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**The Architecture of Safety:
Bunker Mentalities and the Construction of Safe Space in America**

A Dissertation Presented

by

Gregory Stephen Wells Clinton

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature

(Cultural Studies)

Stony Brook University

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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How does “safety” get constructed in American culture after World War II? This dissertation focuses on the ways that architectural spaces—particularly domestic and laboratory space—are configured as “safe” spaces. Through case studies of high-rises, suburban houses, underground bunkers, and industrial cleanrooms, it seeks to uncover how the built environment produces and is produced by the concept of “safety.” This case study model incorporates critical and sociological theory, historical documents, popular literature, and film to investigate “safety” as the basis for projects that sustain racialized and gendered forms of power, as well as participating in a peculiarly American “bunker mentality,” or the politics of fortification, spatial control and defense, and apocalyptic narratives. The figure of the zombie as a destabilizing and deterritorializing force is central to this study since so many of these architectural cases are opposed—in literary but also in governmental policies—to zombies. Ultimately, this study imbricates architecture and story-telling, the material and the imaginative, to critically evaluate how the story of “safety” is told and then mobilized to political ends.

for Soren and Blake

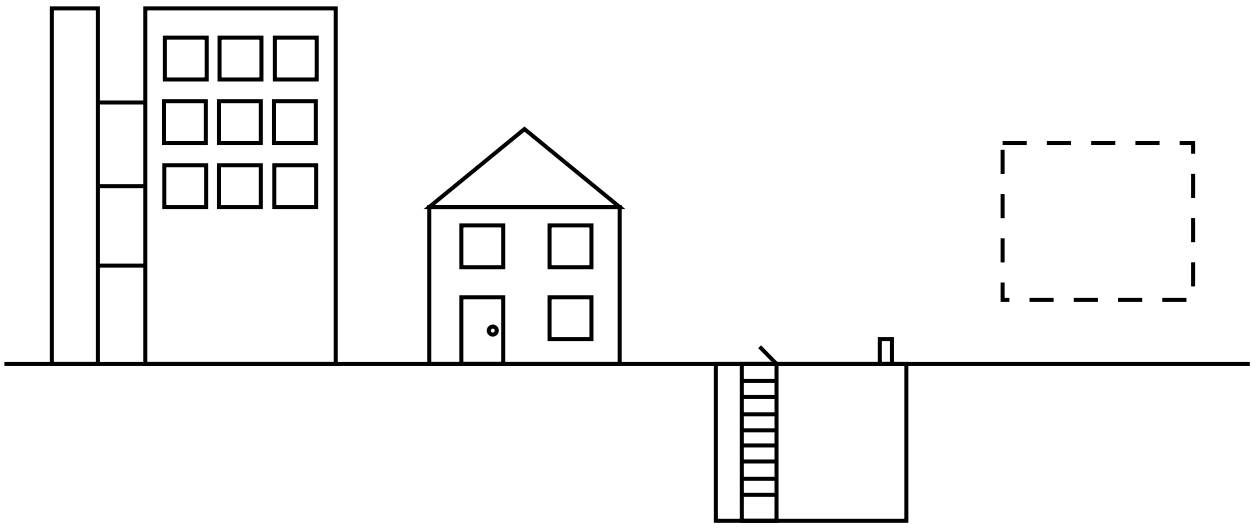


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PREFACE

The 45th President of the United States is a real estate developer by trade, and his signature campaign promise was to transform a geographical border into an architectural tangibility. These moves—to build, to harden, to fortify, to exclude—are more than just rhetorically interesting; they relate to the imbrication of space and politics. What appears to be a set of purely pragmatic tasks—the planning of space for residential and commercial neighborhoods, zoning and constructing, contracting and sub-contracting, and all the other legal and infrastructural concerns that go along with modern “civil engineering” or “urban planning”—speak to the shape and function of power relations within a society.

I began my dissertation research well before Donald Trump was elected to office, and in fact well before he was even considered a contender for office. But from the moment he entered the presidential campaign, descending his gold-trimmed escalator to rail against dangerous immigrants and the need for a giant border wall, promising to undo environmental protections and praising autocrats around the world, engendering excited support from white supremacist organizations, it was clear to me that the questions I have been asking about risk and safety, walls and fortifications, and the ways that white masculinity maintains its superiority are critical questions for our times. That Trump is in the White House means the questions are no longer theoretical, though they never were.

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A number of individuals require special acknowledgement for their help and support of this project. Mary Moran-Luba, for unwavering administrative and moral support; Robert Harvey, for his generous time and attention to all my academic and professional goals; E. Ann Kaplan, for years of encouragement and opportunity, and for inspiring my interest in the environmental humanities; Lisa Diedrich, for carefully and insightfully reading anything I asked, and for always having time; Michele Friedner, for helping me hone a critical sense for health and disability studies, and for lots and lots of supportive criticism of my writing; and Patrice Nganang, my advisor and mentor, for radically challenging me as a thinker, writer, and teacher.

My friends and family have also contributed this project—the ways they've helped and all their names are too numerous to list, but no less deeply appreciated. My children, Soren and Blake, gave me joy, which is a crucial ingredient for completing any large project. My wife, Lynn, deserves so much credit—she endured my obsessions and stresses, and picked up all the slack I left behind as I focused on this work. I'll forever be grateful to her for that.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is primarily concerned with understanding “safety” in American culture through an examination of the socio-cultural construction of space and the built environment. I analyze safety from the perspective of domestic spaces—high-rises, houses, bunkers—and laboratory spaces—biosafety labs and cleanrooms. The range of cases that I examine is important to show how safety is constructed at global and local scales, and how “safety” is a rhetoric that can be mobilized to liberatory and oppressive, progressive and reactionary, peaceful as well as violent ends. One of my central conclusions is that “safe” is ambivalent and slippery, a conclusion that can be applied to a variety of social and environmental discussions. By historicizing “safety” in the built environment of post-World War II and contemporary American culture, I hope to illuminate the political landscape in the twenty-first century, an era in which risk seems ubiquitous and the quality, speed, and vectors of violence and domination are changing rapidly.

This dissertation employs a case study model to explore four architectural patterns that reveal the ways in which safety serves to reify and ossify hierarchies of power as well as binaries of difference. There are several main themes in this analysis. First, I find that the architecture of safety participates in the history and discourse of war; safety is a question of defense. Second, the architectural spaces I examine participate in projects to construct race, gender, nation, family, and other socially constitutive categories. Third, safety is reflected in the built environment as well as the stories and imaginative productions that contribute to the cultural meaning of those lived spaces. And last, the architectures of safety I examine from the mid-twentieth century to

the present participate in and contribute to the uncertainties and violence of the Anthropocene.¹

The implication of this last point is that these spaces are infused with a determination to survive, to control the environment and the future, to normalize and standardize the present, and to effectively manage the flows and intensities emanating from a reconfigured planet. The four case studies focus on the high rise, the detached house, the bunker, and the cleanroom.

Each of these architectural forms will inhere in an ongoing analysis of domesticity as it is constructed in the contemporary twenty-first century moment. By paying attention to the construction of storm and fallout shelters, militarized home bunkers, and laboratory and manufacturing cleanroom spaces, I will show how safety shapes and reshapes American domestic space in its design and its cultural significance. I also hope to illuminate the political circulation of safety and safe space that will add to discussions of safety in domains such as civil defense, climate change, education, and social welfare policies.

The “domestic” in contemporary American political rhetoric is as slippery as “safety,” and I show how they are both involved with one another on multiple levels. For instance, at the local scale, domesticity is figured in distinctly gendered and racialized ways: housekeeping and homemaking are traditionally women’s work, while the very idea of owning a detached house, a key component of “the American Dream” in the post-war era, was configured around white male

¹ Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill, “The Anthropocene”; Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History”; Latour, “Agency at the Time of the Anthropocene”; Waters et al., “The Anthropocene Is Functionally and Stratigraphically Distinct from the Holocene.” The Anthropocene, according to much recent scholarship such as these cited, is loosely defined as the era in which humans have become a geological force. Its precise beginnings are often a matter of debate, but the Anthropocene is often linked to the rise of industrialization in the nineteenth century or nuclear proliferation in the twentieth century.

workers and white families.² At the same time, the American Dream house was framed by threats from Soviet radiation as well as foreign disease and deadly dust: the house, meant to safeguard and nourish the family, was also a threatening space, unsafe.³ The tension between “safe” and “unsafe,” I argue, was and remains a crucial source of rhetorical and political energy for constructing and transmitting power.⁴ At the global scale, on the other hand, we are facing what many have taken to calling the Anthropocene, a situation in which the relationship between humans and the planet will inevitably be reassessed and reformed given that environmental degradation threatens humans as a species. The Anthropocene produces violent and unsafe conditions for those who cannot afford to avoid or counteract them—usually the global poor, women and children, and non-white populations.⁵ So in order to address the global and transnational scale, I analyze the ways that safety is mobilized in biosafety labs and cleanroom fabrication spaces, how safety can alternatively produce and destroy, generate and violate.

² For a deeper discussion of these concepts, see Chapter 2 and 3 below, as well as Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*; Wright, *Building the Dream*; Harris, *Little White Houses*.

³ Chapter 2 and 3 below, and also Rose, *One Nation Underground*; Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs*.

⁴ This comes into sharp relief when we consider the ongoing and fluid rhetoric of national security and safety generated by Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and administration. The theme for the first night of the Republican National Convention in 2016, for instance, was “Make America Safe Again”; the speeches focused on the construction of barriers to immigration and the global war on terrorism. Simultaneously, however, President Trump has moved to undo measures to reduce environmental damage by coal and other industries, exacerbating ecological violence and increasingly unsafe environmental space.

⁵ Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History”; Žižek, *Living in the End Times*; Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

The Space of the Text

An alternative title to this dissertation might be “the imagination of safety” since what I try to illuminate is not just how safety is constructed and expressed in things and structures, but also how safety is a story being told. It is a story whose setting, plot, and characters are enmeshed in a world of things, whether actual, virtual, or imagined. I take architecture as a point of entry because I see building as a rich expression of social values both in specific times and places—as socio-historical records, texts, and monuments—but also as palimpsests upon and in which everyday life is inscribed, erased, and renewed.

This dissertation is a construction project. That is, I am constructing a theoretical edifice, bolstered by logic and language, images, texts and case studies. If it is true, as I am arguing, that “safety” is a crucial ingredient of the ideologies of contemporary power, it is worth considering the ways that “safety” animates the practice of scholarship itself. I am attempting to create a safe theoretical space for the conclusions I draw about the history and cultural expression of safety in American post-war culture. For this reason, this dissertation may be subject to its own critiques. Is a text a building? Is a building a text? How are texts and spaces related? Michel de Certeau offers an answer: that *space* is a *place* that is part of a story, and stories are inherently spatial.⁶ For de Certeau, walking in a city is like inscribing a text, giving meaning to otherwise empty, ordered, structured, and stratified places. In fact, order and hardened structures are never totally

⁶ In his celebrated essay “Walking in the City” de Certeau makes an explicit connection between stories and place through which space is produced. What a place means is a matter of its imbrication in legends and tales. The numbered order of a cityscape can tend to erase the legends of otherwise linguistic constructions of space. Thus, walking is a way of re-animating the legends and producing space. “What this walking exile produces is precisely the body of legends that is currently lacking in one’s own vicinity”. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life.*, 107.

stable, despite their hardness or logic; like stories, which are told with language that is never completely reducible to logical or grammatical structures, the built environment is always countered by the practices of everyday life. “Things *extra* and *other* (details and excesses coming from elsewhere) insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order. One thus has the very relationship between spatial practices and the constructed order. The surface of this order is everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning: it is a sieve-order.”⁷ The “space of the text” is similarly opened, contested, and destabilized by reading.⁸

Under this analogical and functional comparison between spaces and texts, to construct a text like a dissertation that is meant to sustain itself under the weight of a “defense” is already to participate in the project of delineating and hardening a safe space from which I can proffer an indissoluble analysis of some object. The illustration I created⁹ to signify the structure of my dissertation is thus a tactic of structural fortification. However, this dissertation contains an interlude that is not included in the structural diagram. The subject of the interlude is my theoretical fulcrum: the zombie. Zombies—mindless and also single-minded, aimless and also purposeful, monstrous perpetrator and also oppressed victim—insert, at every level of this dissertation, what de Certeau argues are inevitable lacunae of meaning, gaps in the ways that both the buildings I analyze and the texts I read should operate. *Zombies are* those lacunae; empty, yet full of potential. “Within the structured space of the text,” notes de Certeau, “[the lost details and excesses] thus produce anti-texts, effects of dissimulation and escape, possibilities of

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ For a parallel exploration of the openness and incompleteness of texts, in particular in relation to the task of translation, moving from the “space” of one language to another, see De Man, “‘Conclusions’ Walter Benjamin’s ‘The Task of the Translator’ Messenger Lecture, Cornell University, March 4, 1983.”

⁹ See Figure 1, below.

moving to other landscapes...”¹⁰ I appropriate de Certeau’s argument in order to assert that zombies play a special destabilizing and potentially revolutionary role in contemporary literary and political discourse.

Can we take a second look at the “monster,” the physical manifestation of that-which-makes-me-unsafe? From the perspective of the person who is making his house safe from zombie hordes (see Interlude), the zombie is configured only as threatening other. The zombie is “bare life,” killable and disposable; the zombie does not “matter.”¹¹ But by rethinking what counts and what matters in and through the animation of excessive or unsafe modes of being, I hope to repurpose safety, in the end, away from its use as a mechanism of structuring and hardening, fortifying and defending, and toward the creation of counter-spaces and anti-texts. This presents a paradox, however, since I am not interested in becoming a zombie, although according to my own logic perhaps I should be.¹² The paradox opens the possibility of zombie-being as politically potent, as animate, and as generative, even as the zombies are targets of ecological or political force. It may be possible to rehabilitate the zombie, just as it has been possible to re-appropriate terms like “queer” and “crip” in the context of political and rhetorical resistance to normative violence.

¹⁰ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life.*, 107.

¹¹ The concept of “bare life” occurs in Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, and it refers to the status of a non-person, the person who exists outside the law and who is thus vulnerable to extermination, extra-judicial violence, or banishment and indifference. Mel Chen analyzes the connection between what matters politically and the degree to which it is considered or rendered as “animate” or lively. On the “animate” see esp. Chapter 2 and 5, below. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*; Chen, *Animacies*.

¹² This question of becoming a zombie and its potential for reshaping both social and spatial politics is a central concern in Colson Whitehead’s zombie apocalypse novel *Zone One*. In other zombie texts, such as Max Brook’s *World War Z*, the only people who become zombies are the unlucky, the unprepared, or the mentally unstable. Whitehead, *Zone One*; Brooks, *WWZ*.

The dialectic I see in the story of zombies is that which Hegel presents in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* between the master and the slave. The story of history, Hegel tells us, is the story of the slave awakening to and gaining his freedom; the master is imprisoned in his status as “master,” what we might call a kind of political dead-end or death. Self-consciousness requires a recognition of self-consciousness in the other.¹³ If we treat the zombie as mindless and worthless, then “we” masters are destined to be overrun. The zombie—in its abjection, in its enslavement—is the protagonist of world history. The zombie may be a slave to its desire, but it is also a story-teller since it moves constantly, compelled to walk (or shuffle) and thus gives meaning to the political and cultural landscape. This is why zombies are so hard to ignore in contemporary culture, and why their relationship to the concept of “safety” is politically important. When we enact “safety” by fortifying against zombies, we are setting ourselves up as masters.

The architectures I examine are solid, defensible, and tactical structures. I am particularly interested in the ways that these “fortresses” are breached, crumble, or otherwise fail; I am reading with an apocalyptic hermeneutic, the understanding of texts as cyclical projects of stabilization and destabilization.¹⁴ Despite the inevitable breakdown of fortified structures, it is important to emphasize that the construction project itself constitutes a way of being in the world that signals a form of life, a culture, and the promise of happiness. As foreboding as the topic of safety may be, especially since we will be approaching it in many cases through the lens of catastrophe, I do not want to lose sight of safety or danger as the situation out of which we may

¹³ Hegel et al., *Phenomenology of Spirit*, chap. B.IV.A. “Independence and dependence of self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage”.

¹⁴ Frank Kermode examines the phenomenon of texts as apocalyptic cycles; see Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*.

generate pleasure, love, and joy. Architecture can protect but also express; a house may function as a fortress, but also as a hearth and home; a clean lab can serve as a nuclear weapons factory, or a life-saving operating theater; a story can engender fear, but also comfort or new ideas. To explore the philosophy and cultural significance of safety, and to understand the complex socio-politics at work, we must hold these opposites in an unresolved tension.

This study relies on theory and scholarship on space in sociology, critical theory, philosophy, and literary and cinematic media. It is an interdisciplinary study in the field of cultural studies; it moves between the abstract, the virtual, the representational, the imaginary, and the concrete. The interdisciplinary nature of this project means, from a practical standpoint, that there is no established blueprint for presenting the questions and results of my analytical goals. For scholarship, which is ultimately judged on the quality of its ability to communicate a *reproducible* argument, this is remarkably unsafe. My wish is that the riskiness of this mode of argumentation will undermine the flows of violence, control, and power differences that safety tends to encourage in the first place.

Safety and Anxiety

The “home” is an icon of safety, despite the brutal truth that “home” is often a site of psychological or physical violence, especially against women and children. In this dissertation I examine some of the ways that “home” is constructed metaphorically and politically. As I have suggested, the architecture of safety can envelop and fortify a “secure” interior against external threats, and it also places limitations on itself by assuming it is impervious and unassailable. Gaston Bachelard traces this dialectic in the home as a shelter. He notes that within the confines

of even the “slightest shelter,” the human imagination will “build ‘walls’ of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection—or, just the contrary, tremble behind thick walls, mistrust the staunchest ramparts. In short, in the most interminable of dialectics, the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter.”¹⁵ The shelter that is a comfort, that is safe and secure, can also be, in its very construction as a safe space, the space of uncanniness and anxiety. Bachelard stresses dreams, imagination, and memory as the motors of this dialectic; from Freud’s account of the uncanny as well as images of haunted houses via the horror genre, we can incorporate nightmares into the theory of safety in the “home.”

“Home” is a common and potent symbol of selfhood. This is particularly the case in America, where dreams of success are bound up in home ownership. In some ways, this American Dream of home ownership is really the dream of freedom from the oppressions of global capitalism. For Marx, the way that workers live under industrial capitalism is a regression to “cave dwelling,” not in the so-called *natural* sense in which ancient humans found themselves protected in caves, but in the sense of having to live in someone else’s basement or apartment block. The poor renter who lives in cramped quarters is *estranged* from his place of dwelling; his home is “a hostile dwelling.”¹⁶ This is because “it is a dwelling that he cannot look upon as his own home where he might at last exclaim ‘Here I am at home,’ but where instead he finds himself in *someone else’s house*, in the house of a *stranger* who daily lies in wait for him and throws him out if he does not pay his rent.”¹⁷ The material conditions of poverty and alienation foreclose the possibility of constructing a stable identity in a dwelling space. The fear that one’s

¹⁵ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 5.

¹⁶ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 125.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

home—and thus one’s identity—will be assaulted or invaded is at the core of stories about safety; the imagination of disaster motivates the quest for the home that is also a safe space.

One of the political problems I identify in this dissertation is that it matters a great deal who gets to tell the story of safety and anxiety. For example, when wealthy city planners or developers enact a strategy of safety based on the imagination of uprising, the urban environment is suddenly the site of an imagined class war, and safety is oriented to those with the power and means to actually get things built.¹⁸ In the post-war period in America and other Western industrialized nations a tendency has arisen to craft “defensible” space. This version of constructing safety is a manifestation of a “fortress mentality” that pervades urban and suburban space and contributes to violence along lines of race, class, and gender. To safeguard wealth is to construct “vertical power;” to safeguard gender and race superiority is often to construct the “fortress;” and to safeguard a way of life is to participate in a “bunker mentality.” I mobilize these terms to describe the architecture of safety, how it is built and how it functions, both rhetorically and physically.

¹⁸ A remarkable account of this sort of tactic can be found in Walter Benjamin’s sketch for the Arcades Project, entitled “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” in which he exposes the spatial control strategies of Charles Fourier and how authoritarian power literally traced itself onto the map of Paris by cutting highways, segregating populations to lessen their potential to gather, and linking armed security forces with lower class neighborhoods to suppress rebellion. Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.”

The Structure of the Dissertation

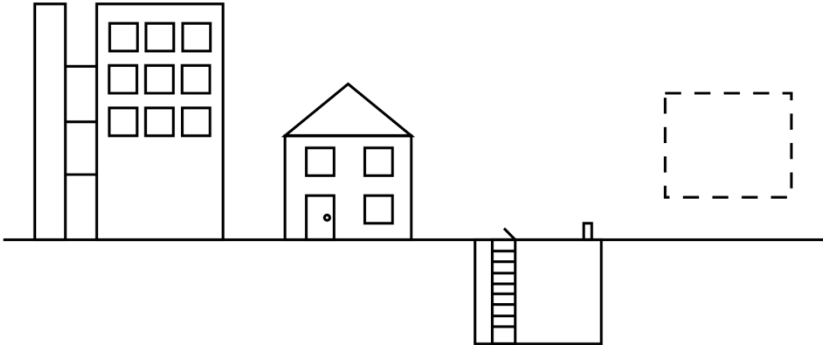


Figure 1: The structure of this dissertation. High-rise, house, bunker, cleanroom—the zombie is absent, lurking. Illustration by the author.

In Chapter 1 I argue that the intersection of utopian urban concrete domestic ecologies with the politics of class reveals a covert violence beneath the structures of modern life. When this covert social violence is represented overtly, in novels and films, for example, it is often represented as war.¹⁹ I note that constructed space is political space, made so through its engagement with class, race, gender, and family.²⁰ The emblem of this chapter is the high-rise, looming above other structures to announce its presence and its participation in a politics of threat and defense. In this first chapter I place in conversation the utopian rational and mechanistic designs of modernists like Le Corbusier and Ernő Goldfinger, and the “steel and concrete” novels of J.G. Ballard, in particular *High-Rise* (1975) and *Running Wild* (1988), to

¹⁹ I examine the commonly quoted reversal of Clausewitz by Michel Foucault: “Politics is war by other means.” In other words, I want to understand how war is hidden beneath the practices of everyday life and embedded in the architectural space of those practices, and thus to reveal the politics of that space and those practices. See Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 15–16.

²⁰ This is not an exhaustive list of the political engagements of the built environment. For example, I note in several places in this dissertation that the built environment has a material impact on the experience of disability.

establish the relationship between built environments and social conflicts around class, race, and gender.

In Chapter 2 I focus on the detached single-family house in suburbia. I introduce the idea that post-war American domesticity is a battleground, not only in the sense that men and women contest their roles within that space, but that the space itself participates in the war. Modern architecture is political, and thus militant; domestic space in America is overtly and covertly attached to the American dream of war. Suburban space is covertly violent. I read the domestic horror literature of Richard Matheson—including his novel *I Am Legend* and the story “Mad House”—to not only illuminate the metaphors of militancy and fortification in domestic space, but also to describe the ironies and expressions of embattled (white) masculinity at the heart of fortified domesticity. These gendered and raced anxieties will play a prominent role in the following case as well, in the “bunker mentalities” of the mid- to late twentieth century.

Chapter 3 continues the discussion of fortified domesticity, but looks deeper—that is, underground. My argument about “architecture” here, by descending to the depths, tends to hinge more on the imagination of risk and defense, the fantasy of mastery and survival, and what are essentially psychological and immaterial phenomena such as paranoia. Going underground is also a matter of internalizing and interiorizing, plumbing “inner space” and “bunker mentalities.” This chapter proceeds from the bunker, a pattern of fortification in American domestic architecture that stretches from the early days of colonial frontier life—circling the wagons, delineating and defending the homestead—through the Cold War era of fallout shelter construction and into a new era of home security, during the late twentieth and early twenty-first

centuries, in the age of “preppers.”²¹ The bunker is a material manifestation of a bunker mentality: a new and renewed interest in preparedness as a rubric for safety. American bunker mentalities connect the politics of safety to issues of race, class, nation, family, and individual liberty. Through a history of the discourse and imagery of bunker building, as well as a reading of recent film and television focused on preppers and preparedness, I continue to examine the meaning of the white middle-class “home” as a safe space.

Chapter 4 is an interlude, a crucial departure from the neatly structured line-up of fortified architectures. Its premise is that the figure of the zombie has been appropriated at multiple levels and scopes of American society to stand in for ubiquitous risk, what Ulrich Beck calls the “risk society.”²² This interlude extends the discussion of preppers and safety to a critical understanding of zombies and the function of the zombie apocalypse in constructing global, national, and personal safety and security. It further broadens the definition of “architecture” to include the construction of narratives, scenarios, and dramatic performances that bring the future into the present—the story is a construction, the text is architectural. Zombies, I argue, are an idealized threat, a global and ubiquitous risk against which safety can be constructed. This chapter attempts to realize how safety operates at multiple levels, multiple scales, and multiple scopes, drawing together the globalizing visions of grand architecture, the more humble family domestic space, and the buried, fortified and secret bunker spaces. It is a crucial departure from

²¹ To support these ideas, I was able to examine archives at the Smithsonian Museum of American History, including a box of previously unexamined and so-far-uncataloged documents on fallout shelter building and design. This research was made possible by a grant from the Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation.

²² Beck, *Risk Society*.

the “plan” since zombies themselves represent the revolutionary potential for deterritorialization, destabilization, and the undermining of disciplinary architectures.

We have travelled from the heights of the high-rise, to the ground level house, to the subterranean bunker. The final step, I suggest finally in Chapter 5, is to the space which has become so purified, so empty, and so invisible that it can manifest the greatest intensities of architectural power: “clean” space. In taking the biosafety lab and industrial cleanroom as my final objects, I do not leave the discussion of domesticity behind. Biosafety labs and cleanrooms are genealogically related to the “safe” homes of the chemically sensitive, for example, which are embattled fortresses of their own, moored at the outskirts of modern society. They are also outgrowths of a turn to cleanliness and safety as a defense against microbes, dust, chemicals, and even bioterrorism. Although biosafety labs and cleanrooms are not domestic spaces, I will argue that not only did they develop in and through domestic concerns with cleanliness, convenience, and environmental control, but that they have, since the end of World War II, become the very foundation and matrix of modern post-industrial forms of life, and even perhaps the space which has in its meticulously controlled environment enabled the future of the planet to become profoundly and worryingly uncertain in the first place. It may be that the cleanroom is both a symbol and manifestation of modernity as a fundamental negation of life that has become a hallmark of the Anthropocene. On the one hand, therefore, biosafety and cleanroom space functions to produce the fast and slow violence of the Anthropocene. But “safe” homes for those with MCS can be understood as having the potential to reverse this relationship between people and the environment, between bodies and chemicals, and between safety as violent defense and safety as dwelling in a universe of things, acknowledging that the rhetoric of safety calls us to decide what matters and what is valuable.

CHAPTER 1: High-rises

Part I: J.G. Ballard and the Violence of Concrete and Steel Modernism

...it can never be inherent in the structure of things to guarantee the exercise of freedom. The guarantee of freedom is freedom.

— Michel Foucault, “Space, Power, and Knowledge”¹

My goal in this chapter is to analyze how safety gets constructed and mobilized in built environments, both architecturally and discursively, and how those built environments affect people’s lives. To work toward that analysis, I begin with a more fundamental question: is there some inherent relationship between people and space? In an interview with Michel Foucault from 1982, Paul Rabinow asked if Foucault could point to any specific architectural projects that were “forces of liberation or resistance.”² In other words, can architecture be inherently political? Can a built environment embody a politics of a certain kind, without qualification or context? Foucault answers that no, he does not believe that built space is *inherently* this or that; “liberation is a *practice*” and it is the practice of liberation within a space that guarantees the liberation itself. Even a concentration camp, says Foucault, the architecture of confinement *par excellence*, cannot foreclose the possibility of *some kind* of resistance and opposition. (Foucault implies that it is not that the confined subject can be really liberated merely by resisting, but only that resistance is possible, in some limited form.) Architecture can have effects, and it can encourage and discourage certain practices through its form, but if we wish, we can blow up the

¹ Foucault, “Space, Power, and Knowledge,” 245.

² Ibid.

building, sneak into it, spray paint it, or string up a high wire and dance around it in the sky, as Philippe Petit did in 1974 between the twin towers of the World Trade Center. And even Le Corbusier does not deserve to be indicted for “crypto-Stalinism,” argues Foucault, since his designs were probably intended to promote liberty; the fact that they did not completely have that effect is not inherent to the design.

Design strategies whose purpose is to promote “safety” can be subverted and inverted by the practices of everyday life, and can even be incorporated by designers to promote segregated safety, or the safety of one group over and against the increased risk and exclusion of another group. I will justify this thesis in several ways in this chapter. First, I will examine two novels by J.G. Ballard, a British author of science fiction and dystopic/apocalyptic literature. These novels are fiercely critical of the oppressive qualities of modern architectural space. Ballard is in direct conversation with Le Corbusier, refuting the latter’s worship of industrial machinery, standardized space, and unadorned concrete. Ballard’s novels depict violent and troubling social effects that occur as a result of architected modernist space, such as in a concrete high-rise and in a heavily securitized gated community. I argue that these two novels—*High-Rise* (1975) and *Running Wild* (1988)—suggest the following: the design of space has a concrete effect on people and how they interact, but spatial design and control also reflect wider and more insidious psychological, economic, and political realities. In the high-rise, the structure and defense of hierarchies of class and wealth is a façade that covers over a deeper nihilistic aggression. In the gated community, the structure and defense of class, and the construction of safe space for the reproduction of “civilized” family life, is a façade that covers over a deeper imprisonment of human being in its desire, at times, for the wild messiness of irrationality (in other words, for

childishness and childhood). Taken together, they constitute a basic “theory” of architecture that helps us understand how violent and warlike is the modern defense of hierarchical power.

In the second section, I examine the history of high-rise and “defensive” architecture as it developed in the 1950s to 1990s in response to wider demographic flows in the United States. I consider the political role a tall building might play, and I think about why attempts to make urban space safe or secure has contributed to the development of warlike, “fortress” spaces. I look at the transformation of apparently progressive architectural thought from the 1950s, through the defensive space movement of the 1970s which begins to take on the quality of a fortress mentality, and finally to the 1990s and what Nan Ellin calls “the architecture of fear” or what Blakely and Snyder call a “fortress mentality.”³ This is a kind of contemporary architecture that embraces its role as the hardened material and shape which, I argue, will help reproduce hierarchical (or “vertical”) privilege. The architecture of safety, from this angle, is an architecture of exclusion, fear, and violence.

Part of the importance of this chapter for the rest of the dissertation is that I establish that architectural space, built environments, and *hardware* still play an important role in this contemporary era of globalization in which software seems to be “taking command,” as media theorist Lev Manovich is fond of arguing.⁴ In referring to the influence of hardware, I am seeking to address the totalizing tendency to attribute power to “soft” technologies.⁵ In other words, concrete and steel barriers and walls still matter, despite the increasingly ubiquitous flows

³ Ellin, *Architecture of Fear*; Blakely and Snyder, “Divided We Fall: Gated and Walled Communities in the United States,” 94.

⁴ Manovich, *Software Takes Command*.

⁵ Preciado, “Pharmaco-Pornographic Politics: Towards a New Gender Ecology”; Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control.”

of capital, microbes, and information along digital or liquid “routes” and networks.⁶

Furthermore, this hardware, in the form of architectural space, frequently contributes to a violent, aggressive and warlike construction of interior safety at the expense of exterior suffering.

Ironically, however, what is made safe within these modern citadels is only ever safe within a dystopian “carceral” space; what is excluded is left to face the apocalypse of environmental and economic disaster. When the goal is to sustain hierarchies and forms of domination, the very project of constructing safety is exactly the problem, since it creates a violent rift and then offers the perfectly unsatisfactory choice between dystopia and apocalypse.

War in the Everyday Built Environment

Those skilled in defense hide in the deepest depths of the earth,
those skilled in attack maneuver in the highest heights of the sky.

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*⁷

...politics is the continuation of war by other means. ... We are
always writing the history of the same war, even when we are
writing the history of peace and its institutions.

— Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*⁸

⁶ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*. I borrow this term “routes” from the sense that Gilroy gives it in *The Black Atlantic*: as opposed to finding “roots” of identity, cultural studies requires that we trace “routes,” which are fluid and ephemeral and contrast with the inscription of history on landed territory, with the attachments to the earth that roots imply. Identity—of nation, national belonging, nationality—is predicated on what Gilroy calls “cultural insiderism.” The problem with this insiderism is that it promotes “an absolute sense of ethnic difference” that is not only destructive but false. This is where Gilroy’s critique gets its force: the forms of identity promoted by nationalism are “constructed” in the most false sense of that term—they are baseless, without foundation, and constitute hostile borders. *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ Tzu, *The Art of War*, 59.

⁸ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 15–16.

War, in this broadened sense, is everywhere and everything. It is large and small. It is boundless in space or time. Life itself is war.

— Philip Agre, “Imagining the Next War”⁹

Space and warfare are entangled politically but also rhetorically, metaphorically, and imaginatively. In a world of sovereign state power, wars between nation states determine geographical and cultural hegemony; consequential historical trends depend on the exertion of force on a battlefield. The story of world history and of geopolitics has likewise depended on recounting these battles and the military leaders who won or lost them. The winning and losing of wars and the “Great Men” who led the charge thus became a way of telling the story of human progress. But as globalization continued apace in the age of exploration and then in the age of industry, sovereign state power, even as it dominated the world’s early global economy, peaked, and is now in notable decline. This is the story, at any rate, of geopolitical power as it is often told today.¹⁰ The way we think about power is no longer attached so much to the military might of a field of battle, in part because guerrilla warfare and kamikaze ideological fanaticism have hybridized in the shape of urban suicide bombing and mass shootings, but also because of the rise of transnational corporate and infrastructural power that is precisely transnational.

One theory for understanding this geopolitical shift, and the corresponding shifts in what it means to “fight a war” or “do business” or “trade” is Foucault’s theory of disciplinary power in which power is no longer centralized but circulates through various institutions and micro-structures. These smaller non-state apparatuses, which are not centrally controlled and sometimes have no intentional actor at their helm, operate independently and collectively to

⁹ Agre, “Imagining the Next War: Infrastructural Warfare and the Conditions of Democracy.”

¹⁰ Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*, 138–49; Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*.

sustain, reproduce, and perpetuate divisions and norms that are understood to characterize various ideological definitions of what is good and right, values that promote what is normal and what is abnormal, what is safe and what is threatening, what is just and what is unjust, and so on. One of the principle techniques of this kind of disciplinary power, according to Foucault, operates on a basic pre-condition of visibility, with Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon providing a useful architectural prototype: subjects are individuated, delineated, and observed, and thus controlled. Disciplinary power reaches its zenith when these techniques of observation are internalized by the subjects themselves, when the apparatus of domination—the external imposition of order, the overt control of values and norms—is naturalized and subjects self-regulate.¹¹

At that point, the operation of power is not centralized or concentrated in, say, the figure of a king, but has been diffused and begins circulating throughout cultural and social spaces. The design of space becomes more and less important to the operation of power. It is less important as infrastructural flows become more abstract and distant from centralized state power. The design of space is more important as it becomes increasingly necessary to defend the nodes of wealth and privilege from being dissolved into the globalized, infrastructural flow of capital and ideas. The “flattening” of globalized capital can only go so far; it must maintain and reproduce hierarchical privilege. To keep privilege safe, a structural defense is often necessary. This structural defense is a tactical move in a hidden battle between the interests served by control and the interests served by liberty: the continuation of politics by other means.

¹¹ Foucault, *Discipline & Punish*.

The idea that “life itself is a war”¹² requires that we broaden the definitions of war to include the violence of the everyday within the context of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. To this end, I will turn to two novels by J.G. Ballard, *High-Rise* and *Running Wild*, that express this relationship between violence and the built environment of fortified luxury spaces and vertical, hierarchical, or “citadel-ized” space. I present these novels as illustrations of not only the war of everyday life and attempts to construct safety behind walls and in vertical fortresses, but of the potential in those spaces of control to incite “counter-conduct” or, a form of revolutionary opposition.¹³

J.G. Ballard’s contribution to the politics of built environments

Domestic architecture and domesticity are at the crux of the conflict of both *High-Rise* (1975) and *Running Wild* (1988). These novels are highly spatialized and they illustrate the politics of interiors and exteriors. They will help us establish a set of vocabularies with which to discuss safety, which exists as a tension between inclusion and exclusion, fear and familiarity, and dystopia and apocalypse.

J.G. Ballard is a British author of essays, short stories and novels, mainly in the genres of science fiction, apocalyptic disaster, and techno-dystopia. Ballard has identifiable periods in which he seems to focus on a set of related themes and subjects. For example, he published a succession of ecological apocalyptic novels during the 1960s, including *The Drowned World* (1962), *The Drought* (1965), and *The Crystal World* (1966). For this early work in apocalyptic

¹² Agre, “Imagining the Next War: Infrastructural Warfare and the Conditions of Democracy.”

¹³ Foucault, *Security*, 356.

imaginaries, Ballard was considered part of a burgeoning New Wave of science fiction, which also included Samuel Delany in the U.S., a movement that Frederic Jameson has dubbed the “aesthetic” or “speculative fiction” movement in SF history.¹⁴ Ballard’s apocalypses are examples of the history of the future, contemplating the present as a history for which the ambitions of imperialism have been “cancelled.”¹⁵ Ballard is thus an early practitioner of the genre of apocalyptic fantasy that has become influential in the debate within the humanities over climate change, global warming, and the violence of the Anthropocene.¹⁶

The period of Ballard’s work that is most useful in the present analysis, however, includes a marked turn to architecture, concrete, domestic, urban and suburban space. Martin Amis calls these works the “concrete and steel” period.¹⁷ In novels such as *Crash* (1973), *Concrete Island* (1974), *High-Rise* (1975), *Running Wild* (1988), *Super-Cannes* (2000), *Millennium People* (2003), and *Kingdom Come* (2006), Ballard uses an apocalyptic imagination to illustrate the internal contradictions of designed communities and built environments. The environments he describes in these novels are more local than global; the apocalyptic events are spatially contained, but intensified by their limited space, like a pressure cooker. For instance, rather than narrating a far-future swamp of a world after the polar ice caps have melted, as he does in *The Drowned World*, *High-Rise* follows the unfolding of an apocalypse within a single building. By turning to constructed space, Ballard opens a critical evaluation of “construction” in all its literal and metaphorical senses, including what Foucault refers to as “the broad sense of

¹⁴ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 93.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁶ Heise, *Imagining Extinction*, 219; Kaplan, *Climate Trauma*.

¹⁷ Amis, “Cronenberg’s Monster.”

construction,” with which disciplinary power is ultimately concerned.¹⁸ Ballard deploys deconstruction—the breaking down of constructed space and relationships—both as a strategy common to postmodernism and as a potent political tactic. Ballard takes the apocalyptic form of literature and makes it perform a kind of hermeneutic project; in destroying itself and devolving from rational enlightenment to barbaric violence, the “master planned” community has recourse to interpret itself. This movement, from planning and production to self-destruction to self-determination, is a useful blueprint for the kinds of reflection and analysis we will be required to undertake more frequently as global environmental shifts cause upheaval, violence, and scarcity.

While these novels trade on the apocalyptic shape of speculative fiction, they also highlight dystopian social structures. There is a difference between “apocalyptic” and “dystopian” in science fiction that is tempting to elide. “Apocalyptic” refers to change—it announces a revolutionary overthrowing of an obsolete order, and then a potential for radical reformation or renewal of social, economic, spiritual, or politics conditions. These are external shifts, global and “meta” since they transcend the status quo.

“Dystopian,” on the other hand, refers to the internal oppression that a system or social/economic/spiritual/political structure may encourage. “Dystopia” need not explode; it can

¹⁸ Foucault et al., *Security, Territory, Population*, 16. “Discipline belongs to the order of construction (in the broad sense of construction),” notes Foucault. The ‘narrow’ sense: construction has to do with building streets, zoning residences and commercial space, erecting boundaries and walls. The ‘broad’ sense: “construction” serves disciplinary power by creating differences in social status; e.g. boundary walls are useful insofar as they define space in differentiating, and thus political, ways. Space is political in the way that it is the “constitution of an empty, closed space within which artificial multiplicities are to be constructed and organized according to the triple principle of hierarchy, precise communication of relations of power, and functional effects specific to this distribution, for example, ensuring trade, housing, and so on” (16). And while discipline functions to construct a territory through focused enclosures and the construction of boundaries, security tends to incorporate and assimilate. As opposed to “circumscribing space,” security tends to involve “organizing, or anyway allowing the development of ever-wider circuits” (44).

and wants to remain in place. It is not sufficient to think about dystopia as “bad”—we must think of dystopia as a systematic “badness” that works to reproduce itself.

Some texts entangle the two, like Ballard’s do by borrowing imagery or structure from one genre and applying it to the other. Thus, we will see that both *High-Rise* and *Running Wild* devise a miniature dystopia that *fails to reproduce*, consequently undergoing a miniature apocalypse. Ballard is critically linking interior dystopias to exterior apocalypses, the local to the global, and the “us” to the “them.” We come to understand that neither inside nor outside is safe from the violence inherent to the war of everyday politics, economics, and hierarchically stratified societies, but that both spaces are ripe for revolutionary or reformatory projects.

More specifically, *High-Rise* and *Running Wild* are dystopian precisely because they take aim at the utopian tendency to shape space as safe and secure. (Utopia is merely dystopia waiting to be deciphered.)¹⁹ But they are also apocalyptic since they reveal and enact utopian architecture’s own self-destructive conditions. They are “deconstructive” in the sense that for each utopian or rational design, there will be some internal contradiction that leads to ruin, revolt, or violent catharsis. And while there are explicitly architectural concerns in other Ballard texts as well, *High-Rise* and *Running Wild* illustrate a reaction in and through architecture that we may use to understand the politics of planned and fortified domestic spaces.

Furthermore, Ballard’s fictions are special instances of architectural critique since their un-real or fantastical elements are founded on a premise of functional realism that is then stretched to its logical conclusions.²⁰ The built environment in these texts is fortified and

¹⁹ This is my own adaptation of an aphorism by José Saramago, ostensibly from “The Book of Contraries,” which is included as an epigraph to his novel *The Double*, which reads “Chaos is merely order waiting to be deciphered.” Saramago, *The Double*, epigraph.

²⁰ Functional as opposed to literary realism, which we could argue Ballard is explicitly rejecting or even parodying in his violent fantasies. Functional realism is what I am calling

stratified according to class lines. The dark scenarios that emerge are shaped by the space of the fortified domestic architecture, and they also shape the ways that the characters exist domestically. Ballard's fictions reveal that the construction of class and difference is both *constituted by* and *reflected in* the construction of fortified domestic spaces—space is both cause and effect of societal violence. In Chapter 1, Part II I will relate this insight to the ways in which social scientists and critics understand the politics of built environments.

High-Rise

High-Rise tells the story of a luxury apartment complex on the outskirts of London and the first disastrous months of its occupation. The building has forty floors. It has been designed to be self-sufficient; it is “a small vertical city.”²¹ It includes a swimming pool, recreation areas, a school for the children, a supermarket stocked with artisanal cheeses and plenty of fashionable alcohol, and various shops and conveniences. The space of the complex is organized according to a series of hierarchies. The tenants on the upper floor are the richest and most glamorous (movie stars, models); relative wealth declines the farther down one travels the height of the building. The architect of the complex, Anthony Royal, with a fittingly monarchic name, occupies the penthouse. As a fictional setting, the high-rise is remarkably life-like; we can

Ballard's attention to the mechanical or organizational systems, like the physics of collision in *Crash*, the mechanical infrastructures in *High-Rise*, or the logistics of homicide in *Running Wild*. However, the precise characteristics of Ballard's use of realism is a point for further analysis.

²¹ *High-Rise*, 15. This description mimics the dream of early and modern skyscraper designers; according to Rem Koolhaas, each new skyscraper after the 1902 Flatiron Building strove to be “‘a City within a City.’ This truculent ambition makes the Metropolis a collection of architectural city-states, all potentially at war with each other.” Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 89.

imagine that every reader will be familiar with the actual hierarchies of luxury apartment buildings, what a “penthouse” is, why being higher reflects status, and so on. The setting marks the absolute *normality* of the initial position.

Dr. Robert Laing, one of the main protagonists, is a doctor and anatomy instructor at a nearby medical school who occupies a studio apartment on the 25th floor. Laing is as much a part of the social and political dynamics of the high rise as every other character; he does not transcend the violence or politics, and is not an heroic redeemer. His position in the middle of the hierarchy allows him to function as a witness to the bizarre excesses of the upper floors, the upstart rabble-rousing of the lower floors, as well as the dissolution into tribal violence throughout the middle.

The building is designed according to the principles of modernist architecture best expressed by Swiss architect Le Corbusier, whose boxy concrete buildings express what he argued was a rational and scientific ideology that defined the modern industrial world. In the early twentieth century, reinforced concrete technologies had progressed such that they could be used for architectural purposes on a larger scale, and the material was also an important defensive design technology during World War II, for the Germans and the British. Great Britain—London in particular—suffered enormous damage from German shelling, air raids, and rocket attacks. The post-war period in London was characterized by the opportunity to rebuild, and to build *new*, in current and forward-looking methods.²² Concrete and steel became crucial tools for achieving this aim.²³

²² Grindrod, *Concretopia*.

²³ Macdonald, *Concrete*.

Le Corbusier had set the stage for a new *philosophy* of construction in concrete and steel. In *Towards a New Architecture* (originally published *Veers une architecture* in 1923, translated into English in 1927), which had an enormous impact on the practice of modern building, Le Corbusier insists that the new age requires a new approach to the built environment. The house, he famously declaims, is “a machine for living” to reflect the advent of the machine age. The use of scientific reason in designing space would make more possible: more people would be able to afford houses since costs would decline due to efficiency, and daily life would improve as domestic space aligned with the new realities of factory labor. To “build well and cheaply,” architects needed to adopt the “right frame of mind”—in other words, architects had to begin thinking like industrial designers and engineers.²⁴ Industry would power a rebuilding of society through the redesign of living and working space:

The prime consequences of the industrial evolution in “building” show themselves in this first stage; the replacing of natural materials by artificial ones, of heterogeneous and doubtful materials by homogeneous and artificial ones (tried and proved in the laboratory) and by products of fixed composition. Natural materials, which are infinitely variable in composition, must be replaced by fixed ones.

On the other hand the laws of Economics demand their rights: steel girders and, more recently, reinforced concrete, are pure manifestations of calculation, using the material of which they are composed in its entirety and absolutely exactly...²⁵

Materials and the concepts that they can express, in other words, are crucial to modern design and modern space. The modern architect would move from the natural to the artificial, which would increase the soundness and fixedness of the structure. And besides, mass-produced materials are cheaper, and can be applied in exact and calculable amounts, with no waste. To

²⁴ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 231–32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 232.

rebuild in the modern way, for Le Corbusier, is to build with certainty and cool rationality. Steel and concrete are the materials that most purely manifest these qualities.

To enact this transformation in architectural thinking from what Le Corbusier considered the pre-rational past, with its heterogeneous materials and design philosophies, to the rational present and future was, in a way, to cede to the influence of war on the structure of society and its built environments. The concrete structures of modernism, typified by Le Corbusier but also designed by Mies van der Rohe in Chicago and Ernő Goldfinger in London, are material analogies of the casemates of the Atlantic Wall, bunkers built to defend mainland Europe from the Allied invaders, and the concrete structures of modernism. In my view, the concrete residential buildings are defensive structures in a war to reproduce hierarchical power. The analogy between war and concrete modernism is not just conceptual, but has to do with the manner of production. “The war has shaken us up,” Le Corbusier notes, in that the material complications and disruptions of World War I, as well as the necessity to rebuild what was destroyed (which was subsequently repeated following World War II), had forced architects and engineers to reflect on their practices. Mass production of concrete led to ideas such as “houses made in a mould by pouring in liquid concrete from above, completed in one day as you would fill a bottle.”²⁶ In other words, the house can be a commodity that will be mass produced like Coca-Cola. War had inspired ways of connecting mass production to architecture: “as so many cannons, airplanes, lorries and wagons had been made in factories, someone asked the question: ‘Why not make houses?’”²⁷

²⁶ Ibid., 234.

²⁷ Ibid.

The context of the connection between modernist high-rises, war, and concrete is important to understand Ballard's critical stance toward them. Le Corbusier was writing his essays on the modern use of concrete at the same time that mass-produced concrete technologies were being perfected and put to use; in some ways, Le Corbusier understood the possibilities before they existed. In London, concrete was in wide use by the 1930s. Frederick Etchells, who translated Le Corbusier's *Vers une architecture*, would be one of the first architects to apply concrete to the structure of a commercial building in London, and concrete was being used before World War II to "express a modern image."²⁸ After the devastation of the war, London's construction projects multiplied, and by the 1960s and 1970s were relying on concrete not only because of its structural and design qualities, but because steel was in short supply.²⁹ Thus, London was saddled with new "machines for living," high-rises that attempted to solve a housing shortage but faced strong criticism because of their "rawness," or what would be dubbed "brutalism."

Henri Lefebvre comments on the disjunction between Le Corbusier's stated liberatory program and the "fracturing of space" that his design philosophy enjoined. Once Frank Lloyd Wright had "liberated" interior space by de-emphasizing boundaries between human life and natural landscapes, Le Corbusier went a step further, to "disarticulate" the exterior from the interior. In other words, the exterior of a building did not need to reflect its interior life, much like the exteriors of a car or a train, which hide the inner workings of their machinery from view. Lefebvre sees that something crucial is being hidden by Le Corbusier's rhetoric, namely, that disarticulating exteriors and interiors "corresponds to a disordering of elements wrenched from

²⁸ Macdonald, *Concrete*, 44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57–65.

each other in such a way that the urban fabric itself—the street, the city—is also torn apart.”³⁰

Rem Koolhaas observes a similar tendency for modern urban skyscrapers and high-rises to keep their interiors hidden—he calls it the architectural equivalent of a lobotomy, which “separates exterior and interior architecture. In this way the Monolith spares the outside world the agonies of the continuous changes raging inside it. It hides everyday life.”³¹ These violent metaphors—cutting apart, shredding the fabric of urban space—entail a *concealed* violence in modernist high-rise design; they criticize the architectural unconscious of modernism.

Ballard does something very similar in his texts. Ballard takes Le Corbusier’s philosophy and ideology of production, standardization, concrete, rational and vertical planning, and exposes what is irrational, animal (or, barbaric, uncivilized, and unrestrained), and unscientific beneath it, what brutality lies in this kind of designed community, and what human communities are when exposed to overt gender and class hierarchies. In *High-Rise*, Ballard is in direct conversation with Le Corbusier. In the beginning of the story, Dr. Laing moves into his new studio apartment and as he is getting accustomed to the new space, he “at first... found something alienating about the concrete landscape of the project—an architecture designed for war, on the unconscious level if no other. After all the tensions of his divorce, the last thing he wanted to look out on each morning was a row of concrete bunkers.”³² But he is soon convinced of the “intangible appeal” of life in the high rise, with “the efficiency of the building’s services, the total privacy.”³³ The convenience of efficient planning would improve his quality of life, even if he was forced to contemplate the concrete out of his window. Wilder, one of the lower floor residents, however,

³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 303.

³¹ Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 100–101.

³² *High-Rise*, 16.

³³ *Ibid.*

experiences the building an oppressor; “he was constantly aware of the immense weight of concrete stacked above him, and the sense that his body was the focus of the lines of force running through the building, almost as if Anthony Royal had deliberately designed his body to be held within their grip.”³⁴ Bodies and buildings intertwine—the architect seems to have designed Wilder’s body, not the space.

Robert’s sister, who has also recently moved into the building, notes that because of the building’s supreme efficiencies, Robert “could be alone here, in an empty building.”³⁵ Given the socio-economic makeup of the tenant population—doctors, lawyers, executives, actors and actresses—Robert could not only blend into the crowd, but be isolated to the extent that modernity calls for.³⁶

The high-rise was a huge machine designed to serve, not the collective body of tenants, but the individual resident in isolation. Its staff of air-conditioning conduits, elevators, garbage-disposal chutes and electrical switching systems provided a never-failing supply of care and attention that a century earlier would have needed an army of tireless servants.³⁷

But far from serving needs, the building begins to facilitate violence and its infrastructural arteries begin to fail and become oppressive.

³⁴ Ibid., 61.

³⁵ Ibid., 16–17.

³⁶ Williams, “Mobile Privatization”; Williams, *Television*. Raymond Williams’s concept of “mobile privatization” is useful for describing the tendency in modernity to networks that enable movement but also isolation. For a fuller exploration of this idea, see Chapter 3, below.

³⁷ *High-Rise*, 17.

Concrete Utopian Violence

In fact, Ballard was probably using Balfron Tower and Trelick Tower in London as his models for the building in *High-Rise*. Designed by Ernő Goldfinger, a disciple of Le Corbusier, the Balfron opened in 1967, and the architect and his wife moved into the building for a short time in early 1968. The Balfron is a wide tower block whose apartments are separated from the elevator and services shaft by a series of suspended walkways. Architecture historian John Gringrod suggests that “there was something hyper-masculine and provocative, almost warlike, about it. The lift tower was topped with a series of concrete ventilation pipes that gave it the look of battlements; the concrete had a gritty, stubby feel to it; and its strange asymmetrical silhouette... was designed to create maximum impact on the skyline.”³⁸

Trelick Tower is visually similar to the Balfron. It is, according to one film journalist, “a sort of icon of Brutalist grimness,” a solitary concrete tower block looming over the shops and houses that surround it in West London. It became famous not only for its distinctive exterior, but for the essentially indefensible interior in which, by the early 1970s when the building was first completed, vandalism and assault ran rampant and building services such as water and electricity were disrupted, in some cases with dangerous and tragic consequences. Trelick Tower was known in local tabloids as “Tower of Terror.”³⁹ As Carroll summarizes the situation:

One Christmas, vandals on the 12th floor opened the fire hydrant and unleashed thousands of gallons of water into the lifts, blowing fuses and leaving the block without electricity, heat, water or toilet facilities. Grind up another three floors and you would be where a 27-year-old woman was dragged from the lift and raped. Down the same corridor a depressed young mother jumped to her death. On

³⁸ Gringrod, *Concretopia*, 324.

³⁹ Carroll, “How Did This Become the Height of Fashion?”

the 21st floor, an 11-year-old girl was dragged from a lift into the chute room and attacked.

If there was a figure huddled in a doorway, it was best not to check. It could have been a prostitute waiting for business, an addict shooting up, an imminent squatter or a neighbour, fumbling for a key.⁴⁰

Ballard appears to draw on this sort of coverage of the tower in his descriptions of the social meltdown within his fictionalized (and, it turns out, relatively realistic) building. After a particularly rousing cocktail party in which a large group of women get drunk, Laing witnesses them pull a “thin-shouldered and neurasthenic young masseuse who lived with her mother on the 5th floor” out of the elevator and watched “as the shocked young woman stumbled into the mouth of this eager gauntlet and was pummeled through a circuit of fists before she was allowed to disappear into the stairwell.”⁴¹ This is the first salvo in an escalating civil war within the high-rise.

Space in the building is hierarchically stratified by design. The upper floors have more luxurious apartments with better views. These residents have assigned parking spaces closer to the building (which eventually allows the lower floors to dump their garbage on the cars of the wealthier residents they despise.) The stratification of space causes problems. Competition for access to the building’s amenities and resources becomes violent almost immediately and without warning: the pool is made off limits to children by one of the upper floor residents, and in reprisal the resident’s dog is found dead, floating in the pool. A series of retaliatory actions escalate episodically until all out tribal war is being waged among the various factions, who barricade themselves into their territories, all the while losing control of their basic impulses as

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ballard, *High-Rise*, 42–43.

well as appearing to delight in the violence and carnage around them. In this way, the utopian promise is denuded, and the novel deciphers the building's dystopian core.

People on the lower floors feel they are being kept low by the building's wealthier residents, and the upper floor residents feel threatened by the retaliatory fortifications being erected below them. A man from the lower floors, Richard Wilder, fueled by alcohol and orgiastic excess, leads the revolt. Wilder's self-appointed mission is to climb the building and confront Anthony Royal. His progress is hampered by a rapidly crumbling infrastructure, ad hoc barriers, assault, and a general dissolution of social norms, including a functional verbal language. In the end, Wilder summits the building, only to be ritualistically murdered by a band of women, including his own wife, who have occupied the roof as a sort of militant feminist commune. Wilder, upon reaching the pinnacle of the building, becomes a child once more and as the circle of women advance on him with knives, he "tottered across the roof to meet his new mothers."⁴² Progressing through the violent verticality represents, ironically, the "Descent of Man" to a primitive or pre-civilized state, underscored by Wilder's transformation into a pre-verbal child.

