

Artificial Intensities: The Question of Reality and Immersion in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*

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Abstract:

This paper aims to analyze the methods through which reality may be attained in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*. Through a post-structuralist, chiefly Deleuzian lens, I argue that *Remainder* presents the reader with a return to the postmodern conception of the 'real', while also affirming the necessity, both subjective and objective, of moving beyond it. Such a stance is, I argue, only apparently paradoxical, absurd. In *Remainder*, this article proposes, reality is achieved through artificiality, and not around it, by accelerating a process of performative immersion which facilitates what Deleuze and Guattari consider to be a fundamental property of artificiality: its tendency to self-destruct.

Keywords: post-structuralism, intensity, post-postmodernism, performativity, representation, reality, immersion

1. Introduction

Tom McCarthy's fiction occupies a distinct position within the space of contemporary fiction. A self-declared absolute post-structuralist¹, McCarthy nevertheless writes in a contemporary, post-postmodern vein, primarily through engaging with recent trends in literary and philosophical theory: posthumanism, New Materialisms, Speculative Realism, and so on. This engagement is easily noticeable when surveying the common themes and motifs in his novels. In all his work, Tom McCarthy writes, I argue, to answer a simple yet infinitely complex question: how can one gain access to reality? Both from the perspective of a subject tormented by their own artificiality and from the perspective of a posthuman desire to do justice to materiality, McCarthy's novels describe the contemporary ontological status of both the human and the inhuman, with a particular emphasis on the interaction between the two. Crucially, however, McCarthy assumes this materialist stance which seems to be prevalent in contemporary art without abandoning the post-structuralist distancing from reality and affirmation of artificiality. Unlike other works emerging from the contemporary literary scene, McCarthy's not only allow for post-structuralist readings, but virtually demand them, while also being open to more recent concerns emerging in the wake of postmodernism. It is to this peculiar, yet, as I will strive to show, surprisingly productive mix of post-

structuralism and a contemporary scene oriented precisely against it, that I will dedicate the inquiries of this article. More specifically, this article aims to highlight the ways in which, in McCarthy's fiction, reality is paradoxically a product and a property of representations. In order to show this, I will be closely analyzing McCarthy's debut and breakthrough novel, *Remainder* (2005), where, I propose, the much-desired real emerges when artificiality is accelerated, intensified, to the point that the human merges not with the real, but with the fake, producing a nonhuman intensity that allows the real to resurface uninhibitedly. Initially, I will provide a brief summary of *Remainder* (section 2), to then emphasize the protagonist's postmodernist condition (section 3.1), and, subsequently, to describe his process of re-immersion (sections 3.2 and 3.3). Informed by the post-structuralist works of Deleuze and Guattari, I will argue that such an immersion is, once again, the product of embracing the artificial, rather than attempting to bypass it.

2. Summary

McCarthy's both debut and breakthrough novel, *Remainder* tells of an unnamed narrator protagonist's attempt to recover from an incident which leaves him incapable of performing any human action naturally. Having been hit in the head by a falling object – a mysterious event which is never discussed in detail yet which nevertheless permeates the plot of the novel – the protagonist (whom I will hence be referring to as X) finds himself unable to move, act, think and so on, without first understanding mechanically each step involved in it. For all intents and purposes, he has become a machine, a robot. This condition appears, we are told, immediately after X emerges from a deep comatose state in which the accident has placed him. The action itself starts with the concretization of the Settlement, an agreement by which X agrees never to mention the accident to anybody in exchange for eight and a half million pounds in compensation from the responsible parties. The absurdity and obscurity of this Settlement is augmented by the fact that X could never have mentioned the event in the first place, since he has lost all memory of his life before the accident. Regardless, X's lawyer Daubenay sees the affair finished, leaving X in a fascinating situation – an incredibly rich robot. Of the narrator's past life, the reader is only afforded with minimal information which is made available through two of X's friends: Greg and Catherine. Towards both of them, X feels distant and indifferent, especially when they try to help X decide what to do with his money. X then employs a stock-broker, Younger, with whom he decides to invest a great amount in the domains of technology and telecommunications.

The plot picks up in intensity when X, while at a house party, notices a crack in the wall of the bathroom which causes him to remember (though the factualness of this remembrance is questionable) a moment from his past. In this key moment, X is in his apartment, doing nothing extraordinary but nevertheless feeling real, immersed in life. The protagonist then decides to re-enact this precise moment, by staging it as faithfully as possible. With the help of a facilitator, Naz, and the money from the Settlement, a suitable building is bought, re-enactors are employed and everything is designed perfectly down to the most minute of details. X will then repeat certain movements –

going down the stairs, opening the fridge door, etc. - specific moments, to the point of perfection, when he feels most real. Throughout the rest of the novel, several such other moments are re-enacted: replacing a tire at a garage, a drive-by shooting, leading up to a final re-enactment, a bank heist. During all of these re-enactments, X experiences moments of intensity which not only cause him to feel real, but also plunge him into momentary lapses of consciousness which mirror his initial comatose state.

