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"Superhistory" and the "Spirit of Transgression": E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*

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ABSTRACT

The Book of Daniel, E. L. Doctorow's first widely-acclaimed novel, is a fictional exploration of the controversial case of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg who were wrongfully executed for treason by the Truman Administration during the Red Menace of the 1950s. The novel demonstrates not only Doctorow's strong aversion to social injustice---one of the themes that run through all his work---but also the novelist's successful experiment in fictionalizing a historical event. Historical actuality and imaginary episodes are deftly woven together into a literary construct.

To Doctorow, official history is to a certain extent fictionalized, and fiction can be a "superhistory" in which a writer may amass available historical data, reconstruct them in an intricate configuration, and thus offer dialectical perspectives on sociopolitical realities. A writer, as it were, is a "perceptive criminal"---a criminal who opens himself to perception, is sensitive to the life of the downtrodden, and possesses "a spirit of transgression" to facilitate social change.

Keywords : superhistory, official history, simulation, perceptivn criminal, spirit of transgression, history of the oppressed

「超級歷史」與「逾越意識」：達特羅的《但以理書》

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摘　要

達特羅第一部廣受稱譽的小說《但以理書》是以文學想像的手法探究一九五〇年代，赤色恐慌時期，遭杜魯門政府入罪羅森堡夫婦的故事。這部小說展現出貫穿達特羅所有作品的主題，亦即對社會不公不義的憎惡，以及作者成功地運用小說手法改寫歷史的實驗。歷史的眞實情境和想像的情節圓熟地交織於這個文學創作中。

就達特羅而言，在某種程度，正史是虛構的，而小說可以是「超級歷史」，藉此作者得以匯聚歷史文獻，重新形塑縝密的架構，並對社會政治現況提出辯證的觀點。作家可以說是「睿智的罪犯」──開放接受各種相異觀點，關注受壓迫者的生活，並且具有逾越的意識以促進社會變革。

關鍵詞：超級歷史、正史、虛擬、睿智的罪犯、逾越的意識、受壓迫者的歷史

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> We need history, but not the way a
> spoiled loafer in the garden of
> knowledge needs it.
> ---Nietzsche, *Of the Use and Abuse of History*

The historical novel comprises a particular kind of fiction. It oscillates around the border between fictional discourse and factual one. On the one hand, it represents reality by means of certain conventions of fictional writing and contains some sort of verifiable referentiality to the historical world on the other. The historical novel points to the capacities of fictional writing to construct alternative historical consciousness and critical perspectives on the present socio-political realities. It is, to appropriate E. L. Doctorow's concept of fiction in general, a "superhistory" or "speculative history" in which a writer derives abundant and critical data from heterogeneous sources so that he may construct a dialectic mode of perception to reexamine official or mainstream version of history which single-mindedly justifies the hegemony of a dominant order. Doctorow evokes Walter Benjamin's notions in "The Storyteller," maintaining that a fictional writer should recover "the state of wisdom" existing at the time when fact and fiction were not "ontologically differentiated." Literary writing binds "the present with the past, the visible with the invisible" and helps "to compose the community necessary for the continuing life of its members." All "writers are by definition engagé"; they are both creators and documentarians ("False Documents" 18, 21, 22, 25; cf. Benjamin 83-5). It may be justifiable to say that, to both Doctorow and Benjamin, literary writing is fundamentally socio-political and that the writer is supposed to commit themselves to passing on collective wisdom for social change.

Doctorow's writing is enormously indebted to Benjamin's historiography. In *E. L. Doctorow: Essays and Conversations*, for instance,

Doctorow repeatedly states his great admiration for the theorist's historical approach, humanist critique and political skepticism. Indeed, to Benjamin, the hitherto existent history is simply the history of the oppressor which documents the lineage of a mainstream culture; he advocates instead "materialist historiography," a reconstructive method of history that is in keeping with the tradition of the struggling, marginalized classes. To cut athwart the dominant version of history, a historical materialist arrests within a configuration disparate historical data and gives that configuration a "shock"---to construct an alternative permutation of historical data that charges the past with radical meanings in relation to the present political struggle. A "shocking configuration" is to seek solidarity with the oppressed and to disrupt the "homogeneous continuum" of mainstream chronicle ("Theses on the Philosophy of History" 260-3). Doctorow echoes Benjamin by saying that all history is "composed"; history shares with fiction "a mode of mediating the world," a process of "intrusion" that is inherently "moral" ("False Documents" 23-4). A novelist, Doctorow says, should cultivate his perception "out of a spirit of transgression," should be "open to all aspects and forms of thought and behavior and feeling," so as to obtain "a limitless possibility of knowing the truth"; fiction has no boundaries and everything is open (McCaffery 43, 47). Throughout his career, Doctorow has been trying to demonstrate how he can achieve his openness to perception and how he constructs his novels as versions of superhistory to brush against the grain of the continuum of mainstream history.

