

The Anamorphic Sublimation in Tom McCarthy's Remainder (2005)

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept the anamorphic sublime in Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*. Through a psychoanalytic-neo-Marxist lens, it argues that the main character's compulsive repetitions and reenactments are bound to fail the more he strives to attain the sublime in its positive perfect version. Each attempt of repeating the imagined and real events the narrator witnesses reproduce a gap (remainder) that resists meaning and rational narration. Rather than grasping the sublime, the narrator produces and reproduces an anamorphic sort of sublimation that distorts his real desire rather than transferring it perfectly. This anamorphosis is supported by the late-capital system that sustains itself not through labor or prohibition, but through injecting the subject with surplus pleasure, money and urging it to commodify its own desire in an anamorphic way. Rather than providing meaning and depth, the late capitalist apparatus devoid the subject of its substance.

Keywords: Sublime, Capitalism, Remainder, Real, Anamorphosis

السمو الانامورفي في رواية "الباقى" لتوم مكارثى

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المستخلص

تتناول هذه الورقة مفهوم السمو الانامورفي في رواية الباقي لتوم مكارثى. ومن خلال منظور تحليلي نفسي ذي نزعة ماركسية جديدة، ترى ان التكرارات القهرية التي يقوم بها البطل واعادة تمثيله للاحداث ترتبط بمحاولته المستمرة بلوغ السمو في صورته المثالية الكاملة. غير ان سعيه الى اعادة انتاج ما شهدته من احداث، سواء كانت متخيلة ام واقعية، لا يفضي الا الى توليد بقايا تعاند المعنى وتقف في وجه السرد العقلاني. وبدلاً من بلوغ السمو، ينخرط الراوي في انتاج شكل انامورفي من السمو يعيد تشكيل رغبته ويشوهها بدل ان ينقلها على نحو مكتمل. ويستند هذا التحول الى نظام الرأسمالية المتأخرة، الذي لا يستمر عبر العمل او المنع، بل عبر اغراق الذات بفائض من اللذة والمال، وحثها على تسليع رغبته الخاصة بطريقة انامورفية. وهكذا، بدل ان يوفر المعنى والعمق، يعمل هذا النظام على تفرغ الذات من جوهرها .

الكلمات مفتاحية: السمو، الرأسمالية، الباقي، الواقع، التشوه

1. Introduction: Anamorphic Sublimation

The classical concept of sublime has come to be understood as a grand phenomenon; a transcendent experience beyond the subject's reach as Kant contends: "The Sublime may be described in this way: It is an object (of nature) the representation of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation of ideas (1964, 119). For Kant, the sublime in its essence exceeds sensory comprehension, forcing the subject to grasp it partially through reason, abstract ideas and empirical thinking, yet, it cannot be contained as a whole. In *The sublime Object of Ideology*, Slavoj Zizek comments on Kant:

The Sublime is therefore the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way, of the dimension of what is unrepresentable. It is a unique point in Kant's system, a point at which the fissure, the gap between phenomenon and Thing-in-itself, is abolished in a negative way, because in it the phenomenon's very inability to represent the Thing adequately is inscribed in the phenomenon itself- or, as Kant puts it, 'even if the Ideas of reason can be in no way adequately represented [in the sensuous-phenomenal world], they can be revived and evoked in the mind by means of this very inadequacy which can be presented in a sensuous way. (1989, 229)

the sublime is something beyond the logic of language, symbols and reason, yet, the subject strives to represent it through the previous methods nevertheless it fails to grasp it in its wholeness. This failure, according to Zizek, produces meanings, despite that, there is always this sense of imperfection that leads the subject to successive attempts of representing the sublime in its perfect form. To put it differently, the sublime drives the subject to form a world of representations despite its failure in representing it as it is since it cannot be contained as a whole, as a "thing-in-itself". Therefore, it appears in a "negative away" as a gap, a hole, or an imperfection within the subject's world of representations, this gap comes to be the driving force that led the subject to deconstruct/reconstruct the world of representations in an attempt to grasp the perfect version of the sublime.