While in one of such trance-like moments, X realizes that his re-enactments are imperfect because they isolate specific events from reality, instead of merging them with it. Thus, X decides that his last re-enactment, the bank heist, should be conducted at the real bank. Naz, who designed and arranged all of the previous stagings, organizes this one as well, devising escape plans for X and several other re-enactors, while planning to kill the less important ones after the event. The re-enactment itself goes horribly wrong when one of the re-enactors trips and shoots another one. Regardless, X is jubilant, having finally managed to become immersed in life. The novel ends with X, Naz and a couple of other re-enactors on a plane, running from the scene. When authorities demand that the plane land, X hijacks it and has the pilot turn the plane continuously, in a figure eight pattern. Suspended, stuck, repeating the same artificial motion again and again, X nevertheless feels real.

3.1 The Condition

The beginning of McCarthy's *Remainder* is obscure to say the least. "Technology, parts, bits" (McCarthy 2005, 10) have had their say, and the protagonist is irreparably damaged, traumatized. He now has to understand everything – it is his absolute imperative: "I've learnt to do things slowly since the accident, understanding every move, each part of what I'm doing. I didn't choose to do things like this: It's the only way I can do them" (14). Precisely because he must think before he acts, he is separated from reality. It is therefore not necessarily the machinic behavior which X employs that is problematic, but rather that the behavior itself is only available through understanding; nothing is automatic, nothing is natural. Worse, than a machine, the narrator is "a low-quality machine" (38). Worse than artificial, he is self-consciously and self-reflexively artificial. One may liken this condition to the post-structuralist or postmodern one: "the novel begins with the recognizable postmodern lamentation of mediated existence" Irmtraud and Seita concur in their study on *Remainder* (262). Immediate access to reality is prohibited by the conscious interference of the subject, causing an insufferable alienation. What is important to note here is that X is not somehow rendered inhuman by the accident. Although several critics² have argued that McCarthy's protagonist is traumatically altered - rendered less human - by the accident, I would argue that, far from this, the human condition since the advent of modernity has been precisely that of absolute self-reflexiveness. In other words, X's desire to merge with his surroundings, his longing for an authentic way of being should not be associated with a desire to be human, but rather with a desire to transcend subjectivity and humanity. The protagonist, in Greg's words in the novel, is simply "more usual than everyone else" (59). Therefore, the accident ought not to be interpreted as a

disruptive event, as something which radically alters the subject's way of being. Rather, what the accident constitutes is precisely the birth of the subject itself. Out of the void of a comatose, preconscious state, X has negotiated his own existence, an existence which leaves him inert, indifferent, secluded. Let us now reconsider, then, both the accident and the Settlement itself. Nothing causes X to behave differently. Instead, the event with which the novel opens creates life as one knows it. Considered from this perspective, thus, the Settlement cannot be seen as a compensation for existing. Rather, I would propose that the absurd amount of money X receives is paradoxically part of the event. Money alienates, abstractifies reality. Further yet, perhaps the accident is nothing but the Settlement: a contract, one which provides the subject with the means to represent reality (currency), but one which simultaneously prohibits one from attempting to make sense of it. We are now, I argue, in an initial context of post-structuralist conditioning: alienated, separated. How do we approach what is real? Is there such a thing at all?

In recovering from such a frustratingly human condition, X is told to concentrate his efforts on understanding: "Understanding ... cuts circuits through your brain that will eventually allow you to perform the act itself. That's the idea" (48). There are dozens of steps involved in performing even the most basic of actions, such as walking, or holding a carrot, and the narrator is encouraged to visualize all of them, combine them; at some point, he is told, things will come naturally. Conceptualization, thinking, both constitute the condition of our protagonist, yet at the same time, they are held to be the solution to it as well. In theoretical terms, this is as if to say that the answer to a post-structuralist condition which gravitates around the real but never touches it, through endless linguistic chains of deferral and repetitive, complex abstraction is to delve deeper yet into this cognitive process; that somehow understanding will undo itself, revealing reality in its entirety. Yet this inevitably fails, because there will always be something left out, something which resists understanding or which when understood is misrepresented – namely, matter. Matter which is "dirty and irregular ... and you know, as soon as you see it, ... that it's not going to work" (49). Throughout the novel, X will repeatedly encounter things, objects, which disrupt his efforts of immersion; and as he himself remarks, "my undoing [is] matter" (43). If, then, understanding is our protagonist's condition, matter and materiality constitutes his absolute failure.

Nevertheless, the narrative indulges in speculating on the possibility of such conscious appropriation of reality. In a programmatically post-structuralist section of the novel, X misleads the reader by constructing an episode in which he observes and later approaches a beggar on the street. This latter individual seems to the protagonist to be in tune with matter, to be one and the same with it. X offers to buy the beggar a meal, to then ask him about his condition, in hopes of discovering, of understanding some deeper secret with regards to reality. Yet, as we progress, the narrative starts to gradually break down. If the waiter was first described as an old lady, they then become an Italian young woman; further yet, the white wine they order inexplicably becomes red when it is spilled. All of this leads to a final rejection of the story itself, when X confesses that all of this had been made up. He never approached the beggar in the first place, because he too, like all the other people X observes

while drinking coffee, was fake, artificial. Their every aspect was constructed, and even though they seemed to be immersed, it was all just a representation, a simulation: “and their swaggering, their arrogance: a cover. Usurpers. Frauds ... I didn’t go and talk to him. I didn’t want to, didn’t have a thing to learn from him” (148) There is nothing that understanding can do for X. McCarthy’s own conclusion here completely rejects efforts of rational speculation, of pure cognitive understanding. If one is to break representation, to transcend, understanding reality is not the way to go. X at least understands this.

