mother and the loss of her only child, Angela, whom she lost due to the noise's pervasive effects and her dubious medical treatment by Lucidity – the company profiting from the noise's effects. As Wenaus argues, 'Noon's use of environmental noise as understood in information theory serves as a metaphor for the emotional state of loss' ('The Chaotics of Memory' 261). Most male characters, such as her father and ex-husband, are nameless and exert their influence through their abandonment. This is the case of the abandonment she experienced as child caused by her father: 'My father [...] I do not think of him very often, and when I do it is only as an absence, an unknown object, a shape in the mist [...] always with his back to me' (75). As her recapitulation of death of Angela shows, both male characters are defined by their distance and absence:

Angela's body, her lovely coffin, her hair and skin and bones and flesh, all sent to flames. The little church. My mother's face all creased with pain, beyond reach; and the space beside her where my father should have stood. And my husband across the aisle from me, distant (103).

Noon's narrative displays how, from Marlene's melancholy standpoint, the noise's deterritorialization of time and erasure of past recollections are threatening effects to what she holds most dearly: her memories of Angela. This simple detail is completely dismissed by theoretical accounts of schizophrenia, for whom this breakdown of temporality either entails a liberation of desire (Deleuze and Guattari) or a joyous embracement of the materiality of the present (Jameson). As Val Gough points out,

Noon's work displays a 'cyberpunk feminist sensibility' by articulating how 'cyberpunk *can* begin to pursue the radical possibilities of feminist thinking' (126; italics in original). *Falling out of Cars* displays how patriarchal structures are integrated into the cultural dominant and are key to achieve a better understanding of her reaction to the noise's effects.

The text depicts how catatonia emerges from the interplay between capitalism's deterritorialization and reterritorialization components represented by the dominant forces shaping Marlene's narration: the plague called the noise and its corporately-prescribed remedy, Lucidity. In order to provide a minimal degree of coherence to their experience of the world, the characters must consume daily doses of Lucidity – a drug sold by a company profiting from the noise's effects: 'What would I be, without Lucidity? I would not be able to write, I would have no real understanding of words, as they are spoken. The world would fill up with noise and I would be lost, completely' (37). Lucidity combats the noise's deterritorializing symptoms by reterritorializing Marlene's perception of time, that is, by allowing her to save the past and suture the disjointed fragments of the present. However, as Henderson remarks, the company profits from this mode of temporality: 'Fucking bastard company... the money they're making from this' (26). Lucidity reconstitutes the temporality at the verge of extinction by the noise: the past determining her position in the present and the future orienting her actions. This drug is, despite these ameliorating effects, highly addictive and, as Angela's case shows, its overdose can cause catatonia and, ultimately, death:

They said an overdose brought a veil down, between yourself and the world, a veil so black that nothing could be truly experienced; nothing touched, nothing seen or heard, nothing tasted. They said it closed up the body, sealed it. And this is what they did to Angela, towards the end. Encircled her with darkness. Is this what I now desire, for myself? (38)

In a similar manner to the account of Deleuze and Guattari, catatonia 'gives its model to death' (375). Marlene's narration exhibits how the interplay between the noise and Lucidity brings about this mode of temporality and leads to a paralysis of cogni-

tive abilities. Due to its self-referential narrative structure, the diary operates as both a reflection and means of resistance against the pervasive effects of this mode of temporality. Marlene's diary entries are a conscious effort to reterritorialize and provide a minimal degree of order to the deterritorializing logic of the noise. Lucidity, the drug produced and consumed to counteract these pervasive effects, serves an apparently similar purpose and, rather than being depicted as a cure for the noise, it shows how individuals can reach a catatonic state through radical reterritorialization.