As long as the sublime cannot be directly represented, it can only be perceived through a distorted gaze, that is, an anamorphic angle. The object "the Thing" cannot be seen directly only from a side view. "Anamorphosis", Zizek thus maintains, "the logic of which is quite different: a detail of a picture that "gaz'd rightly," i.e., straightforwardly, appears as a blurred spot, assumes clear, distinguished shapes once we look at it "awry," at an angle" (*Looking Awry*, 1991, 9). Overall, in psychoanalysis, forming the subject's narcissism emerges through anamorphosis. ideologies -as the core of the Lacanian order of reality- are constituted through distortion in an attempt of comprehending the Real (the sublime in its perfect version) in its positive form, Zizek states: "then, the precise definition of the real object: a cause which in itself does not exist - which is present only in a series of effects, but always in a distorted, displaced way" (*The Sublime*, 1989, 184).

This Anamorphic sublime is generated due to the late capitalist system. Culture, in late-capitalism, “has become a product in its own right”. What Jameson suggests in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* is that cultural sphere is commodified; art, identity and life are converted into commodities. As a result, subject status is changed, the subject becomes deprived of its connection to history, forming its identity through superficial representations, simulations, from which depth is lost. Jameson argues: “a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary “theory” and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality”. The rationale of consumption pervades every dimension of life under the shade of “the new culture of the image or the simulacrum” (1991, 6)

Tom McCarthy’s *Remainder* stages what one might term as anamorphic sublimation where the unnamed narrator has obsession in reconstructing imagined and real incidents through successive reenactments. His failure in representing all imagined scenarios every time he reenacts them is due to the fact that the sublimated/perfect version of each scenario he has aimed to reenact cannot be approached directly/perfectly only through a distortive imperfect version. The unsuccessful process of reenactments leads the narrator to a more radical and transgressive anamorphic sublimation through sublimating violence, murder and death. Thus, one might argue that *Remainder* meditates on the traumatized subject’s repetition compulsion, simulative practices, madness, and violence. Rather than representing the sublime object through reason and rational acts, the narrator resorts to violence and murder as the last attempt to grasp the sublime in its perfect version.

2. Tom McCarthy: Biography

As a contemporary novelist, Tom McCarthy occupies a distinctive position in literature and theory as his works have received significant critical praise specially *Remainder*, *C*, and *Men in Space* (Duncan, 2016, 4)). What makes his style unique is that he summons the contemporary novel back to the modernist experimentations. For that, Pieter Vermeulen contends that his art is as much as the postmodernist ones, they seek to deconstruct the norms of novel such as linear plot and psychological dimension (2012, 549). According to Dennis Duncan, novels written by McCarthy presents flat characters which resist psychological depth making it difficult for the reader to relate his experience with. Duncan argues that McCarthy’s characters lack emotional depth since they are not familiar with human psychical experience. Duncan’s justification for that his main interest is not emotional relatability, rather that the intellectual messages he aims to convey. In other words, he does not want to reduce his works to “sentimental humanism” (2016, 6).

McCarthy aims at continuing the modernists’ legacy such as James Joyce and Samuel Becket, a legacy that prevents sentimental storytelling compelling the readers to consider his art intellectually rather than emotionally. Therefore, his major emphasis in his novels is critiquing the flaws of system/individuals instead of commodifying feelings and sentiments. Thus, rather than empathy, McCarthy’s characters are perceived critically due to their illogical acts. For example, his novel, *Men in Space* shows clearly this lack of emotional and

psychological dimensions emphasizing the external spatial atmosphere, rather than showing the characters' inner world. In his other novel entitled *C*, the main character gazes at the world from his critical observation rather than psychological perception reflecting on the contemporary technology and media (Duncan, 2016, 7). One of these external realities that McCarthy tackles is the reality of the postmodernist culture that produces delusional individuals with anamorphic sublimation. McCarthy's *Remainder* can be considered as a critique levelled at this very postmodernist beliefs (Huber, 2017, 3).

