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Global Homesickness in William Gibson's Blue Ant Trilogy

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EIGHT
Global Homesickness in William Gibson's Blue Ant Trilogy

Sean Scanlan

Redefining Homesickness and Global Homesickness

William Gibson's groundbreaking cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* (1984) revealed a sympathetic yet flawed protagonist Henry Dorsett Case and the futuristic horizon of technology's impact on human desire. But his recent Blue Ant Trilogy, comprised of *Pattern Recognition* (2003), *Spook Country* (2007), and *Zero History* (2010), reels in the future and imagines the here-and-now of today's physical world using the ideas and anxieties of post-9/11 globalization as focalized through three realistic characters operating in global cities: Cayce Pollard, Hollis Henry, and Hubertus Bigend.[1] Opposed to his earlier Sprawl Trilogy and Bridge Trilogy, in which abstract AI technology dominates characters and settings, these three characters drive the plot through their unique talents that harness non-standard business skills or "tame pathologies" connected to technologies, consumerism, reading patterns, and writing—all of which are submerged beneath a lurking type of globalization built from the struggle of freedom clashing against security.[2] More specifically, Gibson's globalization combines hyper-consumption, data overload, and a post-9/11 militarized sense of uncertainty converging in urban centers.[3]

Gibson's attention to the present raises a set of questions about what more realistic and naturalist modes of narrative style and characterization help him achieve. Jaak Tomberg helpfully observes that in this trilogy writing style has "qualitatively converged" with ideas so that they feel "plausibly everyday and plausibly cognitively estranged."[4]

While the [END page 143] converging strategies of writing about the edge of future human potential and the extrapolation of a techno-cultural event horizon are noticeably jarring in the early fiction, the strategies used in the Blue Ant Trilogy are tame by comparison. Gibson's newest trilogy seeks out submerged anxieties, retro-reflections, and next-week's business and cultural news in the contemporary world.[5] In fact, I argue that these three novels reveal not radical change but strained sameness—the recognition of what is accessible here and now, only with ratcheted-up anxieties over terrorism and merchandising. Gibson's everyday character interaction and character decision-making deserve a closer look. These novels seek out the ragged edges of character pathologies, especially the ways in which their cognitive estrangements collide with their attempts to reconceptualize the idea of self and the idea of that one place that always seems just out of reach: home.[6] In order to clarify this collision and underscore the importance of cultural and aesthetic codes of uneven globalization, this chapter offers a character study focused through the place-based intensities of global homesickness. Each character has a strained relationship with home: Cayce Pollard only feels at home while reading and writing in an online film forum; Hollis Henry wonders if she might be considered homeless, even though she lives in boutique hotels and apartments; and Hubertus Bigend's multiple homes consist of temporary offices, apartments, hotels, and planes. First, however, I want to redefine homesickness in a way that sheds new light on the warp of identity reconfiguration and self-narration crossing the weft of technological and socio-economic contexts.

Commonly thought of as a yearning for a previous home or the recent past due to present losses, homesickness is a deceptively complex idea that, like an umbrella, covers a wide range of personal and collective feelings about the collision between the past and the present. But homesickness is also about the future, characterized by, especially, the tension between looking toward the past for traditional answers and looking toward the future for hope. The simultaneous presence of peculiarly modern forms of destabilization and recurrent desires for stabilization produces this tension.

Homesickness and its synonym nostalgia have an extensive history; both terms have long been tethered to upheaval. Homer's Odysseus, the war veteran, was homesick for Ithaca, and even when he returned, he had to reconfigure his idea of home before he could be, once again, at home. Much later, Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) explored the role of physical houses and the concept of home amid the clash of classes and genders during the Gilded Age. And DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007) reveals domestic unraveling in New York City after 9/11.[7] These examples point to three possible ways that homesickness fuses the past with the present and leans into the future: by requiring engagement with one's ancestral past, by idealizing images and memories of home through [END page 144] retrospection and

hope, and by framing future anxieties about the nature of home in a world of chance and violent upheaval.

Borrowing from philosophical and sociological definitions, modern homesickness indicates a desire to return to a past home, but it also indicates some knowledge that one cannot return to a past home because that home is now gone (perhaps too remote or it has been sold), and the self, upon such a return, would not be the same self it was in that past home. The knowledge of this doubly impossible return, especially as increasing mobility borne from colonialism and industrialization unleashed large-scale migration patterns beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, is the typical source of the pain or anguish felt by a homesick person—a modern idea described as far back as Kant and Hegel, both of whom wrote about the inevitability of history and the inevitability of the impossible return home.[8] The philosopher Edward Casey says that a person feels homesick or nostalgic when the self, in the act of remembering the past home, collides with the older self during a moment of shock in the present. Casey insists therefore that such feelings are not regressive forces, but imaginative and place-based; they provide an "insight into a world that has become irretrievably past and that arrays itself, as we remember it now, in a plenitude of places."[9] Homesickness is not merely connected to place and memory, though; it is a feeling inextricably linked to mass migrations, especially industrial migrations and migration patterns from rural communities to urban centers during and after the world wars. Jean Starobinski says that the particularly modern power and complexity of nostalgia and homesickness were established in western culture as the "result of the process of urbanization."[10] The feelings activated by such a modern comparative collision between past and present have the power to help people adjudicate between industrial pasts and postmodern, postindustrial dislocations by resisting or welcoming changes to their family structure, social affiliation, or home environment.

