# Writing Technologies

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Guest edited by
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**'Without return. Without place':
rewriting the book and the nation in *Only Revolutions***

Philip Leonard

# 'Without return. Without place': rewriting the book and the nation in *Only Revolutions*

## Philip Leonard

### I

There is nothing new about the idea of automated writing. At the beginning of the 1750s, Friedrich von Knauss built a machine that traced the movements of a hand writing, and by the end of the decade he had constructed a device that was capable independently of reproducing programmed sentences. Pierre Jaquet-Droz's automaton 'The Writer' enchanted spectators of the 1770s with a cursive script that suggested not the reproduction of programmed text, but an authentic and autonomous act of writing. To the delight of audiences across Europe, Henri Maillardet's 1805 childlike 'Draughtsman-Writer' drew sketches and composed poems unaided. And writing puppets figure among the Karakuri mechanical dolls of the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. As much as these devices entertained and seduced spectators with their capacity for replicating nature, for copying human movement, and for imitating the act of imaginative invention, they also produced a disturbing experience of the human rendered mechanical, and provided an unsettling early encounter with what is now often termed 'the transhuman'.[1] The captivating deception of the automaton, Sigmund Freud proposes, results from its dual state of being lifelike yet inanimate, representing a terrifying figure of the double that can induce a fatal delirium in those who witness its anthropomorphic vitalism.[2] But as well as offering 'an uncanny image that reflects our shared fascination and dread with the machine',[3] these machines were also among the instruments with which national progress was measured, and the devices through which national authority was communicated. For Tom Standage, 'Automata provided a showcase for each nation's scientific prowess since they embodied what was, at the time, the absolute cutting edge of new technology'.[4] On occasion, these devices were harnessed to the pursuit of empire; 'French colonialism […] influenced the subject matter chosen for automata' which were, Lisa Nocks observes, 'reflected in exotic figures of the Orient, Middle East, and Africa'.[5] As well as offering an uncanny image of the mechanized

human, writing automata have also, therefore, acted as symbols of mechanized modernity onto which was displaced the pursuit of national self-identification and the assertion of cultural pre-eminence.

## II

Today, writing technologies may have graduated from clockwork figures to digital media, but both an uncanny sense of the human and a troubled articulation of national culture persist in new textual devices and systems. Certainly, the possibility for these technologies to allow textual meaning, perhaps even literary invention itself, to be self-generating and de-authorized are now familiar. Italo Calvino envisages a literature machine that is capable of reproducing not just programmed text, but of the clinamen that characterizes literary invention; such a machine would:

> produce avant-garde material to free its circuits when they are choked by too long a production of classicism. […] nothing prevents us from foreseeing a literature machine that at a certain point feels unsatisfied by its own traditionalism and starts to propose new ways of writing, turning its own codes upside-down.[6]

Niall Lucy invites us to consider the computer as just such a device that is capable of writing imaginatively: 'Imagine a pen that writes', he suggests, 'Writes, not by holding it but of its own accord produces graphematic marks on a writing surface. We might want to call that pen a computer: not an instrument used for writing but a writing *machine'.*[7] Various software programs have literalized the possibilities of the computer as a writing machine: perhaps most famously, Ray Kurzweil's Cybernetic Poet 'uses language-modeling techniques to automatically generate completely original poetry based on poems that it has 'read'"[8] and, more recently, numerous online story and poetry generators (including markoff, mchain, and Gnoetry[9]) provide tools for automating the act of text generation. Satirizing such tools in his novel *ScriptGenerator*©®™, Philippe Vasset warns that the long association between writing and invention is being undermined by media corporations that will monetize cultural production through its automation. The software at the centre of this story:

allows the user to exploit all narrative stock rationally and generate a competitive product, which meets the needs of the market. **ScriptGenerator©®™** is revolutionary in that it obliterates the 'creative' process, or more specifically, it transforms the production of content into one long treatment of raw material.[10]

Digital writing and electronic literature, taking advantage of the new tools that programmed media offer, are often seen as placing devices and readers (or users) at the centre of the compositional act. Here, textuality becomes a coded and interactive matrix, distinguished by recombinative, mutable, multivocal, and multimodal strategies that animate it as a networked and aleatory environment. With such devices and in such writing, textuality appears to shake off the bonds of authorship and becomes a multidimensional space that lacks the guiding hand of the author and resists authoritative decoding; a space, in other words, that lacks both *arche* and *archon* and where poiesis returns to the poetic. The Enlightenment dream of a device that can write autonomously seems therefore to have been realized by technologies of the 1990s and 2000s. Textual production, it would appear, is now released not only from the act of mechanized reproduction but also from the confinements of printed media, offering an open and ever-expanding textuality that finally allows for a writing that is truly automatic.