3. Anamorphic Sublimation in *Remainder*

McCarthy's *Remainder* can be understood as a dramatization of the anamorphic sublimation. These anamorphisms define the protagonist's attempts to grasp the real/the sublime in its perfect version. Hence, the unnamed narrator passes through three stages in an attempt to gain the sublime: first, the crucial event that changes the protagonist's life; a mysterious object falls from the sky to hit his head, causing amnesia, that is, loss of memories: "about the accident itself I can say very little. Almost nothing. It involved something falling from the sky" (McCarthy, 2005, 5), second, his attempts of regaining his lost memories as well as an authentic identity through a series of reenactments, that is, repeating events he sees as a dejavu from a crack in his apartment - "I was going to recreate it: build it up again and live inside it. I'd work outwards from the crack" (2005, 62) -, these reenactments can be perceived as compulsive repetitions which are supposed to reproduce the Real in a perfect (positive) version: "his ultimate goal, of course, being to – how shall we put it? To attain – no, to accede to – a kind of authenticity through this strange, pointless residual'" (2005, 231). Third, the protagonist's descent into darkness; after the failure of reenactments, murder, and violence become the last resort in grasping the sublime, yet in an anamorphic way. Therefore, the unnamed narrator, who is "left appropriately nameless and underspecified so as to fit the role of Everyman" (Violi, 2018, 93), becomes a reincarnation of the Lacanian-Zizekian traumatic event, the surplus remainder that resists symbolization, (this is best represented in the protagonist's amnesia and the loss of the historical self).

The protagonist's amnesia, from a psychoanalytic standpoint, represents the absence of the anchoring point, the solid ground and the sublime object (his identity) that constitute the narrator's fictional authentic self. However, the loss of memory traumatizes the unnamed narrator's psyche that he is cornered in an infinite cycle of repeated activities such as lifting the carrot to his mouth "again and again and again" in an attempt of grasping "how they all work" (McCarthy, 2005, 19). These recurrent activities hint at his later obsession with reenactments driving him to live a life of simulation and mimesis searching for his own Real self that can be regarded the perfect sublime he aims to grasp (his authentic self).

Seemingly, the accident the unnamed narrator has been exposed to symbolize a shift in his own perception/way of thinking releasing him from his past and forcing him to embrace a new reality that is defined by depthlessness, money and excessive pleasure. As the postmodernist culture, under the shade of late capitalism, produces consumer subjects, so is the fictional world of the novel in which the narrator strives to grasp the sublime through spending money. In other words, he consumes the Real in an unproductive way. "The terms

of the Settlement drawn up between my lawyer and the parties, institutions, organizations - let's call them the bodies - responsible for what happened to me prohibit me from discussing, in any public or recordable format" (McCarthy, 2005, 5). There is a hint that those "bodies" are responsible for the accident. Although the identity of the "bodies" remains unknown all over the novel, one might suggest that they represent the late capitalist system that exerts its authority and sustains itself through transforming the unnamed narrator to a consumer, as those "bodies" provide him with - "eight and a half million" (McCarthy, 2005, 8). In other words, money becomes operative within the protagonist's process of reenactments that aim for producing the sublime.

Anamorphosis refers to a distorted perception as Zizek states, this anamorphic gaze is well represented in the narrator's distorted perception of the city:

The city had that closing-ranks look, when it gathers itself up into itself but Thuts you out. It was glowing, but it wasn't heating me. As I sat there it occurred to me that I could go and stand on almost any street, any row, any sector, and buy it – buy the shops, the cafes, cinemas, whatever. I could posses them, but I'd still be exterior to them, outside, closed out. This feelings glow, closing ranks. The landscapes I was looking at seemed lost, dead, a dead landscape. (2005, 46)

This belief of the absolute control over every object in the city can be perceived as a failed attempt of grasping the sublime/perfection "I could go and stand on ...any street, any row, any sector, and buy it". This attempt is doomed to fail as long as the narrator sees himself excluded, an outcast or empty despite having wealth that might enable him to own whatever he desires "I'd still be exterior to them". The city itself becomes an anamorphic sublime, functioning as a false image of perfection, the narrator is able to grasp it, yet, a sense of lack/emptiness persists preventing him of experiencing the city as a perfect sublime as it exceeds comprehension. In other words, despite the fact that the narrator can own anything in the city enjoying his wealth, the city is paradoxically perceived, overwhelming and "glowing" and at the same time, arises a sense of discomfort and emptiness. From an anamorphic perspective, what appears as plenitude to the narrator is proven to be a distortion. Hence, consumption becomes a false path to sublimation as the more the narrator consumes the more, he feels empty. What the narrator is exposed to is lucidly what Fredrick Jameson terms as "the eclipse of subjectivity in a new anonymity" (1991, 174). While he is devoid of identity, depth, history or memory, he becomes a representation of this "new anonymity" that causes an "eclipse of subjectivity" as a consumer person whose desire is woven by late-capitalist system.