Global homesickness is a more fitting term for the psychic and physical homesickness present in the Blue Ant Trilogy. This feeling shares some characteristics with modern homesickness, but has a central difference. Global homesickness arises from a two-fold feeling of displacement. First, a person who feels global homesickness is detached from local community and the family home, perhaps due to economic, social, or political forces, or perhaps by choice. Such detachment has the effect of severing philosophical and ethical orientation points often consecrated in local institutions such as schools, churches, family rituals, or neighborhood customs. Second, such a person forms new attachments, but these attachments are not local, they are affiliations to disembedded, non-state entities represented by, for example, global brands of phones, jeans, and coffee shops. Global homesickness harnesses the idea that mobility is now considered an essential characteristic of market globalization. Here, Susan Matt's formulation is helpful: the myth of individualism combined [END page 145] with

current pop cultural messages of easy travel and escape reinforce the idea that "ceaseless mobility is normal."[11] Global homesickness is a feeling of loss associated with the knowledge that homesteading, completeness, stability, and wholeness are impossible; going further, global homesickness is a comparative feeling of being continually between national pasts and global futures. A person who feels global homesickness typically suffers from an excess of possibilities, often has multiple affiliations, and is often termed global elite due to an education, economic freedom, and a passport than enables frequent and unfettered travel. The feeling may emanate from the desire for continuous global mobility, but the feeling may also arise from too much global mobility. Global homesickness is not an ideal or narrow type, but rather, it is a flexible concept that can covers a wide range of feelings for home catalyzed from excessive mobility.

Cayce Pollard and Hubertus Bigend: *Pattern Recognition* and Crisis Ordinary

The heart of the novel concerns the weaving of three goals. Cayce Pollard wants to finish her freelance job as a fashion-logo specialist with Blue Ant; and simultaneously, she is trying to find out the source of a series of mysterious, anonymous film clips that have become a worldwide, viral sensation. The third strand is Cayce's missing father, Wingrove Pollard, an "evaluator and improver of physical security for American embassies worldwide," who went missing on 9/11 somewhere near the Twin Towers (*PR* 44). His body has never been found, and so Cayce and her mother have not received any help from Wingrove's employer: the U.S. Government, specifically the NSA. The novel is not about 9/11 in terms of surface emplotments, but instead, it serves as an energy source, much like a psychic undertow. The momentum of *Pattern Recognition* is propelled by a convergence of these three strands, but the anxiety and tension emanate from Cayce's traumatic loss and the inability for any character to resolve personal security in a business world that surfs on highly mobile capital. Hubertus Bigend hires Cayce on a mission to try to track down the filmmakers of the footage, and she is able to solve this mystery via interactions with people that she meets both online and in-person. Such creative collisions (both good and bad) occur primarily in cities (both online and physical).

Cayce feels most at home sifting for patterns on an online film forum that she reads and to which she contributes. F:F:F, or Fetish:Footage:Forum, is devoted to discussions of the series of 135 mysterious film clips going viral, gaining traction in global popular culture within the novel's world (*PR* 3). The film footage appears to show an out-of-focus couple embracing each other, but no distinct identification is pos- [END page 146] sible. The openness and hyper-interpretability of the footage brings viewers together: it "has a way of cutting across boundaries, transgressing the accustomed order of things"

(*PR* 20). The narrator reveals that this forum, for Cayce, "is a way now, approximately, of being at home. The forum has become one of the most consistent places in her life, like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones" (*PR* 4). Cayce's desire to find home on an anonymous film discussion site provokes the question of whether or not a satisfactory sense of home can be achieved, or consolidated, online. Is home a process, a place, or a set of people? Or, is home always an overburdened combination? Such a tangled and yet elemental concept is a reminder of Levinas' dwelling: the "privileged role of the home does not consist in being the end of human activity but in being its condition"; it is an "event."[12] Crucially, the novel points to an ethical adjustment, or decision-making process, associated with Cayce's feeling of continual displacement alongside her desire to turn the forum into her intellectual home. Put as a question, can any of these characters make ethical adjustments if continually displaced?