3.2 Representations and Intensity

While at the movies with Greg, the protagonist can’t help but admire the actor’s performance. X is in awe at “how perfect De Niro was. Every move he made, each gesture was perfect, seamless” (57). Counterintuitively, it is the artificial reality, the filmed, staged one, which X can appreciate more than the real people on the real street. As opposed to De Niro’s performance, X’s interactions with Greg seem off: “It felt strange – the whole exchange. I felt we hadn’t done it right” (77). Additionally, another moment in which the protagonist feels an intensity which approximates a real state of being is when begging for money in the subway station. This, shortly after having been made a multi-millionaire, comes across as ridiculous – a man pretending to beg, even though he has more than enough. Despite the absurdity of it all, he feels real: “It made me feel so ... intense that I felt almost real” (109). What is common to both of the previously mentioned instances is their artificiality. In both performances, there is that which one would immediately call fake. Both X and De Niro go through motions, perform acts which are controlled, unnatural, and still they manage to project a degree of intensity which cannot be ignored. How is this possible? It is essential that this question be answered, because these are not isolated cases; at this early point in the novel, these two instances constitute merely intimations of what is to come and what is to dominate the rest of the narrative – the re-enactments.

The episode which prompts X to launch into his re-enacting mania calls for a close analysis. While at the house party, X wanders aimlessly through the apartment, his movement resembling that of a figure eight – which is a recurring motif in the novel. He is “bored – by people, ideas, the world: everything” (151), until he discovers a break in the pattern he had been tracing – a spare bathroom, outside the figure eight pattern of the apartment. Having entered, he notices the crack in the wall which will prove quintessential to the economy of the novel. Both the crack and the bathroom itself entail an outsideness of sorts. They are beyond structured patterns, beyond unifying, standardizing conceptualization. While the bathroom may be seen as a remainder, a residual which resists understanding, the crack itself – which is more important – is a complete negation of representation; it is an absence, a void. Strangely, however, it is out of this crack that the memories of a lost reality quite literally overflow in X’s mind. Already, then, one is presented with a hint as to the nature of this reality; namely, this memory appears out of thin air, with no solid, ‘real’ foundation. It is the product of the void, just like X himself. This is doubly confirmed by X’s adamant decision

which he makes in that bathroom: “I’d been real [in his memory] ... Right then I knew exactly what I wanted to do with my money. I wanted to reconstruct that space [the apartment] and enter it so that I could feel real again” (164). Two things are essential to notice here. Firstly, it is not by chance that the narrator specifies that it is “with [his] money” that the re-enactments will have been made possible. On the contrary, money proves to be the driving motor behind the creation and recreation of all the ensuing re-enactments. This speaks volumes as to the nature of those future representations. Specifically, these representations appear by virtue of the power of an abstraction, of an alienating force: money. They appear out of the ‘crack’ that economics is for reality (a negation of the latter). Secondly, in the same sentence that X mentions the idea of ‘reconstructing’ something, he also affirms that he will definitely “feel real again”. The underlying affirmation here, is that reality pertains to the representational, to the constructed, to the structured. Contrary to what multiple critics have pointed out³, reality for McCarthy is not that remainder which resists representation; rather, it is representation and nothing else. X, who by virtue of his condition is forced to question and ponder everything, does not stop, even for a second, to ask himself if reality might be other than constructed. Reality, then, pertains to performance, to spectacle; it can be designed, minutely calculated, and then felt. To this extraordinary effort, whose assumptions and implications previously described he does not comprehend, X nevertheless spends all his time, money and energy; he builds life.

It is essential to differentiate between the former two modes of constructing representation. On the one hand, there is the representing of reality through understanding. As previously mentioned, this is not a feasible option for X, nor is it for anyone. Understanding alienates. On the other hand, there is the type of representation which appears to X in that bathroom: “I couldn’t quite make it out exactly, but I got the general sense of it, the way it flowed. I let my mind flow over it, floating above it – sinking into it too, being absorbed by it” (176). What is prefigured here is intensity in its purest form. When X represents, he has no rationality based on which he makes his decisions; instead, the represented must feel right. Romantic as this may sound, this notion of intensity is in fact much closer to the Deleuzian one, a pre-personal intensity which not only resists conceptualization, but is also oriented directly against the subject. To this notion of intensity, as well as to the Deleuzian undertones it carries, I will return later, when dealing with the re-enactments themselves.

