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**Religion of War: The Disruption of Telos
in Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian***

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis takes it upon itself to investigate Cormac McCarthy's rendition of the process of creation of American national identity based on pragmatic individualism during the period of the nation's westward expansion, as it appears in his 1985 novel *Blood Meridian Or The Evening Redness in the West*. The initial point of departure for the argument will be the essay written by G. Deleuze "Bartleby; or, The Formula," where Deleuze conceives of American identity and culture as a continuous process of rapture with what he calls paternal models of social formation pertaining to the old continent, seeing the pragmatic line of thought as the chief constituting factor of this essentially anti-teleological process. This attitude is going to be juxtaposed to McCarthy's own depiction of America in the period of the nation's westward expansion. Through working with Deleuze and F. Guattari's concepts of reterritorialization and deterritorialization we shall investigate some of the prominent features of McCarthy's narrative style, most notably his imagery and narrative technique, attempting to suggest how his specific stylistic choices influence the novel's rendition of what shall be claimed to be an ideologically decentered space, not dissimilar to Deleuze's conception of nation without fathers. Subsequently, it shall be our aim to show the most significant departure of McCarthy's rendition from Deleuze's theory that is, the ways McCarthy's protagonists conceive morally of this anti-ideological space.

This investigation shall be enhanced throughout the first chapter by comparing McCarthy's views with other important figures of American letters studied in Deleuze's essay, namely H. Melville and R. W. Emerson. The second chapter, focused at the investigation of the character of Judge Holden, shall conceptualize the moral question as the Nietzschean problem of resentment, which will, however, be studied in its cognitive appropriation by Deleuze in his philosophy of the event. By thorough application of this

theoretical framework on Holden's views of morality, representation and language, Holden shall be shown as an embodiment of the worst version of American pragmatic individualism. In the conclusion of the thesis this shall be put into broader perspective and seen as critical comment of McCarthy's on the conception of American national identity; a conception wherein the individual is unable to live up to the positive aspects of the disruption of teleological models of historical identity spoken of by Deleuze, and instead turns the solidification of his own supreme individualism into a version of continuous warfare against everything that would stand autonomous to it. Not excluding the land and lives of the American indigenous population whose eradication McCarthy so conspicuously depicts in his novel.

ABSTRAKT

Tato práce si klade za cíl prozkoumání procesu formování Americké národní identity v období národní expanze na západ, založeném na konceptu pragmatického individualismu, tak jak je zpodobněn v románu *Krvavý Poledník* amerického autora Cormaca McCarthyho. Počátečním bodem práce bude esej „Bartleby; or, The formula“ francouzského filozofa G. Deleuze. Deleuze v této práci pojímá americkou identitu a historii jako neustále probíhající zlom a odklon od vlivu kontinentálních, „otcovských,“ modelů společenské formace, jež se v jeho interpretaci projevuje právě v pragmatickém pojetí přístupu k identitě a dějinnosti, které jsou tímto zbavené všech ideologických či teleologických nároků. Toto pojetí bude v průběhu práce porovnáváno s McCarthyho vlastním zpodobněním americké národní identity. S využitím termínů jako „reteritorializace“ a „deteritorializace“, zavedených Deleuzem a jeho spolupracovníkem F. Guattarim, se nejprve pokusíme prozkoumat stylistické aspekty McCarthyho vypravěčské metody v románu, s cílem poukázat na to, jak dané formální volby přispívají ke zpodobnění světa, jež je ve své podstatě nezátížen ideologií, světa decentralizovaného, jež se do určité míry podobá právě zmíněnému Deleuzovskému pojetí. V této fázi bude ovšem také poukázáno na zásadní rozdíl v těchto dvou pojetích, konkrétně pak na to, jakým způsobem se McCarthyho protagonisté k takto pojatému světu bez otců vztahují, zejména pak z hlediska morálního.

Toto zkoumání bude v průběhu první kapitoly obohaceno o srovnání McCarthyho přístupu s dalšími americkými autory, jež ve své práci zmiňuje Deleuze; s H. Melvillem a R. W. Emersonem. Druhá kapitola, jejímž středobodem bude analýza postavy soudce Holdena, se poté pokusí jasně vymezit zmíněný morální problém skrze Nietzscheho pojem resentimentu, jež bude ovšem pojímán v jeho Deleuzovské interpretaci, tedy v jeho učení o události. Skrze podrobnou aplikaci tohoto teoretického rámce na Holdenovo pojetí morálky,

reprezentace a jazyka se pokusíme dokázat, že je to právě postava soudce Holdena, jež představuje odvrácenou stranu amerického pragmatického individualismu. V závěru této práce se pokusíme pohlédnout na výše řečené v širším kontextu. Tedy, jako na McCarthyho kritiku Americké národní identity, kde se jedinec v jeho pojetí ocitá v situaci, ve které není schopen dostát nárokům Deleuzovského pojetí identity jakožto neustálého stávání se, a jež tak tuto zásadní otevřenost Deleuzovského přístupu proměňuje v neustávající proces upevňování své vlastní individuality navzdory všemu, jež by si nárokovalo existenci na jeho nadřazené individualitě nezávislou. Zde samozřejmě nevyjímaje území a životy původních obyvatel severní Ameriky, jejichž decimaci McCarthy ve svém románu s tak zneklidňující samozřejmostí zachycuje.

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I. Introduction

I.1 Worlds without fathers: Deleuze and McCarthy

In one of his seminal essays “Bartleby; or, The Formula” directly addressing American literature and culture, Giles Deleuze attempts to define the history of the United States as a process of continuous rapture with the universalistic and paternal models of history and national ideology which pertain to the old continent. A progression wherein the nation does no longer define itself by recourse to stable universal whole and where the paternal function and authority is not only essentially dead but always in the further process of dying. It is a form of national identification realized as a constant line of flight from its European models. Deleuze accredits this conception especially to the invention of a deterritorialized language, an original and deeply individualistic style made possible by the break with the patriarchal continental history and ceaselessly destabilizing the paternal function. This line of flight is as much linguistic as it is cognitive that is, the de-centered style allows perceiving the historical space as an essentially open structure, the enactment of constant becoming rather than universal and rationalizing being. It is therefore specifically the individualism manifested as a pragmatic line of approach to history that Deleuze credits for the dissolution of paternal social formation and the installment of nationhood based on “community of anarchistic individuals.”¹

Despite some, though by no means exhausting, attempts of Deleuzean reading of *Blood Meridian Or The Evening Redness in the West* (most prominently perhaps that of

¹ Giles Deleuze, “Bartleby; or, The Formula,” *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith, Michael A. Green (London: Verso, 1998) 85.

Steven Shaviro),² the above mentioned strain of Deleuze's thought seems virtually untouched in the critical reception of the work. A fact that we shall argue to be all the more conspicuous, considering that Cormac McCarthy's rendition of the final stages of American westward expansion in the novel appears to manifest important traits of ideologically decentered, deterritorialized style devoid of paternal influence spoken of by Deleuze. It is a style that carefully disrupts any universalistic or sacred conception of the nation's history; shunning both the continental heritage of Christian morality, as well as the providential myths endowing the national history with a sacred mission such as the doctrine of manifest destiny described among other scholars by Richard Slotkin.³ Both Deleuze's and McCarthy's concept of American identity and history could be thus said to be importantly anti-teleological; no longer being an object of a paternal whole that would be prescriptive of a stable destination and identity, the line of flight is a process of constant becoming precluding any identification.

It shall be further argued, however, that despite the important similarity between Deleuze and McCarthy as regards their renditions of fundamentally fatherless spaces, there is also a profound divergence between the two conceptions, specifically in the moral outcomes and effects these decentering processes hold. In McCarthy's conception the loss of paternal

² Shaviro in his essay, "A Very life of Darkness: A Reading of *Blood Meridian*," *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Cormac McCarthy* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009) 11; for example openly touches on the conception of deterritorialized space, when he claims that; "Blood Meridian rejects organicist metaphors of growth and decay, in favor of an open topography (what Deleuze and Guattari call "smooth space") in which the endless, unobstructed extension of the desert allows for the sudden, violent and fortuitous irruption of the most heterogeneous forces ..."

³ Here we mainly refer to his exploration of the myth of American frontier in *The Fatal Environment: the Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

coding is surely far from enacting the liberating and life-affirmatory line of flight that it does in Deleuze's conception, even though it seems hard to deny that McCarthy's version of America is still very much influenced by the loss of the figurative father. So much so that we shall argue that it is the state of rapture with and secession from the paternal models of history that constitutes the main conflict that McCarthy addresses in the novel. Accordingly, the most significant part of our thesis shall deal with the moral challenges this conflict poses for McCarthy's protagonists. Our aim being to show what may be called the other, dark, potentiality of American pragmatic individualism embodied in Judge Holden, which arises as the result of the individual's erroneous conception of identity as a perpetual process of self-invention spoken of by Deleuze.⁴ It is the vastly different conception of identity, nonetheless grounded on the similar basis of pragmatic line of thought, which constitutes the source of the radical divergence between McCarthy's and Deleuze's view. Difference that separates radical self-invention in Deleuze, from equally radical, yet also infinitely destructive self-assertion in McCarthy; openness and freedom from domination and war.