Doctorow's most successful and important novel, *The Book of Daniel*, is an intriguing case in point. Based on the story of the notorious Rosenberg Trial, the novel recounts a moment of distress in the political history of the twentieth-century America. The narrative of the novel, as Doctorow himself explains, is deliberately "discontinuous" and "in the throwing of multiple voices that turn out to be the work of one narrator" (McCaffery 39). The novel is a book on how the protagonist Daniel comes to shape a critical perspective on the political realities since the Great Depression and how he searches for disparate materials to finish his dissertation on the history. Daniel's quest seems to point to Doctorow's own, so to speak. That is, Doctorow consciously constructs the story in a self-reflexive mode which conveys a profoundly radical political sentiment.

The constant alternation of points of view and the intricate deployment of various documents and cultural allusions thus formulate critical revisions of the politics of the Cold War era, the vicissitudes of American leftism and the function of literary writing itself. This essay is then an attempt to delineate the narrative of *The Book of Daniel* in a rather chronological way, to analyze the themes and images of the novel in terms of certain contemporary theoretical concepts, and to explore Doctorow's revision of sociopolitical realities. My point here is to underscore the fact that literary writing, as Doctorow might put it, is essentially ideological, social, and political.

The Book of Daniel has been somewhat neglected since the novel was first published in 1971 though critical essays on the novel have constantly appeared over the last three decades. Conservative critics tend to consider the novel a work contaminated by the author's political views or to relegate the historical referents in the novel to simply a textual deployment. Joseph Epstein charges Doctorow with "rigging" the point of view for particular political purposes; Robert Alter invokes the traditional criterion of the New Criticism, disparaging *The Book of Daniel* as "an adversarial political novel" with no universal statements about human conditions; Carol Harter and James Thompson hold that the "pervasive tension between social matter and personal vision" in the novel is just to "energize the novel" (Qtd. in Williams 148; Harter & Thompson 30-1). In fact, Doctorow does not mean to issue a new verdict on the case though he portrays Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, the fictive versions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, as innocent. In an interview Doctorow describes the common themes in his novels, saying that he is "extremely sensitive to the idea of injustice"; the "idea that something is not fair" gives him "energy in writing" (Qtd. in Harpham 49). He is mainly concerned with the rediscovery of certain social principles and with the political function of literary writing. For instance, *The Book of Daniel* fervently questions the validity of the seeming objectivity of literary criticism at the moment when Daniel Lewin-Isaacson, Paul and Rochelle's son, imagines a scene of his parents meeting in the council-room of Sing Sing. With their lawyer Jacob Ascher watching out for them, Paul and Rochelle, who have been separately imprisoned for quite some time, steal a few minutes to make love. Ascher's description of the scene has been haunting Daniel's mind since childhood. Daniel feels a great deal of pain when he thinks of the episode; he then remembers a question he has once

asked of his advisor Ronald Sukenick, the actual metafictional writer and theorist who views fictional writing as purely a language game: "Under what circumstances do we suspend criticism? Note the clear instance here of the paradox of literary sensibility that is formed by the previous generation."[1] Literary sensibility seems to mean a writer's subjective, intense responsiveness, in thought and feeling, to human conditions. It urges a writer to tell a story with characters whose sufferings and joys emotionally affect us and hence, to share with us moments of enlightenment on our collective existence. As Doctorow says, what has moved him to write the story is "the historical intersection of social and personal agony" (McCaffery 39). The introduction of Sukenick into the novel as Daniel's advisor seems to be an oblique and satirical comment on the theorist's notion of fictional writing as just a game in that Sukenick views a story as a "playful game" someone has made up for the reader to play (Waugh 34). Daniel seems to refute the idea that literary writing could be devoid of sociopolitical elements. Literary writing, to Daniel, can be seen as a means through which intellectual and emotional modes of social experience are exchanged between the writer and the reader.