Given that the accident constitutes a sudden irruption of the Real as "a hole, a gap, an opening in the middle of the symbolic order" (Zizek *the Sublime*, 1989, 191). It is due to this disruptive void within his symbolic order; the narrator becomes obsessed pathologically with reenacting imagined and real scenarios. The tale of re-enactments begins once he sees a crack in the wall inside his apartment triggering in him "a sudden sense of déjà vu" (McCarthy, 2005, 58). He begins conceiving an uncannily familiar scene he later reenacts recurrently. While the crack might be a symbol of a negative form of the sublime (a meaningless spot),

the narrator's déjà vu can be understood as his Ideal version of this sublime: the imaginary scenario that he perceives as a perfect construction of his authentic lost memory. what is left is actualizing this imaginary scenario into a perfect reality, thus comes the role of reenactments as a Zizekian "protective screen" (*Looking Awry*, 1991 12) on which he projects his own desire. This "protective screen" is a psychological defense that enables the narrator to escape his void/emptiness through sublimating the crack (reproducing what he imagines in reality through reenactment).

The narrator's déjà vu goes as such:

There'd been...a window directly above the taps just like there was in this room... out of the window there had been roofs with cats on them. Red roofs, black cats. It had been high up, much higher than I was now...The smell of the liver cooking in a pan had been wafting to me from the floor below – the sound too, the spit and sizzle- and then two floors below that there'd been piano music. Not recorded music playing on a CD or the radio, but real, live music, being played on a piano by the man who lived there, a musician. (McCarthy, 2005, 58)

The narrator's obsession in reenacting this flooding memory, and materializing it as a perfect coherent narrative is nothing than an attempt to grasp the sublime (the uncomprehensible perfect narration). This can be his "new route" (2005, 18) towards his perfect authentic self. However, the Real here does not present itself in a unified form as a consistent narrative, rather, it emerges fragmented and arbitrary in a form of a lady cooking a liver, a man playing on the piano, cats on the red roof...etc. These disjointed images which resist meaning and depth must be translated into an intelligible reality. To put it differently, the protagonist's goal is centered around reproducing these scattered images in a perfect way to impose depth and meaning. Moreover, money becomes the infrastructural force, and the engine that renders the anamorphic gaze possible. It plays the crucial role in materializing the narrator's imaginary scenarios: "I could do it all, of course. That was no problem. I had funds, I could not only buy my building and the building behind it, but also hire the staff" (2005, 63). The excess wealth he possesses is indicative of the late-capitalist trace, that is, the invisible hand that shapes and structures the narrator's desire, yet, in anamorphic/distortive way, inciting him to purchase, consume; this is the new form of capitalism that transforms the sublime into a commodity.

The narrator's reenactments are closely attuned with Zizek and Lacan's process of transference: a sublime moment in which the subject is attached to a meaning (Lacan *Psychosis*, 1993, 222). The process of reenactments has its own late-capitalist logistical intermediary, that is, Naz who is depicted by the protagonist as "extra set of limbs ... tentacles spreading out in all directions, coordinating projects, issuing instructions, executing commands" (McCarthy, 2005, 69). Without Naz as a mediator, these reenactments are impossible. Naz, to put it differently, can be perceived as a representative of the late-capitalist system that materializes the narrator's desire, shaping it as a simulated reality. Naz thus is seen as the Zizekian "protective screen" that conceals the traumatic emptiness the narrator has been suffering from since the accident: "Before he came into the picture, I had endless troubles... I mean with communicating. Making people understand my vision, what it was I

wanted” (McCarthy,2005, 69). In term of Jameson’s neo-Marxist farmwork, Naz can be perceived as “the extraordinary systematizing and unifying forces of late capitalism which are so omnipresent as to be invisible” (1991, 185). Although his authority remains unseen, Naz functions as this “systemizing and unifying” force that works on organizing the narrator’s chaotic real in a logical, rational yet fictional reality. The question that should be posited: does Naz succeed in satisfying the narrator’s demands? Can the crack become narratable rationally so that the narrator can grasp the sublime in its perfect version?

