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'It is always another world': mapping the global imaginary in William Gibson's Pattern Recognition

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‘It is always another world’:
mapping the global imaginary in William Gibson’s *Pattern Recognition*

Brian Jarvis

No account of the contemporary relationship between landscape and identity can afford to ignore the impact of globalization. Understanding the intricate imbrications of space and subjectivity increasingly requires a global perspective. A wide variety of connections have, of course, always existed between groups in far-flung places, but the contemporary era has witnessed a spectacular intensification of global socio-spatial interdependence. The movement of people, capital, commodities, information and images between regions, countries and continents is now taking place in magnitudes and at velocities which are entirely unprecedented. The Westphalian nation state is far from obsolete, but its once sovereign borders are now continuously crossed by transnational flows. As the identity of any landscape is progressively determined by its relationship with other places, axiomatic geographical markers such as ‘here’ and ‘there’ become permeable and even problematic.

The burgeoning critical literature on globalization is vast and variegated but, at the risk of caricature, we might say that it tends to point in one of two directions. On the one hand, many studies in this field have signposted the destructive consequences of globalization. According to this perspective, globalization involves the displacement of a vibrant regional particularity by the bland, the placeless and the homogenized. Traditional links between local geography and distinctive cultural identity are eroded by transnational capital and consumerism, tourism and telecommunications. Some of the most strident critiques of globalization equate this term with U.S economic and cultural imperialism: ‘coca-colonialism’, or ‘McDonaldization’ steamrollers diverse and indigenous locales to pave the way for standardized shopping malls selling standardized commodities to standardized consumers living in standardized suburbs. Alongside the discourse of anti-globalization (of which the preceding is of course only a crude sketch), there is a second and more sanguine critical perspective. A number of studies in the field have focused on the enabling consequences of globalization. Whilst not altogether denying the powerful shaping influence of global corporate empires and multinational media, this school of thought insists that homogenization is counterbalanced by ‘heterogenization’. Developments in transport and communications technology have dramatically increased mobility and interaction between distant and different cultures. This has resulted in the evolution of unique and hybridized cultural identities, the expansion of social relationships beyond regional and national boundaries and a concomitant rise in global consciousness.

Despite their differences, these two perspectives on globalization often share a critical idiom: both agree that relatively fixed and linear structures have been superseded by ‘flows’ and ‘flexibility’,

'nomadism', 'networks' and 'deterritorialization'. These terms and an acknowledgement of their indebtedness to Deleuze feature prominently in the work of leading globalization theorist, Arjun Appadurai. In one of his early essays, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy' (1990) (which subsequently appeared in revised form in *Modernity at Large* (1996)), Appadurai introduced a serviceable framework with which to approach the subject of landscape and identity in the contemporary era. This model divided global cultural flows into five overlapping categories: 'ethnoscapes', 'technoscapes', 'financescapes', 'mediascapes' and 'ideoscapes'. The *ethnoscape* signifies 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers, and other moving groups and persons' (Appadurai 1990: 297). In conjunction with the acceleration of geographical mobility and cultural exchange on the ethnoscape, Appadurai draws attention to the rapid movement of technology across borders which previously appeared impervious. The *technoscape* refers to the global configuration of all forms of industrial machinery and postindustrial gadgetry owned by individuals, corporations and government agencies. *Financescape* is Appadurai's term for the indefatigable flows of capital across the globe. With the advent of digital currency, financialisation and neoliberal deregulation, this global economic landscape has become ever more mercurial and inscrutable. Whilst the financescape is largely hidden, the *mediascape* is spectacularly visible. The global and increasingly integrated infrastructure of media and communications technologies facilitates the ceaseless flow of images in newspapers and magazines, on television and cinema screens, mobile phones and the internet. Appadurai's final category, the *ideoscape*, is closely related to the mediascape as a 'landscape of images' (ibid: 299), but one which is more 'directly political... the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements' (ibid: 300). Together, these five landscapes form the building blocks of what Appadurai refers to as 'imagined worlds' (ibid: 296). This term extends Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' to a global scale and is founded on the increasing social significance of the imagination:

The world we live in today is characterized by a new role for the imagination in social life. To grasp this new role, we need to bring together: the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt School sense); the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson's sense); and the French idea of the imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations... now mediated through the complex prism of modern media. The image, the imagined, the imaginary—these are all terms which direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice* (Appadurai 1996: 31).