As violence escalates and bacchanal intensifies, the residents spend more and more time inside the building, until by the climax, they never leave. The building is a pure interior, a fortress of chaos, and also a prison. Laing's apartment is an "over-priced cell"; Wilder is at work on a documentary on a local psychiatric prison, and his bedroom "uncannily" reminds him of a cell in that building; the buildings in the larger complex are "Alcatraz blocks" in which a single apartment is "one cell in this nightmare termitary."⁴³ Before one of his last forays into the

⁴² Ibid., 201.

⁴³ Ibid., 13, 57, 65.

outside world, after barricading his apartment, transforming it into “a home-made blockhouse,” Laing tries to make himself presentable. The result looks to him “like a discharged convict in his release suit blinking at the unfamiliar daylight after a long prison sentence.”⁴⁴ This is high-end carceral space, the prison of privilege.

As they spar over territory and influence, the well-heeled residents begin to roam the building, hunting and gathering; their language unravels and is reduced to grunting; marriages dissolve, left behind as if forgotten; the dogs who were once kept as pets go feral or become someone’s lunch. The end result is bloody and ugly. As the residents of the upper floors contend with the insurrection of the lower floors, they form a kind of war council, “tribal conferences” in which they would discuss “the latest ruses for obtaining food and women, for defending the upper floors against marauders, their plans for alliance and betrayal” and from which the obsessions of the “new order” were on display: “security, food and sex.”⁴⁵ The residents seem to be de-evolving socially, from the “modern” hierarchies of the twentieth centuries, through states of warring, disorganized factions, to a primal, pre-linguistic moment. I believe Ballard’s re-valuation of social hierarchies is ironic, as I mentioned above, since he depicts both primitivity and civility as absolutely brutal and absurd.

The novel ends as it began, with Dr. Laing sitting on his balcony, grilling and eating a white Alsatian, the beautiful show dog that had once belonged to Anthony Royal. Laing contemplates the high-rise tower on the adjacent lot into which the first tenants are just moving.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 164. Dystopian and tribal violence in carceral settings could arguably be considered a trope—we see a similar pattern in José Saramago’s *Blindness* in which a group of people stricken blind by a mysterious ailment are quarantined in a derelict mental institution. The prisoners establish a violent hierarchy based on food, protection, and sexual predation. One might also refer to gang cultures in U.S. prisons. (Thanks to E. Ann Kaplan for suggesting this link.) See Saramago, *Blindness*.

But a glimmer of peace shines through the apocalyptic battle zone: Laing muses that perhaps he'd like to go out again, maybe go back to teaching. The ending makes the apocalyptic seem as though it could lead to something new, reformed, and revolutionized. The vaguely hopeful ending suggests, ever so deftly, that liberation is a practice rather than an inherent quality of spatial control, as Foucault suggested. There is a way out.

It would be tempting to generalize about Ballard's concrete novels—and others of Ballard's, which have dystopian and apocalyptic elements in equal or perhaps greater measure—and thus to reduce the texts to a singular type or logic, but the reality may be stranger and less certain than that. While both *High-Rise* and *Running Wild* express the unease of contemporary domestic architecture, and while catastrophe is the outcome, the texts represent opposing attitudes to space and the strictures of culture. Roger Luckhurst notes this tendency in Ballardian theory to reduce Ballard's texts to either “a narrative of transcendence, the desired escape from the confines of everyday space and time” or “texts [that] detail an immanent immersion in a contemporary ‘postmodern’ order of simulation.”⁴⁶

Regarding the “concrete and steel” period, critics have mostly focused on *Crash*, a novel Jean Baudrillard took the time to critique in a special edition of *Science Fiction Studies* that generated critical responses from N. Katherine Hayles and Ballard himself.⁴⁷ For Baudrillard, *Crash* fulfills the promise of media and contemporary “postmodern” culture itself, which is that reality will be taken over by hyperreality. Baudrillard's argument is useful here because it could be applied to *High-Rise* as well. In effect, what seems so remarkable about Ballard's “concrete” novels, is that their apocalyptic violence and mania results not from some invented science

⁴⁶ Luckhurst, *The Angle Between Two Walls*, xvi.

⁴⁷ Baudrillard and Evans, “Ballard's ‘Crash’ (‘Crash’ de Ballard).”

fictional importation—no zombies, supernatural forces, aliens, or the like. Instead, as Baudrillard points out, “[*Crash*] projects into the future along the same lines of force and the same finalities as those of the ‘normal’ universe. Fiction can go beyond reality (or inversely, which is subtler), but according to the same rules of the game. But in *Crash*, there is neither fiction nor reality—a kind of hyperreality has abolished both.”⁴⁸ This argument hinges on identifying Ballard’s work as “science fictional”—science fiction, for Baudrillard, is the genre in which hyperreality has become dominant.

In opposition to Baudrillard, Nicholas Ruddick argues that while “the concept of the real is at stake,” it has not been “abolished” in the way that Baudrillard claims, but instead “the catastrophe, whatever form it takes, actually signifies the liberation of a ‘deep’ real (associated with the unconscious), that has been until then latent in a ‘shallow’ manifest reality (held in place by mechanisms of repression).”⁴⁹ In other words, this way of reading Ballard’s urban disasters allow the works to thematize a certain utopian idealism, a revolutionary break with the forces of control. By invoking the unconscious, Ruddick also allows for an interpretation that includes the “architectural uncanny” or the deep link between psychology and built environments for which I advocate in this project.⁵⁰ But more than that, Ballard is expressing the peculiar character of “politics as war by other means,” of covert and overt violence, of modernity as a constant

⁴⁸ Baudrillard and Evans, “Simulacra and Science Fiction (Simulacres et Science-Fiction),” 312; Kaplan, *Climate Trauma*; Atwood, *In Other Worlds*. Kaplan addresses Atwood’s argument along these same lines; this is the basis for what Atwood calls “speculative fiction.”

⁴⁹ Ruddick, “Ballard/‘Crash’/Baudrillard,” 357.

⁵⁰ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, 6. Vidler historicizes the “architectural uncanny” and locates a peculiarly modern anxiety in the urban uncanny. Whereas the uncanny had previously been located in private interior spaces, it “finally became public in the [nineteenth-century] metropolis. As a sensation it was no longer easily confined to the bourgeois interior or relegated to the imaginary haunts of the mysterious and dangerous classes; it was seemingly as disrespectful of class boundaries as epidemics and plagues.”

struggle. By the end of the high-rise ordeal, “what violence there was had become totally stylized, spasms of cold and random aggression. In a sense life in the high-rise had begun to resemble the world outside—there were the same ruthlessness and aggression concealed within a set of polite conventions.”⁵¹ If the novel is not out-and-out nihilistic, then it stresses the contingency of everyday life and its potential to be otherwise.

In a similar revolutionary or progressive vein, by arguing that Ballard’s work expresses a “transvaluation of utopia,” W. Warren Wagar notes that Ballard understands his own stories as utopian. “The thesis that the universe is random and meaningless is entirely tenable, but Ballard claims not to have chosen ‘that particular exit door from reality.... Quite the contrary. I feel (just as my heroes did in *The Atrocity Exhibition*, *Crash*, and in *High-Rise*) that there is some sort of truth to be found’.”⁵² Through the architectural space, the groundlessness of postmodernism advocated by Baudrillard is rejected in favor of a “transvaluative”—a Nietzschean re-valuing of values—utopian project. In *High-Rise*, this utopian vision is revolutionary in that it seems to reveal that what binds communities together is itself a violence that can be overcome or worked through. By taking us through the rational construction of value embodied in the concrete building, allowing us to witness “the separation of families, the destruction of civilized norms, and aggressive, self-serving behavior”⁵³ that results, and to finally escape the nightmare of bourgeois social strictures, *High-Rise* creates a space for a new engagement with domestic and consumer values.

⁵¹ Ballard, *High-Rise*, 176.

⁵² Wagar, “J.G. Ballard and the Transvaluation of Utopia (J.G. Ballard et La Transvaluation de L’utopie),” 55; Ballard, Interview, 45.

⁵³ Matthews, “Consumerism’s Endgame,” 124.

The novel gestures to this possibility early on—apocalypse is both frightening and full of possibility:

The more arid and affectless life became in the high-rise, the greater the possibilities it offered. By its very efficiency, the high-rise took over the task of maintaining the social structure that supported them all. For the first time it removed the need to repress every kind of anti-social behavior, and left them free to explore any deviant or wayward impulses... Secure within the shell of the high-rise like passengers on board an automatically piloted airliner, they were free to behave in any way they wished, explore the darkest corners they could find. In many ways, the high-rise was a model of all that technology had done to make possible the expression of a truly 'free' psychopathology.⁵⁴

Not only would psychology and inter-personal relationships be rearranged in a fit of dark experimentation, but the landscape itself would change. Even as the high-rise structure broke down and deteriorated, it remained “a model of the world” of the future for the residents, “a landscape beyond technology where everything was either derelict or, more ambiguously, recombined in unexpected but more meaningful ways.”⁵⁵

Ultimately, the high-rise is an architecture of safety because it symbolically safeguards wealth and privilege, it arranges its own inner efficient and mechanical “reality,” it projects its prominent façade as a fortress wall. For Laing and the other embattled residents, “the high-rise represented safety and security” from the empty, homogenous world of modernity. At least by building fortified space they could save themselves from the horror of an external world with its “absence of any kind of rigid rectilinear structure [that] summed up for Laing all the hazards of the world beyond the high-rise.”⁵⁶ As with all the architectural shapes of safety, Ballard helps

⁵⁴ Ballard, *High-Rise*, 46–47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

reveal a hard core of irrational, insecure, and violent power struggles—but through which it may be possible to pass into a new, more hopeful social landscape, one that is not shaped by safety, reproduction of tradition, or hierarchy.

Running Wild

Echoing the architectural critiques of *High-Rise*, in *Running Wild* Ballard aims at the violence of exclusion and inclusion that surrounds so-called “master planned” or gated communities. Ballard uses conventions of detective fiction—murder, investigation, evidence, delayed decoding—to explore a bloody massacre at Pangbourne Village, a private, gated community outside London. The premise of this 1988 novel is simple: there is an expensive planned community on the outskirts of London; all the adults in the gated community, including security guards, maids, drivers, and adult residents, are found murdered, all within a few minutes of each other; all the children are missing, as if abducted. It turns out, the children are the murderers. It is the job of the protagonist, a psychologist hired by the police department to assist in the investigation, to understand why a group of children would systematically and brutally kill their parents and then go into hiding. Like the apocalyptic high-rise, the upper-class and socially engineered community at Pangbourne is the setting for a bloody domestic apocalypse. But at Pangbourne, the children who perpetrate the murders of their parents and guardians seem to be struggling with the tension between the “positive” freedom to do as they wished—which would mean taking risks and making mistakes—and “negative” freedom to be uninhibited and to expand their zone of personal control.⁵⁷ That is, the lives of the children are “negatively” free

⁵⁷ Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty.”

from needs and wants, free from harassment or crime, free from contact with any challenges that may disturb a status quo. But each child appears to suffocate within a micromanaged life of luxury. The children resent this managed freedom—it begins to resemble incarceration. In response, they pull off an elaborate and highly organized plan, killing dozens of adults one morning, and then disappear completely.

The novel slowly reveals the covert violence of the “rational” and “humane” spatial control and social engineering of Pangbourne. The police take video of the crime scene as it is first discovered—the expensive homes in Pangbourne appear as cold and cruel spaces: “everything is strangely blanched, drained of all emotion, and one seems to be visiting a set of laboratories in a high-tech science park where no human operatives are employed.”⁵⁸ This laboratory atmosphere continues throughout the tour that the police videographer provides: “...there is an antiseptic quality about Pangbourne Village, as if these company directors, financiers and television tycoons have succeeded in ridding their private Parnassus of every strain of dirt and untidiness.”⁵⁹ This tidiness has been sullied by blood, or rather, the blood has ruined the façade of civilized enlightenment cultivated by the architects and owners of these houses.

The houses themselves are heavily fortified, designed to be walled off from the surrounding countryside as well as to surveil the interiors. “Security” at Pangbourne is an expression of both sovereign and disciplinary power, in Foucault’s terms, since the walls and armed guards maintain the integrity and purity of the “castle keep” interior, while digital surveillance (e.g. cameras, computer access) and the personal management of children by parents

⁵⁸ Ballard, *Running Wild*, 1989; Ballard, *Running Wild*, 1999, 7. Quotes will be taken from the later edition.

⁵⁹ Ballard, *Running Wild*, 1999, 8–9.

serve to maintain the civilized qualities of childhood by excluding risk, fear, and uncertainty. This is ironically reflected by Ballard's name for the real estate development company in charge of constructing Pangbourne—"Camelot Holdings Ltd"—and more explicit in the narrator's discovery that, like a number of other similar planned communities, "Pangbourne Village has no connections, social, historical or civic, with Pangbourne itself."⁶⁰

Secure behind their high walls and surveillance cameras, these estates in effect constitute a chain of closed communities whose lifelines run directly along the M4 [highway to London] to the office and consulting rooms, restaurants and private clinics of central London. They remain completely apart from their local communities, except for a small and carefully selected underclass of chauffeurs, housekeepers and gardeners who maintain the estates in their printing conditions. . . . Pangbourne Village is remarkable only for having advanced these general trends toward almost total self-sufficiency. The entire estate, covering some thirty-two acres, is ringed by a steel-mesh fence fitted with electrical alarms, and until the tragic murders was regularly patrolled by guard dogs and radio-equipped handlers. Entry to the estate was by appointment only, and the avenues and drives were swept by remote-controlled TV cameras.⁶¹

If at first these security measures are considered "useful," the narrator readily observes that though they "help keep out intruders," that "constantly living under those lenses must have been a little unnerving. The security is cleverly done, but the estate does seem designed like a fortress," to which a detective replies, "or a prison. . .".⁶² The Village is called "a warm, friendly, junior Alcatraz," the product of security-obsessed but liberal and "humane" wealthy professionals.⁶³ From the perspective of the children, the good life is "a despotism of kindness"

⁶⁰ Ballard, *Running Wild*, 1999, 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 14–15.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 41.

and a “tyranny of love and care.”⁶⁴ Security and safety at Pangbourne is oppressive: it erases the possibility of crime or transgression, thus revealing itself as totalitarianism. The children use a code word from George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* to coordinate their attacks—“Snowball”—which sets off the carefully planned series of parricides.⁶⁵

One reason the children spring into action is the possibility of becoming objects of media attention. A television documentary is being planned in which a crew, a director, and a “fashionable sociologist” would be spending time in the gated community, documenting the everyday lives of these privileged and praise-worthy paragons of liberal society. Just before the murders, the children note in their internal “newspaper,” *The Pangbourne Pang*, that the “provisional title of the documentary was *The New Samoa*, a reference to Margaret Mead’s influential but partly discredited work in which she described the idyllic world of these unrepressed islanders, from whose lives all jealousy, repression and discord had been erased.”⁶⁶ They know that not only would the wandering cameras and increased media attention ruin their opportunity for surprise attack and secret escape, but it would serve to solidify an impression of Pangbourne as a place of liberty and humane freedom. This impression was encouraging the creation of new “villages” like Pangbourne, which would “within two or three years ... be amalgamated in a super-Pangbourne with its own schools, community clubs and resident youth counselors, protected by even more elaborate security systems.”⁶⁷

Pangbourne’s gated exclusion contains empty, homogenous space and time. The atmosphere is suffused with “shadowless summer sunlight and the almost blank façades of the

⁶⁴ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 84.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 84–85.

expensive houses.”⁶⁸ And as the narrator begins to understand, “at Pangbourne Village... time could run backward or forward. The residents had eliminated both past and future, and for all their activity they existed in a civilized and eventless world.”⁶⁹ The emptiness and homogeneity speaks to a form of life that is thoroughly organized according to the calculation of wealth, security, and the privilege of extreme environmental control—even to the point of controlling the quality of the sunlight and its distribution—that accompanies the advanced capitalist form of disciplinary power. The Pangbourne family is an extreme example of Althusser’s “ideological state apparatus,” which he describes as a shape of power that operates according to symbolic violence, but violence nonetheless. The family is an institutional and ideological structure, constructed and maintained in architectural space (the gated community, for instance), whose violence is covert but no less operative. Like in *High-Rise*, the rationality of the planning and architectural forms encourage a crisis and subsequently a violent revolt against the socio-economic hierarchies that safeguard privilege from erosion or intrusion, from within or without.

Chapter 1, Part I Conclusion

In making explicit what is hidden, these novels help us theorize the kinds of violence and warfare that undergird even liberal, humane and rational planning of space, in particular if this planning presupposes the stratification of society into well-defended zones of class and race difference. The attempt to engineer safety into dense residential communities, to plan for safety and security, to defend what has been acquired and staked out as territory, is in fact to participate

⁶⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 62.

in a staging of violence and everyday warfare. In what follows, I analyze the theory and philosophy of architectural design that encourages safety through fortification, first through an analysis of verticality, then an analysis of defensive fortification, and finally through what I see as the defense against obsolescence.

CHAPTER 1, Part II: People and Buildings

A wall is beautiful, not only because of its plastic form, but because of the impressions it may evoke. It speaks of comfort, it speaks of refinement; it speaks of power and of brutality; it is forbidding or it is hospitable;—it is mysterious. A wall calls forth emotions.

— Le Corbusier, “La Construction des villes”⁷⁰

Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.

— Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”⁷¹

If we are to understand how safety is constructed in and around high-rises and fortified buildings, then we should first understand the building and its politics. I will argue that the high-rise is linked to the way that people experience their everyday built environments.

A high-rise is an urban architectural pattern that allows for a relatively higher population density by stacking apartments in levels or stories; a high-rise is typically equipped with elevators, which were among the technological innovations that enabled very tall buildings to be produced in the first place, along with the reinforcement of concrete with steel.⁷² A high-rise will either stand apart from its surroundings, or blend into them. If a high-rise rises above its

⁷⁰ From an unpublished manuscript, circa 1910, quoted in Brooks, “Jeanneret and Sitte: Le Corbusier’s Earliest Ideas on Urban Design,” 286.

⁷¹ Frost, *North of Boston*.

⁷² Graham, *Vertical*, 129–48.

surroundings, then its prominence invites various reactions from the public or those who live in it. A tall building interpellates the viewer as a diminished subject in a larger, more powerful political and social milieu, much like the policeman interpellates the citizen in Althusser's example from *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*.⁷³ Althusser's policeman is a "concrete individual" via his investiture of State-sanctioned authority; the "concreteness" of subjectivity is likewise built on interpellation by that authoritative actor.⁷⁴ Concrete conjures concrete. So the "concrete" building also interpellates the subject. The tall building establishes a relationship between ground and sky, like the interior of a gothic cathedral, the vast height drawing the penitent's eyes up, up, up (to God). The high-rise establishes verticality, and consequently: hierarchy, subjectivity, and relationality. As a looming monolith, a high-rise requires us to pit ourselves against it, to determine its proper place—and our own—in our social and political field. The sheer mass of a high-rise in relation to a person looking up at it gives the building the character of an unmediated *event*.⁷⁵ In Marxist terms, the high-rise raises the question of base and superstructure, Marx's architectural metaphor of social and political dynamics. To look at a high-rise, one has the sense that an *ideology*—an assemblage of ideas, values, traditions, and meanings—is being expressed in its vertical form and façade.

The *idea* that a building expresses can have a measurable impact on everyday life in and around the building. In one clinical study of the impact of architectural design on the experience of residents of a group home for people with developmental disabilities, the researchers found that:

⁷³ Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards and Investigation)," 174.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁷⁵ Derrida, "A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event."

the degree to which a building is perceived as homelike or institutional affects the behavior of both staff and resident. ... The findings suggest that the symbolic environment works in tandem with the instrumental environment to affect people's actions both directly by engendering expectations and actions and indirectly by affecting expectations of and actions toward others.⁷⁶

This is a relatively straightforward example of the way that the symbolism of built environments materially affects the experience of everyday life. But if a building can communicate stigma, it can also communicate security, safety, and aggression.⁷⁷ It can be hard or soft, inviting or imposing, delicate or authoritative, and so on. For example, in his study of “fear and the house-as-haven in the lower class,” urban sociologist Lee Rainwater notes that:

feelings of insecurity in one's residential environment can lead to the adoption of a negative and defeatist view of oneself, to ambivalence about job-finding and to expressions of general impotence in the capacity to cope with the outside world. The secure residential environment... may in fact be a most cogent form of social rehabilitation, significant on the level of antipoverty programs.⁷⁸

Under the assumption that there is a deep connection between space and personal identity, architectural design invites a way of looking and tries to create a foundation for the relationship between people and space. That the “symbolic environment works in tandem with the instrumental environment” is another way of saying that built environments are simultaneously material and ideological.

⁷⁶ Robinson and Thompson, “Stigma and Architecture,” 252.

⁷⁷ Davis, *City of Quartz*. Hershberger, “A Study of Meaning and Architecture.” Davis criticizes architects like Frank Gehry for his projects that turn away from the surrounding community, projecting aggressive fortification and the attempt to intimidate passers-by. On the other hand, Hershberger argues that when people attach meaning to architectural forms, they do so through feelings, recognizable forms, and affordances that they encounter in their use of space, but trying to *code* these feelings into the space is a dubious project. People are not as excited by architectural forms as architects are, for instance.

⁷⁸ Rainwater, “Fear,” 23.

If, on the other hand, a high-rise is surrounded by other high-rises, it is one among many and is not prominent. Consider the vertical density of Manhattan. Each high-rise or office tower by itself is a terrifying achievement, vast quantities of concrete, steel, wire, pipe and décor sourced from the farthest reaches of the planet, designed and assembled by professionals who have taken, collectively, many lifetimes to become excellent or even just competent in their tasks. But amid the meadow of tall buildings in Manhattan, from a slight distance each individual building blends into the group. I am referring to the visual effect of distance, on the one hand, and of endless repetition on the other. From a distance, Manhattan is a clump of buildings—very few of them stand apart, and those that do offer grand symbolic messages (see below on One World Trade Center). This effect of de-emphasizing any particular high-rise can be replicated by standing too close: from the street individual buildings can appear as part of a punctuated wall.⁷⁹ This is not to suggest that a high-rise in this context is not still worthy of analysis. As part of an urban ecology that has come to seem *natural* or *inevitable*—as the water to the fish—it is perhaps more important to understand the role of the architectural pattern lest its influence go unnoticed or underappreciated.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ See Figure 2, below.

⁸⁰ McLuhan, “The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion.” McLuhan uses the term “environment” to refer to the field of action that mediates communication, and notes that though the environment is largely invisible and un-noticed, it is perhaps a more crucial target of analysis than the “fragmentary” objects we happen to observe.



Figure 2: View from 57 Wall Street, Manhattan.⁸¹

There are generally two reactions to a high-rise design: a celebration of utopian promise—the “positive” response—and an indictment of dystopian oppression—the “negative” response. The utopian promise emphasizes that the built environment allows each individual to flourish and exercise free will, even if the zone of freedom is very small: a positive expression of freedom. (There are no “small” apartments, only “efficient” ones.) The dystopian indictment charges the built environment with imposing and impinging on the exercise of freedom: a negative concept of liberty.

The utopian observer regards the high-rise as an opportunity to bring people in a collective closer to a rational and peaceful ideal. Social ills such as crime, poverty, suffering, and inequality can all be managed or assuaged with careful planning and design. By applying mechanistic rationality and efficiency to the question of communal living, we can progress toward ever greater states of harmony. On the other hand, the dystopian observer will reply that by imposing mechanistic rationality on the shape and form of life we merely encourage the treatment of humans as machines. This oppressive state, which concretizes inequalities rather

⁸¹ “57 Wall Street, New York.”

than confronting or resolving them, either lasts forever or it pushes the oppressed human spirit to a breaking point, at which moment there is a potential for revolutionary violence and change that will favor greater self-determination and positive freedoms. Whatever the operative design goals—order, control, safety, or beauty—the pre-arrangement of architectural space has a material impact on the ways that people inhabit it, but this prearrangement does not concretely *determine* behavior or feeling. In other words, whatever appears dystopian can, with the right tactics, be subverted. Alternatively, the best and most democratic plans for architectural space may fail to inspire the desired outcome, as Le Corbusier’s designs have shown repeatedly.

Another way to frame this general distinction of styles of thought surrounding the relationship between people and their built environments is one offered by Michel de Certeau in his work on urban spaces. In essays such as “Walking in the City”⁸² and “Practices of Space,”⁸³ de Certeau orients the discussion of the politics of space vertically: he juxtaposes the view from above, which corresponds to the perspective of the architect or urban planner, with the view from below, or the perspective of the pedestrian on the street. Each of these perspectives is privileged in some ways, but “blind” in others. The architect planner may see urban space as a series of rational and controllable fields and zones, but is ignorant of or distracted from the improvisational reality of everyday life. Likewise, the pedestrian navigating urban space (interior or exterior, as the case may be) is generally unaware of the over-arching strategies of the architect, but nonetheless deploys small, fluid and creative tactics for contravening the plan or remaking space into a “place,” a meaningful space of lived experience. In this way a dichotomous politics emerges between positions of authority and positions of subjectivity.

⁸² de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life.*, 91–110.

⁸³ de Certeau, “Practices of Space.”

The vertical opposition between planning and practice can mimic the power relations between the state and the citizen, or between the structure of an institution and the subject who must operate within it. There is an easy and widespread tendency to consider the authority at the top and the oppressed or limited subject of authority at the bottom. Constructing tall buildings, in this view, is a kind of power play, an expression of mastery and domination.⁸⁴ We see this in Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* at the end of which Howard Roark, hero/architect, stands perched triumphantly above "the pinnacles of bank buildings," above "the crowns of courthouses," even higher than "the spires of churches"—surpassing, in other words, the earthly institutions through his transcendent architectural vision.⁸⁵ The skyscraper form, like the high-rise residence, is symbolically potent; it expresses, visually and spatially, more than its function alone. This symbolism is dependent on the particularities of time and space, of course. The World Trade Center towers, the observatory in which de Certeau perches himself to reflect on the vertical, soared over lower Manhattan as the prow of a ship of capitalism. Before their destruction, the twin towers symbolized neoliberal triumph, the champions of free market speculation.

The architectural vision—from above, in which space is a rational abstraction—is a utopian dream, but as de Certeau argues, it can be made to serve authoritarian ends. Similarly, if revolutionary action bubbles up from the street level, the level of lived experience and everyday life, then it may resist authority but be always in danger of becoming as violent as the thing it opposes, as in the Reign of Terror following the French Revolution. (Much violence was meted out, not incidentally, by the Committee for Public Safety.) Verticality is an expression of what

⁸⁴ Although, as we saw in the Introduction, the Hegelian master-slave dialectic critiques this orientation of power by highlighting the *potential* for the oppressed to rise up.

⁸⁵ Rand and Peikoff, *The Fountainhead*, 694.

Foucault calls the “silent war to reinscribe the relationship of force.”⁸⁶ It is to the connection between verticality—of high-rises, but also of walls and barriers—and the “silent war” that I now turn my attention.

The Symbolism of Verticality: What is being safeguarded?

After September 11th, 2001, the symbolic and political significance of tall buildings has been infused with the imagery of terror, destruction, and warfare. When the twin towers were destroyed, there were widespread fears of centralization and urban density—which presumably raised the value of a place as a terror target—and also of verticality—given that tall buildings held symbolic value and were thus, again, “better” terror targets. The skyscraper was suddenly, in its symbolic prominence, a risky space, unsafe, a target; as Peter Marcuse dryly puts it, “obtrusive skyscrapers los[t] some of their appeal.”⁸⁷ Instead, he argues, dense urban forms like corporate office towers and headquarters that had previously emphasized height and visibility—the symbolic presence of centralized power—would now bunker down and de-centralize. This was not necessarily the direct effect of the 9/11 attacks, but the attacks hastened the shift toward neoliberal decentralization and deregulation—what Marcuse calls “deplanning.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 16.

⁸⁷ Marcuse, “The ‘War on Terrorism’ and Life in Cities after September 11, 2001,” 270.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 264. Ironically, this trend toward horizontal decentralization exactly mimics the concept of Le Corbusier’s proposed “Radiant City” in which height would be replaced with breadth; city streets would be kept outside the wide pedestrian parks that would grace the distance between short(er) and broad office and residential buildings. Corbusier, *The Radiant City*.

Deplanning supports a neoliberal re-organization of space and capital by requiring the state to become a security apparatus and to defund (i.e. privatize) public space and social welfare projects.⁸⁹ In the name of counter-terrorism, then, the neoliberal corporatized state will spur “increased *barricading* within the city, a *citadelization* of new construction for major businesses and upper-class residences” which will have the effect of increasing inequality by fortifying and obscuring the position of corporate and personal wealth, drawing sharper boundaries that surround class and race.⁹⁰ In the wake of a relative decline in the singular power of verticality to connote power and privilege, a phenomenon of social distinction that Nan Ellin calls “vertical segregation,” built environments are more regularly segregated horizontally using gates, walls, or other techniques of fortification, exclusion, and control.⁹¹

In the meantime, after 9/11, symbolic verticality is not totally abandoned. The new tower that “took the place” of the demolished twin towers, One World Trade Center, is 1,776 feet tall, a pointed design allusion to the year of the Declaration of Independence. Beyond the unveiled symbolism, however, the (vertical) allusion to the political document does not have much purchase in the new world of globalized capital, trade, communications, warfare, and risk. What does “all men are created equal” mean, exactly, in an era of global capital and overt and covert mechanisms that are designed to promote inequality? The myth of equality is all the more striking now, but the suggestion that One World Trade Center can somehow embody it seems patently strange since its gleaming verticality is a gigantic manifestation of wealth and privilege.

⁸⁹ Marcuse, “The ‘War on Terrorism’ and Life in Cities after September 11, 2001,” 271.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 271–72.

⁹¹ Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism*, 145. Ellin argues that some forms of vertical segregation became “blurred with the advent of the elevator, making all floors equally desirable.” I wonder about this assertion. The penthouse, the highest residence, retains its vertical superiority; some penthouses have private elevators.

Furthermore, the symbolism is politically void. By declaring independence, the colonial Americans established a democratic nation-state against the monarchical power of Britain. But it would seem that as a response to global terror and risk in the post-9/11 era, a declaration of independence is impossible—there is no “here” and “there” in which to frame a difference between a well-delineated oppressor and an oppressed subject. The “war on terror” is also notoriously murky as a coherently defined project; like “homeland security,” it begs the question of its own justification. There is a case to be made, in fact—as Wendy Brown has done in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*,⁹² and that is also taken up in studies of infrastructural power like Keller Easterling’s *Extrastatecraft*⁹³—that nation-state politics have been overcome or overshadowed by transnational political and economic apparatuses, which favor cities as the centers of power. The Revolutionary War, and the ability of a group of people to assertively carve out a space which they might control and which would uphold the idealistic virtues of self-determination, now seems almost quaint.

What is at stake here is intimately related to the construction of personal and institutional safety. If safety is a technique of staving off obsolescence and defending entrenched power structures, I now add that the construction of safety is a way of engaging in what Antonio Gramsci calls a war of position,⁹⁴ the slow and sometimes hidden war that is embedded in peacetime politics. The way that safety is constructed in urban space is through spatial control, and it frequently takes on militaristic forms.⁹⁵

⁹² Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*.

⁹³ Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*.

⁹⁴ Gramsci and Forgacs, *The Gramsci Reader*, 228–29.

⁹⁵ Graham, *Cities Under Siege*; Graham, *Cities, War, and Terrorism*.

The Problem of High-rise Residential Space

While skyscrapers like One World Trade Center are symbols of patriotic, economic, cultural, or other assertions of national and political self-hood, high-rise apartment buildings have a problematic history with regard to their purpose and effectiveness. Luxury high-rises are designed to shelter the rich above the noise and filth of the middle and working classes down on the street—Ballard has already helped us understand the kind of violence this architecture of safety represents, which is the safety of hierarchy. These buildings do not evoke an idealism of political unity, but instead manifest a “vertical segregation”⁹⁶ between “have” and “have-not.” This class boundary is both celebrated as the field of possibility in American economic life—separate but equal opportunities to get rich (someday, if I work hard enough)—and decried as an oppressive concentration of wealth and power that merely defends its privilege.

On the other hand, public housing and so-called “affordable” housing in urban areas, which during the 1960s began to be built as high-rise apartment buildings, have been widely deemed failures of architectural design and public policy. These “projects” have been indicted for encouraging the ghettoization of racial and economic groups;⁹⁷ they have been described as the root cause of criminality and social ills;⁹⁸ they have been feared even where they do not yet exist, since their presence may unravel civilized American ideals.⁹⁹ The mere suggestion that affordable housing be built in a wealthy neighborhood can and has caused political battles due to

⁹⁶ Ellin, *Postmodern Urbanism*, 145.

⁹⁷ Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*; Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls*.

⁹⁸ Newman, *Defensible Space*, 1973; Newman, “Architectural Design for Crime Prevention”; Newman, “Defensible Space,” Spring 1995.

⁹⁹ Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares*.

the general racism and classism that would suggest that apartment buildings, tenement buildings, and any moderately dense housing tends to undermine the value of the most prized middle- and upper-class American property: the detached, single-family house.

The contests over low-incoming housing since the 1960s, which I will describe in more detail below, seems to revolve around two ideas: first, that architectural space is the *cause* of social or individual behaviors, and that by revising the space we might revise (and improve) the health of society; and second, that architectural space is the *effect* of power dynamics that seek to enhance, solidify, and defend certain inequalities and differences. The “causal” view promotes certain kinds of utopian politics, while the “effective” view critiques structural power dynamics but does not deny that built environments can be oppressive. Here we have again the utopian and dystopian reaction to dense residential building designs.



Figure 3: The relative incidence of “inner city” in the corpus of English published material sampled by Google Book’s NGram viewer, 1900-2008.

In the 1960s, cities and the “inner city” in particular—a term that, as we can see from the embedded Google NGram (Fig. 3), became popular in the period after 1960 and has only waned slightly since the 1990s—were not considered safe spaces. Cities were thought of as spaces where one might become the victim of a violent crime. National and urban violent crime rates

spiked alarmingly during these decades.¹⁰⁰ Dense urban centers were especially vulnerable, and the social housing “projects,” these densely populated and rationally designed high-rises, only seemed to encourage the problem. Progressive urban designers argued that the design of high-rise buildings had an effect on behavior, and by modifying these designs to give people techniques for controlling territory and defending private space, crime rates would decline and the city would be safer. Safety, in other words, could be designed with progressive goals in mind. But in this case, “progressive” attitudes about the problem of crime and violence in urban cores tended to “whitewash” the problem of race. As architect and critic Craig L. Wilkins argues:

Architecture—which has a long history of being used to perpetuate spatial dichotomy and marginalization—has since the 1960s overtly viewed the urban condition as an inevitable illustration of the pathologies of its residents, become a place to mitigate, not to cultivate. As such, architecture and urban design are not viewed as having the power for social *change*, just social *control*, not only of space, but of identity and basic humanity.¹⁰¹

And even as architecture and urban design theorists attempted to mitigate the problems of crime and safety, I argue that they ultimately set the stage for the fortification of space, for a project that upholds “an erasing oppressive spatial paradigm embodied in the inhuman housing projects” that they criticize: for example, Pruitt-Igoe in St. Louis, but also Cabrini-Green and Robert Taylor houses in Chicago.¹⁰² Wilkins helpfully gives this paradigm a name: “spatial profiling,” “the physical and material process of locating social relations and social practices in space based

¹⁰⁰ FBI, Uniform Crime Reports as prepared by the National Archive of Criminal Justice. The rate of violent crime per 100,000 people nationally rose from 160.9 in 1960 to 363.5 in 1970, 596.6 in 1980, 729.6 in 1990, peaking in 1991 at a rate of 758.2 before making a steady decline. The current rates of violent crime nationally are approximately what they were in 1970. See www.ucrdatatool.gov.

¹⁰¹ Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity*, 69.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 70.

on historical, political, cultural, and economic exercises of hegemonic power.”¹⁰³ The techniques of the construction of safety in urban cores, as much as in suburban and finally global space, are heavily influenced by the principles of dichotomy, marginalization, separation, and hierarchy that constitutes spatial profiling.

The story of the perpetuation and safeguarding of racial and economic privilege through spatial design is insidious and also more than a little disappointing, since writers and activists like Jane Jacobs paid so much direct attention to the plight of those in inner cities who were not safe and who needed safety in order to live freely and productively. As with Le Corbusier and the failed modernists, Jacobs’s interventions in the problems of inner cities seem to come from a forthrightly liberal political stance.

As part of her project of criticizing the violence of urban renewal, Jacobs took special interest in the question of safety and its relationship to the built environment. In Jacobs’s important book, *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, published in 1961, she makes a strenuous argument about the dangers that presumably clear-minded urban designs pose for the improvement of urban societies. Jacobs understands city space as both a cause and an effect of social problems. For example, in noting that some people may not feel safe in a city or a neighborhood and that this feeling of insecurity comes from a fear of being assaulted on the streets and sidewalks, Jacobs asserts that “sidewalks and those who use them are not passive beneficiaries of safety or helpless victims of danger. Sidewalks, their bordering uses, and their users, are active participants in the drama of civilization versus barbarism in cities. To keep the city safe is a fundamental task of a city’s streets and its sidewalks.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, urban

¹⁰³ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰⁴ Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 37–38.

space is constructed in a relational model—safety is a performative interaction between design, objects, space, and users. And even in the nascent sixties, Jacobs was lamenting that “today barbarism has taken over many city streets, or people fear it has, which comes to much the same thing in the end.”¹⁰⁵ The most influential concept, and one that would go on to inspire Oscar Newman’s defensible space, to which I turn momentarily, is that in order to promote urban safe spaces, “there must be eyes on the street.”¹⁰⁶ This did not mean that streets should be surveilled by government or law enforcement, but that streets have to be attractive to a steady stream of users and neighbors who would be present and naturally watchful. Put simply, the city should be organized to promote openness and collective life—it would be counter-productive to design urban spaces as enclaves or fortified interiors. Promoting safety means promoting openness, community, and equality at the same time that it means making clear distinctions between public and private space. This is true, however, only if the goal is to cultivate urban societies, rather than control, segregate and erase them.

Here we should make a clear distinction between what Jacobs advocates and the kind of safety that Michel Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*, for example, in which surveillance is at the crux of modern institutions of power. Although they are functionally similar—both require surveillance of people’s activities, identification of insiders and outsiders, and transparency in everyday life—they articulate a different connection between being able to see people and the performance of power. The central purpose of Bentham’s Panopticon, for example, is to fix each body in a location by virtue of constant surveillance (or the threat of it). This sort of disciplinary power is a mechanism for isolating, stratifying, and ordering people.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 45.

Jane Jacobs was interested in promoting safety by making communities more transparent and open to each other, and by encouraging organic *cohesion*. Communities would be safer if they could count on each other, if they had deeper personal connections with their neighborhood, and if they could, by virtue of the business of everyday life, establish and perpetuate zones of civility. Safety, through community control, would not be an imposition, but rather safety would be a matter of self-determination.¹⁰⁷ Again, these ideas were meant to promote freedom for the urban underclasses whose neighborhoods were the most crime-ridden and whose public housing was the most ghettoized.

Jacobs's criticism of urban development in the sixties exposes the trend toward class and race segregation that will develop in subsequent decades into what I will call the American bunker mentality. "In the rebuilt city" of the post-war era, writes Jacobs, "it takes a heap of fences to make a balanced neighborhood. The 'juncture' between two differently price-tagged populations, . . . is especially elaborate."¹⁰⁸ These barriers between wealth zones involved cyclone fences, giant parking lots, hedges, and the use of "no-man's land" buffers. In a striking metaphor for gentrification, Jacobs narrates how the people in the higher-income zones think that "eventually . . . all that will go . . ." referring to the poorer neighbors. "Those people will go. We are the pioneers here." Jacobs rejoins by musing that "it is rather like pioneer life in a stockade village, except that the pioneers were working toward greater security for their civilization, not

¹⁰⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*; Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. For another defense of urban space as a foundation for community-building, see Alexander, "The City as a Mechanism for Sustaining Human Contact." Alexander takes aim at the typical loneliness felt by urban dwellers, the loss of intimate contact between people, and what he calls the "autonomy-withdrawal syndrome" which has come to be an "inevitable by-product of urbanization" (408). Such extreme withdrawal from others causes, according to Alexander, forms of schizophrenia and psychosis that are becoming normalized in their pervasiveness.

¹⁰⁸ Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, 62.

less.”¹⁰⁹ The centrality of the mythology of pioneers and frontiers to the construction of American identity will become clear over the course of this dissertation, but it is sufficient at this point to note that the mentality of fortification, stratification, and segregation that drives the kinds of secure spaces that Jacobs criticizes, is intimately linked to the ways that American identity is forged through an appeal to heroic histories. Jacobs, for her part, is able to at least glimpse the problems with that appeal.

Defensible Space, Defensive Space

Modern architecture is invariably presented as a last-minute opportunity for redemption, an urgent invitation to share the paranoiac thesis that a calamity will wipe out that unwise part of mankind that clings to old forms of habitation and urban coexistence.

— Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*¹¹⁰

Oscar Newman’s influential defensible space theory is a direct descendent of Jane Jacobs’s call to reform space in order to promote safety. Defensible space relies heavily on a causal model of urban design: the shape of space is the cause of social ills. If we re-design urban space, we can reform behavior and relationships between people. In a report sponsored by the National Institute of Justice and the U.S. Department of Justice, Newman argues that “we are now certain that the physical construct of residential environments can elicit attitudes and behavior on the part of residents which contribute in a major way toward insuring their security; that the form of buildings and their groupings enable inhabitants to undertake a significant

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 63.

¹¹⁰ Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, 246.

policing function, natural to their daily routine and activities.”¹¹¹ The construction of safety and security in dense urban environments, which Newman is careful to claim transcends income levels, requires a particular architectural arrangement that will push residents to adopt “extremely potent territorial attitudes and self-policing measures.”¹¹²

As with Jacobs’ “eyes on the street” proposition, defensible space is space that is easily watched, and it necessarily involves the creation of a clear boundary between public and private zones. Ignoring these architectural design principles is the root cause of urban crime, according to Newman: “Our acute, and apparently increasing, inability to control crime in urban areas is due in large measure to the erosion of territorially defined space as an ally in the struggle to achieve a productive social order.”¹¹³ Territoriality is both productive of safety and security as well as its bane. To have one’s own territory, which must be clearly marked and demarcated, is to have the ability to control space and make it safe. But too much isolation and segregation would encourage oppositional attitudes. For instance, “the present response of upper-income residents to the increasing crime problem is one which is introverted and withdrawn, and involves intentional isolation, restricting, and hardening of their private dwelling at the expense of immediately adjacent surroundings.”¹¹⁴ Furthermore, “physical isolation of family from family, typical of much contemporary high-rise design has, more than ever, come to imply social isolation as well. The creation of large, monolithic projects has come to imply social anonymity.”¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Newman, “Architectural Design for Crime Prevention,” xii.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, xv.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

Newman's criticism of public housing projects rests on the fact that in their typical design there is no clear distinction between public and private space, that if a stranger (or, a person bent on violence) invades the building, there is no community of neighbors to recognize him as an outsider and discourage his presence. Marking people as "stranger" thus has a positive social function, and public housing projects actively eliminate the concepts of *stranger* and *intruder*. These concepts, argues Newman, "so long an active shaping force in animal evolution, ha[ve] been given over to social utopian conceptions of man: that to define someone as a stranger dehumanizes the opponent and is the source of racism, social strife and war."¹¹⁶ Instead of fostering a utopian optimism about people—all people are my neighbors by default and are therefore trustworthy—Newman points out that the erasure of strangers and outsiders has the effect that "all people become somewhat foreboding."¹¹⁷ Paradoxically, the "democratic organization" of modern cities means that people are surrounded by strangers and never get to participate in a defensible community.¹¹⁸

Newman takes pointed aim at the idea of plurality as, he claims, it has been taken to an extreme that destroys its utopian motivation. In his book *Defensible Space*, Newman sets the stakes in truly apocalyptic terms:

In our society there are few instances of shared beliefs or values among physical neighbors. Although this heterogeneity may be intellectually desirable, it has crippled our ability to agree on the action required to maintain the social framework necessary to our continued survival. The very winds of liberation that have brought us this far may also have carried with them the seeds of our demise.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 13–14.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Newman, *Defensible Space*, 1973, 1.

In other words, the liberalism of the grand city brings the chaos of crime. Newman explicitly links the dissolution of socially cohesive values on “the physical environments we have been building in our cities for the past twenty-five years” that have undermined “amity and... the natural pursuit of a collective action” against crime.¹²⁰ To solve the problem of urban crime, architects must use the design principle of defensible space to re-establish clear interior and exterior zones, and to signal to a potential criminal that a particular space is under the control of a group to which he or she does not belong. In other words, Newman proposes a kind of immune system for urban space, a way of giving a group of people the ability “to set the norms of behavior and the nature of activity possible within a particular place” by giving them “clear, unquestionable control over what can occur there.”¹²¹ Defending space is thus a way of managing, controlling, and making it safe from crime and violence. The question we need to ask is, to what extent does defensible space, as much as it may be offered as a way to combat poverty, violent crime, and injustice, nonetheless contribute to a staging of social warfare, made more covert? Or, in what ways does defensible space get co-opted by the very neoliberal structures that enable and encourage exacerbated racial and economic inequalities?

The claim that defensible space is progressive is based in part on the idea that having one’s own territory is a liberatory end in itself. Territoriality emerged as a tactic of social control that promoted liberty through separation. Sociologists Stanford Lyman and Marvin Scott, for instance, in a 1967 article on the sociology of territoriality, argue that territoriality and “control over space is deemed central for survival” of any living organism—territoriality is thus a necessary condition of life itself. Lyman and Scott note that “although man’s domination over

¹²⁰ Ibid., 1–2.

¹²¹ Ibid., 2.

space is potentially unlimited, in contemporary society it appears that men acknowledge increasingly fewer *free* territories for themselves.” Freedom occurs in the home, in the private dwelling space; what “public” zones there are no longer feel free since they are governed, policed, and privatized. In other words, there is a tension between the smoothing out of space in globalization and the territorially segmented space of individual freedom. “Free territory is carved out of space and affords opportunities for idiosyncrasy and identity.”¹²² This is a clear example of what Isaiah Berlin calls the “negative conception of freedom,” which is concerned with a zone of control and the size and security of that zone. In order to create free zones that promote the creation of a personal identity, there must be “boundary creation and enclosure.”¹²³

When territory is invaded, encroached, violated or contaminated, argue Lyman and Scott, people react in a series of encounters that escalate in directness. First, they will “linguistically collude” with other members of the community to label the intruder as an outsider. People may also engage in practices of insulation by erecting barriers or signals to deter ingress by outsiders in the first place. And if all else fails, people will defend their “turf” directly.¹²⁴ The implications of this are simple: the general trend toward the fortification of corporate or individual wealth in urban environments. This kind of fortification can be seen in the creation of “interdictory spaces” that are “designed to intercept and repel or filter would-be users,”¹²⁵ usually based on class and

¹²² Lyman and Scott, “Territoriality,” 236–37.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 237.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 244–47.

¹²⁵ Flusty, “Building Paranoia,” 48.

race distinctions. It can be seen in the “sadistic street environments”¹²⁶ and “fortress cities”¹²⁷ that Mike Davis argues have emerged as a result of the race and class “wars” of the 1960s.

However, what the biological deterministic argument for territoriality misses is the politics of space, how space is produced through political commitments and programs. Gerald Suttles, for example, pushes back against the biologically determined theory of territoriality. He acknowledges a certain trend in social science models of the 1960s to “equate a kind of provincial conservatism with the ‘biological urge to territoriality’.”¹²⁸ But the theory that humans form “natural communities” as a matter of biological and genetic determination has “little evidence to warrant it,” and in fact “include[s] a strong ideological component which attempts to give such received social forms as the family and the community uncontested places in society.”¹²⁹ Territoriality is not a generic human drive, but is driven by organizations “quite remote from the local community.”¹³⁰ In other words, establishing territorial boundaries (that frequently engage in antagonistic tactics, like buildings, walls, and fences, and enforcing homeowner’s association contracts) is a practice that derives its principles from more widely shared institutions and organizations. Organization is imposed on society, it does not arise organically like in the organization of a cell or a single animal body.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Davis, *City of Quartz*, 232.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹²⁸ Suttles, *The Social Construction of Communities*, 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³¹ Canguilhem, “The Problem of Regulation in the Organism and in Society.” Canguilhem makes a similar argument in this essay in which he notes that while the use of political metaphors in biological sciences is commonplace, and biological metaphors in politics, that actually a human society is not analogous with an organism since the principles of a human society’s regulation are not given inherently in its structure. Organisms self-regulate; societies do not.

Politics are occluded in the defensible space movement in general, but race in particular, which in American culture is firmly entrenched in the way that space and criminality are configured. As Mike Davis puts it, “the neo-military syntax of contemporary architecture insinuates violence and conjures imaginary dangers. In many instances, the semiotics of so-called ‘defensible space’ are just about as subtle as a swaggering white cop.”¹³² Urban housing projects in the U.S. are often racialized ghettos, separating and regulating race, class, and gender. The Pruitt-Igoe projects in St. Louis, designed by Minoru Yamasaki in the early 1950s, demonstrated how urban planning and design might lead to intensified inequality and concrete-constructed racism. Lee Rainwater notes that “each child [in Pruitt-Igoe] is born into a constricted world, the world of lower-class Negro existence, and as he grows he is shaped and directed by that existence through the day-to-day experiences and relationships available to him.”¹³³ The project is an example, for Rainwater, of a modern system of victimization of Black populations by “ghettoization and indifference.”¹³⁴ Rashad Shabazz similarly argues that the philosophy of urban planning stemming from Le Corbusier’s influence on urban housing projects—this time in Chicago—rested on the management of racial and ethnic difference, and resulted in the creation of “carceral spaces” that oppressed the Black community in a way that mimicked the containment strategies of prison.¹³⁵ As I have already noted, Wilkins argues that urban space is fully racialized, and that public housing projects from the 1950s and ‘60s were

¹³² Davis, *City of Quartz*, 226.

¹³³ Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls*, 1.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹³⁵ Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*, 58–59.

especially objectionable since they “authorized and sanctioned the wholesale movement of people and erasure of communities.”¹³⁶

High-rise public housing has not only been attacked on racial grounds; it is also the target of arguments around gender. For example, Weisman offers a feminist critique of Pruitt-Igoe and high-rise public housing. Following the general principle that “massive, monotonous, and institutionalized high-rise projects like Pruitt-Igoe were built to identify the residents and isolate them from the surrounding neighborhoods,” Weisman argues that not only were these racialized ghettos but also “female ghettos”: reliable and safe childcare was not available, but the public spaces were barren, polluted, and unsafe, forcing at-home mothers and their children to stay inside.¹³⁷

These spaces that are designed for the management of populations, segregation and identification, and the rational control of everyday life, are examples of the potential for making covert social tensions into overt social tensions, revealing a hidden struggle and unacceptable slow structural and constructed violence. “Defensible” space has become “defended” space: gated communities are commonplace, and so is a related rise in the construction of “blockhomes,” or secured residences.¹³⁸ What had been a predominantly inner city “problem” with heterogeneity is now ubiquitous. An expanding population, concentrations of wealth and poverty, and cultural segmentations lead to “a densely packed heterogeneous population manifesting dramatic juxtapositions of privation and opulence” that undermines the hegemony of the white privileged class.¹³⁹ The response is an internalization and attempt to defend

¹³⁶ Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity*, 70.

¹³⁷ Weisman, *Discrimination by Design*, 106–10.

¹³⁸ Flusty, “Building Paranoia,” 48.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

homogeneity through “defended neighborhoods”—“street gangs use spray paint while homeowners associations use neighborhood watch signs; either way we are talking informal militias.”¹⁴⁰ The white population that can afford to is flocking not to suburbia, but “whitopia”—what author Rich Benjamin calls the white-utopian enclaves of privilege, safety, and financial security, protected by legal, cultural and sometimes militant force, that now dot the American landscape.¹⁴¹

Ironically, this transformation of defensibility from the relatively progressive attitudes of Jacobs and Newman, who were addressing the problem of urban crime in order to promote the possibility of socially responsible renewal projects, to the defense of white privilege, only increases the paranoia and fear that fueled the rise in spatial control strategies to begin with. As Koskela puts it, “while increasing security might make some people feel safer, it also creates increasing fear, racist paranoia and distrust among people.”¹⁴² Blakely and Snyder argue that the trend toward militant “forting up”—constructing high-rise fortresses or gated communities—reduces heterogeneity, decreasing the possibilities for social cohesion.¹⁴³ Walls, gates, and fortifications in urban and suburban residential space not only segregate race and class groups physically, of course; those divisions are symbolic as well. Setha Low shows that “adding walls, gates, and guards produces a landscape that encodes class relations and residential (race/class/ethnic/gender) segregation more permanently in the built environment.”¹⁴⁴ The

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 57.

¹⁴¹ Benjamin, *Searching for Whitopia*.

¹⁴² Koskela, “‘The Gaze without Eyes,’” 247.

¹⁴³ Blakely and Snyder, “Divided We Fall: Gated and Walled Communities in the United States,” 98.

¹⁴⁴ Low, “The Edge and the Center,” 45.

defensive attitude of the 1960s has served to further stratify American social space according to power differences, and has encouraged the development of militant space, the space of social warfare.

Safeguarding National Influence: On Defending Against Obsolescence

And on the pedestal, these words appear:
My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

— Percey Shelley, “Ozymandias”¹⁴⁵

Shelley’s “Ozymandias” expresses the vain hope that sovereign power may defeat the juggernaut of Time by building with stone and chiseling out a royal name and declaration. It is about the obsolescence of power and the inevitability of structural decay. It takes note of the possibility that architectural works intended to defend a form of power are inevitably vulnerable, and will become victims of Time if not always of History.

Walls are meant to invoke permanence, not only of the wall itself but of what it surrounds and defends. But it would seem that in an era of globalization in which boundaries are being revealed as porous and permeable, that concrete, stone or hardened walls are in some ways obsolete. In *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, Wendy Brown wonders about just this: why, if we are experiencing an unprecedented wave of globalization, are we (that is, so many state and non-state actors around the world) also in the midst of a massive wave of wall building? Of

¹⁴⁵ Shelley, *The Major Works*, 198.

course, for readers living in the era of Trumpism, the question of walls and borders is only now too obvious and also paradoxical. Brown notes that what we think of as globalization—a continual opening up and smoothing of space and spatial control—is in fact constituted by a tension or a paradox between “opening and barricading, fusion and partition, erasure and reinscription.”¹⁴⁶ Ultimately, what these wall building projects reveal is that even as nation-states undertake to reinscribe boundaries, borders, and delineations, they are doing so in reaction to “nonstate transnational actors—individuals, groups, movements, organizations and industries.”¹⁴⁷ Since the kinds of territorializations that nation-states are designing are not targeting other nation-states, but shoring up defenses against a rising tide of globalized de-territorializing forces, “they take shape apart from conventions of Westphalian international order in which sovereign nation-states are the dominant political actors. As such, they appear as signs of a post-Westphalian world.”¹⁴⁸

The strategies and tactics at work in this representation of global politics belong to neoliberalism.¹⁴⁹ To speak about the neoliberal architectural tactics that construct safety is, in the most general sense, to speak about the ways that institutions and organizations and entrenched

¹⁴⁶ Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, 7.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*. In *A Brief History*, Harvey makes a convincing case that the ideology of neoliberalism is theoretically tied to the defense of private property (against the “tragedy of the commons”), free flows of capital, deregulation and state non-intervention. However, in practice neoliberalism establishes class power, decreases competition, exacerbates inequalities and financial volatility, diminishes most people’s freedoms by impoverishing them, encourages dangerous nationalism, and goes hand-in-hand with morally supremacist and militaristic neoconservatism. In *Spaces*, Harvey highlights the unevenness of neoliberal development that is underwritten by financialization, the regime of the IMF and the hegemony of the US dollar, and other monetarist policies. This, again, restores and creates class power, not economic growth.

power structures, especially whiteness and neoliberal corporate wealth, work to stave off dissolution or obsolescence. The question of obsolescence, or the inevitability of change, is a powerful thought in the history of the connection between building and power. Going back just a handful of decades, Paul Virilio noted that the Atlantic Wall of Nazi bunkers constructed to defend the European mainland from the Allied assault was an announcement of its own obsolescence. He writes:

These concrete blocks were in fact the final throw-offs of the history of frontiers, from the Roman *limes* to the Great Wall of China; the bunkers, as ultimate military surface architecture, had shipwrecked at lands' limits, at the precise moment of the sky's arrival in war; they marked off the horizontal littoral, the continental limit. History had changed course one final time before jumping into the immensity of aerial space.¹⁵⁰

What was being defended, and how it was being defended, was already on its way out and about to be superseded. I argue here that the (neoliberal) construction of safety, both architecturally and ideologically, is primarily a matter of preservation of class and race hierarchies, of survival of the fittest or the maintenance of meritocracies, and of thwarting obsolescence and making power relations more durable.