In order to begin answering this question, consider Cayce's home-work system. She works freelance for corporations seeking approval for their logos and designs. The setting for this novel is one year after 9/11, located, primarily, in four global cities: New York, London, Tokyo, and Moscow. Cayce is so susceptible to diluted or simulacral logos and designs, such as those produced by Tommy Hilfiger, that "she is, literally, allergic to fashion" (*PR* 8-9). Yet, she makes her living from her "violent reactivity to the semiotics of the marketplace" (*PR* 2). Lauren Berlant's idea of *Cruel Optimism* (2011) helps shed light on Cayce's ironic suffering and success. According to Berlant, "a relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing," and Cayce Pollard suffers from just such an "impasse" in that her affect components of belonging, affiliation, and relationship are harnessed to a highly desirable skill set that often makes her throw up or get a rash.[13]

Cayce's well-being, a term that I borrow more from Martha Nussbaum's philosophical flourishing than from Antonio Damasio's cognitive paradigm, is not separate from the global flows of capital and advertising, but instead, they are fully enmeshed.[14] She is not traumatized in the usual sense: she is not shut down by her encounters with manufacturers' labels. Instead, she adapts to and mediates herself through both negative and positive experiences, a series of precarious, uneven shocks that Berlant refers to as "crisis ordinary."[15] The idea behind this term holds that a person can be habituated by trauma and can respond by expressiveness rather than by blocking. In a positive sense, her allergy provides a marketable skill that opens the door to the global elite in terms of income and ability to travel freely. In a negative sense, her job requires an onerous travel schedule; she is continually displaced, and she feels "jet-lag" or "soul delay" as a matter of daily living (*PR* 1, 126). [END page 147]

I want to move beyond Berlant's emphasis on the singularity of affect and find the edges where Cayce seeks and rebuilds an idea of

home by engaging with her homesick feelings of displacement. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's attention to cultural nodes and the anchors and roots that provoke and disable remaking the home provides a helpful set of metaphors for thinking through global homesickness. Bauman suggests that the key to ethical decision-making hinges upon the proximity, quality, and quantity of orientation points.[16] Loosening traditional ideas enables flexible arrangements and cross-border travel and living, and at the same time, Bauman implies that excessive choices have the effect of effacing usual, modern and modernist, attachments and ideals of institutional orientation. Cayce Pollard is without any firm connection to any local, regional, or national institution such as her high school, her hometown, a neighborhood festival, a sports team, a political camp, or even a sense of national affiliation. Instead, she claims that F:F:F, the online forum, is her one constant affiliation; she is a devoted follower of the forum, yet it also follows her. This seductive digital-place is emancipating, and it can help widen the circle of who can enter one's home, but it presents inherent risks. When inviting the unknown or the other or the radically new, new stresses arise. For example, one frequent commenter on F:F:F is Mama Anarchia, an unknown figure who is not merely antagonistic, but dangerous. Mama Anarchia is actually a rogue Blue Ant employee, Dorotea Benedetti, who fears she will lose her job and sells her inside knowledge of Cayce's movements to Russian intelligence agents. Dorotea later drugs Cayce in an attempt to extract the filmmaker's identity, nearly killing her. The anonymous forum is then a problematic home. Whom to invite to join the forum, whose opinions to believe, whom to trust, how to integrate or assimilate new ideas—all may dominate the never-ending need to reinforce one's identity. Further, the pull of the online film forum provides constant reminders of missing out on the action of the forum and a reminder that this forum is not a real place.

Cayce's allergy, her new job with Blue Ant, and her fascination with "homemaking" inside F:F:F are part of the characteristic of global homesickness that requires some further work. Cayce's desire to constantly check in with the forum may be considered a type of digital global homesickness, an idea that Matt describes. She argues that the increase in electronic communication has increased homesickness because constant communication reinforces the person or place that is currently not available: "the immediacy that phones and the Internet provide means that those away from home can know exactly what they are missing and when it is happening."[17] While familiarity is heightened by increased connectivity, a parallel and increasing need to stay connected means that the familiarity requires relentless updating. Instead of absence making the heart grow fonder, the opposite occurs: increased electronic familiarity and connection (through email, texting, video chats, Facebook updates, phone calls.) [END page 148] propels more desire for more contact. Increased connection magnifies

homesickness; the repeated recognition of absence makes the heart grow fonder for the missed object of desire.

Online writing combined with face-to-face contact are the two methods that enable Cayce to successfully track down the makers of the film clips that Bigend hired her to find and to remake a more sustainable concept of home. But how do her methods shed light on questions of home, global homesickness, and identity reconfiguration. Cayce meets the footage filmmakers by seeking out a retired Cold War spy named Hobbs, understanding digital watermarks, following her intuition, and, primarily, by writing very personal emails. In much the same way that Jane Austen's Darcy and Elizabeth coordinate and reconfigure their relationship through letters, so too does *Pattern Recognition* rely on such writing and reading technologies and processes. Janine Tobeck astutely observes that two terrorist explosions "influence nearly everything Cayce does, but the story's focus is on how she deals with that influence rather than how she is determined by it."[18] Indeed, the point is that her adaptation relies upon the decisions that she makes while processing her feelings of displacement and her feelings for others—reading not only fashion logos, but also online posts about the footage and, especially, facial expressions.