### **Catatonic *Écriture*: Losing the Traces of the World**

*Falling out of Cars* is, in stylistic terms, as Wenaus has noted, with the exception of *Needle in the Groove*, a much more complex and experimental novel than its predecessors ('The Chaotics of Memory' 260). The noise and Lucidity are not only speculative elements dealt by the plot of the novel, but forces shaping its narrative and bringing about its catatonic structure. The noise and Lucidity are forces that respectively deterritorialize and reterritorialize Marlene's narration; a stylistic feature which links catatonia's individual and social dimensions as a cultural dominant. Lucidity is what allows Marlene to articulate her narrative account of events, position herself as a person with a fixed identity and organise her temporal experience of the world: 'I have taken advantage of the needle's sweetness, *to hold the day in words*; and the pages I have just written, and the page already written, they seem to make a kind of sense now. I have knowledge of the story once more, *my own story, my place in the story* (215; italics in original). As Marlene succumbs to the effects of the noise, her narration becomes increasingly distorted: poetic imagery supersedes narrative purposes; her memories of past narrated events are erased; and, ultimately, she dissociates herself from narrated events: 'I have called her name. My name. My own name. We have the same name' (269). The influence of the noise, as Marlene explains, is textually manifested through mistakes and displacements: 'Mistakes [...] Pages are ripped, or torn out completely; some discarded, others taped into new positions [...] This is the story' (11). This uncertainty between message and receiver is also expressed as a relationship among selected and discarded diary entries: 'I've decided to make a new start [...] Many times before I have done this, and always each time the

confusion takes over' (11). This last detail also opens the consideration if the text is supposed to be Marlene's final version or some of her failed attempts. *Falling out of Cars*, thus moves away from schizophrenia's heightening of materiality by disrupting the reliability of the text in both a paradigmatic – as a message intended text by its author – and syntagmatic level – as an objective account of the events represented.

The impossibility of finding recursive patterns is one of the constant motifs of *Falling out of Cars* and constitutes Noon's radicalisation of Marx and Engels' formula: 'All that is solid melts into air' (*The Communist Manifesto* 6). The chaotic temporality of the noise is constantly grappled throughout Marlene's narration in her attempt to find patterns. This is a widespread social phenomenon in the dystopian universe of the novel. As Tupelo comments, people attempt to find patterns in the radio's static hiss and transmit them as music through Radio Lucy: 'They're just sending out signals, measuring responses. Trying to find some meaning in the chaos. Some pattern or other. That's the plan of it' (110). Likewise, diary entries abound with seemingly insignificant details following no purpose: 'The yellow flowers of the wallpaper, with their silky black centres, the green shoots that twined around each other, the spray of leaves; my fingers, tracing a pathway through the tangles' (185). These descriptions are, nevertheless, strictly aimed at the task of finding patterns in order to amend her experience of the world: 'Where did each stem lead to, from which point, which root, towards which flowers? [...] I was searching for the pattern's repetition' (185). The same concern is raised by Marlene in her obsessive classification of reality: 'I have been doing things. I have been measuring. I have been counting' (263). This taxonomic activity is performed through the analysis of insignificant patterns: 'The streetlights, for example; how many along the promenade, how many back again, checking to make sure it is the same number each way' (263). Marlene's quantification of the world is strictly related to reassure her identity as an individual: 'And I have been looking for girls who remind me of other girls [...] This is called "deciphering the code". I have been searching for a face, one certain face hidden amongst the crowd, a woman's face' (263–4). The identity of these strangers can be assumed as that of Marlene and Angela respectively; an identification which is the result of an



obsessive organisation of experience according to patterns counteracting the effects of the noise.

One of the most radical examples of catatonia's mode of experience is the dissociative episodes suffered by Marlene. Most of Marlene diary entries are narrated by a first-person narrator representing her voice. This narrative unity is disrupted in some passages describing Marlene's actions by a third-person narrator and signalling her dissociation from her narration: 'I stood up. Marlene stood up. This is what happened. I watched myself standing up. Marlene watched herself standing up' (161). These passages are sometimes foreshadowed by an amnesiac effect concerning her proper name: 'I could not remember my own name. Where had it gone to?' (293). But, also, they might refer a dissociation between narrative voice and the subject committing the act of writing: 'Words being put there, on the skin with Marlene's own hand doing the writing [...] Marlene's realizing that the words, these very words, they will either enliven the girl, or kill her [...] Marlene knew that she was failing in the task' (271). This dissociative disorder is experienced according to acute negative affects and, more importantly, is linked to a primordial loss of selfhood as shown in the despair at her inability to save the memories of Angela through her writing. The act of writing is Marlene's attempt to amend her present experience of the world by relating it to her memories and future goals. In spite of her relentless pursuit, this aim is constantly undermined by the effects of the noise: 'The writing was a poison' (271). This lack of subjective unity is also experienced through her other senses: 'Music. I had not noticed before, this long stream of random notes that almost became a tune, and then becoming lost once more' (251). As her attempt to build a story shows, this predicament is related to an inability to find patterns that might enable her provide order and relate to her experience of the world as her own.