The techniques of segregation and fortification that Wendy Brown and Paul Virilio both understand as a kind of fulcrum of state power reflect the ways that safety and security play a role in the planning of residential—and in this case, urban—space. The fortifications, “interdictory spaces,” and the private control of public spaces all speak to the militancy of contemporary space, a participation in a project of social warfare, or what Davis refers to as the “Second Civil War” between racial minorities and the power structures that, through architectural planning, pathologized them in the name of safety and civility.

¹⁵⁰ Virilio, *Bunker Archeology*, 12.

Chapter 1, Part II Conclusion

This chapter has examined some of the ways that dense urban residential space has been shaped by the construction of safety, which has ultimately been expressed as the defense of racial, political, and economic privilege, despite the best efforts of some progressive urban theorists. This story of the failure of the state to care about its least privileged citizens is also the story of how hegemonic power structures co-opt the techniques of resistance movements. The “defensible space” movement was supposed to allow for the cultivation of minority urban cultures and small communities. Instead, it has allowed existing privileged hierarchies to flourish and harden their own defenses. In the end, this story reveals that architecture and the built environment is very often a tangible record of domination, of the those with the money and influence sufficient to get something built, and of the meaning of safety.

CHAPTER 2: Suburban Houses: Dreams and Nightmares

...the sheltered being gives perceptible limits to his shelter. He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams.

— Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*¹

In the American imagination, safety is deeply embedded in the idealization of middle-class suburban detached houses. In focusing on this genre of architecture, this chapter bridges the distance in scale and verticality between high-rise construction in Chapter 1 and underground bunkers in Chapter 3. Studies of suburban culture and architecture have revealed that the history and ideals of what has become the most common form of housing in the United States is implicated in contests over racialized access to social and economic mobility, the norms of gender and domesticity in different periods of time, as well as the shared hopes and fears exemplified and expressed in popular culture. I enter the conversation by trying to understand to what extent and in what ways these suburban domestic spaces were (and still are) constructed as safe and unsafe spaces. In doing so, I link the politics of war and national identity with the ways that political struggles over race and gender are represented and fueled by spatial control and the design of domestic space. I also show how safety is mobilized in the post-World War II era as a defense of white (and male) power.

The detached single family house is an icon of post-war American cultural and social ideals. It is an architectural representation of the American Dream. Dreaming, as Bachelard argues, is at the heart of the experience of the house, but I will show how dreaming also matters

¹ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 5.

politically. To say that houses are spaces of dreams is not an empty statement of metaphysical whimsy. The dialectic between dreams and nightmares is a useful point of entry for a discussion of American domestic space and its cultural meanings. In particular after World War II, the suburban American house was a manifestation of aspirational dreams that were theoretically accessible to every American, but practically only accessible to white Americans.² To dream is to hope—an association stamped indelibly in the American political consciousness by Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech at the March on Washington in 1963—but it is also to remember and to engage in reverie. That is, dreams are an occasion to look to the past as well as the future, and they are also a way of structuring the present: what can we do now to attain that future of which we dream? Nightmares, however, are experienced in the present; they evoke a panic that grips the moment, and they call for an escape or a defense. In this way, the dialectic of dream-nightmare in suburbia is also an occasion to understand the ways that time and space intertwine and influence each other.

The construction of the American suburban house as an ideal is tied up with changing values associated with the family as well as the ways that gender is constructed within the limits of those values.³ (Single-family homes in general had taken on these moral and ideological valences in earnest beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁴) The history of family

² Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*, 172–75; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 243–45; Wright, *Building the Dream*, 211; Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, 23; Taranto, “Defending ‘Women Who Stand by the Sink’: Suburban Homemakers and Anti-ERA Activism in New York State,” 38–39.

³ See for example Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*; Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*; Matrix (Organization), *Making Space*; Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 243–45.

⁴ Clark, *The American Family Home, 1800-1960*, chap. 9, “The American Family Home and the American Dream.” After about 1840, housing reformers mounted a campaign to “give domestic architecture a symbolic and moral meaning.” Beginning in that period, “houses were no longer simply the physical structures in which families lived. ... Single-family houses were designed not only to strengthen the family but also to fulfill a symbolic function. ... Inherent in

and gender, from the perspective of feminism, tells the story of the oppression and liberation of women in various social and political roles. However, representations of suburbia have often, even since the 1920s, revolved around white male protagonists who pity themselves and their entrapment in an empty, soulless monoculture.⁵ These representations express a white, and quite often male, “fantasy of victimization.”⁶ So suburbia in the latter half of the twentieth century is both a site of aspiration and alienation, of dreams and nightmares. My argument is that safety is operative in both these realms. Middle-class families—not only white families—sought out suburban space after the war as a way to ensure financial stability and safety, joining the previously upper-class residents of early suburbs—the dream—but also as a way to avoid the unsafe conditions of urban centers, racial mixing, and uncertainty of variety—the nightmare. This chapter helps us understand both how safety is an ideal and an illusion, and why it may be politically important to undo or revalue the mediated—that is, the virtual or imaginative—construction of safety.

Male Victimhood

Post-war suburbia was constructed—that is, physically constructed as well as culturally constructed—around the male hero: the veteran of the Great War. The U.S. federal government

this powerful promotional and reform vision of the middle-class house was the idea that the family home, as a retreat protected from the instability of a transient society and the competitiveness of the business world, could serve as the central, stabilizing force for American democratic society... A properly designed single-family house would protect and strengthen the family, shoring up the foundations of society and instilling the proper virtues needed to preserve the republic” (238).

⁵ Jurca, *White Diaspora*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

subsidized mortgages for returning vets and their wives.⁷ A massive housing crunch and then housing boom upended the American real estate market, and the middle-class suburb was born.⁸ Idealizations of white middle-class life in television, film, and literature, as well as advertising for new domestic machines and conveniences like air conditioners and washing machines, lent credibility and stoked desire for these safe, well-kept, and apparently utopian neighborhoods.⁹

But while the idea and the implementation of post-war suburbia was by all empirical measures a giant success—from 1940 to 2000, suburban zones accounted for the majority of population growth in the United States, with now over half the U.S. population living in suburbs¹⁰—suburban space as ideal space was never fully embraced and has continued to inspire fictions that highlight the feelings of alienation and cultural loss of the white middle-class.¹¹ In fact, the white male heroes who had first inspired the need and potential for suburban development, once transformed into salary-men, were its primary self-pitying victims. Jurca situates this expression in novels such as John Updike’s *Rabbit* trilogy;¹² Beuka sees a similar crisis of masculinity in suburban space in the Updike trilogy as well, but also in Mike Nichols’s 1967 film *The Graduate*.¹³ I wish to add Richard Matheson’s *I Am Legend* (1954) and “Mad House” (1953) to this discussion of the white male victim of suburban alienation, not to

⁷ Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*.

⁸ Taranto, “Defending ‘Women Who Stand by the Sink’: Suburban Homemakers and Anti-ERA Activism in New York State.”

⁹ Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*; Taranto, “Defending ‘Women Who Stand by the Sink’: Suburban Homemakers and Anti-ERA Activism in New York State”; Archer, Sandul, and Solomonson, *Making Suburbia*, Introduction; Forty, *Objects of Desire*.

¹⁰ Hobbs and Stoops, “Demographic Trends in the 20th Century,” 33.

¹¹ Jurca, *White Diaspora*; Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*.

¹² Jurca, *White Diaspora*, Introduction.

¹³ Beuka, *SuburbiaNation*, 114–47.

contradict the earlier arguments about how suburbia was reflected as an anxious space of masculine crisis, but rather to expand the scope of how these representations function. While Jurca argues the absurdity of suburban white masculinity claiming victim status, and Beuka keeps to the level of description—these texts represent “ongoing concerns over the relationship between masculinity and the suburban environment”¹⁴—I suggest that Matheson, in grounding his fictions in apocalyptic suburbia and then playing with the notions of animacy and agency, casts the crisis of masculinity as an ironic contest in which the mastery of white masculinity is *properly* brought low. In other words, Matheson’s fictions actually *do* what Jurca laments is not done in other post-war suburban literatures; they take a *position* vis-à-vis what Beuka has placidly labeled “ongoing concerns.”

The argument I make about these stories, however, has largely been overshadowed by their context at the beginning of what has become a powerful contemporary (twentieth- and twenty-first-century) American (and world-wide, for that matter) love-affair with zombies. Zombies do import a crucial racial component to the texts—through the figure of the zombie, whiteness as a category can be effectively critiqued. However, without letting race and zombies monopolize the discussion, taken together “Mad House” and *I Am Legend* illustrate not a “melodrama of beset manhood”¹⁵ nor a celebration of humanity in a zombified world, but a critique of the violence of white male victim mentalities in the allegedly placid, idealized American suburban setting.

This brings us back to the theme of dreams and nightmares, which I argue maps onto aspirations and apocalypses. Suburbia itself is an aspirational space; it is a wish and its

¹⁴ Ibid., 146.

¹⁵ Baym, “Melodramas of Beset Manhood.”

fulfillment. Matheson's apocalyptic war—in the single-family house of “Mad House” and in the wider social and architectural setting of *I Am Legend*—a war between genders and races, a war between the animate and the inanimate, is a waking nightmare for which the only escape is the sleep of death. What makes these “tragedies” so satisfying is that they do not naively or shortsightedly martyr their protagonists, they problematize them.

War and Peace in Suburban Space

Before we explore the ironic dramas of embattled suburban masculinity in Matheson, we should also set out the ways that suburban space is a post-war space and political space. We have noted that suburbia as a place for the white middle-class emerged from the pro-veteran legislation enacted after World War II. Suburbia was populated with a generation that had just experienced war—its traumatic intensities, the rhetoric of which helps construct male heroism, as well as war's potential to forge uniquely powerful fraternal bonds¹⁶—and so suburbia is in a very literal sense the space in which war turns to peace, but in which “war” continues to be enacted through political contests—war by other means—over racialized and gendered spaces and social categories.

In general, to what extent has “war” played a role in constructing domesticity in America? Furthermore, in what ways can post-war domestic space be understood as a battle zone? These questions will reverberate through this and the following chapters since the suburban house and the bunker—the subject of Chapter 3—are architectural manifestations of

¹⁶ See for example Gray and Arendt, *The Warriors*, chap. Two, “The Enduring Appeals of Battle.”

fortification and defense. The bunker is explicitly an architecture of safety since it is related to the defensive fortification of a literal battle zone. Outwardly the suburban house is idealized as a safe, modern container for family life. Beneath the surface, the suburban house is both the mode and site of violence against women and non-white families who also aspire to middle-class security.

The metaphor of war and the technologies and design strategies of war sometimes collude and enmesh. Beatriz Colomina brilliantly reveals the imbrication of war, media, and architecture in *Domesticity at War* in which she argues that what counted as post-World War II and Cold War domestic space—in other words, modern American domestic architecture—was deeply militarized and animated by new media.¹⁷ Her historicizing of modern architecture and of modern residential space is clearly marked by the concept that when war officially ends, it continues by other commercial and political means. For Colomina, modern architects—Ray and Charles Eames, Le Corbusier, and Buckminster Fuller, among many others—linked war, design, and domestic space in new and energetic ways. New domestic technologies of mid-century America—machines for automating housework and making domestic labor more efficient—were expressions of war in that their images were weaponized as part of an ongoing cultural conflict to defend the values of American domesticity in the face of political and environmental threats. These new domestic technologies were also products of war: “War does not go away. Rather, it is carried out in the consumption of mass-produced spin-offs of military technology and efficiency.”¹⁸ What Colomina makes explicit is not only the importance of understanding the relationship between design and power, but that we should understand concepts like “efficiency”

¹⁷ Colomina, *Domesticity at War*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

and “standardization” as militaristic. What drives the design of violence and war also translates to a domestic context, and vice versa. Domestic interior space was shaped by military technologies and ideas, and in turn it shaped the Cold War of ideology.¹⁹

If we accept that, from a technological and design perspective, modern interior design is a *function of war*—which is to say, the logic of modern design is in some way reducible to the logic of war—then we can argue that the cultural contests at work in those spaces are also affected and shaped by the logic of war. Elaine Taylor May makes this point in *Homeward Bound*, her study of Cold War domesticity in which she argues that the white, middle-class Americans who had access to suburban affluence contributed to a dominant ideology of “domestic containment.” Containment was a Cold War foreign policy strategy; communism could be defeated or resisted if it could be contained to a particular sphere of influence. The same logic was applied to domesticity; communism and communist “deviance” could be resisted if members of the family adhered to gendered expectations of behavior. To “alleviate the fears” of “dangerous” social fragmentation—in the form of “racial strife, emancipated women, class conflict, and familial disruption”—the white middle-class “turned to the family as a bastion of safety in an insecure world, while experts, leaders, and politicians promoted codes of conduct and enacted public policies that would bolster the American home. Like their leaders, most

¹⁹ For example, the famous “Kitchen Debate” between Nixon and Khrushchev hinged on an ideological battle between American representations of domestic modernity and its Soviet counterpart. Colomina, however, takes a different tack than other histories of domestic space that emphasize the rise of home economics and home engineering in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command*). In these histories, advancements in industrial production efficiencies, promoted by the likes of Frederick Winslow Taylor after 1890, encouraged a new economic, scientific, and engineering attitude to home interior design. Catherine Beecher’s works on “domestic economy” were published even earlier, between 1840 and 1870. Beecher’s recognition of domestic labor as labor, that is, as potentially subject to the same logic of efficiency that applied to industrial factories and mass production, inaugurated a profound change in interior designs.

Americans agreed that family stability appeared to be the best bulwark against the dangers of the Cold War.”²⁰ This focus on the family and the home by citizens as well as leaders and policy makers consisted in a correlate to containment abroad: containment at home.²¹ Women were subordinated to men as a matter of national security—as Sherry puts it, “with the nation’s very survival apparently at stake, women’s claims to equality seemed laughable, irrelevant, or even subversive.”²² The translation and dialogic shifts between national and domestic spaces illustrate the slipperiness of the term “domestic,” since it means both the internal constituency of the nation as well as the interior of the home.²³ Safety and security that preserves one, preserves the other: so goes the rhetoric.

The allegories of race, gender, and even ontological (animate and inanimate) conflict that Matheson invokes, I argue, are imaginative expressions of the ways that war manifests in peacetime political and social life. Matheson’s texts are, in a sense, “war literature,” even though the battle is being waged in an official peacetime setting. From the perspective of literary criticism, Jennifer Haytock’s study of the relationship between domesticity and war in the World War I period of American literature clarifies how the politics of space are at stake in these questions. In *At Home, At War*, Haytock examines “war literature”—stories generally written by men about a man’s experience in battle—over and against “domestic literature”—a genre of nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels written by women about home life. Juxtaposing them reveals that “war and domestic life exist on a continuum. The ideology that defines domesticity

²⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*, 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²² Sherry, *In the Shadow of War*, 150–51.

²³ See also De Hart, “Containment at Home: Gender, Sexuality, and National Identity in Cold War America.”

rests on gender roles, roles that define who goes to war and who stays home.”²⁴ In some ways, this is a way of understanding labor: women working at home and men working in battle depend on one another. But the similarities in these forms of story-telling, for Haytock, are striking, since “both are marked by a need for order in a chaotic world as well as a feeling that small rituals can create a place of safety. . . . Both kinds of writing address the idea of the individual within a larger unit, either the family or the military. . . .”²⁵ Fundamentally, this reveals the ways that home spaces and war spaces interact, how tensions between danger and safety, defense and offense, threat and violence, are all at work.

And if the tendency for our current discussion is to understand war and politics as fundamentally oppositional and binary, then I want to appreciate the criticism offered against it by Lora Romero in her study of Antebellum domesticity, *Home Fronts*.²⁶ In the introduction to that book, Romero frames her method by refusing the temptation to fit it into either a liberatory or oppressive politics, as if any text fulfills such a role purely and simply. In this, Romero follows Foucault who questions “the binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations.”²⁷ What has historically been understood as “a war” in any case has largely gone away in the contemporary era. “The War on Terror” is as close to a paradigm of war as we have now, which is to say: war is global, war is local, war is an engaged and sustained practice, war is infrastructural, war is religious, war is secular, war is a series of media events, war is total, war is ongoing and never ending, war is personal, war is by proxy, and so on. The boundaries of war have dissolved, but so have the binaries, despite attempts by

²⁴ Haytock, *At Home, at War*, xxii.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Romero, *Home Fronts*.

²⁷ Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 94; Romero, *Home Fronts*, 6.

state institutions to reinforce “for” and “against,” “us” and “them.” The state makes these attempts since oppositional binaries produce and sustain state power and reinforce entrenched hierarchies. The dissolution of boundaries in war reflects a similar dissolution of boundaries in domestic space, a process that produces anxiety and consequently a greater desire to fortify and defend, and to re-inscribe what boundaries may be imagined.

White Space as Safe Space

While they participate in the American Dream for economic stability and the relatively new post-World War II project of national security, as I have just shown, suburbia and the suburban house are architectural re-inscriptions of anxiously blurred boundaries between white and non-white. “It is inarguable,” asserts Wilkins, “that in Western culture, the power of *white*—the body of *white*—maintains a place on the American stage as its most important, historic, and immovable actor. As a result, *whiteness*—as the normative condition—becomes embedded in the foundation of, and is critical to, the determination of desirable space, place and property.”²⁸ Suburban space in the post-war period was racialized in that it was a spatial “system of domination based on physical and cultural difference” that helped oppose urban blackness and poverty with suburban whiteness and affluence.²⁹

Dianne Harris underscores the extent to which architectural space is made into a medium to create and maintain social values—in this case, whiteness.³⁰ Harris argues that the architecture

²⁸ Wilkins, *The Aesthetics of Equity*, 17.

²⁹ Rios, “Everyday Racialization: Contesting Space and Identity in Suburban St. Louis,” 187–89; See also Baxandall and Ewen, *Picture Windows*, 172–75.

³⁰ Harris, *Little White Houses*.

and visual rhetoric of privacy in postwar American domestic spaces, in particular the “ownership of a single-family detached house with its own private, fenced garden... and carefully designed interior spaces” became a symbol of safety from exterior threats but also “the security of respectability through confirmed membership in the white, middle-class American majority.”³¹ The house was then made into a media object, beginning in the 1950s, in the entertainment and journalistic programming that made it the site of a definition and sustenance of “racial identities that were bound to space and place”; television “helped perpetuate ideas about who belonged in suburbia and for whom postwar houses were intended.”³²

What Harris is pointing to is the construction of disciplinary space, in the way that Foucault uses this term, and its operation in and through media space. Post-war American suburbia was a construction project: the building of roads and houses. It was also a “construction” project: the reinforcement of normativity. Sometimes this reinforcement—the cousin of “enforcement”—is not only obliquely symbolic, but overtly pragmatic, which generates a new set of symbols. In other words, sometimes reinforcement is about building walls and fortifying. As we began to see in Chapter 1, gated communities in the late twentieth century illustrate both the practical design questions of fortified domesticity as well as the social values that underpin the project of building walls and gates.³³ Blakely and Snyder find that economic and demographic uncertainty/change is being reflected in “growing number of methods used to control the physical environment for physical and economic security.”³⁴ Gated communities—collections of houses and dwellings surrounded by various kinds of blockades, walls, road

³¹ Ibid., 114.

³² Ibid., 260.

³³ Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress America*.

³⁴ Ibid., 1.

blocks, gates, guard houses, and so on; enforced by home-owners' associations (HOAs) with rules and covenants—represent “a new fortress mentality” in American communities; in light of economic and social uncertainty, people are “forting up.”³⁵ For Blakely and Snyder, the underlying motivations for the fortress mentality are complex, but can be explained as a search for “sociospatial community,” for safety, privacy, and control.³⁶

Gated communities and their variants are found mainly in suburban space, but also in urban communities, and are utilized by every socioeconomic group.³⁷ But in the final analysis, each type of gated community is architecturally fortified to sustain and (literally) concretize established norms and social mores.

The maintenance of social norms is not only architectural, however—it is also based on policies and rules, systems of legal governance meant to enhance a group's control over some hyper-local space. Gates and road blocks discourage access by outsiders, and draw physical boundaries that promote a sense of private and public, of inside and outside, that may be comforting if not always strictly necessary or effective. In other words, “the important point is not whether [residents in security zone communities] *need* to cut off access to their streets, but that they feel they *must*.”³⁸

³⁵ Ibid., 1–2.

³⁶ Ibid., 2.

³⁷ Ibid., 44–45. Blakely and Snyder draw three major category distinctions among American gated communities. Some are designed for “lifestyle”—retirement communities are prime examples. Others are “prestige” communities—a class-based utopian space. And finally, some groups choose to “fort up” in order to securitize—Blakely and Snyder call these “security zone communities.” Each of these communities is caught up in social tensions, especially based on race and class, and each has a different emphasis when it comes to reflecting four central social values: a sense of community, a system of exclusion, the privatization of life, and stability (fed by homogeneity and predictability.)

³⁸ Ibid., 42.

Fear is a powerful motivator, and policies do as much as concrete to protect American communities from perceived enemies and Others. Home-owners' associations (HOAs) typically play this role. Robert Fogelson's incisive investigation into the history of suburban HOAs and the politics of exclusion that shaped the divide between urban and suburban illustrates the potency of fear in the history of real estate development and the construction of domesticity in early twentieth century America. Focusing on the half-century between 1870 and 1930 when American communities were grappling with new race, gender, and economic landscapes, Fogelson's *Bourgeois Nightmares* brings to light the dark dreams and utopian visions of the racial, economic and social values in suburbia.³⁹ Developers were the "gate-keepers" to suburban developments, using covenant agreements to deny black, Asian, Jewish, or other non-white prospective buyers from purchasing homes. But beyond that, a fear of urban crime and the loss of the moral foundations of white superiority drove suburban communities to strictly enforce what kinds of buildings could be built—the construction of buildings and the construction of social values were understood by developers and residents to be deeply linked. For instance, the single-family home promoted moral qualities like hygiene, the unity of the family, and in particular, privacy.

Apartment buildings, as opposed to single-family dwellings, constituted an assault on American moral foundations, since beneath this belief "was the assumption that morality was contingent upon privacy."⁴⁰ The seclusion and separation of one family from another sustained the sacredness of private property and therefore a kind of morality of wealth.

Where privacy is lost, wrote Bernard J. Newman, director of the Pennsylvania School for Social Services, morality declines. Men indulge in drinking, gambling, and promiscuity. Families stop

³⁹ Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

going to church. Couples file for divorce in alarming numbers. And the birth rate falls, a sign of what one critic of the apartment house called “race suicide.”⁴¹

The built environment signaled a territory, a space from within which one could establish and then defend a particular form of life. Suburbia’s detached houses opposed the high-rises of (racialized) urban space and its attendant dangers and risks. Architecture does not only reflect values, it “constructs” them, reinforces them, and encourages them. Per the logic of early twentieth-century social designers and civic planners, particularly those in positions of authority who tended to be white and male, what constituted good and right moralities were those that upheld the patriarchal family, which in turn cemented the sanctity of private property.

Richard Matheson: *I Am Legend* and “Mad House” as illustrations of domestic war

We saw in the previous chapter how J.G. Ballard’s urban high-rise revealed a hidden war-like social hierarchy at work in the modern Western understanding of what it means to live privately, live together, and live in a modern way. Likewise, in the context of the American post-World War II period in which suburbia (in addition to urban concrete) played an important role in reshaping society, I turn to Richard Matheson, whose fiction places interesting emphasis on war, defense, gender, and race. The texts I analyze here—*I Am Legend* (1954) and a short story “Mad House” (1952)—rest on the imbrication of war and architecture that emerges from the Cold War. These fictions will be useful tools for opening a window into the architecture of domestic war, into the contestation of domesticity in an era of rapid social and technological change, and into the historical groundwork of a contemporary architecture of safety.

⁴¹ Ibid., 156–57.

Matheson, like Ballard for his concrete and steel period, was particularly interested in domestic architectures and in the construction and dissolution of safety. As an author of horror stories, Matheson used the idealization—the dream—of domesticity as a foil for the pleasures of terror—the nightmare. Ballard and Matheson have both opened up domesticity as an apocalyptic interior, taking sci-fi/horror away from romanticizing of outer space to what Ballard champions as the journey to “inner space,”⁴² of the interiors of built and lived environments, and even further, to the space of psychology and consciousness and identity.

In *The Shrinking Man* (1953),⁴³ for instance, Matheson undermines the dream of safe domesticity with a nightmare of chemical surrealism. Scott Carey, good suburban husband and family man, is accidentally exposed to a dose of chemicals and radiation that combine to cause his body to slowly shrink. As he gets smaller, his claims to masculinity are also diminished; as he shrinks to the size of an ant he must even do battle with a black widow spider, a femme fatale of the insect world. Michael Kimmel calls the novel “an allegory of the disappearance of real manhood.”⁴⁴ Referring to the 1957 cinematic adaptation, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*,⁴⁵ for which Matheson wrote the screenplay, Amanda Hagood maintains that the film describes the infiltration of the “home front” by the “enemy,” manifested by “serious and frightening political, technological, and even environmental questions that, like killer giant ants, must be contained or managed if life is to go on as usual.”⁴⁶ But unlike other science fictional thrillers of its era, *The*

⁴² Ballard, “Which Way to Inner Space?”; Ballard, “Time, Memory and Inner Space.”

⁴³ Matheson, *The Shrinking Man*.

⁴⁴ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 242.

⁴⁵ Arnold, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*.

⁴⁶ Hagood, “Giant Bugs and Shrinking Men: Domesticating Technology in The Incredible Shrinking Man,” 99.

Incredible Shrinking Man argues that “the cherished values of domesticity... will not serve as a retreat from the dangerous forces set loose in the world after the geopolitical revolution initiated by the atomic bomb, nor will they shelter anyone from implication in the powerful sweep of those forces. Nobody, it seems, can claim to be safe at home anymore.”⁴⁷

Similarly, “Mad House” and *I Am Legend* illustrate how suburban middle-class domestic space can be configured as a theater of war that in turn shapes the contest over gender and race. In both these texts, the white, middle-class, patriarchal home is presented as profoundly unsafe for the men who have constructed a certain racial and gendered identity there, and for the women who live with them. I argue that Matheson’s texts are part of the “melodrama of beset manhood,” but that they ironically twist the anxiety of suburban male victimization, exposing it as false and monstrous. For the protagonists of these texts, “the wife” is gone or on her way out the door; children are hauntingly absent; and “the man” fights a losing battle against the dissolution of safe space around him. The men’s attempts to fortify or control their domestic kingdoms are doomed, and they react with a range of strategies: more fortification, more scientific knowledge, better weapons, denial and rage, self-pity, and finally the revelation that comes with death. These works are bleak, not redemptive. They both animate the inanimate—a wife who leaves, breaking free from an objectified domesticated existence; everyday household objects, symbols of domesticity rejecting the power structures that dominate them; corpses, death come back to life in the figure of the vampire/zombie; dust and microbes, situating the texts in a field of global risk.

Matheson’s *I Am Legend* is important in another way, too: it provides the basic inspiration for George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead*, and so inaugurates an era of

⁴⁷ Ibid.

increasing relevance and resonance of zombies as cultural icons of Threat, and consequently of un-safety. In other words, the reaction to zombies can serve as a literary imaginary proxy for the socio-political construction of safety.

“Mad House” animates white male victimhood

Indeed, everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate.

— Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*⁴⁸

The sentience of the couch, in our meeting and communing, then becomes my own sentience as well.

— Mel Chen, *Animacies*⁴⁹

I proceed from Mel Chen’s *Animacies* in this section because that text helps undermine a fairly “natural” distinction—between what is alive and what is dead, what is animated and what is inanimate—and reminds us of the potential liveliness of what is objectified. Chen’s couch, because of an experience of allergic chemical sensitivity, gives Chen the sense that objects are as alive and affective as subjects, that the distinction is no distinction at all and may give rise to new modes of interaction and political discourse among people, things, and the entire spectrum of what “matters.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 39.

⁴⁹ Chen, *Animacies*, 204.

⁵⁰ For more on chemical sensitivity and chemical violence, see Chapter 5 below, especially section on Cleanrooms.

Who or what has agency and liberty is often the animate subject; but it doesn't matter whether or not "you *are* a couch, a piece of metal, a human child, or an animal," what matters in determining the quality of animacy is "how holistically you are interpreted and how dynamic you are perceived to be."⁵¹ Women in 1950s suburbia were in this sense "inanimate"; they were strongly cautioned to be subordinate to their husbands, to enact the role of dutiful housewife—we have seen that this culture of self-denial and objectification was tied rhetorically to national security and economic security.

This mode of self-denial has defined suburbia for decades, obscuring domestic violence against women. In a sociological study of a suburb of New York City conducted in the late 1980s, for example, Baumgartner finds that the overwhelming moral order of suburbs is that of "moral minimalism"—basically, conflict avoidance. The "culture of avoidance" that Baumgartner describes seems to go hand in hand with the fact that "domestic life is largely free of violence."⁵² While no evidence is provided for this assertion beyond the absence of evidence to the contrary, Baumgartner also acknowledges that in this suburban community men's "authority is weaker [than in other patriarchal societies]. Men sometimes claim it, but they are often met with resistance (or even laughter) when they do."⁵³ Furthermore, when it comes to enlisting the help of a third party or outsider to resolve an internal family dispute—like, for example, an abusive husband—we are told that "some women may forego mobilizing outsiders because they know how negatively their husbands would respond."⁵⁴ Reading against

⁵¹ Chen, *Animacies*, 210.

⁵² Baumgartner, *The Moral Order of a Suburb*, 11, 40.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

Baumgartner, then, in other words, husbands abusing their wives in response to the perceived loss of masculine authority may very well go unreported for fear of retaliation.

The 1950s saw men and masculinity being redefined in multiple ways, from a new emphasis on being a “dad” to the increased importance of being a bread-winner.⁵⁵ Relations between husband and wife were idealized in suburban sitcoms of the era; man and woman each dutifully played their role, and happiness ensued. However, advertisements for home goods like coffee seem to show how prevalent spousal abuse was at that time. For example, Rebecca Shrum’s study of the gendered history of coffee and coffee makers in mid-twentieth-century American markets reveals a list of advertisements depicting apparently “normal” amounts of spousal abuse—husbands angry at the poor taste of their coffee throw it on their wives and threaten them or physically abuse their wives for not buying the best brands. Under an image of a surprised woman with a coffee cup dumped on her head, and the headline “Men! Don’t let it come to this! Win your fight for a decent cup of coffee without losing your temper!”, the ad copy asserts that “A man’s home is his castle! You have a right to good coffee in your home, and your wife has a duty to serve it. . . . Men, assert yourselves! Be calm, but firm!”⁵⁶ An advertising executive at Proctor and Gamble even conducted research to see “‘how ugly and aggressive we could get in the ads.’ They found that ‘women “would accept as reasonable all sorts of abuse” in ads because many of them heard it at home.’”⁵⁷ Presumably they felt it, too. But 1950s conformity, particularly in the homogenous, family-oriented milieu of suburbia, did not afford

⁵⁵ May, “Myths and Realities of the American Family.”

⁵⁶ Schenectady Gazette, October 29, 1959, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=XPEqAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=yokFAAAIIBAJ&pg=3626%2C4670655>; Shrum, “Selling Mr. Coffee: Design, Gender, and the Branding of a Kitchen Appliance,” 281.

⁵⁷ Ibid.; quotes from Swasy, *Soap Opera*, 117–18.

women many avenues of escape. As Elaine Taylor May puts it, “the costs of deviating from the norm in the age of consensus was extremely high. Unmarried women and men were suspected of being selfish and immature at best, perverted at worst. Divorce left women with few opportunities to earn a decent living and a heavy stigma of having failed in life’s main task. For men, the inability to succeed as a ‘family man’ was tantamount to being un-American.”⁵⁸

Matheson’s “Mad House” places this problem in its cross-hairs: that the prevailing definitions of masculinity were contradictory, commanding both conformity and independence, and that an “awakening” of feminist subjectivity was threatening the entire enterprise of suburban family cohesion. What had been appropriately inanimate and controllable—the housewife, the house itself—was animating, and in this case, violently so. The male protagonist suffers from his predicament, only surviving long enough to grasp the notion that his victimhood has precipitated his own demise. Published in 1952, “Mad House”⁵⁹ tells the story of Chris Neal, forty years old, a mediocre and unproductive novelist struggling as a mediocre and unsuccessful English professor at fictional Fort College. Chris is married to Sally, who is fed up with his anger issues, and so is preparing to leave him and move in with her mother. They live in an unnamed state in the town of Fort, a name that subtly alludes to the war at the heart of the story.⁶⁰

Chris is beside himself with rage at his inability to write compelling fiction, at his failure professionally, and at his failure as a husband, to make enough money to afford a good life or support a child. He resents his failures enough to abuse his wife physically and verbally. Sally

⁵⁸ May, “Myths and Realities of the American Family,” 580.

⁵⁹ Matheson, “Mad House,” February 1953; Matheson, “Mad House,” 2007.

⁶⁰ More specifically, though, we learn later in the story that Fort College is named for Charles Fort, a journalist and author who was famous for compiling notes and theories on “strange experiences and anomalous phenomena” “Charles Fort Institute.”

decides to leave him—not an insignificant move for a married woman in the 1950s, as we have noted.⁶¹ To dissolve the nuclear family was to undermine the dominant ideology of social value.⁶²

The anger Chris feels at his failures is a “cold sickness,”⁶³ a “sickness that prevailed with more violence every time he contracted it,” a “pit of introspective fever.”⁶⁴ As he succumbs to his anger, he begins to roughly handle the objects of his domestic life: his typewriter on which he cannot seem to write anything of worth, his razor with which he attempts to shave in the morning, his dental floss that only seems to make his mouth bleed, his dining utensils that are perpetually too dull to be effective. Every object on which Chris imposes his resentful anger reacts with violence or resistance in kind. The typewriter cuts his hands when he lashes out at it, the razer cuts his neck, the floss cuts his gums, the rug bunches up to trip him.

The morning of Sally’s departure, Chris tries to ignore her and goes about the business of getting ready for his day. He attempts to open the bathroom window and gets a splinter in his finger from the wood; angrily, he pulls out the splinter, then goes to open the bathroom cabinet, which sticks until he yanks hard on it, whereupon the door flies open and bruises his wrist. At moments like these, Chris “began to sense something. Intangible. A sense of menace.”⁶⁵ The

⁶¹ Also see Wright, *Building the Dream*, 194; Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution*, 23.

⁶² Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, 413–15; Taranto, “Defending ‘Women Who Stand by the Sink’: Suburban Homemakers and Anti-ERA Activism in New York State,” 36; Boys et al., “House Design and Women’s Roles,” 55; May, “Myths and Realities of the American Family,” 540.

⁶³ Matheson, “Mad House,” 2007, 223.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

objects of his domestic life are animating, seeming to either defend themselves from his violent outbursts or to exact a kind of retribution on him for his history of domestic violence.

For a moment he wondered why it seemed that everything was happening to him lately. As if some revenging power had taken roost in the house, pouring a savage life into inanimate things. Threatening him.⁶⁶

The animacy of inanimate domestic objects contributes to the overall sense that Sally's departure—what amounts to Sally's rejection of patriarchal domestic abuse—has unmade the house: Chris “wanted to get out of the house suddenly. It felt alien and strange to him. He had the feeling that she had renounced all claim to it... The touch of her fingers and the loving indulgences she had bestowed on every room; all these things were taken back.”⁶⁷ “The house was a different house.”⁶⁸

Sally understands it as well. For a brief moment the story is focalized through her as Chris struggles to cut a steak and gives up in violent frustration. “The woman appears... Her husband is beside himself. Her husband is shooting poison through his arteries. Her husband is releasing another cloud of animal temper. It is mist that clings. It hangs over the furniture, drips from the walls. It is alive.”⁶⁹ This shift in narrative perspective is significant because it allegorizes the ways in which a “domesticated” wife—“the woman”—may have understood domestic interiors as spaces in which health and miasmatic pollution were primary concerns. The

⁶⁶ Ibid., 230.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 231.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 221.

imagery in this moment of the story reflects the kind of war on germs and pollution that emerged through the domesticity of the middle of the twentieth century.⁷⁰

What Sally in “Mad House” seems to understand is that Chris’s resentful and angry “illness” is caused by poisons and miasmas that exceed the weapons of domestic housekeeping; or perhaps, Sally understands that the struggle her husband is waging with his desire to construct his own masculinity cannot, ultimately, be made orderly.

What is at stake in Chris’s confused frustration and in his increasingly bloody war with the house and its animated objects is an inability to accept the dissolution of domestic space as it is defined through patriarchy. The loss of this family structure is incomprehensible to Chris; it does not compute. As Sally finishes her packing in the “extra room” that has never been made into a nursery, presumably because of their financial woes, Chris feels the “sickness” and wonders:

Is all this possible?—his mind asked, incredulous. Possible that she was leaving? But she and he were man and wife. They had lived and loved in this house for more than eighteen years. Now she was leaving. ... He couldn’t reconcile himself to that. He couldn’t understand it or ally it with the functions of the day. Where did it fit into the pattern?—the pattern that was Sally right there cleaning and cooking and trying to make their home happy and warm.⁷¹

Strangely, Chris’s mind is the speaker, creating the sense that he has been doubled. This sense of doubling, of the instability or fragmentation of mental disorder, is enhanced when Sally thinks about her husband as “beside himself”.

The title: “Mad House”. The house is angry, gathering psychic strength for its retribution. Chris is “mad” in two ways: he feels like the objects in his house are deliberately trying to harm

⁷⁰ Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs*.

⁷¹ Matheson, “Mad House,” 2007, 233.

him (and senses his own insanity lurking), and he is enraged and confused. The two circumstances, we learn, are linked. Storming out of the house before Sally does him the indignity of walking out on him, Chris obsesses that “she is alone in the house, our house. What might have been our *home*. Now it is only a shell, a hollow box with sticks of wood and metal for furnishings. Nothing but inanimate dead matter. No matter what John Morton said.”⁷² John Morton is an old college friend who has made a successful career as a scientist and is also a professor at Fort College. He insists that Chris’s anger is *in fact* emptying out into the domestic interior.⁷³ Morton explains:

Where do you think that temper of yours goes? Do you think it disappears? No. It doesn’t. It goes into your rooms and into your furniture and into the air. It goes into Sally. It makes everything sick; including you. It crowds you out. It welds a link between animate and inanimate. *Psychobolie*.⁷⁴

The imagery of poison, pollution, of diffusion and radiation, emerge here once more. “I say you’re poisoning your house. I say your temper has become ingrained in the structure, in every article you touch,” Morton tries to impress on Chris, and that this poisoning will come back to attack him in the end. Chris is in danger.

Chris returns home, only to have one last confrontation with Sally during which he throws her out of the house. His conflict with the house reaches a fever-pitch; he is dizzy with the “feeling that he was sinking into the couch, into the floorboards, dissolving in the air, joining the molecules of the house.”⁷⁵ Here we may recall Mel Chen’s in-toxic-ated encounter with her

⁷² Ibid., 237.

⁷³ In this, Morton is a caricature of Charles Fort, investigator of inexplicable experiences; see fn 60.

⁷⁴ Matheson, “Mad House,” 2007, 241.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 249.

own couch, the sense that Chen's body and the furniture are melded and intertwined. Chris experiences what Stacy Alaimo calls the sense of "transcorporeality," the way that bodies, objects, and spaces are materially infused in and within one another.⁷⁶ Chris, in this transcorporeal space, is disoriented; something is there, but it is not quite *there*. Standing alone in his living room, "as though there were fumes he tried to smell them. As though it were a sound he tried to hear it. He turned around to see it. As though there were something with depth and length and width; something menacing."⁷⁷ The world did not appear differently, but it was suddenly toxic and intoxicating: "he felt drunk. Everything was fuzzy on the edges."⁷⁸ And finally, the house goes on the attack, desks knocking him down, glass shattering and cutting his skin, and the straight-razor slicing his throat. The coroner concludes that the wounds were "self-inflicted."⁷⁹

What Chris's (self-)destruction illuminates is the profound unsafety of domestic space in 1950s American imaginary. Where the profusion of cleaning and anti-microbial products in the 1950s helped construct the domestic space as more efficient and more scientifically controllable, and simultaneously helped establish feminine housework as labor *per se*, what Matheson reminds us is that the construction of safe domesticity is itself a violent enterprise since it is oppressive and hinges on narrowly proscribed gender and social roles. Furthermore, it is often a fiction rather than a reality for those who are abused by husbands or who come to inhabit a space made toxic by the modern profusion of chemical products. This "inside fear" is captured by Anne Troutman's poetic autobiography of secret and hidden space:

⁷⁶ Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*.

⁷⁷ Matheson, "Mad House," 2007, 249.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 253.

I do not believe the house is a safe place. For me, it is a collision of dream, nightmare, and circumstance, a portrait of the inner life. The primal shelter is also the site of primal fears. Its interiors are a map of the conscious and unconscious, with conscious securities and insecurities visible in the main rooms, and unconscious ones lurking in smaller, peripheral spaces. There is danger in the house.⁸⁰

Chris's violent reaction to his failed masculinity conjure this lurking danger in the home, bringing it out into the open and animating the material objects of the domestic space.

We are not meant to sympathize with Chris, but to empathize. In other words, the story does not offer redemption to the fallen patriarch or the embattled husband, but instead explores the "inner space" of his domestic interior and his psychology. The interiorization of this conflict of gender and class (insofar as his frustratingly weak economic status implies the debilitation of labor under capitalism) is causally and historically related to global capitalism, according to Peter Sloterdijk.⁸¹ Globalization erased the illusion that the earth is a shelter; it is merely a lonely rock floating in an abyss. In the face of the impossibility of "cosmic safety," modern life turned to an interior where safety can be established, at least with the help of an active imagination. Thus, "the exemplary human of modernity is *Homo habitans*, with the accompanying bodily extensions and touristic extensions."⁸² Understanding modernity in general, then, requires an understanding of interior and domestic spaces, or as Sloterdijk summarizes the point, "Modernized dwelling is the condition of possibility for modern cognition."⁸³ This cognition gives rise to dreams of safety and nightmares of insecurity: modernity, in other words, is constructed on what Jane Harrison calls "the fiction of safety... a paradoxical equilibrium

⁸⁰ Troutman, "Inside Fear: Secret Places and Hidden Spaces in Dwellings," 143.

⁸¹ Sloterdijk and Hoban, *In the World Interior of Capital*.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

negotiating nostalgia and novelty, property and place, independence and communality, seclusion and exposure, isolation and proximity, and danger and safety—a play of appearances.”⁸⁴

The appearances at work in suburbia cover over not only physical violence but the anxiety of loss of personal identity as well. In Matheson’s story, however, all anxieties are not treated as equals. Chris symbolizes white masculinity in crisis, an anxiety that consumes itself in its own attempts to master its environment. In this sense, the story is a parable of global capitalist apocalypse: the Anthropocene.

The Last White Man Cannot Remake the World

There is a TV comedy called “The Last Man on Earth” that chronicles the life of a man in a post-apocalyptic suburb of Tucson, Arizona.⁸⁵ In the near future, a virus has wiped out the human population, and the protagonist, Phil, believes he is the only survivor. This causes him (understandable) anxiety and depression; he drinks heavily; he paints faces on a collection of billiard balls and other objects so he can engage in pretend conversation. Finally, he attempts suicide. (This is a comedy, after all, that gestures to the absurd, as Albert Camus has formulated it.)⁸⁶ But before he is successful in his attempt, he encounters another person: Carol. She is a quirky and highly annoying woman who is delighted to meet another person, especially another man. They immediately feel that it is their duty to work together to repopulate the planet. Believing that this is his one and only chance at love (read: sex) and a relationship with another

⁸⁴ Harrison, “Multiplication and Subdivision: A Paradox of Danger and Safety,” 71.

⁸⁵ *The Last Man on Earth*.

⁸⁶ Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” sec. “Absurdity and Suicide.”

human, Phil agrees to marry Carol. (Carol's requirement that they marry before having sex plays on the absurdity of recreating suburban social mores in a post-apocalyptic world.) Soon after their "marriage," they meet additional survivors, and Phil begins to regret his decision to "wed." He has limited his opportunities for sex. Phil does everything he can to get away from Carol, treating her terribly so that she will want to divorce him, so that he can pursue more attractive survivors. Against the backdrop of viral apocalypse, Phil's failure as a devoted husband and his selfish idiocy parodies the shallowness of suburban masculinity, its utter failure to fulfill the promise or duties of the masculine heroic archetype.

Phil's existential problem (aside from his overactive libido, which is also at issue) is typical of "last man" narratives: he feels responsible for rebuilding the human species, in effect taking on the role of Adam as the first man. This scenario is politically problematic since it essentializes female and male reproductive functions, but in particular it strips women of the space to choose their reproductive future for themselves: a very real, nonfictional biopolitical situation. The "Adam and Eve" scenario plays out in many different post-apocalyptic stories, in various ways. In Kurt Vonnegut's *Galápagos*, for instance, the sole survivors of a nuclear holocaust are stranded on an island in the Galápagos, but the only female in the group capable of bearing children, a young girl, has a genetic mutation that is then passed on to every future human, moving them evolutionarily toward a kind of pleasantly unintelligent seal creature.⁸⁷ The solution to Vonnegut's "return of the same" problem—if humans repopulate the planet, then they will cause the same kinds of environmental and political damage that they did the first time around—is to mutate humans *out* of their "dangerous intelligence." In a darker version of the trope of repopulation, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* homes in on the enslavement of

⁸⁷ Vonnegut, *Galápagos*.

women for reproductive purposes, describing the implications of a kind of dystopian biopower in which creating life is a form of state control more disturbing than causing death.⁸⁸

Matheson's novel *I Am Legend*⁸⁹ also takes up the theme of the "last man," and it shares many thematic and stylistic features with "Mad House." Some kind of illness has wiped out all of humanity, all except Robert Neville. The illness that spread—through a combination of dust, radiation, fallout, and/or microbial infection—did not necessarily "kill" its victims. Instead, the illness transformed them into vampires.⁹⁰ There seem to have been two kinds of reactions to the illness. One type of vampire is zombie-like: a growling, cannibalistic, ghoul (that nonetheless follows certain vampire conventions such as being garlic-averse, shying away from religious symbols, disliking mirrors, and needing to hibernate at night.) The other type of vampire is more intelligent and verbal: these are still ghoulish, still hyper-aggressive, and still follow the vampire conventions surrounding garlic and mirrors and hibernation, but appear to be sentient.

Neville survived the illness, he suspects, because he was once bitten by a vampire bat during his tour of duty in Panama (the colonial "exterior" from which dangerous illness tends to emanate in virus fiction) and so developed an immunity to whatever it was that caused the apocalypse.⁹¹ Several details of the situation are crucial for my present analysis: Neville has fortified his home as a safe space against the zombie/vampires who try to kill him and eat him

⁸⁸ Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*.

⁸⁹ Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 1954; Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 2007.

⁹⁰ Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*. Thacker reads horror texts through the history and poetics of industrialization – he traces the notion that some mist or dust would symbolize a global apocalypse through several key texts, such as Shiel's *The Purple Cloud*; J.G. Ballard's *The Wind from Nowhere*. *I Am Legend* would fit well with Thacker's reading of those other texts. For more on dust, see Chapter 5, Cleanrooms.

⁹¹ Wald, *Contagious*; Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*; Kraut, *Silent Travelers*; Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*. Disease and foreignness is a consistent thread in world history, especially in the history of European and American colonialism and protectionism.

after sunset. He has also lost his wife and daughter to the illness, and so is working through the trauma of an absent woman, much like Chris Neal in “Mad House.” Neville has similar anger issues, coupled with a depression-fueled drinking habit (or, a whiskey-fueled depression). Neville decides (after contemplating suicide) to “solve” the issue at hand using scientific knowledge and scientific principles. If he can “cure” the vampire virus, then he can regain control, and re-establish the human species.

As with the bumbling and depressed Phil, Neville encounters a woman who has (or, appears to have) survived intact. He is overwhelmed with emotion and forms an immediate attachment to her. But Neville’s love is unrequited: the woman is actually an “intelligent” vampire in disguise, come to spy on him for the rest of her kind. These vampires have concocted a pharmaceutical to keep their sun sensitivity and garlic allergy at bay so that they can form a new political society. Neville is thus the threat, not the redeemer or the re-populator, since his pastime is to find sleeping vampires and summarily kill them. He is seen as a monster, a mass murderer; *Neville* is now the legendary evil, and just as he is dying from a poison the vampires have given him to execute him in the end, he makes the connection: “I am legend.”⁹²

In the case of “Mad House,” animacy is troubled through the awakening of domestic objects and the animation of the house itself. The premise of that conflict was a dissolution of heteronormative family structures, the ironic crisis of suburban masculinity, as well as the insidious toxicity of modern life. *I Am Legend* invokes a similar war between the living and the dead: the fight against the undead, the living dead, animated corpses and toxic/infected bodies. The novel also suffuses the major battle with a complex set of minor contests, between the male

⁹² Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 2007, 159.

ego and its loss of control, between exterior and interior violence, and between feminized emotion and masculinized empirical research.

The Fortress Defends White Masculinity

Twice a week Neville has to restring the garlic that he hangs outside his windows and doors, since the pungency decreases. He goes to the trouble of growing and stringing up the garlic because it constitutes his “first line of defense.” “Defense? he often thought. For what?”⁹³ Neville’s question floats by on the wind of despair, but it is a question with which to tarry. What is being defended here?

In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault addresses this question directly. Following his lectures on the abnormal, Foucault returns to the question “What is power?” He examines the idea that power is something surrendered or suspended, which is a juridical model of power as a kind of commodity to be given or lost. He offers the alternative hypothesis, that power can be understood as a continuation of war, a “silent war,”⁹⁴ a “perpetual relation of force.”⁹⁵ Foucault illustrates the way that war can act as a framework of analysis, since Western societies have evolved, in relation to sovereign power as well as the flows and networks of disciplinary power, into societies founded on binaries of race. Ultimately, these binaries, made concrete, rehearsed, and sharpened through colonialism and European imperialism, have served to reorganize civil society itself.

⁹³ Ibid., 4.

⁹⁴ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 16.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 17.

Why is war a useful matrix for analyzing the ways that power flows through different people and institutions? During peacetime, war is a social and imaginary space in which “force-relations [are] laid bare.”⁹⁶ In historicizing the discourse of the “silent war,” placing it in the context of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century political struggles, Foucault notes that in the discourse of binary social war, of “us” and “them,” of victories that must be won, there is a “perspectival” truth at work. Truth as a neutral middle, the truth of ancient Greece, is “dissolved” in favor of a new situation in which “being on one side and not the other means that you are in a better position to speak the truth.”⁹⁷ By binarizing truth and interpretation, not only are power and truth (or power and knowledge) intertwined, but the idea of a silent war becomes intelligible. After the bloody war is over and political power is established, the war continues in the struggle over rationality and truth, a rationality “of calculations, strategies, and ruses; the rationality of technical procedures that are used to perpetuate the victory, to silence, or so it would seem, the war, and to preserve or invert the relationship of force.”⁹⁸ The axis of power relations according to this picture of history is strikingly dark: at bottom, at the level of violent struggle, truth is defined by a “crude and naked irrationality” that emerges from the binaries of social war. But “higher up, we have a fragile rationality, a transitory rationality which is always comprised and bound up with illusion and wickedness.”⁹⁹

To return to Robert Neville’s question: Defense? For what? Neville’s “last man” status has thrust him into the impossible position of an everyday war, the only member of his own private army, defined through his garlicky and ply-wooden lines of defense. We can read this as

⁹⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

the imagination of “force-relations laid bare,” war as a metaphor for social relations. He is working to defend himself as a living body but also as a subject. Herein lies his despair and confusion: Neville is no longer a subject since the institutions and networks that served to constitute him as a subject have disappeared. His despair stems from an instinctual or obsolete compulsion to defend his home as the location of the middle-class family unit, but ironically since his family is dead and gone. So the “perspectival” truth that Neville—along with all his neighbors in suburbia—easily established and defended through participation in suburban domesticity is not any longer defined in and through a network of power relations. What a weight to bear: to single-handedly establish not only the truth that must be defended, but the physical means of their defense. Neville’s question “for what?” belies this difficulty.

The Absent Feminine

Neville is a last man. His embattled masculinity is underscored by the haunting absence of Neville’s wife Virginia and their daughter Kathy. The immediate consequence of this is that the house has been transformed into a domestic fortress, a “gloomy sepulcher,”¹⁰⁰ overtly militarized but also squalid, playing on the stereotype of bachelors not being very good housekeepers or that a house is a “home” when it has the benefit of a “feminine touch.”

The early sections of the novel clearly establish the absent feminine, Virginia and Kathy’s presence as ghostly memories, and the effects their absence has on the house itself. Neville lives a semblance of suburban life in that he cooks for himself and drinks whiskey in the den as he entertains himself (with a set of dark, moody classical music records). The first pages

¹⁰⁰ Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 2007, 4.

depict Neville going about his daily routines to shore up the defensive mechanisms he needs to repel the vampires.

...he forced himself into the kitchen to grind up the five-day accumulation of garbage in the sink. He knew he should burn up the paper plates and utensils too, and dust the furniture and wash out the sinks and the bathtub and toilet, and change the sheets and pillowcase on his bed; but he didn't feel like it.

For he was a man and he was alone and these things had no importance to him.¹⁰¹

One of the chores he can't ignore is cooking, although this practice has become a (military) necessity, a mechanical maintenance problem. As he collects the ingredients he needs for his meal, his "jaded" eyes scan his provisions, and "he took down a can of tomato juice, then left the room that had once belonged to Kathy and now belonged to his stomach."¹⁰²

The domestic interior is reorganized to fit the new requirements of militancy. The bedroom, which would have been the center of private family life, the place of moral sexuality, is rebuilt as a workshop where Neville crafts his wooden stakes that he will drive into the hearts of sleeping neighbors. Before the vampire virus "the room had been warmly decorated, but that was in another time. Now it was a room entirely functional..."¹⁰³ (This is reminiscent of Chris Neal's lament in "Mad House" that the nursery was ultimately re-dubbed "the extra room.") Neville nails up plywood, plunging the interior into darkness. He installs air conditioning units, and posts a giant mural of an idyllic mountain scene on the living room wall.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰² Ibid., 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2.

Neville is “forting up,”¹⁰⁴ interiorizing to the point of absurdity, a move that reflects not only the desire for male freedom in the “man cave,”¹⁰⁵ but also the intensification and investment of privacy that Walter Benjamin and other historians of architecture have noted was a key factor in the creation of modern (bourgeois) domestic space.¹⁰⁶ Staged as an inter-species war, Robert Neville’s fortifications suggest an embattled male psyche in an era of increased female participation in the workforce; laboring under the dual pressures of suburban conformity—being made into a zombie—and supporting the family financially.

When he isn’t “working”—or, fortifying, hunting, and gathering—Robert Neville falls into fits of alcoholic despair over the absence of his family and the apparent futility of survival. He also despairs his new state of enforced celibacy. The female vampires, undead though they are, sense this sexual frustration and have hit on the strategy of lifting their skirts outside the house each night and miming sex acts in hopes that he might be lured to unlock the door. Neville turns up his music and pours glass after glass of whiskey to stave off these temptations.

Interestingly, Will Smith’s turn as Robert Neville in a 2007 cinematic remake of the story significantly downplays the “last man’s” sexual frustration.¹⁰⁷ Robert Neville portrayed as a

¹⁰⁴ Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress America*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ In 2011, CIL Paints launched a campaign to market paint colors to men by “masculinizing” the names. The newly masculinized names are remarkably violent, and in the context of domestic interiors, disturbingly so. “Plum Escape” became “Sucker Punch;” “Great Grey” became “Brute Force;” “Jade Frost” became “Fort Knox;” and of course “Juliet’s Potion” was renamed “Zombie Apocalypse.” Lopez, “Zombie Apocalypse or Sucker Punch, Marketing Paint to Men.” The “man cave” as a strategy for rehabilitating and re-asserting masculinity in suburban space can be read in parallel to George Wagner’s analysis of the bachelor pad that “can be understood to constitute a strategy of recovery of the domestic realm by the heterosexual male.” Wagner, “The Lair of the Bachelor,” 199.

¹⁰⁶ Prost, “Public and Private Spheres in France”; Rybczynski, *Home*, 25; Harris, *Little White Houses*, chap. 4.