The footage filmmakers, as Cayce finds out, are twins from Russia who have embarked on their project as a way to process their own loss and displacement: their parents were also killed in a terrorist bomb attack against their powerful family, seemingly unrelated to 9/11, but very much enmeshed with the undertow of a global militarized fear that pervades all three of the novels. Both of the twins, Stella and Nora, were injured by a Claymore Mine and forced into hiding. But Nora was severely disabled, unable to speak or walk. Cayce meets both sisters in their secretive Moscow studio, because, simply put, she has to know if they are human. She asks in the pivotal email to the sisters:

> What I want to ask you is
> Who are you?
> Where are you?
> Are you dreaming?
> Are you there? The way I'm here? (*PR 256*)

It is crucial that Stella answers her email and wants to meet Cayce face-to-face because of the double connection of urban terrorism and family loss. Both Cayce and Stella and Nora have had their homes destroyed and they have been exiled: Cayce is self-exiled from New York City and her Manhattan apartment and Stella and Nora have been forced to hide in Moscow for fear of further terrorist acts against them.

When Cayce finally meets the sisters, their faces seem to speak, registering the rarity of Cayce's face-to-face interactions and helping ease her fear of being watched on the F:F:F forum and followed by Dorotea and [END page 149] her hired Russian agents in London. The

less injured sister, Stella, was still disfigured: "It is Stella's face, but some fault bisects it vertically, not quite evenly. There are no scars, only this skewing of the bone beneath" (*PR* 314). Cayce finds out that the other sister, the real "maker," Nora, had undergone nearly a dozen operations, but surgeons have not been able to extract a piece of the U.S.-made Claymore mine, which still rests inside Nora's skull, in the shape of a "T," and the T is also the shape in one of the film clips Cayce has been trying to interpret. Cayce realizes that what the world had thought was a film clip that resembled a blurred map of some city in the shape of a T was actually Stella's consciousness "bound to the T-shaped fragment [of the Claymore mine] in her brain" (*PR* 305). When Cayce looks into Nora's "dark eyes," we merely read: "Nora sees her. Then doesn't. Turns back to the screen," and continues her work (*PR* 304). Nora's work is a sort of writing, a sort of filmic memoir in which she attempts to process fragments of her memories of her family (possibly her parents) and her self and the extra-diegetic bombing moments—trying, it seems, to reintegrate a sense of self. Making the film is what seems to keep her alive, and I want to suggest that Nora's wound, "speaking wordlessly into the dark"—and now seen as footage by the world—is also an example of cruel optimism, a painful reminder of loss and injury, of severe disability, yet also a condition of possibility.

These details of the larger forces are important because they influence the action in the same way that a large ship must avoid an iceberg from a distance; the anxiety of collision creates a new horizon of choices. Such choices get fine-grained attention by Cayce—ultra sensitive to violence and markets. The first moment of human touch for Cayce occurs when, outside of the film studio, she cries, and Stella "places her hands on Cayce's shoulders. 'Now you have seen her work'" (*PR* 306). The mystery is solved on multiple levels: Cayce is able to display a strong and honest affect—crying—and she finds the maker of the film—a disabled woman—and she learns that it is a work in-progress, not a completed film cut up and sent out in fragments. She recognized the film's pattern of creation and distribution before anyone else, and she is beginning to recognize her own pattern of well-being. In the end of the novel, Cayce's global homesickness, her unease in world of fashion and her attraction for it, and her attraction for the online home and her fear of it all have radically changed. She now suffers no discomfort from Louis Vuitton, Tommy Hilfiger, or the Michelin Man, and seems cured of one of her pathologies (*PR* 355). With the help of Stella and Nora's surviving relatives, Cayce and her mother can at last gain access to Win Pollard's pension and his patents because he has been formally declared deceased by the U.S. government. And, her homemaking takes a new twist as she delays going home to her apartment in Manhattan and stays in Paris with Peter Parker (Parkaboy), one of the forum commenters whom she comes to [END page 150] realize was genuine in his writing. So, writing and face-to-face meetings merge to become important parts of her nascent home. That

said, Cayce is a work-in-progress, much like her life and her future, which Gibson reveals later, in *Zero History*.

Hollis Henry's Non-Places

Pattern Recognition is, according to Gibson, a story "about the immediate psychic aftermath of 9/11," while the second novel in the trilogy, *Spook Country*, is "about the deep end of the Bush administration and the invasion of Iraq."[19] Both novels carry forward the strain of security competing against freedom, tracing not so much the details of aftermath and invasion, but instead exploring the fringe where war profiteering meets art and commerce in three global cities: Los Angeles, New York, and Vancouver. The first and most compelling of the three plot strands of *Spook Country* closely follows Hollis Henry, the ex-singer of the rock band the Curfew, who is now a freelance writer for *Node*, a Bigend-financed magazine project. The second strand follows Tito, a Chinese Cuban freelance spy. Milgrim, the third strand, is an anxiety-pill addict and Columbia graduate school dropout who is being used by an ex-military man named Brown to translate Volapuk, an international constructed language, in order to help facilitate stealing a large sum of war profits from the Iraq reconstruction effort. No character has a permanent address; their assignments and movements keep them momentarily suspended or moving between hotels and company apartments—always in cities.