The Book of Daniel involves both the protagonist's reflection on the political function of literary writing during the process of writing a dissertation and, as his name suggests, his commitment to becoming a writer-prophet figure to "give counsel" to the reader ("False Documents" 21). The title of the novel clearly alludes to the prophetic book of the same name in the Old Testament. In Babylonia, Daniel the prophet works as a dream interpreter for King Nebuchadnezzar in order to soften the ruler's malicious will against the Jews. He interprets the king's dreams and prophesies the future for him. Nightmares and apparitions in the night, Doctorow writes in the novel, seem to be "an occupational hazard" of the ruler (13). In one case, the king suffers a nightmare and forgets it afterwards. Daniel is summoned to reconstruct and decipher the dream. The gigantic Ozymandias-like statue in Nebuchadnezzar's nightmare seems to prophesize the decline of Babylon if racial discrimination and oppression continue. Daniel's method of dream-interpretation, to use Doctorow's own words,

[1] E. L. Doctorow, *The Book of Daniel*, New York: Fawcett, 1971, 234. All subsequent references to this novel will be given parenthetically with page numbers provided after the quotations in the text.

binds up the visible with the invisible, the past with the present and future. Like its biblical counterpart, *The Book of Daniel* re-envisions the troubling dreams in political history and foretells the future of society.

Just as the prophet in the Old Testament whose exhortations more often than not annoy the ruler, Daniel Lewin-Issacson will come up with a radical perspective on sociopolitical realities through his quest for family history. That is, *The Book of Daniel* also means a book written by the protagonist Daniel whose parents were executed by the U. S. government more than a decade ago for suspicion of passing atomic secrets to the Soviet Union. The actual time of the novel covers the period from Memorial Day 1967 to the early 1968 when student demonstrations take place at Columbia University. A doctoral candidate, Daniel sits in the Columbia University library, writing his dissertation on the American leftist tradition and trying to figure out its connection with the history of his radical family. Daniel Lewin-Isaacson is a modern prophet who deciphers historical nightmares and constructs political prospect for the country.

In a 1978 interview Doctorow expresses that *The Book of Daniel* is "the story of the American left in general and generally sacrificial role it has played" in the American history ("The Writer As Independent Witness" 61). The legacy of American radicalism becomes at once a troubling vision to the dominant order and a source of enlightenment for social progress. By juxtaposing in the novel the two phases of American leftism, the thirties and forties radicalism and the New Left politics of the sixties, Doctorow portrays Daniel as a figure of bridging the two historical moments of the American radical tradition. Thus, early on in the novel, Daniel is described as some sort of anachronistic figure full of radical fervor: "In fact nothing about his appearance was accidental. If he'd lived in the nineteen thirties and came on this way he would be a young commie. A cafeteria commie" (4). And towards the end he possesses the truth of the whole history and learns to move on into a new era of political struggle.

For Doctorow, official history is a kind of fiction, and fiction is a "superhistory" by means of which "the available data for the composition is seen to be greater and more various in its sources" than historists could imagine ("False Documents" 25). In the novel various social threads are woven into an intricate and panoramic configuration so that sociopolitical realities can be reconstructed from a dialectical perspective. Here

Doctorow deploys a variety of materials---biblical allusions, letters, analyses of historical events, family history, extracts from newspapers and books---in a non-linear and multi-contextual narrative. The narrative deployment demonstrates that literary writing, as a revision of social actuality, is supposed to be a multiple construct and that personal history is inseparable from the larger context of social history. It is, to use Benjamin's phrase, a "shocking configuration" intended to intervene with a "Messianic cessation" in the continuum of official history ("Theses on the Philosophy of History" 262-3). Following Benjamin, Doctorow compiles and weaves together all possible data so as to rewrite the past in order to redeem it in a revolutionary deployment as against official history.

From the outset of the novel, Doctorow constantly alternates the points of view. He begins the narrative in the third person and brusquely shifts to the first person, then back to the third person---thus indicating a dialectical relationship between the social and the personal. On Memorial Day 1967, Daniel, with his wife Phyllis and his infant baby, thumbs lifts to a mental hospital where his sister, Susan, is incarcerated for attempted suicide. Because family tragedy and her enthusiastic involvement in political activities have caused her nervous breakdown, Susan has been under therapy for quite a while. The first paragraph ends with this sentence: "…not many drivers could pass without wondering who they were and where they were going" (3). That is, the novel is about Daniel's search for his own identity, his socially and historically defined self; Susan represents an agent that urges Daniel to begin the quest. The theme of self-identity, moreover, is in conjunction with two conflictual themes of the temporal. Memorial Day hints at militarism associated with the Cold War and with the execution of Daniel's parents whereas the year of 1967 signifies the counterculture and the New Left politics of the late sixties. Daniel's discovery of his own identity will be eventually related to the political and ideological conflicts in the social context.