¹⁰⁷ Lawrence, *I Am Legend*.

black man is not insecure about his loss of sexuality; it is as if it never existed to begin with. Instead, to cope with his loneliness we see Neville engage in childish flirtation fantasies with dressed up (white) mannequins in a Blockbuster video store—Neville is playing with dolls. What Matheson identifies as the white male’s anger at the absence of the female as sex object is translated by twenty-first-century Hollywood into the black male’s absence of libido entirely. This is particularly striking when we consider that Will Smith is flirting with a white mannequin, the white female as object of male gaze par excellence; we are confronted with an apparent requirement to erase black male sexuality, participating through this erasure in racist myths of black sexual aggression toward white women.

The film illustrates this lack of libido in a number of other ways as well. Ruth, when she appears in the film, is not a potential sexual target for Neville, but instead is a migrant in need of shelter and protection. We never see Neville tempted by a beautiful stranger, as he is in the novel; the film encourages us to witness the nuclear family (a “modern” inter-racial family: black male, Latina female, Caucasian boy) being chastely reinstated before Neville chivalrously gives his life so the woman and child can escape—an ending that contradicts the novel’s entirely. The black Neville’s libido is never the site of conflict; his self-sacrifice is “legendary” as if it expresses ascetic, asexual Christian selflessness.

In contrast, in a scene in the novel during which Neville is conducting empirical research on a female vampire in hopes of developing a cure for the vampirism,¹⁰⁸ Neville senses his sexual anger as it rises within him:

He took the woman from her bed, pretending not to notice the question posed in his mind: Why do you always experiment on women? He didn’t care to admit that the inference had any

¹⁰⁸ Techniques Peter Sloterdijk might call the “cognitive sadism” of research; Sloterdijk and Hoban, *In the World Interior of Capital*, 34.

validity. She just happened to be the first one he'd come across, that was all. What about the man in the living room, though? For God's sake! he flared back. I'm not going to rape the woman! Crossing your fingers, Neville? Knocking on wood?¹⁰⁹

The female vampire he is using for his research wakes up while he is working on her and she attacks him. Neville

...grabbed at her shoulder, then jerked his hand back. It was dribbling blood from raw teeth wounds.

His stomach muscles jerked in. The hand lashed out again, this time smashing her across the cheek and snapping her head to the side.

Ten minutes later he threw her body out the front door and slammed it again in their faces.¹¹⁰

What happens in the intervening ten minutes is left to our imagination. Matheson's version of Neville confronts both the desire and the ability to rape, beat, and kill a female—the most extreme forms of domestic abuse, needless to say. And this is just the point: the domestic interior, overtly militarized and masculinized, transformed into the fortress defending white masculinity, is profoundly unsafe, even as the exterior (or the “environment”) collapses in a fiery apocalypse. There is no safe place when interiors are dystopian and exteriors are apocalyptic.

Will Smith's Robert Neville, on the other hand, coolly examines his female vampire in the clean, rational space of his underground laboratory. He is a soldier-scientist, trained by the military as an epidemiologist before the zombie/vampire virus emerged. He wears a white coat, white latex gloves and laboratory safety glasses with a remote camera attached: this is the sadist's uniform, of cool, reasoned distance, his gaze amplified by a digital scope. He is entirely unmoved by the vampire's potential sexuality; she is, like his other subjects the lab rats, a target

¹⁰⁹ Matheson, *I Am Legend*, 2007, 49–50.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

of what Foucault calls “the medical gaze.”¹¹¹ He carefully scans her translucent white skin with a UV light, and then injects her arm with a chemical he is testing as a cure, all the while narrating the sequence of movements and observations dispassionately for the benefit of his scientific record. Her body reacts poorly to the medical intervention: she tries to lash out in rage, and then dies in a violent fit on the table as Robert Neville looks on sadly. The end result is the same as the fantasy of violence in Matheson’s novel: the woman is penetrated (by a needle), she resists, and she dies.

It is important to underscore here the sexual and racial conflicts at work in a comparison between the novel and the most recent film adaptation. While Matheson’s Neville must confront the sexual violence at work in suburban heteronormative domesticity, Smith’s Neville is black and thus carries the weight of racist sexual threats against white female bodies. Unfortunately, white supremacy is once more animated in the erasure of the black Robert Neville’s libido, as if shielding it from sensitive white viewers. This is an unfortunate irony: the black male hero, in an attempt to “update” the racialized character of the zombie-horde trope, in which a white protagonist defends himself from covertly or overtly racialized living-dead monsters, instead reinforces a fundamentally racist stereotype.¹¹² The suburban fortress is still defending white masculinity.

¹¹¹ Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*.

¹¹² McAlister, “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies.” McAlister explains how the racialization of zombies is inverted in the 2007 film, and how whiteness and blackness interact with the history of zombies as religious figures.

Chapter 2 Conclusion

The inanimate has risen up to assert its animacy, or its re-animacy in the case of the monstrous revenant. A razor blade draws the blood of an abusive husband. Neville, the embattled white male, is put to death by the revalued political force of enlightened vampire/zombies. War is the symbolic structure of these conflicts. The explicit war of maneuver, however, is a literalized (and literary) representation of the less visible war of position, a politics that continues war by other means, a war that contests race, gender, and class. Suburban space is the site of a disturbing and shifting dialectic of safety in which white identity is both enshrined as dominant and victimized. It is my contention that Matheson shrewdly undermines the force of the claim to suburban white male victimhood by taking seriously the threat patriarchal violence poses to women, especially behind closed doors, in the shadow of the suburban interior.

CHAPTER 3: Bunkers: Preparedness and Bunker Mentalities



Figure 4: Family fallout shelter, circa 1955, Smithsonian Museum of American History (archives), photo by author, July 2016.

This chapter is about bunkers. A bunker is a fortified position, usually associated with military defense, and often built into or completely underground. Bunkers are typically constructed or lined with concrete walls or steel enclosures, and accessorized with other modes of protection depending on the threat the bunker opposes.

More specifically, this chapter is about a *bunker mentality*, what I will call the mindset that justifies the construction of the material bunker and also validates its symbolism. Bunkers are built for military defense; the bunker mentality is strongly correlated to militant opposition and war-like rhetoric. Bunkers hide their inhabitants, shielding them from a force that will fly in from the sky or cover the earth, forcing them to huddle, and wait for some imminent strike, to be vigilant for the signs of attack; the bunker mentality is animated by paranoia of global assault

and violence, encouraging not only the establishment of safe havens but the preparation for the imminent arrival of a threat and the need to defend against it. The material bunker functions as a symbol and a material manifestation of bunker mentality. As such, bunkers are used in popular film and literature to describe bunker mentalities, and they link the psychology, logic, and politics of bunker mentalities with visual and architectural media.

This chapter is also about the people who build bunkers, and why they do it. I do not offer a strictly sociological or anthropological answer to this question, but instead I use the texts, theories, and narratives around bunkers to build a theory of bunker mentalities and unravel how they function in contemporary American culture and politics.

In Chapter 1 I argued that the intersection of utopian urban concrete domestic ecologies with the politics of class reveals an apocalyptic or revolutionary violence beneath the structures of modern life. I recapitulated the Foucauldian narrative that politics is war by other means. I noted that constructed space is political space. These three points articulate the groundwork for how architectural space and the rhetoric and design of “safety” operate—safety has the potential to construct militant oppositional environments that maintain categorical boundaries. This provides an initial glimpse into how I analyze underground bunkers. Bunkers are concrete and steel; they are simultaneously utopian (they assert a faith in survival and survivability, a better future) and dystopian (they assert a faith in the impending apocalypse); bunkers describe a boundary that is violently and militantly challenged and defended; and bunkers reinforce political boundaries such as nation, race, class, and family. In Chapter 2 I introduced the idea that post-war American domesticity was a battleground, not only in the sense that men and women contested their roles within that space, but that the space itself participated in the war. Modern

architecture is political, and thus militant; domestic space in America is overtly and covertly attached to the dream of war.

The bunkers I consider in this chapter are both real and imagined. American bunker mentalities I consider here are caught up in American mythologies of guns and the frontier, but also American tendencies to paranoia and radical individualism. I pay attention to what is commonly called “extreme” behavior, and I test the idea that extremism is in fact extreme; perhaps instead it reflects the core of American political thought. Where survivalism and right-wing conspiracies were typically fringe politics, they have entered, in various guises and modes, into the very heart of American politics.¹ One such mainstreaming of extremist politics has emerged in the form of “prepping,” and in the adoption of preparedness as a core tenet of national security strategies in the past several decades.

I will show how preparedness functions in relation to safety by analyzing fictional and speculative texts that illuminate the practice of scenario construction or imaginative enactment of disaster. First, I will provide some historical background to the construction of bunkers and scenarios during the Cold War period of nuclear anxieties in the 1950s and 1960s. This post-war era established not only the basis for modern architectural design, but the foundation for an imaginative (and paranoid) politics of apocalypse that I will argue shapes contemporary preparedness practices, in particular in the United States. Then I will analyze the emergence of a subculture of preparedness—“prepper” culture—that expresses similar but distinct ways of confronting the Anthropocene and globalized economic and political interests. The confrontations that preppers imagine and enact in television shows such as *Doomsday Preppers*,

¹ While this dissertation is not focused on the conspiracy-mongering and undermining of truth that has fueled Donald Trump’s rise to the Presidency, everything here must be read in light of those events.

and related shows like *Doomsday Bunkers*, and *Doomsday Castle*, are, I argue, genealogically related to the myth of the American frontier, the “paranoid style of American politics,” and forms of racial and economic extremism that have arisen in reaction to the neoliberal, corporatized state.

A Note on Zombies

Haunting all three of these analyses—of the Cold War, of contemporary national security preparedness, and of prepper culture—is the figure of the zombie. Weaving through the global and local architectures of preparedness, and involving the zombie as an animated figure of horror in each case, I hope to show how preparedness and safety are shaped by the contest between, for example, living/dead, animate/inanimate, and domestic/foreign. As with previous chapters, we encounter the heuristic of apocalypse in which the future breakdown or dissolution of social, political, and cultural norms becomes the window through which those norms are made more concrete in the present. I focus in greater detail on the connection between bunker mentalities, the storytelling of safety and security, and zombie tropes in Chapter 4.

Waiting for the End of the World: Toward a Theory of Bunkers

First I want to explore the symbolic and philosophical potential of modern bunkers in order to work toward a theory of bunkers and bunker mentalities. Bunkers, being embedded in the ground and forming a shell or a cocoon have, almost needless to say, enormous symbolic potency. What does it mean, for example, that bunker architecture is designed as a response to

the possibility of apocalyptic catastrophe, what we might call the uncertainty of the Anthropocene or the ubiquity of risk society? To answer this question, I turn to a collection of photographs by Richard Ross, images of bunkers and shelters entitled *Waiting for the End of the World*.

An “apocalypse” is literally a revelation; it reveals what was hidden.² Richard Ross’s book of photographs documenting bunkers and shelter spaces from around the world depicts an architectural “apocalypse,” an unveiling of what is hidden beneath the premise of the architecture of safety; the bunker is domestic space that has rooted itself underground, in the darkness, and Ross’s camera throws light on it. What kind of dwelling is at work in an underground bunker? What dwelling is possible there?

² Frye, *The Great Code*. Frye points to the etymological connection between “apocalypse” and “revelation” by noting that “the Greek word for revelation, *apocalypsis*, has the metaphorical sense of uncovering or taking a lid off, and similarly the word for truth, *aletheia*, begins with a negative particle which suggests that truth was originally thought of as also a kind of unveiling, a removal of the curtains of forgetfulness in the mind” (135). For a deeper analysis of the Greek understanding of truth, see for example Heidegger, *Parmenides*.

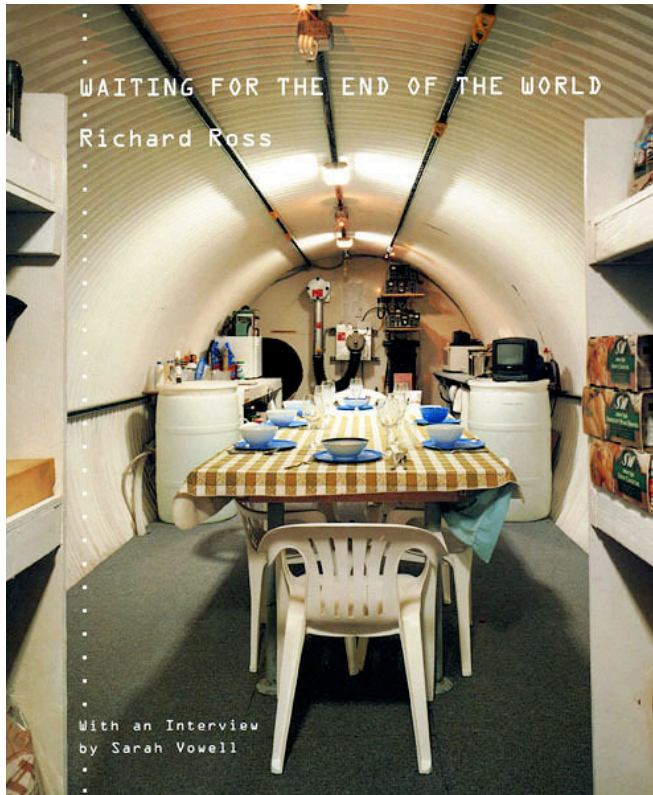


Figure 5: Cover image of *Waiting for the End of the World*.³

The cover shot has the following caption:

This three-family shelter in San Pete County, Utah, located more than twenty feet underground, is fifty feet in length and ten feet in diameter. It includes a separate twenty-eight-foot bathroom and shower area. Photographed 2002.⁴

The image frames the interior of a shelter made from what appears to be a corrugated metal pipe.

At the center of the image there is a dining table set for six, complete with checkered table cloth,⁵ flatware, and a set of matching blue plates and bowls. The camera appears to be situated in the

³ Ross, *Waiting for the End of the World*.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Panofsky, "Style and Medium in the Motion Pictures." Panofsky analyses the visual tropes of early film and takes special note of the "checkered tablecloth" which means, "once and for all, a 'poor but honest milieu'" in which these images seem to take part. See also scenes from "Walt Builds a Fallout Shelter," Figure 9 below. Thank you to E. Ann Kaplan for suggesting this connection.

entryway, which also functions as a kind of pantry: shelves and stacks of foodstuff are apparent just at the edge of the foreground frame. At the back of the shelter there are two drums of liquid (presumably water), a small television with built-in VCR, a miniature microwave, a miniature refrigerator, and shelves with cooking, cleaning, and mechanical supplies. An air filtration mechanism is mounted on the back wall. The floor is carpeted.

This image is typical of the rest of the book in that it depicts an uninhabited, hauntingly empty shelter. We can imagine that we have found this abandoned shelter, that its inhabitants have been killed by the apocalypse for which the shelter was built. (Ross suggests that the emptiness of the bunkers he explores is a source of optimism for him; if shelters are derelict and unused, then the apocalypse is not nigh.)⁶ Although the symbols of dwelling are here—the table cloth, the water, the food, the chairs—this is a space that narrates safety but does not safeguard anything. It is a space of terrifying possibility, or the possibility of terror. (Imagine *needing* to inhabit this space.)

There is a scene in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* that dramatizes the function of an underground bunker: the man and the boy, wandering the burnt and inhospitable landscape, find a hidden bunker with all the provisions of a comfortable home, including shaving cream and razors, soap, whiskey, and canned fruit.⁷ The man indulges in these luxuries for a night, but he knows they are not sustainable or defensible should the man and the boy be discovered in the shelter; these provisions and luxuries are simply material memories of all those around them who are dead and gone. The haunting presence of the dead preppers who have left this empty space for the man and the boy, just like the emptiness of Ross's photographs, speak to the spectral and

⁶ Ross, *Waiting for the End of the World*, 17.

⁷ McCarthy, *The Road*.

uncanny connection that these spaces of desperation have with the everyday domestic spaces aboveground. The dead speaking to the living.

Robert Pogue Harrison reminds us that from ancient times, a dwelling place—that is, a place where dwelling does in fact occur, unlike the space of domestic violence or home arrest—is a place of warmth and provision, not only because of the quantity of calories stored, but because the safe-haven it provides is given in memory of the past, of the dead, of the ancestors. This is still true, captured in family photographs, heirlooms, and recipes, for example. “It is as if we the living can stand (culturally, institutionally, economically, in other words humanly) only because the dead underlie the ground on which we build our homes, worlds, and commonwealths,” he surmises.⁸ And in any case, he adds, the home was in ancient times defined by the sacredness of the hearth and the storeroom, the gods of the fire (*lares*) and the gods of the pantry (*penates*):

[The living] thought of the hearth not as a fireplace but as the glowing coals on their altars; they thought of the house’s shelter not so much as a defense against the elements but as the ancestor’s awesome power to protect the family against misfortune and calamity. A house, in sum, was a place where two realms—one under and the other on the earth—interpenetrated each other.⁹

But the house with no windows—the underground house in Ross’s cover photograph and in the treasure trove that McCarthy’s wanderers unearth, the house with no windows that will come to define modern architecture, through the replacement of picture windows with televisions¹⁰ or

⁸ Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 38–39.

¹⁰ Friedberg, *The Virtual Window*.

conversely with walls of pure glass¹¹—is a tomb, a coffin, the house of the dead.¹² Even if in the West the house is no longer defined in these sacred terms, the underground shelter serves as a reminder, a monument, to the religiosity that has been erased when houses are economized as investments and properties.

Gaston Bachelard notes that the house, in some cases, functions as a bulwark against a world that is “harsh, indigent and cold” and that would threaten us with, for example, the “bestial hostility of the storm and the hurricane.”¹³ As a kind of fortress against the world,

the house’s virtues of protection and resistance are transposed into human virtues. The house acquires the physical and moral energy of a human body. ... Such a house as this invites mankind to heroism of cosmic proportions. It is an instrument with which to confront the cosmos. ... Come what may the house helps us to say: I will be an inhabitant of the world, in spite of the world.¹⁴

Here the house is armor, a shield that sets up a fundamental confrontation between self and other, between self and world. The dialectic of inside and outside, for Bachelard, is not a neutral effect, but tends to not only take over all philosophical thought, but “simple geometrical opposition becomes tinged with aggressivity. Formal opposition is incapable of remaining calm.”¹⁵ The house is a fortress. Similarly, we might inhabit a shell or a stone, or we may be given a sense of security from a door and a wall. Bachelard writes about space as it functions and is created by material but also through imagination and dreaming, and so houses and homes are able to manifest themselves as animal and human bodies, psychologies, and material symbols.

¹¹ Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*.

¹² Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead*, 39.

¹³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46–47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

In this spirit, we could call the underground bunker a womb rather than a tomb; Freud might support this assessment. Connections between domestic and interior space and female bodies is a commonplace; feminist architecture critic Leslie Weisman takes note of this seemingly ubiquitous and cross-cultural trend, but adds that in the West, psychoanalysis and literature have introduced intensely romanticized versions of interior-womb metaphors. Psychoanalytically, the built house was a structure that allowed primitive man to separate himself from the womb, or else the house became a kind of productive substitute for it.¹⁶ Weisman adds that going back to the womb is considered a pejorative, while striking out to conquer territory—that is, fully separating oneself from maternal protection—is a healthy trajectory for male psychosexual development. We can hear this value-laden judgment in Christian Norberg-Schulz’s declaration that:

...the purposes of human life are not found at home; the role of each individual is part of a system of interactions which take place in a common world based on shared values. To participate we have to leave the house and choose a path. When our social task is accomplished, however, we withdraw to our home to recover our personal identity. Personal identity, thus, is the content of private dwelling.¹⁷

Identity is an accomplishment of leaving home, and then seeking repose back at home. Of course, if women are expected to stay home, they do not appear to be part of this story of going and returning. The narrative of going out to fulfill the public “purpose of human life” seems to reinforce male territoriality and the need to separate inside and outside, male and female.¹⁸

¹⁶ Weisman, *Discrimination by Design*, 17.

¹⁷ Norberg-Schulz, *The Concept of Dwelling*, 89.

¹⁸ Weisman, *Discrimination by Design*, 23–29.

Freud's suggestion, in both *Civilization and its Discontents* and *The Uncanny* (and elsewhere), that the maternal womb is a destination for which men long and which also produces fear, bears some attention, since it raises issues that will be usefully criticized from the perspective of feminist and disability studies. The uncanny is intimately associated with the concept of home or familiarity. Freud notes that what is uncanny may arise from childhood psychosexual experiences, in particular from the reminder of the possibility of castration, but also from an unexpected repetition of the same, which reminds us of an unconscious compulsion to repeat.¹⁹ What is familiar becomes unfamiliar: the familiar home is not safe and never was; the embrace of the maternal is smothering; the womb becomes a tomb. Ross sees his own photographic subjects in the light of the association between death and birth (or death and sex).

In an interview, Ross admits that

Many of the shelters are almost womblike, structurally organic spaces with an entrance resembling a reversed birth canal: a mysterious, inviting, convoluted tunnel with a light at the end of it, promising security, protection, nutrition, and life-granting safety inside. Think of reemerging from this sanctuary and being reborn into a world that is fearful and drastically changed from what we had known before and from what we imagined could happen.²⁰

The shelter is a destination, but is uncanny if it configured as a limit to life—a limit that once functioned as an origin (womb) and will again function as a terminus (tomb). Even Ross shies away from this thought. He ends his consideration of the shelter-womb by saying “sex and death all tied up together—it’s getting too metaphorical for me.”²¹ One gets the feeling that “metaphorical” carries the weight of the uncanny in that moment.

¹⁹ Freud, *The Uncanny*, 139, 145.

²⁰ Ross, *Waiting for the End of the World*, 14.

²¹ *Ibid.*

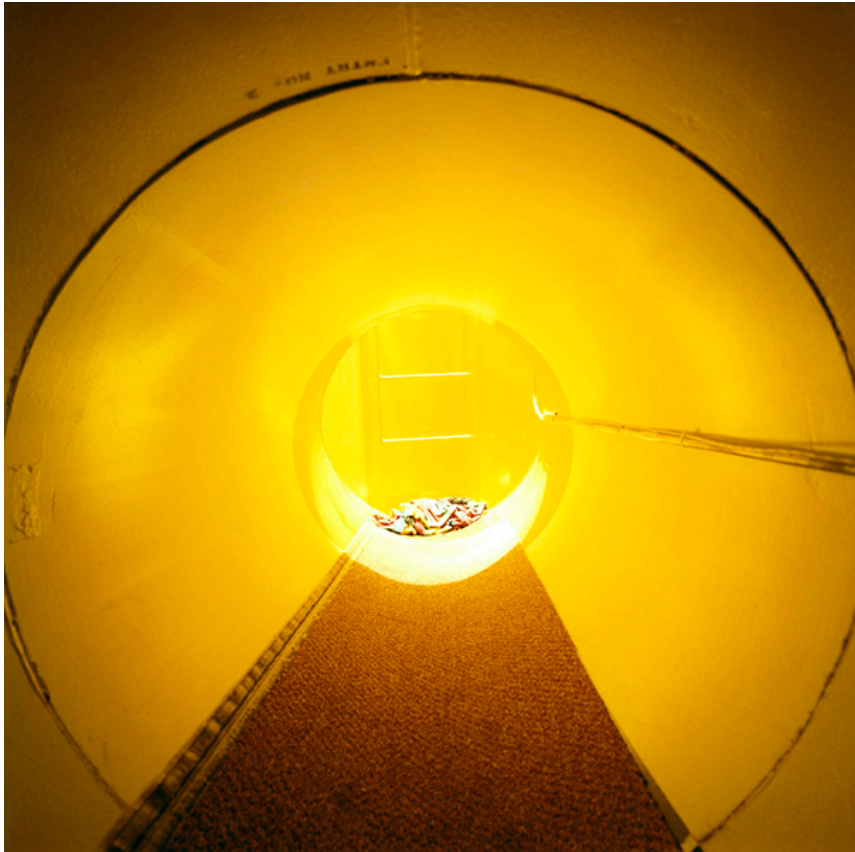


Figure 6: Salt Lake City, Utah, 2003. The transition tunnel from a vertical entrance to the blast-proof room (behind the camera) “was painted yellow to make a friendlier passage for the two youngest children.”²²

Once we go out into the world, then, we control space using technology, but the memory of the womb is never totally erased. Freud’s diagnosis of culture and civilization as prosthetic ultimately yields to the longing for what is lost or absent, the material expression of a kind of nostalgia and desire. Culture, in Freud’s analysis, is whatever humans do to control and defend against nature, to make life livable. Civilization is technological; “the first acts of civilization were the use of tools, the gaining of control over fire and the construction of dwellings.”²³ Each

²² Ibid., 20, 22.

²³ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*.

tool is a prosthetic in service of “perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or... removing the limits to their functioning.”²⁴ Engines extend the power of human muscles, cameras extend vision, telephony extends hearing, and so on. “Writing was in its origin the voice of an absent person; and the dwelling-house was a substitute for the mother’s womb, the first lodging, for which in all likelihood man still longs, and in which he was safe and felt at ease.”²⁵ These last two—writing and dwelling—are not prosthetic but substitutive. Instead of extending a power or removing some limit, written text functions as a companion or memory, and the dwelling-house symbolically and actually recreates the lost safety of the womb.

Another aspect of the uncanny that illuminates Richard Ross’s photographs is Freud’s suggestion that what should remain hidden, when it is revealed, can give rise to the feeling of uncanniness. A photograph participates in this process by its very nature, which is to visualize and make apparent. In an interview on his project, Ross notes that some of the architectures of nuclear shelter that he encountered were well hidden underground, such that photographing them emphasized not only their existence but their concealment as well. “A casual passer-by,” Ross says, “would never see these [air vents for a group shelter in Montana] and could not suspect what they signal below... For reasons unknown I have taken on the odd responsibility of making what is hidden, visible—by changing the status of these structures from covert to overt”.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid., 41.

²⁵ Ibid., 42.

²⁶ Ross, *Waiting for the End of the World*, 11.



Figure 7: Entrance and air vent for a group shelter in Montana.²⁷

What Ross considers an “odd responsibility” to reveal what is hidden is also my own task. In analyzing the stories and architectures of safety, I intend to reveal safety not as a grand unified theory of culture, but as an idea whose roots in Western culture run deep, and whose influence is surging through contemporary American politics and daily life.

I have so far avoided the obvious: these bunkers were designed as an antidote to the injuries of war. Nuclear fallout was a central character in American political discourse in the 1950s and ‘60s; every capable American understood at least the rudiments of radiation and its effects on the human body. Guarding against this invisible invader was a matter of national security. Preserving the family was a top priority for U.S. Civil Defense strategists, not only because national shelters would be prohibitively expensive to build and impossible to use given the size and scale of U.S. territory, but also because militarizing the family produced a stronger

²⁷ Ross, *Waiting for the End of the World*.

sense of patriotic cohesion.²⁸ As important as the debate over fallout shelters was during the height of Cold War tensions, a debate that forced Americans to grapple with values like community, family, and nation, the fallout shelter itself remained largely on the margins. The shelter was primarily the star of theatrical and imaginative productions, of pamphlets, TV announcements, political speeches, and science fiction. The imagination of safety was more potent, in the end, than the materiality of safety; architecture and media were and are facets of a single phenomenon of constructing safety and risk. Even so, it is impossible to discuss the materiality of domestic safety, the fortification or purification of dwelling space, without the context of the plausibility and threat of nuclear war. The Cold War indelibly shaped the way that safe space is conceived and constructed in the United States, even as the binary threat of Soviet-American nuclear exchange seems to have refracted in the Anthropocene to encompass multifarious threats and risks such as terrorism, market fluctuation, toxicity, and global warming.

Living in a Fortress

Bunker mentalities are shaped by the defense of boundaries, of interiors and exteriors, and of centers and peripheries. The fortress looks out to an exterior, a horizon that may contain monsters, natural disasters, or enemies. The interior of fortresses is designed as a safe space;

²⁸ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, chap. 3, "The Nuclear Family: Militarizing Domesticity, Domesticating War". McEnaney details the ways that families were encouraged to take on military-style roles—the father as commander, the oldest children on patrol searching for supplies, the mother as nurse and inventory specialist (what McEnaney calls an “atomic housewife”, p. 108-113), and so on—and drill procedures in preparation for attack. These drills not only made the family more efficient at tasks designed to minimize harm from fallout, but conceptually and affectively linked the family to the national project of civil defense.

what is outside is threatening. Architects Charles Moore, Gerald Allen, and Donlyn Lyndon express this tension between in and out, and its modern imbalance, when they write:

...the legitimate purpose of architecture, to lay special claim to part of the world ('insides') and to set them off from the rest ('outsides'), has turned about on us. We have overbuilt, and often built so badly that instead of having what, for instance, the Middle Ages had (where most of what was built was secure and everything outside the walls was scary), we have now made a world in which the most alien things are what we have built for ourselves, while nature by contrast looks good. What we have built does scare us.²⁹

In other words, the way we construct and the practice of architecture has had an effect on how we experience the space of everyday life; where architecture was supposed to delineate safe spaces, it has itself become what is frightening. A fortress is not comforting, it is monstrous. This idea aligns with the history of the uncanny in American culture, centered as it is on the rural or suburban house, and in the histories of violence at work in those private spaces.³⁰ Instead of the violence of politics and social relations, however, these architects of domestic space locate the uncanny in the derailed process of design itself. What has been designed to house the family and the self has been “built badly” in the sense that it is not any longer sufficiently integrated into the design of a community and a sense of a collective. In the modern house, which is designed to maximize personal privacy and personal property, “each of us becomes nearly solipsistic—acting as though the world were entirely of his own making, inhabited only by those he knows, and animated by processes that each can command. This is a delusion.”³¹ What we can recognize in the literature and film of bunkers and fortified domestic spaces, and in the modernist architecture

²⁹ Moore, Allen, and Lyndon, *The Place of Houses*, 49.

³⁰ Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*.

³¹ Moore, Allen, and Lyndon, *The Place of Houses*, 269.

that understands the house as a machine for living, disconnected both from history and the uncertainties of the future, is precisely this tendency to solipsism.

Raymond Williams calls this solipsistic tendency “mobile privatization”³²—the increasing availability for mobility within networks, and the consequent sense that we, privately and alone, are in control. Williams’ argument uses spatial perspective to illustrate its force, much like de Certeau in “Practicing Space” and “Walking in the City.” He asks us to look down on modern highway traffic, as if from a satellite: from this aerial perspective, the traffic appears “controlled” or determined in systematic ways. But from within the “shell” of the car, we feel as though we have control over our destiny, that we are not part of a well-regulated whole, but are individuals with individuated wills and destinations of our own choosing. Other cars are not other people but other shells, each privately controlled to its own ends.

The vastness and inscrutability of truly global thought means that consumer decisions are made not on the basis of the good of the whole, but of the good of the individual mobile privatized “shell.” Politically, this encourages solipsism that winds up supporting global capitalism, producing a kind of “deep assent.”³³ “From the shell, whether house or car or employment, the only relevant calculations are the terms of continuing or improving its own conditions.”³⁴ The privatized domestic interior, as its shell hardens and the delusion of our solipsism ossifies under the category of safety, obscures the necessity of negotiating collective being. Those who can afford it construct barriers, fortresses, or bunkers, which seem to be

³² Williams, *Television*; Williams, “Mobile Privatization.”

³³ Williams, “Mobile Privatization,” 129.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

immobile but are mobilized—animated, one could say—by digital media networks.³⁵ The extent to which global capitalism ignores or exacerbates global warming, for example, is related to the prevalence and impact of a style of thought that focuses exclusively inward, or what I am calling the bunker mentality.³⁶

Cold War Bunker Mentalities

The advent of the nuclear age also inaugurated the era of “the scenario,” a way of thinking about possible future events in an analytical and imaginative process of preparing for them. The archetypal possible future event at the time was, of course, a thermonuclear war, which is vividly described by Herman Kahn,³⁷ to whom the new sense of the word “scenario” is ascribed.³⁸ Since thermonuclear war was not a war that could be actually fought—the illogic of nuclear exchange is memorably expressed in Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove*³⁹ and a later Cold War film *War Games*⁴⁰—it took the form of the Cold War in which the main adversaries, the United States and the Soviet Union, engaged in proxy, covert, and ideological battle. My purpose here is to illustrate the function of preparedness to the national consciousness during the

³⁵ Chen, *Animacies*. As I discussed briefly in Chapter 2 in relation to trope of embattled masculinity, Chen’s text explores the politics and rhetoric of animacy and its relationship to inequality, race, and sexuality, among other topics.

³⁶ The impact of the bunker mentality is heightened when it is possessed by the wealthy and privileged.

³⁷ Kahn, *On Thermonuclear War*.

³⁸ Kahn, *Thinking about the Unthinkable*.; “Scenario, N.”

³⁹ Kubrick, *Dr. Strangelove, Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying And Love the Bomb*.

⁴⁰ Badham, *WarGames*.

1950s and 1960s, in particular as it played out in the rhetorical and ideological construction of domestic space as a bunker site.

In a speech to Congress on May 25, 1961, President Kennedy noted that the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence rested on a calculated balance of retaliatory power, but this in turn relied on

...rational calculations by rational men. And the history of this planet, and particularly the history of the 20th century, is sufficient to remind us of the possibilities of an irrational attack, a miscalculation, an accidental war... which cannot be either foreseen or deterred. It is on this basis that civil defense can be readily justifiable—as insurance for the civilian population in case of an enemy miscalculation. It is insurance we trust will never be needed—but insurance which we could never forgive ourselves for foregoing in the event of catastrophe.⁴¹

The potential for war is not explained here in terms of ideology or moral necessity, but rather in terms of rationality and irrationality, calculation and miscalculation, foreseeable and unforeseeable, and ultimately in terms of *insurance*. War as a condition of risk (against which the U.S. needed to insure itself) is a specific example of the logic of what Ulrich Beck calls the modern “risk society.”⁴²

In *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Beck argues that what has been understood as “modernity”—that is, bourgeois industrial society prior to the Second World War—is developing beyond itself, as it were, into a new form of modernity dominated by risk. The move away from industrial social and economic models involves uncertainty. “The system of coordinates in which life and thinking are fastened in industrial modernity—the axes of gender, family and occupation, the belief in science and progress—begins to shake, and a new twilight of

⁴¹ Kennedy, “Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs.”

⁴² Beck, *Risk Society*; Beck, *World at risk*.

opportunities and hazards comes into existence—the contours of the risk society.”⁴³ What had previously been given as tradition and social structure is made fluid; the narrative of technological progress is upset by the Anthropocene since “progress” seems to be proliferating violence; the logic of national containment—that is, bounded space that can be discretely and locally controlled—is undermined by global toxic, epidemic, and migratory flows that transcend and transgress boundaries; and so on. “Risk” does not refer to “danger,” but rather new modes of calculation and the range of globally interdependent possible futures that are increasingly difficult to define since the end of the Second World War.

Anthony Giddens, whose work on risk intersects in many ways with Beck’s, argues that a risk society is “a society where we increasingly live on a high technological frontier which absolutely no one completely understands and which generates a diversity of possible futures.”⁴⁴ This condition has developed in an era, according to Giddens, in which both “nature” and “tradition” have ended. We are living “after nature” in the sense that “there are now few if any aspects of the physical world untouched by human intervention”—which has been dubbed the Anthropocene—and that we are not so much worried about “what nature could do to us” but rather “what we have done to nature.”⁴⁵ Similarly, risk society operates “post-tradition” by allowing individuals to live life apart from the fate of rigid gendered, sexed, classed, or racialized strictures. Importantly, for Giddens as it is for Beck, we should not understand “risk society” to mean that life is inherently *riskier*—or, more *dangerous*—than in other moments in human

⁴³ Beck, *Risk Society*, 15.

⁴⁴ Giddens, “Risk and Responsibility,” 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

history. It is not danger *per se* that characterizes risk society—“rather, it is a society increasingly preoccupied with the future (and also with safety), which generates the notion of risk.”⁴⁶

What ultimately characterizes this new form of modernity, if we are to follow Beck and Giddens, is its orientation to a set of probabilities and uncertainties, rather than an inherence to a heroic, teleological narrative of progress. Ironically, what the grand progress narrative generated—advanced weaponry, advanced communications, new pharmaceutical, chemical, and genetic technologies, massive industrial waste—is precisely what forms the basis for risk. Risk society is a post-modern framework since it destabilizes tradition, undermines grand narratives, and produces a state of being that not only promises yet more catastrophe, but is infused with uncertainty and competing probabilities. Kennedy’s analysis of civil defense as an insurance policy against “enemy miscalculation” represents the logic of risk as a justification for a modern form of national security, one based on preparation and rehearsal, as well as the creation of fallout shelters. Bunkers, then, are the spaces of that preparation and rehearsal, the political space where war and peace, rehearsal and performance overlap.

In the same address to Congress, Kennedy underscores the need to initiate “a nation-wide long-range program of identifying present fallout shelter capacity and providing shelter in new and existing structures.”⁴⁷ The concern for fallout shelters had been ramping up in the years before Kennedy’s speech. For example, according to the 1959 Annual Report of the New York State Civil Defense Commission, shelter “offers the most realistic answer to the hazards of radioactive fallout,” and individual citizens should be educated on the importance of building

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Kennedy, “Special Message to the Congress on Urgent National Needs.”

their own shelters in basements or outbuildings.⁴⁸ To build a shelter in the basement of your home was to participate in a form of realism that epitomized values such as protecting the nuclear family, maintaining a simulation of domestic space, and supporting a nationalistic program of war against Communism. Media of all kinds were created and distributed to persuade the American public that it was in their interest and their responsibility to prepare for catastrophic nuclear attack by building a miniature fortified domestic bunker. Transforming emergency measures into tasks for everyday life, the need for ongoing civil defense procedures and strategies like the fallout shelter “clearly reflects the new vital relationship of non-military preparedness to military preparedness in the overall defense of our Nation.”⁴⁹ Here we witness the initial imbrication of military and civilian preparedness in both government security rhetoric as well as in the public consciousness.

⁴⁸ “Annual Report 1959,” iv.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, i.



Figure 8: “Sitting it out in a Family Fallout Shelter”⁵⁰—The trappings of traditional middle-class, white, branded domesticity are apparent on the shelf behind the nuclear family: Nescafe instant coffee, Quaker oatmeal, Chef Boyardee canned spaghetti, Eveready batteries, and so on.

In one television spot produced in 1960 by the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization (OCDM) in collaboration with the National Concrete Masonry Association (who were apparently positioning themselves to capitalize on a new market for cinderblock shelters), “Walt Builds a Family Fallout Shelter,” the viewers are treated to a happy gentleman building a basement shelter, assuring us that “It’s not so hard, anyone who’s not all thumbs can do it!” After Walt’s seemingly uncomplicated construction project is complete, OCDM Director Leo A. Hoegh delivers a closing remark in which he urges the viewer to build a shelter in their home.

⁵⁰ Ibid., v.

“By doing so, you not only protect your family, but you also contribute to the nation’s security,” he argues, and concludes that “No home in America is modern without a family fallout shelter. This *is* the Nuclear Age.”⁵¹ As historian Kenneth Rose puts it, “the American home had been put on the front lines of the Cold War.”⁵² American domesticity was thus the locus of rational action in support of an emergent modernity dominated by a calculus of risk, threat, and the maintenance of white, middle-class traditions. The underground shelter became a metonym for this new shape of modernity.



Figure 9: Walt (center) leads a tour of his recently constructed family fallout shelter, complete with checkered table cloth.⁵³

⁵¹ *Walt Builds a Family Fallout Shelter*.

⁵² Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 4.

⁵³ *Walt Builds a Family Fallout Shelter*.

The basis for this sort of propaganda was to inculcate a doctrine of self-help—a national preparedness program that involved massive public shelters and the infrastructure to support them was prohibitively expensive, and as such there was little political support for such a government-funded program. Thus, civil defense planners in the 1950s advertised the notion that civil defense was a matter of personal and family responsibility;⁵⁴ “Civil defense, like charity, is something that begins at home.”⁵⁵

The ways in which personal and family preparedness, materialized by the fortification of the suburban, white, single-family house, were imagined and visualized can help us understand how bunker building was idealized and how it contributed to the construction of white, heteronormative national identity. We have seen how Walt would fortify his home, and we can also see how Walt’s design mirrors the designs for more contemporary shelters, with its checkered table cloth and the trappings of middle-class life.⁵⁶ These are images of safety, an imagination of safe space in the face of nuclear apocalypse.

To bolster the image of safety, the white, middle-class settings and characters are invariably calm, placid, and emotionless. In a brochure published by the Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) in April 1958, as part of its larger efforts to educate the American public on the dangers of fallout and the necessity to prepare sheltered space, we encounter a serene image of domestic security. After learning that “radioactivity is nothing new” and that “the whole world is radioactive”—which is to say, that we need not think of radiation as monstrous or

⁵⁴ McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 23; Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 24.

⁵⁵ Millard Caldwell, 1952, quoted in McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 23.

⁵⁶ See Figure 9.

alien—we are told that though “you can seldom feel it” and “often you can’t even see it”, if you are exposed for long enough that “it could kill you!”⁵⁷ The brochure represents nuclear attack as eminently survivable, if you “play it safe” and are adequately prepared. The nuclear family—white, heterosexual, statistically “normal” with two parents and two children—can be seen calmly inhabiting the underground shelter that the brochure recommends.



Figure 10: Family in fallout shelter, illustration, Warshaw 1958a, Smithsonian Archives Center.

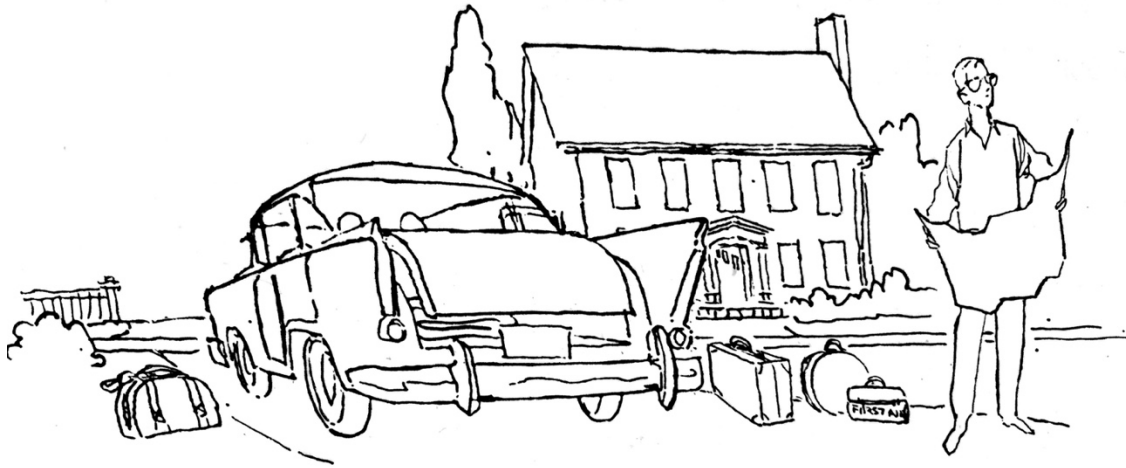
⁵⁷ Warshaw, “Fallout.”

In a similar brochure, this one entitled “Guide for Civil Defense Action in the Washington Warning Area”, Washington residents are advised to get in their cars and drive as far from the city as possible in the event of a nuclear attack.⁵⁸ The cartoon shows a white male with a map expanded before him, suitcases ready to be loaded into his automobile. The unadorned Georgian house behind him subtly evokes the early colonialist history of the United States in which Georgian architecture stood for a particularly “American” national identity.⁵⁹ This historical icon of American domesticity is juxtaposed against a 1950s family sedan and its futuristic design. Presumably in the wake of a nuclear blast, the white male calmly consulting the map looks up to determine the direction he should drive to escape the ill effects of a nuclear attack.⁶⁰ The bomb has dropped, but American traditions and technological futures are intact and can be effectively defended. Everything is still “normal.”

⁵⁸ Warshaw, “Guide for Civil Defense Action in the Washington Warning Area.”

⁵⁹ Rhoads, “The Long and Unsuccessful Effort to Kill Off the Colonial Revival,” 14–16.

⁶⁰ Ordinary citizens were advised to drive away to safety, but essential government officials would be sheltered in bunkers inside and outside the city. The basement of the White House (the Presidential Emergency Operations Center) is designed to withstand a nuclear attack. See Safire, “Essay; Inside The Bunker.” In 1962 construction was completed on a secret bunker embedded below a high-end West Virginia resort hotel, the Greenbrier. It would function as an emergency bunker for Congress in the event of a nuclear attack. The Greenbrier bunker was never used, and in 1992 the Washington Post revealed its existence to the public in an article, at which point it was decommissioned and has been transformed into a museum. “About the Greenbrier > History.”



11

Figure 11: From “Guide for Civil Defense Action in the Washington Warning Area”, illustration, Warshaw 1958b, Smithsonian Archives Center.

The imagery of bunkers protecting calm, white, and apparently hetero-normal families was remarkably consistent throughout the Cold War. This imagery reproduced gendered and classed domestic scenes such as women cleaning or taking care of children, while men socialize, build and plan. I analyzed an archive of architectural plans and guides, donated to the Smithsonian American History Museum archives as background documentation on a fallout shelter used in an exhibit on “science in American life.”⁶¹ The collection of architectural, engineering, and preparedness guides contained a representative cross-section of materials from the 1960s-1980s. In a civil defense “adult education manual” entitled *Personal and Family Survival* from June 1966, for instance, we are told about the various ways of bolstering fallout protection in basements by installing an additional layer of concrete blocks between the floors.⁶²

⁶¹ “Science in American Life”; Gambino, “How a Fallout Shelter Ended up at the American History Museum.”

⁶² Office of Civil Defense, “Personal and Family Survival.”

White men are seen building, lifting, and constructing; white women are seen doing laundry or otherwise sitting passively.⁶³ The repetition of laundry as a way of illustrating the safety of these underground spaces is remarkable since the images reproduce typically gendered domestic labor as an emblem of “utility,” but more symbolically, the process of fortifying the basement to keep radiation *out* mirrors the process of concretizing women’s placement *inside*.

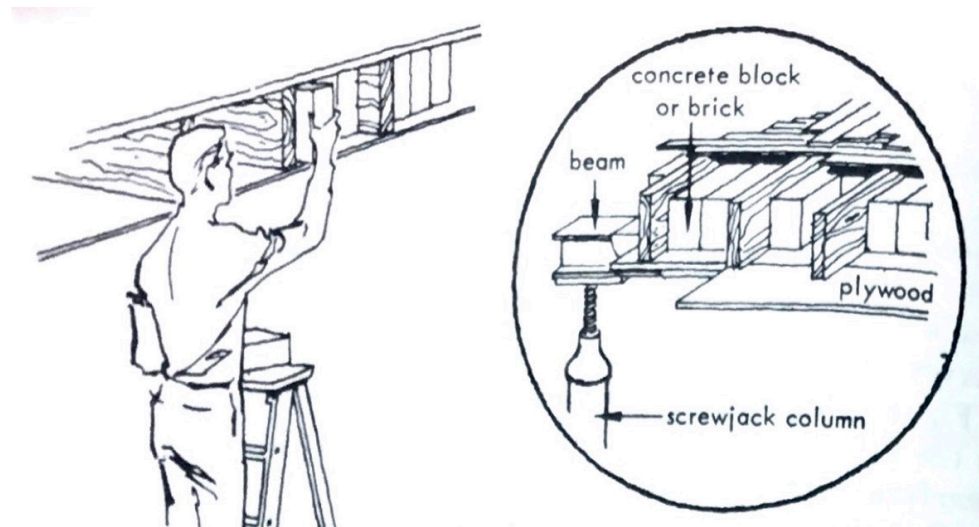


Figure 12: A man shields his basement from fallout radiation, 1966.⁶⁴

⁶³ See for example Lichtman, “Do-It-Yourself Security.” Lichtman helps make an explicit connection between the masculinization of do-it-yourself construction projects and the feminization of cleaning and arranging in Cold War safety literature. These gendered divisions of home labor were already antiquated by the end of the 1950s—women’s participation in the national workforce had reached levels only seen in the war-time peak. But safety “required” these divisions to be reinforced in order to construct and maintain domestic fortifications.

⁶⁴ Office of Civil Defense, “Personal and Family Survival,” 56.

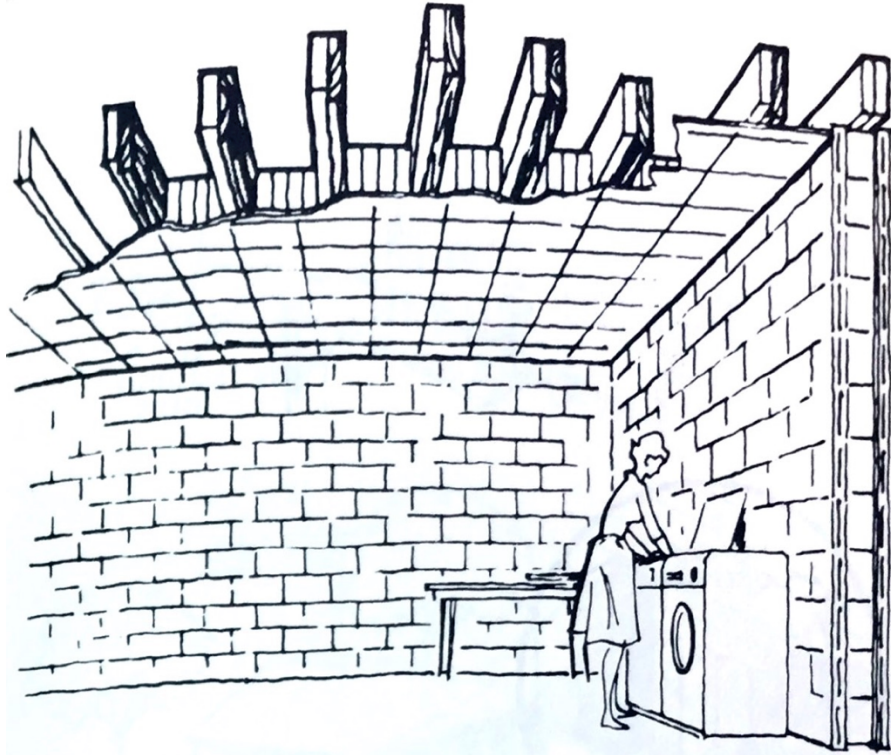


Figure 13: A woman does laundry beneath the reinforced ceiling, 1966.⁶⁵

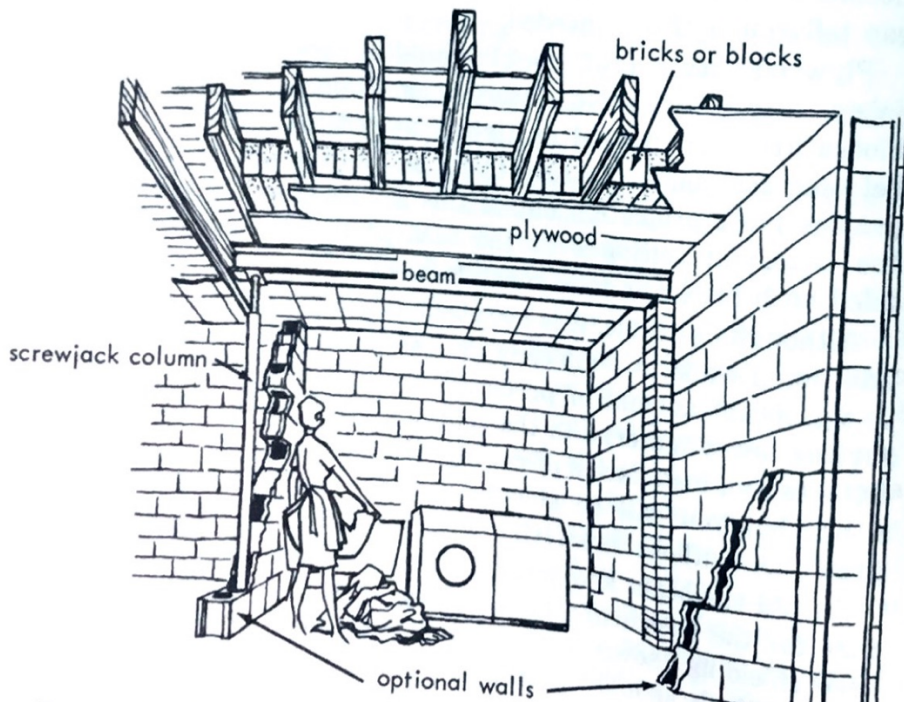


Figure 14: Another woman does laundry in a safe, fortified basement, 1966.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 56.

Imbricating the safety of fortified space into the rhythms of daily life is fully on display in a 1969 report published by the National Association of Home Builders in conjunction with the Office of Civil Defense entitled *Shelters in New Homes*.⁶⁷ The purpose of the document was to provide schematic plans for incorporating bunkers into the design of new construction (middle-class, suburban, detached) homes. The justification of this kind of design was to not only provide extra shelter space for families—allaying the need to invest in national or community shelter space—but to use the extra safety as a marketing tool. As the first chapter of the document argues, “bonus shelters can sell your homes.” As one “marketing expert” is quoted as saying, “anything that enhances the livability and security of the new home adds to its marketability. The builder who will make the effort to use this concept effectively will find that it helps sell homes.”⁶⁸ The document illustrates an array of possible multi-use spaces, as design ideas for ways to incorporate safety into the pleasures of modern, middle-class life. A sauna, a wine cellar, a game room, and a utility room, among other domestic perks, are presented as marketable safe spaces.

⁶⁷ “Shelters in New Homes.”

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5A.