I.2 Methodology

Following is a brief outline of the methodological and theoretical framework used in the thesis. As mentioned above, in the present thesis we propose what is essentially a Deleuzian reading of *Blood Meridian*. In the course of our work we shall strive to constantly

⁴ Deleuze gives a following description of what he means; "we understand the novelty of American thought when we see pragmatism as an attempt to transform the world, to think a new world or new man in so far as they *create themselves*." ("Bartleby, or, The Formula," 86) We could say that our argument partially lies in the analysis of the italicized passage. McCarthy's novel seems to imply the question of how does the new (American) man conceives of such self-creation and subsequently, what it is that he creates himself against.

juxtapose and bring together McCarthy's and Deleuze's approach to the American identity seen as a pragmatic process of flight from continental models. We shall do so by utilizing a rather complex assembly of theoretical tools. In the first chapter we shall make use of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concepts of reterritorialization and deterritorialization in order to investigate some of the prominent features of McCarthy's style, most notably his imagery and narrative technique, with the aim of showing how these contribute toward his rendition of ideologically decentered space. By the end of the first chapter and especially throughout the second one, our argument shall take a distinctly moral turn.

Firstly, we shall investigate what has been termed as the central conflict in the novel that is, the death of the figurative father. We shall proceed to do so by utilizing the views on morality as put forward by Friedrich Nietzsche, namely his concepts of slave morality and spirit of resentment. This discussion shall take us to the investigation of the character of Judge Holden, which will be the main aim throughout the chapter. Holden's intricate views on morality, representation and language shall constitute the basis for introduction of further theory of Deleuze's. Especially his cognitive development of Nietzsche's teaching on resentment. Through appropriating Deleuze's philosophy of the event as outlined mainly in his *The Logic of Sense*, we shall attempt to further elucidate upon Holden's attack on historical memory that he stages in the novel. The theoretical framework is also going to help us define the nature of Holden's role in the narrative, namely his seemingly never ending manipulation of meaning and sense through which he attempts to assert his supreme individuality. The above made findings come together in the closing part of the chapter, which is dedicated to analysis of the eponymous religion of war that Holden attempts to instigate. The conclusion of the thesis shall then briefly attempt to contextualize our conclusions within the canon of McCarthy work, and above all to connect and contrast the

analysis of Holden's role to the opening argument concerning McCarthy's vision of the dangers of American pragmatic individualism.

II. Chapter One

II. 1. Disruption of teleological outlook

Commenting on the universal providential myth governing the nation throughout the better part of 19th century, Richard Slotkin describes the conception of the natural horizon such a narrative popularly entails, a conception where; “An environment, a landscape, a historical sequence is infused with meaning in the form of a story, which converts landscape to symbol and temporal sequence into "doom" a fable of necessary and fated actions” (Slotkin, 11). What Slotkin broadly characterizes here is a process (in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms) of reterritorialization⁵ of the natural space, a process wherein the solidification of national consciousness took the form of providential mission configuring the whole space of the country as rightful property of the emerging Republic granted by God. It is a paternal concept of national history that, despite the parallel historical setting, seems to be virtually absent from McCarthy’s rendition.

Early on in the novel the kid is enlisted in a group of filibusters bound for Mexico led by a former U.S. army officer captain White. Explaining the group’s mission the captain uses

⁵As Eugene W. Holland explains the terms reterritorialization and deterritorialization were appropriated by Deleuze and Guattari from psychoanalysis to social critique, in their rendition re-territorialization designates the recapturing of the strains of libidinal desire released by the free workings of capitalist economy by the state. It is a process of reintegration of individual desire into state formations. See Eugene W. Holland, “Schizoanalysis and Baudelaire,” in *Deleuze: A Critical Reader*, ed. Paul Patton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996) 241-42.

In our appropriation of the terms we would say that the myth of the sacred claim on the country helps to solidify the territorial and technological power of the ascending Republic. In McCarthy’s vision of the period of the westward expansion, similarly to Deleuze’s treatment of Melville in the essay, there is however striking lack of any form of institutional or ideological re-territorialization of the space.

rhetoric typical of the national ethos of the time. The story he describes is a one of violent overtaking of the reigns of history from the people that are “manifestly incapable of governing themselves.”⁶ What seems vital in White’s speech is that there is no longer any recourse to higher moral principle guiding his actions. It seems clear from his reasoning that the national ideology is rendered void here, his speech does not voice a belief in any divine claim on the land he sets out to take and his true opinions seem at best motivated by an unsubstantiated racism and a principle of gain. Indeed it seems precisely the empty discourse that is all that remains of the conception of the national history as a mission.

In the following passage, setting out across the desert towards their future demise, the band travels through a violently charged dawn which surely seems to foreshadow the eponymous evening redness that lies ahead of them;

They rode on and the sun in the east flushed pale streaks of light and then a deeper run of color like blood seeping up in sudden reaches flaring planewise and where the earth drained up into the sky at the edge of creation the top of the sun rose out of nothing like the head of a great red phallus until it cleared the unseen rim and sat squat and pulsing and malevolent behind them. The shadows of the smallest stones lay like pencil lines across the sand and the shapes of the men and their mounts advanced elongate before them like strands of the night from which they'd ridden, like tentacles to bind them to the darkness yet to come (McCarthy, 47).

The description of the landscape seems to be deeply intertwined with the inner state of the group progressing through it. The great paradox here is that the sun is not a source of light but the source of obscurity. Its light casts men into shadow and if it indeed is revelatory of

⁶ Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian or the Evening Redness in the West* (London: Picador, 2010) 36. All further references will be made to this edition.

anything than it is so only in the negative; what we receive is an absence not presence, an absence of the power to illuminate which is accordingly manifested as darkness. The sun traditionally associated with the symbol of paternal law and wisdom turns here into a phallic symbol of predominantly masculine and violent desire. In Lacan's theory moreover the phallus is essentially a symbol of lack, the object that drives the desire which in itself cannot be satisfied. The scene better than many other similar descriptions of landscape in the novel seems to point to the fact that McCarthy's imagery and use of language are essentially non-representational that is to say they deny the representation of any overarching order. Following Foucault we could say that the imagery begins and ends in darkness and unreason precisely because it is being disturbed by the eruption of essentially objectless desire⁷ which replaces the paternal law and reterritorialization of the space connected with the sacred concept of the national history.

If the conception of landscape spoken of by Slotkin is one pertaining to a paternal model of historical course, a conquest of the continent granted by god the father, then McCarthy's landscape seems a dark copy of this. The imagery employed for the description makes it stand outside the realm of any paternal claim; there is no infusion by meaning and fate in it, the exact opposite seems to be true. The landscape is species of deterritorialized space, both the point of origin and the destination of the band lies along the vectors of obscure desire without end. This way McCarthy seems again to point out the loss of paternal function and ordering in the novel. The father is reduced to phallic desire that disrupts any sacred conception of space. The stylistic choices employed here render a space without any

⁷ On desire and representation see Michele Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2003) 226-235.

overarching ideology or mission and the characters, or rather paths of dark desire, elude containment in any paternal order.

II. 2. Narrative

Similar comment appears to be valid as regards McCarthy's narrative technique as a whole, which seems to be composed almost exclusively of chance events and happenings as opposed to conscious rationalizations of the events and pre-meditated plot lines driven by observable laws of causality. Same as the sun in the above quoted passage the author-eye does never illuminate the path that lies ahead, the protagonists' progress seems to emerge and cease in unlimited darkness which disables us to see any intrinsic causal ties or motives behind their movement. Their actions seem fortuitous and unmediated, committed solely in the name of blind pursuit of desire of immediate gain and possession. In keeping with Deleuze's theory, McCarthy's narrator never justifies or rationalizes the action he presents, the narrative is driven by the line of the protagonist's flight across the landscape.

This surely accounts for the loose ends and anticlimactic resolutions interspersed throughout the narrative. McCarthy never lets neither his characters nor the readers to experience a unity of action that would be productive of catharsis. It is precisely the absence of purificatory resolutions that marks the action the narrative enacts. Thus White's crusade to Mexico starts, precariously progresses and is abruptly annihilated within a space of a single chapter. The manner of its demise at the hands of the Apache party is characteristic of McCarthy's narrative irony. The Apache army forms a carnivalesque procession of historical costumes, they are clad in "pieces of uniform still tracked with the blood of prior owners, coats of slain dragoons, frogged and braided cavalry jackets, one in a stovepipe hat and one with an umbrella [...] and one in the armor of a Spanish conquistador, the breastplate and

pauldrons deeply dented with old blows [...] done in another country by men whose very bones were dust” (McCarthy, 55). The scene stages an ultimate disruption of any conceptualization of men’s endeavors, the Apache party appears or rather erupts seemingly out of nothing, its appearance is a chance and unpremeditated event which however has perfectly fatal repercussions for most of the protagonists. Here McCarthy again shares much with Deleuze as the conception of historical continuity is openly disrupted here by means of dark sense of humor. The remains of the history of the conquest are made into grotesque vestments for the indigenous force whose chance eruption on the surface of the landscape destabilizes any claim for sacred mission.

It is moreover interesting that the fatality of the encounter is absolute only in as much as it abruptly changes the expected course of the narrative, but not in a sense that would entail any final resolution. On the contrary the ensuing merciless carnage which annihilates most of the band sets into motion another strain of events. The most notable of these events is certainly the chance survival of the kid. It seems characteristic that McCarthy lets the event of the battle virtually to obscure the kid’s existence. The kid again appears only after the battle as its lone survivor, however his doings during the event and the manner of his survival is, as so many other times in the narrative, left untouched to the working of chance. McCarthy obscures the chain of causes, the rules of the battle, and presents us with the result of the kid’s presence, his fate fatally changed without any conscious agency apart from the omnipresent propensity for violence and destruction.