In the second paragraph, the setting shifts to the Columbia University library where Daniel is working assiduously on his dissertation. This is a scene of writing. Elated at the abundant store of materials in the several sections of the library, Daniel says, "I feel encouraged to go on" (4). The theme of writing, in juxtaposition to the themes just mentioned, suggests that Daniel's quest for self-identity cannot do without the mediation of a writing

process---a dialectical means enabling him to introduce meanings into his life and the historical world. The available materials in the library give him confidence to create a "superhistory" emulating official history.

The library is a cultural space where documents and books of the past are compartmentalized and organized according to assigned categories. Data are in order and domains of knowledge clearly defined. But latent within this carefully arranged space there are always intersections between different fields of knowledge possible for cultural and social revisions.[2] This library scene may thus suggest that the formation of a shocking configuration often arises from a deconstruction of established order and boundaries of knowledge through the act of writing. By the constant shift of the points of view, the multi-contextual narrative, the themes of reshuffling of various data in the library and of writing as political revision, Doctorow sets up a dialectical pattern at the very beginning of the novel.

The dialectical pattern not only is a narrative strategy but implicates Doctorow's notion of cultivating a radical perception out of "a spirit of transgression." Doctorow once refers to Daniel as a "criminal of perception." Daniel, "as all writers must," opens himself to multifarious perceptions and survives by embracing the "cold and frightening" truth (McCaffery 47). A perceptive writer is a transgressive or subversive criminal in the sense that his keen perception more often than not leads him to challenge the hegemony of a dominant order. Like his parents who have been branded as traitors Daniel commits the "treason" of probing into the painful truth about the country to which he belongs. At one moment he lists the names of some traitors in American political history and associates them with "the archetype traitor, the master subversive Poe, who wore a hole into the parchment and let the darkness pour through" (218). Literary writing is here bound up with political opposition:

A small powerful odor arose from the Constitution; there was a wisp of

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[2] In "Fantasia of the Library" Michel Foucault states that "fantasies are carefully deployed in the hushed library…with its titles aligned on the shelves to form a tight enclosure, but within confines that also liberate impossible worlds….The imaginary is not formed in opposition to reality…it grows among signs, from book to book in the interstice of repetition and commentaries; it is born and takes shape in the interval between books. It is a phenomenon of the library." Michel Foucault, "Fantasia of the Library," *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Donald F. Bouchard, ed., Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977, 91.

> smoke which exploded and quickly turned mustard yellow in color. When Poe blew this away through the resulting aperture in the parchment the darkness of the depths rose, and rises still from that small hole all these years incessantly pouring its dark hellish gases like soot, like smog, like the poisonous effulgence of combustion engines over Thrift and Virtues and Reason and Natural Law and the Rights of Man. (218)

Here Daniel seems to suggest that there might be alternative social meanings mediated by the subversive visions such as Poe's. Carol Harter and James Thompson, however, disparage Poe as "an antirationalist and anti-Emersonian whose demonic genius corroded American idealism." The idea of the "criminal of perception" is, for them, just a logic of literary imagination and the general effect of the political parallels in the novel is but "a high level of reader interest" (*ELD* 30-1). The point of invoking Poe is not only to indicate that the openness to perception is to gain a wider scope for literary writing, but more importantly to demonstrate that subversive perception has to be directed towards the broader arena of sociopolitical realities. Similarly, literary historian Vernon Louis Parrington employs historical and biographical references to portray Poe, concluding that "the problem of Poe, fascinating as it is, lies quite outside the main current of American thought"; Frank Lentricchia evokes Poe to exemplify how a romantic outcast resists the mainstream discursive formation despite tremendous psychological and emotional costs (*MCAT*, 56; *ANC*, 206; cf. *EAPM*, 2-6). As John Parks puts it, then, Doctorow situates Daniel in the radical tradition of Poe, Hawthorne and Melville, challenging the "glib certainties of Franklin and Emerson" (*ELD* 41). In this respect, American leftism may be partly viewed as a continuation of the American radical tradition since the early nineteenth century.[3]

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[3] According to Andrew Ross, the Preamble to the Constitution of the Communist Party USA was amended in 1938 by Earl Browder to manifest that the CP "carried forward the traditions of Washington, Jefferson, Paine, Jackson, and Lincoln." See Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1989, 21. Moreover, at one moment in *The Book of Daniel* Doctorow echoes the CP's manifesto and Marx's words in *The German Ideology*, saying: "We are the revolutionary heirs of Jefferson and Lincoln and Andrew Jackson and Tom Paine. The philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it" (237). Cf. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, C. J. Arthur, ed., New York: International Publishers, 1988, 123.