Before turning to the first re-enactment, however, one more scene calls for attention. When designing the re-enactments, X employs Naz to coordinate the logistics of it all. Several people are employed to scour London for an adequate building to purchase in order to stage X’s recovered memory. However, the protagonist is fully aware that only he can find the correct building. Still, he has Naz keep his people looking, and this is “because I liked the process, liked the sense of pattern” (237). Naz’ role, essentially, is that of arranging and organizing matter into the desired form for X. From a materialist perspective, then, this entire process is worse than artificial; it is transcendental – the subject’s tyranny over the object. And yet X likes the process, not only because of the ecstasy afforded by tyranny, but also – and perhaps more importantly - because he feels in it the same type

of intensity he experienced in the recovered memory. Consequently, not only is reality nothing but a representation, but the act of representing itself creates an intensity which immerses one in life. Accordingly, when, in the following paragraphs, I will be analyzing the re-enactments, the emphasis will not be placed on the extent to which X and Naz succeed in rendering them mimetic, realistic, but on the extent to which these re-enactments will have managed to perform fluently, if artificially, in order to channel intensity through representations.

The process of staging a re-enactment is tedious, to say the least. Everything has to match the memory X had, and so not only do many objects need to be carefully modified – the floor sanded to seem older, the stairway littered, windows smudged just the right way, the fridge’s door modified to open in a certain manner – but the re-enactors themselves have to comply to rather odd requirements. One of the neighbors must cook an exact amount of liver in a precise way to create a smell which is to waft up to X’s own apartment. Another, a pianist, has to make mistakes exactly how the memory dictated, while yet another neighbor is to continuously work on his motorbike, revving the engine to annoy the pianist at times. X himself has to practice brushing past the windowsill in just the right way, to create the sensation he had previously recalled. In a word, matter is controlled as much as possible. When it is all perfected, the narrator will “move throughout the space ... as I see fit. We’ll concentrate on different bits at different times. Different locations, different moments ... The combinations are endless” (220). Already, then, we move away from mere mimesis. X is in the ‘wrong’ places at the ‘wrong’ time; he does not aim to behave as if the re-enactment were real. Instead, he wants to take as much intensity in as possible. What the protagonist is working towards, in other words, is a more intensive type of representation; he refines, he crafts a specific image, “stripping away surplus matter” (229) allowing specific intensities to pass through.

Naturally, he fails. For the most part – and all of this is valid for all re-enactments – matter creeps in, ruining the ‘correct’ experience. Be it a smell of cordite, the cats on the opposite building’s roof falling too often, or the neighbor taking the trash out incorrectly, the re-enactment is more often than not inadequate. Yet, in a few but crucial moments, it all works, and matter behaves. Intensity then flows, and the narrator is real: “For a few seconds I felt weightless ... light but dense at the same time. My body seemed to glide fluently and effortlessly through the atmosphere around it – gracefully, slowly, like a dancer through water. It felt very good” (354). X then obsessively repeats the sequence which worked, feeling the same vertigo again and again, reminding us that this is not a unique, Romantic experience, but a carefully crafted product: “Again I felt the sense of gliding, of light density. The moment I was in seemed to expand and become a pool – a still clear pool that swallowed everything up in its calm contentedness” (363). Repetition is crucial here, since it shows that performativity in McCarthy’s vision is never transcendental: “The realness I was after wasn’t something you could just “do” and then have “got”: it was a state, a mode – one that I needed to return to again and again and again” (586-587). In other words, the experience of representation and intensity through performance is not simply a matter of doing the correct movements, but rather a matter of continuous, repetitive motion. Assuredly, the quality of the re-enactment matter extremely; yet at least

as important is their mind-numbing, trance-inducing repetition. Moreover, it is noticeable that the moment “swallows everything up”; in one sense, when intensity flows properly, the matter which had previously been constrained, modelled in specific ways, now becomes free – free of representation, and free of conceptualization. This idea is further reinforced through the narration itself. Overwhelmingly, the re-enactment episodes are dominated by long, strenuous descriptions of materiality; pages on pages of matter seem to pour on the reader, making conspicuous the amount of matter being controlled. However, in those moments of pure intensity, neither the narrator nor the reader is in contact with materiality. It has suddenly vanished, and what is left is the energy of the performance. Consequently, when intensity is achieved, a negative representation of matter emerges. This is when objects are freed, and when matter matters.

Of such moments as the latter, criticism has tended to provide two opposite interpretations. On the one hand, Violi's reading provides a perfect example of a transcendentalist reading when she argues that repetitions have “the capacity to penetrate the texture of material life” (Violi 2018, 106). Violi's transcendentalism here has to do with a decided affirmation of the possibility of interacting with materiality in and of itself – through repetition, Violi thus argues, one bypasses phenomenology, achieving a noumenal relationship with the object. Though I tend to agree that this is indeed the result of re-enacting repetitively, I nevertheless disagree that there is any sort of ‘penetration’ occurring in such scenes. Instead of the latter, what happens is an intensification of representation alone; there is no contact with materiality itself, only with phenomena which are accelerated in their performance to the point of meltdown. There is no transcendence going on; the subject is simply immersed in a trance, in a powerful vertigo, while, around him, matter flows freely, unobserved, untouched. On the other hand, criticism such as Irmtraud and Seita's argues that, during such moments of intensity, “matter is distilled into aesthetic form” (Irmtraud, Seita 2012, 267); that re-enactments, in other words, further degenerate the already tyrannized condition of materiality. This cannot be the case in a post-structuralist, horizontalized world, where whenever there is a subject, an interdiction of direct access is placed. One cannot treat matter ‘better’ or ‘worse’; when engaging with materiality, an absolute tyranny is already established. Thus, re-enactments cannot “distill” matter; it is already as distilled as it can get. Nevertheless, as I argue here, reality can be appropriated in a negative form, by intensifying representation (“aesthetic form” in the latter author's terms), thus having it – representation - break down, open up. It is, as I will now attempt to show, all very Deleuzian.