The one actual residence in *Spook Country* is the new Blue Ant apartment in Vancouver, British Columbia. Besides the Mondrian hotel in L.A., it is the most stable place where characters rest and where they discuss the narrative that brought them together. Simply put, the apartment is one of the primary places where people can meet and discuss the mysteries that they are attempting to unravel or recognize. But where *Pattern Recognition* promoted what Fredric Jameson refers to as Gibson's "hyped-up name-dropping" style,[20] *Spook Country*'s style reflects low-level panic of those sorting out the opportunities and problems of establishing home and working on the fringe of the military industrial complex as the Iraq war winds down. This secure apartment has four floors and a bathroom where "nothing much resembled conventional amenities" (*SC* 267), a "glassy concrete floor" for the garage, an elevator with "doors of brushed stainless," and "two flights of giddily suspended stairs," made from slabs of "frosted glass" (*SC* 253-54). Overall, the apartment "might have been the central concourse in the national airport of some tiny, hyper-wealthy European nation, a pocket Liechtenstein" (*SC* 254). Hollis and her Parisian friend Odile comment with clipped reserve-[END page 151] tion upon entering the apartment: "Yes indeed," and "Formidable," and "Good, isn't it?" (*SC* 253-54).

The Mondrian and Bigend's apartment are examples of what Marc Augé refers to as "non-places."[21] Of course, each of these places is actually a physical place as both "place and non-place really exist in the

absolute sense of the term," says Augé.²² Non-places, such as "airports and railway stations, hotel chains . . . and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks," enable a peculiar "double movement" of the traveler and the traveler's inward attention.²³ Such double movement reflects a focus on the singular form of self-possession in which a character like Hollis surrenders herself not to environment but to passive considerations of "identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing."²⁴ While Augé remarks on the difficulty of integrating non-places into a person's identity repertoire, it is more accurate to say that non-places are always being processed, or integrated, within identity-building networks. Non-places, such as Hollis' Mondrian and the Vancouver apartment, are not merely integrated to a highly personal, sealed compartment, instead they become frontier orientation points. Such points have not been configured into Hollis's self, but they have been registered; they are prenumbral and emergent spaces. Reading the Mondrian and Bigend's apartment as non-places converts them from banal, modernist spaces into key sites; they are magnetic urban orientation points that draw her into Bigend's corporate family and ironically help her to negotiate her post-music self. The draw is not stabilizing though. Such spaces are not exactly inviting; they enforce distance, even as they glow with the stainless steel cool of high modernism.

Hollis is a particular type of global elite that I term floating elite; she is always on tour, even through no longer performing music. This pattern is both alluring and also destabilizing—mirroring the cool places in which she camps. At one point, early in the novel, Hollis wonders if she could stay in a luxury hotel like the Mondrian and "technically still be considered homeless? It felt like you could, she decided" (*SC* 4). But she is wrong, of course. She is without a formal, rented or mortgaged home, but to say she is homeless does severe disservice to those without means of shelter, those in refugee camps, those who might be suffering from radical homesickness, a more severe mode of global homesickness in which homemaking and dwelling are barred, disallowed. In other words, her drift away from orientation points enables her to claim a radical homesickness, when, in fact, she is cognitively and physically displaced, adrift from communal or familiar attachments, but with all the proper credit and passport stamps to keep her mobile.²⁵

She says she is "trying to be" a writer (*SC* 275), but we never see her write in the novel. She travels, talks, investigates, and observes, as if still with the Curfew. Although she does not use the word global homesickness, we can interpret her distanced relationship to people and places as [END page 152] such. Near the end of the novel, when she attempts to log on to a Blue Ant Powerbook, she has a hard time getting online and cannot find a "trusted network." We read: "The phrase 'trusted networks' briefly made her feel like crying. She wasn't feeling as if she had any" (*SC* 283). Her feeling here is global homesickness in action, a feeling of being caught between digital realms and hotels—all

the while desiring to continue searching out the edges of this suitcase existence. Even though Hollis's writing emerges later, in *Zero History*, she is working and traveling and closely reading the characters who are making locative art, who are trying to steal Iraq war money, and who are trying to foil the Iraq money laundering system. So, she is working on her skill set and she is working on herself, composing, prewriting by using her intuition to detach and find the edge to the mystery of where Bigend's desires and her willingness to suspend her attachments will lead her. And they lead her to a new sort of "trusted network," or family.

The novel ends with the successful tagging and tracking of the stolen Iraq funds in a shipping container—making the money impossible to use or spend. Hollis has yet to write the article for *Node*, but Bigend keeps pursuing her skill set of finding the edges to mysteries. Her skill of tracking down ideas, of being on tour, also results in her inability to settle down and maintain a permanent address.