The global imaginary - a consciousness of inhabiting a dynamic and interconnected world - is a key component in globalization itself. And Appadurai contends that the 'imagined worlds' in which people live can be a source of political hope as they 'are able to contest and sometimes even subvert

the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surrounds them' (Appadurai 1990: 300).

It might be tempting to establish a straightforward opposition between the pivotal role played by print media (newspapers, novels, poetry) in the construction of the 'imagined communities' of nationalism and the visual media which are at the heart of the transnational imaginary. This tidy binary, however, would repress both the historical and contemporary significance of fiction in the formation of 'imagined worlds'. As Thomas Peyser illustrates in *Utopia and Cosmopolis* (1998), a nascent brand of the global imaginary flowered in American fiction of the late nineteenth- and early-twentieth century. Peyser's study focuses on realist writing by Henry James and William Dean Howells, but begins with Edward Bellamy's science fiction novel, *Looking Backward* (1888) in which Julian West falls asleep in 1887 and wakes up in the year 2000 to discover a utopian and globalized new world with the U.S at its centre. In *Equality* (1897), the sequel to *Looking Backward*:

Bellamy foresaw a world linked by video telecommunication, a world in which the global and the local could as nearly as possible occupy the same space... Julian West, seated at the controls of the 'electroscope', 'had but to name a great city or famous locality in any country to be at once present there so far as sight and hearing were concerned. I looked down on modern New York, then upon Chicago, upon San Francisco, and upon New Orleans... I visited London. I heard the Parisians talk French and the Berlinese talk German, and from St. Petersburg went to Cairo by way of Delhi' (Peyser 1998: 37).

In the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century, science fiction has continued to play its part in the fashioning of a global imaginary. Cyberpunk has been especially prominent in this regard. Fredric Jameson has proposed that this sub-genre offers not only an 'archaeology of the future' but perhaps the 'supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself' (Jameson 1992: 419). For the past thirty years, William Gibson has been at the forefront of cyberpunk fiction as both archaeologist and architect of the future. Gibson is credited with coining key words such as 'cyberspace', the 'Net' and 'the Matrix' as well as prophesising the advent of 'reality TV'. Gibson's cyberpunk *mise-en-scène* crosses over with visual culture (science fiction films, anime and graphic novels) and its global imaginary involves crossings on a deterritorialized terrain: the disjunctive flows of people and technology, capital and commodities, information and power across international boundaries and polarized zones. One side of Gibson's cyberpunk cartography is dominated by a grungy global cityscape: rustbelt, rundown and retrofitted with rain falling on permanently nocturnal crime-ridden streets that are overrun with crooked cops and jaded Private Investigators, rival gangs and sleazy nightlife. This low-tech, noir city is then jarringly juxtaposed with a high-tech digital spatiality: cyberspaces and virtual realities governed by shadowy global corporations and crime cartels. Identity in this bi-polar landscape is profoundly unstable, fractured and multiple: the body is grafted onto technology and consciousness fused with computers. The cyberpunk self is a matter of

software and hardware, clones and avatars: memory is downloaded, implanted and erased. The crossing of boundaries between and within spaces and subjectivities has to be triangulated with a third traversal since cyberpunk also cuts across historical boundaries. Although it is set in the future, the genre offers a cartooned cartography of the contemporary: a comic book delineation of the contours of late capitalist uneven development and postfordist subjectivity.