The re-enactment is a representation – a specific moment in life, isolated and refined. This representation is not mistaken for reality. Instead, it is treated as a representation, as artificial. And yet, when intensity emerges, when the performance flows seamlessly, the representation opens up, turning on itself and ‘revealing’ matter, raw matter which cannot be observed at all. What we are presented with, I argue, is Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy in *Anti-Oedipus*. Specifically, I refer here to the notion that desiring-machines (or simply representations) function so that they may break down. There is an ontologically ‘real’ intensity which permeates representations, and, for Deleuze, this intensity is attained not by avoiding, or by dismissing representation, but by further

affirming it, accelerating its performativity to the point that it becomes deterritorialized, or schizophrenized: “Desiring machines work only when they break down, and by continually breaking down” (Deleuze, Guattari 2000, 31), Deleuze and Guattari argue, thus equating the notion of intensification with that of destruction, of dissolution. This equating lies at the theoretical core of this paper. In *Remainder* too, we have advanced, with the advent of re-enactments in the novel, from a desire to access reality, to a desire to experience one set of representations until their machinery falls apart, with a view to feeling intensity. The very notion of a re-enactment then, is synonymous with that of a desiring-machine. And, similarly to capitalism’s appropriation of desiring-machines, when one re-enactment has been intensified to its maximum capacity, our protagonist will move on to bigger, more complex ones, including more and more intensity, indefinitely. Admittedly, X is not an absolute schizophrenic in Deleuze’s conception, as that would imply the disappearance of representations; far from it, he is the exact opposite, a neurotic, bound to repeat everything, every re-enactment, again and again. Yet a schizoid world has never been a real possibility for Deleuze in the first place. His Body-without-Organs is an absolute, or a limit. What one can actually do with representations, Deleuze would have it, is precisely what X does in McCarthy’s novel – treat them as structures, as machines, and intensify artificiality, so that the process of deterritorialization may occur. Thus, despite the artificiality of it all, X feels realer and realer. In short, *Remainder*’s claim here is the very same that Deleuze and Guattari put forth when arguing that one has “to go further, to accelerate the process” (260). In order to become real, X further affirms the artificial. Such is the paradox which sustains the narrator’s longing for immersion, and as *Anti-Oedipus* tells us, “No one has ever died from contradictions. And the more it [a desiring-machine] breaks down, the more it schizophrenizes, the better it works, the American way.” (171)

The ensuing couple of re-enactments follow the same pattern, all leading to some key moments of experienced intensity. However, a number of particularities from each should be considered individually. To begin with, the premise of the second re-enactment is an accident which occurs at a car garage. X has his windshield liquid refilled, but when looking at the reservoir, he notices it has disappeared. This satisfies him, since it is matter – his nemesis - which has vanished: “matter – these two liters of liquid – becoming un-matter – not surplus matter, mess or clutter, but pure, bodiless blueness. Transubstantiated. I looked up at the sky: it was blue and endless” (McCarthy 2005, 420). After starting the engine, though, “a torrent of blue liquid burst out of the dashboard and cascaded down” (421). This is an episode of a failed transcendence, a moment of disappointment for a neurotic who longs for perfection. Nevertheless, X stages this precise moment – which begs the question: why? If previously the re-enacted moment had been one of immersion, this one is one of failure to do so. On a surface level, it would seem that this is the protagonist’s way of making peace with matter – including it in his re-enactments. This is what Miller argues in their essay, “Intentional Fallacies”⁴. Yet represented matter will always cease to be matter in and of itself. There is no way to include the remainder, the accidental, in a re-enactment; they are complete opposites. As an alternative to this interpretation, I would argue this re-enactment shows that the object of representation is irrelevant.

It does not matter whether one represents transcendence or the failure thereof; both types of representation have the same potential for intensity. One can feel real even when failing to transcend; perhaps one is even more real when this is the case. However decided X had been in the beginning to re-enact certain events, he now becomes gradually more aware that everything is a suitable candidate for his staging efforts. What the protagonist chooses to re-enact as the narrative develops becomes less and less important; X will take up and then abandon projects as he discovers others who captivate him more – it is as if his eyes have opened to the potentiality around him. What is happening here is a horizontalization of representations; there are no profound and superficial moments, there is no Romantic spot of time which demands attention. Instead – everything, everywhere, whenever; what matters is refining, getting all the details ‘right’, despite – or, as I previously argued, precisely because of – the superficiality of such a ‘rightness’.