Hollis and Bigend: New Orientation Points and New Homes in *Zero History*

Zero History continues where *Spook Country* ends. A central off-site plot point is that, as *Zero History* begins, Hollis has written and published a book about locative art; clearly the *Node* article has been converted to a finished product. Due to his extreme wealth and his prescient ability to penetrate the skills and weaknesses of his freelance workers, Hollis is loath to join forces with Bigend again, but she lost half of her money in the housing bubble crash of 2008. So, she agrees to a new contract with Blue Ant because, as Bigend says, "I need a wildcard. I need you" (*ZH* 24). Hollis's assignment is to track down an underground denim designer with the help of Milgrim. Danger emerges as an arms dealer named Gracie wants to procure a large U.S. military contract for special camouflage pants, but realizes Blue Ant might have scooped him. Gracie then kidnaps a Blue Ant employee and tries to black mail Bigend. After a foray into Paris, the denouement occurs in London where Hollis, Garreth, and Milgrim outsmart Gracie's team using a drone and disguises.

Still without a permanent address, Hollis resides in hotels exclusively: "Everything she owned, currently, was here in this room," at the Blue Ant-owned boutique hotel named Cabinet in Soho, London (*ZH* 17). Her homes are pieced together from non-places (hotels and rented apart- [END page 153] ments); they are contrived and processed homes. Simply put, relationships are the core of her idea of home, which is conceptual, a reminder of Svetlana Boym's definition of home as a "state of mind that doesn't depend on an actual location."[26] Her lack of real estate and things leads her to form orientation points cobbled together from temporary places, temporary alliances, and contract obligations.

Hollis' boyfriend, Garreth, a professional BASE jumper, whom she met in *Spook Country*, and to whom she gets engaged, has now become part of her new concept of home. Instead of joining the Bigend/Blue Ant trip to Iceland, she opts to stay in Cabinet, the boutique hotel in London, before moving with Garreth, to Berlin. Garreth's new flat consists of "One very big room and a bathroom. No kitchen, just the stumps of pipes and ganglia sticking up from the floor" (*ZH* 397)—in other words, a home in the making, not finished, provisional. Although not solved, Hollis's global homesickness has changed from an investment in her blurry orientation points (hotels, permanent travel) to an investment in the possibility of a stable, local place and community. The unfinished flat in Berlin is a metaphor for Hollis' continuing project of remaking her idea of home. From rock star to writer, readers cannot be sure what her next project will be and if her affiliations with Bigend are at an end. Although there is no closure to Hollis' drifting, she has decided to live with another person, to marry Garreth, and that creates a new host of anxieties, opportunities, and shocks. Her global homesickness will change as will her identity, but she has a new sense of control over this newly emerging Berlin home that was absent in the hotel rooms.

The end of the novel reveals Bigend's business and homemaking skills. He invites the Blue Ant employees to join him for an extended vacation in Iceland. But the trick, or his conceit, is they have to travel there on a refurbished ekranoplan, a massive plane with clipped wings that skims above water, a WWII relic updated by the fashion house Hermès. Milgrim's girlfriend, Fiona, is on the plane as is Pamela Mainwaring, her mother. Pamela, we find out, is Bigend's girlfriend. If the entire staff of Blue Ant is there, too, then this is a family vacation. The giant plane is a metonym for his new home: a detached and detachable single-family home inside a corporate plane. The ekranoplan is one of the few meeting places outside of the city, and so it is valid to conjecture that even though most of the trilogy's actions, revelations, and solutions occur in global cities, the corporate owner relies on a truly floating and flying home—completely detached from place, truly mobile. Perhaps the plane is a strategic reaction to the threats the company faces as they squeeze the marketplace and post-9/11 energies. Bigend uses the creative capital of global cities (the talent pool, the infrastructure, the concentration of capital), but he wants his home so secure and so free that it must be untethered from the usual bounds of earthly houses. His plane-as-home is surely a nod to Gibson's science fiction roots. [END page 154]

Bigend's search for a new sort of family and new freelance workers is a reminder of Bauman's central worry: the shortage of "firm and reliable orientation points" in our current age of what he calls "liquid modernity" "coincides with a proliferation of tempting suggestions and seductive offers of orientation."[27] This vexing problem of new, exciting, but deceitful propositions, Gibson's Blue Ant Trilogy

suggests, can be resolved by face-to-face encounters which lead to homemaking, even if the physical home is unfinished or mobile. Rather than electronic or filmic or telephonic forms alone, the resolution comes by way of accumulation and accrual of experiences, a sort of unbalanced balance of modern and postmodern home-configuring technologies. As much as technology is on the surface, the central technology pulling characters into new orbits with new characters is the very old and new construct: home. By pushing the concept of home into the category of technology, I push the process of writing oneself toward the process of homemaking, a conceptualization that presents the possibility that even the anxiety of global homesickness can enable decisions and adaptations that change Cayce and Hollis from conscripted talent (subjects) to selves with continually reconfiguring identities. Bigend, however, is conscriptor and conscripted; he seeks out what Saskia Sassen calls the "systemic edge" of capital flows that describe the recent extreme twists of globalization—in his case the systemic edge where fashion marketing and skill concentration fuse, exclusively, in global cities.[28] Bigend's knowledge of dematerializing networks still relies on urban centers as a home base for operations. His double sense of place and skill serves as a reminder, as Sassen predicted, that global cities produce a sense of place and a sense of imagination; the world is not Bigend's home, but global cities are.[29]