It would, however, be a mistake to find agency in the act of reading here, just as it would be a mistake to conceive the programmers of automata as human engineers who remain secure in their detachment from their inorganic creations. Rather, it would be better to conceive the various constituents of these writing technologies—inventor and puppet, text and reader—as parts of a wider system of textual production, one that generates and manages itself as a complex apparatus which contains the components for both production and interpretation. It is possible, in other words, to conceive literary machines as the kind of assemblage that resists explanation by canonical onto-theologies of cause and design, since these devices and systems possess the capacity to develop as self-constituting entities. To describe such self-constituting structures, Niklas Luhmann turns to the notion of autopoiesis; this, for him, forms the principal conceptual figure in a synthetic ontology whereby systems are seen to emerge, acquire *sui generis* integrity, and become functional entities through acts of separation and closure that detach them from other systems and entities:

> We call those systems operatively closed that rely on their own network of operations for the production of their own operations and which, in this sense, reproduce themselves. […] The innovation achieved by the concept of autopoiesis shifts the idea of a self-referential make-up to the level of the elementary operations of the system […] and, in doing so, to everything that constitutes unity for the system. What is involved here is no longer only a self-organization in the sense of a control and change of structures by the system itself, and so no longer only autonomy in the old sense of self-regulation.[11]

Mark Z. Danielewski's 2006 *Only Revolutions* appeals to such a notion of autopoietic self-production. Although not distributed online, and despite appearing to decline the opportunities offered by digital media, *Only Revolutions* nevertheless seems to operate as a literary system that somehow produces itself, and its structural dimensions echo some of the organizational characteristics that are often associated with electronic literature. Part narrative poem, part free verse, part road novel, part historical collage, *Only Revolutions* not only ranges transgenerically across different literary modes but also often resembles haptic poetry, provoking readers to perceive their status as components integral to the functioning of the text, and who need to handle it to elicit meaning from it. *Only Revolutions* therefore folds readers into its pages, not simply because it generates multiple and open-ended responses, but because it exposes what Derrida describes as the repressed 'subjectile' of representation by flaunting the tangibility of its medium.[12]

*Only Revolutions* charts the love affair of its two principal characters, Hailey and Sam, through their stream-of-consciousness monologues, recording their work, sex, and travels across the US. Yet it presents these monologues in the form of a chiral textuality, asymmetrically counterpointing each other, beginning at opposite ends of the text, inverted one above the other, and requiring readers to turn the book over and around periodically in order to experience the unfolding narrative. Refusing the linearity of conventional novelistic writing, *Only Revolutions* has no determinate or discernable origin and neither does it allow reading to end; rather, readers switch constantly (though not necessarily randomly) between Sam's and Hailey's narratives by undertaking a series of circular and elliptical movements which incessantly shuttles them between the interior and the exterior surfaces

of this book. *Only Revolutions* totals 360 pages, each double page has 360 words, and page numbers, when flipped through like a flick book, revolve 360°. Such typographical manipulation and such a sense of circularity recur throughout the text: Hailey's half of the book synaesthetically draws attention to spheroid graphemes—zeroes and the character 'o'—by printing them in gold; in Sam's half these same characters are printed in green; both monologues start in a large font, but diminish in size as they progress through the book. At the middle of the text, on page 180, the two monologues achieve equilibrium on the page, and here Sam's and Hailey's stories converge and mirror each other exactly, if briefly, line by line. On the endsheets are concordances, grouped in circles and ellipses, of 'all the words that are not in the book'.[13] And, in the inner margins of Sam's and Hailey's monologues are placed series of historical fragments—what the book's colophon terms 'chronomosaics'—that instantiate seemingly random events from November 22 1863 to May 29 2005 (with blank entries continuing thereafter until January 19 2063). For Patrick O'Donnell, this departure from compositional and generic conventions for shaping narrative needs to be understood not simply as an empty form of textual ludicism. 'While these techniques may superficially appear to be but typographical gimmicks', he observes, in *Only Revolutions*, 'they generate substantial reflections on the process of reading as such'.[14] This text's organizational complexity and Möbius band-like non-linearity therefore provides readers with a folded and doubled architecture that seems to be constituted through reading as an involuted or recursive process. But, as Derrida argues, interpretation becomes uncertain in such writing which 'both marks and goes back over its mark. […] This double mark escapes the pertinence or authority of truth: it does not overturn it but rather inscribes it within its play as one of its functions or parts'.[15] As much as *Only Revolutions* often appears to devolve authority to the reader, it also therefore resembles a carefully structured system that guides readers through it—that somehow seems to produce its own narrative order—by pulling readers inexorably through an interpretational circuit that dispossesses them of any agency that interactivity of this sort might suggest.