In *Pattern Recognition* (2003), his first novel of the twenty-first century, Gibson appeared to turn his back to the future. *Pattern Recognition* was published in February 2003 and set in August-September 2002 which, for a cyberpunk author, is practically the distant past. However, this milieu needs to be viewed in the context of Gibson's proposition that 'the future is already here; it's just not evenly distributed' (Gibson; 1999). This aphorism reminds us that the future in science fiction is always a projected vision of current conditions. In *Pattern Recognition*, Gibson offers a vision of the future of landscape and identity which is in fact now but as yet unevenly distributed. The protagonist at the centre of Gibson's decentred postmodern travel narrative is Cayce (pronounced 'Case') Pollard. 'Google Cayce and you will find "coolhunter" and if you look closely you may see it suggested that she is a "sensitive" of some kind, a dowser in the world of global marketing' (Gibson; 2003, 2). In *Pattern Recognition* identity protocols are wedded to information technology: internet search engines, e-mail and text messaging, social networking and chat forums. Cayce is a freelance consultant on fashion and image who surfs the web for new trends but also does field work. On the streets of the global city she surveys the semiotics of subcultural style. Her CV boasts that Cayce spotted 'the very Mexican who first wore his baseball cap backwards' (ibid: 32). This somatic sensitivity to street fashion is speedily appropriated by transnational capital.

'What I do is pattern recognition. I try to recognize a pattern before anyone else does.'
'And then?'
'I point a commodifier at it.'
'And?'
'It gets productized. Turned into units. Marketed.' (ibid: 86)

This work is not without its risks since Cayce is an advertising consultant afflicted by an allergy to advertising. Her 'sensitivity' escalates into a violent reaction when she is exposed to certain successful brands and logos such as Disney, Tommy Hilfiger and Bibendum (the 'tire man' corporate symbol for the Michelin Company). This hypersensitivity makes Cayce an invaluable marketing tool and she is recruited by various corporations to test the potency of new brands and trademarks. At the start of the novel Cayce has just arrived in London to work for Blue Ant, a 'lethally pomo ad agency', who are designing a new logo for a multinational sports shoe company (ibid: 277). Blue Ant themselves are so expansive and diffuse that Cayce sees them as 'more post-geographic than multinational' (ibid: 6). At the briefing session she meets the company's similarly 'post-geographic' founder and marketing guru: Hubertus Bigend is a 'nominal Belgian' in a cowboy hat who 'looks like

Tom Cruise on a diet of virgins' blood and truffled chocolates' (ibid: 6). Bigend proceeds to offer Cayce an additional and unexpected contract: to hunt down the maker of a series of mysterious film clips, known as 'the footage', which appear at random on the internet and have generated a global cult following. Bigend sees the footage as 'the most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century... **attention** focused daily on a product that may not even exist' (ibid: 65). Cayce initially has reservations about accepting the contract in part because she is a self-confessed 'footagehead'. As part of the global fan base she is addicted to watching the 135 film clips over and over and she belongs to an online discussion forum (F.F.F) which endlessly debates their meaning and origin.

Somewhat reluctantly then, Cayce accepts the assignment and her first lead is offered by a friend on the discussion forum. 'Parkaboy', an online *nom de plume*, e-mails Cayce with the revelation that an encrypted watermark appears to have been discovered on a segment of the footage. As Cayce pursues this lead she becomes entangled in international plots and conspiracies. She globetrots between transnational urban landscapes (New York, London, Tokyo, Moscow and Paris) and navigates the informational city (the digital labyrinth of the internet). Both her geographical and virtual movements are mirrored by noir crossings and double crossings involving corporations, the Russian mafia and the post-cold war intelligence community. Cayce's quest to find the origins of the footage also gets snared in an oedipal dragnet. The search for the film's 'maker' is spliced with the mystery surrounding Win Pollard, Cayce's father and a cold war security consultant who vanished in New York, on September 11th 2001. (*Pattern Recognition* was the first major novel to incorporate references to 9/11). Cayce finally tracks down the makers of the footage in Russia. Twin sisters: Stella and Nora Volkova, the nieces of a 'Russian zillionaire' and organised crime boss, Andrei Volkov. Stella is responsible for distributing the short films which are made by her sister. Nora, the filmmaker, has been severely traumatised following an assassination attempt on her uncle which resulted in a T-shaped fragment from a 'U.S Army M18A1 Claymore mine' being lodged in her brain (ibid: 274). Although Nora cannot speak and her movements are severely restricted, she manages to create the footage on a computer by gently manoeuvring a mouse. The raw materials that Nora works on are fragments of 'found video' from surveillance and security cameras (ibid: 305). The enigmatic short films she crafts are then rendered in a labour-intensive process at the 'Dream Academy': an isolated privatized prison owned by her uncle. Cayce's discovery of the Volkova twins leads to an encounter and then apparent merger between Andrei Volkov – the Russian mafia boss - and Hubertus Bigend. The two are last seen on CNN standing ominously alongside a senior US politician. Cayce realises that she has been complicit, '[t]hough in what, exactly, is harder to say' (ibid: 194). At the end she turns her back on the cabals of global politics and capitalism and retreats to a flat in Paris with her friend, now lover, **Peter 'Parkaboy'** Gilbert.