Conclusion

Three final threads require some tightening, even though the project here is to allow the fabric a sort of looseness and flexibility. First, these meetings, these face-to-face encounters, that Cayce, Hollis, and Bigend have with people accord with an ethics of responsibility set forth by Emmanuel Levinas in *Ethics and Infinity* (1985). Meeting people face-to-face is, according to Levinas, "knotted" with the "node of the subjective" and also with ethics properly "understood as responsibility."[30] What this means is that a person can only understand her own subjectivity in relation to the Other; and simultaneously, a person becomes responsible to oneself in the act of becoming responsible to the Other. The cost carried by the floating elite is that community is hard to establish, and allowing people into ad hoc communities may attract people like Dorotea Benedetti and Gracie, people who are not imaginative or only concerned with money or actually very dangerous. The benefit for such loose affiliations [END page 155] and ad hoc identity-building in the world of global marketing is that some chance meetings enable Cayce Pollard to be able to learn more about herself upon meeting people face-to-face. She moves to Paris with Peter Gilbert (her email confidant on F:F:F), and her allergies, or "panic reactions," have been "relieved," perhaps permanently (*PR* 354). And, at the end of *Zero History*, readers learn that the maker of the secret denim brand Gabriel Hounds is none other than Cayce, the person who had so successfully learned global

guerrilla marketing from her former employer, Bigend, that she ends up out-marketing him. Global homesickness does not merely problematize orientation points in the tightly spooled collection of affects, places, memories, and anxieties about a freelance existence. Cayce, Hollis, and Bigend make decisions about who to let into their on- and off-line homes. And this decision-making process is part of the crisis ordinary, daily, uneven experiences, that rise and fall in relation to encounters based on trust and based on unequal power. But, as Gibson's technocultural-inflected fiction (no longer cyborg-inflected) has here reinforced, face-to-face in the near future is not always possible, and it is not the only path to sustaining relationships.

Second, there is no surprise that global homesickness may indicate dislocation and overconsumption. But what are the possible costs and benefits to such ease of "weighing anchor"? This term, from Bauman, signals a process of disembedding in which a person travels from port to port (or from home to home) without establishing roots, a process that forces belonging to new dispensations, toward unorthodox communities.[31] One cost is an unknown quantity of stability, or the loss of some established relationship(s) to family, friends, home, neighborhood, region, and nation. The benefit of such ease of dislocation and remaking the home (weighing anchor) is that feelings of global homesickness may catalyze decisions to include others into such a newly remade home. It is not an easy arrangement, and it is not without some degree of irony that the neo-capitalist, neo-family conscriptor Bigend seems committed to this evolving type of project. Cayce and Hollis remain uneasy, suspended in more self-reflection and self-reconfiguration. In other words, global homesickness may pull others into one's orbit, it may act to bind people together who might not do so if they were still rooted. Global homesickness may enable quick adjustment and free one to invite others into one's home, allowing for the ability to understand more people—or at least pretend to. This relationship is still unequal, as globalization does not guarantee even distributions of power, and expanding one's own home may be a forceful intrusion into another's.

Lastly, I position the idea of global ethics as necessarily harnessing a concordance and discordance of replies and decisions to which these characters attend. Shaped by Paul Ricoeur's idea of "narrative identity," these modern and supermodern emplotments between Gibson's characters and actions, between characters and narrative, is how selfhood is [END page 156] made both on paper and on the sidewalk.[32] Further, there is always a gap between the self and the other and the narrative. Far from the idea that there has been a failure to achieve well-being in our globalized, post-9/11 world, these new orientation points, though less solid, suggest that home is less about an inherited site and more about those spaces created by the self in relation to those others we invite to enter. Yes, there are spaces for home outside of the global city, but these characters are after something that

cannot occur in rural environments or rarified suburban enclaves. Instead, more collision and more friction are needed to animate these characters. The global city *in sum* is their primary home, and this home-as-city in which mixophilia is the norm is home ground for their conception of self. Ricoeur implores readers to change the question from the tormented "Who am I?" to one of relation: "Who am I, so inconstant, that *notwithstanding* you count on me?"[33] Bigend counts on Cayce and Hollis, and they count on him in an interdependent, unequal relationship that suffers from different degrees of global homesickness and yet also draws a reciprocally tinged energy for continuous self-formation and reconfiguration. The crisis ordinary of globalization and its inherent global homesickness does not mean the game is over; instead, it means that the game must be reimagined in new places, in new homes, in new relations.