The case is indeed much the same for the Glanton’s gang. Although occupying much more extensive portion of the novel (spanning over 13 chapters) the gang is finally obliterated in chapter XX., with the same abruptness and ferocity by the Yumas who, moving “in total silence” one by one mercilessly slaughter most of the gang, finally reaching Glanton sitting in

his bed like some “debauched feudal baron” and splitting “his head to the thrapple” (McCarthy, 289). The subsequent horrible mutilation and burning of the gang’s bodies too parallels the Apache massacre of White. In the vein of Deleuzean philosophy of an event⁸ we could say, that McCarthy’s narrative technique constantly dramatizes the abrupt emergence of an event which produces unaccountable changes in a series that reverberate through multiple structures and multiple lives. White’s band ceases to exist but the event reconfigures the line of the kid’s headless flight toward Glanton with whom his path temporarily merges only to be again violently released at the Yuma ferry. The only certainty in McCarthy’s world seems to be the inevitability of the re-emergence of the event itself; the multifarious violent crossings and clashes of individual desiring bodies let loose after the loss of the paternal law. None of the events, however, seems to be endowed with truly symbolic significance, the desire skirts the surface of the landscape only and this seems to be the case even in regards to the book’s frequent allusions to the sacred narratives of the Bible.

II. 3. Biblical imagery

It certainly seems valid to say with Amy Hungerford⁹ that *Blood Meridian* frequently radiates Biblical authority by means of its parables, orations, symbolic allusions and paratactic diction. It however seems equally valid, and for that all the more striking, that the narrative is very much devoid of the supremacy of truth that Erich Auerbach speaks about when describing the internal mimetic mode originally employed in the scripture. The

⁸ See for example Giles Deleuze, “Of The Event” in *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: The Athlone Press, 1990) 148-154. For further discussion on the event in Deleuze’s theory see chapter II.2, and the accompanying notes.

⁹ Amy Hungerford, *20/21 : Postmodern Belief : American Literature and Religion since 1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.) 86.

immanence of sacred meaning underneath the surface spoken of by Auerbach does not seem possible in McCarthy's world. The images here are never "fraught with background"¹⁰ wherein the mystery of being would reside. McCarthy's protagonists are scarcely engaged in interpretation of the events and sceneries they witness and the text rarely invites the possibility of investigation of a hidden meaning. The opposite is for the most part the case, the imagery McCarthy uses seems to cancel the notion of a semantic depth, or at least to render it utterly unattainable. It therefore seems contingent to McCarthy's narrative project that most of the biblical allusions and scenes interspersed throughout the novel retain only seeming likeness to their biblical models.

Halfway through the novel the kid temporarily loses the main gang. After wandering aimlessly through the wilderness, being described as a "solitary pilgrim" he comes across "a lone tree burning on the desert" (McCarthy, 227). Seated in front of it he is joined by the sundry desert insect, lizards and owls all together forming a "constellation of ignited eyes" watching the tree. The setting indeed seems to dimly evoke the story of Moses, yet the irony is telling of the situation that the kid and by extension all other protagonist in the novel are in. In Exodus, Yahweh appearing in the perennially burning bush reveals to Moses the consummation of his journey, the land of Canaan. The analogy with the puritan conceptualization of America as the new Canaan seems especially conspicuous in a novel where history as a mission seems to receive fatal blows. Here the flame is mute and its presence perfectly accidental. In the morning it is burnt and the kid "seated tailorwise in the eye of that cratered waste [...]" watches "the world tend away at the edges to a shimmering

¹⁰ Erich Auerbach, "The Odysseus' Scar," *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) 12.

surmise.” (McCarthy, 228) The quasi-symbolic event is thus characteristically diffused into the expanse of the landscape which seems endless and reveals no set destination.

Perhaps the best demonstration of the superficiality of the biblical discourse is to be found in the final part of the novel where we get a condensed description of the kid’s wanderings after his violent divorce with the scalphunting gang. At one point the narrator informs us that the kid; “had a bible that he’d found at the mining camps and he carried this book with him no word of which he could read. In his dark and frugal clothes some took him for a sort of preacher but he was not witness to them, neither of things at hand nor things to come, he least of any man.” (McCarthy, 329) Despite his countless adventures no sacred wisdom seems to be gained. The bible is a mere object that joins the kid on his reckless flight through the seamless expanse of the country. Neither his experience nor the providential wisdom contained in the book provides him with sufficient vantage point that would offer an overarching view of his life path. The same comment would certainly apply to McCarthy’s narrative technique as a whole.

II. 4. McCarthy and Melville

Up to this point we would therefore postulate the similarity between Deleuze’s and McCarthy’s conception of space without parental influence. However there also is a crucial difference between the two, and thus it would seem derisory to compare briefly McCarthy’s conception of space and natural horizon with another prominent dramatization of smooth space one which is importantly discussed by Deleuze himself that is Melville’s. The comparison seems all the more warranted due to the very frequent critical analogies made between *Blood Meridian* and *Moby Dick*.

It seems important that Deleuze specifically associates Melville's art with that of simulacrum; a constant disruption of the paternal function and a careful defiance of any notion of transcendental whole by means of taking the being as a constant becoming.¹¹ In *Moby Dick* the end of the journey is not paternal unity and law but the existence as an unlimited line of flight across the limitless expanse of the sea. The diverse minorities taken on the road aboard the Pequod make it impossible for the voyage to be driven by a single governing principle and goal, Ahab's being only one of many. It is therefore on the sea as the infinite horizon that the ultimate multiplicity and diversity of endeavors manifests itself. However it seems to be precisely this freedom of multiplicity, the heterogonous space that McCarthy's protagonists fail to see. The difference between Deleuze's interpretation of Melville and McCarthy's novel does not seem so much to lie in the fatherless space that they create but rather in the way their protagonists' perceive and conceive of this space.

If we for example venture to compare the kid with Ishmael we receive mostly negative results but not because the world which the characters occupy would be so fundamentally different but because their respective experience of this space diverges greatly. The most important feature that the characters share is the propensity to take on the road as a means to elude their present state of affairs. Both are also described as avid watchers and witnesses to an immense number of events.¹² However, what they make out of the road and events that

¹¹ According to Deleuze the disruption of Universalist paternal models is achieved by the heterogeneity of individual voices, which is however only possible in a fundamentally open system that allows for the enactment of existence as constant becoming. As Deleuze says; the sound of the individual voice is heard "only when it takes to the open road (or to the open sea) [...]when it leads its life without seeking salvation, when it embarks upon incarnate voyage, without particular aim [...]" ("Bartleby; or, The Formula," 87).

¹² Although the characters are vastly different in their rendition, it is hard to overlook at least some important similarities that may not be of inconsequential importance given the number of conscious inter-textual allusions that McCarthy is fond of making. Apart of their status as

they witness could not be more different. Ishmael, “tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote,” is ceaselessly opened toward the endless expanse of space and always ready to transform it into the promise of the new by means of his imaginative language (“the wild conceits”), which serves him as a key to swing open “the great flood-gates of the wonder-world.”¹³ His attitude is in other words that of constant openness toward any event that the ever shifting surface of the sea might offer. He overcomes his present dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs (the parental wholeness) and sees the state as a possibility for a new series of events.

It is characteristic that the kid too first embarks on his journey by fleeing from the influence of his father who “lies in drink and quotes from poets whose names are now forgotten,” (McCarthy, 1) a father contingent to the past (indeed the poets he quotes are very likely continental ones) that has utterly failed in his paternal authority and function. When the kid attains the furthestmost horizon of his journey in the form of a view on the ocean from the shores of California (which is also the inland limit of the westward march), his reaction to the prospect of unlimited space is nonetheless nothing like Ishmael’s. He seems to perfectly fail to conceive of the ocean horizon as the fundamental openness for the realization of man’s actions. The narrator gives a detailed and characteristically depersonalized account of his experience;

He squatted in the sand and watched the sun on the hammered face of the water. Out there island clouds emplaned upon a salmon colored othersea. [...] Downshore the dull surf boomed. There was a horse standing there staring out upon the darkening waters

castaways and witnesses they are also both in their own way confronted with and impelled to face against the books’ deceptive monomaniacs, Ahab and Holden.

¹³ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994) 26.

[...] watching, out there past men's knowing, where the stars are drowning and whales ferry their vast souls through the black and seamless sea (McCarthy, 320).

It is crucial that McCarthy does not give us any insight to the kid here, indeed the kid does not seem to be any more privileged experiencing subject than the horse. The whole prospect of the horizon seems to be flat and impregnable. The surface of the ocean is a source of otherness, dully reflecting the clouds above. The horizon culminates in impenetrable darkness and there seems to be no possibility of communion between man and the prospect that it offers. There seems to be no experience gained, nor any way in which the cognitively static horizon could be transformed into a genuine prospect. Perhaps the most crucial difference here is a cognitive one, the kid same as the rest of McCarthy's characters is a species of a nomad, constantly adrift in a space no longer territorialized by the paternal law, but he is never really able to perceive the event of freedom that the space offers.

Once more evoking Deleuze we could than say that McCarthy's characters ultimately fail in a moral selection, they seem to be unable to select that which is timeless and worthy in the present state of affairs, not able to live up to the rapture with the paternal structures described by Deleuze and to creatively partake in the fundamental openness this state offers. For them there is no open space but only blind venting of desire producing an endless strain of violence and destruction. The infinite expanse of space is thus productive of despair often turning into masculine aggression rather than of the heterogeneity of outcomes. In McCarthy's world the paternal law loses all validity but the characters cannot for the most part meet and perceive the grand and liberating in the event.