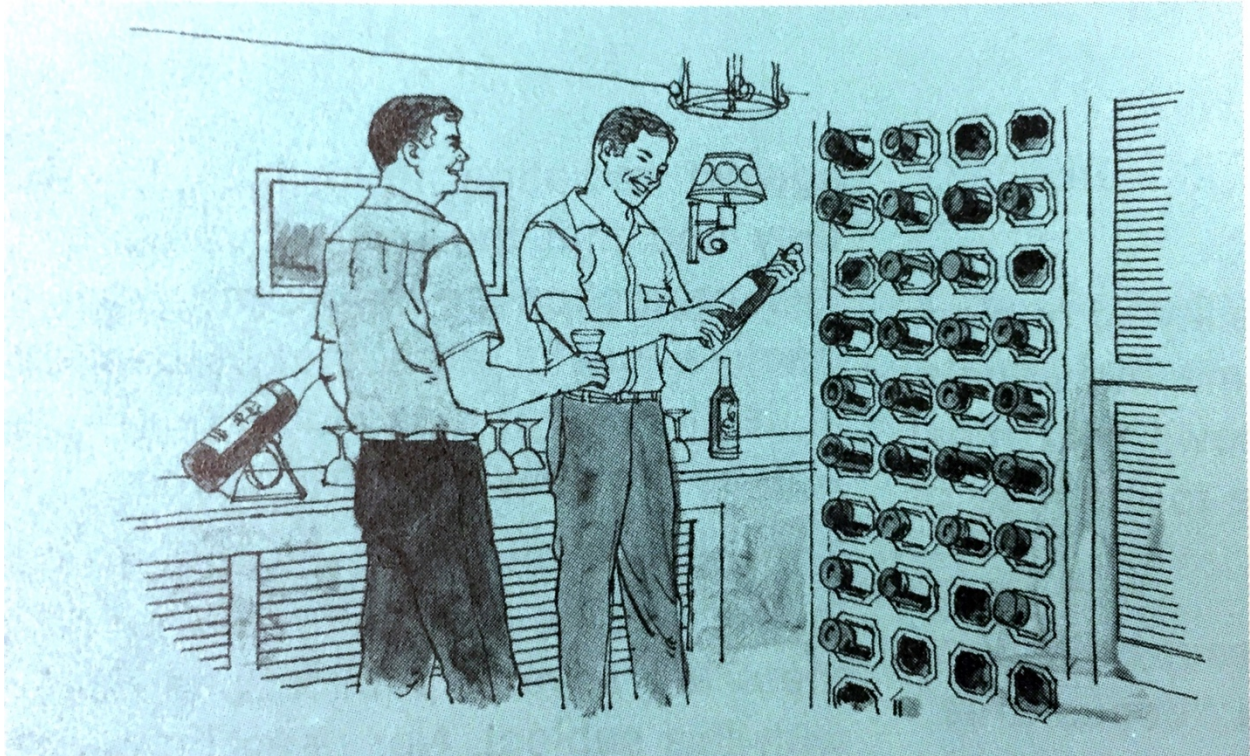


Figure 15: Two men enjoy wine and the fortified wine cellar, 1969.⁶⁹

The bunker-cum-wine cellar is “a place where wine—the only beverage that improves with age in the bottle—may be stored safely and conveniently. But it’s more. It could be the start of a hobby where you collect and compare, and perhaps, do a little tacit boasting—a marvelous conversation piece.”⁷⁰ Two white males happily sample and admire the impressive collection of wine, and this “safe” space—for wine as well as for gentle competition—is explicitly a space for conversation and communion. The appreciation of wine also adds to the sense that the bunker is part of a sophisticated life, a way for home owners to participate in luxury and high class pleasures. The safety of the bunker is shared by the safety afforded to the wine, an emblem of class.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 6A.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

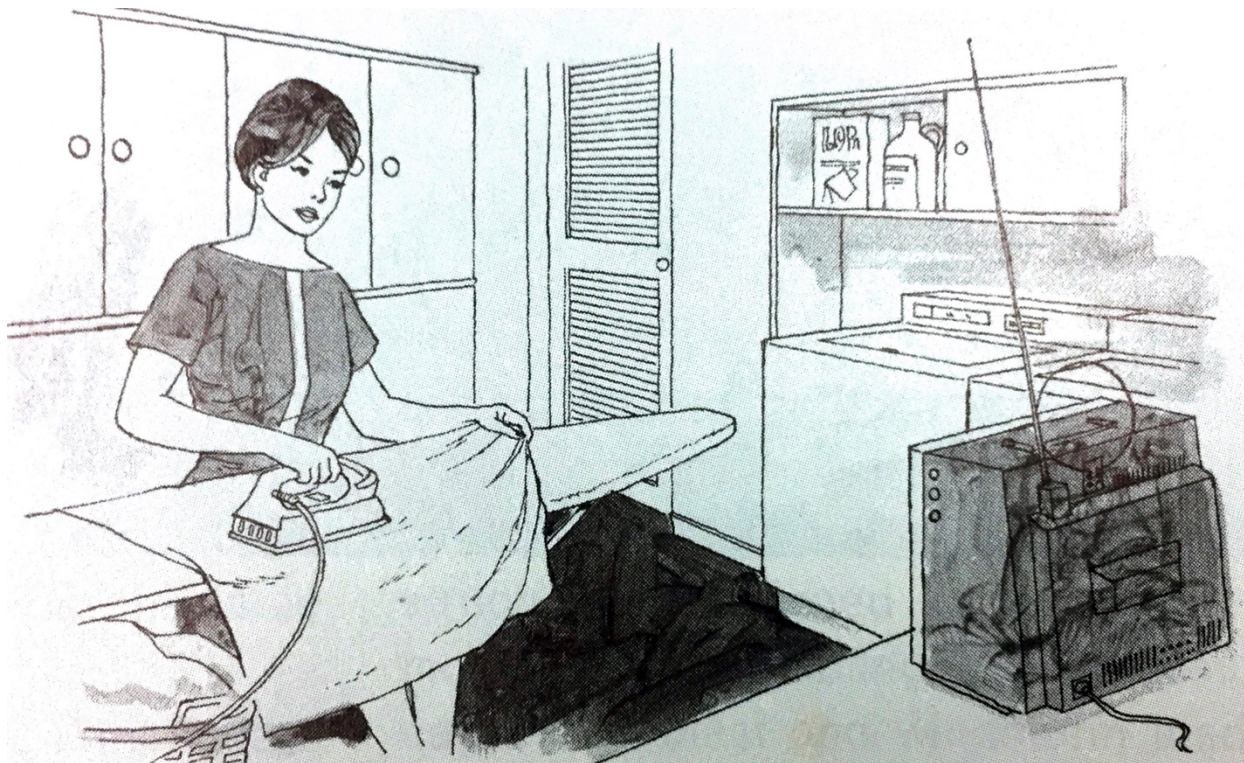


Figure 16: A lone woman irons laundry in a fortified utility room while watching TV, 1969.⁷¹

The utility room depicts a solitary woman ironing clothes next to a caption that reads:

A UTILITY ROOM or center is a place where Mrs. Housewife does so many important jobs and where she stores soaps, cleansers, polishes, detergents, brooms, etc. It can be a happy space, too, where she can iron and watch T.V.⁷²

Her face is unsmiling—happiness here is in the satisfaction of domestic work and the escapism offered by day-time television. The door is closed and Mrs. Housewife is conspicuously alone, reinforcing the notion that domesticity is labor for women and leisure for men. As the house becomes a fortress, entrenched gendered versions of happiness and domestic satisfaction can be maintained and even enhanced.

⁷¹ Ibid., 7A.

⁷² Ibid.

Imagining shelter space had not undergone radical changes by the 1980s. In a series of design pamphlets showing the potential for not only constructing but utilizing bunker space in the realm of everyday life, we see notably similar images of white men and women, in a similar suburban milieu. A series of FEMA documents from 1980, serving a similar purpose to *Shelters in New Homes*, shows women doing laundry in fortified basements,⁷³ and a fortified snack bar.⁷⁴



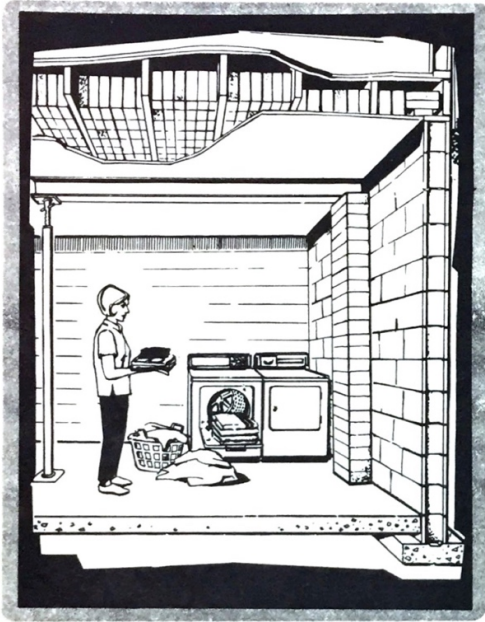
Protection is provided in a basement corner by bricks or concrete blocks between the overhead joists. Additional 2" x 12" joists support the extra weight.

Figure 17: Woman ironing laundry in fortified basement, 1980.⁷⁵

⁷³ “Home Fallout Shelter: Modified Ceiling Shelter-Basement Location Plan a”; “Home Fallout Shelter: Modified Ceiling Shelter-Basement Location Plan B.”

⁷⁴ “Home Fallout Shelter: Snack Bar-Basement Location Plan D.”

⁷⁵ “Home Fallout Shelter: Modified Ceiling Shelter-Basement Location Plan B”, cover.



Protection is provided in a basement corner by bricks or concrete blocks between the overhead joists. A beam and jack column support the extra weight.

Figure 18: Woman folding laundry in fortified basement, 1980.⁷⁶



A snack bar built of brick or concrete block can be converted into shelter. The hinged canopy can be tilted-down for filling with brick or concrete block.

Figure 19: A social gathering in a fortified basement “snack bar”, 1980.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “Home Fallout Shelter: Modified Ceiling Shelter-Basement Location Plan a”, cover.

⁷⁷ “Home Fallout Shelter: Snack Bar-Basement Location Plan D”, cover.

In these images of fortified domesticity, we see the now-familiar image of white females performing domestic duties within the protected shells constructed by men. The snack bar scene, while portraying a professional class as signaled by the ties and jackets of the men, subtly emphasizes the differences between the professional and social possibilities of men and the sidelining of the woman, who looks down and is disengaged from conversation. The men are all leaning toward each other on the bar, either speaking or listening.

The 1983 versions, updates to the collection of FEMA architectural guidelines for home fallout construction, have more detailed and elegant imagery of white families lounging around a fortified pool bungalow,⁷⁸ or eating lunch outdoors above an underground bunker.⁷⁹

ABOVEGROUND HOME FALLOUT SHELTER

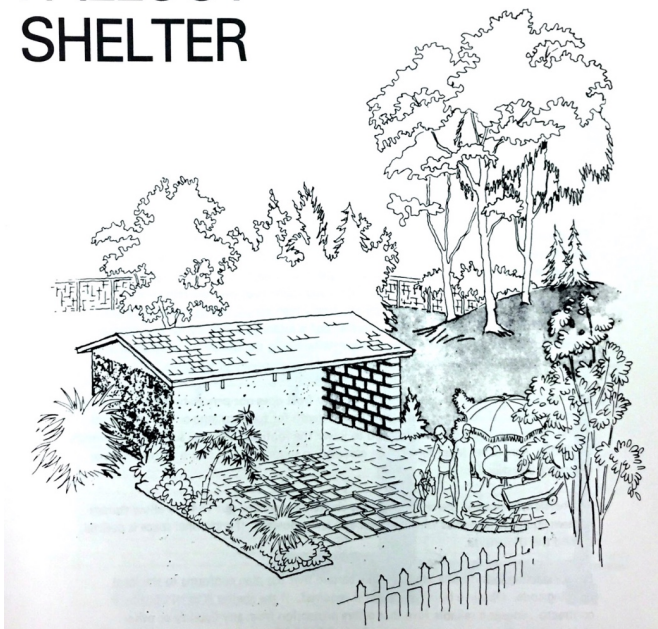


Figure 20: A fortified leisure space, 1983.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ “Aboveground Home Fallout Shelter.”

⁷⁹ “Belowground Home Fallout Shelter.”

⁸⁰ “Aboveground Home Fallout Shelter”, cover.

BELOWGROUND HOME FALLOUT SHELTER

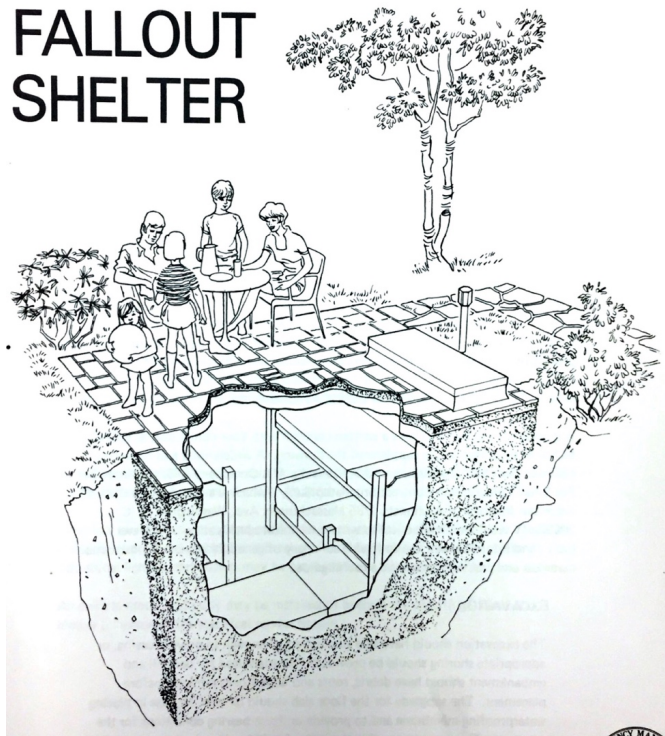


Figure 21: A below-ground shelter, hidden below the white family at rest, 1983.⁸¹

Taken together, what these illustrations show is the overwhelming imaginary of whiteness and the middle-class “good life” embedded in the concept of civil defense and family preparedness. The gendered, classed and ultimately racialized qualities of these images is difficult to miss: these are white, hetero-normative families, wealthy enough to afford home modifications, and their safety from fallout is overlain on the safety of their socio-economic position. The bunker mentality that is expressed in these documents constructs not only the safety of America as a nation but also of the white, upwardly mobile, middle-class, hetero-normative family unit. Safety and preparedness, in other words, need not upset traditions and values, and in fact may make them more secure and prosperous.

⁸¹ “Belowground Home Fallout Shelter”, cover.

Preppers

The Cold War ended in 1991, but bunker mentalities have not disappeared in American culture, and have enjoyed a resurgence. Bunker mentalities, it seems, are fluid, taking the shape of the perceived threat. Contemporary anxiety in American culture is not so much tied to nuclear holocaust, but instead to the multifarious menu of risks caused by globalization such as emerging diseases, reliance on fragile digital and infrastructural networks, and accelerating climate change. The question of “being prepared” and its practical and ideological expression has taken on new forms and intensities in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that I will explore below. Bunker mentalities have shifted from an emphasis on placid “normalcy” to visions of apocalyptic horror. In this section I analyze the relatively recent phenomenon of “prepper” subculture and the bunker mentalities that animate it. I will show how prepping is a set of practices connected to preparedness, of course, but also the imagination of apocalypse, paranoia, and the construction of safety as a defense of white male exceptionalism.

The Grasshopper and the Ants

Prepping—and its survivalist cousins—is a commitment to the imaginative enactment and construction of the future. As Mitchell describes, “the attractions of survivalism lie in imaginatively reforming the totality of social life.”⁸² This accords well with my own interactions with a local prepper group in early 2016, meetings of which are essentially group imagination

⁸² Mitchell, *Dancing at Armageddon*, 9.

sessions, pondering an endless string of invented “what-if” scenarios.⁸³ Mitchell stresses this generative potential in survivalist practice when he notes that survivalists are attracted to “the imaginative work of *culture crafting* not the artifacts of culture” and that “survivalists relish inventing new narratives, new primal means and fundamental meanings by which the world may be known.... In this process survivalists deconstruct fixed and formalized notions..., transforming these from social ‘facts’ to talking points and plot structures for dramaturgic invention.”⁸⁴ The practice of inventive storytelling and “what-if wonderment”⁸⁵ is at the heart of Mitchell’s theory of survivalist culture, and extends neatly to the prepper movement.

To prepare is an imaginative project. Using available rational tools, the preparer imagines a possible or probable future and arranges the *present* to meet the *future* in such a way as to optimize the outcome. Preparation establishes a relationship of probability, belief (in plausibility) and temporality. It is also a kind of ideological or value-laden practice: to prepare for a desired outcome is to idealize the future, to choose the best among a set of outcomes based on some idea of what is good. While preppers are preparing for an apocalyptic future, their idealized future is one in which their values of independence, competence, and survivalism will be dominant.

Some preparation behavior might be understood as instinctual: the fable, from Aesop, of the ants and the grasshopper, in which the ants spend the summer months stockpiling food in preparation for winter, while the grasshopper spends his summer having fun making his music, anthropomorphizes actual animal behavior. Many ant species do have a kind of stockpiling economy that conforms to what we think of as “planning ahead.”

⁸³ The Batman, “Home Security.”

⁸⁴ Mitchell, *Dancing at Armageddon*, 9–10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

The parable of the ant and the grasshopper is commonly traded in prepper literature and online forums and blogs. The story perfectly encapsulates the logic of prepping: availability of resources, whether in the form of food and water, or in the form of effective physical defense against those who would threaten one's family, are unevenly distributed and unstable. The grasshopper in the story winds up cold and hungry; he begs for help from the ants, who refuse to be charitable or sympathetic. The moral is clear, and also brutal: be self-sufficient and prepared, or suffer.⁸⁶ To be a prepper is to aspire to “ant” status, and to see others as “grasshoppers.”

On a popular prepper website, one typical blog entry, “Are You the Grasshopper or the Ant?”, for instance, notes that the conclusion to the parable—ants turning away the starving grasshopper—raises an ethical dilemma for the author. Having taken the moral to heart and stockpiled food and water, “how will our family react to the hungry eyes and desperate hands” of friends and neighbors who laughed at their prepping before the “calamitous event”?⁸⁷ Another prepper blog post makes this point more explicit:

We regularly hear “I am coming to your house when it all goes down.” That is when I tell them the ant and the grasshopper story. [...] Our responsibility starts with our own household. To put our family in jeopardy by giving away the provisions we have set aside for them is wrong.⁸⁸

The question of responsibility—of being *active*, of admitting and taking ownership of one's choices and place in society—is another key prepper theme, since it both ennobles the

⁸⁶ The most well-known version of this tale is “The Ant and the Grasshopper”, also known as “The Ant and the Cricket,” in which the cricket makes music and the ant gathers food for winter. Another tale, “The Ant and the Dung Beetle,” is very similar but not as oft-cited. See Aesop, *Aesop's Fables*, 65–66.

⁸⁷ Adams, “Are You the Grasshopper or the Ant?”

⁸⁸ “Sunday Prepper Bible Study - The Ant and the Grasshopper.”

defense of the family (where responsibility “starts”) and bolsters the central prepper virtue of self-reliance.

Safety, for the prepper, is built on a set of values whose origins as markers of American-ness stretch back to the first days of colonialism but have coalesced as “frontier-ism,” a loose collection of virtues and ideologies that can include “democracy, individualism, egalitarianism, liberty, freedom, mobility (both social and geographic), idealism, optimism, practicality, self-reliance, materialism, energy, violence, lawlessness, and anti-intellectualism.”⁸⁹ Self-reliance and self-control are chief among these beliefs and characteristics. According to the American Preppers Network (APN), a popular prepper forum, website and online marketplace founded in 2008, a prepper is “a person who takes Personal Responsibility [sic] and Self Reliance [sic] seriously. Preparedness is an important part of life for a serious Prepper. They follow the Five Principles of Preparedness while they Walk the Path of the Prepper.”⁹⁰ The Five Principles of the APN are:

1. Practice thrift and frugality;
2. Seek to be independent;
3. Become industrious;
4. Strive towards self-reliance;
5. Aspire to have a year’s supply of every needful thing.⁹¹

On this view of prepping, which is typical across the spectrum of prepper literature published online and in book form, the concept of security and safety is bound up in the values

⁸⁹ Mulloy, *American Extremism*, 136.

⁹⁰ Burns, “What Is a Prepper?”

⁹¹ Burns, “5 Principles of Preparedness.”

of individuality and productivity.⁹² As prepper blogger “Pat Henry” (an alias he maintains for the purpose of anonymity) puts it, “Prepping is a lifestyle, not a destination...”⁹³ It is a way of life, a set of practices that embody a central ideology of freedom and security for oneself and one’s family or chosen inner circle.

From a material standpoint, prepping means stockpiling food, water, and medicine; learning techniques for self-sufficiency in the event of wide-spread social, infrastructural, economic, or governmental collapse; fortifying space in preparation for self-defense; and developing a habit of secrecy and suspicion. Culturally, though, prepping is an ongoing process of renewing the values of personal property, traditional American family structures, and exercising personal freedom and creativity in the cultivation of imaginary futures. The practice of prepping exceeds the mandate of preparedness and becomes a logic of cultural generativity.⁹⁴ By stockpiling resources and practicing self-sufficiency, the prepper will be “able to fully experience life and truly enjoy the blessings of [their] family.”⁹⁵

While the exact origins of prepping remain vague—largely, I believe, due to the fact that prepping is an ill-defined *mélange* of Cold War anxiety, survivalist and frontier cultures, and wider government efforts to promote preparedness—critics and observers typically agree that the origins of mainstream prepping lie in a reaction to media events or natural disasters. Google’s NGram viewer, which searches millions of texts and plots the relative occurrence of words on a timeline, indicates that the term “Prepper” began appearing in English texts (fiction, news media,

⁹² Bennett, “Rise of the Preppers”; Cobb, *Prepper’s Home Defense*; Luther, “The Self-Reliance Manifesto”; Stein, “Self-Reliance for Everyone.”

⁹³ Henry, “What Am I Prepping For?”

⁹⁴ Mitchell, *Dancing at Armageddon*.

⁹⁵ Burns, “5 Principles of Preparedness.”

websites, etc.) after 2002 and has been gaining steam until the most recent data available, in 2008. Personal preparedness seems to have gained media traction and greater popular awareness after the anxiety around Y2K in 1999 and 2000 (in which computer malfunctions were supposed to cause worldwide networks to crash), then the events of 9/11 in 2001, followed by the failures of government relief efforts after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. A flurry of television programming featuring preppers aired after the hit reality series *Doomsday Preppers* launched in 2012.

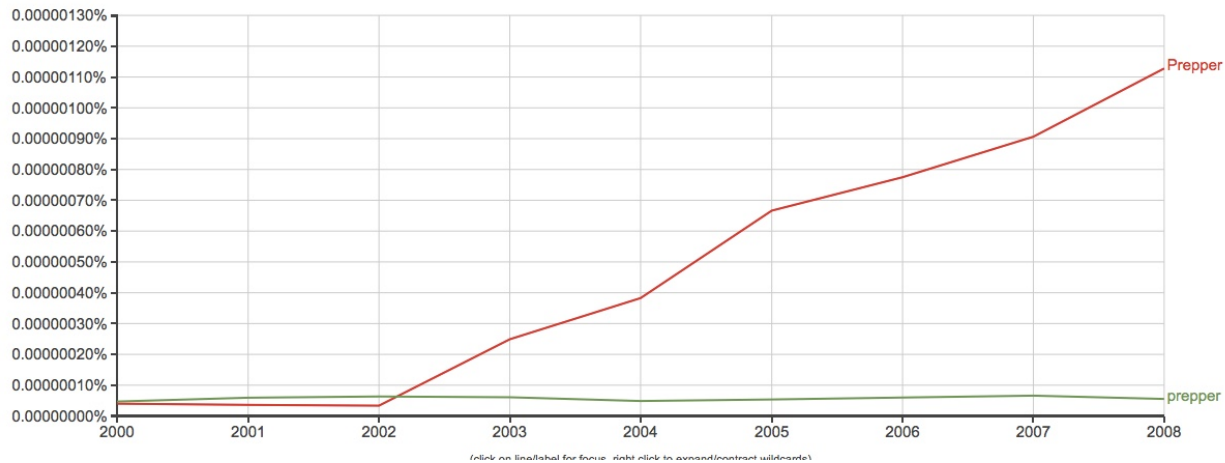


Figure 22: The relative incidence of the words “prepper” and “Prepper”, 2000-2008, via Google Books NGram Viewer.⁹⁶

At a Preparedness Expo in Fredericksburg, Virginia (January 2017), I spoke to Jay Blevins—a self-proclaimed preparedness expert who has been featured on *Doomsday Preppers*⁹⁷ as well as daytime talk shows like *Access Hollywood* and *The Today Show*—after his keynote presentation at the Expo on surviving an active shooter scenario. Blevins now sells his book on preparedness⁹⁸ and operates as a personal preparedness consultant for people looking to fortify or

⁹⁶ NGram Viewer.

⁹⁷ “Bad Times All the Time”; *Prepper Profile*.

⁹⁸ Blevins, *Survival & Emergency Preparedness Skills (SEPS)*.

protect their homes.⁹⁹ Blevins opined that prepping had really hit a critical mass of popularity when *Doomsday Preppers* began airing in 2012. He acknowledged that zombie media like *World War Z* and *The Walking Dead* have spurred greater interest in the “movement” of prepping, since those stories depict “people surviving and using prepper techniques.”¹⁰⁰ When I asked him if the business of prepping—running a consultancy, selling various products or services related to prepping—required him and other preppers to cultivate fear, to drive the need and desire for a prepper economy, Blevins countered that being afraid was different from “being practical” and knowing the “reality that things like terrorist attacks and hurricanes really happen” but that “we can all benefit from having skills and relying on ourselves.”

Since Blevins had been featured on the show, I asked him how he thought *Doomsday Preppers* portrayed preppers and prepper culture. He responded that he was generally satisfied with his own depiction on the show—although he was slightly annoyed that the producers had erased any mention of his Christian spirituality, which he maintains is a critical part of being “spiritually” prepared—and that he “watched the show with my family for the first two seasons, but when they showed that guy who is prepping to attack people and steal their gear, I thought the show went too far, and a lot of other people did too, and their popularity tanked after that.” Blevins is referring to season three, episode five, “We Are The Marauders,” in which a man named Tyler Smith explains and demonstrates his plans to invade other people’s homes and rob them at gunpoint; this, Smith explains, is his prepping strategy, and he has recruited a small army

⁹⁹ Blevins, “Jayblevins.com.”

¹⁰⁰ Blevins hits on the idea that there is a connection between the way that preppers are socially constructed through media like *Doomsday Preppers* or these zombie survival fantasies, and the ways that preparedness itself is reinforced as an appropriate or attractive cultural practice. In effect, prepper media frames a sort of preparedness environment that normalizes bunker mentalities and defensiveness.

to assist him that he calls “the Marauders.”¹⁰¹ The tension between what is seen as practical and personally responsible prepping behavior and its nightmarish opposite, the version of prepping that closely resembles criminal and extremist strategies, quickly becomes evident. While some preppers at the Expo were preaching the importance of self-reliance as a sound economic and personal safety strategy, the culture of vigilante or extreme individualism was on full display (see Figure 23).



Figure 23: “Free Men Don’t Need Permission” sign at Fredericksburg Prepper Convention, photo by author.

Some critics and commentators view prepping with utter hostility, others see it as reasonable, logical, and the sign of a brighter future for American culture. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, in her vehement and profoundly pessimistic screed against what she calls “apocotainment” and a “culture of apocalypse” in contemporary America, argues that prepping

¹⁰¹ “We Are the Marauders.”

went mainstream as a direct result of *Doomsday Preppers*, and that it celebrates death and selfishness, fueled by greedy merchandisers. She argues that

It hardly matters to the merchandisers what Americans are afraid of: global warming, economic meltdown, asteroids, nuclear annihilation, comets, environmental disasters, worldwide power shortages, the Rapture. Teotwawki [The End Of The World As We Know It] sells and merchandisers care little about politics and reason; they just want us to buy guns and ammo, food prep, and underground living shelters. Indeed... corporations in the business of prepping merch [sic] have so effectively mainstreamed and monetized “preparedness” that prepping is no longer associated with survivalists and fringe hate groups.¹⁰²

This analysis, as useful as it is in explaining the business and corporatization of prepping (and the money that can be made with hit shows like *Doomsday Preppers*), however, effectively strips preppers of agency. In this view they are merely pawns—mindless and devoid of will, in zombie fashion—to the desires that have been constructed and foisted upon them by the corporate “merchandisers.” This explanation fits neatly into a narrative of the war embedded in everyday life, which I have argued is a useful lens of analysis. Alternatively, it neatly reproduces the anti-narrative of industrial and consumer progress, a narrative in which over-consumption—or, “gluttony” in Foster’s terms, ironically appropriating a deadly Catholic sin—yields its own destruction. Whatever the truth of this rather straightforward critique of consumer culture, what Foster’s analysis seems to miss is the tension between a “dangerous” prepper and a “reasonable” prepper like Blevins, who stresses on his website that his goal is “to promote a well-researched, practical, and reasonable understanding of what emergency preparedness really is.”¹⁰³ Foster reduces prepping to the doomsday it anticipates. As she puts it in the final lines of her book, “The future of the world hopefully exists in the reclamation of the planet through the end of our

¹⁰² Foster, *Hoarders, Doomsday Preppers, and the Culture of Apocalypse*, 26–27.

¹⁰³ Blevins, “Jayblevins.com.”

species. It's something we appear to desire, something that fascinates us. And someday, it will come to pass."¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, some critics understand prepping as part of a progressive future for American society. In journalist Ted Koppel's recent book *Lights Out* in which he argues that a cyberattack on an unprepared United States would result in widespread catastrophe, preppers are depicted favorably. Koppel interviews two preppers, presumably representative of the larger movement: one who is relatively wealthy and can spend more than \$500,000 on a well-stocked and fortified "bug out" property,¹⁰⁵ and another who invests what Koppel calls "sweat equity" rather than liquid capital into an off-grid property powered by alternative energy technologies. Because of the threat of a devastated electrical grid, this second prepper, Andrew Rose, is "a role model" if not a "practical example." He is doggedly self-reliant: he hand-makes thousands of adobe bricks for the walls of his house, for instance.¹⁰⁶ In being "early adopters" of alternative and renewable energy sources, Koppel argues that "what they've done... can serve as an example for the future. The concept, called 'distributed generation,' is not unique to Andrew Rose. It envisions downsizing the current system of large-scale power plants to clusters of smaller generators spread across a broader area. ...it provides a glimpse into a more sustainable future. In that very real sense, Andrew Rose and his family are pioneers."¹⁰⁷ Koppel mobilizes the myth of the west and of pioneer frontiersman-ship not to incite the violence of conquest, but

¹⁰⁴ Foster, *Hoarders, Doomsday Preppers, and the Culture of Apocalypse*, 69.

¹⁰⁵ To "bug-out" means to "bail out of the current location of uncertain circumstance and potential danger and head to safer territory" "Prepper's Dictionary." A "bug-out location" (BOL), also called a "remote" or "isolated retreat" is "a privately owned stronghold designed to be almost entirely self-sufficient and self-contained" Rawles, "A Glossary of Survival and Preparedness Acronyms/Terms."

¹⁰⁶ Koppel, *Lights out*, 163.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 164.

to conjure an image of innovation, “insatiable curiosity and an indefatigable drive” that he suggests has been a gift to American society. Rose is not only a symbolic pioneer, but a determined and skilled one, capable of making “it through the Donner Pass,” that notoriously dangerous and difficult route to the Pacific Ocean over the Sierra Nevada mountains.¹⁰⁸ Koppel almost organically ties prepping to the mythology of American exploration of the West.

Prepping as a lifestyle can in fact be understood historically as part of the survivalist tradition, which in the mythology of American history stretches back to the first European colonists of the New World. Colonial Americans and settlers of the West are kin to modern preppers in two senses: they forged a living from the land, defending themselves from enemies (native peoples) and environmental threats; and they used the force of arms to establish personal liberty as the basis for a new nation.¹⁰⁹ By orienting itself to individualization, prepping is actively engaged with managing potential futures and the defense of historical norms, over and against the “risk society” that threatens to undermine territorial and cultural coherence. As we will see throughout the following analysis of prepper culture (and preppers in popular culture), the ideologies of the American frontier are important frameworks for constructing the meaning and value of preparedness.

Doomsday Preppers in “reality”

Bunker mentality during the Cold War was geared toward the defense of family and nation, and both of these categories were depicted as white, middle-class, and heteronormative.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ The idea that prepping tends to defend white exceptionalism maps onto the frontier mythology of white settlers defending their “property” against indigenous people or “Indians.”

In a sense, the defense of racial, social and geopolitical exceptionalism is an established genre of both documentary and fictional media. To what extent does a show like *Doomsday Preppers* continue the generic project of depicting a peculiarly American culture that is geared toward militant defense of home, family, and identity?

Doomsday Preppers is a reality-style television show that aired on National Geographic from 2012 to 2014. Each episode follows a handful of characters who are dedicated to the practices of preparing for apocalyptic futures. Each character describes the future they imagine—nuclear war, an electro-magnetic pulse, a series of massive earthquakes, and so on—and then details the preparations they have devised to make themselves, their families safe. These preparations are chosen for maximum astonishment—the more outrageous the consumption, the more elaborate the security plans, the more antisocial the ethics, the longer the camera lingers.

Doomsday Preppers is about being prepared, and my reading of this show further illuminates how preparedness relies on particular concepts of home and family. But there is an interesting ambivalence built into the show that I hope to tease out, one that distinguishes preppers from the placid, clean, middle-class white families depicted in Cold War preparedness literature. On the one hand, to prepare seems like a good, rational thing to do. On the other hand, this practice is rendered as a threat since preppers are configured as hostile to non-preppers. The preppers end up being both defensive and offensive, both symbols of securitized preparedness and figures of the doomsday itself. All this ambivalence is bound up with domesticity, domestic ideals, and being at home.

Home is the architecture of safety that can be a dwelling space, a fortress against the future, but also perhaps a dangerous and unsafe space in itself, a space that must be escaped.

Doomsday Preppers is ostensibly a look at how to prepare for apocalyptic futures, but is framed

as a discussion of home, in particular through the concern with the architecture of the middle-class, suburban house. In the opening sequence, the camera pans around a cul-de-sac of suburban homes. The image is intentionally grainy, and it shimmers and glitches: this could be the beginning of a horror film. And like the haunted house, the suburban house is rendered as both familiar and sinister, as a place where people live and also as the site of conflict, war, or violence.

For many of the preppers in this show, their house is both a shelter and a potential target. They employ various strategies of preparation, including (1) fortification and stockpiling, which in prepper parlance is known as “bugging in,” (2) escape, known as “bugging out,” and (3) exile.

To bug in is to fortify and stockpile a house. In the first episode of the show, preppers Paul and Gloria Range have constructed a compound Paul describes as built out of “nine forty-foot steel shipping containers. They are designed to carry about fifty-eight thousand pounds each, and be stacked eight high, so that’s an incredible half a million pounds of weight that these things can sustain.”¹¹⁰ “The compound,” we are told by the voiceover, “is based on the layout of a medieval castle: a square fort that encloses a safe courtyard that allows them 360 degrees protection.” The inhabitants of this literal fortress describe their defensive firing positions: they can see up to eight hundred yards from the ground floor (peeking out through strategically positioned embrasures) and up to two miles from the top of the structure, allowing them to “see people... to see predators.”¹¹¹ Furthermore, the couple have stockpiled approximately fifty thousand pounds of canned and preserved food, enough to feed, they claim, two people for twenty years. Paul and Gloria are retirees, and so they “consider prepping for the apocalypse a

¹¹⁰ “Bullets, Lots of Bullets.”

¹¹¹ Ibid.

full time job. They dedicate fifty hours a week to storing food, shoring up defenses, and designing gadgets, all to improve their chance of survival after the end of days.” As Gloria puts it succinctly, “It’s not a hobby. It’s a lifestyle.”



Figure 24: Paul and Gloria’s shipping container fortress.¹¹²

As we see here, “bugging in” requires a hardening of domestic space, militarizing it as if it were on the front lines of a war. The fortress is a completely armored shelter that will house, feed, and protect its inhabitants. Gloria remarks, when she sees the house for the first time, “wow, this is really something we’ve done.” It is a monument to past experience as well as a bulwark against the future. As the couple stands on the roof looking out, they stare at the horizon with an intensity that is inspiring and disturbing since they expect that horizon to produce marauders and predators, and through their hopes, fears, and expectations, they bring the

¹¹² Ibid.

apocalyptic future into the present. We, the viewers, are then forced to confront it alongside them.

What we are called to confront is a global risk society and the environmental violence of the Anthropocene. Paul and Gloria’s response—to stockpile food as an investment and an insurance policy, to generate contingency plans to leave the fortress should it be overrun and travel to a secret location in armored and specially-fitted school buses, to train with firearms, to fortify their home—reflects a broader shift in the way that time and space are managed in American culture, which is yet still legitimized through “frontierism.” For instance, their strategy of “bugging out” with the school buses involves constructing a makeshift wagon-circle with the vehicles.

PAUL: The pioneers circled their wagons for extremely valid reasons.

VOICEOVER: By replicating the pioneers and creating a square with four bug-out vehicles, Paul’s team can spend the night in the safe central haven defended on all sides.

P: With a minimum of four guards, you have a defensive position. I think that you need to be responsible for yourself and for your family. To do anything less is a criminal act.¹¹³

This appeal to history in the pioneer or frontier ethic—personal responsibility, maintaining the family unit, circling the wagons, defending the safe haven—legitimizes prepping as a patriotic activity, with personal safety and private property as collateral.

The appeal to history—the colonial founding of the United States, the mythology of the western frontier, as well as reanimated Cold War anxieties—is a common conceit in *Doomsday Preppers*. In an episode entitled “Americans, not Ameri-can’ts” from season three, we open with

¹¹³ Ibid.

a shot of a dusty road interspersed with a close-up of a ragged man, toothless (to connote his connection to hillbilly and country culture), strumming a guitar and singing a song about cowboys and working the land. Joe, a Vietnam veteran living in a remote “off-grid” location in Texas, is concerned about a cyberattack on the United States that would wipe out communications and computer networks that undergird social and governmental institutions. “I would say,” Joe muses about the effects of a major cyberattack, “that you’d be back to horse and buggy, or at best you’re back living in the 1950’s.”¹¹⁴ By this logic, our survivalist techniques must match the state of historical technology, and presumably the state of self-reliant and preservationist ethics, that reigned in the (mythically constructed) moment in history that Joe evokes. Thus, we must prepare and rehearse a pre-digital lifestyle.

In an episode from season four, “Back to the Basics,” Chad declares his fundamental fear of federal government. As the camera lingers on a young girl riding her bicycle on an empty road near a small cluster of houses in a desert landscape (we learn, near Phoenix, Arizona), we hear Chad’s voice:

Our founding fathers said that government is a terrible evil. There are powers that are in control of a lot of the policies that are coming down the pike that are, I guess you could call them evil, they’re not for the good of the people. As the man, it’s my responsibility and my duty to protect my family, and to put us on a path that will enable us to survive tyranny.

I’m prepping for a nuclear strike brought on by the United States government, and resulting in a genocidal siege.¹¹⁵

His fear is that the U.S. government will use nuclear weapons against its own citizens. Chad repeatedly points to what he considers historical facts—for instance, that the major cause of death in the past century has been governments killing their own citizens, or “democide”—to

¹¹⁴ “Americans, Not Ameri-Can’ts.”

¹¹⁵ “Back to the Basics.”

both justify his prepping decisions and to invoke the rationality of the distrust he harbors. The central power aims at not only the family he loves but the status of his masculine individuality—“as the man”—which prepping defends.

As Richard Slotkin argues in his magisterial *Gunfighter Nation*, a study of the myth of the frontier in twentieth-century America, “the myth [of the frontier] represented the redemption of American spirit or fortune as something to be achieved by playing through a scenario of separation, temporary regression to a more primitive or ‘natural’ state, and *regeneration through violence*.”¹¹⁶ Preppers “play through scenarios” that precisely mimic forms of separation from society—homes as hardened fortresses, off-the-grid properties that have been disconnected from shared networks of information and power on which society has become dependent—as well as a nostalgic or pragmatic appeal to more primitive or regressive forms of life. By surviving the violent apocalypse, and in being prepared to not only absorb but to mete out violence should it come to that, the American family is renewed and rejuvenated. Prepping is anticipatory, but I argue it anticipates not the apocalypse but the renewal of American-ness. That is, whether or not the apocalypse arrives, preppers are in a position to assert “American” values of independence, personal liberty, the sacredness of personal property, and patriarchal domestic values. This is how bunkers function symbolically, and is at the root of contemporary American bunker mentalities.

¹¹⁶ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 12, original emphasis.

Preppers and Race War

The conflict that preppers envision and that their fortification practices make material, is racialized; embedded in prepper logic is a war along class, race, and ideological lines. In his genealogy of ideological conflict, Foucault argues that the difference we attribute to political or national dichotomies is essentially grounded, since the seventeenth century in Europe, in race. The “matrix for all the forms” of conflict that we think of as “social warfare” is found in the phenomenon of articulating society around two races, one of which must subjugate the other. A rhetoric of “ethnic differences, differences between languages, difference degrees of forces, vigor, energy, and violence; the differences between savagery and barbarism; the conquest and subjugation of one race by another.”¹¹⁷ Then by the nineteenth century, race war undergoes a “transcription... which tends to erase every trace of racial conflict in order to define itself as class struggle.”¹¹⁸ What emerges in this transcription of race to class that is “new,” in Foucault’s opinion, is the re-conception of race not as a “race that came from elsewhere” or as social conflict between an inside race and an outside race. What emerges is “a polarity, ... a binary rift within society, [that] is not a clash between two distinct races. It is the splitting of a single race into a superrace and a subrace. ... it is the reappearance, within a single race, of the past of that race.”¹¹⁹ The “superrace” is the centralized, dominant power, “the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm”; and the “subrace” is the group that is produced by society but must be eradicated or normalized according to the force of the centralized power.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 60.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

This is what Foucault calls “State racism” or “the internal racism of permanent purification, ...one of the basic dimensions of social normalization.”¹²⁰

Similarly, Slotkin’s analysis of the frontier myth in America reveals that the “moral landscape of the frontier myth is divided by significant borders, of which the wilderness/civilization, Indian/white border is the most basic.”¹²¹ Racial difference is the fundamental character of the struggle for progress in the West. Once the frontier disappears geographically and becomes primarily a discursive entity, and once the Indians are actually eradicated and subjugated, the race war is translated into other forms of social conflict, and internalized. Labor disputes and concerns over immigration begin, in the nineteenth century, to be couched in terms of the old race wars of the frontier, in which, for example, working class organizers are called out as “white savages” whose activities are “barbaric.”¹²²

The substitution of the symbolism of “savage war” for that of “class war” shifts the ground of controversy from the ideological frame of democratic tradition to that of race war, from a frame in which progress and right order are presumed to emerge from the widest imaginable diffusion of property and political power to one in which progress depends on the exclusion/extermination of a congenitally regressive type of humanity and on the aggrandizement of a privileged race of people.¹²³

After the 1880s, when working class populations grew in numbers and ethnic diversity increased, “the possibility of a class/race apocalypse became a staple of political polemics” as well as the basis of a “newly popular genre of utopian/dystopian fiction.”¹²⁴ Just as Foucault identifies a

¹²⁰ Ibid., 62.

¹²¹ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 14.

¹²² Ibid., 19–21.

¹²³ Ibid., 21.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

rhetorical and political translation between racial and class struggle in the nineteenth-century European states, Slotkin identifies the translation of racial difference into class difference, and the establishment of a tradition of social conservatism in American politics.

In *Doomsday Preppers*, the fears that preppers evince are racially coded and the vast majority display the hallmarks of frontier racism. “Home” is the front line of a class/race apocalypse, to borrow Slotkin’s phrase. In an episode from season two, “The Gates of Hell,” Steve—a contractor who builds houses for a living—explains his reasons for prepping in remarkable clarity. As we watch scenes of domestic tranquility—a young boy playing with toys, a woman working in a kitchen—Steve says:

I believe it’s gonna happen. I wasn’t born yesterday. And I’ve been watching, and I’ve been waiting, because I know it’s gonna happen. I pray I’m wrong, but I don’t think I am. The way I see it, one of two things is gonna happen. Either the government is gonna get their head outta their ass, and they’re gonna implement some serious austerity measures, and they’re gonna save this economy, in which case the entitle-ists are not gonna be getting their checks. Or, they’re not, and the economy is gonna collapse, and the entitle-ists are not gonna be getting their checks. And when those people who think they’re entitled to stuff, don’t get their stuff, they’re going to come try to take our stuff. And when they do, this is what they get.¹²⁵

At that point, Steve brandishes a large handgun, and we cut to several rapid shots of large guns firing and causing concussive explosions.

STEVE: I’m preparing my family for the imminent collapse of the United States economy.

VOICEOVER: Steve H. fears that economic collapse will encourage widespread riots and looting, and that his home, in an easily accessible neighborhood, could become a target.

¹²⁵ “The Gates of Hell.” Steve’s use of “entitle-ists” is not overtly explained in the series, but seems to denote Americans who receive benefits from welfare or “entitlement” programs.

S: We've taken steps at our house to ensure our safety—alarm, video camera, guns, traps—but in the doomsday scenario that I see coming, that place is not gonna be safe. There's gonna be people roving in bands, coming and hitting people's houses and stuff. And when that happens, I plan on being long gone from there. That's why I got my bug-out location.

V: Steve's bugout location is a cabin, deep in an undisclosed mountain range, fifty miles away. For the past year, the family has travelled there on weekends to add to their stockpile.



Figure 25: Steve's "easily accessible neighborhood"—a suburban enclave that he fears will be overrun with "rioters and looters."¹²⁶

In this example, Steve opts for "bugging out" even after implementing numerous home fortification strategies. Security through obscurity is the immediate justification that Steve offers for abandoning his home after the doomsday he predicts. But the "rioters and looters" who threaten his suburban space—too easily accessed by the hordes arriving from a nearby city—are

¹²⁶ Ibid.

racially coded Others, echoing the history of black riots against police brutality and attacks on the civil rights movement. Indeed, the history of suburbia is rife with the politics of exclusion, fear, and discrimination by design. We have seen in previous chapters how suburban and urban housing developments are designed in relation to the defense of whiteness and privilege and the construction of racial Others.¹²⁷ Here, the logic of race wars is reconfigured as preparedness, only just barely erasing the classism and racism that is defined by urban and suburban geographical codes.

Steve's declaration that the "entitle-ists" who stop receiving government checks will come to his house looking for his "stuff" and be met with incredible firepower—guns that he and his two sons meticulously catalog, clean, and train with—also evokes the concept of frontier hardship and vigilante justice, two virtues of self-reliance that are upheld in prepper ideology and that emerge from frontier mythology as well. As Slotkin notes, part of a response to the fears of the loss of racial privilege in a new era of trade (which succeeds the era of conquest) was to emphasize the importance of a rite of passage in the form of "the strenuous life" of a hero. "The strenuous life' scenario," Slotkin writes, was one in which "a man softened by modern civilization is immersed in a wilderness and thus recovers his race's latent capacity for mastery."¹²⁸ In this, "virility is the most important racial gift/virtue."¹²⁹ Coupled with the virile power of a firearm is the will and justification to use it. Steve is prepared to kill to defend his family and his "stuff"; his manliness is defined in and through a right to stand one's ground, a "dignified self-respect, self-control, and that self-assertion and jealousy of encroachment which

¹²⁷ Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares*; Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*.

¹²⁸ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 163.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

marks those who, knowing their rights, dare maintain them.”¹³⁰ To defend one’s property is thus integrated simultaneously into the modes of being white, being male, and being American.

Preppers as Survivalists, Extremists, or Vigilante Heroes

However, masculine and racial power will not only be defined according to capacity for mastery, but on the ethics of vigilante justice that solidifies after the Civil War. During Reconstruction, after 1865, “vigilantism acquired broader significance as a means of justifying new forms of social violence directed against the ‘dangerous classes’ of the post-Frontier, urban, and industrial order. As a result, the vigilante ideology itself was transformed from an assertion of a natural and democratic right-to-violence to an assertion of class and racial privilege.”¹³¹ Steve’s assertion of the right-to-violence as a defense against the dangerous hordes of urban invaders is a clear expression of this brand of social warfare. Rachel Hall has suggested that the vigilantism of the frontier has, via the “wanted” poster and reality television featuring outlaws, criminals and bounty hunts, created a new kind of viewership: the vigilante viewer. Hall notes that the wanted poster (and other public displays of criminality that interpellate the viewer as a citizen-defender)

periodically produces and repeatedly stimulates an imagined geography of dangerousness inherited from the frontier. In the social and psychic geography of American culture, the wanted poster occupies the border that separates home from the external dangers that threaten its sanctity. ... Within this visual economy family is both a place... and a body of sentiment in whose name individuals strive for more or violently defend what is already theirs. The idea of family gives a moral sheen to the desperation of

¹³⁰ Commons, *Races And Immigrants In America*, 6–7; quoted in Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 190.

¹³¹ Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 173–74.

striving for material wealth and the violence used to defend private property, as well as racially exclusive communities and practices. The paternalistic habit of imagining threats to family and the violence used to guard the home come to seem not merely rational but also righteous.¹³²

Hall's argument that the visual culture of criminality and the "outlaw" produce a violently defensible boundary between home and threat runs parallel to my suggestion that the prepper as configured in shows like *Doomsday Prepper*, who fortifies the home and digs the bunker, and who operates according to the ideologies of the frontier, heroically appropriates virility, gun violence, and self-reliance to sustain masculine and racial superiority.

The question this raises is the following: To what extent does preparedness in the form of preppers and prepper culture reflect a genealogical relationship with other ideologies of individualism, violence, and racial superiority? In particular, does prepping have any vital relationship to survivalist and extremist movements in the U.S. since the turn of the twentieth century?

The bunker mentality, to put it very simply, did not originate with preppers by any means. The bunker mentality in America, especially its overtly political practice of creating off-the-grid communities or sheltered political groups, has shifted from the Left to the Right since 1960. As James Coates notes, in the 1960s it was "leftist idealists" who had established "remote compounds hoping to escape the hassles of congested urban life and seeking rural security from the prospect of the Bomb."¹³³ But by the late 1980s, those communes had disappeared, "while increasing numbers in the survival Right are becoming compound dwellers, stockpiling large stores of weapons, food, and medicine in preparation for" a final apocalyptic moment in the vein

¹³² Hall, *Wanted*, 10–11.

¹³³ Coates, *Armed and Dangerous*, 19.

of the Book of Revelation.¹³⁴ The leader of an extremist militia group that calls itself the “Minutemen,” after the Revolutionary war militias that were always prepared, Robert DePugh preached a bunker mentality from the pages of *On Target*, the official Minutemen newsletter. His organization was not only paranoid of the federal government, but also of imminent Soviet invasion. They were meant to “prepare for Armageddon” by establishing a “personal ‘hide’ in some remote area.” These would be “earthen bunkers, ten feet wide and six feet deep, stocked with enough food for thirty days and enough ammunition to allow two latter-day Minutemen soldiers to fight an occupying army for a month.”¹³⁵

Historians of right-wing extremism in America tend to focus on two aspects of this shift from the communes of leftist idealism to the paranoid, survivalist right-wing bunker mentality. First, the paranoia itself: right-wing extremists are said to be ruled by passionate attention to conspiracy theories and what amount to paranoid delusions of governmental power run amok. Second, the survivalist right, if we may allow this description to suffice for all the various white nationalist, anti-governmental militant groups and ideologies operating in the past half-century in the United States, is a politics of apocalypticism. That is, the problems that the survivalist right confronts will be ultimately solved or sorted out through total war and apocalyptic struggle.

Paranoia

A classic text in the study of American politics, Richard Hofstadter’s 1963 essay “The Paranoid Style in American Politics” describes a “style of mind”—a way of believing rather than

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 146.

a specific content of belief—that is “an old and recurrent phenomenon” and is only recently (since the 1960s) attached specifically to the political right. In other words, for Hofstadter paranoia is deeply rooted in American politics in general, and not necessarily in a tendency to the right, although he admits that the term is “pejorative, and it is meant to be; the paranoid style has a greater affinity for bad causes than for good.”¹³⁶

For Hofstadter, what distinguishes the paranoid style in the late twentieth century is different from that which marks it in older eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conspiracy theories, although all are part of a continuum of conspiracy. Earlier political conspiracy theorists felt that they were defending a way of life that had been well-established: “they stood for causes and personal types that were still in possession of their country.”¹³⁷ But the “modern right wing... feels dispossessed: America has been largely taken away from them and their kind, though they are determined to try to repossess it and to prevent the final destructive act of subversion.”¹³⁸ The feeling of dispossession is not unique, either, to the right wing of America or to the paranoid style, and it will reappear in the discussion of the meaning of zombie literature and of those who suffer from environmental illnesses like multiple chemical sensitivity. Dispossession, in other words, is the feeling and quality of those who are outside of the history being made by the Anthropocene and global capitalism, which as Walter Benjamin presciently notes, is not a history of progress but a history of calamity and disaster.¹³⁹ (Actively retreating from History, as preppers sometimes seem to do, begins to appear a perfectly reasonable political and personal tactic.) Nor does dispossession necessarily lead to a culture of paranoia. But

¹³⁶ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” 3.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History.”

dispossession accounts for the style of thought that presents in right wing political rhetoric that what has been fought for and won—white American exceptionalism—must be defended.

Paranoia is a common rubric for explaining right-wing extremism. D.J. Mulloy notes that new media outlets commonly used the right-wing militia movement to explain the Oklahoma City bombings in 1995 by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols who were “widely portrayed to be irrational, paranoid, extremist, and terroristic.”¹⁴⁰ When the farm crisis descended on rural America in the 1980s—causing millions of families to lose their farms and property, fall into unrecoverable debt, and be forced to leave the rural life behind in exchange for hourly wages in urban centers—“the anger and stress caused by the crisis was either turned inwards” resulting in a sharp uptick in alcoholism, mental illness, suicide, child and spousal abuse; or it was turned into “anti-governmental beliefs.” Long-held “rural myths that spoke of a tranquil and stable lifestyle have been replaced by paranoid conspiracy theories.”¹⁴¹

Paranoia, according to this analysis, is the understandable if not exactly savory and productive result of widespread dispossession due to global economics, climate change, and the centralization of power in American politics which has systematically ignored or undervalued rural life. But paranoia is also perhaps an unfair term since, as Hofstadter readily pointed out, it is pejorative, and also it borrows a clinical term for use in political analysis, thus structuring the analysis according to stigmas attached to mental illness. Regardless of the justice of the term, it structures the way that American extremist movements and groups are understood. But as Mulloy argues, “it is important to acknowledge that such practices and attitudes are not the sole preserve of those on the margins of American life. They can also be found within the political

¹⁴⁰ Mulloy, *American Extremism*, 5.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

and cultural mainstream.”¹⁴² David Bennett makes a similar argument when he notes that “paranoid” and “bigot” interpretations of so-called “anti-alien movements” (political groups that oppose foreigners and outsiders, who work to maintain the purity of the American population) have been unsympathetic, to say the least, but

...the extremists of the movements of the Right do deserve a measure of dispassionate attention, not because of services they have rendered America but because they have reflected tensions endemic in the entire population and in the very structure of American life. For all their overbearing language and grandiose plans, conspiratorial fears and repressive programs, they have been themselves the victims of conflicts and contradictions built into the nature of the society for which they were self-proclaimed protectors.¹⁴³

This sort of “dispassionate attention” is useful, not to tacitly approve or tolerate the overt and covert racist and repressive attitudes of the survivalist right, nor to nurture a victim mentality in those white males who feel dispossessed of their superiority. It is useful in order to clearly delineate the “new strain of white male identity politics fueled by intense rage, resentment, paranoia, and apocalyptic visions”¹⁴⁴ that underpin the survivalist lifestyle as well as the newer, more “mainstream” prepper lifestyle. Only dispassionate attention, in other words, will illuminate the humanity at the core of what is so often, especially in academic settings, considered abhorrently racist, sexist, insane, or destructive. Once again, the construction of safety—the pure interior against the contaminated exterior—speaks not only to extremists but also to what Hofstadter calls “more or less normal people.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Ibid., 9.

¹⁴³ Bennett, *The Party of Fear*, 6.

¹⁴⁴ Kellner, *Guys and Guns Amok*, 92.

¹⁴⁵ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” 3.

There appear to be two ways that paranoia is studied in relation to the extremist or survivalist right. First, paranoia marks those who are mentally ill, unstable, dangerous, and criminally violent. Second, paranoia speaks to a more or less rational distrust of larger economic, climactic, and governmental forces that must be resisted. The interaction of these interpretations of paranoia produce a dissonant intellectual field in which “threat” and “safety” are superimposed on one another and “normal” and “abnormal” are blurred. On the prevalence of paranoia and misinformation (that is, wild or unfounded conspiracy theories) in so-called “patriot” movements, James Wilson Gibson notes that “although most militia members are psychologically healthy, many ‘are on the fringes of mental health.’”¹⁴⁶ They are healthy, but on the fringes of health—their desire to remain on the fringes of society, or to bunker down in the fringes of the world itself, only serves to underscore this metaphor of dangerous liminality.

Two recent films—*Take Shelter* and *10 Cloverfield Lane*—illustrate the difficulties and potential for configuring the mental states of preppers.¹⁴⁷ Both films begin from the premise that underground space is psychologically tormented and paranoid space, but they lead to divergent social and political critiques. In *10 Cloverfield Lane*, we encounter a prepper, Howard, who is clearly and consistently dangerous and criminally violent, although, oddly, his paranoia is fully justified since it accords with the reality of the alien apocalypse. Howard is not insane, he is cruel and devious. In other words, *10 Cloverfield Lane* is a profoundly unsympathetic portrayal of prepping and would hold up well as an example of what Foster might argue is an indictment of the violent selfishness of preppers and hoarders.¹⁴⁸ On the other hand, in Jeff Nichols’s *Take*

¹⁴⁶ Abanes, *American Militias*, 123.

¹⁴⁷ Nichols, *Take Shelter*; Trachtenberg, *10 Cloverfield Lane*.

¹⁴⁸ Foster, *Hoarders, Doomsday Preppers, and the Culture of Apocalypse*.

Shelter, Curtis LaForche finds himself becoming obsessed with preparedness, but also suffering from symptoms of what he comes to believe is some kind of paranoid schizophrenia. Curtis is only dangerous because his alleged illness compels him to construct space that is *too* safe: once locking himself, his wife and their daughter into the underground bunker, he only lets them out with extraordinary difficulty at the pleading of his wife. The ending of the film, in which despite his visions and paranoia he may *not* be mentally ill (where mental illness is a detachment from reality, and his paranoia could be firmly attached to reality), helps us question the firm boundaries between sane and insane, normal and abnormal. Ultimately, what these films help us do is think through the meaning of the bunker mentality as paranoia, and how we can approach the practices of prepping from this perspective. *10 Cloverfield Lane* does this by playing with the tropes of violence and insanity in portrayals of the American extremist right; *Take Shelter* offers a more sympathetic reading of paranoia, without the war-like attitudes of a final solution.