To continue the radical tradition is to survive and resist at once. It is a process of opening up possibilities for "self-preservation and political subversion" (*ELD* 42). These two aspects point to Daniel's persevering and analytical nature. He can always overcome his frustration and transmute it into strength of will. At one point when Daniel sees Susan lie almost lifelessly in the hospital ward, he feels desperate and indignant: "She is washing up on the beach, and when the last moisture sinks below the sand, and the sand dries in the sun, she will be dead. And my whole family will be dead" (255). Suddenly the image of a starfish, a symbol of unification of mental and physical faculties, pops into his mind for the first time; Daniel recovers again from fury and despair: "A starfish is not outraged. We must preserve our diminishing energies insofar as we direct them to the true objectives. A certain portion of the energy must be used for the regeneration of energy" (256). In contrast, Susan is innocent, fervent, and headlong. She wants to establish the Isaacson Foundation for Revolution as a way of reclaiming the past. As she realizes that the name Isaacson means nothing to the New Left, she collapses and tries to kill herself. There is, as Doctorow says, "a failure of analysis" within her revolutionary sentiment; Susan has to "come to a very strict, defensive judgment" and can only survive "by limiting the amount of reality in the situation insofar as her parents were concerned." Daniel, on the other hand, has "openness to perception"; he "is over-tuned to the world. He doesn't miss a thing. He's a hero---or a criminal---of perception" and survives that way (McCaffery 47).

But Daniel deeply admires his sister. He compares Susan to Rosa Luxemburg and wishes he had her aggressive moral courage. Watching his sister lie dying, Daniel cannot restrain his grief and cries out: "…I cannot perceive the world except with your voice framing the edge of my vision….It is the feminine voice that passes through ontological mirrors. It lies at the heart of the matter, the nub of things..." (254). Despite her lack of analytical capacity, Susan may represent for Daniel the moral strength that helps to shape his radical perspective on the world and enables him to penetrate into matters seated at the heart of a social order always mirroring itself. In Daniel's fantasy, Susan becomes an image of starfish. Daniel explains later on that the starfish was once the thirteenth sign of the Zodiac, the most propitious of all signs. The five points of the star led towards the

center, symbolizing the harmony of the five senses with the heart: "Belief was joined with intellect, language with truth, life with justice." But nowadays astrologers no longer mention the sign and consider it an omen of death because "modern man can conceive of nothing more frightening than the self-sufficiency of being of the beautiful Starfish: he mistakes it for death" (305-6). For Parks, the "radical self-sufficiency" of the starfish is "deathly narcissism, recoil from the world into death" (*ELD* 48). Parks seems to follow what people might imagine about the Zodiac sign and ignore Daniel's critique of modern man's limited mode of thinking. The self-sufficiency of being, in my view, might be the long-forgotten collective experience upon which a radical revision depends for its source. This state of being is a level of collective existence in opposition to what has been designated by "inherited ontology," and its thinking mode is "radical imaginary….The existence of this level is shocking only because people do not wish to depart from settled habits of thought" (Castoriadis 63-4). To evoke the image of the starfish seems to mean the will to constantly energize the self with the coordination of mental and physical capacities, and with revolutionary perspectives on socio-political realities; it is meant, as Doctorow puts it, to bind the past with the present, the visible with the invisible, and the collective existence and the individual one. Susan's death may be considered the loss of the radical self-sufficiency. But as Daniel says, his will is growing stronger though Susan's becomes weaker. He overcomes his despair and withdraws from a cardboard tube a poster of himself looking militant and with his hand making the sign of peace. Daniel tapes the picture on the wall facing Susan's bed and moves out into the world.