Conceiving *Only Revolutions* as a machine that somehow writes itself—and writes readers into its operations—does, however, beg several questions, not least about its publication in print in the age of digital media—media which might more convincingly allow the kind of autopoiesis that this book suggests. For J. David Bolter, in 2001: 'The Internet and the Web, CD-ROMS and DVDs, and computer RAM

constitute a field for recording, organizing, and presenting texts—a contemporary writing space that refashions the earlier spaces of the papyrus roll, the codex, and the printed book'.[16] But such attempts to chart the supercession of the printed book by electronic media, and the sort of progressive historiography evident in them, are contestable. Challenging 'the idea of inexorable, quasi-natural, technical progress', Siegfried Zielinski, for example, questions:

> other basic assumptions, such as the history of political hegemony developing from the strictly hierarchical to strictly democratic organization of systems […] the absolute necessity for simple technical artefacts to be developed into complex technological systems. […] In essence, such genealogies are comforting fables about a bright future, where everything that ever existed is subjugated to the notion of technology as a power to 'banish fear' and a 'universal driving force'.[17]

Against such technoevolutionism, Zielinski proposes an 'anarchaeology' of media praxis, which looks to 'uncover dynamic moments in the media-archaeological record that abound and revel in heterogeneity'.[18] Similarly, apocalyptic declarations of the print-book's overcoming by digital production are being challenged by commentators who draw attention to the often unwitting  preservation of, as well as the conspicuous experimentation with, literary structures across different materialities of production. In this manner, N. Katherine Hayles identifies both the persistence of certain structural features of the printed text in electronic writing and the engagement with 'inscription technologies'[19] in experimental print fiction. For her, it is in the 'technotext', rather than digital writing alone, that literary textuality is stretched and redefined, a technotext that 'mobilizes reflexive loops between its imaginative world and the material apparatus embodying that creation as a physical presence'.[20] The unprecedented capacity for rewriting writing that has often been attached to electronic literature and digital writing therefore needs be rethought in terms of a longer history of technotextual reflexivity.

It is in this context and genealogy that *Only Revolutions* should be located as a text that explores technologies of production and representation, even as it abjures what are too narrowly conceived as electronic devices and digital media. One review of *Only Revolutions* dismisses Danielewski as a writer 'for whom the traditional narrative is a

hopelessly old-fashioned form',[21] though this book retains a commitment to the printed codex that strangely seems not outmoded to him. Indeed, as he remarks when interviewed about *House of Leaves*, books:

> can intensify informational content and experience. Multiple stories can lie side by side on the page. […] But somehow the analogue powers of these wonderful bundles of paper have been forgotten. Somewhere along the way, all its possibilities were denied.[22]

His commitment is not, then, to the ordered narrative of the novel, or to an experimentalism that is narrowly preoccupied with stylistic or linguistic innovation. Rather, he finds in the printed book a technology for exploring and enhancing the devices and techniques that are today more commonly associated with new media technologies. Forcing readers to participate in the production of Sam's and Hailey's monologues, this text provokes a sense of the literary object as an interactive apparatus—a self-authoring document and an autopoietic machine—that is activated as a system of operations carried out by a range of components, from the printed character and the page to the hand and eye of the reader.

## III

However, if *Only Revolutions* disputes the overcoming of print by electronic writing then it also implicitly questions the concept of autopoietic structures and systems that would account for how meaning develops within it. Here, it is not so much the poiesis of autopoiesis that is a problem, although *Only Revolutions* does work against canonical formulations of the poietic in Aristotle and Heidegger. In *Ethics*, Aristotle describes the act of creation as the teleo-narcissistic production of an artefact which the craftsman values for its technical accomplishment and durability. Praxis, in contrast, is purposive action, the product of reason, rooted in intention, triggered by choice, and an end in itself. In other words, ethical responsibility resides in praxis, technical ability in poiesis. Challenging this meshing of techne and poiesis, Heidegger defines the poietic as non-propositional communication which propels us towards the unthought, and cannot therefore be equated with the technical use of language that has a misplaced faith in names and identities. Against Aristotle, *Only Revolutions* provokes an ongoing act of narrative production that prevents the formation of a final textual artefact; against Heidegger, this text projects thought away from its ontological

fixations by engaging with and reinventing the technology of the printed codex.

More important is how the 'auto' of autopoiesis is radically refigured by *Only Revolutions.* Luhmann's notion of autopoiesis departs from theological and humanist conceptions of subjectivity as a form of transcendent consciousness, not by invoking a self that originates in a *sui generis* unity but as a complex system which builds itself out of pre-existing entities that populate its environment. However, as much as these systems for him begin in difference, they ultimately attain structural separation and systemic closure, and it is this return to the notion of functional homeostasis, to the idea that self-identicality and finitude reside in social systems, that has resulted in the conceptual value of autopoiesis being questioned by social and cultural theory. Hayles draws attention to this model's reliance on the idea of systemic closure: the 'central premise' of autopoiesis, she writes, 'radically alters the idea of the informational feedback loop, for the loop no longer functions to connect the system to its environment. In the autopoietic view, no information crosses the boundary separating the system from its environment'.[23] In Félix Guattari's fractal ontology, 'Machinic autopoiesis' is a contingent and unstable state which 'asserts itself as a non-human for-itself through the zones of partial proto-subjectivation'.[24] Emerging precariously through connections and combinations, such a state provides not ontological constancy but a simultaneous condition of homeostasis and disequilibrium, what he and Deleuze describe as 'subjectless individuations', and an 'absolute state of movement'.[25] For Jussi Parikka, a viral ontology shapes digital culture; within this media ecology, '"organisms" or "components" participate in the autopoiesis of the general system',[26] and among these organisms and components are 'the accidents of networked media'[27] (including malicious software) that both infect and regenerate information capitalism. What these responses maintain, then, is that the autopoietic entity or system has not only lost its onto-theological moorings, but continues to move uncertainly in the moment that it achieves stasis. In *Only Revolutions*, although recursive acts allow this text to function as a repeatable system and as a re-readable narrative, it nevertheless resists being treated as a fixed or finite structure. The revolutions that shape and enable its emergence are 'revolutions of ruin'[28] and are, for Hailey and Sam, 'Without recursion./Without place';[29] 'Without return. Without place'.[30] Rather than attaining operative separation and unity, *Only Revolutions* therefore functions as an open and adaptable system where repetition is