Finally, since the space is never reflected on as an enactment of an open structure, it also follows that the community of individuals blindly occupying this space can never constitute the species of fatherless anarchistic fraternity that Deleuze advocates for. In yet

another figurative comment on the party's progress across the landscape (this time it is the Glanton's gang) we read that; "although each man among them was discrete unto himself, conjoined they made a thing that had not been before and in that communal soul were wastes hardly reckonable more than those whited regions on old maps where monsters do live and where there is nothing other of the known world save conjectural winds" (McCarthy, 160). The "communal soul" here ironically redolent of the transcendentalist projects of ontological unity of man such as was given voice in Emerson's *Over-soul*, is a wasteland. Although the group still constitutes a formation which is truly original ("thing that had not been before") its uniqueness is not of the anarchistic brotherhood but rather a fraternity of the heedless and deprived. It also seems vital to notice the repeated use of geography and landscape in describing the internal state of the party. The communal soul is a microcosmic version of the teleologically barren natural horizon. The Emersonian imperative on the experience from within that forms the basis of access to the communal soul is rendered invalid here as the community of individuals has no comprehensible within to speak of. The gap between the external and the internal seems to diminish and the group's inner state appears to be the surface of the landscape itself. A surface which unlike in Melville is not one of infinitely free flight, but one traced by a single trajectory of malevolent and heedless desire.

To summarize, McCarthy's novel can be read as a re-interpretation of Deleuze's conception of America as a fraternity of anarchistic individuals. In McCarthy the centre-less space is marked by a profound feeling of loss. The rapture with the parental models of history defining the nation is presented as a severe wound in the novel as its characters are no longer capable to perceive the greatness in the defining moment of the father's death spoken of by Deleuze. However, this seems only the initial point of departure for McCarthy's project, as there seems to be a further moment of reinterpretation in the novel; an exploration of the other

side of American pragmatism. In his essay Deleuze sees the pragmatic attitude as a chief invention and contribution of United States; a practical realization of the process of becoming that characterizes the nation without fathers. It shall be seen that for McCarthy it is the exact same attitude and potential that also lays the foundations for American violent individualistic expansionism. In the next chapter we shall argue that it is the spirit of radical individualism¹⁴ (not dissimilar to the one voiced by captain White) made possible by the absence of paternal law that allows for the existence of the character of Judge Holden, who appears to be the only point of convergence of the disparate strains of violent and possessive desire skirting the surface of McCarthy's landscape.

¹⁴ This is not to be taken to mean that we would connected Deleuze with radical individualism, his theory always strives to stress the communal and inter-personal nature of the event. Our aim, to be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, is solely to point that the historical situation that Deleuze sees as foundational for the U.S. also holds the potential to ground the raise of radical individualism.

III. Chapter Two

III. 1 Judge Holden

Undoubtedly the most conspicuous and puzzling aspect of the novel is the character of Judge Holden and the perverse religion or philosophy of violence that he instigates. Dana Phillips¹⁵ seems to sum up a number of critical attitudes when he argues that no discourse that Holden presents throughout the novel can in the end suffice to explain the degree of violence that the novel enacts. His argument in the end proposes the novel to be a dramatization of the world of pure facts, an optical democracy where there is no distinction between the fates of persons, animals or the landscape and therefore also no way of explaining of the meaning of the violence. Such an argument however seems to discard the complex process of Holden's reasoning in favor of what is essentially nihilist interpretation configuring the novel to be devoid of meaning and virtually untouched by the question of morality. Interpretation which seems all the more unsuitable in a novel where the question of moral selection seems to be the chief underlining issue considering its historical setting and theme. We shall argue that not only there are precise and complex reasons behind Holden's conduct in the novel but that these reasons indirectly comment on the moral character of the birth of extreme form of American pragmatic individualism that emerged in the process of the nation's westward expansion.

It shall be our task in the present chapter to try to outline some of the most prominent features characterizing Judge Holden, especially its Nietzschean aspects, regarding the

¹⁵ See Dana Phillips, "History and the Ugly Facts of Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian*," *American Literature* 68, no. 2 (Jun. 1996): 433–60, JSTOR. JSTOR, The Lovett School, Atlanta GA. 27th July 2014.

question of morals and the critique of values, and this way to try to contextualize Holden within the rest of the novel. We shall begin by discussing what appears to be one of the key passages in the novel that is, the episode taking place in the ruins of the Anasazi and the story about a traveler and his son that Holden tells upon the occasion.

III. 2. Stories of the past: reverence and representation of power

In the episode Judge being asked about the origin of the Anasazi Indians proceeds to answer the group by means of a story about a traveler and his son. In the story a mysterious figure of the traveler reprieves the ingratitude and dishonest livelihood of a harnessmaker with whom he had taken a shelter. Before departing he gives him “a lecture” in which “the old man heard things he had once known but forgotten [...]” and which “the traveler concluded by telling the old man that he was a loss to God and man alike and would remain so until he took his brother into his heart as he would take himself.” (McCarthy, 150) The harnessmaker seems initially abashed and turned back on to the road of Christian faith only to murder the traveler later seemingly without motive or reason.

The concluding part of the story is crucial as it states what appears to be one of the central themes that the novel enacts that is, the mode of relation to the past and to the value systems represented by it. The story about the traveler’s reputation and mysterious disappearance is passed on by his wife and the traveler is in consequence elevated into near martyr status by the means of the story. As a result the traveler’s son is in a “bad way” as the father is in this respect transformed into a god-like figure; an “idol of a perfection to which he (i.e. the son) can never attain.” The resulting paternal bond is highly unsavory as the son stands to the father “broken before a frozen god and he will never find his way.” (McCarthy, 153) It is surely not an accident that the story is being told among the ruins of Anasazi as it

appears to parallel and amplify their fate. Holden describes the ancestral culture in similar terms he uses for the traveler; they are the “dead fathers” and their works “are much revered” by their followers. The physical remains and traces of their past power “stand in judgment on the latter races.” Similarly to the son who has lost his way, their heirs wander the land “to the sound of an ancient laughter.” (McCarthy, 153)

Here however Holden touches upon a moment of important break in the flow of historical time, a break that seems to account for the general lack of guiding principle that characterizes most of the novel’s world of heterogeneous spaces and chance encounters spoken of in the first chapter. The whole scene intertwining the traveler’s story and the Anasazi ruins seems to dramatize in the broadest sense the relationship between the father and son,¹⁶ a pervading theme throughout the whole novel. Both the images are in their own way a representation of the paternal origin of power and values; a mythical origin of an indigenous ancestor in the case of Anasazi and a western Christian origin in the case of the traveler. The traveler’s story seems to be Holden’s conceptualization of the loss of belief in the sacred origin of the nation’s history (especially of course, though not exclusively, the narrative of predestination), these have become fictions having no longer a power to provide actual guidance for the characters in the story, at the same time however it did not make their existence the easier for the fact of its loss.

The key moment here therefore seems to be precisely the moment of the father’s death as Holden himself says; in the end it is only “the death of the father to which the son is entitled and to which he is heir.” (McCarthy, 153) In Holden’s conception the whole world of the novel is being enacted under the symbol of dead father; its existence is an endless reaction

¹⁶ Thus Holden again touches on Deleuze’s concept of U.S. as a nation without fathers mentioned in the first chapter.

to the event of death. By death here we mean the loss of the centre of the symbolic order, the value systems investing and territorializing the space which allows for the existence in it to be endowed with stable meaning.

The nature of the tie of the son to the father-image seems to refer to those properties of all moral systems, which Nietzsche termed as the spirit of resentment associated with slave mentality.¹⁷ For Nietzsche the slave mentality deals specifically with the way in which the past and the present are related to.¹⁸ The key concept is the type of relation to the world, a slave always maintains deeply personal and reactive attitude towards the world and the events. No event simply happens, it always happens to and in spite of the slave. In consequence the slave is constantly in a state of being hurt by the world, his whole existence is a reaction and resentment of the wound preventing him to actively act out his own will. The morality of a slave consists solely of measures to diminish the potential the events have to hurt him, the moral choice thus always takes a form of reaction or revenge. It is never truly an active, self-less act. The event of death in the story seems to be representative of such a wound; the story seems to make it clear that it is the event of death that leaves the son broken and unable to find his own way. The son is to the father like a slave who is locked in perpetually repeated reaction to the event of the father's death who is in consequence transformed into an iconic representation of power to which the son cannot attain.

¹⁷ All present discussion on resentment taken from Giles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlison (London: The Athlone Press, 2002). On more detailed discussion of resentment see chapter 4 "From *Ressentiment* to Bad Conscience," especially pages 112-19.

¹⁸ See Nietzsche on typology of resentment, where the man of resentment is above all characterized by "invasion of consciousness by mnemonic traces, the ascent of memory into consciousness itself." The principal symptom of the slave is thus a "prodigious memory" (*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 115).

However, Holden's rendition makes it clear that the spirit of resentment and reverential attitude towards the past has no place in his conception of the world. And he thus finally refutes both the mythical representation of the past symbolized by the anterior culture and the later western narrative of sacred mission symbolized by the story about the traveler. In fact, Holden seems to go even further when he questions the very validity of the father's existence which, as he claims, "is historical and speculative even before the son has entered it." (McCarthy, 153) This way Holden seems to point to the arbitrariness of the foundations constituting every seemingly sacred history. From his position of a prophet of war (to be discussed further in the chapter) he is able to appreciate the power and seemingly unchecked creativity of the Anasazi (he commends their stonemason works as attempts "to alter the structure of the universe"), yet he refuses for this to turn into an image of reverence.