*Falling out of Cars*, despite its dystopian premise, displays in its last pages hints at some form of politics emerging from this chaotic experience of the world. As Marlene reflects, '[i]n these days of chaos, possibilities abound [...] These pages of smoke. They have their own conclusion. I can only hope that some other sweeter device or agency will cast its spell upon them, making them clean, and the world alongside' (344). Marlene alludes here to the autonomy of the text from herself as a

positive trait: she is not capable of bringing order to her narration, but an external agency or reader perhaps will. Noon himself, in his Post-Futurist Manifesto, remarks that his “liquid fiction” requires an active reader ‘adept at riding the multiple layers of information’ of a ‘fluid society’ (‘How to Make a Modern Novel’). Chaos is deemed as a fertile ground for possibilities. This final resolution is also reflected in her final diary entry as she abandons the quest to find Kingsley’s mirror and, metaphorically, her attempt to draw a narrative thread among the chaos:

Only the photograph. The one thing left to me. How it blossoms in my sight. It burns. Or else clouding over, a murmur of scent arises. In scarlet and blue it cradles; in crimson and gold it may scatter and swirl, unfold, dispersing itself. Now, let these colours cascade. Let these whispers awaken; let these sparkles compose, gleam forth, froth and foam, fizzle, burst, enclose and caress themselves, speaking themselves. Now let this tongue emerge from the light that fell once on a garden, on a child’s face, on chemicals. Let the picture overflow from itself, spilling itself. It spills over and spells out the word of itself, the blossom and bloom and perfume of itself. Only the photograph. This word, this word, almost known. Almost spoken. Louder now, softer. I will wait. Now let me wait (345).

Each element from the photograph gains autonomy from the visual composition represented in it. Synaesthesia mixes visual elements with fragrances and sounds, thus making poetic language supersede any narrative purpose. In opposition to postmodern accounts of schizophrenia, this chaotic perception of the world is not described according to joyous affects nor does it lead to embracement of the materiality of the present. The materiality of the present is undermined through synaesthesia by disintegrating the composition of Angela’s picture. This last diary entry shows the melancholy attachment of Marlene to her memories of Angela in spite of not being able to recognise her face in the picture or even being able to remember her name. Marlene’s appeal to wait for the name of her daughter to reveal itself in the future is indicative of this resolution. *Falling out of Cars’* inconclusive ending and

its appeal to wait, in this sense, depicts how the catatonic cultural dominant might bring about unforeseeable possibilities for hope and change.

The cultural dominant is not only explored through the dynamics between noise and Lucidity, but also in the quest to find the fragments of Kingsley's magical mirror. The narration constantly alludes to the impossibility of repetition and recursive patterns: mirrors distorting the character's reflections; radios and communication devices transmitting aleatory signals; intertextual references being subverted beyond recognition; and so on. The quest serves as a metaphor standing for the population's need to articulate their experience of the world and the novel's exploration of selfhood and identity. As Kingsley explains to Marlene, in the magical mirror '[n]othing is lost. Reflections cannot make their escape [...] Can you imagine, Marlene? That every face that ever gazed into this glass is kept there, alive, seduced' (36). This living quality is explicitly associated to the Narcissus myth and human self-recognition:

Kingsley had told me a little of the history. How, by looking into a pool of water, man first became aware of himself. He spoke of the myth of Narcissus, and this strange, bittersweet love affair we have with our own image; how all mirrors are only copies of that first pool of water, gathered up, bound in glass (200).