infused and infected by difference, and which embodies Derrida's notion of writing as an iterable structure that 'links repetition to alterity'.[31]

Such a rethinking certainly questions the integrity of the subject or system that is self-generating, but it also questions the notion that identity is increasingly dislocated and becoming distributed across information networks. Instead, it promotes what Simon Critchley describes as '*situated universality*',[32] which is both located and differentiated, a complexity that both works against familiar cybercultural declarations of the self's transcendence and challenges the idea that subjects and systems can attain unity and closure. Some recent accounts of the biotechnological transformation of consciousness and corporeality have started to contest visions of the self's disembodiment and dematerialization that characterize some responses to, and representations of, technoculture. Seeking not to celebrate the transcendence of the embodied self, not to look on in delight as the precariously drawn face of man is washed away by the electronic currents of technoculture, these accounts resituate corporeality, consciousness, and perception as simultaneously embodied and disembodied, both subjective and systemic, a bifurcated and incomplete totality. Mark Hansen, for example, claims that 'the "first generation" model of VR as a disembodied hyperspace free of all material constraints simply no longer has any purchase in our world',[33] since this model maintains the idea that consciousness and perception are primarily corporeal, with the body's encounter with technology conceived as the evolution of prosthetic separation. Against 'the hype surrounding virtual reality 10 years ago', he argues that digital technologies 'serve less to revitalize the dream of perfect simulation than to underwrite a more expansive and fluid *functional* interpenetration of physical and virtual spaces'.[34]

Hayles, in *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary*, considers the place of literary textuality in this re-evaluation of the relationship between bodies and machines. 'Contemporary electronic literature is', she observes, 'both reflecting and enacting a new kind of subjectivity characterized by distributed cognition, networked agency that includes human and non-human actors'.[35] And she finds these processes of reflection and enactment at work not only in screen-based electronic literature, but in novels that 'demonstrate the resilience of print culture by responding to the predations of computerization with outbursts of anxious creativity'.[36] Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Salvador

Plascenia's *The People of Paper* (2006): these novels for her provoke a sense of the coming together of text and reader in the continual forging and reforging of a system that is both embodied and technological. To this list it is possible to add *Only Revolutions*, since such a co-institution and mutual mediation is immediately evident in this text, with readers exorbitantly reminded that the passage of literary meaning is not simply from page to eye, that the book does not exist as a repository of fixed content that readers passively experience. But neither are readers activated as individuals by this text; as much as it dramatically exposes the reader's role in the production of Sam and Hailey's narratives, readers are here forced to confront their status as components in the emerging and open system of the text. Readers are drawn into the process of narrative production that Danielewski's text demands, not as surrogate authors who organize the text's development as a kind of prosthetic object, but as interacting and mutable entities that are constantly remade by acts of narrative engagement which they neither manage nor control.

## IV

*Only Revolutions* therefore bears witness to several shifts in recent thinking about literature and technology, providing literary endorsement for the claim that autopoietic entities remain open to adaptation and to the idea that technological devices are resulting in a sense of the complex dialogue between embodiment and disembodiment. Within this context, *Only Revolutions* also re-establishes the printed book as an experimental (perhaps even electronic) textuality. As Danielewski remarks in conversation: 'Books have had this capability all along. Read Chomsky, Derrida, Pinker, Cummings. Look at early 16th century manuscripts. Hell, go open up the Talmud. Books are remarkable constructions with enormous possibilities'.[37]

Derrida's inclusion in this brief list of writers and theorists suggests an affinity between his understanding of representation and subjectivity and Danielewski's. But it also suggests an affinity that extends beyond a shared sense of the book rewritten and the body reconceived. Certainly for Derrida, as for Danielewski, the notion of closed and functional structures, as well as the idea that human and machine begin in a state of mutual detachment, cannot convincingly account for the relationship between subject and system. Alluding to the work of Humberto Maturana, the biologist who provided the inspiration for Luhmann's notion of autopoietic social systems, *Of Grammatology* finds in the emerging science of cybernetics a provocative rethinking of the

separation of human and machine, but one which retains a faith in the systematicity of closed systems.[38] His 2001 essay 'Typewriter Ribbon' (as Derrida's readers might expect), questions the notion that the organic body possesses an 'incalculable singularity'[39] that is absent from the machine, but it also maintains that we are unequipped to conceive the shape of the organic machine; such an entity would require 'a new logic, an unheard-of conceptual form'.[40] And, just as for *Only Revolutions* subjectivity is retained in its transfiguration, so for Derrida the self needs to be understood as both singular and non-self-identical. In this manner, *Monolingualism of the Other* introduces the concept of 'auto-heteronomy' to point not to the endless internal differentiation and dislocation of the self, but to the doubled and impossible state of acquiring interiority from an exterior source—the prostheticized origin that Derrida names in the subtitle to this book. 'The monolingualism of the other', Derrida writes:

> would be that sovereignty, that law originating from elsewhere, certainly, but also primarily the very language of the Law. And the Law as Language. Its experience would be ostensibly *autonomous* […] but remains heteronomous. […] The madness of the law places its possibility lastingly […] inside the dwelling of this auto-heteronomy.[41]

Danielewski's citing of Derrida as a conceptual precursor and critical intertext[42] provokes further consideration of the cultural engagements at work in *Only Revolutions,* since this text looks beyond the body and the book, technology and cognition, machines and embodiment, to constructions of national and transnational belonging. For *Monolingualism of the Other,* the unsettling experience of auto-heteronomy needs to be situated in particular national contexts, and Derrida finds the compulsion for authentic self-expression in a language that is not one's own to be an instance of colonial violence. Monolingualism operates, Derrida claims, 'through a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial, which tends, repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce the language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogenous'.[43] Such a claim might suggest that the articulation of national sovereignty is to be wholly equated with the assertion of national authority, pointing to Derrida's possible preference for global over national cultures. Elsewhere, however, he is concerned less with challenging the 'homo-hegemony' of the colonial state than with questioning the premature celebration of global community, and in

*Learning to Live Finally* this hastily-conceived globalization is associated with the emergence of recent technologies. Here, Derrida observes that the political is being dismantled by various forces; 'the sovereignty of the state', he claims, 'is no longer linked to a territory, nor are today's communication technologies or military strategy, and this dislocation does in fact bring about a crisis in the old European concept of the political'.[44] And yet, rather than proposing that this territorial dislocation is ushering in new opportunities for universal emancipation, he suggests that sovereignty 'in some situations can be a good thing, for example, in fighting against certain global market forces. Here again we are talking about a European legacy that must be at once retained and transformed'.[45] Similarly, 'On Cosmopolitanism'—Derrida's rethinking of asylum, justice, and hospitality after Kant—explores the possibility for metropolitan spaces, rather than international community, to provide an alternative politics:

> Could the city, equipped with new rights and greater sovereignty, open up new horizons of possibility previously undreamt of by international state law? […] This is not to suggest that we ought to restore an essentially classical concept of the city by giving it new attributes and powers; neither would it be simply a matter of endowing the old subject we call 'the city' with new predicates. No, we are dreaming of another concept, of another set of rights for the city, of another politics of the city.[46]

These strangely discrepant responses to national and transnational belonging should not be treated as irreconcilable antitheses in Derrida's work, but as an intervention that takes place between and across the categories with which cultural location and territorial attachment are understood. Neither the nation as immanence nor the global as transcendence are promoted here; for Derrida, just as a different logic is needed to comprehend the body's machinic transformations, so 'an unheard-of conceptual form' is required to understand both the current and future shape of national and global cultures.

Saturated as it is by a sense of place and displacement, *Only Revolutions* begins to explore the conditions for the emergence of this conceptual form, though aspects of this text might guide readers into perceiving Sam and Hailey's environment as one characterized by smooth transitionality and unfettered translocationality. Hailey's half of

the book opens with the conjoined Sanskrit and Arabic exclamation 'Samsara! Samarra!', translatable as 'wandering' and 'delight in seeing', and wanderlust is often evident in her monologue: 'I can walk away from anything', she declares, 'I leap free this spring/ […] I'll destroy the world'.[47] Sam's story opens with the exclamation 'Haloes! Haleskarth!'[48] which, invoking transcendence and freedom from injury, suggests a state of detachment and disembodiment. Beyond these opening exclamations, *Only Revolutions* continues to suggest that Sam's and Hailey's travels are without border or limit. For Sam, the velocity of their journey allows them to escape from stasis and to attain boundless flight: 'Speed. Frightening/everything beyond the edges of our travels./We are without/edge, continually unwinding, uniting./Every around retreating before/our freedom'.[49] Elsewhere, he describes his dissolving of space as unhurried and casual: 'Leisurely I lope, stride, my way/beyond wide, victor of all sides./The obliteration of place'.[50] On some occasions he permits a sense of spatial attachment to creep into his monologue, though this attachment is not to nation or territory but to the nomadic and the transnational: 'How I gather./How I teach this world to travel',[51] he remarks, later describing one encounter as 'A fluttering trouble./Me./I shuffle back. Round the World./Hardly concerned:/ — *I'm quite dizzy now and confustipated*'.[52] Sam declares his attachment to Hailey, as a substitute for attachment to space and culture: 'After all, she's territorial./She's what territories become when some're none./ Lostlastandstrewn',[53] and for him she 'revokes all sorts,/ nationality, tradition & nature/for carrying on stupidly'.[54] On yet other occasions he refers directly to the emergence of global cultures, describing the sanctification of transnational markets as '*Mergers and Acquisitions./- Our global Agios*'.[55]