Another important shift occurring as the re-enactments progress is that of an increasingly diminished self-awareness both on the part of the protagonist and of the other re-enactors. Initially, the relationship between X and the re-enactment he creates is that of a god and his subjects: complete control, absolute authority. In opposition to that, the latter re-enactments seem to possess X’s agency, to the extent that he no longer controls any performance: “our actions [were] passive. We weren’t doing them: they were being done” (527). The re-enactors move “mechanically, like zombies or robots” (433) while the movements themselves are “monotonous, hypnotic, endlessly repeating” (443). All of which peaks beginning with the drive-by murder re-enactment when X starts having frequent blackouts, lapsing in and out of comatose trances, especially when experiencing those moments of intensity when reality flows. And this is by no means an undesired consequence for X. Drag writes about this loss of agency as stemming from a trauma which entails “the subject’s lack of awareness of their repetitive behavior” (Drag 2015, 387). But this is obviously not the case, seeing as though X actively designs the re-enactments to be repeated exhaustively; he wants repetition to the point of annihilation not only unconsciously (if there even is such a notion in *Remainder*) but consciously, cerebrally, intellectually too. When he plays the role of the victim, who was fatally shot after falling from a bicycle, he declares that “for me, this man had become a symbol of perfection. It may have been clumsy to fall from his bike, but in dying beside the bollards on the tarmac, he’s done what I wanted to do: merged with the space around him, sunk and flowed into it until there was no distance between it and him” (484). It would seem, then, that the entire affirmed, intentional purpose of the re-enactment is to create a death of sorts – a death of consciousness. In other words, the intensification of representation not only schizophrenizes (destroys) representation itself, freeing materiality, but it also simultaneously neutralizes the human subject: “I felt myself beginning to drift into them, these surfaces – and to drift once more close to the edges of a trance” (551). Thus, in death, within a space of dying, the subject-object merger is temporarily complete.

The reappearance of comatose states sends one back to the beginning of the novel. It is the accident, along with the Settlement, which creates the protagonist’s condition. Yet now we see that an important part of the re-enactments entails reaching the very same trance-like state. Such a desire –

conscious or unconscious – to return to the origin of one’s suffering can be suggestive of the psychology of the traumatic. However, as Vermeulen extensively shows in his article on the novel⁵, McCarthy’s preoccupation is set precisely against the grain of traditional humanistic views of trauma. Instead, then, it could be argued that the annihilation of the subject as it is traditionally known may actually lead to a greater amount of intensity being channeled. Consider this initial scene, where X describes his earliest memories after the accident: “I lay abject, supine, tractioned and trussed up, all sorts of tubes and wires pumping one thing into my body and sucking another out, electronic metronomes and bellows making this speed up and that slow down, their beeping and rasping playing me, running through my useless flesh and organs like sea water through a sponge” (11). Here, we are presented not with a subject, not with an ‘I’, but with a series of material objects, all “tractioned and trussed up”, being connected to an elaborate machine meant to keep intensity flowing through the body. I would argue that it is at this point in the novel and nowhere else that X is most immersed. His every atom is part of the machine, part of materiality – he has become a conductor for intensity. In consequence, the more X loses consciousness during re-enactments, the closer he gets to his initial state, the more successful his endeavor is. The whole novel is a journey – an attempt to reappropriate not a lost life, but a lost death. An increasingly post-humanist note begins to appear here, and this should not come as a surprise, given that McCarthy himself is fully dedicated to an anti-humanist cause in literature. The author decries the persistence of a literature which is still centered around the human subject, specifically when it comes to realism as the expression of human affect⁶. Yet, perhaps even more than a simple rejection of traditional literary creation, the post-humanism presented to us in *Remainder* further stresses the importance of a disfigured, dehumanized subject. Not only should art stop emphasizing humanity, but the latter itself should be radically altered in its engagement and relation to materiality. Connected to the many intensities and flows of representations we ourselves create, we, no longer individuals but ‘dividuals’, gradually melt, becoming the very matter we had hoped to set free: “No beauty without violence, without death”, declares X (469). A typically Deleuzian future is envisioned here one in which the deterritorializations of *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* are only properly developed in the absence of the human. In the case of *Remainder*, however, the ending of the novel forces things to take a different turn.

3.3 The Solution

The protagonist had started his process of immersion by carefully selecting a moment of importance – the apartment memory -, which he then even more carefully re-enacted. Next came a moment not from a questionable past when X was realer, but an accident from his present. Following this were a series of events which X had not even witnessed when he made the decision to re-enact them. As previously mentioned, this is essentially the description of a process of horizontalizing representation: from quintessential moments to virtually anything, which is partly what Deleuze argued in his own work. Intertwined with this process is another of dehumanization,