Holden here therefore seems to be addressing a question that is at its core a moral one. It is also by virtue of this why we have proposed this scene to one of the key discursive centers in the novel, for the question concerning morality and moral choice is surely of utmost urgency in a novel openly presenting such a degree of violence and obvious moral tumult as *Blood Meridian*. There can be little question that Holden himself represents utter lack of morality but for this reason it seems crucial that he chooses to address a predominantly moral conflict. By openly appropriating the Nietzschean critique of slave morality Holden evokes the question of what it is that should replace it. Being a prophet of war his answer seems deeply pragmatic and contingent to his occupation; the moral law should not be replaced but let to disappear along with the body of the dead father. What should ensue is the unlimited reign of war, the newly posited extra-moral order.

The manner of his refusal, however, seems a highly complex process. It is first of all a refusal of and attack against the historical memory, which he seems to understand both as

the faculty of memory itself which he chooses to represent in the story of the traveler, but also as corporeal representation of past in the form of the ruins. Both are versions of the retention of historical time in the present and both thus constitute the source for the spirit of resentment which he claims to overcome. Memory and representation are thus for Holden implicitly connected with the moral and teleological state of the world. Holden indeed seems to be much occupied with the way the ruins, but in fact, the whole world is represented. It is for this reason that he is consistently being presented as a collector or cataloguer of the world around him, a “draftsman well sufficient to the task” constantly making sketches of the ruins and other items he later on destroys. Holden’s answer to Irving’s question “what you intend to do with them sketches” that is, “to expunge them from the memory of man” (McCarthy, 148) seems to be absolutely vital here. The reverence towards the past and the conception of the world as a physical wound and affront to man must make way for the newly ascending power symbolized by the violent spirit of westward movement personified by himself. In the process of his sketching there seems to be a turning point in his conception of history and time. Following is the close examination of the answer and the re-representing process it entails.

III. 3. Re-representing the world: Chronos and Aion

Holden’s phrase concerning his sketches is in itself indeed paradoxical, as the process of expunging seems to be simultaneously carried out through the effective preservation of the artifacts in Holden’s book. This therefore indicates that the erasure is connected with a specific means of representation. Moreover, the intention here is not to expunge the objects from existence but from memory only. The distinction between existence and memory is crucial, as Holden in the novel is certainly not a nihilistic figure whose aim would be the

radical refusal of existence as such, on the contrary his attempt is to take total control of all things extant, a goal which is in his view achievable only through first destroying the ideological space connected with the reverential attitude to the past. In this respect the faculty of memory is in itself a supreme mode of preservation of the reverential attitude to power; the chief characteristic of the slave type in Nietzsche is after all the “ascent of memory into consciousness itself.”(*Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 115) The past thus becomes the slave’s principal mode of being. Retained in the memory the artifacts (same as the image of the traveler) become representations of the power and values of the past exerted on the present. For Holden they are thus also representative of the wound in the body of time.¹⁹

Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the supremacy of memory postulates the supremacy of a specific notion of time. It is a temporality accentuating the depths and corporeality of time. Memory is an embodiment of the past conditioning the present moment. Through it past becomes a lasting presence, always as if in the background of the now as its hidden depth. The existence of the past moment in the present inevitably configures the two in causal relation; the past is a cause of the present. The present moment same as all possible future moments is thus given as if by dispensation of the past deriving its presence from the whole of time. Memory thus in other words implies a notion of time that Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* discusses as Chronos.²⁰ The introduction of Deleuze’s extension of Nietzsche

¹⁹ That is to say a wound as a source of endless reaction and inactivity upon the paternal loss, the resentment.

²⁰ Deleuze’s conception of the two temporalities is closely connected to his conception of the event. The sense of every event for Deleuze necessarily has two sides or two temporal levels, upon which it is realized. The first, Chronos, is a physical occurrence of the event which is thus associated with corporeal qualities and with the present state of affairs. The other, Aion, (to be discussed further in the text) is the incorporeal and impersonal sense, one realized in thought and language. By attacking the image of the father as well as the ruins of ancient ancestors, Holden

at this point seems justified as Deleuze too addresses the question of moral selection, but importantly connects it with cognitive approach, accentuating the way a mode of representation influences such selection. It is an approach which Holden's seems to invoke by his attack on historical conception of morality by means of representation in his book. Deleuze's approach therefore seems to elucidate some of the more complex aspects of Holden's character, namely the role of his sketches and most prominently the importance he seems to ascribe to language as a means of manipulating sense.

In Chronos then, the present exists always as a finished moment. It is inextricably related to the future and past, which are too only conceived as finished entities (future or past present). The relation of all individual presents constitutes a temporal cycle that is the whole of Chronos. It is an encasement and corporeal representation of all individual presents. Chronos is thus a name for the indivisible cycle or whole of time. Similar applies for the working of causes within the whole; each interlocking moment is a cause for the successive moment. Each individual cause relating back to the unity of all causes that is the final cause which is again the whole of Chronos. It is thus the whole which provides measure, defines and shows as definite all individual moments.

Moreover, this conception of time is firmly associated with a mode of representation characterized by depth and corporeal qualities.²¹ The vastness of the body of Chronos defines the precise measure of all presents which are in turn defined by their relation to each other. The moment thus eternally seeks its definition outside of itself, its cause lies in the depths of

seems to evoke and favour this second plane of sense. See *The Logic of Sense*, "Of The Event," 148-153.

²¹ The difference here is again between physical bodies as causes and the level of language as the incorporeal effect. On more about language and bodies see *The Logic of Sense*, 181-4.

preceding causes, all relating to the central cause that is Chronos. This way the moment and the bodies contained in it are causes only, there is no place for representation of effects and thus no place for representation of action. Rather the action is always as if buried in depth of the matter or body, and thus never truly present. The items that Holden collects seem to be contingent to such an order of representation, they are fragments of a sacred past which, similarly to the image of the father, is made unreachable. The corporeality for Deleuze is however manifest on yet another level; the absence of action also connects these items with states rather than with events. The past power is always already dead, the father already gone. The representation that Holden destroys is therefore constituent of the state of affairs enacted in the novel; the inaction and sense of lost direction upon the abandonment of the sacred conception of history. The corporeality thus also figuratively constitutes the Nietzschean wound that is, the slave's conception of world as a personal affront and his subsequent inability to act.²²

It seems to be precisely this internal mode of representation, the representation of depth that Holden's sketches of the artifacts of past deny. The process is described in detail when he sets about to draw a piece of Spanish armor made in Toledo, which is in itself another trace of sacred past, in this case relating back to the European conquest of the continent and to the providential narratives of westward course of empires culminating in the colonization of American west. Holden sketches it in "profile and in perspective, citing the dimensions in his neat script and making marginal notes." (McCarthy, 147) It is a scientific

²² Deleuze in his treatment of event and the two temporalities consciously expands on Nietzsche's resentment. The occurrence of any event poses an ethical problem approachable from two view points; the event can be either resented and thus become the source of resentment, which pertains to Chronos, or the event can be willed and creatively acted upon, and thus enter the impersonality of Aion. See *The Logic of Sense*, 149-150.

representation of surfaces only, the physical dimensions become a combination of lines and writing. Holden's sketchbook itself thus works as a specific field of representation. The original physical dimensions of the item are replaced, re-represented, by mere scientific record in the form of a script which, aside of the description itself, has no internal value. The representation does not relate to anything outside or deeper than itself. The object is at best a commodity to be used, appropriated and subjugated by the will that possesses it.

Holden's is therefore a mimetic mode that relies on replacing the depth and corporeality of representation by the representation of surfaces only. However, it is specifically the surface mode of representation that Deleuze identifies with the second general conception of time – Aion, which is mutually exclusive with Chronos.²³ Compared with the depth and cycle of Chronos, Aion is the time of pure extension along the surface of an infinite line; the past and future ceaselessly merge and infinitely subdivide the present between them. The present moment is thus a constant becoming; Aion is a time of pure effects and pure events. Being a constant happening the present perpetually eludes the allotment of a definite measure and thus can never form a part of the taxonomical order dispensed by the Chronos.

Since there can be no definition of a moment, there can be no corporeal representation of the state of affairs. In Aion the action is never represented by the bodies, not hidden in them as their inner depth. It is enacted on the surface and thus overcomes the representation of the depth of bodies. The object on the page of Holden's book is no longer an object at all. Being translated onto the field of the notebook it becomes at best a sign disconnected and autonomous from what it represents. At this point a deeper elaboration and application of Deleuze's conception of Aion seems necessary, especially because of its connection with

²³ The present discussion on Aion and Chronos is mainly taken from "Of Aion" in *The Logic of Sense*, 163-8. See also the preceding notes on the event.

language and its ability to create phenomena of sense which seems crucial in further describing the role of Holden in the novel.

Following the Deleuzean interpretation then; the objects turned into script become incorporeal signs to be conceived of on the level of thought, and by extension language. Because it is the language as a creative expression of thought that actively shapes and creates the sense of the items now withdrawn from the realm of bodies. If Chronos is identified with the present immutable state of affairs then Aion is a line which separates the physical states of affairs from the incorporeal events, bodies from language of sense. Only an event translated on the level of thought and thus given sense is an actual event.