Hailey too seems to revel in the dislocating experience of travel. Capitalizing 'US', as the text consistently does to allude ambiguously both to the first person plural and to Sam's and Hailey's national location, she declares that 'allways we will leave US/behind US'.[56] She suggests that their journey propels them across metropolitan locations; they are, she states:

> Amortized. Fueled. Ready to pour it on.
> Our new 911 Cabriolet, nelly, natch to lay
> a batch from St. Louis. Budapest, Santiago,
> Warsaw. Amsterdam, Shanghai, New Delhi.
> Lisbon. Every city. Roam. Air sharper.
> Promises harder. Driving US from the ages.[57]

This transmetropolitan trajectory is further emphasized when Hailey describes their Alfa Romeo as 'screaming on from some/transcontinental terrortory'.[58] Like Sam, her attachment is displaced from the specificity of space and location: 'Sam comes with the terrortory', she states 'He's every terrortory. And drive./Lostlastandstrewn'.[59] Again, a sense of the global becomes explicit when she says that with Sam, 'all New World Order,/globalizes with a relentlessness only/he can coo through so tenderly'.[60] The chronomosaics further reinforce such a sense of the transnational and the global. In these, we find catalogued the birth of the UN, General Assemblies of both the League of Nations and the UN, NATO meetings, the formation of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization in 1954, the creation of the EEC in 1957, Khruschev's 1964 reiteration of the desire to '*Restore the monolithic unity of the World Socialist System*',[61] the 1975 Helsinki Accord on security and co-operation in Europe, and the 1992 Maastricht Treaty on European Union.

And yet, it would be too easy to read *Only Revolutions* as a text that promotes the kind of nomadic globalism that Derrida questions, since Sam and Hailey's journey takes place within a topology that the text firmly situates as the space of the nation. As much as *Only Revolutions* invokes a world in which nomadism is unfettered and borders casually transgressed, Sam and Hailey also display a rooted and inviolable attachment to place; indeed, to the US as a cultural, geographical, and territorial location. At the beginning of the text, Sam's monologue picks out the fauna of his habitat, mainly species that are native to the Americas (including bald eagles, cougars, boreal toads, cottontail rabbits, bighorn sheep, and lubber grasshoppers). 'I'm sooooo from these highlands', he states, 'From/the firn cached and low splashed/gushslushings through spilling vales/under such wheels of a soaring/American Kestrel killying'.[62] Hailey's monologue picks out the flora of her habitat, especially species that are native to the Americas (including Trembling Aspens, Tamarack Pines, Tag Alders, Western Flax, and Snowberries). 'I'm sooooo from these uplands', she states, 'From corries and chines./From the freezeloss and slowwash/slushgushing out of basins/and brooks to miles of/Northern Rock Jasmine growing'.[63] Travel and movement are often described as limping and impeded: Hailey declares: 'We continue on our travels, slipping/rods for catalytic meltdowns, misfires/coughing US along on shreddling tires/ […] the Dodge Omni grunting bitterly onward,/collapsing shocks turning to chunks,/rackandpinion seizing, pulling US left',[64] leading to Sam's Beckettian utterance: 'We can't go on'.[65] And, if the chronomosaics

document world history, then they do so by building a tableau of moments in various nations' histories. Examples of these include Whitman's 1865 lament that Lincoln's death will '*lastingly condense a Nationality*';[66] the 1933 National Recovery Administration of the New Deal in the US; the start of Algerian decolonization in 1958; the 1972 meeting between Nixon and Chou En-Lai, then Premier of the People's Republic of China, who stated that '*nations want liberation, and the people want revolution*';[67] Reagan's statement on signing the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, describing efforts to '*regain control of our borders*';[68] German reunification in 1990; the formation of the Serbian National Council in 1990; New Zealand's National Party; and 'Mary Robinson's Ireland'.[69] Throughout, these moments demonstrate a particular fascination with events in US history, from the American Civil War in the first entry to Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma in the final entry. 'Our Crossley Hotshot snorting/out chilly clouds which drift off into exile', Sam observes, 'Only there is no exile anymore./There's only US'.[70] Rather than charting the departure from national belonging, *Only Revolutions* therefore gathers together an aggregation or assemblage which suggests that belonging has been, and remains, shaped by national culture and territorial location.