previously analyzed, which mirrors post-humanist veins of thought. Promising as this combination may seem, it is not enough for the main character. Quite suggestively, both this acknowledgement of failure and the solution to it stem from one of the many moments in which X loses consciousness, entering a dehumanized, machinic state of being. During such an episode, the protagonist encounters the mysterious figure of a “councilor”, who bluntly interrogates him with regard to his entire project: “So when, recently, has he felt most real?” (586), the councilor asks X, referring to his interlocutor through the use of 3rd person, as if to suggest that this entire conversation is not only an interior monologue, but one in which self-reflexiveness has led to a complete disassociation from the self, the ‘I’ (a subtle post-humanist touch). This episode sets in motion a series of realizations and assessments which culminate with X deciding to move his final re-enactment – the bank heist - to the real world: “Yes, lifting the re-enactment out of its demarcated zone and slotting it back into the world, into an actual bank whose staff didn’t know it was a re-enactment: that would return my motions and my gestures to ground zero and hour zero, to the point at which the re-enactment merged with the event” (643). What occurs here is the destruction of the final barrier which distinguished between reality and representation, or re-enactment. Until this point, X had dedicated his efforts on isolating moments from reality, wresting them from the larger system of life itself, to then concentrate on performing within those secluded cross-sections. Now, an essential realization is arrived at – namely, that “cutting the detour that sweeps around what’s fundamental to events” (642) also implies performing not in isolation, but within the global system of representations. As multiple critics have quickly noticed⁷, this idea of transferring an artificial event into real life, in fact the idea of applying this to a bank robbery itself, is borrowed from Baudrillard’s *Simulations and Simulacra*⁸, where the latter author attempts to prove a point – that the real and the fake have been overlapped and intertwined to the extent that either term no longer carries any meaning. Instead of real/fake, Baudrillard famously argues, we have both and neither; we have the hyperreal, a concept which X quite literally describes as he observes the world around him on the day of the heist:

The other re-enactors in my car looked through the windows fascinated, watching shoppers, businessmen, mothers with push-chairs, and traffic wardens walking up and down the pavement, entering and leaving shops, crossing the road, milling around at bus stops ... I watched too, with the same fascination ... They were all doing it just right: standing, moving, everything – and this without even knowing they were doing it ... I knew that the re-enactment zone was non-existent, or that it was infinite, which amounted in this case to the same thing. (688-689)

An infinite re-enactment – the entirety of the world has become for the protagonist a playground for representation and intensity. All borders have collapsed, and there is no longer any isolation. As the characters glance around, taking in the complexity of everything as if for the first time, they notice the intensity, the perfection in each and every movement, each and every performance. In other words, instead of attempting to alter representations in a neurotic manner, with hopes of allowing for as much intensity to pass through as possible, what X does now is to affirm the infinite potential for intensity in

every single representation out there. There is nothing to refine here, nothing to work on; all performance is perfect performance, a conclusion which immediately sends one to Deleuze's ideal BwO – intensity liberated, flowing freely, schizophrenically. This passage, from a post-structuralist inertia to a Deleuzian vitalism, I consider to be fundamental to McCarthy's *Remainder*. It is at this point that X can finally rest his case, cease his effort for improvement. Once affirmed, the world as one big, hyperreal representation which is always, already perfect opens up to X, embraces him completely.

One final aspect needs to be considered here. What about matter? The very reason X had felt it necessary to remove his re-enactments from the influence of the world was the negative effect of “surplus matter”, which worked to ruin representations. Has something changed? Yes, it has. For the greater part of the novel, the protagonist had waged his war against matter in all its forms: “We had to treat information as matter: stop it spilling, seeping, trickling, dribbling; getting in the wrong place and becoming mess” (644). No mess was allowed. Unexpectedly, however, a gradual acceptance of this ubiquitous mess emerges. Slowly, almost unperceivably, X learns to work with representation even when it does not conform to his dictates. First it was an oil stain made by the bike enthusiast during the first re-enactment; then it was the windshield fluid bursting through the dashboard; later on it was another stain on the tarmac during the rehearsals for the bank heist. The accidental, the unaccounted for, the mistaken and erroneous, they all become gradually accepted as part of the re-enactment, contributing to its intensity channeling, as opposed to being regarded as inhibiting elements. However, it is important to clarify the status of the accidental within the novel. As previously mentioned, some criticism has seen this working with instead of against the accidental as a sign of the emergence of a new type of literature, one which stops trying to control its subject and object, one which stops being artificial by embracing the random and the absurd as part of a movement towards realism. Yet McCarthy is an avowed anti-realist; his purpose has never been to complete the modernist endeavor for authenticity, but rather to do precisely the opposite. The accidental, for him, must never be appropriated, it must remain that which arrests the subject driven by transcendental dreams. Other voices⁹ have associated the radical other, the unaccounted for, with matter itself, making of *Remainder* a novel in which matter and materiality erupts, encroaching on X's feeble attempts of control. This is a more plausible approach, yet it too falls short in assuming that materiality can erupt, facing the human head-on, and vice-versa. In truth, one never encounters the material in and of itself; the noumena are forever inaccessible. Instead, I would argue that the protagonist embraces matter not as matter, but as representation. His discovery is that, wherever and whenever he looks, he can find a complex system capable of funneling intensity, and this includes matter. By the end of the novel, X is capable of taking the accidental, the surplus, the remainder, and inscribe it into a system of re-enactments, or representations, which can produce energy. When, as X realizes, the whole world is an infinite re-enactment, there is no real remainder. Evidently, this is a totalizing view, one which affirms the subject's tyranny over the object. Yet, as I have attempted to argue, what can undo this totalizing representation is precisely its intensification. The protagonist will indulge in his infinite re-enactment to the point of annihilation; then and only then will matter have been freed.