The Genre of Preppers and Bunker Building

Underground space is paranoid space—Kafka’s animal narrator in “The Burrow” gives us a glimpse of this search for safety that is never satisfied, the psychological torment of paranoia of threats from within and without. The burrowing creature is never at peace; “it is not only by external enemies that I am threatened. There are also enemies in the bowels of the earth. I have never seen them, but legend tells of them and I firmly believe in them. . . . Here it is of no avail to console yourself with the thought that you are in your own house; far rather are you in theirs.”¹⁴⁹ The creature has a central room in his complex maze of rooms and tunnels where he

¹⁴⁹ Kafka, “The Burrow,” 355.

keeps his stockpiled food, but the enemy could at any moment come to steal it, so he constantly rearranges and re-hides his resources in a maddening and, frankly, Kafka-esque circularity.

The creature fears going outside, and then once outside, fears coming back in. There is always a “great beast” approaching, circling, and lying in wait. The story never reaches a conclusion; the beast never arrives; the burrow is never completely safe, settled, or secured; and the hero is left “unchanged.”¹⁵⁰ He and the burrow are blended in a kind of psychological space, where safety and risk, enemy and self, outside and inside, escape and fortification, are constantly shifting and contested. The space is uncannily animated, as when he wanders “once more the long road to the Castle Keep, all my surroundings seem filled with agitation, seem to be looking at me, and then look away again so as not to disturb me, yet cannot refrain the very next moment from trying to read the saving solution from my expression.”¹⁵¹ Kafka’s allegorical prepper beset from without and within by every imaginable threat and foe, obsessed with preparing a defense for all possible attacks, neatly sums up what has become a psychopathology of the underground and its association with prepping.

The protagonist of *Take Shelter*, Curtis LaForche, embarks on what seems like a paranoid delusional quest to build a storm shelter in his backyard in order to safeguard his family from an apocalyptic storm he believes is imminent. He suffers under the debilitating pressure of disturbing hallucinations, nightmares, hyper-vigilance, paranoia and fear. By drawing the viewer into this psychological space, the film works to undermine what the viewer assumes is normal or true. Curtis sees what seem like omens: a flock of birds, a dire weather forecast. His dreams are full of images of his rural home and loving family threatened and assaulted by faceless forces of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 386.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 384.

environmental and social destruction. A construction worker by trade, Curtis manages these imagined futures by constructing fortified enclosures, such as a fenced dog house, and finally an underground bunker. The bunker is at once the space of his deepest paranoia, the place where he retreats when the world is bearing down, as well as the manifestation of an earnestly expressed desire to construct a safe space for his family. The bunker, in other words, functions as a metaphorical mental or psychological space (the film suggests Curtis's desire for a bunker could be a symptom of schizophrenia or PTSD) as well as an ideological and cultural space (in which to safeguard the family unit, to control the local interior environment, to establish a concrete and metal barrier between the outside and the inside).

10 Cloverfield Lane also plays with the psychology and politics of above- and belowground, of inside and outside, although in this case the prepper is represented as a pathological threat. The film depicts a predatory prepper, Howard, played by John Goodman, who kidnaps young women in an attempt to recreate the patriarchal mid-century family (albeit in a violently incestuous way). *10 Cloverfield* offers up the prepper as a psychopathic predator (and ultimately a zombie, I argue)—it uses the association of preparedness with dangerous mental illness to interrogate the concepts of reality, tradition, and risk. By situating the drama in a field of uncertainty in which truth is unstable and potentially lethal, and in which the threat of domestic violence shades every scene, *10 Cloverfield* forces the viewer to not only question reality, but to see “traditional” domesticity as potentially abhorrent and dangerous. The film ultimately assumes that the viewer will easily link preppers with dangerous instability; it relies on stereotypes of preppers and prepping behaviors—bunker-building, stockpiling food and weapons, etc.—as insane or deviant to achieve its dramatic ends.

Like many of the survivalist and preparedness scenarios we have so far analyzed, the film is framed as a drama about the destabilized family unit. Before the opening credits, we are treated to a miniature tragedy, acted without dialogue. A woman is hurriedly packing a small suitcase. She rushes out the door; the camera settles on two forlorn objects left behind: her keys and a diamond engagement ring. She is leaving her fiancée.

In itself, a woman walking away from the traditional patriarchal stability of marriage is thoroughly “modern” and a reflection of feminist and liberal progress. This scene can also be read as a reflection of traditions unmoored, of the tenuousness of *all* social structures, no matter how firmly established. Ulrich Beck, in his analysis of the unpredictability of modernity in the “risk society,” points to the “tradition” of the heteronormative family unit as a locus of destabilization since it is both the foundation of bourgeois industrial society *and* a “contradict[ion of] the principles of modernity” in that it promotes a basic patriarchal inequality.¹⁵² Thus, by progressively equalizing gender roles, the structure of “family” is undermined. The modern woman is liberated from the “fate” of gendered and sexualized hierarchies. At the same time, radical change encourages new anxieties.

The prepper, on this view, is the *man* who has constructed a defense of traditional patriarchy. Howard has “rescued” a young woman, Michelle, from what he claims was a nuclear attack. In her rush to escape her impending marriage, Michelle’s car is run off the road. (Howard caused the crash intentionally, we learn much later.) She wakes from her trauma shackled in a basement, part of Howard’s underground fallout shelter. They cannot leave, Howard insists, since the air outside is contaminated and deadly. A young man, Emmett, is also in the bunker, having begged his way in soon after the “attack”. So the fortified domestic space mirrors an

¹⁵² Beck, *Risk Society*, 104.

image of mid-twentieth-century American middle-class, with the father (knows best) and two (rebellious) children. The mother is absent, as with other narratives of fortified domesticity (see Chapter 2, above); the law of the father defends this space, a law which is called deeply into question.

Early in her confinement, Michelle wonders why they haven't tried to contact the authorities. Howard points to a police scanner: "There's no one left to call. See that? There's nothing coming through." Then, holding his temple as if warding off a headache or the voices only he hears, he blurts, "You think I sound crazy. It's amazing... You people. You wear helmets when you ride your bikes, [...] you have alarm systems to protect your homes. But what do you do when those alarms go off? Crazy is building your ark after the flood has already come!" Howard homes in on the slippage from rationality to irrationality, the contest between sanity and insanity. We are forced, as viewers, to question the notion of sanity as that which corresponds to reality; reality, as we discover by the end, corresponds to Howard's psychopathology, to the violence of patriarchal domination.



Figure 26: A shot of the bunker's living room, with video collection, books, and county-style furnishings.

Howard's shelter, where the majority of the action is set, is modelled after Cold War-era basement bunkers, although it is extravagant by the standards of a one-room cinderblock hovel.

Introducing Michelle to the space, while the camera pans 360-degrees, Howard announces:

As you can see I've planned for an extended stay. The hydroponics system keeps the air fresh. Feel free to help yourself to any reading. If you want to watch movies, I have an extensive collection on DVD and VHS cassette[...] The kitchen is fully functional: it has an electric stove, refrigerator, freezer, silverware, and that dining room table is a family heirloom, which means wash your glasses.

A cross-stitched sign, "Home Sweet Home", hanging above a juke box in the living room (piping out the 1967 classic "I Think We're Alone Now" by Tommy James and the Shondells) underscores the irony of the bunker decorated as a "home" but functioning as a prison.



Figure 27: "Home Sweet Home" hangs above the juke box in the bunker's living room.

The centrality of the link between prepping and domestic space is subtly illustrated in a shot of Howard's bedside reading: a double-edition of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, a survivalist classic, and *The Sea-Wolf*, the plot of which parallels the film itself; a book entitled

Surviving Doomsday, which might be an apocalypse survival manual by Richard Duarte (2012); and a copy of *Country Home: The Comforts of Country*, which is a 1995 interior decoration book with images of country-style homes for inspiration.¹⁵³ Taken together, the three books form an odd but coherent framework for understanding Howard and the film by juxtaposing masculine independence, apocalypticism, and domesticity.



Figure 28: Howard's bedside reading.

Howard means to exploit his position of patriarchal control. Beyond the “house rules” that Howard enforces, we learn over time that he plans to use Michelle as a forbidden sexual object, fetishizing her as a replacement for his absent daughter. He is a sinister photo-negative of *Father Knows Best* from 1940s and ‘50s TV. “Hands to yourself!” he declares, invoking a

¹⁵³ Duarte, *Surviving Doomsday*; Meredith Books, *The Comforts of Country*; London, *The Call of the Wild*; London, *The Sea-Wolf*. The protagonist of *The Sea-Wolf*, Humphrey van Weyden, is on a ferryboat when it collides with another ship. He is rescued at sea by Wolf Larsen, a cruel and powerful whaleboat captain. Larsen terrorizes his crew and suppresses several mutiny attempts. He and van Weyden compete for the attention of a woman, Maud. Larsen tries to kill Van Weyden and Maud, but dies in the end. Before he dies he is incapacitated by a stroke, paralyzing half of his body.

fatherly injunction against sibling rivalry, although the viewer understands this to mean Howard wants Emmett to keep his distance from the sexual target, Michelle. In a scene at the dinner table, Howard tries to maintain the pretense of familial decorum, but explodes when Michelle begins to subtly flirt with Emmett. Michelle's subversion of the artificial sister-brother relationship reveals Howard's desire for violent transgression. The ruse of familial care unravels.

This sense of perversion, of an uncanny domestic space in which sexual taboos may be violated, is heightened by Howard's insistence that he is "not some kind of *pervert*" when he resolves to keep an eye on Michelle as she urinates; he watches her "for [his] own protection." The strength of his disavowal of perversion is subtly ironic; the viewer and Michelle are immediately suspicious of everything Howard says. What is true, what is false, what is sane, what is perverted: all these are entangled in the bunker. The underground space becomes not only an abusive, uncanny space, but it also reveals the psychopathology of aboveground domesticity; it is a mirror image, an interior dystopia that reflects an exterior apocalypse.



Figure 29: Howard appears, burned with chemicals, moaning and lurching like a zombie.

In her attempt to escape, Michelle out-maneuvers Howard by dumping a barrel of toxic chemicals, burning Howard's body and face¹⁵⁴, transforming him momentarily into a “zombie”—moaning, lurching, murderous—fully revealing the “truth” of the father as monster. Michelle escapes to the outside world, where she actually encounters an apocalyptic alien invasion.

The inside, it turns out, is as awful as the outside; but outside, Michelle has the chance to become an action hero, a woman of action. She is *super-able*, over and against the zombie-patriarch. After skillfully dispatching some aliens, Michelle drives off in search of the resistance movement. The bunker defends patriarchal domesticity, an interior dystopia whose laws are violent and in which the “dangerous prepper” is installed as the ultimate American pragmatist whose goal is to entomb and enshrine “the family” while denying the potential for action in an exterior reality that undermines those power structures.

Michelle is able to escape her domestic trap by exercising various typically masculine qualities like handiness and do-it-yourself craftiness; the viewer hopes she can exercise agency, and is rewarded when she responds to each obstacle with technical skill. The ability to protect, the ability to provide, the ability to choose—these agencies and “abilities” motivate preppers as well. In an extended rumination on the prepper lifestyle, for example, an author on “SurvivalBlog.com,” one of the most widely read survival and prepper blogs on the internet, notes the slippage from “responsibility” to “response ability”:

Response Ability. Do you have the ability, skills, resources, experience, and will to respond to a situation or set of circumstances outside of your control? Before you see the existence of a problem, become “response able” by acquiring the skills, experience, and resources necessary to initiate a solution,

¹⁵⁴ In the final scenes of *The Sea-Wolf*, Larsen suffers a stroke that paralyzes the right half of his body, paralleling Howard's extensive chemical burns.

even if it means you have to do the work, all of the work, without praise, reward, or recognition.¹⁵⁵

Thus, not only is prepping a “continual state of being,” and we might add, a state of “becoming” prepared, but it is a condition of *ability*, a way of being able. Ability functions as a kind of code of honor, then, since it means that the dedicated prepper will have made himself “response-able,” from which “responsibility” is here derived. In practical terms, it means that preppers value stockpiling but also the ability to produce food for themselves once the stockpiles have been exhausted. Food production and preservation skills — beekeeping, gardening, farming, hunting, fermenting alcohol, canning, cooking, smoking, drying, salting, purifying, decontaminating, freezing — thus become as or more important to the “active” state of preparedness as canned and pre-packaged materials.

Through these materials, published by preppers, we begin to see a relationship between preparedness and ability: the ability to respond, to improvise, to sustain oneself and one’s family, and so on. This interest in salvation through expanded ability that is expressed by preppers through their online communities illustrates how preppers aspire to “super-ability.” Imagination plays a deeper role here than simply imagining scenarios for which one must prepare. Using a generalized apocalyptic situation — total social meltdown, widespread infrastructural collapse, and so on — such as in *The Walking Dead* or *World War Z*, the prepper can imagine himself into a “super-able” role where his skills give him mastery over his environment and his safety.

Take Shelter and *10 Cloverfield Lane* express similar anxieties: the imminence of apocalyptic change, threatened patriarchal domestic space, the embattled middle-class family, the potential for becoming dis-abled by environmental or social catastrophe. They also raise

¹⁵⁵ Latimer, “Ants, Grasshoppers and Other Things That Bug You, by CEH II.”

similar questions about the nature of truth, the reality of experience, and the fundamental uncertainty of a global “risk society” that has undermined or dissolved tradition, fate, and the myth of progress. These are accurate and useful ways of understanding the culture and practices of preppers as well, despite the fact that these films rely on a stereotype of dangerous mental instability to function dramatically.

Apocalypticism

The dream of bunkered safety is sometimes the dream of the apocalypse, the final battle, the final solution. A bunker mentality tends to argue that the exceptionalism in danger of being eroded by global and local forces must be defended by force: the result is war. The right-wing paranoid, in this view, is a “member of the avant-garde who is capable of perceiving the conspiracy before it is fully obvious to an as yet unaroused public” and he is therefore a “militant leader.”¹⁵⁶

He does not see social conflict as something to be mediated and compromised, in the manner of the working politician. Since what is at stake is always a conflict between absolute good and absolute evil, the quality needed is not a willingness to compromise but the will to fight things out to a finish.¹⁵⁷

The absolute binary stokes a vision of apocalyptic finality in which war will illuminate those who are righteous and those who must be destroyed. For a number of conspiracy-minded groups, the grand battle will be against the free-thinking Americans and the so-called “New World Order,” often a mash-up of conspiracies that stem from the global Jewish threat (as publicized by

¹⁵⁶ Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” 30.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

Henry Ford in *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) and various other perceived foreign and domestic enemies which the Constitution of the United States warns them to oppose.

One such group, a loosely defined movement of “Patriots” dedicated to defending America from the “New World Order,” included an outspoken retired police officer from Phoenix, Arizona named Jack McLamb. McLamb was known for his involvement in a Patriot-themed private community (called “Almost Heaven”) situated in the mountains of Idaho, alongside former Populist Party Presidential candidate (and Vice-Presidential candidate on the David Duke bid for the Republican nomination for President in 1992) and Patriot militia leader James “Bo” Gritz.¹⁵⁸ McLamb is perhaps best known, however, for writing a document entitled “Operation Vampire Killer 2000.”¹⁵⁹ This document outlines a contingency plan for police officers to militarize against the threat of an attempt by the NWO to occupy and take over America. The “vampires” of the document are elite, moneyed “globalists” who have a “diabolical” plan to enact a socialist global government. They are vampires since “like the legendary Vampire Dracula lays claim to his victims, the Globalist slowly drains the essence of life and liberty from our Land.” The document goes on to argue that global capitalists have sucked dry the American people’s property, farms, and freedom; the Patriot police and other law

¹⁵⁸ Gritz was reportedly the model for the titular character in *Rambo*—a former Green Beret, highly decorated for combat. His slogans for his 1992 Presidential bid included “The Time is Now—Let’s Take America Back from the “Republicrats” Who Have Brought Our Nation to the Brink of Ruin”, “Help Return America to Greatness”, and “America First Coalition: Vote for Bo... Put America First”. See Abanes, *American Militias*, 131.. All these slogans are echoed in Donald Trump’s largely populist presidential campaign in 2016, and in his rhetoric in office, beginning with his inaugural address, January 20, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ SPLC, “‘Patriot’ Conspiracy Theorist Jack McLamb Dies.”

enforcement personnel should be prepared to respond with force.¹⁶⁰ The conflict is apocalyptic in its absolutist binaries, but also conceived as a global struggle.

McLamb and the Patriot's criticism of the global capitalist elite—which they assume are the global *socialist* elite in disguise—parallels (but of course makes no reference to) Karl Marx's mobilization of the vampire metaphor in his criticism of the function of labor under capitalism. "Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks. The time during which the labourer works, is the time during which the capitalist consumes the labour-power he has purchased of him."¹⁶¹ As Mark Neocleous argues, Marx may be using this metaphor not only to make his somewhat dry text more imaginative, but to enrich the gothic horror qualities of the situation. That is, "as simultaneously inside and outside, the monster disrupts the politics of identity and the security of borders" and thus the vampire as a monster is a "harbinger of category crisis."¹⁶² McLamb and Marx both conjure the gothic monster to frame a global, apocalyptic future in which contemporary categories will be in crisis.

Apocalyptic or cataclysmic battles are close to the heart of survivalist cultural production. In *The Turner Diaries*, a 1978 novel by William Luther Pierce that is often cited as a foundational and even instructional text for right-wing extremists, one that supposedly inspired the Oklahoma City bombings, white nationalists overthrow the oppressive government and ultimately exterminate Jews, blacks, homosexuals, and other groups targeted by white supremacists. *The Turner Diaries* casts the war for identity in explicitly apocalyptic terms.

¹⁶⁰ McLamb, *Operation Vampire Killer 2000 - American Police Action Plan for Stopping World Government Rule*.

¹⁶¹ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, I:342.

¹⁶² Neocleous, "The Political Economy of the Dead: Marx's Vampires," 673.

If the [white nationalist] Organization fails in its task now, everything will be lost—our history, our heritage, all the blood and sacrifices and upward striving of countless thousands of years. The Enemy we are fighting fully intends to destroy the racial basis of our existence.

No excuse for our failure will have any meaning, for there will be only a swarming horde of indifferent, mulatto zombies to hear it. There will be no White men to remember us—either to blame us for our weakness or to forgive us for our folly.¹⁶³

History is framed as a narrative of whiteness, and if whiteness does not prevail, it will be exterminated in turn. It is a “fight to the finish,” in Hofstadter’s terms. Non-white or racially impure people are “zombies”—indifferent, swarming, and monstrous. The monstrous zombie acts as a “harbinger of category crisis,” as does the vampire for McLamb and for Marx. The object is to be prepared for the impending war that the category crisis precipitates.

Chapter 3 Conclusion

This chapter is about bunkers—the materiality of underground space and the ways in which that fortified space is animated by political struggles, the exercise of power in the name of safety, the defense of social and racial boundaries, and the conjuring of gothic horrors.

Constructing militarized and bunkered space is a multi-layered project of architectural design, producing gendered and domestic spaces, and fortifying ideologies. The project of bunker building is conceived and achieved through the bunker mentality, the style of thought that perpetuates traditions and values that are being put at risk in the global risk society. In the peculiarly American form of the bunker mentality, safety is a goal that aligns with white male exceptionalism, patriarchal domesticity, and the social and political construction of Nation and

¹⁶³ Pierce, *The Turner Diaries*.

Family (which are entwined in their own ways). Safety in the bunker is an imagination of apocalyptic exteriors, and the necessity to defend against them by creating dystopian interiors.

As I have noted, the gothic horrors of the apocalypse in which preppers revel often take the form of zombie apocalypses; it is this point, the politics of the zombie horde, that the next chapter attempts to grasp.

CHAPTER 4 (Interlude): Zombies and the Politics of Literary Imagination

The world is full of what ifs.

— The Batman¹

In early 2016 I attended a meeting of the Long Island Prepper Network. The advertisement said the meeting would be devoted to home security and that there would be a demonstration and lecture by a home security expert. The gathering took place at a Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) hall in Levittown, New York. It was emceed by a man who calls himself The Batman. In an online profile he describes himself as a zombie killer, a survivalist, and a prepper. In addition, The Batman is a Marine Corps veteran, and a plumber by trade.

On the night, as assembled, we are a group of twenty-two men and one woman; all but one of us is white. This is a group accustomed to being men-only; I hear a number of admonishments to use language befitting the presence of a woman, and to stick to non-sexual jokes. The woman shrugs these off good-naturedly. She's heard worse, she quips. During the meet and greet milling-around of old friends and strangers, the conversation consists in pleasantries, brief questions about what attracted us to the session, and bitter complaints about Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. One man, Steve, a friend of The Batman's, happily explains his reasons for joining the group and for being concerned with home security. Steve co-owns a pest extermination business with his brother. Should there be another economic collapse and his business declines, using the provisions he has stockpiled he will be prepared to feed his family and live relatively comfortably for almost eight months. He explains this not with any sense of

¹ The Batman, "Home Security."

urgency; he seems to be here for the comradery more than the information on security. Steve is a welcoming host. Others are merely tolerant of my presence and are less interested in sharing.



Figure 30: Home security products—including a doorknob lock, magnetic key case, and a photo of a technique for securing sliding windows—distributed during the lecture. Photo by the author, 2016.

As we saw in Chapter 3, “prepper” denotes a person who is actively stockpiling resources, fortifying a domestic structure, and training to become self-sufficient in the event of some calamitous disaster that undermines the technological, governmental, and social structures that support everyday life in America. The people at this meeting—all but one male, all but several military veterans, all but me employed in a blue-collar trade (plumber, electrician, locksmith, clerk, exterminator, and various retirees from these professions as well)—self-identify as preppers and use the website Meetup.com to organize events and gatherings.

The session begins as The Batman calls us to order. The Batman instructs those in the group complaining about politics to remember that their network is “not ideological” but rather is focused on finding “family-oriented, trustworthy people that we can rely on” should some

catastrophic event occur on Long Island. “That,” The Batman declares, “is what prepping is about.”

Although there were distinct sections to the approximately three hour long meeting—introduction, lecture on home security by resident expert, display and admiration of knives and backpacks—the time was effectively one long group imagination session. Each task—discuss the tactics of home invaders, discuss the laws of New York State regarding firearms at home, discuss the purpose of prepping, discuss how fun it can be to bug out or go paint-balling with friends, discuss the latest zombie-themed TV show—was a new version of the practice of improvisational storytelling and scenario construction. Prepping is contingency planning as a lifestyle and community.

The world today, according to the logic of preppers, is precarious in as many ways as we can imagine, so the best way to guard against whatever is out there is to do the imaginative work, to project ourselves into the future, to tell compelling and plausible stories. Imagination and imaginative storytelling are tools, weapons, muscles to be built, skills to be honed. What if a sunspot emits a devastating EMP? What if ISIS gets ahold of an unstoppable variant of influenza? What if there’s another stock market crash? What if there’s another Hurricane Sandy or Katrina? And just for fun, what if a virus makes everyone else into zombies? What if? During the meeting, we rehearse some of these scenarios, discuss the techniques and tools required to survive them, and I see The Batman look down, shake his head, and then mutter as if to himself: “The world is full of what ifs.”

The Batman articulated a critical feature of contemporary life in America: the ubiquity and intensity of potentially unsafe futures that, it seems, must be imagined.

A Poetics of Anxiety

In his early '80s collection of poetry *A Light in the Attic*, Shel Silverstein animates the anxiety of youth in a poem entitled “Whatif.”

Last night, while I lay thinking here,
Some Whatifs crawled inside my ear
And pranced and partied all night long
And sang their same old Whatif song:

At which point, we are treated to a page-long litany of “whatifs” like “Whatif I’m dumb in school?” and “Whatif I get sick and die?” Some of the scenarios are childish and inconsequential—“Whatif the fish don’t bite?”—and some uncover deeper, more universal anxieties—“Whatif nobody likes me?” There are bodily concerns about height and hair color, there are concerns about the weather (lightning bolts, violent winds). The final couplet is an emphatic lament:

Everything seems swell, and then
The nighttime Whatifs strike again!²

The “whatif” in the poem is a tiny creature, insidious and nocturnal, that infects the speaker’s thoughts and paints the entire world as a series of potential disasters. The poem collects a wide array of disaster types under the “whatif” rubric: natural disaster, war, illness, disability or abnormal body development, social and family insecurity, and failed plans for leisure. I suspect that a young reader might identify with the speaker, and take some solace in transforming anxiety into a concrete entity that can then be managed or rejected. But the poem also does some darker work: it suggests that anything can be the target of the “Whatifs,” that the logic of disaster can apply wherever it may. Personal disasters and worldwide disasters mix and

² Silverstein, “Whatif.”

mingle in the imagination of “whatif?” It is this tension between the global and local concepts of disaster that will play a role in my argument to follow.

I argue that the literary imagination is a constitutive element of contemporary safety, security, and preparedness politics. I broaden my use of the term “architecture” here to make room for *imagined* safe spaces and the literary techniques that constitute a “building.” Specifically, I want to compare the politics of preparing for what Andrew Lakoff and Stephen Collier call “vital systems security”³ with the imaginative practices of preppers. Zombies and zombie narratives are a useful comparative bridge between the wide scale of national security and the narrow scale of personal and family security. First I will argue that contemporary forms of security are imaginative, speculative, and thus literary. Because security is enmeshed in the production and performance of scenarios, which are invented stories, it is rooted in the creation and performance of literary, cinematic, and theatrical productions. Safety and security are configured through story-telling techniques. Then I will analyze some emblematic examples of security as literary performance, including a Department of Defense war game modelled after a zombie apocalypse, a CDC public relations campaign that trades on zombies, as well as prepper home security guides and zombie survival guides. Taken together, I want to show that contemporary national and individual security rhetoric in the United States is framed by a “world of whatifs,” that the literary imagination animates and shapes safety and security politics.

³ Collier and Lakoff, “Vital Systems Security.”

Security is literary

Being prepared for a response to a crisis is different from intervening in an extant crisis. Preparation involves imagining a future that hasn't yet occurred, speculating about possibilities, and making decisions based on that imaginative work. Intervention is a reaction to a problem that is at hand, with identifiable variables and outcomes. Andrew Lakoff makes a distinction between these fundamental outlooks in the realm of global medicine. The focus on emerging infectious diseases, which has flourished in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries as a national and international security problem, relies on a strategy of preparedness. Epidemic outbreaks are increasingly caused by novel viruses, or at least viruses that suddenly and violently erupt onto a novel setting or population. Emerging infectious diseases are just that: emergencies. But Lakoff argues that this way of thinking about global disease events is “oriented toward outbreaks that *have not yet occurred*—and may never occur. For this reason, global health security develops techniques of preparedness for events of incalculable probability that could have catastrophic political, economic and health consequences.”⁴ Disease emergencies, under the view of global health security, are both unforeseeable and probable, and they are threats to the state. Opposed to global health security is what Lakoff calls “humanitarian biomedicine” that intervenes in ongoing health crises, prioritizing individual lives over the security of the state, and usually maintains a focus on lives of the poor rather than the economic health of wealthy nations.⁵

If global security is being oriented toward preparedness, how does this affect or reflect changes in the orientation of global power? In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault lays the

⁴ Lakoff, “Epidemic Intelligence,” 45.

⁵ Lakoff, “Epidemic Intelligence.”

groundwork for his later work on biopolitics and the management of populations.⁶ Specifically, in characterizing the shape and function of security, Foucault distinguishes between sovereign state security and population security as a way of historicizing a shift toward what will be known as biopolitics, or the government of life itself. For the sovereign state, security means defending territory against foreign invaders. This is a military project, and architecturally, the castle or walled town is a paradigm of this type of security. Sovereign state security *excludes*; its purpose is to keep the domestic interior intact and safe from harm. This way of approaching security favors reinforcing authoritarian power structures. It hardens borders, more forcefully divides inside and outside. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death* illustrates this shape of state security: in the face of an epidemic outbreak, the prince walls himself and his entourage off from the working classes, happy to continue the rituals and excesses of authority from behind thick battlements.⁷ The Red Death, however, exposes the difficulty of sovereign state security in a world where resources, materials, and power is fluid and invisible: the disease infiltrates the stronghold and kills everyone. The rituals of authoritarian power are vulnerable, and the monster reveals the illusion of safety in stone walls.

Population security then emerges in the nineteenth century as a way of imagining threats that are *interior*. Where militant exclusion was the basic shape of sovereign state security, public health and epidemiology are the controlling logics of population security. We encounter forms of population security when we read about an epidemic of school violence or an epidemic of obesity, and the subsequent political response that acknowledges the threats to the populace. “Big data” and demography, census taking, and other forms of “internal” surveillance are

⁶ Foucault et al., *Security, Territory, Population*.

⁷ Poe, “The Masque of the Red Death.”

techniques of population security, in which government turns its attention from the maintenance of authoritarian power in itself and toward the health and proliferation of the population.

Crucially, Foucault doesn't suggest that the sovereign state has disappeared entirely, but that the tactics of sovereign power have been naturalized and invisibly embedded in the existence of the State.⁸

Lakoff extends Foucault's historicization and analytic of government by arguing that there is a third form of security that has emerged in the past few decades, in the era of heightened awareness and interest in emerging infectious diseases, that he calls "vital systems security."⁹

According to Lakoff,

vital systems security... is oriented to a distinctive type of threat: the event whose probability cannot be calculated, but whose consequences are potentially catastrophic... Vital systems security does not develop knowledge about an enemy or about regularly occurring events, but rather uses techniques of imaginative enactment to generate knowledge about system vulnerabilities.¹⁰

By dramatizing a virtual future catastrophe, it is possible to detect vulnerabilities in the security apparatus, thus increasing preparedness by imagining systemic gaps or failures. Disaster scenarios have become tools for affectively bringing the disaster "into the present moment," of constructing the future here and now.¹¹

⁸ During his explanation of the emergence of techniques of population government, Foucault notes that "I am not saying that sovereignty ceased to play a role when the art of government becomes a political science. Rather, I would say that the problem of sovereignty was never more sharply posed than at this moment, precisely because it was no longer a question, as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of how to deduce an art of government from theories of sovereignty, but rather, given the existence and deployment of an art of government, what juridical form, what institutional form, and what legal basis could be given to the sovereignty typical of a state." Foucault et al., *Security, Territory, Population*, 106.

⁹ Lakoff, "From Population to Vital Systems," 37.

¹⁰ Ibid., 36.

¹¹ Ibid., 35.

What is this form of security except an extension of the theatricality of war, a dramatization of the porousness of boundaries and the vulnerability of infrastructure? Drama, theater, the apocalyptic genre: all these are domains of literature and imaginative story-telling. To construct a secure zone or a safe space is thus inextricably linked to literary practice. My task here is to illustrate striking examples of the deep connection between the literary imagination and safety, security, national identity, preparedness, and domestic space.

My argument is arranged according to a logic of scale: Homeland Security is the widest scale to encompass a nationalist framework (although the U.S. version of this concept widens further to envelope the entire globe), while the practice of prepping is focused on a particular house or very small social unit such as a nuclear family. Thus, the background of this discussion is the interplay between global and local. How does the local affect the global, and vice versa? How do global policies differ from or resemble local practices? The literary mode—that is, the *scenario*, practices of storytelling and drama, role-playing and performance, and in a crucial sense, *play*—is the bridge between the two.

Strategic Fiction

Story-telling has practical political effects. In “Future-War Storytelling” Doug Davis traces the advent of what he calls “strategic fiction,” which is a special subgenre of futuristic war narratives that blends abstract speculation and concrete policy-making. Davis notes that during the Cold War, future-war fiction fell in line with national defense strategy since for the first time both authors and national security officials had to rely on speculative imagination for their

various projects. This is because global nuclear war was an event that had never occurred and could never be allowed to occur. “Straddling fact and fiction,” so-called strategic fictions are

tales of catastrophic future wars whose scenarios everyday citizens and defense planners alike treat as seriously as historical fact. Strategic fictions became an intrinsic part of U.S. national security strategy during the Cold War with the formulation of a policy of nuclear defense built on an imagined catastrophic future war. ... The events described by these stories and scenarios are not real, but they could be. For national defense planners, that is reality enough.¹²

The question at stake here is: to what extent do speculative narratives influence the intellectual and pragmatic structure of national security? And the opposite: to what extent does the rhetoric of national security influence speculative fiction? Davis argues that the relationship between fiction and policy is dialogic. That is, for Davis, films like *The Sum of All Fears* and *The Peacemaker* both reflected anxiety about rogue nuclear terrorism and shaped national security postures toward nuclear terrorism.¹³ In their involvement with nuclear attacks, Davis traces a clear genealogy of Cold War narratives.

But to take the issue further, can we describe the interplay between fiction and forms of national security policy and consciousness? I put the question like this because “national security policy” is a matter of documents and archives; a policy is a written statement of the function of various boards, committees, and workers. But the psychology of national security is muddled, less clear, and not contained in formulaic documentation. It is, however, latent in these texts. So in order to understand the dialogue between fiction and national security, let us take an exemplar and trace the literary-political thread.

¹² Davis, “Future-War Storytelling: American Policy and Popular Film,” 16.

¹³ Robinson, *The Sum of All Fears*; Leder, *The Peacemaker*.

The way that preparedness is embedded into contemporary national security is through the enactment of scenarios. As Lakoff suggests, “the scenario-based exercise... is exemplary of the type of rationality that underlies the contemporary articulation of national security and public health in the United States.”¹⁴ There are a number of manifestations of scenario-based planning tools: table-top exercises, functional exercises, full-scale exercises, games, and other variations on these. The complexity of scenario-based planning tools ranges from a simple discussion (tabletop exercise, or TTX) to coordinated simulations of disaster scenarios involving thousands or even millions of participants. These tools are used to increase situational awareness and allow officials or citizens to assess their current preparedness levels.¹⁵

Some scenario-based exercises produced by Homeland Security agencies are identical to the “reality” we come to expect from dramatic cinema. The 2001 scenario “Operation Dark Winter,” produced by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civilian Biodefense Strategies in collaboration with several other institutes for preparedness strategy, depicted a plausible smallpox attack on Oklahoma quickly overwhelming U.S. preparedness. It was designed “to give national security officials a *feeling* of how an unprecedented event might unfold.”¹⁶ The strategies Dark Winter employed to portray pandemic chaos were culled from Hollywood’s own playbook. For instance, the fictional footage from Dark Winter shows a newscaster interviewing an epidemiologist, noting in horror that there are not enough vaccines to protect the entire

¹⁴ Lakoff, “The Generic Biothreat, Or, How We Became Unprepared,” 401.

¹⁵ “FEMA - Emergency Planning Exercises.”

¹⁶ For basic description and analysis of the exercise, see: Lakoff, “From Population to Vital Systems,” 50; O’Toole, Michael, and Inglesby, “Shining Light on ‘Dark Winter’”; Schoch-Spana, “Bioterrorism”; Guillemin and Schoch-Spana, “Bioterrorism.” Guillemin critiques the exercise for its exaggerations and shows how the drama of the scenario led to concrete national security policy changes during the George W. Bush administration.

American population. There were several fake newscasts of this type, along with official looking documents and a narrative script. Senior defense and civilian administration officials took part in the role playing exercise; they read scripts and watched the “news” and then imagined the decisions they would have to make in those circumstances. Response systems were then reformed or revised based on the imagined failures of current procedures and resources.

Dark Winter is part of a longer tradition of scenario-based training beginning in the Cold War as a way of both involving ordinary citizens in preparedness and of testing national disaster or attack response systems.¹⁷ Furthermore, enacting scenarios was designed to “define the public perception of nuclear war by writing the future as history” to show what would happen (ideally) after a nuclear attack.¹⁸ In defining a “doctrine of nuclear crisis mastery,” the proposition was that if the American public could be sufficiently prepared to carry out a set of routines, then “everyday life would be resumed as if nothing had happened.”¹⁹ Along with widespread marketing campaigns to encourage training in the techniques of civil defense, the federal government initiated a yearly theatrical event dubbed Operation Alert in 1954. This was a piece of theater performed on a national scale with the purpose of not only testing preparedness levels but of successfully overlaying war-time readiness with peace-time culture and behavior. Operation Alert “enacted simulations of a nuclear attack in an elaborate national sociodrama that combined elements of mobilization for war, disaster relief, the church social, summer camp, and

¹⁷ Davis, *Stages of Emergency*. Davis’s text is an intricate history of the kinds of theatrical productions, produced during the Cold War, that contributed to a contemporary reformulation of “civil defense” in American politics and culture. Some productions were very public, involving millions of citizen-participants, while others were private and covert. Preparedness and the scenario game operated at many levels of society and government.

¹⁸ Oakes, *The Imaginary War*, 78.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

the county fair.”²⁰ The drama involved a scripted series of scenarios in which the Soviets executed a coordinated attack on several dozen American cities. The local populations demonstrated their preparedness by going through the motions of, for example, evacuating hospitals, setting up shelters, and securing resources. Strategists wanted maximum media coverage of the millions of people participating in the drama and so presented a film version of Operation Alert 1956 in which thousands of clean, well-dressed and calmly purposeful white actors did their duty to manage the nuclear crisis at hand. The theatre of war was designed to reduce the future to a manageable past—made possible by preparedness techniques—and to secure the future as “an extension of contemporary middle-class American culture.”²¹ Crucially, as Tracy Davis argues in *Stages of Emergency*, “theater (and not merely spectacle) had a utility in twentieth-century governance, education, and social life, central not only to how anxiety was expressed but more importantly to how people envisioned ways to identify and resolve anxious problems. ...it is not “performance” that matters here but the preparation for it...”²²

“The scenario” is now a standardized and widely used technique of national security. The Department of Homeland Security has established a Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP) to standardize the practice of scenario-based training. These scenario training exercises “play a vital role in national preparedness by enabling whole community stakeholders to test and validate plans and capabilities, and identify both capability gaps and areas for improvement. A well-designed exercise provides a low-risk environment to test capabilities, familiarize personnel with roles and responsibilities, and foster meaningful interaction and

²⁰ Ibid., 84.

²¹ Ibid., 104.

²² Davis, *Stages of Emergency*, 4.

communication across organizations.”²³ The scenarios are a way, through the self-reflective practice of literary and theatrical enactment, to support national preparedness across the entire range of potential future disasters or crises. Security and preparedness are equated; in an earlier 2003 version of the HSEEP, we find a note explaining that “the terms ‘domestic preparedness’ and ‘homeland security’ are used interchangeably in this manual.”²⁴ Preparedness is thus a rubric for safety and security in general: “Homeland Security Preparedness is a comprehensive national program encompassing all homeland security systems...”²⁵ The best security is therefore the widest and most diverse security, which can be achieved through an “all hazards” approach to imagining and designing scenarios.

The Zombie as Idealized Disaster Scenario



Figure 31: Web “button” distributed by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as part of a preparedness campaign.²⁶

²³ “HSEEP,” April 2013, Intro-1.

²⁴ “HSEEP,” March 2003, 1 fn.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Zombie Preparedness.”

If the performance and rehearsal of literary imagination has been mobilized for the construction of national security and safety, then what are the features of this genre of disaster “literature”? More specifically, to what extent has the zombie apocalypse trope become a form of idealized disaster such that it forms a bridge between the imagination of national disaster and an assault on the scale of a family? In this section, I examine several literary documents related to zombies and security: a Department of Defense zombie training scenario, a website and graphic novella produced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and a personal zombie survival guide. The purpose of placing these texts in conversation is to understand the ways that zombies do cultural and political work to idealize home and homeland safety and security.

CONPLAN 8888 is a document produced on April 30, 2011, and its purported origin is the Headquarters of the United States Strategic Command. “CONPLAN” stands for “concept plan” or “contingency plan.” The numerical identifier differentiates it from other CONPLANS for archiving and reference purposes, specifically so it can be looked up on the “Intellipedia” or the Intelink, which is a kind of government-specific and private Wikipedia database. The name of the plan, in other words, is a label rather than a title. The title of the document is “Counter-Zombie Dominance.” This title yields complex readings. We know right away that we are dealing with zombies, and that the plan will pit itself against the zombies, setting up an inherently oppositional stance that makes perfect sense in the context of a military plan. “Counter-zombie dominance” could mean, however, that the plan is intended to counter some potential zombie domination of “us,” or alternatively it is a label that marks the plan as the instantiation of dominance over the zombies. Or both. It is probably sufficient to note the

polemical qualities of domination and opposition, and that this contingency assumes an outbreak of war with zombies.

What is a contingency plan, and what modes of thinking are fundamental to it?

Contingency implies the possibility for a future state of affairs to manifest; it may also refer to a state of affairs that is not necessary, but could have occurred otherwise. Contingency is at the heart of recent developments in critical social and political theory. Contingency—the possibility of *anything* and *everything*—is rooted in the idea of orderly, governed territories.

Governmentality, speaking in Foucauldian terms, consists in developing tactics for reacting to a generalized environment of risk. As Brian Massumi puts it,

The overall environment of life now appears as a complex, systemic threat environment, composed of subsystems that are not only complex in their own right but are complexly interconnected. They are all susceptible to self-amplifying irruptive disruption. Given the interconnections, a disruption in one subsystem may propagate into others, and even cascade across them all, reaching higher and wider levels of amplification, up to and including the planetary scale.²⁷

In the face of globalizing forces, national and global security fuse into a planetary field of risks and contingencies. The series of institutions and populations that make up the field of power relations are so interwoven, as Massumi points out, that they can be thought of as a “vital system” in the sense that Lakoff uses the term. The ultimate vital system is, of course, the planet itself. So security and risk are totalized, and one of the functions of power is to prepare tactical contingency plans. This is true of the insurance industry, whose occupation is to calculate the risk of any contingency that might affect the object it has insured, and to monetize that risk. It is

²⁷ Massumi, “National Enterprise Emergency Steps Toward an Ecology of Powers,” 159.

also true of the national security industry, with which the current text, CONPLAN 8888, is concerned.

At the beginning of CONPLAN 8888 there is a disclaimer. It notes that the “plan was not actually designed as a joke” but as a training exercise for educating military “augmentees”—including students in JPME II (Joint Professional Military Education)—in the skills required for the JOPP (Joint Operations Planning Process).²⁸ The fact that augmentees (who possess some skills or training that enables them to perform jobs in different branches of the military, as opposed to a single branch) are the target for training indicates a level of interconnectedness within the U.S. Armed Forces to begin with, and this is reinforced by the text’s use in joint training scenarios. “Joint” operations is a kind of code for “inter-disciplinary” military strategy. That is, the doctrine of joint operations encourages a sort of teamwork among the various branches of the military. The interconnectedness of military training and performance underscores the “complex, systemic threat environment” that this contingency plan addresses.²⁹

Zombies are a blank slate, a catch-all for shared anxieties, a figure in which the totality of risk is subsumed and reduced. That the Counter-Zombie Dominance plan was not conceived of as a joke is simply to say that zombies, as representative of total risk and the contingency of power relations, are the perfect basic training exercise. CONPLAN 8888 notes that there are several reasons for the efficacy of zombies as educational targets for contingency planning. First, since this is for educational purposes only, it cannot involve a “real” plan of action since there might be “political fallout... if the general public mistakenly believes that a fictional training

²⁸ “CONPLAN 8888,” sec. disclaimer.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

scenario is actually a real plan.”³⁰ Second, because the content of the plan is a zombie outbreak, students enjoyed the process and thus retained information more readily. Consequently, by distributing the document, the authors hope that it will inspire other military trainers to come up with ways of teaching recruits about “topics that can be very boring”³¹ such as how to respond to a global threat to the existence of humanity. It was also meant as a form of entertainment “for personnel deployed away from their families supporting military ops abroad.”³²

A final note about the disclaimer. The authors claim that they decided to distribute the document on Intellipedia “after reading about the benefits of crowd sourcing phenomena in the business management book ‘The Starfish and the Spider’.”³³ That text, by Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom, is an analysis of “the unstoppable power of leaderless organizations” such as Wikipedia and Skype³⁴, organizations that, I assert, resemble the contingent, rhizomatic environment which the “joint” military securitizes, and that resemble zombie hordes themselves. The starfish, the authors argue, are “decentralized” organizations that can’t be fought using antiquated notions of centralized authority. The zombie horde—each member independent, and mindlessly contributing to the power of the collective—will overwhelm the rank and file forces of traditional military formations. To fight decentralized organizations, one must decentralize in turn.³⁵ In a curious set of family resemblances, the U.S. military, zombies, and contemporary digital consumers all appear as examples of fluid, nonhierarchical assemblages.

³⁰ Ibid., 3.

³¹ Ibid. For other examples of “boring” topics of discussion that are perhaps very important, see “standards” in Chapter 5, below.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Brafman and Beckstrom, *The Starfish and the Spider*.

³⁵ Ibid., 207–8.

What is the purpose of the plan? In a section with the heading “PURPOSE” we read the following:

This plan fulfills fictional Contingency Planning Guidance (CPG) tasking for USSTRATCOM to develop a comprehensive JOPEs³⁶ Level 3 plan to undertake military operations to preserve “non-zombie” humans from the threats posed by a zombie horde. Because zombies pose a threat to all “non-zombie” human life (hereafter referred to as “humans”), USSTRATCOM will be prepared to preserve the sanctity of human life and conduct operations in support of any human population-including traditional adversaries.³⁷

That the plan is a work of fiction is defined explicitly in this passage, but the rest of the purpose statement is decidedly serious in its tone. The threat here is a zombie horde, but what is being threatened is “all ‘non-zombie’ human life”—in other words, the entire population, or, life itself. The “sanctity of human life” that must be preserved by USSTRATCOM extends *even to* “*traditional adversaries.*” Under the model of military or state power that defines and maintains strict borders between interior and exterior, this would seem nonsensical. If our traditional adversaries are killed, and through no effort of our own, so much the better! But zombies are the global threat *par excellence*. Like a plague, zombies respect no boundaries, and they negate the constructs of race, class, and privilege. Zombies represent the planetary threat, the universalized or systematized risk that constitutes “the environment” in Massumi’s essay or what Beck calls risk society. CONPLAN 8888 mirrors a planetary risk. It “has no pre-identified primary

³⁶ “JOPEs” is the Joint Operations Planning and Execution System, which is “an electronic information system that is used to monitor, plan, and execute mobilization, deployment, employment, and sustainment activities associated with joint operations” Bates, “JOPEs and Joint Force Deployments,” 30. This system collects data about all the activities and supplies that are circulating in and being generated by different branches of the U.S. military and then helps plan for different higher order actions, such as troop deployment or logistical adjustments.

³⁷ “CONPLAN 8888,” 4.

adversaries; therefore, it does not direct forward deployment of forces into any particular region.” Those forces are already “deployed around the globe.”³⁸ Furthermore, the plan is eminently flexible and “situationally dependent” in the sense that it can be unleashed “in support of national OR theater [that is, outside the U.S. borders] objectives.” The risk is total: “...given the global threat to humanity posed by zombies, once CDRUSSTRATCOM issues orders to transition to a specific phase of operations, that phase will apply to the entire globe.”³⁹ Whatever mode of counteraction the plan calls for—“shape,” “deter,” “seize initiative,” “dominate,” “stabilize,” “restore civil authority”—will apply globally, since the threat is global.

Finally, though, the imagination of countering zombie dominance relies heavily on the literary and cinematic imagination of zombies—as it must since zombies are fictional creatures. The main resources for zombie information and response tactics listed in CONPLAN 8888 come from the work of Max Brooks: *The Zombie Survival Guide*, *Recorded Attacks*, and *World War Z*.⁴⁰ The very process of scenario building and rehearsal is here woven together with the late twentieth-century literary (and cinematic) vision of zombies. Interestingly, however, since zombies have become “neutral” figures of risk, the colonialist history of zombie terror is erased in favor of a narrative that promotes species-survival and global security.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., 9.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Brooks, *Zombie Survival*; Brooks, *WWZ*; Brooks, *The Zombie Survival Guide*.

⁴¹ Kee, “‘They Are Not Men... They Are Dead Bodies’: From Cannibal to Zombie and Back Again”; Dendle, “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety.” Dendle does a focused reading of the ways that zombies have historically been mobilized to allow for American cultural anxieties—primarily white anxieties—to be represented and worked through. Kee’s reading shows how a colonialist discourse around cannibalism is integral to understanding zombie tropes.

CONPLAN 8888 represents a vision of American security that has encompassed the globe. But zombies represent risk at more local scales as well. For example, the ways the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) animates zombies for the purposes of promoting preparedness place emphasis squarely on the safety of the nation and the family. A page on the CDC website run by the Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response, under the parent page “Are We Prepared?”, is entitled “Zombie Preparedness.”⁴² Under the ghoulish green eyes of a zombie we read that zombies were at first “a tongue in cheek campaign to engage new audiences with preparedness messages” that has turned out to be “a very effective program.” The CDC thus is able to reach “a wide variety of audiences on all hazards preparedness via Zombie Preparedness.”⁴³ On its blog, the CDC has reproduced a simplistic history of zombies in popular culture,⁴⁴ as well as a “lessons learned” post that educates the reader on good and bad preparedness techniques taken from the first season of AMC’s *The Walking Dead*.⁴⁵ Like the CONPLAN 8888, zombies are a catch-all disaster that, if we prepare for them, will allow the “nation” and the “family” to stay safe no matter the actual disaster. Zombie preparedness is “all hazards” preparedness.

The CDC’s graphic novella “Preparedness 101: Zombie Preparedness” illustrates this neatly.⁴⁶ As in *Doomsday Preppers*, the establishing images are domestic: a row of houses in a light urban setting, a young couple, Julie and Todd, watching a horror film together on the couch. Julie goes to bed, and Todd stays up to watch the news. Reports begin to come in about some

⁴² “Zombie Preparedness.”

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Khan, “Preparedness 101: Zombie Apocalypse.”

⁴⁵ “Teachable Moments – Courtesy of The Walking Dead on AMC.”

⁴⁶ Silver, *Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic*.

kind of zombie virus; he dutifully checks the CDC emergency preparedness website, prints out a preparedness kit, and gathers what emergency supplies he has lying around the house. Just then he notices his neighbor's cat in distress, and when he opens the door the neighbor steps out of the shadows in all her zombie horror. Julie awakes to the commotion, and they turn their attention to the T.V. for updates on the pandemic.

Quarantine efforts have failed, and the national guard has been mobilized. The government is requesting that everyone who is not infected stay inside and lock their doors. "The CDC is working with local health departments on a vaccine. Until then... bunker down and don't go outside unless you have to," announces the news anchor. "I thought you said stuff like this only happens in the movies! What is going on Todd?!" shrieks Julie.

The plot then follows a conventional pandemic trajectory, similar to films like *World War Z* or *Contagion*: the CDC scientists isolate the virus in their lab (it's a variant of the flu), they produce a vaccine, and the government establishes community "safe zones" and fortified shelters. Just as the vaccine is being delivered to the shelter, zombies overrun the facility, at which point Todd wakes up and realizes it was all a dream. There is, however, a violent storm headed their way, and Todd's dream has encouraged him to get an emergency preparedness kit together. The zombies—and the intersection of horror films and news media—have illustrated the necessity of preparedness for all disasters; the row of houses is returned to its original, placid and safe state.

Preppers and the Zombie Imaginary

Thus, through the zombie imaginary, we have transitioned from global security to national and finally domestic safety. At each scale, preparedness is the key to survival and management of the zombie threat. Global and national security, however, presuppose collective safety. How does the zombie function in the context of survivalist prepping, which emphasizes radical self-reliance and individualism above the needs of the community? To address this question we turn to the prepper survival guide, which like *Doomsday Preppers*, is framed as a question of maintaining and securing home.

“‘Being home,’” note Chandra Mohanty and Bidy Martin, “refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; ‘not being home’ is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself.”⁴⁷ As we say in Chapter 3, the concept of the uncanny, un-home-liness, is also derived from this ambivalent quality in “home”; the literature of haunting reveals how home is both safe and unsafe. The uncanny is typically oriented to the past—the ghost that appears in a haunted house is of a long-dead ancestor or other offended spirit; Mohanty and Martin locate “not being home” in occluded histories of oppression. In Gesa Mackenthun’s astute analysis of American horror fictions in the late twentieth century, we find the argument that the uncanniness of the haunted house reveals the unassimilable history of colonial dispossession of Native American property and “real estate,” while at the same time “wrapping it up again, by translating it into a family drama

⁴⁷ Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders*, 90.

evoked by the supernatural evil of the bad place.”⁴⁸ Haunting is a return from the past to the present, a function of history, a return of the repressed.

Zombie narratives can and have functioned like “traditional” hauntings by evoking the past, but I find that contemporary zombie narratives such as *The Walking Dead* and *World War Z* are also much more forcefully oriented to the future. Rather than evoking prior trauma, zombies are a part of an apocalyptic future, one in which a hidden truth will be revealed but whose time is not now. The hidden truth, as we saw in relation to *Doomsday Preppers*, is not hidden at all, but is related to the on-going defense of a mythology of frontiers and masculine power.

Zombie narratives are very popular in prepper groups, since the typical protagonists are or strongly resemble preppers and survivalists: those who are prepared to do anything to protect themselves and their families. Prepper and zombie culture have emerged in tandem, and I would argue, as mirror images of one another, especially as re-animations of earlier forms of American-ness such as individualism, survivalism, and white exceptionalism (see Chapter 3). The currency of this link is evident on prepper websites. On *The Prepper Journal*, for instance, a popular news, advice, and community site for preppers, in a guest post by Michael Martin on “Zombies: Separating Fact from Fiction,” the editors have included a caveat to a discussion that they admit “covers a polarizing subject for some of our readers.”⁴⁹

There are two sides to zombies when it comes to how the threat posed by the undead is seen in the Prepper community. There are some who believe zombies are no more real than Big Foot and think that to worry about a zombie apocalypse, much less entertain the reality of zombies in the first place, is foolish. There are others that genuinely believe in the potential of some form of virus outbreak actually causing the type of zombie behavior we have seen in movies and TV for years. Real or not, convincing you one way or the other isn't the intent of this post. I think if nothing else,

⁴⁸ Mackenthun, “Haunted Real Estate,” 98.

⁴⁹ Martin, “Zombies.”

zombies are a metaphor for a lot of potential behavior post-apocalypse.⁵⁰

The idea that “zombies are a metaphor” is a standard response to the zombie phenomenon, even outside of prepper culture; the zombie has a unique attractiveness as an object for *interpretation*, inside and outside the academy. Part of this has to do with the self-reflexivity of the contemporary zombie tradition. For example, in George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* zombie hordes are explicitly compared to hordes of rapacious consumers in a shopping mall and to hordes of panicked minorities and people of color.⁵¹ But zombies have been closely associated with American culture since their emergence in early films such as *White Zombie*⁵² because of the fact that the zombie is of American, not European, origin, having evolved from a *mélange* of African and Caribbean religious and social traditions and then imported and translated to fit contemporary cultural critiques and anxieties.⁵³ In America, the zombie is a slave, a potentially contagious lack of will and autonomy. For preppers, the zombie figure can be explained as a manifestation of virulent and contagious outbreaks, but also as a metaphor for difference along lines of class, race, ability, and nationality.

Survival Guides

The ideological relationship between zombies and preppers can be seen in the ways that “zombie preparedness” resembles “prepper preparedness” in survival guides. The survival guide

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Romero, *Dawn of the Dead*.

⁵² Halperin, *White Zombie*.

⁵³ c.f. Davis, *Passage of Darkness*; Dendle, “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety”; Lauro and Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto.”

is a kind of self-help text, a do-it-yourself manual. It is a common genre of prepper text; there are well over a thousand such guides for sale on Amazon.com alone. The prepper guide is a visible tool of the prepper; it marks the owner in a subtle or overt way. In Chapter 3 we saw a survival guide briefly featured on Howard's bedside table in *10 Cloverfield Lane*, and we noted that prepper Jay Blevins has established his expertise by publishing a preparedness guide. National Geographic has published a preparedness survival guide as a tie-in to the *Doomsday Prepper* series.⁵⁴ A diverse array of such manuals exist, focusing on "bushcraft" or wilderness survival, military tactics and survival, home security, producing, preserving and cooking food, off-the-grid energy, and so on. The purpose of a survival guide is to educate the reader through a series of lists, thought experiments, scenario-based explication, and first-hand advice. Unlike the CONPLAN 8888 contingency plan, which is not credited to a particular author and is not meant to reflect the expertise of an individual (rather, the efficacy of an abstract military strategy), the survival guide is typically written for the uninformed reader who needs a reason to trust the content of the advice. But like the military contingency, survival guides can reveal implicit and explicit frameworks for thinking about disaster and safety. By situating Jim Cobb's *Prepper's Home Defense* next to Max Brooks' *The Zombie Survival Guide*, I want to show that the cultural practice of prepping and the literary practice of conjuring the zombie apocalyptic scenario are becoming intertwined, identically reflecting a worldview predicated on an imagination—even a paranoia—of globalized and diffuse risk and threat.