More than this, however—more than simply representing the persistence of the national and the call of the global—*Only Revolutions* folds these bifurcated halves into each other to expose co-constituting movements of location and dislocation, the simultaneity of stasis and transition, incessant departure and the inevitability of return. Hailey's opening exclamation—'Samsara! Samarra!'—connotes not only drifting or migration, but reincarnation and transmigration, as well as the Iraqi city of the Babylonian myth retold by Somerset Maugham and John O'Hara in the 1930s; her flight is perhaps, then, not one of nomadic and liberatory egress, but of repetition and return, and one marked by archaic territorialism and death. Sam's opening exclamation—'Haloes! Haleskarth!'—connotes not only transcendence and disembodiment, but circularity and recurrence. Such ambivalent simultaneity, and such a dual sense of place and displacement, constantly punctuates the text. Sam states that 'This land is my land', yet a page later declares that 'there are no countries';[71] Hailey states that 'I'm a new terror upon the land' precipitating 'plateaus of national hurt', yet she immediately declares that 'there are no conflicts./Except me. And there's only/one transgression. Me'.[72] When declaring her rootedness in the landscape, Hailey describes this environment as 'Allready a wilderness./though never my own'.[73] For Sam, national borders are seen as both erasable

and inescapable: 'Our Crosley Hotshot snorting/out chilly clouds which drift off into exile./Only there is no exile anymore./There's only US'.[74] And Sam's and Hailey's travelogues asymmetrically mirror each other when they locate their surpassing of topography in the roadscape of the national capital:

> Niggles the stew barrel, that's me
> and my Baker Imperial:
> free, free, free.
> Chief of every cost, all around, lost and never lost.
> By the Potomac.
> Around Dupont Circle.
> Down Connecticut. B. Street.
> Arlington.
> […]
> So beyond Occident & Orient.[75]

> Anything to festinate freely
> with my Corvette Sting Ray:
> me, me, me.
> On the round,
> all around, found and never found.
> By the Anacostia.
> Around Logan Circle.
> Down Vermont. Constitution.
> For Arlington.
> […]
> I'm beyond transient and lingering.[76]

Passages such as these suggest that, for *Only Revolutions,* the familiar narrative of an epochal shift into global society needs to be rewritten. This text engages with the familiar perception of material detachment as global attachment, but it does so while resisting narratives of the nation-state's obsolescence and transcendence, instead showing an ongoing dialogue between national and global cultures, a dialogue that might, perhaps, allow something like the internationalism that is often mistaken for the globalization that is loudly proclaimed as the new actuality.

**V**

If *Only Revolutions* leaves readers with a sense of the simultaneity of the situated and the dispersed, of territory and deterritorialization, of the national and the global in a state of co-constitution and mutual critique, then Derrida proposes a provisional name for this condition: cosmopolitanism. Just as the concept of auto-heteronomy co-locates the subject as an entity that is committed to the discourse it cannot hope to possess, so the concept of cosmopolitanism rethinks the national as an inhabitation that can never be attained and the global as a universal inclusivity that cannot be known. Referring not to the surpassing of national borders and the arrival of an all-encompassing and international universalism, cosmopolitanism for Derrida instead signals the reinvention of the nation-state as a singularity—the sort of singularity that is, according to Derek Attridge, 'constitutively impure, always open to contamination, grafting, accidents, reinterpretation, and recontextualization'.[77] Neither evaporating in the transcendence of space nor retaining an irreducible unity, the nation here becomes reimagined as a definable entity that constantly exceeds itself, a condition conveyed by Hailey when she describes the 'sadness of the world after US/but we are already before US/and sadly surpassing even US'.[78] Importantly, for Derrida, the concept of cosmopolitanism is an erasable (non)concept that can only point to the horizon of the national and the global. This cosmopolitan condition remains unthought, Derrida cautions, and as a consequence it can promise only an inconceivable futurity; our position on the threshold of new cultural formations means that:

> a certain idea of cosmopolitanism, *an other*, has not
> yet arrived, *perhaps*.
> > – If it has (*indeed*) arrived...
> – ... then, one has perhaps not yet recognised it.[79]

In *Only Revolutions* too, this alternative understanding of cultural and territorial attachment and displacement has not yet arrived, or at least is not yet perceived. The chronomosaics certainly refuse to predict the shape of national and international cultures after the book's completion by Danielewski in 2005. And, although a sense of the nation-state's uncertain and unstable constitution runs through Sam's and Hailey's monologues, future cultural systems retain their futurity and are left uncompromized by speculative proclamations on the emergence of postnational community:

> For a greater economy will follow US
>            and it will be outdone.
> And a greater autonomy shall follow US
>            and it too will be outdone.
> And a greater feeling shall follow Love
>            and it too we will blow to dust.[80]

> For a greater nation shall follow US
>            and it will be outdone.
> And a greater devotion shall follow US
>            and it too will be outdone.
> And a greater emotion shall follow Love
>            and it too we will blow to dust.[81]

Engaging with the technologies of its production and interpretation, *Only Revolutions* therefore explores new possibilities for printed textuality, and reflects on literature's capacity to unsettle the relationship between embodiment and technology. In this respect Danielewski's text reflects and extends recent critical work on literature and digital culture, challenging notions of textual (and social) production as a closed and functional system and exposing the impurities, contaminations, and recontextualizations that constitute literature's singularity. But, as the writing automata of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries demonstrate, literary machines have also functioned within national and international contexts. *Only Revolutions* continues in this troubled tradition, seeking neither to reaffirm comforting myths of territorial fixity nor to indulge in fantasies of postnational transcendence, but to suggest the singularity of the cosmopolitan.