If we now translate the said into moral terms, then we can say that a truly moral choice overcoming the spirit of resentment consists of being able to actively will and select the sense of the given state of affairs, and open it to endless possibility.²⁴ That is to say, the death of the father must not be resented in a resigned gesture but rather creatively willed and thus cognitively reinterpreted as a species of sense. The death of the father is thus not a cause of the present misery, but rather a possibility for action. It is for this reason that language and especially the creative application of language as a game becomes a crucial concept. The notion of language game, the game of sense, implies a space of perfect openness to chance. There is no stable state of affairs in the game as language has the ability to constantly creatively transform the rules of the game and thus to instantly turn the presupposed winners

²⁴ The question of moral selection lies at the core of Deleuzean reading of Nietzsche. The man of resentment conceives morality as a system of prescriptive rules that essentially serve to maintain the present state of affairs and allow the slave to remain in reaction and inactivity; for both Nietzsche and Deleuze this is an erroneous conception of morality. For Deleuze a moral living lies in struggling against the event's physical effects and in selecting the impersonal in it. It is a person-actor who selects and who replays or redoubles the event's physical occurrence. For more on the event and actor see *Logic of Sense* (150-153). Also see footnote 25.

into losers that is, to change not the physical outcome of the event but its sense and significance. The significance that the event receives, moreover, leaves the realm of the personal precisely because it enters the pure impersonality of language. The death of the father is therefore no personal wound and need not be resented. The death is overcome by diminishing the physical wound of the event to a smallest possible point by creative shaping of the event's sense by means of language. Here we touch on an important divergence in Holden's approach to the event, as his invocation of the incorporeal finally has little to do with Deleuze's moral selection.

Holden's technique holds surprising affinities with Deleuze's cognitive development of Nietzsche's notions, even though his version of a game has radically different aims and consequences in the end. The dimensions and notes in neat script to which the corporeal trace of sacred past is turned in Holden's book essentially represent a species of incorporeal sense; the objects become simulacra deriving only a seeming likeness from their model, but their sense is grasped and shaped solely on the level of thought which manifests itself in Holden's cunning (if not necessarily creative) rhetorical play. For Holden however the acting of the event entails a special kind of transition. In his version the state of affairs after the death of the father is too re-represented or reinterpreted, but Holden's rendition of the event of death, the sense he gives it, is invested and interpreted by means of deceptive rhetoric, not by a creative language play.²⁵ At this point of Holden's technique there is surely most significant

²⁵ The term of creative play, or acting is crucial for Deleuze; the event is truly selected and overcome only when its corporeal occurrence (actualization) is brought back, redoubled and thus counter-actualized by person-actor who creatively opens (and infinitely subdivides) the event. The art of creative enunciation and humour thus becomes the field where the counter-actualization takes place. The actor simultaneously selects both the future and the past of the event thus infinitely subdividing the present wound it bears.

difference from both Nietzsche and Deleuze; Holden thus never perform a true counter-actualization that would select that which is timeless and impersonal in the event, but rather utilizes the impersonality of language and makes the newly conceived event serve his personal needs. Surely there is no innocence of play and no humor in Holden's speech, only deception and utility. As such however it in itself constitutes a different version of a game, a false game entailing only very perverted notion of morality and justice. In this respect the whole process of his sketching seems a figurative description of his treatment of reality in the novel; Holden translates the whole world to incorporeal sense by means of his deceptive language game. His deception constantly changes the states of affairs and mocks all established patterns of conduct or thought. He incessantly selects in any given event and any state of affairs that which most suits his needs in order to possess all sense in an all engulfing realm of war.

The ruins and artifacts become subjects of Holden's rhetoric and the new sense of the father's death that he gives is being interpreted and performed for the sake of influencing his audience. The sense of the death is therefore being shifted, yet the mode of this shift contributes anything but what it pretends to do, that is overcoming the resentment. Holden as an actor does not change and open what he acts but tries to make it his own. In this respect Holden can be seen figuratively as a type of thief who steals the present state of affairs by utilizing the general moral and ideological collapse that characterizes the novel's world, and transforms in to a dominion of his own. The finest expression of this process, and the highest

In contrast, Holden's treatment of the event is only a pseudo-selection, he does not act and subdivide the burden that the physical event poses, as his aim is anything but the openness and freedom of existence. The free enunciation is thus replaced by deception and control. Language in his rendition is thus not open and de-personalized domain of actors, but merely a rhetoric, which is necessarily connected with physical presence and thus with personal need and utility.

expression of his game is his religion of war. The war seems a realization of the new sense that he attempts to dictate to reality, a new value and moral which is paradoxically characterized by its extra-morality. The war thus seems to be nothing short of a philosophical justification of violence. However before we set to investigate his concept of war in more detail, which shall also necessarily entail a suggestion of its ultimate failure, we should spend more time in observation of the role of Holden's language and rhetorical play in the narrative. After all, what else is his religion of war than a language construct, a type of language game which attempts to re-interpret the sense of the historical moment that the novel enacts.

III. 4. Language and deception

It seems crucial to notice that the destruction that Holden commits and instigates throughout the novel is as much rhetorical as it is physical. Indeed often it is the power of Holden's rhetoric that allows for or sets into motion the carnage committed by the gang. This role of Holden is probably nowhere more conspicuous and symbolic than in the scene where he effectively uses his rhetorical mastery to procure weapons for the Gang. It is telling that it takes place directly before the kid's first riding out with the scalphunting party and as such it constitutes the outset of the atrocious journey led by Holden. The outcome of the gang's gun trade being threatened by a sudden arrival of Mexican war party, Holden takes the party's leader aside and delivers one of his complex pseudo-revelatory lectures; in this case he uses the issue of race, personified by black Irving whose presence seems to be of much interest to the Mexicans, as a scapegoat for his rhetorical deception. Since it is the investigation of Holden's rhetorical play we are concerned with here, it seems necessary to quote at length;

He sketched for the sergeant a problematic career of the man before them, [...] of what varied paths conspired here in the ultimate authority of the extant [...] like strings

drawn together through the eye of a ring. He adduced for their consideration references to the children of Ham, the lost tribes of Israelites, certain passages from the Greek poets, anthropological speculations as to the propagation of the races in their dispersion and isolation through the agency of geological cataclysm and an assessment of racial traits with respect to climatic and geographical influences. (McCarthy, 89-90)

There are two important observations to be made on the passage. Firstly, the destructive power of the gang is procured by means of flowery rhetoric which importantly derives entirely from the tradition of western education and science. In his philosophic lecture, Holden lightly skips from one discourse to another, starting by invoking the workings of chance and fate, following by the evidence drawn from the scripture and classical literature, and finishing with scientific discourse on the origin of humans in the physical space. The second important observation, one that is surely paradoxical in the light of the complexity of the argument itself, is that the actual meaning of the words seems quite superfluous. The Mexican sergeant, just as most of the other characters in the book for that matter, cannot be expected to understand the intricate discourse that Holden is using (even more so for the fact that it derives from cultural environment that is mostly alien to him). This is certainly the meaning of Holden's answer when he is asked by the members of the gang about the actual contents of his speech;

The judge smiled. It is not necessary, he said, that the principals here be in possession of the facts concerning their case [...] But it is consistent with notions of right principle that these facts [...] should find a repository in the witness of some third party. [...] Words are things. The words he is in possession of he cannot be deprived of. Their authority transcends his ignorance of their meaning. (McCarthy, 90)

The ending of the speech seems to be crucial, “words are things” to be freely manipulated, entrusted as if for keeping to the listeners who then serve as unconscious carriers of a new faith unaware of its ulterior and purely pragmatic meaning. Surely this is a part of Holden’s overall intention, to let the characters carry his teaching without understanding it, to let the authority of the words be transformed into artifacts which will ensure Holden’s perpetual control of the game he plays. It is the intricacy and grandeur with which the sense is delivered and the semblance of authority which it derives from the elitist philosophical discourse that finally overwhelm the sergeant, and achieve Holden’s pragmatic end. Note, moreover, the judicial discourse and terminology used in the passages. Surely it is one of the many possible plays on Holden’s eponymous occupation that he so often refers to the events in the novel in court terms and pronounces his truths as judicial decrees, as if dictating the terms through which the sense of the events should be understood, or indeed misunderstood.

Language in Holden’s hands becomes an undulating and constantly shifting stream of will to control and dominate, a stream that at the same time is a masquerade; his words form a procession of masks and guises pretending on classical and scientific knowledge, yet the true meaning of his game lies in its pragmatic usage. This way Holden voices a second potentiality of language game. On one side, there is the Deleuzian language play that expresses the potential to creatively liberate the sense of the present state of affairs; the overcoming of the spirit of resentment by acting out the event through the impersonality of language. However, Holden shows that precisely because of the fact that language as a system of signs need not have any connection to the actual physical reality which it represents, it can be infinitely used and manipulated. The chance event of the meeting between the gang and the Mexican party, the fatal crossing of roads between the Mexican sergeant and the black Irving is being made into a specific and exclusivist sense by the exertion of Holden’s language game. The

multiplicity of outcomes that the event of meeting could entail is stolen by Holden, its sense misinterpreted and swerved toward himself and toward the future destruction and degeneracy committed and spread by the gang made ever more lethal by virtue of the successful trade.

Holden seems to be using this other aspect or potential of language, the potential to be superficial that is, to be the semblance of the art of surface. This seems to be the meaning of another episode in the novel when Holden is in the process of sketching a prehistoric femur and simultaneously giving lecture on geology; his listeners are depicted as “apprentice scholars,” reverently nodding and reaching out “to touch that pillar of stained and petrified bone, perhaps to sense with their fingers the temporal immensities of which the judge spoke.” (McCarthy, 266) Having finished the sketch and throwing away the fossil Holden laughs at their reverential attitude; “Your hearts’ desire is to be told some mystery. The mystery is that there is no mystery.” For Holden there is no hidden under layer of sacred meaning, no temporal immensity. However the laconic comment made by the ex-priest at this point that is, “Aye [...] no mystery. As if he were no mystery himself,” seems to be surprisingly revelatory. It combines an observation on the nature of Holden’s game while simultaneously being a subscription to it. Holden himself certainly is shrouded in mystery; hidden behind the thin and ever shifting mask of language he constantly defers the possibility to be identified, to become sense himself. However it is because of his seeming incomprehensibility that he seems a mystery to others. His language is deprived of depth while also surreptitiously implying it. It seems telling that the ex-priest, though supposedly man of god and perhaps the only character besides the kid showing traces of dissent against the judge, in the end holds him in reverence because of his cunning and entangled rhetoric, and looks for depth and mystery where there is by Holden’s own admission none.