The Zombie Survival Guide: Complete Protection From the Living Dead is arguably the most comprehensive collection of contemporary zombie genre conventions. The author Max Brooks is also the author of the novel *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War*, which

⁵⁴ Sweeney, *Doomsday Preppers Complete Survival Manual*.

is encyclopedic and global in its imagined engagement with zombies;⁵⁵ reading *Zombie Survival*, one has the feeling that it is the result of the detailed research and systematic thought that went into constructing that longer narrative work. The tone of *Zombie Survival* is identical to a “real” survival guide: it assumes that the threat in question (that is, a zombie attack) is an actual possibility. The first sentence of the Introduction neatly condenses this conceit: “The dead walk among us.”⁵⁶ We are informed that “conventional warfare is useless... as is conventional thought” but that with the right education, a private citizen can survive in the face of the zombie threat. “Do not discount any section of this book as hypothetical drama. Every ounce of knowledge was accumulated by hard-won research and experience. Historical data, laboratory experiments, field research, and eyewitness accounts (including those of the author) have all served to create this work. Even the doomsday scenario is an extrapolation of true-life events.”⁵⁷ By literalizing zombies, Brooks acknowledges the joke as well as the seriousness of zombies, and encourages the reader to inhabit an alternative reality wherein the zombie illustrates “true-life,” not “hypothetical drama.” Brooks’s guide enmeshes imagination with reality.

The text is divided into six practical and education sections—“The Undead: Myths and Realities,” “Weapons and Combat Techniques,” “On the Defense,” “On the Run,” “On the Attack,” and “Living in an Undead World”—and one appendix-like section devoted to “historical” data on “Recorded Attacks.” Each chapter explores scenarios of zombie warfare from the perspective of an individual survivor; that is, a person fighting without the benefit or support of state-sponsored military resources. “The Undead: Myths and Realities” situates the

⁵⁵ Brooks, *WWZ*.

⁵⁶ Brooks, *Zombie Survival*, xiii.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv.

zombie phenomenon squarely within the epidemiological: zombie-ism is the result of a viral infection, and everything follows from this first principle. In contrast with CONPLAN 8888, which embraces the possibilities of a variety of zombie origin legends, thus underscoring the eminently diffuse, fluid and contingent forms of risk involved in globalized systems (and globalized control mechanisms), *Zombie Survival* proceeds from a rigidly “realistic” premise of viral infection.

While *Zombie Survival* ranges beyond the topic of home security, it is a prominent theme of the text and I will focus on it in order to directly compare it to Jim Cobb’s *Prepper’s Home Defense*.⁵⁸ The conflict between “zombie” and “home,” both as an abstract concept and as an architectural space, is explicit: “Zombies are migratory organisms, with no regard for territory or concept of *home*.”⁵⁹ The “regard for territory” is rendered as a norm, something that humans do and have naturally, as it were, and that zombies lack. Zombies are decentered, deterritorialized. They are an illustrative example of globalized flows, of capital or toxins or microbes, for instance, that tend to disregard political boundaries.

We have seen in earlier chapters how a threat to previously inviolable territory produces rhetoric and practices that tend to defend the masculinization of power—buildings concretize territory that has been claimed or conquered. Many zombie narratives—and spectacular epidemic narratives as well—endeavor to portray what Foucault calls a “counter-conduct” that opposes the operations of an apparatus of security. In the conclusion to *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault notes that the rise of modern governmentality that culminates in what he calls *raison d’État*, is simultaneous with movements and forces that reject this new *raison d’État* but are also

⁵⁸ Cobb, *Prepper’s Home Defense*.

⁵⁹ Brooks, *Zombie Survival*, 17.

based on the same principles.⁶⁰ One of the primary conditions that *raison d'État* initiates is that there will always be a state: there is no longer any future in which the eschatological End Days will come to pass, giving over all politics to the Kingdom of Heaven. The counter-conduct that developed, according to Foucault, in the sixteenth century and “is still with us today” is exactly the concept that time *will* end, that the state *will* end, and that it will be replaced by “the emergence of something that will be society itself. The day when civil society can free itself of the constraints and controls of the state, when the power of the state can finally be reabsorbed into this civil society...”⁶¹ Along with this revolutionary eschatology comes the right to revolution—that the bonds of obedience will be dissolved in favor of “my law, the law of my own requirements, the law of my very nature as a population, the law of my basic needs...”⁶²

Seen from this perspective, if we return to Foucault’s thesis that territory is a condition of possibility for sovereign and consequently state power that zombies are deterritorialized beings makes them allies of the counter-conduct. *Zombie Survival* expresses the zombie threat as a deterritorialized threat, and home security as a kind of reterritorialization. The reterritorialization of the post-apocalyptic zombie scenario is not a complete rebuilding of state power, though. In most zombie narratives—and other apocalyptic visions—the state simply ceases to exist.

In *Prepper’s Home Defense*, Cobb argues that the project of home security is typically “predicated on one fact: that Officer Friendly from your local police department will be able to

⁶⁰ Foucault et al., *Security, Territory, Population*. Foucault describes how the logic of sovereign power was organized around some divine logic or cultural tradition like heredity, but that in the period beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the State became its own justification and source of reason.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 356.

⁶² *Ibid.*

help you in the event things go awry.”⁶³ But in the aftermath of a truly catastrophic event—Cobb cites nuclear terrorism, solar flares or other EMP sources, the collapse of the U.S. dollar, and various other typical prepper scenarios—“the rules will change substantially... there will be no police officers coming to arrest the bad guys. There will be no SWAT teams to handle hostage situations. Dialing 911 just won’t be an option. You will have to handle things on your own.”⁶⁴ In contrast to the assumption that the existence of state power is natural and necessary, Cobb positions prepping as a counter-conduct, a practice that proceeds from the erasure of the state but that will also help reform it. As Cobb notes soberly, despite the fragility of state power, no matter how hard things have gotten in other disaster scenarios, “eventually law and order were restored.”⁶⁵ Prepping addresses this interregnum between deterritorialization and reterritorialization.

Thus, zombies and preppers both harbor a measure of revolutionary counter-conduct. They are both positioned against *raison d’État*. The difference is, zombies are figures of idealized deterritorialization, the kind of flow that will never ossify as a center and periphery through which hegemonic power can once more grow. Zombies will never elect a leader or organize a society, like the vampires in Matheson’s *I Am Legend* (see Chapter 2). Preppers plan to preserve, in miniature and prioritizing individual and family needs as priorities, the potential to reconstitute family and social structures that have been threatened with zombification. The difference, in other words, lies in the imagination of that final state of civil society when it can “free itself of the constraints and controls of the state.”⁶⁶

⁶³ Cobb, *Prepper’s Home Defense*, 16.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁶ Foucault et al., *Security, Territory, Population*, 356.

Zombie Survival is attuned to this tension around the status of territory. The fantasy of zombie apocalypse is a fantasy of reterritorializing civil society outside the constraints of state power. In its final words dedicated to survival, *Zombie Survival* suggests that

worst-case survival manuals, as well as many historical texts, will be your best guide to a complete rebuilding. What they may not instruct you to do, and what you must do, is make sure that your new, more civilized home is secure! Remember: Yours is the only government, the only police force, the only army around. Safety will be your responsibility, and although the immediate danger may have passed, it must never be taken for granted.⁶⁷

The durability of a post-apocalyptic civil society is guaranteed by defensible, safe space. By preparing for such a scenario, one reterritorializes a *new* territorial zone without state power but a still-functioning civil society. Zombie apocalypse narratives are about the desperate and thrilling attempts to survive but also to re-form civil society, to imagine the deterritorialized nation and family as an opportunity for re-territorialization.

A zombie's deterritorialization defies the logic of progress and the state: "They will travel miles and perhaps, given time, cross continents in their search for food. Their hunting pattern is random... Certain zones or structures will not be singled out as more likely to contain prey... Zombies appear to be totally unaware of their surroundings."⁶⁸ They wander, like ghoulish *flâneurs*, tracing transnational and illogical trajectories. Crucially, says *Zombie Survival*, zombies cannot be *domesticated*: "Domestication?" reads one title under a section on zombie behavioral patterns. "Behavioral modification therapy and other such attempts to train the living dead like some kind of pack animal have... met with failure. [T]he machine cannot be

⁶⁷ Brooks, *Zombie Survival*, 180–81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

rewired. It will exist as is, or it will not exist at all.”⁶⁹ Zombies are thus *categorical* and never *contingent*. They are categorical in that their very being defines a category of being: zombie-being. And they are never contingent in that a zombie’s situation will never have some influence on its being: it is a zombie, this animated material, in all situations; and then it ceases to be. This is the moment when the literary zombie approaches the philosophical zombie. The philosophical zombie is a being that appears to have free will but in fact possesses none. The philosopher will ask: what is the difference, if there is one, between “normal” humans and zombie humans? How do we point to the element of being human that constitutes free will? The literary zombie, as summarized in *Zombie Survival*, is both freely wandering and goal-oriented (find what can be eaten; eat it), but still does not possess what we call a free will. A lack of free will is in radical opposition to what I have shown is at the heart of prepping; the prepper and the zombie are thus natural enemies.

Chapter 4 (Interlude) Conclusion

This chapter on global and local preparedness as seen through the lens of the zombie is an attempt to illustrate not only how security and territory are conceived in parallel at different scales, but also to emphasize that safety and security are literary constructs as much as material ones. Telling stories, enacting scenarios, imagining disasters, and cultivating preparedness all rely on the playfully serious task of seeing the future and bringing it close to the present and of animating monsters in order to narrate an unforeseeable but potentially catastrophic crisis of categories, territories, and identities. This relates back to the concept of defensible space and

⁶⁹ Ibid., 19.

territoriality: what are the targets of these administrative or home security scenarios? In other words, how do these scenarios function to increase safety, and what kind of safety do they promote? National security scenarios construct safety for the nation, of course, but also individual human bodies, since each human who is infected then joins ranks with the “enemy.”⁷⁰ CONPLAN 8888 takes this a step further, constructing transnational safety through the species, which renders security a matter for the entire globe. The CDC, as we also saw in Chapter 3 in the case of fallout shelters, focuses on safety for families and domesticity, which are ideological foundations of “nationality.” And finally prepper and anti-zombie home security guides withdraw from the larger nation in order to construct safety exclusively in the individual family domestic structure. Prepper and anti-zombie home security functions to redraw territorial boundaries, make private property more durable, and cement neoliberal calls to individualism and negative forms of freedom.

This interlude also stresses the impact and political importance of the zombie as counter-human, the *flâneur* who traces a path that is constituted entirely by desire but also works against human attempts to fortify, domesticate, and territorialize. Recall from the introduction Michel de Certeau’s analysis of the wanderer and the walker who inscribes a counter-text on the territorial plans give to a particular place by dominant organizational and institutional structures.⁷¹ The

⁷⁰ It should also be noted that under the rubric of the CONPLAN 8888, the Laws of Armed Conflict (LOAC) do not apply to zombies. This means that there is no distinction between civilians in the zombie population and combatants; action against zombies need not be proportional to the violence they perpetrate (in other words, you can kill them even if they aren’t attacking you); actions against zombies need not be justified by military necessity; and zombies need not be protected from unnecessary suffering. “CONPLAN 8888,” 17.

⁷¹ *The Walking Dead*. This show emphasizes zombies as pedestrians: they are often referred to as “roamers” or “walkers.” The nickname for zombies can be an indication of a zombie narrative’s political target; see “stragglers” and “skels” in Whitehead, *Zone One*.; “Partially Deceased Syndrome” and “rotters” in *In the Flesh*.

zombie writes a counter-text to the architectural defenses erected to oppose it; the zombie has critical potential despite its abjection.

CHAPTER 5: Clean Rooms: Biosafety Labs, Cleanrooms, and Safe Housing for the Chemically Sensitive

The pattern that has emerged throughout this dissertation is that the construction of safety, which in one sense should be a fundamental right and is the basis for social justice, is often mobilized in the service of proliferating risk and enacting violence. The final case study I offer of the architecture of safety is focused on the intersection of “clean” and “safe” and the ways that clean space fits this overarching pattern of violence expressed through safety. It also offers a strategy for reorienting “safe” architecture away from the violent bunker mentalities and war-like fortification strategies I have been analyzing to this point. The purpose of this chapter is to work through the violence of “clean” space in order to reach a point at which it can be inverted and revalued as generative or “revolutionary” space. “Clean” space can be mobilized or configured to safeguard violent (unsafe) configurations of labor, gender, and race. But “clean” space is also part of a project of dwelling and persisting that (for the person who suffers from Multiple Chemical Sensitivity, out of unjust necessity) rejects dominant forms of life and seeks new shapes of “safety” and community.

There are three types of “clean” and “safe” space I want to juxtapose in this chapter: the biosafety lab, the industrial cleanroom, and the “safe” home of the person who suffers from MCS, or Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. The first two are not domestic spaces—they are not spaces in which people “dwell.” They are workplaces. I will begin by analyzing the ways that they construct “safety” and also how they participate in various forms of social and environmental violence. Biosafety labs, cleanrooms, and the safe space for the chemically sensitive all resemble each other in fundamental technical and architectural ways—they all

control interior environments, keep them clean, and establish some basic concept of “safety” as a target. But by comparing these spaces, I can show how safety shifts and can be reconfigured in oppressive or liberatory ways. The last space, the “safe” house, is particularly important because I understand it to be an intersection of many of the previous themes of the dissertation: the struggle for survival, the social production of space, the flows of inclusion and exclusion that mark socio-economically controlled space, and the ways that nature is managed or controlled.

I begin by analyzing the industrial cleanroom and the biosafety lab. First I will briefly summarize how each space is constructed as a “safe” space. What is being made safe in these spaces? What is configured as a threat to safety? How and under what ideological rubrics are things kept separate, shielded, or segregated? In both the cleanroom and the biosafety lab, “safe” means maintaining the integrity of one type of thing, preventing it from being polluted, contaminated, or infected by another type of thing. I will show how they are similar in their technological controls but diverge in several key ways, including their political foundations.

Biosafety Labs and the Ideology of Viral Logic in Epidemiological Thrillers

A biosafety lab (BSL) is a laboratory used to study living things, typically under the assumption that the living thing—bacterium, virus, animal, plant—might be hazardous in some fashion. A BSL might be used to study the effects of a novel infection, or to test for the presence of an infection in a person or animal. BSLs may be used to study agricultural products or pharmaceuticals, or conduct vaccine trials. They are at the heart of government institutions that respond to outbreaks as well as build and defend against biological weapons. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the primary outbreak response and preparedness organ

of the United States, publishes a *Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories* manual that defines the four standard levels of biosafety: BSL 1, the least controlled environment, to BSL 4, the most strictly controlled environment. The principles of biosafety, according to the CDC manual, are “containment and risk assessment.”¹ Containment involves “microbiological practices, safety equipment, and facility safeguards that protect laboratory workers, the environment, and the public from exposure to infectious microorganisms” being studied in the lab.² In other words, what is being made safe are people inside and outside the lab, as well as the outside environment. The threat—the virus, the microbe, the pollutant—is contained by the practices and architectures of biosafety. BSLs are explicitly designed as tools for countering the increased risks of global political and environmental change. “We are living in an era of uncertainty and change,” declares the CDC manual.³ “New infectious agents and diseases have emerged. Work with infectious agents... has expanded. Recent world events have demonstrated new threats of bioterrorism.”⁴ So biosafety in a particular lab is integrated into a global web of risk and threat.

The sense that biosafety labs are nodes in a wider web of risk makes them appealing subjects for authors and filmmakers who wish to highlight the unsafe—that is, uncertain, threatening, dangerous, and violent—qualities of globalization. The dramatic tension that arises in epidemiological thrillers and outbreak narratives inevitably plays out in a biosafety lab, and it often hinges on the particular safeguards in place to contain the dangerous microbe coupled with

¹ Prevention, Service, and Health, *Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories*, 1.

² *Ibid.*

³ Prevention, Service, and Health, *Biosafety in Microbiological and Biomedical Laboratories*.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

a valorization of scientific detection. The battle is waged between humans and microbe, and the battlefield is the BSL.⁵ The microbe is constructed as a shadowy double of the human—the logic of the virus must be countered with the logic of the scientist. By examining BSL safeguards and the logic within which they operate, we can glimpse the system of thought beneath the biosafety lab as a cultural and political space.

In outbreak narratives, as Priscilla Wald calls them, or more specifically the genre of epidemiological thrillers, this is precisely the issue: the biological or microbial evil that has taken hold and traced its infectious network has also laid bare social ailments or national vulnerabilities.⁶ When these scientist-heroes defend against the microbe in an outbreak thriller, they are defending a way of life itself, a society, or the promise of rebuilding a society that has been devastated. Epidemiological thrillers attempt to show how the logistical and algorithmic problem solving that will help to defend against the microbe contains the germ of a future-oriented ideology, the next step in the ethics of imposing the social justice mechanisms that society does not contain naturally.

Perhaps the most technical of all virus thrillers, and arguably the paradigm text of contemporary epidemiological suspense, is Michael Crichton's 1969 novel *The Andromeda Strain*, which was adapted to film in 1971 and again in 2008. This novel epitomizes both the arc of the epidemiological mystery as well as the kind of militarized, algorithmic, and rational journey that must be undertaken by the hero-scientists in order to solve the mystery and keep the

⁵ Rather than merely storing and containing, BSLs are spaces in which microbes are examined, probed, taken apart, understood in an attempt to counter their logic (or, in the case of bio-weapons, to proliferate their logic). This kind of “battle”—or contest—is allegorized in films such as *Resident Evil* and literalized in films like *Contagion*. Anderson, *Resident Evil*; Soderbergh, *Contagion*.

⁶ Wald, *Contagious*.

world safe. Like other science fictional invasion fantasies and viral thrillers set in America, the virus first appears in a small town, symbolizing the Heartland.⁷ By killing (most of) the town's population, the virus is marked as enemy combatant and foreign other.⁸ The response is militarized: a small team of scientists has already been trained and placed on call in the event of a dangerous outbreak or other biological crisis. In carefully quarantined biosafety laboratories and offices, secretly constructed underground⁹, the crack team must examine the samples of the alien "lifeform" and figure out a way to match its viral logic with the power of scientific and algorithmic rationality.

Andromeda Strain uses the tension of an elaborate biosafety lab to imbricate microbial threats with nuclear anxiety, command and control techniques, and the political force of protocols. Part of the novel's purpose is to build an explicit link between the history of crisis and the emerging crises that will, in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century future of the novel, be *biological*. The biological, according to the novel's didactic narrator, has emerged as a critical component not only for health workers, but for the military as well. Biological attacks and emergent biological phenomena—new viruses—are matters of national security. Cleanroom and biosafety technologies are thus a part of a security apparatus that safeguards both national

⁷ See for example the short stories of Philip K. Dick (e.g. "The Father-thing"), or *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which begins in a small town. Dick, *The Philip K. Dick Reader*; Siegel, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

⁸ The virus kills by solidifying the victim's organs and fluids, transforming them into a crumbling, dusty mass; dust emerges as the emblem of death, and the bodies are not figures of abjection, as are smallpox victims with their outpouring of bodily fluids. See below, "Cleanrooms".

⁹ Like the NORAD Cheyenne Mountain Complex, which came online in 1967, just two years before the novel was written.

and species integrity.¹⁰ *Andromeda Strain* is an epidemiological thriller, but it is also an encounter with an alien that threatens political and ontological boundaries.

As part of the novel's didactic framework, the narrator reports that cleanroom and biosafety technologies were extensions of Cold War space exploration, weapons research, and industrial production. Crucially for a novel about a killer virus and the American scientific and military response, Crichton situates the cleanroom as an extension of the turn to biological science and the analysis of life itself, in whatever form it might take. In other words, biosafety and clean space is biopolitical.

Without making specific references to the history of cleanroom technology, Crichton's narrator reports that:

In 1965, the whole field of sterility and contamination was one of major importance. For example, NASA was building a Lunar Receiving Laboratory [to detect organisms that had contaminated spacecraft before they were released in Earth's atmosphere]... Further, the problems of "clean rooms" of industry, where dust and bacteria were kept at a minimum, and the "sterile chambers" under study at Bethesda, were also major. Aseptic environments, "life islands," and sterile support systems seemed to have great future significance...¹¹

¹⁰ "Chemical and Biological Warfare"; Koblentz, "Pathogens as Weapons"; Beeching et al., "Biological Warfare And Bioterrorism"; Roberts, "Review of Chemical and Biological Weapons"; Wheelis, "Biological Warfare at the 1346 Siege of Caffa"; Preston, *The Demon in the Freezer*. The weaponization of biological agents tracks closely with a general understanding of communicability; during the 1346 Siege of Caffa, for example, plague-ridden bodies were said to have been catapulted into the city in order to spread the disease. The emergence of a U.S. national security apparatus surrounding chemical and biological weapons occurred during the U.S. Civil War, with the creation of a military arm dedicated to chemical and biological combat and defense. Resources and technology proliferated during the Cold War, and in particular after 1990, when it became clear to U.S. officials how advanced Soviet research had become. A comprehensive and sensational account of these processes can be found in Preston (2002).

¹¹ Crichton, *The Andromeda Strain*, 55.

The text situates sterile, pure, and uncontaminated space in the matrix of defense, biology, spaceflight, and industrial production.

The isolated lab—code-named “Project Wildfire,” but also “cross-filed” in the fictional military-governmental archives with “Project CLEAN, Project ZERO CONTAMINANTS, [and] Project CAUTERY”¹²—is constructed in 1963 using a \$22 million government appropriation (which, adjusting for inflation, would be worth approximately \$169 million in 2017). The price reflects a certain “state of the art”—this is cutting edge scientific lab space. Its purpose is to support preparations for a biological crisis, but it is also aligned with the development of the “Life Analysis Protocol,” a project that “detailed the way any living thing could be studied.”¹³ This protocol—the study of life itself, which can be understood as the biopolitics of military force—is mobilized in order to defeat the Andromeda Strain.

The scientists and medical doctors who combat the new pathogen rely on codes, algorithms, and pattern recognition to defeat the germ. Scientific intervention in *Andromeda Strain* is *informatic*, based on cracking codes: life is no longer a matter of organic individuals, but of encoded matter that can, with a certain amount of human ingenuity, be decoded and manipulated. As Carlo Caduff puts it, in relation to biological science, “it is matter itself that is increasingly understood in informational terms... Biological matter... is generally considered informed matter today.”¹⁴ Biology is reduced to DNA, which is code, and has been mapped if not fully understood. The “code” model of life has made impacts on other fields as well. For instance, the theory of consciousness based on computational models has been at the root of

¹² Ibid., 111.

¹³ Ibid., 54.

¹⁴ Caduff, “THE SEMIOTICS OF SECURITY,” 336.

intense debates in the philosophy of mind concerning the validity of analogy between brain and computer, brain and mind, and brain and psychology.¹⁵ The rise of neuroscience and pharmaceutical interventions into mood and behavior seems to support the idea that consciousness is computational-mechanical, and that life itself is finally a code that may be remixed, recoded, or disrupted, although the nature of consciousness is very much still contested.

Computers are central to the drama of *The Andromeda Strain*. In the course of the novel, we encounter “complex” maps based on statistical data, the idea of processor sharing (that multiple terminals could share the processing time of a central “mainframe”), a fascination with miniaturization and real-time analysis, the problem of optics presented by low-resolution screens, futuristic (for the 1970s) interfaces such as “light pen” pointers and voice interaction, and much more. In the Wildfire bunker complex, a computer is at the heart of the action. It is the computer that detects a breach in the contamination control seals at the climax of the story, as the virus escapes, and a computer that begins the self-destruct sequence that one of the team must dramatically terminate. The computer is a control mechanism, one among several in the text that place control at the heart of laboratory work and scientific knowledge production. Control is also effected through military and bureaucratic protocols, scientific protocols, empirical observation, algorithmic safeguards, and finally, a nuclear self-destruct mechanism meant to “cauterize” the facility—blowing it up, thus keeping the rest of the world safe—should the microbe escape its prison.

At the heart of Wildfire is “main control,” a computerized cockpit of sorts, whose “chief function was detection—the room was geared to detect and isolate microorganisms.”¹⁶ The main

¹⁵ See for example: Block, “The Mind as the Software of the Brain”; Chalmers, “Does a Rock Implement Every Finite-State Automation?”; Piccinini, “The Mind as Neural Software?”

¹⁶ Crichton, *The Andromeda Strain*, 194.

control room is the first of three steps in the application of the “Life Analysis Protocol,” which include “detection, characterization, and control. First the organism had to be found. Then it had to be studied and understood. Only then could ways be sought to control it.”¹⁷ Containment, safety, and technology are all configured, in the novel, around mastery and control.

A remarkable bulk of the novel—perhaps half—is dedicated to moving from the “outside” to the isolated core of Wildfire. Bodies are scanned, zapped, misted, irradiated, injected, scrubbed, bathed, clothed and re-clothed and re-clothed again. Moving down through the successive layers of biocontainment requires ever-more stringent “rituals” of corporal purification, including one in which the scientists must fully immerse themselves in a bath of disinfectant, emerging on the other side as if baptized or reborn.

One of the safeguards built into their secret military medical lab is a thermonuclear self-destruct mechanism. If the foreign microbe escapes from the subterranean holding cell, the nuclear device counts down and then destroys the labs, everyone, and everything inside it. The only way to abort a self-destruct countdown is to insert a special key into a particular keyhole, and the only key is given to one of the scientists on the team, the so-called “odd man.” The Odd Man Hypothesis is perhaps the most perfectly rendered example of what I call “algorithmic ethics,” or, the resolution of moral and political questions using algorithmic processes. Who will make decisions regarding the thermonuclear device, when and if to turn it off? The hypothesis is explained in wonderfully technical language, via the text of a top secret memo transcribed within the novel:

SUMMARY OF ODD MAN HYPOTHESIS: First tested as null hypothesis by Wildfire advisory committee. Grew out of tests conducted by USAF (NORAD) to determine reliability of commanders in making life/death decisions. Tests involved

¹⁷ Ibid.

decisions in ten scenario contexts, with prestructured alternatives drawn up by Walter Reed Psychiatric Division, after n-order test analysis by biostatistics unit, NIH, Bethesda.

...

RESULTS OF ODD MAN STUDY: The study concluded that married individuals performed differently from single individuals on several parameters of the test. Hudson Institute provided mean answers, i.e., theoretical “right” decisions, made by computer on basis of data given in scenario. Conformance of study groups to these right answers produced an index of effectiveness, a measure of the extent to which correct decisions were made.

...

The data indicate that married men choose the correct decision only once in three times, while single men choose correctly four out of five times. The group of single males was then broken down further, in search of highly accurate subgroups within that classification.¹⁸

Further data reveal that the subgroup of unmarried men who make the best decisions in these situations are “Professional: scientists”.¹⁹ The unmarried scientist, in a nail-biting scene, is *just* able to avert disaster by making the correct decision to disarm the self-destruct mechanism. This prediction-action sequence highlights the rationality presumably inherent in maleness, but in particular the male who also falls under the categories “scientist,” “bachelor,” and implicitly “white American.” This sort of white, male exceptionalism, coupled with the nuclear power of Cold War American neo-imperialism and the cold reason of science, appears almost too obvious to the contemporary reader. And yet the exceptionalism that it names remains embedded in political and literary responses to outbreaks.

What are the political, ethical, or ideological implications of the Odd Man Hypothesis? Aside from its conclusions that underscore heteronormativity and gender reductionism, the hypothesis is a parable for the role of science in determining normative futures: a scientific study

¹⁸ Ibid., 135–37.

¹⁹ Ibid., 137.

has produced data that show the probability that particular people with particular professions and genders will act in drastic ways to attack or defend against foreign threats. The “right” actions, or in other words, the ethical actions, are derived from computer calculations (a type of calculation that was still novel and slightly magical in the ‘60s and ‘70s, as illustrated by the novel’s breathless attention to the now-dated technology). These probabilities are confirmed by the narrative itself: the single, male, professional scientist does in fact make the “right” decision.

In the 2013 zombie apocalypse film *World War Z*, based on the 2006 novel by Max Brooks, a similar algorithmic defensive strategy is mobilized against the viral threat. As the protagonist of the epidemiological thriller—this time involving a zombie virus—jet-hops around the world in an attempt to track the zombie plague’s origin, he finds himself in Jerusalem where the Israelis have constructed a gigantic wall around the city to keep the zombies out. Gerry Lane, our hero played by Brad Pitt, asks a Mossad operative how the Israeli government had enough time to construct the wall, since the zombie plague had spread so quickly. The operative, Warmbrunn, declares that they were ready because of “the tenth man.” Israel had made a number of near-fatal strategic defense errors in the past, Warmbrunn reminds us. They assumed that the Arabs would not attack during a holy holiday (in the case of the 1973 Yom Kippur War), nor did Israelis take seriously the threat to their athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. After these and other crushing failures of intelligence decision-making, according to Warmbrunn, the Israelis decided to adopt the Tenth Man system. So, recently, having intercepted a memo from the Indian military mentioning the word “undead,” Warmbrunn explains their algorithmic approach:

WARMBRUNN: If nine of us look at the same information and come to the same conclusion, it is the duty of the tenth man to disagree. No matter how improbable it may seem, the tenth man has to start digging under the assumption that the other nine are wrong.

LANE: And you were that tenth man?

W: Precisely. Since everyone assumed that this talk of zombies was cover for something else, I began my investigation on the assumption that when they said ‘zombies’ they meant ‘zombies.’²⁰

The Israelis were therefore better prepared than any other nation to resist the hordes of undead. In an awesome display of vertical power and military preparedness, the Israeli government went about constructing a giant wall around Jerusalem in order to protect itself from the zombies once they reached Israel.²¹

The ultimate failure of the wall, which we witness in the film’s most spectacular scenes, does not diminish the clear message of the Tenth Man: in matters as critical as national defense and collective survival, algorithms are more powerful than intuition. How do we read the failure of this preparation? Is the vertical power wielded by the state of Israel against Palestine vulnerable, in this telling, to the hungry multitudes? Army helicopters, hovering above the hordes, emptying thousands of rounds of automatic machine gun ammunition into the waves of careening bodies, are brought low. The disintegration of vertical power is a stunning reversal that is meant to evoke terror, and the figure of the zombie can never be rehabilitated.

But the film is not finished constructing a reflection of white superiority in the biosafety containment of zombies. While holed up in the offices of the World Health Organization in Cardiff, Wales, Gerry formulates a theory about the zombies: that they will ignore “sick” people since sick people will be poor hosts for the zombie virus. How will they test this theory? The

²⁰ Forster, *World War Z*.

²¹ Clarke, “Possibilistic Thinking”; Samimian-Darash, “Practicing Uncertainty.” The use of the Tenth Man is an example of what Clarke calls “possibilistic thinking,” as opposed to probabilistic thinking that favors the likelihood of an event. Possibilism lends emphasis to the possibility of an event, not its probability, and thus may be a useful tool for institutions and organizations to increase their preparedness for catastrophic—though extremely unlikely—situations. Samimian-Darash analyzes the ways that scenario-based logic has been taken up as a technology of national defense in Israel since the early twenty-first century. See also above, Chapter 4 (Interlude), on scenario-based preparedness dramas.

only way, Gerry declares, is by infecting one of them with a deadly disease and then “getting in there with *her*.” Gerry points to a locked glass observation room inside of which is a hideous, snarling zombie wearing a white lab coat—one of the infected doctors who by chance has been caught in this room. That she is a woman is interesting, but that she is a black woman is a point that at least should be recorded, since the film is predominantly about white people (even scenes in South Korea feature troops of white American soldiers). White science, an emblem of colonial power, effectively opposes the racialized zombie, as has been common in the history of zombie myths appropriated from Haitian/Creole and West African traditions and re-created in the United States and other colonialist nations.²² The logic of the virus hunter, Gerry Lane, must be tested against its most fearsome representative: an anonymous black woman (played by British actress Sarah Amankwah), whose fierce breath fogs up the glass of the biosafety room as she glares viciously out at the researchers observing her.

²² Davis, *Passage of Darkness*; Dendle, “The Zombie as Barometer of Cultural Anxiety”; Hurston, *Folklore, Memoirs, and Other Writings*; John, *Hayti; Or, The Black Republic* /; Kee, “‘They Are Not Men... They Are Dead Bodies’: From Cannibal to Zombie and Back Again”; Seabrook, *The Magic Island*.



Figure 32: Sarah Amankwah as “W.H.O. Lab Zombie” in *World War Z*. The images of laboratory tables and researchers are reflected in the glass.

What these representations of biosafety express is an ideology of reason rooted in white male exceptionalism—at times, such as in *Andromeda Strain*, this is explicit and supported by “research.” At others, such as in films like *World War Z*, this is implicit in the way the outbreak narrative organizes itself around the protagonists and threatening figures. But in all biosafety situations, fictional and non-fictional, what is at stake is the safety of the *species*, and who gets to be counted as part of it. The problem with species safety is that *species* is already a political construct, a concept that defines “human” in a particular way that emphasizes, excludes, or erases various conditions and forms of life that are politically relevant.²³ Microbes are different

²³ The idea that “species” is politically problematic has been expressed in a number of important texts, including Chakrabarty’s critique of the Anthropocene from the perspective of historical analysis, as well as texts like Deleuze and Guattari’s *What is Philosophy?* in which the authors argue that species-specific behaviors do not explain the essence of species, but rather that the ways that organisms shape their environments impacts what they are as organisms. Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History”; Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* This discussion of “what is human?” is taken up energetically by a new crop of cultural theorists

enough that there is an intuitive correctness to the idea that microbes and humans are either parasitically related—we need each other—or are fundamentally incompatible—kill or be killed. But this intuition is flawed; it is fundamentally anthropocentric, and so it begs the question. We could readily imagine telling the story of the interaction between humans and microbes from the perspective of the microbe—in a certain sense, this is the premise of histories of epidemics like William McNeill’s *Plagues and Peoples* or Jared Diamond’s *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, that remove or reconceive historical agency, giving it over to “fate” or to the unintelligent Darwinism of microbial and geographical contingencies.²⁴ The Europeans ended up conquering the New World as if by accident, according to this version of history, because they brought with them novel infections that did a giant portion of the dirty work of genocide. Alfred Crosby’s *Ecological Imperialism* uses this reversal of agency in a particularly productive way, arguing that different organisms—humans, animals, pathogens and microbes, “weeds,” and so on—operate as “portmanteau biota,” engaging in coordinated efforts.²⁵ Humans are not the stars of history, nor the cause of events, nor the controlling force, despite their general ruthlessness. Or, to borrow anthropologist Theresa MacPhail’s imagery: because of the fact that human DNA—the code for “species”—contains remnants of so much ancient virus DNA, it is possible to say that “in essence... humans are really just advanced viruses with smart phones and shoes.”²⁶

debating the “posthuman.” See Wolfe, *Animal Rites*; Lauro and Embry, “A Zombie Manifesto”; Braidotti, *The Posthuman*; Grusin, *The Nonhuman Turn*.

²⁴ McNeill, *Plagues and Peoples*; Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*.

²⁵ Crosby, Worster, and Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 23, 91. This narrative tends to work against the narrative of human geological agency in the Anthropocene.

²⁶ MacPhail, *The Viral Network*, 11.

On the other hand, zombies are viral organisms—in their contemporary form, at least, they are most often configured as being “infected”²⁷—in a “human” form, thus troubling the distinction between microbe and human. But unlike the strong theory of virality, zombies are not humans, or they are only humans if we do a lot of hard philosophical work to give them that status, or if we “play” with the idea of zombies, as in films such as *Shaun of the Dead* in which zombies and humans are really versions of each other.²⁸ I maintain that the zombie body is a polluted or contaminated body, marked by differences that also become tools for political exclusion and violence, and the vilification of deviance in general. At the root of these representations of biosafety lab space is a recognition that species boundaries are permeable, and a vehement, almost subconscious desire to harden them through reason, scientific objectivity, and technologies of environmental control. The Human is thus kept safe.

Cleanrooms

Clean is neither well nor good, clean is clever cold white. Dirty is low and near, clean is above and all around. Of dirty you could at least say, but clean is nothing, clean is dirty angry and sick, clean is powerful, clean is here to stay: so be advised.

— Christian Enzensberger, *Smut: An Anatomy of Dirt*²⁹

Whereas biosafety labs are designed to keep the Human safe, the concept of a cleanroom is very different, even though the kinds of environmental control and protocols are superficially

²⁷ Zani and Meaux, “Lucio Fulci and the Decaying Definition of Zombie Narratives”; See also Whitehead, *Zone One*; Boyle, *28 Days Later...*; Brooks, *WWZ*; Brooks, *Zombie Survival*; McAlister, “Slaves, Cannibals, and Infected Hyper-Whites: The Race and Religion of Zombies.”

²⁸ Wright, *Shaun of the Dead*.

²⁹ Enzensberger, *Smut: An Anatomy of Dirt*, 127.

similar. For instance, the “space suit” of a BSL-4 looks remarkably like the “bunny suit” of the cleanroom—they are both full body garments with face shields or masks. But cleanroom safety is oriented toward the commodity being manufactured rather than the human laborers.

Cleanrooms sometimes involve conditions that are, in fact, remarkably unsafe for workers; also, cleanrooms are the manufacturing sites of a wide variety of products that tend to decrease safety on a global scale.

Safety is therefore operating at several levels in this discussion. First, safety is the measure of value—in this case, the commodity exchange value of, say, a microprocessor. By extension, safety is also the measure of corporate stability; as one cleanroom design manual puts it, “semiconductor chip manufacturing, now a \$200 billion per year industry, is carried out in the cleanest manufacturing areas on earth. As measured by the metric of aerosol particle concentration, chips are manufactured in rooms far cleaner than surgical operating rooms, because trace contamination can ruin products and thus can also ruin companies.”³⁰ Safety intervenes between people and products; people are the threat, and they are also the hosts of other invisible, microbial threats. What is not always adequately addressed by cleanroom standards and design, however, is the safety of laborers, who have suffered (and continue to suffer) chemical exposures in the course of their work. And finally, safety as a “global” phenomenon is at stake here; cleanrooms are the infrastructural requirement for producing nuclear, biological and chemical weapons—needless to say, the very existence of these poses risks on a global scale—in addition to a massive proliferation of pharmaceutical and chemical products that present risks to ecological and public health. All these registers of the concept of

³⁰ *Contamination-Free Manufacturing for Semiconductors and Other Precision Products*, iii.

“safe” are entangled, in this case, in the concept of “clean.” Both concepts, I show, are fluid and may be mobilized for various and even opposing political and economic projects.

The analytic of “clean” is complex, in the cleanroom and elsewhere, and it is worth capturing a glimpse of this complexity in terms of symbolic and cultural resonances and their implications for how we theorize cleanroom as space. “Clean” and “dirty” are not objective categories, but are produced through processes of dividing, sorting, and managing objects, people, and space. “Reflection on dirt,” writes Mary Douglas in her 1966 anthropology of dirt, *Purity and Danger*, “involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death. Wherever ideas of dirt are highly structured, their analysis discloses a play upon such profound themes.”³¹ Douglas uses the tools of comparative religion to understand the psychological and cultural root of dirt-avoidance and dirt-management. Cleaning is not at its root a matter of disease avoidance, but rather a way of drawing boundaries, establishing order. Georges Bataille, in a pair of fragments on “Dust” and “Hygiene” published in 1930, makes a largely similar point: that there is “something essentially religious in cleanliness” that produces and sustains class distinctions and disdain of those higher for those lower on the social hierarchy.³² The dust that is being excluded and filtered out of clean space is not finally instrumental—even when dust is placed in a matrix of control and production, it still carries the weight of “injurious phantoms that cleanliness and logic abhor.”³³ Dust exists at a boundary between waking and dreaming, day and night; in Bataille’s example of a domestic cleaner, dust is the stuff of “night-terrors,” “obsessions, phantoms, [and] spectres,” and is an

³¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 7.

³² Bataille, Waldberg, and White, *Encyclopaedia Acephalica*, 52.

³³ *Ibid.*, 43.

emblem of the long sleep of death.³⁴ As dour as this sounds, for Douglas and Bataille, each in their own ways, dust and dirt are generative and productive: they evoke and provoke. For Douglas, managing dirt is not always a negative or fearful gesture, but can be “an attempt to relate form to function, to make unity of experience.”³⁵

Because dirt can be thought of as “matter out of order,” as Douglas contends, we have to recall that:

Dirt then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements. This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.³⁶

Because dirt is systematic and relational, it can be understood as part of the universe of signs and symbols. In many of the cases we have explored in this dissertation so far—creating safe spaces in dense urban, in suburban, and in bunkered or underground locations—the act of constructing safety architecturally has functioned as both a material and symbolic ordering of a social system. What is “dirty” is what must be excluded and removed since it threatens the safety of social order; what is “clean” is what is pure, what is included, what matters, and what must be made safe. The identity of the self, the community, the family, or the nation—all these rest on the clean and the unclean, the acceptable and unacceptable, the self (“us”) and the other (“them”). The architecture of safety is what helps delineate and then produce value for these distinctions.

In light of its symbolic weight, dirt takes on a powerful psychological dimension, as well. Julia Kristeva identifies the revulsion to filth as a primordial experience that undergirds the

³⁴ Ibid., 42–43.

³⁵ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 3.

³⁶ Ibid., 44.

formation of the self. For Kristeva, the abject—excrement, filth, waste, corpses, breast milk, bodily fluids, etc.—opposes the self; what is “dirty” is thus on the other side of a porous and continually threatened boundary, within which is “my identity.” When that boundary breaks down, we are faced with an apocalypse, the anxiety over which is constantly being worked out in art and literature:

On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted, no matter what its sociohistorical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject.³⁷

Apocalyptic narratives are often concerned with hybrid, abject conditions, from the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch to the strange beasts of Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*. Abjection is, paradoxically, the experience of delineation between self and not-self. Dirt—or, the abject, the threat and porousness of ontological boundaries—is a signal that social and symbolic order is shaky, unstable, and always at risk, but is also the way that social order establishes itself negatively. Civilized society is orderly, *not* messy; rational, *not* irrational; planned, *not* chaotic; clean, *not* dirty.

The interplay of abject and subject is also at work in the entanglement of hybridity—so constantly working in, for example, Donna Haraway’s cyborg³⁸ and Paul (néé Beatriz) Preciado’s pharmaco-pornographic³⁹ politics—with identification. Bruno Latour, for example,

³⁷ Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de L’horreur (English)*, 207.

³⁸ Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century.”

³⁹ Preciado, “Pharmaco-Pornographic Politics: Towards a New Gender Ecology”; Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control.” Both these texts emphasize a shift in power from hardened institutional structures to softer, mediated, and networked flows.

diagnoses modernity as the interplay between practices of “translation” and practices of “purification.”⁴⁰ Translation describes practices that connect, hybridize, remix, and remodel forms, objects, and things; translation generates and traces networks. It is a connective tissue. Purification, on the other hand, is the practice of separating and discriminating between types of things, and also between different realms or zones of knowledge and discourse.⁴¹ In particular, purification “creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other.”⁴² I would add that those zones can be created using language, and they can also be created (and defended) in architectural space. We see the purification principle at work in the rise of “germ theories” of disease; Louis Pasteur posits that air, and the “dust” that populates it, is teeming with potentially threatening microbial life. Dusty air was a health threat during the early decades of germ theories, according to Nancy Tomes.⁴³ And even as those theories have been revised—as scientists understand more about how bacteria and viruses propagate, and what dust “is”—there remains (in me, at least) a lurking feeling that dust, like the abject, is unnerving. We still read articles in the news that dust is deadly, justifying its abjection.⁴⁴ Under the framework of germ and dust theories of health, then, to clean meant to

⁴⁰ Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 10–11.

⁴¹ This distinction can be seen in the overlapping meanings of “matrix”—from *mater*, mother, the origin, generative and creative space, symbolized by the spider and her web—and “pattern”—from *pater*, father, that which should be repeated, symbolized by the table, the algorithm, or the calculation. The film *The Matrix* deals with this interplay—the “matrix” is both a prison and a raw material for acting freely. Another film, based on José Saramago’s novel *The Double*, entitled *Enemy*, is also explicit about the inextricability of matrix and pattern—the spider imagery blends with the patterns of history and the repetitive dullness of the protagonist’s daily life.

⁴² Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 11.

⁴³ Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs*, 94–96.

⁴⁴ Davis, “Toxic Chemicals in Household Dust Linked to Cancer and Infertility.”

segregate zones of human and non-human control. But dust always creeps back in; I constantly shed it, collect it, and must continually banish it. “Ontological zones,” like the ontology of self in Kristeva, are unnerved and dis-integrated by dust and dirt.

The question of clean and dirty is never settled, in other words—it is constantly being negotiated, re-inscribed, re-created, and re-asserted. Clean is a practice. In 1968 Christian Enzensberger, a German professor of English literature, published a perplexing poetic and philosophical account of “clean” and “dirty” entitled *Smut: An Anatomy of Dirt*. His experimental depiction of “clean” reveals a sinister quality to it, much as we have found is the case with safety. Where clean is produced, it is “neither well nor good. Clean is clever cold white.” But as we will see in the history of clean space, it is also “dirty angry and sick.” And importantly for our purposes, “clean is powerful”; like safety, purity, and velocity, “clean” labels a focused intensity of the power to delineate and obliterate.⁴⁵

Cleanroom Space

Now that we have established that “clean” is a systematic framework constantly under threat—and thus must constantly reconstruct mechanisms of safety—and that there is a symbolic, ritual, and practical dimension to “clean,” we should enter the cleanroom and investigate its function and features. I am seeking to understand the spatial politics of the cleanroom as they relate to the production of contemporary conditions at global and local scales.

First, a definition of terms: a cleanroom is a “room within which the number concentration of airborne particles is controlled and classified, and which is designed,

⁴⁵ Enzensberger, *Smut: An Anatomy of Dirt*, 127.

constructed and operated in a manner to control the introduction, generation and retention of particles inside the room.”⁴⁶ This definition comes from documentation published by the International Organization for Standardization, or ISO, which is an international consortium that sets a wide variety of standards for commerce and government.

A cleanroom is defined by the particle count in the space. These particle counts have been defined by various national and non-governmental agencies under the rubric of standards. Standards, as Lampland and Star argue, are generally ignored by cultural and anthropological scholars (and most other people paying attention to the world, for that matter) because they are boring. Standards are boring because they seem too technical to matter to most people, and anyway, the existence of standards is so ubiquitous in the Western world that it constitutes an “environment.”⁴⁷ As Marshall McLuhan puts it, “the really total and saturating environments are invisible. The ones we notice are quite fragmentary and insignificant compared to the one’s we don’t see.”⁴⁸ Standards, in other words, like the ones that define clean and safe space in industrial settings, are increasingly the media through which material culture flow. From the materials of food packages to the shape and size of electrical outlets to the placement of bathrooms in public buildings, standards format a modern spatial and ontological environment.

A cleanroom can take many forms—it can be a temporary or mobile cleanroom, it can be a permanent structure, it can be a designated area within a larger structure, it can be above or below ground, and so on. The space within a cleanroom is—almost by necessity—controlled by

⁴⁶ “ISO 14644-1.”

⁴⁷ Lampland and Star, *Standards and Their Stories*, 8.

⁴⁸ McLuhan, “The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion,” 164.

HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate) filters or ULPA (Ultra Low Particulate) filters.⁴⁹ But by definition, a cleanroom is any space that consistently meets the qualifications of “ISO 14644: Cleanrooms” and related standards.

To provide a sense for what “clean” means in this context, let us compare the number of particles in typical “room” air with the various levels of “clean” as indicated by the ISO. A designation of ISO Level 9, or ambient room air, suggests that the air contains no more than 35,200,000 particles per cubic meter that measure 0.5 microns or larger in diameter. Each ISO Level proceeds according to an order of magnitude (a power of ten): Level 8 indicates a maximum of 3,520,000 particles per cubic meter that measure 0.5 microns or larger; Level 7 is a maximum of 352,000; and so on. At Level 6, measurement of smaller particles—those whose diameters do not exceed 0.3, 0.2, or 0.1 microns—becomes possible, given that the total number of particles is low enough that current measurement techniques can effectively determine the densities of smaller particles. The most stringent classification on the ISO scale is Level 1. At this level of clean, a cubic meter of air should not contain more than 10 particles whose diameter is greater than or equal to 0.1 microns. All other particles should be undetectable. A micron, or a millionth of a meter, is about 1% the width of a human hair. 0.1 microns is ten times smaller than that. A single bacterium would be about thirty times the width of these incredibly tiny particles.

Cleanrooms are a requirement for a variety of modern industries. Products that require a cleanroom for their successful manufacture are called “precision products.”⁵⁰ Precision products include semiconductors and microprocessors, precision electronics, optics (cameras and lenses), nuclear and other precision weapons, pharmaceuticals, chemical and biological weapons,

⁴⁹ *Contamination-Free Manufacturing for Semiconductors and Other Precision Products*, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

packaging, and biotechnologies. In addition to commodities and weapons, medical devices—such as those intended for implantation—are often manufactured in cleanrooms. If ultra-clean environments are not being used for production, they may be required for scientific research that requires precise manipulation of very small or microscopic objects and precise control of environmental variables.

The cleanroom is a “safety” technology in several ways. First, safety is always a component of cleanroom design and construction: there are teams of professionals assigned to monitor and maintain laboratory and fab safety, and safety protocols are strictly enforced. But cleanrooms are also meant to keep the products safe from human contamination—according to cleanroom design and technical literature, humans are the most dangerous contaminant. The target of analysis or the commodity being manufactured must be kept “safe.” And last, cleanrooms serve as the front lines of a battle for mastery between the human and the microscopic.

Cleanroom History

“Doing the history” of cleanrooms is more complex than it first appears, as with any object or technology embedded in the techno-scientific landscape. The approach I wish to take follows from Donna Haraway’s method of unraveling a ball of yarn, to explode the “imploded objects” that contain entire worlds.⁵¹ I am also indebted to studies like Jennifer Gabry’s “natural history of electronics” in which the material history of technology is overlain on the “unintended,

⁵¹ Haraway et al., “Cyborgs, Coyotes, and Dogs: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations; And, There Are Always More Things Going on Than You Thought! Methodologies as Thinking Technologies,” 328.

‘after-the-fact’ effects.”⁵² The cleanroom is subtle because it is hidden, but its effects are everywhere in the techno-scientific contemporary condition; also, its after-effects in the form of slow violence of chemical contamination are erased and occluded by the rhetoric of “safety.”

The cleanroom is not typically a subject of analysis,⁵³ either as an historical object or as a cultural object—this section aims to take some steps to remedy that situation. Of the limited literature available on the cleanroom as an historical object, most of it consists of introductions to cleanroom design materials.⁵⁴ The other source I have been able to locate that treats cleanrooms as historical objects is a short article by Daniel Holbrook on the history of contamination controls.⁵⁵ Holbrook’s analysis focuses on the emergence of standards, and the various pressures to miniaturize and militarize that gave rise to the modern cleanroom. Convergence, a concept that Holbrook borrows from Nathan Rosenberg, enables him to tell the story in which “different industries converge in their needs, and, over time, individually and collectively develop the means of satisfying those needs.”⁵⁶ Those industries, collected under the umbrella of “high-tech,” are dominated in the first place by military concerns, but the “needs” of industries such as

⁵² Gabrys, *Digital Rubbish*, Introduction.

⁵³ Although there are several anthropological studies of laboratories that involve cleanroom practices, they do not focus on the cleanroom as such, but rather use the cleanroom as the setting for an anthropology of scientific knowledge work, in the vein of Latour and Woolgar, *Laboratory Life*. Cyrus Mody comes closest to an analysis of “clean” as a scientific category of thought. See Toumey, “Expeditions to Na-No-Tech”; Johansson, “Plenty of Room at the Bottom”; Mody, “A Little Dirt Never Hurt Anyone: Knowledge-Making and Contamination in Materials Science.”

⁵⁴ Whyte, *Cleanroom Technology*, chap. 1; Lieberman, *Contamination Control and Cleanrooms*; Kozicki, Hoenig, and Robinson, *Cleanrooms*; Whyte, *Cleanroom Design*; Ramstorp, *Introduction to Contamination Control and Cleanroom Technology*.

⁵⁵ Holbrook, “Controlling Contamination: The Origins of Clean Room Technology.”

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

telecommunications, medicine, and even automobiles, come into play during the course of this developmental story.

Interestingly, Holbrook's narrative begins with watchmaking, a craft that had the twin requirements of miniaturization and reliability through clean manufacturing. The precise control of time required contamination control. More strenuous contamination controls stemmed, in Holbrook's telling, from the requirement to reduce infection in surgical settings, the desire to defend against chemical and biological weapons in the two great wars, and then to make global communications (of voice along transatlantic cables and of explosive power within nuclear warheads) a possibility. Modernity's great projection outward, facilitated by cleanrooms, is then epitomized by their use by NASA in its dream to slip the bonds of Earth's gravity.

Holbrook placidly notes that "as the technologies developed and standards emerged, the advantages became increasingly clear to more industrial sectors."⁵⁷ Despite this peculiar understatement, one virtue of this picture of events is that it clearly emphasizes the requirements of military power for more what we might call *clean power*, a power that is born and exercised in highly regulated, fortified, and ordered space. In the valence of military force, clean power is potential energy (ultimately released in violent kinesis) that manifests as restriction, prohibition, and purity. Clean power is the sheen of aluminum tabletop, the coldness of ceramic tile, the whisper of HEPA-filtered air that caresses the nuclear device like a newborn, whispering of its potential, what it will be when it grows up never in doubt. It is the "clever cold white" of a space designed for the production of mass destruction.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 186.

Typically, the timeline of cleanrooms begins with Willis Whitfield, a physicist working at Sandia Laboratories in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁸ Sandia National Laboratory began as a components manufacturing laboratory for the Manhattan Project in 1945. It expanded and morphed—now Sandia dabbles in a huge variety of “national security” projects, including nuclear weapons, defense systems, energy and climate security, homeland security, global security (e.g. responding to global crisis events), and so on.⁵⁹ In 1960, Whitfield came up with the idea to produce “laminar” (unidirectional) airflow, pushing particles and contaminants down through a filter, never letting them settle on surfaces and objects. This is still the standard model for the most effective cleanroom design, although there are other methods used where absolute cleanliness is not required.

Importantly, the history of the cleanroom offers an opportunity to understand how technology and culture interact to produce new ways of thinking about space and the environment. Interest in controlling air took on a number of forms prior to 1960, including in the production of healthy, harmonious living and working spaces. Air flow—and specifically, the ability to control microclimates and to “condition” air—was a central figure in how people rethought the relationship between engineers and designers and between public and private spaces in the early twentieth century. Gail Cooper, for instance, argues that the way idealized interior environments in the United States are understood—as comfortable, cool, healthy, and so on—whether at work or at home was shaped by the politics of engineering and inventing new ways to control interior climates with air conditioning.⁶⁰ Controlling humidity, moving air,

⁵⁸ In 1962, Time magazine published a short blurb on Whitfield under the titled “Mr. Clean”. “Mr. Clean.”

⁵⁹ “National Security Programs.”

⁶⁰ Cooper, *Air-Conditioning America*.

filtering air, and cooling air not only changed labor conditions but were contested in political, economic, and social arenas. At times, Cooper shows, the integration of air conditioning into everyday space belied a “vast public uneasiness with modern interior spaces and an unwillingness to cede control of working, learning, and living spaces to the engineering community.”⁶¹ As air conditioning technology continued to develop, Americans grappled with what it meant to be healthy, to be comfortable, to be safe and clean, and even to live in the world, in a city or in the countryside, in a particular location with its quirks of climate. In other words, the early to mid-twentieth century was marked by an awakening to the possibility of precise and scientifically standardized control of the environment, as well as to the separation of interiors and exteriors that this control required. This was an era in which technology introduced an “ideology of perfection.”⁶²

But furthermore, as Marsha Ackerman shows, air conditioning helped change what it meant to “be at home” in America by sustaining the home space as “a shelter against dangerous social forces” as well as “equally threatening natural perils” like pollution, germs, and heat.⁶³ The climax of this design principle—that the domestic space is a shelter—comes with fallout shelters in the 1950s and then a renewed trend toward domestic fortification in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (see previous chapters). But airflow and the intersection of engineering with spatial design also profoundly influenced the practice of architecture. Le Corbusier, one of the touchstones of the design of “modernity” in this dissertation, was particularly interested in ventilation and the control of air. In his early career, Le Corbusier saw

⁶¹ Ibid., 63.

⁶² Ibid., 109.