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**Notes**

1   On 'the transhuman', see, for example, Julian Huxley, 'Transhumanism', in *New Bottles for New Wine: Essays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), pp. 13-17; N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Neil Badmington, 'Theorizing Posthumanism', *Cultural Critique*, 53 (2003), 10-27; Philippe Verdoux, 'Transhumanism, Progress and the Future', *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, 20:2 (2009), 49-69.

2   Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McClintock (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 135ff.

3   Bruce Grenville, *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2002), p. 10.

4   Tom Standage, *The Mechanical Turk: The True Story of the Chess-Playing Machine That Fooled the World* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 2.

5   Lisa Nocks, *The Robot: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), p. 38.

6   Italo Calvino, 'Cybernetics and Ghosts', in *The Uses of Literature: Essays*, trans. Patrick Creagh (London: Harcourt Brace, 1986), p. 13.

7   Niall Lucy, *Beyond Semiotics: Text, Culture and Technology* (London: Continuum, 2001), p. 133.

8   Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: How We will Live, Work and Think in the Age of Intelligent Machines* (London: Orion, 1999), p. 163. Examples of the poetry produced by Kurzweil's program can be found at:
    http://www.kurzweilcyberart.com/poetry/rkcp_poetry_samples.php3 [accessed 21 October 2010].

9   Details about markoff can be found at:
    http://mac.softpedia.com/get/Utilities/markoff.shtml;
    information about mchain can be found at:
    http://mchainpoetics.wordpress.com/about-this-blog/; Gnoetry can be accessed at: http://beardofbees.com/gnoetry.html [accessed 14 February 2011].

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11  Niklas Luhmann, *Law as a Social System*, trans. Klaus A. Ziegert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 80-1.

12  Jacques Derrida, *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 44.

13  Callie Miller & Michele Reverte, 'LAist Interview: Mark Z. Danielewski', http://laist.com/2007/10/23/laist_interview_55.php [accessed 21 October 2010].

14  Patrick O' Donnell, *The American Novel Now: Reading Contemporary American Fiction Since 1980* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 214.

15  Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone: 1981), p. 193.

16  J. David Bolter, *Writing Space: Computers, Hypertext, and the Remediation of Print* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), p. 12.

17  Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*, trans. Gloria Custance (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), p. 3.

18  Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media*, p. 11.

19  N. Katherine Hayles, *Writing Machines* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), p. 24

20  Hayles, *Writing Machines*, p. 25.

21  Sean O' Hagan, 'I wouldn't say this is unreadable...', *The Observer* (24 September 2006), http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/sep/24/sciencefictionfantasyandhorror.features [accessed 21 October 2010].

22  Sophie Cottrell, 'A Conversation with Mark Danielewski', http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0400/danielewski/interview.html [accessed 21 October 2010].

23  Hayles, *How We became Posthuman*, pp. 10-11.

24  Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Baines & Julian Pefanis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 54.

25  Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone, 1988), pp. 266-7.

26  Jussi Parikka, *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 259.

27  Parikka, *Digital Contagions*, p. 3.

28  Mark Z. Danielewski, *Only Revolutions* (London: Doubleday, 2006), Sam, p. 347/Hailey, p. 347.

29  Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, pp. 163-4.

30  Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 163.

31  Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context', in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1982), p. 315.

32 Simon Critchley, *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), p.42.

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34 Hansen, *Bodies in Code*, p. 3.

35 N. Katherine Hayles, *Electronic Literature: New Horizons for the Literary* (Indiana: U of Notre Dame P, 2008), p. 37.

36 Hayles, *Electronic Literature*, p. 165.

37 Cottrell, 'A Conversation with Mark Danielewski'.

38 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974 & 1976), p. 9.

39 Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon', in *Without Alibi*, ed. & trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 72.

40 Derrida, 'Typewriter Ribbon', p. 73.

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43 Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*, p, 39-40.

44 Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascale Anne Brault & Michael Naas (Hobeken: Melville House, 2007), p. 46.

45 Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally*, p. 46.

46 Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley & Michael Hughes (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 8.

47 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 1.

48 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 1.

49 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, pp. 221-2.

50 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 10.

51 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions,* Sam, p. 80.

52 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 108-9.

53 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 292.

54 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 307.

55 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 197.

56 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 290.

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58 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 227.

59 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 292.

60 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 225.

61 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 16.
62 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 35.
63 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 35.
64 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, pp. 142-3.
65 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions* Hailey, p. 144.
66 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 3.
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68 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 194.
69 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 216.
70 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 224.
71 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, pp. 2-3.
72 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, pp. 2-3
73 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 16.
74 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, pp. 224.
75 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 57.
76 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 57.
77 Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 63.
78 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 311.
79 Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism*, p. 23. I consider Derrida's notion of cosmopolitanism further in *Nationality between Poststructuralism and Postcolonial Theory: A New Cosmopolitanism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
80 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Sam, p. 351.
81 Danielewski, *Only Revolutions*, Hailey, p. 351.