The overall effect that Holden's cunning play of guises holds is perhaps best voiced in the dream sequence that the kid experiences in the prison. In the dream the narrator comments on Holden's origin as follows; "Whatever his antecedents, he was something wholly other than their sum, nor was there system by which to divide him back into his origins for he would not go. Whoever would seek out his history [...] must stand at last darkened and dumb." (McCarthy, 326) Holden may be in possession of the sum total of western teaching but that does not mean he can be explained by it. Despite using and pretending on countless discourses he cannot be identified through any of them, because the knowledge and science in his usage are neither the representation of the state of affairs of the world he occupies, nor a way of conceptualizing this state of affairs. The discourses are unhinged from their traditional order and subsequently used, as if woven into a screen pretending on sacred authority which perfectly obscures the figure of the waver, who is certainly Holden himself.

It is therefore curious that the dream in the end does claim to answer the question raised early on by the kid that is, "what is he a judge of?" However the nature of the answer finally seems rather to confirm than to disprove what was said above. In the dream we see Holden standing in judgment over the work of a "false moneyer" who works "with hammer and die, perhaps under some indictment and an exile from men's fires, hammering out like his own conjectural destiny all through the night of his becoming some coinage for a dawn that would not be." We further learn that the minter "seeks favor with the judge and he is at contriving [...] a face that will pass, an image that will render this residual specie current in the markets where men barter. Of this is the judge judge and the night does not end." (McCarthy, 326) Falsity and subterfuge here is again productive of yet another falsity and Holden's judgment seems to be valid only insofar as to keep the shroud of dark falsehood alive. The judgment that Holden passes here is moreover the impossibility for his face to

become a common currency in the systems of the world. Being a currency presupposes ascription of value and the rule of law which vouchsafes this value. However it is precisely the lawlessness of existence that Holden needs to maintain, as only then is the possibility for the game of deception unlimited.

Holden's true role is therefore to spread the subterfuge and disruption of the common economy, showing the arbitrariness of the accepted values in the face of his affirmation of the state of war.²⁶ Surely the novel is filled with scenes where Holden pretends to partake in the common codes and laws of the world only to completely devalue and undermine them in front of the participants. Such as is the case when during one of the raids Holden seemingly shows mercy and rescues an Apache boy only to mercilessly kill him and burn his body afterwards. In yet another scene Holden appears to be interested in buying a pair of small dogs from a local boy, he spends some time in the negotiation and finally pays four times the amount for the animals. Immediately afterwards Holden throws the dogs from a cliff into a raging river. There are many other similarly minor transactions that Holden participates in only to undermine them in a sleight of hand. Holden constantly devaluates any system that would pretend on ascription of values whether material or moral. As it is only in a space that configures values to be valueless that war can reign freely.

It seems to be precisely the installment and keeping of this superficial level of signification, the words and discourses broken loose from their traditional order and given sense to Holden's liking that constitutes the space upon which (and in which only) the state of

²⁶ Holden's approach differs from Deleuze's assumptions while also, indirectly, evoking him. His act pretends on disruption of and rapture with prescriptive systems of values, the common economies of the world, yet his ulterior ends are never the de-centering and freedom. His disruption is pure moral relativity, void that allows for perfect control.

perpetual war can be enacted. Being himself the misleading centre, the deceiving machine, Holden must always strive to deepen the impact of the death of the figurative father, to ever deepen the moral and teleological twilight that characterizes the novel's world.

III. 5. War

We have seen how Holden uses all the disparate individual encounters and events to his own liking. We have also seen that his selection of the event always consists and results in misrepresentation of its sense which entails imbuing the event with a new value, one that consists solely of serving and fulfilling his needs. It is the deceptive rhetoric conceived of as a perverted art of language game through which the selection of sense is carried through. It then follows however that the state of war everlasting is precisely another such selection, a supreme and all embracing one to which all others minor manipulations are contingent and subordinated, indeed all trades are included in the trade of war. We shall now proceed to investigate the nature of this choice where the death of the father constituent and representative of the state of affairs is figuratively selected by Holden and – same as in the previous cases – made into a utilitarian sense disguised as a remedy for the historical moment.

Halfway through the narrative the Judge holds one of the central disputes in the novel on war. The whole scene dealing with the subject of war is above all a supreme example of rhetorical manipulation and of philosophical justification of violence. One of the gang starts the dispute by recalling the biblical moral view on war proclaiming; “the good book says, who shall live by the sword shall perish by the sword.” Holden's answer is swift and characteristic “what right man would have it any other way.” (McCarthy, 261) The answer is another instance of his rhetorical upsetting of all sense. He turns the biblical line around and mocks its claim on the possession of universal wisdom as well as its claim to offer guidance

on moral conduct. Upon this Holden takes the main stage and in supreme rhetorical game attempts to imprint his sense and view on the historical moment that the novel enacts and transmit it to the others.²⁷ “It makes no difference what men think of war,” Holden begins “War endures. [...] War was always here. Before man was, war waited for him. The ultimate trade awaiting its ultimate practitioner. That is the way it was and will be. That way and not some other way.” (McCarthy, 262) War is therefore posited here as the most basic, primordial, state of being; a state which importantly precedes the formation of moral or religious faculties. It is the most rudimentary form of man’s activities which includes and subsumes all others (“all trades are included in that of war”).

Holden’s reply to Irving’s question for the reason of the omnipresence of war seems to be crucial here; “it endures because men love it” says Holden. War thus finally emerges as an ultimate enjoyment of existence. It is the most basic, infant even, state of man. In other words Holden tries to pass war as a remedy for the wound he himself tried to deepen, indeed there is no real wound because the lack of moral guidance is the truest form of existence Holden’s perverted logic says. His answer to Irving’s argument that “the man that wins in some combat is not vindicated morally,” therefore tellingly takes the form of typical misrepresented Nietzschean maxim; “Moral law is an invention of mankind for the disenfranchisement of the powerful in favor of the weak.” (McCarthy, 263) War is a state beyond morality, the moral and religious despair characterizing the novel and ever deepened by Holden’s disruptive influence of all values is thus the only state there is Holden seems to suggest.

²⁷ The theatrical trope seems very fitting here as what Holden does in this scene perhaps more conspicuously than in others is that he performs for others. The difference from an ordinary play here being that Holden wishes for his performance to become reality for the others.

This line of argument certainly finds its most conspicuous expression when Holden posits war as an ultimate form of game. “Men are born for games. Nothing else. Every child knows that play is nobler than work,” (McCarthy, 262) says Holden. The childlike joy and freedom from paternal influence is being alluringly juxtaposed here to “the work” connected with the paternal law. Moreover, “the worth or merit of a game is not inherent in the game itself but rather in the value of that which is put at hazard.[...] But trial of chance or trial of worth all games aspire to the condition of war for here that which is wagered swallows up game, player, all” adds Holden. Its stake being the existence of the whole system of rules and participants war is the ultimate form of game; the deepest joy felt upon being freed from the constriction of the law. As Holden puts it; “war is a game enhanced to its ultimate state.” A state of war as a game here therefore seems to be posited as an ultimate expression of Holden’s proposed break from the state of affairs under the sign of the father’s death; the perfect game which stands beyond morality.

III. 6. Game

However since Holden’s notion of a game seems to be his answer to the problem expressed in the pivotal scene about the traveler, it should be put under scrutiny in a broader discourse of games, especially those games that seem to have as their object similar goal as Holden purports; the enactment of space which overcomes prescriptive systems of morality and the spirit of resentment. By arguing for his game to be an ultimate one (“game enhanced to its ultimate state”) that is, the state of being emancipated from religious concept of history which he connects with the slave mentality and spirit of resentment, Holden

evokes the notion of an ideal game as proposed by Nietzsche and after him Deleuze.²⁸ However similarly to his previous discourse on representation his evocation of a game seems to be much more accountable to his deceptive rhetoric and will to manipulate than to a truly emancipating mode of being.

Holden attributes the game to the child and thus implies the innocence of play that is, the innocence from the patriarchal governing rule and the father-centered game or order of values, which prevents the child from acting out his own will. However, such a form of innocence, which is endemic to an ideal game, strictly requires the absence of preexisting rules; the space of game has to be constantly ready to re-create the rules anew with each moment of the game and thus prevent the dividing of the openness of chance between the bipolarity of gain and loss.²⁹ Connected with the indivisibility of chance is the non-existence of a wager which would fatally stratify the space of game. It seems obvious that Holden's game of war rather fatally breaks this key concept of a game as open, de-centered structure. Holden always evaluates the merit of a game by the height of that which is wagered; the wager in war being the existence of the game and the players themselves. Through it Holden brings about a fatal division of the space of game; its aim is the attainment of the wager that is

²⁸ Deleuze's ideal game here again seems to partially fall in with Nietzsche's notion of game as a tragic joy stemming from the affirmation of chance as necessity; the eternal return. Being the infinite subdividing line of the present moment, Aion eludes the cyclicity of time (Chronos). Every moment is simultaneous extension in both past and future and it thus follows that each event, too, "runs along the entire Aion and becomes coextensive to its straight line in both directions" (*The Logic of Sense*, 64). That is to say, Aion is also the eternal return of the same, the return of the freedom of chance. Holden in this respects attempts to present, or offer, his game of war as a similar liberating play, eluding the endless cycle of Chronos (regardless whether we understand it as destiny, god, or other paternal entity).