Which is precisely what happens. Of the final re-enactment, X tells us succinctly that he knows “two things: one, it was a fuck-up; two, it was beautiful” (687). Though repeated and rehearsed obsessively, the heist goes poorly – one of the re-enactors trips and accidentally shoots another; this is matter resisting totalization once more. Before this moment, X had begun to feel real: “I’d reached an intimate cell, a chamber far beneath the surface of the movements and positions. I was right inside the pattern, merging, part of it ... an started to become real” (698). Then the accident happened, and one would expect this moment of failed transcendence to interrupt the intensity flowing through X, given that this precise moment of interruption had appeared in each and every re-enactment so far. Yet what happens is the exact opposite: “Beautiful!” X declares when the re-enactor drops dead – “The tingling really burst its banks now; it flowed onwards from my spine’s base and flowed all around my body ... The intensity augmented until all my senses were going off at once” (715). No need to stop the re-enactment; however ‘poorly’ it may go, intensity will find its way to X, who now affirms its full extent. Later on, when making his escape from the scene, X will board a plane headed to an unspecified destination. When commanded to land, the protagonist instead will have the plane endlessly turn in the air, drawing a figure eight on the sky. Why? Because while turning his “coffee cup slid to the side of the table top; coffee sloshed over the edge onto its surface. We righted again. The coffee trickled back into the middle of the table top, towards my sleeve. I didn’t move my hand out of the way; *I wanted it to stain it.*” (745, my italics). The novel ends like this, with an apparent inconclusiveness which leaves things quite literally in the air. Still, the conclusion here is more than decisive - it is enthusiastic. Everything is just a re-enactment, but it is always a perfect one.

Remainder is ultimately a novel about matter, about the possibility of co-existing with as well as controlling it: “... matter’s what makes us alive – the bitty flow, the scar tissue, signature of the world’s very first disaster and promissory note guaranteeing its last. Try to iron it out at your peril” (743). As seen here, in one of the only deeply intimate remarks of its protagonist, it is also a novel about the impossibility of negating matter by creating perfect representations of it. Yet, perhaps most importantly, McCarthy’s *Remainder* tells not of transcending this representational stage in its protagonist’s life, but rather of intensifying its capacity to the point that all matter is included in it. Through that intensity, matter matters, even though – or perhaps precisely because – the protagonist has no interest in such an ethics of materiality. In the theoretical terms which I have employed so far, this novel describes the passage from a post-structuralist inertia accompanied by post-poststructuralist speculative optimisms to a Deleuzian discovery of intensity, affirming representation and its energy in any given form, including the dreaded “surplus”, whose negative connotations dissolve as intensity flows. Through such a passage, a negative immersion is achieved, and abstraction, alienation is removed. If there is one thing to take from *Remainder*, thus, it is that there is no remainder - nothing needs to be eliminated, nothing needs to be assimilated - or that everything is a remainder, which really amounts to the same thing.

Endnotes:

1. Matthew Hart, Aaron Jaffe, Jonathan Eburne. "An Interview with Tom McCarthy." *Contemporary Literature* 54. 4 (Winter 2013): 657-682.
2. Wojciech Drag. "Compulsion to Re-enact: Trauma and Nostalgia in Tom McCarthy's "Remainder"." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies (HJEAS)* 21. 2 (2015): 377-392; Sydney Miller. "Intentional Fallacies: (Re)enacting the Accidental in Tom McCarthy's "Remainder"." *Contemporary Literature* 56. 4 (2015): 634-659; Pieter Vermeulen. "The Critique of Trauma and The Afterlife of The Novel in Tom Mccarthy's "Remainder"." *Modern Fiction Studies* 58. 3, New British Fiction (2012): 549-568.
3. Sydney Miller. "Intentional Fallacies: (Re)enacting the Accidental in Tom McCarthy's "Remainder""; Alessandra Violi. "Re-run and Re-read Tom McCarthy's Remainder as an Archeology of the Present." *English Literature* 5 (2018): 91-110.
4. Sydney Miller. "Intentional Fallacies: (Re)enacting the Accidental in Tom McCarthy's "Remainder"".
5. Pieter Vermeulen. "The Critique of Trauma and The Afterlife of The Novel in Tom Mccarthy's "Remainder"".
6. See Matthew Hart, Aaron Jaffe, Jonathan Eburne. "An Interview with Tom McCarthy". p. 676.
7. Alessandra Violi. "Re-run and Re-read Tom McCarthy's Remainder as an Archeology of the Present"; Wojciech Drag. "Compulsion to Re-enact: Trauma and Nostalgia in Tom McCarthy's "Remainder""; Sophie Seita, Irmtraud Huber. "Authentic Simulacra or The Aura of Repetition: Experiencing Authenticity in Tom McCarthy's Remainder." *The Aesthetics of Authenticity: Medial Constructions of the Real*, Ed. by Wolfgang Funk, Florian Groß and Irmtraud Huber. Transcript Press: Bielefeld, 2012.
8. See the first chapter, "The Precession of Simulacra", in Baudrillard's *Simulation and Simulacra*.
9. Sophie Seita, Irmtraud Huber. "Authentic Simulacra or The Aura of Repetition: Experiencing Authenticity in Tom McCarthy's Remainder".

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- Violi, Alessandra. "Re-run and Re-read Tom McCarthy's Remainder as an Archeology of the Present." *English Literature* 5 (2018): 91-110.