As this précis indicates, Gibson's narrative rendition of contemporary space and subjectivity is painted with a broad brush. At the same time, the novel features some intricate and suggestive patterning. My aim, in the reading that follows, is to use Appadurai's critical framework of 'ethnoscapes', 'financescapes', 'technoscapes', 'mediascapes' and 'ideoscapes' as a stencil through which to trace the global imaginary in *Pattern Recognition*.

Appadurai suggests that whilst 'stable communities and networks' continue to exist in the global cultural economy, 'the warp of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move' (Appadurai 1990: 297). The contemporary ethnoscape is characterised by a rapid acceleration of geographical mobility and cross-cultural exchange: 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers, and other moving groups and persons' (ibid: 297). The ethnoscape is a key part of Gibson's global imaginary. *Pattern Recognition* begins with Cayce waking up in Camden Town to '[f]ive hours New York jet lag' (Gibson 2003: 1) In the short (six pages) opening chapter there are no references to no fewer than five cities (Cannes, Chernobyl, Chicago, London and New York), two US states (California and New England) and nine nations (Afghanistan, America, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea and Russia). In the subsequent chapters Cayce travels between global cities: London (chapters 1-12 and 20-32), Tokyo (14-20), New York (in memories and dreams in chapters 15, 21 and 27), Moscow (33-42) and Paris (43). Several sections of the novel are devoted to airports and flights between them. When she is not travelling between cities, Cayce is traversing the urban landscape by limo and scooter, tube train and taxi, or on foot. On her one excursion outside the city - escaping from the Dream Academy to a desertscape north of Moscow - she is rescued by helicopter.

Cayce is not alone in her restless globe-trotting. Blue Ant's other employees are similarly transient. When Cayce asks her Japanese-American co-worker where he is based, Boone Chu points to his 'child-sized antique suitcase' and says: 'I'm based in this' (ibid: 104). The 'realities of having to move' are tied to the exigencies of work. Although relatively small in terms of permanent staff, Hubertus Bigend's agency is 'globally distributed, more post-geographic than multinational... a high-speed, low-drag life-form in an advertising ecology of lumbering herbivores' (ibid: 6). Unlike the 'older, more linear sort of agency' (ibid: 9), Blue Ant specializes in the spatial rhizomatics of the network and thus typifies organisational structure in a global information economy. In *The Informational City*, Manuel Castells explains that whilst organizations are still located at specific sites (Blue Ant has offices in London, New York and Tokyo), 'the *organizational logic is placeless*, being fundamentally dependent on the space of flows that characterizes information networks' (Castells

1989: 169). Castells' description of the paradigmatic worker within the informational city could serve as a job specification for Cayce Pollard:

employees, consultants, and other businesses – are brought together to work on a particular project, then dispersed and reallocated when the task is complete. This new environment requires skilled flexible workers: the organization man gives way to the flexible woman (Castells 2000: 12).

With her daily Pilates exercise regime, Cayce displays all of the attributes of the flexible woman required to gather and process information in the network of global style and fashion: 'hyper-specialized, a freelancer, someone contracted to do a very specific job. She seldom has a salary... adamantly short-term' (Gibson 2003: 61).