Inexplicably, the crack presents itself as a rupture in the protagonist’s own new reality. It is the non-symbolized space, where any consistent narrative collapses. Rather than genius and rational, the narrator’s actions become “duplicated, unnatural, acquired” (McCarthy, 2005, 71). Such is the case with his initial attempt of re-enacting the first de-javu. There persists, a surplus excess, a trace or a remainder that resists symbolization after each attempt of re-enacting the scene:

‘I shall move throughout the space’ I said, ‘as I see fit. We’ll concentrate on different bits at different times. Different locations, different moment. Sometimes I’ll want to be passing the liver lady as she puts her rubbish out. Sometimes I’ll want to be out by the motorbike. Sometimes the two at once: we can pause one scene and I’ll run up or down the stairs to be inside the other. Or a third. *The combinations are endless.*’ (McCarthy,2005, 80)

The movement from one moment to another, from one scene to the next reflects the narrator’s anamorphic construction of his identity. However, the entire procedure becomes perpetual due to the fact that narrator seeks the perfect version of reenactment (the sublime), yet with every attempt a remainder persists, that is, a mistake that prevents the narrator to grasp perfection. This remainder becomes a lucid trace of the distortive version of the Real/sublime that makes perfection ungraspable. The narrator, being deprived of his own authentic self, is gradually swallowed by this excess of pleasure supplied by the late-capitalist system, the excess money he has been gifted enables him to conclude that “the combinations are endless”. The late-capitalist system fosters this endlessness, circulating the surplus/remainder without solving it. The Protagonist’s reality is thus defined by what Jameson coins as “multidimensional digression” (1991, 174). His reality is digressive that his anamorphic way of sublimating it fails to provide “any hermeneutic or interpretive system” (1991,174)

The question that is raised by the narrator after a series of failures: “Had it been a success?”, he continues:

...A Difficult question. Some things had worked, and some things hadn’t. My shirt had slightly caught against the cutting board, but then the fridge had opened perfectly. The liver lady had come up with that fantastic line but then dropped her rubbish bag when she’d tried to re-enact her movements for a third time. Then there was the question of the smell, of course. But had it been a success? A success at what? Had I expected all my movements to be seamless and perfect instantly? Of course not. (McCarthy, 2005, 136)

These failures are nothing than anamorphic attempts of grasping the sublime (a perfect version of the imagined scenarios he reenacts). “My shirt had slightly caught against the cutting board”, “the liver lady...dropped her rubbish bag”. What the protagonist hints at that he has already expected an imperfect reenactment, that might be the reason behind his insisting on grasping the sublime in its distorted version.

The core dilemma that forces the narrator to articulate the sublime in an anamorphic way is his inability to translate the *de javu* perfectly, rather, it produces a distortive version of it. At first glance, these reenactments appear perfect, the choice of performers, timing, coordination, nevertheless, “there’s just one thing not quite” (McCarthy, 2005, 118). That is, the smell of the fried liver, “the smell is kind of strange, a bit like cordite” (2005, 118-125). This smell is the sign of a distortive/anamorphic sublime. The narrator’s memory has already been plagued with a rupture when he is unable to recall the face of one of the women in his imagined scenario, yet, he chooses that the performer puts on a mask, an attempt of perfecting the reenactment. This traumatic residue generates a perpetual loop of reenactment, that comes to be understood as the narrator’s anamorphic attempts grasping the sublime. The entire procedure of reenactment is repeated numerous times whenever the narrator encounters a gap. Yet, repetition does not solve the narrator’s dilemma, it rather increases it, thus after each attempt, the narrator states that “this wasn’t right. Wasn’t how I remembered it” (2005, 126).