The self-sufficiency of being depends for its realization on its dialectical relations to the factual world. The call for collective transformation, as Andrew Ross might put it, is the sense of cultural responsibility that sustains the Old Left radicalism and that distinguishes it from the New Left activism. The Old Left establishes the tradition of cultural responsibility as their central belief and supplements it by the sense of duty to promote massive political change whereas the New Left sets out to redefine responsibility in terms of "micropolitical" objectives. Sectarian oppositions in "style, sexuality, and personal expression characterized the

new grammar of dissent and the new modes of political action" (*NR* 221).[4] While the new Left radicalism is resourceful in self-preservation against unfavorable political situations, it abandons dialectics and the radical revision of a collective existence. If the failure of the Old Left radicalism is its lack in the capability of self-preservation, the New Left politics evokes no political prospect for social transformation that alone makes political opposition meaningful. In *The Book of Daniel*, the portrayal of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson is a portrait of the Old Left and Artie Sternlicht represents the New Left---with Daniel as a central figure to conflate the two moments of radicalism in his social revision.

Paul Isaacson is tendentious, full of radical passion but incapable of making connections between his ideal and society. Daniel refers to his father as a person "without real resources" (40). Both Paul and Rochelle have been students at the City College of New York and have participated in various radical activities during the Great Depression. Paul incessantly analyzes the truths of the capitalist system and explains them to Daniel. His ongoing analysis is basically theoretical, and it sometimes makes Daniel wonder:

> Why did he expect so much of a system he knew by definition could never satisfy his standards of justice?...Lots of them were like that….If they were put on trial, they didn't say, of course, what else could we expect, they said you are making a mockery of American justice. And it was more than strategy…it was passion. (49)

As Daniel reflects later on, Paul fails because he never believes that anyone would find his ideal so threatening as to commit treason and that actual politics is not like what he used to argue with fellow students at the college cafeteria.

In contrast, Rochelle is more practical. Unlike Paul who derives his political belief largely from theoretical analysis, Rochelle gains hers from

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[4] In *Against the Grain* Terry Eagleton analyzes the so-called "post-revolutionary" disillusionments pervasive in the late sixties and the seventies. The upheavals in the late sixties created a prevailing condition of political debate on the left, which eventually evolved into a general climate of profound pessimism---power being ubiquitous, truth unattainable, only micropolitical activities feasible, and so on. Terry Eagleton, *Against the Grain: Essays 1975-1985*, New York: Verso, 1986, 1, 93.

the actual experience of penury. For Daniel, she is a more committed radical:

> Her politics was not theoretical or abstract. She had no difficulty making connections….Like a woman suffering pregnancy and childbirth to get the child. The child would make it worthwhile. The coming of socialism would sanctify those who had suffered…not because you expected anything from it, but because someday there would be retribution and you wanted just a little of it to bear your name. (52)

Daniel inherits, on the one hand, his father's analytical capacity and on the other, his mother's perseverance and capability of making connections.

Daniel once recollects seeing in a medical textbook photographs of three female bodies which he associates with his grandma, Rochelle and Susan. The three women stand in a row, and a red arrow line runs from his grandma's breast through his mother's to his sister's. The red line describes "the progress of madness inherited through the heart" (88). Madness here may be understood as strong response to social injustice in that the old lady's madness largely results from her long tormenting life. The grandma has grown up in a cottage of a provincial Russian town, as a Jew and a Russian peasant. Poverty has taken away most of her relatives over the years. She goes mad whenever she remembers her misfortunes and the death of her close relatives: "…what killed them all was poverty and exploitation…madness was the disease of fantasy…a predictably abnormal expression of impoverished life" (85).

The grandma often cautions Daniel not to forget the family plight: "…I recognized in you the strength and innocence that will reclaim us all from defeat. That will exonerate our having lived and justify our suffering" (87). Indignation about social injustice, as it were, has gradually shaped the "edges" of Daniel's vision. Daniel's search for his family history and his radical self in society is driven by the maternal legacy, and this quest leads him to Artie Sternlicht.

If the legacies of Paul and Rochelle contribute to framing Daniel's perception with a dialectical pattern, the cynical New Left, Artie Sternlicht, exemplifies to Daniel the intrigue of shocking configuration. As his name symbolizes, Sternlicht seems to be an "artful" or cunning "starlight" that

could enlighten Daniel on gaming tactics of the New Left politics. To Sternlicht, Paul and Rochelle fail because they play by the rules of the system. His notion of the Isaacson trial somewhat echoes Daniel's remarks on the blind passion of the Old Left: "…if they ever put me on trial my action will be to show them up for the corrupt fuckers they really are." Sternlicht covers the whole wall of his apartment with a collage of pictures and posters---Babe Ruth, FDR, Marilyn Monroe, Susan B. Anthony, and so on. He names the collage "EVERYTHING THAT CAME BEFORE IS ALL THE SAME" (186). To him, history is meaningless, the state apparatus is powerful, and only gaming is a viable means of political opposition.