Reflections are presumably trapped within this original mirror along with this faculty of self-recognition, namely the ability of the subject to relate to the flux of experience as her own. This dissociation between subject and mirror image stands for her inability to articulate this link between identity and experience; a predicament which is directly related to the catatonic cultural dominant presented in the text. As with Jacques Lacan's mirror stage, the assumption of the specular image is the moment in which the '*I* is precipitated in a primordial form' into 'the symbolic matrix' and constitutes the basis for following socially-determined identifications – law, morality, sexuality, and so on (76). The noise's distortion of reflections acts as a literalised metaphor for the shattering of this primordial form of identification: 'the folding vanity mirror [...] The sickened glass [...] which is the one true sign and evi-

dence of life itself' (314). Catatonia emerges as a cultural dominant also due to this impossibility of relating to her experience of the world and atomising the experience of individuals: 'It was the feeling of not being looked at, not now, not by anybody, and not for any time to come and Marlene felt a panic, a sadness' (218). The quest to find the pieces for Kingsley's broken mirror, in this sense, works as a metaphor for her ultimately impotent attempts at saving her memories, the identity related to her past and her aim restore all of this through her narration.

### **Catatonic Capitalism: Sleepwalkers and The Republic of Leisure**

Lucidity is the means by which capital manifests itself in the social landscape and profits from the catatonic mode of temporality. Despite having pervasive effects on the population's experience of the world, the catatonic temporality does not interfere with the circulation of capital and is a fundamental part in its mode of production. *Falling out of Cars* establishes an asymmetrical relation between the precarious temporality at play in the psychic sphere and the mechanical capitalist regulation of time in the social field:

Very few of the stores had proper names to them. They were called things like BUTCHER, or else BAKER, or even PRODUCT. There was more than one shop called, quite simply, SHOP [...] The town hall clock was hidden behind tarpaulin... And then standing near a glass-fronted booth called DRUG, I watched an orderly queue of people having their night's supply issued to them [...] The company's eye beamed down (40).

This nonsensical Carrollian scenery is a hyperbolic representation of commodity fetishism according to which value, as the PRODUCT, SHOP and DRUG signs show, no longer is connected to the materiality of things and their use-value. Lucidity is granted a central position among the scenery and presides all the other shops from above. Despite the town hall clock not being at work (as every other device capable of tracking time due to the noise's effects), the population is orderly waiting for its night supply of Lucidity to carry on with their lives, representing its fundamental

role in the functioning of productive forces and social relations in the mode of production. The catatonic temporality experienced by individuals, as Tupelo comments, does not interfere with capitalism's organisation of labour time: 'All these people desperate to carry on with their work, even with the noise levels rising' (98). On the contrary, *Falling out of Cars* shows how the complete disarticulation of the population's perception of time, and the despair emerging from it, does not lead to social anarchy, but to an anxious need for reterritorialization and stability. In this sense, Noon's novel follows Marx's claim that '[t]he true barrier to capitalist production is *capital itself*' and that 'production is production only for *capital*' (*Capital III* 358). Noon's dystopian universe is a radicalization of this proposal by showing how mental illness is profited by Lucidity and capitalist production: the system operates at the expense and due to the population's cognitive instability.

*Falling out of Cars* not only represents how the catatonic temporality enacted by the noise and Lucidity fits into the dynamics of capitalism's production but also how it influences the sphere of consumption. This predicament is represented in the Republic of Leisure episode, where the crew stops to fill the tank of their car. The link between leisure and consumption is established at the entrance to the location, where a security guard informs them that the place is designed as 'a leisure complex' where 'only the finest of leisure activities take place' (127). The language deployed by the guard, his cheerful voice and good manners, resembling the corporate demeanour of advertisements, are, as Peacock explains, a result of Lucidity overdose (128). Within the leisure complex, residents consume and overdose on the cheapest variety of Lucidity (128). Rather than becoming more conscious about the world surrounding them, addicts become sleepwalkers, as Peacock refers to them: 'The cold trance; too much Lucidity. The mind just lifted up and sharpened so much, it could do nothing more than contemplate some far-off realm, and the world became a place that other people lived in' (130). Sleepwalkers follows Marx's logic of labour exploitation in which the worker 'becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him' (*The Communist Manifesto* 12). This complete state of dissociation is what Tupelo suspects is the future of the world: 'Is this really the future, Marlene? Really? People

doped up, all the hours of everyday of the year' (135). This state of dissociation, in spite of its negative connotations, is actually contemplated as a tempting fate by Marlene:

I needed some time. I wanted to let the bad day grow steady, inside. And the idea came to me then. Maybe I could just walk away? Maybe I could just walk into the crowd here at this place and take all the cheap Lucy I could find. That would be good. Memories would die. Maybe I could lose myself this way, become folded and bound and lost for ever (133).