Notes

[1] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984); *Pattern Recognition* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2003); *Spook Country* (2007; New York: Berkeley, 2008); *Zero History* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2010). The Blue Ant novels hereafter cited in text: *Pattern Recognition* (*PR*), *Spook Country* (*SC*), and *Zero History* (*ZH*).

[2] Gibson's Sprawl Trilogy, which references the sprawl of the not-yet-named Internet, is *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero* (New York: Arbor House, 1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1988). The Bridge Trilogy, which references a post-earthquake San Francisco bridge, is: *Virtual Light* (New York: Bantam Spectra, 1993), *Idoru,* (New York: Viking, 1996) and *All Tomorrow's Parties* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1999).

[3] See William Gibson, *Distrust That Particular Flavor* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2012), 46.

[4] Jaak Tomberg, "On the 'Double Vision' of Realism and SF Estrangement in William Gibson's Bigend Trilogy," *Science Fiction Studies* 40, no. 2 (July 2013): 263.

[5] Ibid., 264; see also Veronica Hollinger, "Stories about the Future: From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern Recognition," *Science Fiction Studies* 33, no. 3 (November 2006): 452-72.

[6] The idea of home is connected to, but more than equal to, the physical home. Home, then, is not an idea or place, but an enmeshed, embodied fusion of both. Feelings for and about home help form the cornerstone of human experience.

[7] Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1996). Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (1905; New York: The Modern Library, 1999). Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (New York: Scribner, 2007).

[8] For a reading of how Kant, Hegel, and Marx described the idea of nostalgia and by extension homesickness, see Marcos Piason Natali, "History and the Politics of Nostalgia," *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* 5 (Fall 2004): 10-25. [END page 157]

[9] Edward S. Casey, "The World of Nostalgia," *Man and World* 20, no.4 (Oct 1987): 380. For Casey, philosophers such as Kant, Heidegger, Levinas, and Husserl (among others) have often missed the critical edge of nostalgia and homesickness. Critics Svetlana Boym and Andreea Ritivoi write that homesickness is an aspect of memory, that it can provide memory circuits that reinforce or erode the self's ongoing, never ending process of identity formation and reinforcement. See Boym and Ritivoi.

[10] Jean Starobinski, "The Idea of Nostalgia," *Diogenes* 54 (1966): 101.

[11] Susan J. Matt, *Homesickness: An American History* (New York: Oxford University Press,
2011), 253.

[12] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 152-53.

[13] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 1, 4.

[14] According to Antonio Damasio's analogy, feelings are the finest developments, the "leaves" of an organism's homeostatic "tree" whose aim is to help maintain well-being, or what Spinoza referred to as *conatus*. See Damasio, *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2003), 36-37. Similarly, Martha Nussbaum refers to feelings (with help from Aristotle) as the necessary ingredient for *eudaimonia*, or "human flourishing." See Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 19-88.

[15] Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 9-10. Berlant reads *Pattern Recognition* as a novel in which Cayce's sensorium gets organized around the shift from bad precarity to good precarity, and her theory that the ideas set in motion emanate from Cayce's trauma of 9/11 and her father's death has informed my reading; see *Cruel Optimism*, 82-92. While Berlant focuses on the ways that Cayce's wounds, and her liminality, help her to adapt and adjust, I filter the ideas of adjustment and decision-making toward a theory of Cayce's efforts to reconfigure her home.

[16] Zygmunt Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 17-30.

[17] Matt, *Homesickness,* 259. For other critiques that configure nostalgia and homesickness as useful, productive, and complex ways by which memory links history to place and identity, see Boym, Ritivoi, and Su.

[18] Janine Tobeck, "Discretionary Subjects: Decision and Participation in William Gibson's Fiction," *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies* 56, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 392.

[19] Gibson, *Distrust That Particular Flavor*, 46-47.

[20] Fredric Jameson, "Fear and Loathing in Globalization," in *Literature and Globalization: A Reader*, ed. Liam Connell and Nicky Marsh (London: Routledge, 2011), 246.

[21] Marc Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, trans. John Howe (London: Verso, 2008), 63.

[22] Ibid., viii.

[23] Ibid., 64, 69.

[24] Ibid., 83.

[25] See John Durham Peters' lucid argument against extoling nomadism, homelessness, and tenting in "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon," in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. Hamid Naficy (New York: Routledge, 1999), 35-36.

[26] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 251.

[27] Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?*, 24.

[28] Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 2014), 211.

[29] Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xxii.

[30] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 95.

[31] Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?*, 19.

[32] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 148. One of Ricoeur's most important ideas, in the chapter "The [END page 158] Self and Narrative Identity," is that the issue of ethics is the relationship between the self and the self and the self and the other, not simply between the self and the other.

[33] Ibid., 168.

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