“Therein consists the most elementary formal definition of psychosis: the massive presence of some Real which fills out and blocks the perspective openness constitutive of ‘reality’. This magnetic force which distorts the linear perspective on reality is of course enjoyment” (Zizek *Enjoy Your Symptoms*, 1992, 119). The narrator’s obsessive attempts of repeating imagined and real events render him mad (not clinically only, but symbolically). The core of the issue is his goal, the pursuit of perfection that paradoxically intensifies the flaws within his own production. Part of the reason is the late-capitalist culture injects him with unlimited pleasure (money) that drags him to the point of zero desire (Jameson’s depthlessness). Thus, the whole operation turns into a metaphor for the inadequacy of the late-capitalist apparatus in governing the subject’s impulses, and in brining about meaning. it produces labor, enjoyment, commodities without offering depth. Yet, by means of this deficiency, late-capitalism maintains itself exploiting the subject’s compulsive repetitions, Naz persists as this late-capitalist figure whose performance and logistical coordination does not produce significance and substance, yet, the more his performance fails the more the narrator relies on his logistics and support. The narrator emerges a being of late capitalism, lacking clear identity, deprived of any selfhood or memory, and his madness is embodied in his efforts of recreating reality through his fragmented visions, he is not situated in a definite position.

For this, after the failure of the logical re-production of reality, he resorts to a more radical anamorphic procedure to grasp the sublime, that is, committing transgressive acts such as robbery and murder: “forensic procedure is an art form, nothing less. No, I’ll go further: it’s higher, more refined, than any art form. Why? Because it’s real” (McCarthy, 2005, 166). The

narrator's words are a connotation of his anamorphic gaze to the concept of sublime, it is no more grasped by ethical/rational processes, rather, it is achieved through a distortive perspective (death and crime) as the corpse is perceived by him as the sign of his real authentic self. Transgressive acts such as murder and violence are no more seen traumatic, they are aestheticized/sublimated, being regarded as a higher form or art. Crime becomes the narrator's new anchor of sublimated ideology, and violence is thought of as the anamorphic ground for significance: "It's like cricket...each ball is like a crime, a murder. And then they do it again, and again and again, and the commentator has to commentate, or he'll die too" (2005, 166).

Guns, which are a symbol for violence are sublimated and regarded beautiful:

One other thing about guns: their beauty. ...Some are more beautiful than others, of course, depending on the sleekness of their finish, the curvature of the handle, the thickness of the hammer and a dozen other factors. But just being guns makes them all beautiful. That thing so small, so pleasing to the eye, so friendly to the touch — so passive — can contain such force is breathtaking. Then the way they hang just off the body, cradled tenderly like babies, sleeping — till the moment they erupt and carry beauty to another level. No beauty without violence, without death. (McCarthy, 2005, 171).

For the narrator, the guns are seen here as a source of anamorphic production, that is a pure immediate authentic event. Sublimating guns in itself is a trace of the narrator's anamorphic way of establishing his own subjectivity. This anamorphic gaze towards an object of murder marks a lucid ethical collapse. Criminal acts emerge as the new phantasm that is meant to restrain the narrator's chaotic impulses, yet ironically, it unleashes them. Earlier, the protagonist strives to control his traumatic outburst of drives and capture authenticity through coherent narratives, reenactments and regulations, these are the symbolic constructs which fail to provide the narrator with fulfillment due to their lack of flawlessness. Rather, death substitutes the prior fantasies as a ultimate sort of fantasy, the moment at which all forms of mediation are proven insufficient, and symbolic illusions disintegrate, this represents, that is to say, the most radical form of illusion, it is lucidly a sort of anamorphic one. Blood and brutality are regarded the narrator's "new route" to self-authentication.

The narrator's obsession with reenacting scenes of murders is a moment of madness that Naz brings him a doctor: "you'd gone completely vacant... for the whole last hour and a half" (McCarthy, 2005, 173). This madness is a symbol of the narrator's withdrawal from reality and rationality. The late capitalist apparatus injects him with wealth and pleasure pushing him to the point of depthlessness and de-subjection: "Both mind and actions are resolved themselves into pure stasis" (McCarthy, 2005, 178). Once the narrator proclaimed his descent into a "pure stasis", he turns into an anamorphic subject of late-capitalism. Perfection, for the protagonist, found in immediacy only legitimizing his aestheticization of violence. Hence, death becomes validated, universalized, and viewed as sacred "... And so I had to re-enact his death... for the world in general as well" (2005, 178). His transgressive

acts become a “blessed ground”: death, for the narrator, promises a replacement for meaning rather than authenticity, nevertheless, it appears as a pure act without any logical sense.