> So how do you bring change to something this powerful. How do you make revolution. You don't preach. You don't talk about poverty and injustice and imperialism and racism. That's like trying to make people read Shakespeare, it can't be done. Everyone is digging the commercials….In less than a minute a TV commercial can carry you through a lifetime….Society is a put-on so we put on the put-on. Authority is momentum. Break the momentum….Hit and run….We're gonna overthrow the United States with images. (171-2)

Sternlicht's political view recalls Jean Baudrillard's concept of symbolic exchange. For Baudrillard, capitalist culture depends for its continuation on the reproduction of images or simulacra. The only way to counter the cultural dominance is act out a reversal of the simulating logic. "The play of simulation must…be taken further than the system permits….The system's own logic turns into the best weapon against it…a reversible simulation in a hyperlogic of destruction and death" (123). The New Left radicalism of Sternlicht and Baudrillard seems to be cynical, individualist, and micropolitical. To some critics, Sternlicht's politics of images and commercials is anarchistic, suffused with radical arrogance and underestimating the power of the state apparatus (Harter & Thompson 37; "The Conspiracy of History" 190). I would argue that no social order has ever been so powerful as to exhaust all human capacity and practice. The New Left politics lacks the Old Left scope of the self-sufficiency of being. But it also points out that new social practices based on the momentum of

the system might expedite the process of social change. Though the politics of images as a gaming tactics does not crystallize radical concepts into prospects of alternative sociopolitical realities, it shows that a shocking configuration of existing materials might engender social meanings unrecongnizable by existing social systems if such a configuration encompasses the commitment to the resuscitation of certain social principles and to social transformation. Sternlicht's politics of images, as Susan Lorsch remarks, inspires Daniel with confidence in his writing (Qtd. in Parks 47). The multi-contextual, panoramic deployment of various elements proves that Daniel's book is more resourceful and palpable than official history. Daniel virtually puts Sternlicht's tactics in practice to elevate his radical beliefs into applicable revolutionary schema. When talking about Daniel, Doctorow says in a rather complacent manner:

> …I love that character, and also understand him. I was making an observation in my treatment of him, that very often a man who begins as a radical somehow---with all his energy and spirit and intelligence and wit---by a slight change of course can use these gifts to succeed under the very system he's criticizing. Very often this happens without his losing his sense of himself as a radical. (McCaffery 46)

Daniel's quest, in a sense, seems to reflect Doctorow's search for his own radical self under the capitalist system he is criticizing.

American leftism, Daniel says, is brought down at the moment of the arrest of his parents. "The American Left is in this great moment artfully reduced to the shabby conspiracies of a couple named Paul and Rochelle Isaacson" (135). Daniel once witnesses a car accident in which a lady is crushed through the fence of the schoolyard opposite to their house. Reminiscing about the moment when two FBI agents come on to their door, Daniel compares the political oppression of the Cold War era to a gigantic surveillant apparatus which beams in all directions and finally bears down on the Isaacsons just as the car crashes into the lady through the fence (132). Paul and Rochelle are scapegoats accidentally picked up to discredit the American Left and justify the promulgation of the Red Menace.

The Cold War, in effect, is a political maneuver of enhancing the power of the state and shoring up the capitalist economy after the Second World

War. As Daniel cites from one congressional report, Secretary of State Acheson once testified that no one in the Truman Cabinet ever seriously considered Russia a military threat. The Cold War was to keep American people living in fear of the Russian so that the American leaders could invest huge amounts of money in arms spending, fortify pro-American regimes, and open foreign markets for American goods (286, 290). Likewise, Michael Parenti argues that Truman was skillful in creating crisis atmosphere. In 1947, Truman declared that vast amounts of American money and arms would be used to defend world freedom from Soviet expansion. In one issue of *Business Week*, Parenti quotes, the headlines and captions read: "U.S. Drive to Stop Communism Abroad Means Heavy Outlays for Bases, Relief and Reconstruction. But in Return American Business is Bound to Get New Market Abroad" (Parenti 118-20). The Cold War is "hyperreality," a simulation of the real. "The only weapon of power…is to reinject realness and referentiality everywhere….For that purpose it prefers the discourse of crisis" (Baudrillard 179). The Isaacsons are sacrificed as a pretext to falsify a political crisis so that the government is able to facilitate capitalist expansion.