Contrary to Deleuze and Guattari's schizo revolutionary, the deterritorialization of desire here leads to passive complicity with the capitalist mode of production. *Falling out of Cars* depicts a world in which laws are no longer enacted by authority figures and permissiveness has spread across the globe. Despite this seemingly emancipatory effect, leisure is completely assimilated by the mode of production to the point in which subjects, like Sleepwalkers, lose their individuality. Catatonic temporality does not only involve the contemplation of life as a sequence of unrelated moments, but, ultimately, the complete withdrawal from life, leaving the body to serve as an organ for the reproduction of capital as the guards and sleepwalkers: producing and consuming.

Sleepwalkers, similar to the zombified catatonic schizos described by Deleuze and Guattari, also partake in the circulation of capital, even though in its most marginal and precarious sectors. Sleepwalkers consume the cheapest variety of Lucidity and are described as contemplating 'some far-off realm' distanced from the world where the rest of the people live in (130). This radical social stagnation is symbolised at the beginning of the chapter by the white dove printed on the Republic of Leisure flags (129). The symbol of peace and Christianity, under this context, operates as a metaphorical reformulation of the Marxist phrase 'religion is the opium of the masses.' The opium in this context, however, is Lucidity and its consumption for leisure works, as in the Marxist formula, as a means to alienate the population from objective conditions of existence. Lucidity nullifies any possibility of violent revolt as

it is portrayed in the disaffected fight between two sleepwalkers among the market stalls: 'A fight was going on between two middle-aged men and nobody paid it much attention. It was a tired and lazy fight without any real violence to it' (129). Catatonic workers are detached from reality and described as absentminded and happy, and are completely unaware of the exploitation of their labour: 'How long have you been here?' I asked [...] 'I don't rightly know, madam' (133). The catatonic mode of experience nullifies any insurrection or agency on the part of the subject, who is unable to orient her actions towards the future, let alone relate to objective conditions of existence. In spite of these symptoms, capital is circulating through all its different stages: commodities are being sold in market stalls, workers are being exploited for their social labour, leisure is integrated into the sphere of production and consumption. Catatonic workers and sleepwalking consumers are integral parts of capitalist production.

*Falling out of Cars* forces readers to reassess historical tendencies in global capitalism and poses multiple challenges to cultural studies on postmodern schizophrenia. The novel provides an alternative to postmodern accounts on cultural schizophrenia by provides how capitalism's organisation of social practice is experienced according to negative affects – melancholy, dissociation, anxiety and disorientation. By positing catatonia as the cultural logic of late capitalism in its dystopian future, the text allows for a historical understanding of subjectivity as a social phenomenon. This dystopian future is closely connected to material developments in the mode of production as represented in the Lucidity industry and its hyper-commodified narrative space. The centrality of Lucidity in the narrative space involves the premise that there is a fundamental incompatibility and gap between capitalist social practice and the cognitive abilities of the subject to cope with it. This catatonic future illustrates the point that capitalism can profit from widespread mental instability as presented in the transversal use of Lucidity in capital production – its reterritorialising role in social labour as exemplified by catatonic workers; its consumption as commodity for leisure by sleepwalkers; and its generation of profit in the pharmacological industry. Fantastic elements, such as the noise and the mirror shards, are also crucial and serve as

metaphors rendering visible this mode of experience and its impact on subjectivity – memories, identity and desire. While catatonia might seem to be an even more debilitating position than schizophrenia, it implies the idea that individuals cannot be assimilated into the mode of production according to joyous affects. The melancholy experienced by Marlene and expressed in the narrative fabric of the text are a manifest reflection of this aporetic struggle between subject and social reality. This catatonic disjunction between individual and social reality is explored in a productive manner throughout the narrative by showing how the subject experiences and reacts to it. Catatonia is both a reflection and reaction against this social discontent and can be the starting point for revolutionary praxis. As Marlene remarks in the last pages of the text, '[i]n these days of chaos, possibilities abound' (344).

### Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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