The procedure of re-enactment is limited to fragments that recur themselves mechanically without offering substance: “So fast that the individual shots merged into a hum of infinite self-repetition without origin or end” (2005, 186). In other words, repetitions become damaging rather than constitutive, acts become meaningless rather than purposeful, and that the gunfire becomes like a “hum”, that is, a pure noise-void. The crime scene is regarded a work of art, signifying the apex of the anamorphic gaze. Crime is not considered as a traumatic, immoral, and tragic event, rather, it is sublimated in a distortive way: “It struck me that the world ...must have loved this man” (2005, 191), a remark about a murdered man that indicates the protagonist attaining the dehumanizing condition.

The last re-enactment the narrator performs, that is “a bank heist”, becomes a symbol of the deficiency of the capitalist system in establishing balanced subjects. Money is regarded as a source of pure enjoyment without providing the subject with depth or authenticity. The late capitalist system is based on wealth, purchases, commodities, and surplus pleasure. Instead, the symbolic order, heist, murder, and blood are considered the anamorphic sublime object the narrator wants to grasp. Transgression itself becomes a commodity; money is paid to purchase the performers’ services to steal the bank. This attempt of re-enactment represents the collapse of the protagonist’s ethical and rational thinking. The narrator is lucid trapped in the late capitalist psychotic logic, being manacled in a loop of repeated irrational events without capturing the sublime in its perfect version. Both reality and fiction are submerged, this is Zizekian anamorphism at its most. the protagonist’s unproductive efforts are best presented by Jameson’s depiction to the postmodernist subjects of late capitalism, that their:

relations to production are blocked, when they no longer have power over productive activity. Impotence is first and foremost that, the pall on the psyche, the gradual loss of interest in the self...that the condition of non-productivity, ...must be dealt with in another way, a way that, acknowledging its persistence and inevitability, disguises, represses, displaces, and sublimates a persistent and fundamental powerlessness. That other way is, of course, consumerism itself. (1991, 316)

This encapsulates the narrator’s unproductive attempts as a consumer rather than a producer.

“What Lacan mockingly referred to as the “narcissism of the lost Cause,” and to courageously accept the full actualization of a Cause, including the inevitable risk of a catastrophic disaster.” (Zizek *In defense of the Lost Cause*, 2008, 13). This explicitly what the narrator attempts to do, “the full actualization of a cause” that ends up with “a catastrophic disaster”. The paradoxical critical point in the terminal reenactment is that the catastrophic flaw happening throughout the last re-enactment is understood as a huge success. One of the performers (two) stumbles, killing (four) by accident. This whole tragic scene is perceived as “beautiful” by the narrator, this is anamorphic enjoyment at its peak. Death thus emerges as an anamorphic supplier for meaning, it is a false guarantee of an authentic version of the sublime. Depthlessness and transgressive actions replace ethical logic and rational realities.

For this reason, the narrator ends up with an act of violence; that is, hijacking the plane he used to run away, asking the pilot to repeat the plane path, turning back, and go forth and “keep the sequence in place... turning back then turning on” (2005, 275). The compulsive repetition is totally anamorphic, rather than producing the sublime, it is repeated without a productive moment.

4. Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that the narrator’s pursuit of the perfect version of sublime - chasing perfection, authenticity, selfhood- is bound to failure. By applying Žižek’s concepts of the sublime and anamorphosis, the study reveals that the narrator’s attempts of capturing the sublime leads him to constitute a distortive version of it, and that after each process of reenactment, a remainder persists as a sign of this very distortion. In this context, sublimation becomes anamorphic under the shade of the late capitalist system that provides the subject with money and pleasure rather than prohibition foreclosing the possibility of a meaningful integration and depth. Ultimately, the late capitalist system sustains itself through constituting this anamorphic sublime that pushes the subject to the need for spending money and commodifies its own desire to grasp the perfect version of sublime.

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