²⁹ For Deleuze's distinction between the standard games (games of skill and chance) and the ideal game (game as affirmation of the chance) see, *Ideal Game* (*The Logic of Sense*, 58-60)

the achieving of victory. His game of war is played solely for the purpose of being won, the game exists to be dominated by its winner, presumably Holden himself.

It is thus an extreme investment of the whole space of the game and by extension of the physical space wherein the game is played (that is the land of America) by the principle of domination and victory. All moves made by the players are divided only between the possibilities of winning or losing. And it certainly follows that a successful player, one that perpetuates and solidifies the game of war, is only the one who is victorious. There can be no losers in war, but not because war would be just, but because it configures the ideal player only as the one who wins in the combat, who reaches for and attains that which is wagered that is the victory itself. In this respect Holden achieves the contrary of what he purports, his game is an extreme stratification and territorialization of the child's (or son's) space. The potential of the players is turned toward only one goal and one value which is the domination of the game. The territory of the country is thus also effectively divided between winners, those who accept the principle of victory, and those who do not. Holden's space is thus a type of one-sided space same as his game is a game of one major rule investment which is never allowed to change. War is in other words an expression solely of the pragmatics of gain and a reduction of all possibility of open space. In this respect however Holden's game is no different than the other paternal and corrective structures that he seems to attack. It is not a liberation from the slave mentality but its most extreme representation. War is a privileged exceptionalist kind of game in which only a player-winner can exist. In this way Holden seems to be a specific comment of McCarthy on the nature of American expansionism; no longer being able to perceive the telos of history he proclaims this loss for a general state of affairs, and as a means to counterweight this loss, he asserts his own supreme individuality. What else is his dance of war that a near fetishization of the ego, its goal being to subsume all

difference and autonomy and transform all space into a domain of ceaseless self-assertion, a total all-absorbing oneness.

The true nature of Holden's war as a system which surreptitiously utilizes the discourse on liberation from slave mentality, only to transform Holden as a centre of a new, but equally restricting order as the ones he pretended to attack, is best seen in his comparison and elevation of war into a near sacred status. Continuing in his lecture on the merits of war Holden proclaims; "war is the truest form of divination. It is the testing of one's will and the will of another within that larger will which because it binds them is therefore forced to select. War is the ultimate game because war is at last a forcing of the unity of existence. War is god." (McCarthy, 263) In an instance of prophetic rhetoric Holden aptly replaces one centre of a governing order by another. The boastful rhetoric, as well as the openly religious connotations, seem crucial here, Holden speaks to the whole group who are often described as his followers or apprentices and presents to them a sermon on the merits of a new religion. One that he attempts to draw as profoundly irreligious that is, as a game that dispels the numbing hold of slave mentality. However by a sleight of hand he simultaneously relegates the listeners into followers of a new order with himself as a master. The whole discourse on war surely seems only a grand attempt to justify his own master status. The test of individual wills that he speaks about can take place only within a perfectly delineated and enclosed space where the working of chance is divided only between the victory and loss. It follows that the one losing is configured as not worthy of the game. As such Holden's war is crystallization not disruption of the spirit of resentment. His true player is necessarily a master figure, one who is always victorious and who always dominates all others. Applied to the historical moment of westward expansion Holden's teaching is a distillation of all discourses (whether

sacred, technological or moral) that justify the eradication of the cultural other and the takeover of the whole of American space.

His perverted religion is installed in the position formerly occupied by god that is, to the centre of the new extra-moral order. And his followers are therefore nowhere close to being freed from their blind devotion to the new transcendental whole. What started as an attack against the divine influence is after all a new form of divinity. Its nature is however telling of the ruthless project that Holden enacts. Instead of a creator and total sum of created things, his god of war is the ultimate devourer of all things extant, including indeed the individual wills contained in it.

Holden's game thus has to be taken precisely as falsified inception of a new reverential whole, unflinching adherence to which by the gang reterritorializes and transforms the entire space taken up by the new republic into one standing beyond the concepts of law (according to his perverted logic war is a game and therefore stands outside of law), justice and morality. The ideal game is another guise, the boastful rhetoric on war nothing more than another attempt of dictating the sense of the world, a sense which justifies the all embracing violence. To be even more precise, war seems to be the name (or sense) that Holden tries to imprint on the wound made by the event of the father's death. He deepens the moral relativity and disrupts all order only to be able to utilize it later to his own advantage.

IV. Conclusion

The fact that war is the sense which Holden tries to impose on the event and thus utilize the moral downfall to his advantage is not the only meaning to be derived of it. As though Holden manages to exert a great deal of control over the space by its means the very fact does not exempt him from the resentment. Closer investigation of the first epigraph prefixed to the novel by Paul Valery seems to prove that the opposite is the case.

In its original context the epigraph coming from Paul Valery's "The Yalu" is pronounced by an eastern sage and it is taken as an accusation of the western reliance on and adoration of intelligence, especially on its attempt to break from and ward off the natural flow of historical time. "Man intoxicated on it believes his own thoughts are legal decision"³⁰ says the speaker in a phrase reflecting Holden's own belief in his ability to dictate the sense to the events around him. There is however further and more important similarity. For Holden's apology for violence and war too attempts to realize a break from world, from "the blood and time" of the epigraph, as he himself is not able to sufficiently answer the claim that the fundamental openness of time and the events (or states of affairs) lays on him. A thing which seems crucial about the world that McCarthy depicts is that its heterogeneity does not unequivocally imply a state of hopeless resignation. Surely there are other possible outcomes to the encounters that the novel stages apart of the hopelessly lethal and violent ones; the presence of the kid and his sporadic yet extant moral dissent from the judge seems to confirm this. Holden's war on the contrary attempts to replace and reinterpret all possible singular outcomes of events and all space by the spirit of victory. Having abandoned all multiplicity

³⁰ Valery's "The Yalu" quoted in Julius Thomas Fraser, *Of Time, Passion, and Knowledge: Reflections on the Strategy of Existence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) 139.

Holden, in a profound gesture of resentment, chooses to rely on his individualistic cunning (that he hopelessly tries to mask as a will to power) and trick the game of existence to follow the principle of infinitely egotistic gain. Holden's realm of war likewise exists only as a resentment of the father's death and his reaction to the wound takes a form of a violent and angry attack against reality itself. Holden builds himself an empire of war in the breach in time made upon the death of the figurative father and attempts to ever deepen the wound. He is in constant reaction and fear before acknowledging the true unobstructed openness of time and the event which constantly threaten to dissolve his egotistic and possessive existence.

In order to bring our argument to its conclusion let us now return to the initial premise from the beginning of this work, that is, the concept of American identity based on rapture with and secession from the paternal influence of continental models. In the spirit of Deleuze's argument McCarthy seems to postulate and depict in his novel a great eruption of free-flowing energy (or desire) unleashed upon the break with the parental concept of history. We have attempted to trace this energy in the first chapter when investigating McCarthy's deterritorialized narrative technique and imagery. Unlike in Deleuze, however, McCarthy's rendition does not produce an image of ultimately de-centered social formation based on fraternity. In his portrayal the individuals seem to have failed above all in moral selection, failed in being able to live up to the event of freedom, to be worthy of the event of father's death.

In broader context we could thus say that McCarthy's work (at least from the above view point) constitutes a critique of the foundations of American national identity. In his view the secessionism governing the national self-identification fails to live up to the pluralist and democratic spirit it claims to enact. No fraternity or patchwork of minorities spoken of by Deleuze, McCarthy's America remains to be caught in endless reaction, fear and resentment

upon the event of rapture with paternal structures that stands at the beginning of its history. At this point it might not be without consequence to mention that this is not a feature exclusive to *Blood Meridian* but a theme pervading most of McCarthy's work. Regardless whether we look at Lester Ballard, John Grady Cole or Sheriff Bell, to name a few, most of the protagonists in McCarthy's novels either have no father or, as the kid, attempt to escape from the dominion of his influence. They are nomadic characters caught in constant flight from the paternal space. McCarthy however seems to suggest that in the process of their flight, there is a possibility that no distinct, or original, voices will be developed and that the flight, now turned into mere escape, will constitute a re-active identity of its own.

In this respect Judge Holden seems to be the embodiment of this much feared identity, the dark side of the individualistic secessionism. Unable to be the actor of his own freedom Holden turns into the image he attempts to avoid. His self-affirmation (which is still a mere re-action) takes the form of paternal self-assertion. Holden asserts his own identity at the cost of all otherness. Deleuze's line of flight thus becomes a vector of endless eradication of all difference and autonomy enacted under the name of solidification of individualism. By the same token American pragmatism, being the embodiment of the line of flight, becomes an attitude by which the individual is able to conceive of the world as ultimately unstratified and open space, open however only in so far as to be entered and reterritorialized by his supreme individuality. Finally, the preceding is not to be taken as a critique of Deleuze's approach, on the contrary by our repeated stressing of the ultimate difference between the two versions, we have tried to suggest the validity of Deleuze's moral notions in the face of the self-consuming obsession with power and the ego, that lie behind the unspeakable violence that McCarthy's vision of America presents us with in the novel.

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