Daniel's quest eventually leads him to California and to Disneyland where he meets his parents' betrayer, Selig Mindish, the fictive version of David Greenglass. If the Cold War is a simulation of the real, it is certainly appropriate that Doctorow has Daniel meet Mindish in a place composed of simulation models of the real. That Daniel's superhistory and his radical beliefs are set against the mythologized cultural themes embodied by the gigantic funhouse---the opposition between a critical historical perspective and a debased one---makes Doctorow's historical views even more indignantly and ironically resonant (Cf. "Politics and Imagination" 54-5).

Two years after the execution of the Rosenbergs, Disneyland was opened in Anaheim. The theme park, as Daniel depicts, is shaped like a womb. It invites the customer to participate in the mythologized rituals of American culture within the simulated surroundings. Here technology co-opts and shapes the cultural myths of the nation with the funhouse as an incubator. The theme park as a whole, to use Louis Marin's words, is a "semantic structure of ideological representation" which fabricates "reduced models" of history (Frontierland), cultural ideology (Fantasyland) and technological progress (Tomorrowland) with Main Street USA at the

center as the site of "real exchange of commodities" (Marin 290-4). Within the thematic unities, it is hard to find a pattern among the references to literary heritage except recalling "the preemptive powers of the Disney organization with regard to Western culture" (349). What the customer encounters is a shorthand version of culture and this "radical process of reduction" leads up to the "quintessential sentiment" at the moment of a purchase (350-1).[5] Just as the hyperreality of the Cold War politics implicates American capitalist expansion, cultural simulation of Disneyland seems to involve economic motivation. With all the simulation models, the gigantic funhouse might also suggest the attempt to displace the social disturbances since the fifties. It is a cultural fantasy predicated upon the notion of freedom in imaginary flight. By making a connection between the Rosenberg Trial and Disneyland, Doctorow indicates "the stigma of falsity" with which the case is associated (*NR* 39) and counters his sociopolitical revision with the cultural ideology represented by the theme park. Hence, Doctorow has Daniel comment on Disneyland as a site of "sentimental compression of something that is itself already a lie" (350). This remark corresponds to what Baudrillard says of this amusement park: "Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are …of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation" (*JB* 172).

Daniel concludes his book with three brief endings. The first describes his visit to his old house in the Bronx where he has spent his childhood before the arrest of his parents. The neighborhood has changed; a black family now lives in the old house. Daniel sadly says: "It's their house now" (364). The scene functions as a "black chorus to the anguished Jewish family's engagement with a maddened American" (Parks 52). The second ending combines the funeral of Daniel's parents with Susan's: "My sister is dead. She died of a failure of analysis" (365). As an innocent radical determined to redeem her parents, Susan is unable to enter into dialectics with the present social context. Unlike Daniel, Susan lacks the analytical capacity essential to sociopolitical revision. The conflation of

[5] See also Louis Marin's analysis of Disneyland. Here Marin views the theme park as a degenerate utopian structure which changes ideas and values of the American capitalist system into a collective fantasy. Louis Marin, "Disneyland: A Degenerate Utopia," *Contemporary Literary Criticism: Literary and Cultural Studies* (Third Edition), Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer, ed., New York: Longman, 283-95.

the two funerals implies the failure of the Old Left radicalism to confront the social metamorphosis of the late sixties. At his sister's grave, Daniel hires prayermakers to sing the Kaddish for his parents and his sister: "Isaacson. Pinchas. Rochele. Susele. For all of them.…And I think I am going to be able to cry" (367). Daniel finally discovers the historical truth; he is able to mourn for his radical family. Thus, the third ending brings us back to the library. Daniel hopes to elaborate some of the questions raised by the story. But because of the vehement demonstrations at the Sundial, the library is closed and he is forced to leave:

> "That's right, man, move your ass, this building is officially closed."
> "Wait---"
> "No wait, man, the time is now. The water's shut off. The lights are going out. Close the book…don't you know you're liberated?" (367)

There is no need for Daniel to be immersed in the history any longer. For he has dissolved the confines of knowledge and accomplished his revision of the history: "DANIEL'S BOOK: A Life Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements forthe Doctoral Degree in Social Biology, Gross Entomology, Women's Anatomy, Children's Cacophony, Arch Demonology, Eschatology, and Thermal Pollution" (368). Daniel's book, his life, is still incomplete; he has to move on into a new era of social transformation. He leaves the library and walks towards the Sundial to see "what's going on" out there.

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