⁶³ Ackermann, *Cool Comfort*, 103.

air conditioning technology as a utopian solution to the control of environments.⁶⁴ Thus “technique” could be at the root of “poetic” production, as seen in his diagrams of air-conditioning apparatuses from *Precisions*:

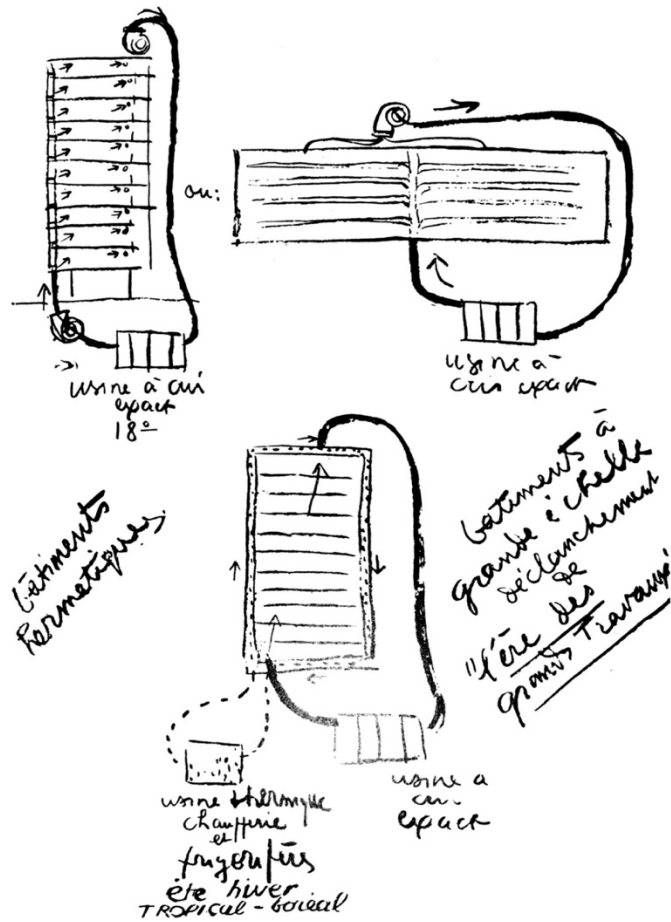


Figure 33: Le Corbusier drawings of “air exact”, or air conditioners, which he annotates: “big-scale buildings, the beginning of the ‘era of big works’”; “airtight buildings”; and “heating and cooling plant, summer, winter, tropical, northern”. From *Precisions* (1930).⁶⁵

Part of the utopian project was to contain and control an interior environment, safe from the exigencies of the outside. This vision was at the heart of, for example, the luxury building in

⁶⁴ Sobin, “From L’Air Exact to L’Aérateur: Ventilation and Its Evolution the Architectural Work of Le Corbusier,” 220–21.

⁶⁵ Le Corbusier, *Precisions*, 65.

Ballard's *High-Rise* (see Chapter 1): the modern interior would be a perfect microclimate from which we would never need to emerge. This project is reflected in the intensification of airflow and air conditioning technologies, not only in residential space in mid-century America, but in space devoted to commerce, in offices, in cars,⁶⁶ and in laboratories and industrial facilities as well.

Cleanrooms as “Modern” Space

The question I have about cleanrooms is simple, but it belies a deep complexity at issue: if we say that cleanrooms participate in or produce modernity, what sort of modernity are we talking about? In one sense, the clean space of cleanrooms is part of an infrastructural network that links governmental and corporate power structures. Some cleanrooms are owned and operated by governments, and produce the measures of state power—weaponry, vaccines for the protection of public health, space craft, and so on. Others are built by corporate players, like pharmaceutical and electronics manufacturers, who produce capital wealth and exercise

⁶⁶ One of the most interesting cases of the convergence of biosafety, cleanroom technologies, and daily life is Tesla Motors' new Model X SUV. In the online promotional materials for the car, the company declares that the design was conceived “safety first”. Safety is achieved structurally—through the architecture of the car—but also technologically. For instance, the car has “medical grade HEPA filter [that] removes pollen, bacteria, viruses and pollution from cabin air.” The company explains that the car is “Pollution Free, Inside and Out”: “A medical grade HEPA filter strips outside air of pollen, bacteria, viruses and pollution before circulating it into the cabin. There are three modes: circulate with outside air, re-circulate inside air and a bioweapon defense mode that creates positive pressure inside the cabin to protect occupants.” While the “bioweapon defense mode” sounds *cool*, reports indicate that the feature is probably aimed at Chinese buyers who can afford to shield themselves from increasingly prevalent and dangerous air pollution. <https://www.tesla.com/modelx>; See also: Oremus, “Tesla’s ‘Bioweapon Defense Mode’ Sounds Like a Gimmick. It’s Actually Ingenious.”; Zhang, “Tesla’s Most Absurd-Sounding Feature Will Actually Help It Sell a Ton of Cars in China”; Korosec, “Tesla.”

“extrastatecraft,” or, organizational power beyond state sovereignty, as Keller Easterling has argued.⁶⁷ (That cleanroom space is defined and accredited through the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) adds to its status as a participant in infrastructural networks of power; Easterling asserts that the ISO and its member states and non-governmental organizations are “a quintessential parliament of extrastatecraft.”)⁶⁸

So, on the one hand, cleanrooms fit the flows of state and capital power that shape global economic forces. If we assume that in many ways “the social” is conditioned and framed by economic activity—where public space is replaced by privatized galleria malls, for instance—could the cold economics of a cleanroom participate in constituting the social? Michel Foucault suggests a way of thinking about space that goes toward explaining how relatively isolated sites of individual and small group identity can work together to make up a society. Foucault notes that apart from these coherent and socially acceptable spaces—ideal spaces or “utopias”—there are spaces to contain what is unclean, liminal, or apart from the everyday—other spaces or “heterotopias.” Society only coheres because heterotopias stitch together the isolated sites of everyday life.⁶⁹ Heterotopias “suspect, neutralize, or invert”⁷⁰ all the other sites of meaning in a culture—prisons, for example, are a type of “heterotopia of deviation” that are forbidden to the public but which contain those individuals deemed to be deviant and dangerous.⁷¹ Similarly, argues Foucault, “crisis heterotopias” emerge around individuals deemed to be in crisis:

⁶⁷ Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶⁹ Foucault and Miskowiec, “Of Other Spaces.”

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

“adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.”⁷² The cleanroom is outside, is forbidden but at the same time accessible via a series of rites and purifications to those who have the requisite training and temperament. It also creates “a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled.”⁷³ Like the puritanical and religious colonies of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in the New World, the cleanroom requires purification, behavior management, and machinic design not only in order to function, but in order to subsequently manufacture the products of the messy, ill-constructed jumble of a modern, hyper-connected wealthy Western subject. Threaded throughout Foucault’s theory of heterotopias is the notion that religious observance and sacredness still resonates in what are typically secular contests and assertions of power; colonization and the creation of “heterotopias of compensation,” for example, meant that “Christianity marked the space and geography of the American world with its fundamental sign.”⁷⁴ We have already discussed the ways that religiosity resonates in cleanroom space, in the symbolism, systems, and ritual that frame the concept of “clean.” Thus, a cleanroom operates something like what we could call a “scientific heterotopia.”

By calling the cleanroom “heterotopia” I am trying to emphasize its simultaneous inclusion and exclusion in the constitution of modern societies. Where everyday life tends to be a “messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled” milieu of hybridization, intoxication, remixing and blurred boundaries, the otherness of the cleanroom, which produces the technologies of modernity, stands as an invisible glue, a purified connective tissue. It connects, for example, a user with a

⁷² Ibid., 24.

⁷³ Ibid., 27.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

digital network through the production of sensitive electronics; political spheres of influence through the production of nuclear and conventional weapons; home space and healing space through the production of pharmaceutical products. Cleanroom space is a modern substrata.

Cleanrooms also seem to be participating in what Marc Augé calls “supermodernity” since they are, in a sense, “non-places.” Augé argues that “if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place...”⁷⁵ The design of the cleanroom is precisely anti-relational: it is formally and environmentally detached from the outside. Cleanroom space is precisely anti-historical: it is defined through a standard that applies universally across time. And the industrial cleanroom necessitates a rejection of human identity, so far as possible, in favor of the purity and integrity of the commodity. As Foucault’s heterotopias are opposed to utopias, “the non-place is the opposite of Utopia: it exists, and it does not contain any organic society.”⁷⁶ Cleanrooms are non-places because they are anonymous, anti-organic, anti-social, and strictly standardized (and so, indistinct).

Safety is for Commodities

As cleanroom spaces continue to proliferate, we have to wonder: who or what is being made safe, and what is being put at risk? What we saw in *Andromeda Strain* and *World War Z* was that for biosafety labs, safety and risk center around the human organism and species—the microbe and the non-human is the enemy. In industrial settings, “people” are the greatest

⁷⁵ Augé, *Non-Places*, 63.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 90.

threat—the commodity is the object of value that is being made safe through the spatial control strategies of cleanrooms. People are threats because they are the *hosts* of the microbes and dust particles, and also because people are prone to “human error,” uncertainty, irrationality and ignorance.⁷⁷ The human as a cultural entity must be reduced to the human as it functions within the machinic relations of production.⁷⁸ humans and bodies must no longer be “biomes,” full of messy and intersecting variety, but need to be covered and contained in order to become integrated into the clever-cool-whiteness of the fab. In order to control the microscopic, cleanroom protocol must also tightly control the people who enter the space.

Science writer Steven Johnson, author of *How We Got to Now*, has acknowledged, in a rather reverential manner, the central importance of cleanroom technology to the production of the “now” of the twenty-first century. After undergoing the rituals of purification required to enter the Texas Instruments semiconductor manufacturing plant in Austin, Texas, Johnson remarks:

There’s something strangely inverted about the process. Normally when you find yourself dressing in such extreme protective outfits, you’re guarding yourself against some kind of hostile environment: severe cold, pathogens, the vacuum of space. But in the clean room, the suit is designed to protect the space from you. You are the pathogen, threatening the valuable resources of computer chips

⁷⁷ Jackson, *Inside Intel*, 243. Jackson notes that during the 1970s, one of the advantages that Japanese microprocessor manufacturers held over American manufacturers in Silicon Valley was a culturally-conditioned adherence to protocol, loyalty, and repetitive labor. Their loyalty, “combined with a very high boredom threshold—acquired in the country’s efficient but highly regimented and inflexible education system—meant that many Japanese operators could stay at the same place on the line for years on end, honing month by month the subtle technical skills that made the difference between silicon wafers that were spotted with flaws and those that were almost entirely clean. Another by-product of the Japanese education system was that fab operators tended to be more disciplined and almost militaristic in their habits.”

⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

waiting to be born: your hair follicles and your epidermal layers and the mucus swarming around you.⁷⁹

Johnson has hit on the “strange inversion” that actually constitutes a violent inversion—the loyalty to commodity fetishism at the expense of all other forms of value. But Johnson’s intuition accords well with the technical literature: people are one of, if not *the* worst forms of contamination. “People represent the greatest potential for contaminating microelectronics manufacturing environments and ultimately impacting yield,” asserts Jensen.⁸⁰ Lieberman suggests that “the contamination generated by personnel is a major problem to be controlled.”⁸¹ “Man is a constant source of contamination emission,” we learn from a handbook on contamination control produced by Sandia Laboratory.⁸² “Cleanroom personnel are an important source of cleanroom contamination. Almost all micro-organisms found in a cleanroom come from personnel, and personnel are a major source of particles and fibres. They can also contribute to airborne chemical contamination”, writes Whyte.⁸³ Personnel are a threat to the product.

Safety and Slow Violence in Semiconductor Manufacturing Cleanrooms

...all materials in any form may potentially be regarded as contamination.

— Kozicki, Hoenig, and Robinson, *Cleanrooms*⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Johnson, *How We Got to Now*, 158.

⁸⁰ Donovan, *Contamination-Free Manufacturing for Semiconductors and Other Precision Products*, 392.

⁸¹ Lieberman, *Contamination Control and Cleanrooms*, 255.

⁸² “Contamination Control Handbook,” X2.

⁸³ Whyte, *Cleanroom Technology*, 233.

⁸⁴ Kozicki, Hoenig, and Robinson, *Cleanrooms*, 9.

While cleanrooms are configured as safe and efficient—and while they *produce* safety and efficiency in daily life by generating the digital and pharmaceutical tools that consumers and governments demand in order to mitigate the uncertainties of the global risk society—cleanrooms are also participants in slow, chemical violence that disproportionately affects women, and increasingly non-white women.

To illustrate the distance between public perception and chemical reality, let me turn to Intel Corporation, a company that has relied heavily on the image of cleanrooms to promote itself as a cutting-edge, high-tech company. In 2009, Intel launched a marketing campaign called “Sponsors of Tomorrow.” It was the first campaign by the company that was designed for “the promotion of the Intel brand and not a processor product.”⁸⁵ Among the various print and television ads, which together announce the fact that Intel’s chips undergird an ecstatic, luminous future of miniaturization and computational power, there is a marketing image that speaks to a central problem with the imagination of safety as it pertains to cleanrooms and sterile environments.

⁸⁵ “Sponsors of Tomorrow.”



Figure 34: Magazine spread for Intel's "Sponsors of Tomorrow" campaign, 2009.⁸⁶

On the left, a young girl sits on her bed in her bedroom that is entirely pink. On the right, in predominantly blue and white, stands a woman wearing a "bunny suit" in a cleanroom fabrication facility, known as a "fab." The copy reads: "Your clean room isn't like our clean room." The small print reads: "Making microprocessors is a tricky business. The tiniest speck of dust is the equivalent to a two-ton boulder around our microscopic transistors. This is why our clean rooms are 10,000 times cleaner than a hospital operating room. It's also why our workers must wear those silly-looking outfits."

The ad plays with the idea that "clean" can have different meanings in different contexts. The context on the left is a young girl's bedroom, orderly with its display of toy horses, and clad

⁸⁶ "Sponsors of Tomorrow Cleanroom Print Ad."

entirely in pink. The girl sits demurely on her pink bedspread; this is a fully gendered space, with all the trappings of a white bourgeois, middle-class home. The image on the right is white and blue—a color that, when opposed to pink and the “girl” gender, is associated with “boy” (but since we are in the “neutral” space of a cleanroom, the male is once more made the neutral or standard gender). The woman in her bunny suit stands purposefully, but her gender is “covered”—“she” is subtly erased, and the importance of this room is that it is a space for manufacturing, building, and doing, as opposed to the bedroom configured as a delightful if passive space of display and rest.⁸⁷ This opposition also reinforces a typically patriarchal, bourgeois separation between work and leisure, the office and the home. And by invoking a comparison with hospital operating rooms, the ad copy suggests that not only is this manufacturing space orderly and precise, but it is *healthy* and *safe*.

What interests me most about this ad is how it speaks to the conditions of working in semiconductor fabs and the gender politics of industrial and environmental violence. The first irony is that in a cleanroom semiconductor fab, as I have argued, the “safety” and protocols are organized around keeping the chips safe from humans: people are the threat. At the same time, “safety” for the chips, we are told, equates to “safety” for the fab workers: the space is meticulously clean, cleaner than an operating room, ergo it is “safe.” This comparison between cleanrooms and hospitals is standard procedure for the semiconductor industry. In a 1998 article for the Wall Street Journal, Lee Neal, then head of safety, health and environmental affairs for the Semiconductor Industry Association, is quoted as boasting that the semiconductor fab “is an environment that is cleaner than an operating room at a hospital.”⁸⁸ When confronted with the

⁸⁷ While her gender is effectively shielded by her bunny suit, the name on her corporate ID card is feminine: Trudy Taylor. It is only barely legible even at high resolution.

⁸⁸ Richards, “Semiconductor Plants Aren’t Safe And Clean as Billed, Some Say.”

possibility of an EPA study into the birth-defect rates of chip workers, in the same article, the director of environmental affairs at Intel told a meeting of industry and government officials that cooperating with such a study by allowing the EPA access to personnel files would be tantamount to “giving discovery to plaintiff’s lawyers” and that he “might as well take a gun and shoot myself.”⁸⁹ The 1998 EPA study fizzled without the support of the chip manufacturers.

The “clean” of cleanrooms is defined, according to ISO standards, by the particle counts, *not* by chemical traces or toxicity. Semiconductor manufacturing involves the use of hundreds of chemical compounds that are well-known to be toxic to people, including trichloroethylene, lead, arsenic, arsine, cadmium, and methyl chloroform.⁹⁰ In the 1960s and 1970s, when semiconductors and integrated circuits were first put into mass production by start-ups like Fairchild Semi (the company that helped establish the Mountain View and San Francisco region as “Silicon Valley,” named after the silicon chips being made there), solvents like trichloroethylene were not known health hazards.⁹¹ In the late 1990s, several lawsuits involving hundreds of plaintiffs were brought against semiconductor companies by “fab” (or, fabrication) workers who suffered from various cancers, diseases, and debilitations that they claimed were due to the exposure to toxic chemicals in their workplaces.⁹² The semiconductor industry has

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.; Bolmen, *Semiconductor Safety Handbook*; Byun et al., “Assessment of Arsenic Exposure by Measurement of Urinary Speciated Inorganic Arsenic Metabolites in Workers in a Semiconductor Manufacturing Plant”; Chepesiuk, “Where the Chips Fall”; Hsieh et al., “Prolonged Menstrual Cycles in Female Workers Exposed to Ethylene Glycol Ethers in the Semiconductor Manufacturing Industry”; Mundt, “Cancer Risk in the Semiconductor Industry.”

⁹¹ Stranahan, “The Clean Room’s Dirty Secret”; Richards, “Semiconductor Plants Aren’t Safe And Clean as Billed, Some Say”; Jackson, *Inside Intel*, 144–45.

⁹² Stranahan, “The Clean Room’s Dirty Secret”; Richards, “Semiconductor Plants Aren’t Safe And Clean as Billed, Some Say”; For an exemplation of how rapid technological changes affected working conditions in fabs, see Jackson, *Inside Intel*, 143–44.

been under steady criticism for its risk exposure to workers, and concerns over environmental violence have only increased as chip manufacturing moves to countries with looser and unenforced environmental or worker protection regulations.⁹³

In fact, very little is still known about the exact hazards that industrial chemicals pose to people in manufacturing jobs, or to ecosystems that are affected by cleanup and dumping practices. Of the 67,748 industrial chemicals currently (2017) listed in the US Environmental Protection Agency's database,⁹⁴ only 83 are currently being targeted for study for their effects on human health. According the Government Accountability Office (GAO), it may take a decade for the EPA to successfully study these chemicals,⁹⁵ and in the meantime, tens of thousands of new substances will have been put into industrial use. It simply takes too long and too much effort to effectively study the effects of the thousands of new chemicals that enter the manufacturing and commodity space each year, let alone their effects in combination or at low levels over long periods of time. In other words, the "slow violence" of chemical exposure and cleanroom manufacturing processes, which are just a subset of the overall chemical exposures in worldwide manufacturing, is invisible and thus impossible to regulate.⁹⁶

Michelle Murphy "cracks open" the issue of detecting toxicological damage to the bodies of workers in her remarkable study of women workers and environmental justice, *Sick Building*

⁹³ Stranahan, "The Clean Room's Dirty Secret"; Richards, "Semiconductor Plants Aren't Safe And Clean as Billed, Some Say"; Lavin, "Samsung's Devastating Secret"; Grossman, "Toxics in the 'Clean Rooms'"; Kim, "Infirm Former Samsung Workers Slam Company Response"; McCurry, "South Korean Film Spotlights Claims of Sickness Linked to Samsung Plants."

⁹⁴ US EPA, "About the TSCA Chemical Substance Inventory."

⁹⁵ Office, "Toxic Substances."

⁹⁶ Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*; Rogers and Larsen, *Silicon Valley Fever*, 184–90. Rogers and Larsen outline some of the environmental problems that had already accumulated by the early 1980s.

Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty: Environmental Politics, Technoscience, and Women Workers. According to Murphy, the toxicological methods—air samples, blood tests—of the early twentieth century led to successfully establishing the harm done by lead, silicon, and asbestos. These same methods were put to use in adjudicating worker’s compensation disputes. The standard for “proof” thus became that the plaintiff could “demonstrate (1) an exposure to a specific chemical, (2) the symptoms affiliated with exposure to that chemical, and (3) a blood test, X-ray, or other standardized diagnostic test which objectively demonstrated a physiological effect typical of that chemical.”⁹⁷ Despite the success of these methods for certain cases of exposure, they “simultaneously lent a narrow shape to what counted as a significant chemical exposure.”⁹⁸ The very methods used to obtain “certainty” were also then used to determine, in the cases of uncertainty, what did not exist or was not a real health problem. “Low-level and mixed exposures became de facto uncertain phenomena.”⁹⁹ What was uncertain, and thus unprovable, was then politically and legally marginalized.

Without attempting to “solve” the basic uncertainty of the proliferation of chemicals in manufacturing environments and their effects on health and ecosystems, and before we take our final architectural case—safe housing for people who are chemically or electro-magnetically sensitive—let us summarize the difficulties and complexities associated with environmental justice and violence. The cleanroom is “clean” because of strict controls of the flow of air and the filtering of particulate matter, not for its toxicity (or its use in violent projects—producing weapons of mass production, for example). It is staffed increasingly by women, and it is often

⁹⁷ Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty*, 91.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 92.

low-wage and long-shift work.¹⁰⁰ While the imaginary space of cleanrooms is safe and clean, as shown in the Intel ad, the “system” that the clean/dirty distinction implies is organized around engineered and controlled microclimates in the case of air purification; and in the case of worker safety, the “system” is organized around the ability of toxicology to detect effects and the ability of workers to prove their claims in court. Thus safety of cleanrooms is organized around the hierarchical distinctions among the values of commodities, laborers, and local and global ecologies.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity

The final case that I take up follows directly from the biosafety and cleanroom spaces—safe housing for people who are chemically sensitive, or who suffer from what is known as environmental illness (EI) or multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS), among many other names and designations. As a growing number of historians, social scientists, medical professionals, therapists, and people who suffer from these conditions have outlined, MCS is a tricky topic of discussion since it does not appear to fit the standard models for illness, disability, or environmental justice.¹⁰¹ MCS is a label for a vast range of “personalized” conditions—that is, each person’s experience is in some ways unique—in which the sufferer has violent reactions to

¹⁰⁰ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics for May 2015, “Assemblers and Fabricators” accounted for 64,100 jobs out of a total of approximately 368,00 jobs in the U.S. semiconductor industry. Where the mean hourly wage for the entire industry was \$33.97, for fab workers the mean rate was \$14.99. https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/naics4_334400.htm#51-0000

¹⁰¹ History: Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty*; Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*; Social Science: Coyle, “‘Safe Space’ as Counter-Space”; Medicine: Matthews, *Defining Multiple Chemical Sensitivity*; MCS narratives and guides: Gibson, *Multiple Chemical Sensitivity*; Matthews and Sinaiko, *Chemical Sensitivity*; Todd, *The Invisible Prison*; E Magazine, “No Safe Haven”; Mollow, “No Safe Place”; Chen, *Animacies*.

trace chemicals and substances in their environment that seem not to harm other people, and are, indeed, often considered legally “safe.” The causes of this condition are unknown. MCSers (as Michelle Murphy calls people with chemical sensitivity; I will use this distinction as a practical shorthand as well) tend to have a story about some kind of low-level or high-level chemical exposure that seemed to “trigger” their sensitivity.¹⁰² But the fact is that it has thus far been impossible to “prove,” according to the standards of biomedical science, the causes and physiological mechanisms of MCS. For this reason, MCS is a hotly contested diagnosis; many medical professionals and organizations consider it a psychosomatic disorder.¹⁰³ And because the majority of people with MCS (or, at least the majority who have reported their symptoms and have fought for their diagnosis) are women, the side-lining of MCS as a legitimate disease, worthy of social welfare and legal accommodations, is seen as simultaneously a feminist and disability rights issue.¹⁰⁴

Instead of recapitulating the history of the MCS movement, or the intersections of disease discourse with medico-legal case history, I will intervene in the discussion of MCS by attending to the ways that safety seems to frame the issues. Again, like in the biosafety and cleanroom spaces, safety is operating and being mobilized in multiple ways, in and around the MCSer, his or her daily environment, and the wider, global environment. My intention is to tease apart these different vectors and spaces of safety, and to show how safety can mobilize a “counter-conduct” or form of resistance to the often violent ways that safety functions in military-industrial spaces.

¹⁰² Johnson, *Casualties of Progress*; Mollow, “No Safe Place.”

¹⁰³ Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty*, 152–54.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

In the course of Michelle Murphy's richly researched history of the formation of the MCS movement and the ways that MCSers have found to "build a body in safe space"—that is, find a way to produce "valuable ways of inhabiting the world" despite their medical, legal, and social abjection—she notes that "the search for safe space... followed a peculiar late-twentieth-century, middle-class obsession with safety. Safety as an ethos involved equating the reduction of "risk" with moral goodness."¹⁰⁵ Murphy links this "peculiar obsession" with the creation of safe consumer spaces in shopping malls, various fortification strategies for residential spaces, and the affluence that could buy safe separation from the dangers of "the street."¹⁰⁶ Safety is a part of contemporary consumer culture—"the gizmos and doodads for producing a safe space were traded in a market niche catering to the ecological movement, a market which, moreover, was not confined to alienated MCSers but also included environmentally concerned middle-class consumers."¹⁰⁷ It is at this juncture that I offer an intervention: how does the concept of "safety" shift back and forth between the safe domestic space of the middle-class and the safe domestic space of an MCSer? How might that question help us read "safety" in a more productive, positive light, as opposed to the kinds of safety that are mobilized to support national security or corporate profit?

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 166.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 165.

The Production of Safe Space for the Chemically Sensitive

Coyle argues that people—mostly women—seeking safe space in which to cope with or escape their multiple chemical sensitivities use body-centered and environment-centered techniques to construct safety.¹⁰⁸ Body-centered techniques are methods of purifying and protecting the body by regulating their intake of air, water and foods that have an effect on daily well-being. Environment-centered techniques are spatialized modes of constructing safety—specifically, “reconstruction of the home into a safe space or ‘oasis’.”¹⁰⁹ Accomplishing this, according to Coyle’s study, is a matter of air purification, spatial control, predictability, and communicativity (or, a therapeutic, emotional safe space; a place to safely express oneself)—in other words, a space that is “immutable.”¹¹⁰ In particular, the safe home begins to sound, on the surface, quite a lot like the cleanroom. Its air must be purified of contaminants; it must be strictly controlled and inert; protocols and behaviors must be observed by those who enter it; people are typically the hosts or carriers of harmful contaminants; and zero contamination is ideal but not practically possible.¹¹¹

However, the safe home is diametrically opposed to the cleanroom for a number of reasons. First, the safe home is a dwelling place. The injustice attached to this ideal of safety is that it comes at a financial cost that not everyone can underwrite; as Rhonda Zwillinger has documented, some MCSers are forced into exile or into a kind of limbo, living in their cars or in

¹⁰⁸ Coyle, “‘Safe Space’ as Counter-Space.”

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

tents at the outer edges of social space.¹¹² The second way that the safe home opposes the cleanroom is simply that the purpose of safety in a safe home is the production and protection of a person, rather than the production and protection of a commodity. It is distinct from biosafety labs, which also protect people from microscopic threats, in that the safe home does not invoke national or ideological projects to justify safety. The production of safety in a safe home rejects—or simply excludes—tactics of justification. Rather, it is the positive expression of safety that MCSers seem to seek: a way to survive but ultimately to flourish. It is a reimagining of gendered and oppressive histories of “home making.”

As Murphy points out, the history of “clean” and “safe” is a political contest involving gendered domestic labor and the consumption of chemical products. The profusion of chemical cleaning products sold to consumers for the purposes of eradicating “unhealthy” dust and germs coincided with what Nancy Tomes calls the spread of the “gospel of germs.”¹¹³ In *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life*, Tomes illustrates the impact of new bacteriological knowledge on domestic, commercial, and cultural practices in early twentieth-century America. A new sense of the importance of cleanliness (and in particular, the eradication of dust) for disease prevention gave rise to a host of domestic rituals—vacuuming carpets, installing linoleum, disinfecting bathrooms and kitchens—as well as manufacturing and service industry reforms. Even fashion—short skirts that didn’t drag in the “unhealthy” dirt—and interior design—a minimalist, easy-to-clean aesthetic that became mid-century “modern”—were affected by the “gospel of germs.” Tomes’s work also illustrates another trend, one that isn’t explicitly foregrounded in the text but instead lurks alongside the history of hygiene: the

¹¹² Zwilling and Heuser, *The Dispossessed*.

¹¹³ Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs*.

profusion of chemicals in daily life. Hydrogen dioxide, for example, also known as peroxide, was marketed as a disinfectant for baby's bathwater and for sterilizing milk.¹¹⁴ Listerine, which at the turn of the twentieth century was a boric acid solution, could be used to clean skin or as a mouth wash, and could be applied as lotion, spray or "injection."¹¹⁵ Supported by a new obsession for white surfaces, bleach became an increasingly common tool for housewives to disinfect kitchen counters, floors, bathrooms, and especially toilets, which had a (understandably) long-lived reputation as possible disease vectors.

Bodies, floors, walls, liquids, containers, clothes, linens, dishes, utensils, food: all these were subjected to increasingly stringent hygiene protocols in the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Some of those new protocols and practices were supported by social and public health education initiatives, and others were mandated by law. The story Tomes tells is clear and compelling. The "gospel of germs" spread, at times unevenly, throughout American culture and produced remarkable public health benefits for rich and poor alike. On the other hand, these advances in public health arose in conjunction with a radical increase in the production and consumption of chemicals in the home and in manufacturing processes.

The rise of the gospel of germs is gendered and domesticated. Home economics—or "domestic science"—was at the forefront of educating a generation of white, middle and upper class female homemakers on the new theory and practice of germicide. Housework was not so much keeping things in order anymore. As Tomes notes, "the broader conception of housework as microbe management... can be most clearly discerned in the teachings of 'household

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 165.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

bacteriology' that were promulgated by early home economists."¹¹⁶ Early home economists targeted women and their "natural" interest in homemaking, and "sought to make their sex more productive and contented citizens."¹¹⁷ In other words, domestic hygiene—which came to involve the "safe" use of home cleaning products—was conceived as a way of reinforcing the domestic space as a safe space, made more safe by feminine attention and labor.

The idea that chemical industries and technologies might be harming both environments and people who inhabit those environments is often traced to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962.¹¹⁸ Carson attempts to encourage her readers to think in terms of ecosystems and organisms, and how they are all bound up together. The chemicals introduced in one area may diffuse into another area; chemicals are accrued in the course of their journey through the food chain. Carson argues that no amount of chemical trace can be considered "safe." As government agencies like the Food and Drug Administration delimit certain "allowable" amounts of carcinogen or harmful chemicals in daily life, they create the illusion of safety where there is none in reality. If a tiny amount of DDT is "safe" for a product like lettuce, argues Carson, "the meal includes other foods, each with allowable residues" such that each product represents only a fraction of the "total exposure" for a person eating a salad, for instance. "This piling up of chemicals from many different sources creates a total exposure that cannot be measured. It is meaningless, therefore, to talk about the "safety" of any specific amount of residue."¹¹⁹ Chemical loads accrue all around us, and the illusion of safety cannot be sustained. Safety is revealed to be a commercially and politically expedient concept, a ruse.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 136.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 138.

¹¹⁸ Carson et al., *Silent Spring*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 182.

Todd Haynes's *[Safe]* and the ambivalent architecture of safety

Perhaps the most popular depiction of MCS, and one that focuses precisely on the interplay of the politics of safety and architecture, is Todd Haynes's film *[Safe]* starring Julianne Moore.¹²⁰ It is the story of Carol White, an affluent housewife living with her husband, Greg, an executive, and her step-son, Rory. It is 1987 in the San Fernando Valley. They drive a black Mercedes. In the opening credit sequence, the Mercedes emblem can be seen as the camera looks out the windshield of the car, winding its way through the suburb at night, headlights and sinister synthesizer music making the scene uncanny and dangerous. The large, well-manicured house sits behind an imposing, electronically operated iron gate. After pulling into the garage, Carol notes that "it's freezing in here." It is a cold, controlled interior, set apart from the warm California climate. This is "clever cold white" space: "clean" and "safe."

Carol is charged with crafting a domestic space. She speaks stilted Spanish to her housekeeper, but is never very convincing as a manager. Rather, she comes across as a whiny child: "Could I have some milk, some *leche, por favor?*" She directs delivery men to put a new sofa set *just so*. Later she realizes they have delivered a black sofa, not the teal they ordered. The black of the sofa is jarring against the rest of the decor, which is governed by whiteness, clean lines, almost otherworldly modernist touches like the softly glowing white egg lamps. These modernist interiors subtly express the violence of modernism that we explored in Chapter 1, and the slow violence of the modernist sense of "clean" that appears in Nancy Tomes's histories of domesticity, for example. For critic Roy Grundmann, Carol's "interior" duties amount to

¹²⁰ Haynes, *Safe*.

“redesigning her suburban fortress, a color-coordinated symphony of profuse pastels and postmodern interior design which regularly dwarfs her and reduces her to one more object in the scene.”¹²¹ And almost immediately we get the sense that Carol is unsettled in her domesticity. When she begins feeling sick, ostensibly from traffic fumes, from her milk, from the chemicals in her perm and the cologne on her husband’s neck, it is as if domestic space and the obligations of affluent house-wifery are contributing to her revulsion.

Milk as Object, and Rejected Maternity

Carol is continually marked in subtle ways by a rejection of feminine domesticity and of maternity. Until her illness, Carol was a self-proclaimed “milkaholic.” This is borne out in the first few scenes: Carol has a glass of milk in front of her as she hears a friend deliver the news of her brother’s death; Carol asks for a glass of milk in the following scene at home; and, after realizing that the couch they received is black instead of teal, she asks for another glass of milk from her housekeeper. This third glass begins the explicit destabilization of her character: sinister music swells up, and Carol drinks the milk slowly as an almost imperceptible dolly zoom makes the background surrounding her loom menacingly. Milk is what sets off a “biggie” reaction during her allergy test, once her illness has manifested symptoms and she requires medical examination. While attending a baby shower, Carol has an attack that severely restricts her breathing, and we can either understand it as an allergic reaction to maternity itself or to the ice-cream cake she has just eaten (her friend hands her something that “is melting all over the place,” which suggests ice cream, not cake). Either way, the repetition of Carol’s reaction to milk

¹²¹ Grundmann, “HOW CLEAN WAS MY VALLEY,” 22.

functions symbolically to render her an anti-mother, a woman who is physiologically or psychologically rejecting the maternal—she ingests but does not produce milk.¹²²

Rob White argues that the scene that I called the “third glass of milk,” in which Carol’s glass of milk coincides with a slow dolly zoom and the sinister music, is influenced by the opening of Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange*. In that film, a group of young men drink milk in a milkbar before going out on the town to find a victim for their aggression. He suggests that “antisocial hostility hovers in the intertextual background to scenes of Carol’s passivity.”¹²³ This anti-sociality is, for White, Carol’s reaction to “an imprisoning social apparatus,” but a reaction that is not “ostentatious defiance,” but rather simply *disappearance*. “Disappearing may be... a much more effective opposition,” he notes.¹²⁴ This is because in disappearing, Carol is rejecting the obligations of selfhood—having the correct desires, valuing the correct things, and in the process allowing social obligations to control and minimize oneself—that structure the patriarchal domestic life. White argues that her “disappearing act” is a failure, ultimately, since she gets swept up in the cult-like mindset of the Wrenwood institute, where she is convinced to re-inscribe herself according to the psychological rubric that she is the origin of her own illness. Hence, the final scene: “I love you, I really love you.” She has made herself appear again to herself through the mirror image and the ritual of language. White argues that this failure to disappear is the root of the film’s tragedy—she had, in effect, a chance to escape, but was simply re-contained by a new architecture of cleanliness, still cold, still white.

¹²² Thank you to Lisa Diedrich for her conversation and comments on this section.

¹²³ White, *Todd Haynes*, 44.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

What I take from White's argument, though, is that Carol is attempting to enact a subversion of or a rejection of the roles and identities that have been given to her. The film therefore asks the viewer, in light of her failure, to consider the possibility of different ways of resisting, of different ways of being or not being. Could the act of making one's home a "safe" place, as the MCSers do if they are able, play a part in a meaningful reconstitution of dwelling that does not succumb to the environmental and political violence of the contemporary world?

Disappearing, Being "Out of Time"

For Paul Virilio in his short book *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, children are *picnoleptics*.¹²⁵ Virilio defines this term as the tendency to frequently lose or "miss" time, to have chunks of time that our consciousness does not record or retain. He understands picnolepsy as a mark of childishness that is trained out of us through social conditioning. Adulthood is then a state of *being there* and being accountable, of taking responsibility for time, but also of experiencing time in a particular way. The everyday life of an adult takes shape according to an established rhythm. But "the very notion of rhythm implies a certain automatism, a symmetrical return of weak or strong terms superimposed on the experienced time of the subject. With the irregularity of the epileptic space, defined by surprise and an unpredictable variation of frequencies, it's no longer a matter of tension or attention, but of suspension pure and simple (by acceleration), disappearance and effective reappearance of the real, departure from duration."¹²⁶ The interruption of duration that epilepsy and picnolepsy involve is strikingly similar to the kind

¹²⁵ Virilio, *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

of arrhythmic temporality that governs multiple chemical sensitivity, the condition that Carol seems to suffer from.

Carol White, as her debility is intensifying to the point that she cannot function according to the calendars and expectations of her former life, experiences a haunting duo of what we might call “picnoleptic” episodes. In the first, we see her in her home, back to the camera, in a wide shot in which her body seems to be just another object in the room. She is disturbed by the space, but we are not sure by what in particular. Silence. We see her face, blank. From the wide shot of the room a sharp cut to her husband and her startled face, as if she has been sleep walking and just woken up. Time has been lost, and neither Carol nor the viewer knows how much. It is significant that it occurs in her house, an interior space that not only defines her but, of course, confines her. The decor that surrounds her is the same mid-century modern design that Nancy Tomes shows was influenced by the gospel of germs, the fear of infection that led to the proliferation of chemicals in the home. In the moment Carol is suspended out of time, the familiar dolly zoom and sinister synthesized bass drone begin, with the effect of destabilizing perspective inside the room, as though the space itself were warped and the walls were closing in. When her husband Greg wakes her up with a sudden “Carol?...” the camera reveals her several steps further into the room than before. The effect is subtly terrifying—it is a special effect often used to emphasize a haunting or a possession.¹²⁷ One asks: When did she take those steps? *How long has she been standing there?* Picnolepsy gets projected onto the viewer and we are left wondering if we’ve missed something.

The second picnoleptic episode is a seizure Carol suffers when she enters the dry cleaners. She is wearing her oxygen mask, but it is not enough to shield her from the pest control

¹²⁷ See Verbinski, *The Ring*; Myrick and Sánchez, *The Blair Witch Project*.

worker fumigating the room. She has a seizure and falls to the floor, and continues to seize as she is transferred to a hospital gurney, blood and bile being forced out of her mouth. These scenes of lost time, of being outside time, are the closest the film comes to the horror genre with eerie suspense on the one hand and sudden gore on the other.

Disability and queer studies scholar Mel Chen describes from personal experience, in the book *Animacies*, the kind of strategies of daily life that environmental sensitivity can exact from the body.¹²⁸ During an attack of chemically-induced debility, Chen is sprawled on the couch at home: a safe place. Chen's lover returns home and offers physical comfort, but Chen rejects the proximity of another person, even a lover. "What is this [form of] relating? Distance in the home becomes the condition of these humans living together in this moment, humans who are geared not toward continuity or productivity or reproductivity but to stasis, to waiting, until it passes."¹²⁹ Domestic space and the bodies within it, for Chen, are suspended in a kind of interregnum, a purgatory, or a state of exception—they persist rather than produce, so the meaning of "home" and "labor" are both troubled.

The toxic body in this suspended state, even and perhaps *especially* in a safe space, bears a family resemblance to *homo sacer*, or the legal concept that Agamben refers to as "bare life," which is a body that is suspended by the State in a state of exception, outside the law, and thus eminently *killable* (or *expendable*).¹³⁰ This is true since MCS (or, "environmental illness") is not a universally acknowledged medical condition. So not only is the intoxicated body not "geared... toward continuity or productivity or reproductivity,"¹³¹ but must contend with a medical/legal

¹²⁸ Chen, *Animacies*.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹³⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 72; Agamben, *State of Exception*, chap. 1.

¹³¹ Chen, *Animacies*, 202.

system that does not recognize its symptoms as valid. It is outside the law. There is political potential here, though. As Roland Barthes says about weariness: “weariness is not coded, is not received” and it is “unclassified, therefore unclassifiable: without premises, without place, socially untenable.”¹³² At the same time, weariness is caused by “the demand for a position. The present-day world is full of it (statements, manifestos, petitions, etc.), and it’s why it is so wearisome: hard to float, to shift places).”¹³³ And in the final analysis, we ought to understand that “the right to weariness (but what is at stake here is not a problem of health coverage) thus shares in the new: new things are born out of lassitude, from being fed up.”¹³⁴ Barthes is trying to speak about a way of being that pushes against the obligations of language and meaning, much like Carol’s disappearance would push against the obligations of toxic and gendered space.

I take Barthes’ text, in his tangential analysis of “weariness,” to mean that there is an affinity between the symbolic and the actual forms of debility that I am discussing here. He isn’t referring to chemically induced disability, but he asks precisely the same question of weariness that might be asked of MCS, fibromyalgia, or chronic fatigue syndrome: “What is the place of a lesion of the (total) body in the (socially) recognized table of illnesses? Is weariness an illness or not? Is it a nosological reality?”¹³⁵ That is, if weariness is an illness, then it can be cured; if it is not an illness—if it falls outside the binary of cured and ill—then it is made not to matter. “Mattering” means precisely that a way of being contributes to the social and political order. Similarly, as observers and sufferers alike have maintained, part of the violence of rejecting MCS and related conditions is not only the physical but the emotional and mental suffering that

¹³² Barthes, *The Neutral*, 17.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

attaches to being abjected. But finally, Barthes understands that the stakes do not rest necessarily on “a problem of health coverage,” although this is a central issue for disability rights activists. Instead, Barthes wonders if “something new” might not arise from this “right to weariness” as a socially recognized matrix.¹³⁶ Mel Chen on the couch in a living room and Carol White on the cot in her safe room are examples of actual and symbolic manifestations of the possibility (and also the failure) of some new thing being born from the liminal state, the state of exception, the suspension of time and ability... from the “safe” space. Similarly, what Murphy describes as the ways that MCSers “create a body in a safe space” can be understood as political resistance in its own right. This is the moment at which creating “safe” space as an MCSer and being “obsessed with safety” as a middle-class American diverge. For the typical consumer, “safety” is just another way to mark and delineate familiarity from otherness, or to purchase the mitigation of a perceived risk. For the MCSer, “safety” is a space in which to create a way of being that resists the mainstream indifference to chemical toxicities, environmental degradation, and oppressive architectures.

Safe Domesticity as Intolerable Confinement

Although Haynes has not made any remarks about the link, *[Safe]* is profoundly influenced by Charlotte Perkin Gilman’s 1892 short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Grossman calls the film a “quiet adaptation”¹³⁷ and a “late twentieth-century reprise”¹³⁸ of the story, and Pick

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Grossman, *Literature, Film, and Their Hideous Progeny*, 106.

¹³⁸ Grossman, “The Trouble with Carol.”

contends that the story is a “feminist anchorage” for the film.¹³⁹ Both works of fiction undertake a critique of domestic space not as safe space but as the architecture of the pathologization of the female. Gilman’s tale is narrated by a woman through her journal. She and her husband John, a physician, have rented a house for the summer so that she can rest after he diagnoses her with a “temporary nervous depression,” this following the birth of their child. The child is absent. The room they inhabit is upstairs, and she thinks it was once a nursery. The wallpaper is yellow, but it contains a strange and illogical pattern that begins to obsess the narrator. She complains of the smell of the room and the house, she wanders at night among the flowers, and her husband insists that she rest, and essentially remain passive in this room. The narrator gradually notices and then begins to identify with a woman she can see scuttling around in the patterned wallpaper. Sometimes the woman wanders around outside, sneaking through the shadows. At last, at the end, the narrator rips the wallpaper down and then, scuttling around the room, announces that “I’ve got out at last” and that “I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!”¹⁴⁰ The truth is revealed: the narrator, the woman writer, incarcerated by the medical and maternal room, escapes into a type of insanity. Her escape takes the shape of open rebellion.

[Safe] is also ostensibly about a woman who feels the need to break free from an architecture of maternity and femininity that is oppressive, but clearly presents a more complex situation than the earlier short story. For example, Carol, too, wanders at night among her flowers and trees, floating in and out of moonlight and shadow. The camera locks onto a bush blooming with yellow roses near the beginning of the film, and the roses seem to mark a certain wifely duty to garden. Later, during some of her most troubled night wandering, the camera finds

¹³⁹ Pick, “Todd Haynes’ Melodramas of Abstraction,” 149.

¹⁴⁰ Golden, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s The Yellow Wall-Paper*, 144.

this same bush, but at night. The yellow roses are a subtle warning, a hint. The second reference to the Gilman text comes during Carol's stay at Wrenwood, when she is asked to describe a room from her childhood. "It had yellow wallpaper..." she murmurs.

During the day, in her California life, Carol exists in a realm of the interior. Interior space, and particularly the interiors of homes, which provides the sense of horror in Gilman's story, also drives the anxiety of *[Safe]*. Carol is managing a housekeeper who cleans the interior of their house with chemicals and sprays; she has apparently hired some workmen to paint the kitchen cabinets; Carol instructs some furniture deliverymen to place a couch in one of several sitting rooms, and takes some time and effort to clear up the mistaken delivery. The other housewives that she interacts with attach great importance to interior space. After relaying the sad news of her brother's untimely death, Carol's friend asks if Carol has seen the new den. "It's lovely," remarks Carol, only to be told that they would be suing the contractor for some unspecified reason. Interiors are constantly being renewed, repainted, repositioned, re-perfected.

There are some revealing scenes of Carol in her house that attach a pathological quality to ostensibly safe interiors. We already considered the first picnoleptic scene in which Carol "loses time" inside the safety of her living room. Recall, in that scene, the house itself is monstrous and uncanny. Soon after, as Carol is beginning to find a vocabulary for her condition, she writes a letter to Wrenwood, introducing herself and her symptoms. Greg comes into the room while she is doing this (which should remind us of the overbearing husband in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, although in this case Greg is not there to regulate her behavior. He just seems baffled.). When he asks her what she's doing, she stops and blurts "Oh God... What is this? Where am I? Right now?" to which Greg replies, "We're in our house. Greg and Carol's house." She doesn't seem to believe it or make sense of it; her tears are either expressing the terror of

amnesia (a kind of picnolepsy, having lost time) or the frustration of her impulse to fade away. The house has revealed itself to Carol as uncanny, and we might assume monstrous as well.

The Bunker, Architecture of Safety

I read this film backwards, or, from the final scene. This is the scene where the second bracket of the title—*[Safe]*—finally opposes itself to the initial architectural bracket, which is her home in California. In the safe room at Wrenwood, Carol has accepted a new form of domestic safety, albeit one that similarly leaves her confined, both physically and psychologically, and is no closer to completing the project of disappearance that Rob White has argued is her initial desire.

The scene: It is midnight on her birthday as a fellow guest at Wrenwood, Chris, walks Carol to her new quarters: the white safe room that will separate her completely from the surrounding environment. Their encounter is chaste; he politely walks her to the door of the safe room, and then quietly asks if everything is ok. She says yes, and they say their goodbyes. Chris sweetly and almost sadly turns back and gives a little wave.

Carol enters the structure and closes the door behind her. We see the bunker interior as Carol ambles in from the right, dragging her oxygen tank. The stone floors and metal walls are smooth and white. There is a harsh white light hanging from the center of the round room. A metal shelf stands in the background with some survival supplies on it, and a simple metal cot is set up in the center. Carol puts on the oxygen mask. She looks over in the direction of the camera, as if seeing it for the first time; you get the sense that she is looking at you, the viewer. There is an imperceptibly slow zoom toward Carol, bringing to mind the earlier dolly zooms that

marked her destabilization in California, as she removes the mask and stands up. As she walks forward, we see her briefly from behind, walking toward a mirror. A close-up of her face; she peers forward and croaks “I love... (cough)... I love you. I really love you. I love you.”

Carol is speaking to her reflection, but she implicates the viewer directly. You might even forget that she is supposed to be looking in a mirror, her gaze is so direct and steady, and it is held for such a long time. How have we been implicated? We are in the room with her, contained in this whitewashed, sterile space. We watch her from our own places of safety—the classroom, perhaps, but more likely our own living rooms—and the contrast between the viewer and Carol suggests that domestic space and the safety it presupposes are not what they seem.

Following Mel Chen and Rob White, I want to end by gesturing toward the possibility of an alternative to resistance and open warfare that tends to characterize liberation politics. Chen admits to being “reluctant to deny the queer productivity of toxins and toxicity... or to neglect (or, indeed, ask after) the pleasures, the loves, the rehabilitations, the affections, the assets that toxic conditions induce.”¹⁴¹ The queer productivity of toxicity, for Chen, is that it helps us understand the “animacy” of things like couches—and I would add, houses, egg-shaped lamps, and safe rooms. What is made inanimate—like MCSers, for example—through social or legal or medical indifference, can be re-animated, or given new political standing by troubling the clear and distinct boundaries between subject and object. Toxicity might “introduce a certain complexity to the presumption of integrity of either lively or deathly subjects.”¹⁴² Already in this chapter we have seen the architecture of safety draw us into a discussion of gendered space, toxic bodies and liquids, and the socio-historical problem of contamination, toxicity, and disease. We

¹⁴¹ Chen, *Animacies*, 211.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 218.

may be weary from the complexity that toxicity introduces into a discussion of architectural forms, but we may also, importantly, find something new.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored biosafety labs, cleanrooms, and “safe” domestic space for the chemically sensitive. By placing these apparently very different spaces in conversation, I have been able to show how “safety”—and related concepts like “clean” and “white”—are shifty and ungrounded. Safety in these spaces is tactical, as we saw in the case of biosafety, which protects the integrity of nations, species, and bodies by enforcing boundaries. For cleanrooms, safety is both a technology of production—to produce precision products, they must be kept safe from itinerant dust or particles—and a tactic for allaying the allegations of chemical exposure—our space is cleaner than a hospital! But finally, the “safe” domestic space, having come through the trials of oppression and manipulation evident in Todd Haynes’s film *[Safe]*, is a space produced by a different way of being in the world. This “different way” is a *problem*—MCSers are forced to live differently, off the grid, in relative isolation and poverty, in many cases.¹⁴³ The difference marked out by the experience of those with MCS illustrates the violence of neoliberal capitalism, the eco-catastrophes of contemporary life in the Anthropocene, and the need for more forceful calls to environmental justice. But MCS also illustrates the necessity of rehabilitating difference in order to expand modes of inclusion and resist the biopolitical tendency to “make live and let die.”¹⁴⁴ Justice for MCSers and for the chemically injured cleanroom fab workers and

¹⁴³ Zwillinger and Heuser, *The Dispossessed*.

¹⁴⁴ Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 241.

for communities forced to cope with increasing toxic loads dumped by corporate polluters means pushing back against allowing bunker mentalities to proliferate, to create and maintain zones of privileged inclusion. If there is a lesson from the imagination of apocalypse in the Anthropocene, it is that everyone on the planet is vulnerable, even if that vulnerability is delayed by the fortifications and technologies afforded to the privileged few.

How does MCS accomplish this call to rehabilitated or renewed consciousness when it so closely resembles the cleanroom it is meant to oppose? What, for instance, is the difference between “control” in cleanrooms and the “sense of control” in a “safe” home?¹⁴⁵ They are both enforced by knowledge and protocols, but for the cleanroom, the goal is to produce a commodity; in the safe home, the goal is to dwell. To make a safe home, in other words, is not necessarily to participate in a bunker mentality. Not all forms of safety produce violence. For all the suffering that MCS renders, it also presents the potential for ending a kind of mass cultural and political blindness to the ways that industrial and post-industrial societies value production and truth, ways that toxicity and hierarchy are both normalized and enforced. People with MCS are *forced* into this sort of alternative consciousness—they are not suffering some metaphorical condition. Even so, MCS and its representations allow us to reconceive safety away from the violent and militant and toward the creation of a form of life that is oriented toward dwelling—surviving without defending, persisting without a counter-offensive, disappearing but at the same time reaching out in hopes of creating community and more inclusion.

The lesson of MCS, gleaned especially from personal narratives, is that “safe” is not possible, but also that “safe” is not the only way of participating in a form of life. This is not to say that MCSers do not deserve more safety than they currently enjoy (if that be any at all). I

¹⁴⁵ Coyle, “‘Safe Space’ as Counter-Space.”

mean that forms of life and ways of dwelling are beginning to take new shapes and appropriate new techniques. Even though toxic burdens are debilitating and unbearable for MCSers, as Mel Chen points out, these burdens are anti-normative in a (potentially) positive way. This is Murphy's conclusion as well, that "making a body in safe space" involves a multi-pronged strategy of producing counter-spaces and alternative networks. This is how MCSers and preppers are proximate, strange as that may seem given that I diagnose prepping as a continuation of right-wing paranoid militancy, and that MCS is clearly associated with a leftist style of thought in which individuals are inextricably bound up with everyone *together*. Both MCSers and preppers are trying in their own ways to react to global and local precariousness—real and imagined—foisted on them by the forces of neoliberal capitalism.

Over the course of this dissertation, over and again I have portrayed safety in its ability to conjure profoundly unsafe conditions, or in its ability to be mobilized in the interests of the powerful and to the detriment of especially vulnerable populations. The literature on MCS suggests that constructing safe space can also function as a counter-conduct, and that safe space can be thought of, in some cases, as "minor architecture," the architecture that resists the majority like Deleuze argues "minor literature" forms a counterpoint to dominant literary forms.¹⁴⁶

But I must be careful not to hang a pat conclusion on this comparison, for two main reasons: First, I have not tested these observations on the MCS community itself; mine is a second-order analysis of socio-historical studies and texts whose creation has involved figures in and around the MCS community. Second, MCS is itself so "multiple," and configured through multiple valences, that my observations of its interaction with my case studies of the architecture

¹⁴⁶ Deleuze, Guattari, and Maclean, "Kafka"; Stoner, *Toward a Minor Architecture*.

of safety are in danger of reducing or minimizing it—in effect, making MCS more linearly intelligible. Nonetheless, in good faith I offer the idea that the experience and techniques of creating safe space in the context of MCS is related to and yet distinguishes itself from the web of safety that has fully entangled affluent and non-chemically sensitive Americans, both in the ways that nation and family are constructed, but also in the ways that domestic interiors are arranged, modified, and renovated. “Safe” is truly a term that lives in scare-quotes, since it is always contingent, even when it should be demanded as a political right.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have examined safe space as an architectural, material, and rhetorical construction. I have leveled a broad critique of the politics of safety in contemporary American society, although I end with an attempt to imagine new forms of safety that do not participate in a militant defense of identities and boundaries. This is the question that pushes past this dissertation: what will these new and potentially liberating shapes of safety look like? In rejecting the violence of neoliberal capitalism, must we all become zombies or disappear entirely? If we reject neoliberal categories of “human” and “animate,” must we become “post-human” (or even non-human) and “inanimate”?

Having spent so much time thinking and reading about preppers and survivalists, what has struck me more than the prevalence of bunker mentalities is the prevalence of imaginary worlds. And not just their prevalence, but their *potency*. Imaginary worlds move us in both recognizable and obscure ways. To imagine safety without violence is to give it some measure of reality. Carol’s retreat in *[Safe]*, while ultimately unsuccessful, offers up some hope—she succeeds, after all, in escaping her suburban prison. I imagine a different ending to that story, one that wouldn’t disturb us so profoundly from everyday complacency, perhaps, but could nonetheless be the story of a real person, a person who comes through the violence of chemical exposure to a new form of care, attachment, and dwelling.

Imagination is laced with tendrils of political thought—what we imagine is what we dream and what we fear. How that imaginative work gets expressed in our built environment and in the ways we shape space is a critical question for our time.

For example, where social housing projects in the postwar era failed was in their imagination of safety: the *purpose* of safety to enable dwelling was infected by a project of safety that erected the foundations of neoliberal privilege. A safe zone for family dwelling in the suburbs, on the other hand, is not inherently oppressive. But the imbrication of an *imagined* community—“America”—with that dream of domestic happiness served to ossify and petrify safety in the shape of heteronormativity and patriarchy. Preppers take this process to an extreme, imagining not only that social relations may be reformed in a modern world of risk, but that they are living “in the end times.” However, even though the imagination of safety can be seduced by projects that exclude, segregate, and stratify, imagination itself is still potent and can be redirected to conjure new forms of care, new dwelling spaces, and generative new modes of inclusion. This is the politically important work that the literary imagination and critical consciousness can accomplish.

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