Geographical mobility also characterizes other areas of the labour market. On her travels, Cayce encounters migrant workers: Polish and African and Russian antiques dealers in London; an Israeli street vendor selling Chinese sunglasses in Tokyo; cabbies and limo drivers from Cambodia and the Caribbean. At a 'faux-French café' in Camden town, Cayce finds 'real French waiting the tables. Chunnel kids, guest workers' (ibid: 79). The hordes of American and Japanese tourists on the Portobello Road remind us that transnational mobility is as integral to leisure as labour. In each location she passes through, Cayce experiences a prodigious ethnographic diversity. The everydayness of cultural heterogeneity is particularly noticeable in relation to food. Before she travels East, Cayce samples numerous westernized versions of Asian cuisine at restaurants in London: the dishes at 'Charlie Don't Surf' are 'California-inflected Vietnamese fusion with more than the usual leavening of colonial Frenchness' (ibid: 14); she enjoys a Tandoori takeaway and also sushi at 'a pan-Asian place' which is served in 'sanded wood and raku bowls' (ibid: 107). Conversely, when she arrives in Tokyo, Cayce is intrigued by the way 'Japanese hotels interpret Western breakfasts' (ibid: 138). Cumulatively, the effect produced by Cayce's constant travel, the melting-pot of international food cultures and other instances of cultural diversity, is both stimulating and somewhat disorienting. Gibson develops the motif of jet-lag as 'soul delay' to underline his heroine's essential homelessness. 'What is that', Cayce ponders, 'to be over thirty and not know where you'll be in a month or two?' (ibid: 88). *Dis*-location encompasses not only the future but the present: as well as not knowing where she will be, Cayce often does not know exactly where she is. Sites of consumption trigger an *unheimlich* queasiness. At a Greek restaurant in London, the 'utterly characteristic Greek tourist tat... somehow reminds Cayce of the experience of being in a Chinese restaurant in Roanoke, Virginia' (ibid: 214). The Starbucks in London and Tokyo have 'exactly the same faux-Murano pendulum lamps they have in the branch near her apartment in New York' (ibid: 207). Cayce experiences global cities as uncanny 'mirror worlds' in which she struggles to find her bearings.

The movement of people and cultural commodities across a shifting ethnoscape is closely mirrored by the global flows of capital on the 'financescape'. According to Appadurai, 'the disposition of global capital is now a more mysterious, rapid and difficult landscape to follow than ever before as currency markets, national stock exchanges, and commodity speculations move megamonies through national turnstiles at blinding speed' (Appadurai 1990: 299). *Pattern Recognition* offers glimpses of a 'mysterious, rapid and difficult' financescape. Boone Chu traces an e-mail address linked with the footage to a domain based in Nazran:

Capital of the Republic of Ingushetia. It's an ofshornaya zona... An offshore tax haven. For Russia... the outfit our boy is with has links to some of the players who're looking into Russian oil... Saudi oil has not been looking so good to the really big guys, globally, since nine-eleven. They're tired of worrying about the region. They want a stable source. Russia Federation's got it. Means huge changes in the flow of global capital (Gibson 2003: 280-1).

Although Gibson offers occasional allusions to heavy industry and manufacturing (of athletic shoes), the financescape in *Pattern Recognition* is primarily associated with postindustrial phantasmagoria: computers and cell phones, television and film, fashion and advertising. In this regard, *Pattern Recognition* confirms Castells' thesis, in *The Rise of the Network Society*, that machinery associated with energy and materials is increasingly matched in importance by information technology (Castells 2009). Bigend is desperate for information about the footage because it represents the century's 'most brilliant marketing ploy' (ibid: 65). The footage itself has been secretly encrypted with a watermark that can be used to track its distribution on the internet: '[s]teganography is all about concealing information by spreading it throughout other information' (ibid: 76). Parkaboy suggests to Cayce that 'the highest level of play... is always and purely about the information itself' (ibid: 169) and this resonates with Bigend's claim that his work is purely concerned with 'transferring information' (ibid: 63). One of Blue Ant's sub-units, 'Trans', is experimenting with a new form of niche marketing that involves paying people to namedrop in clubs, restaurants and bars: to 'mention a client's product... [a] great new streetwear label, or this brilliant little film' (ibid: 84). The point of this strategy is not (at least initially) to get consumers to 'buy jeans... see movie' so much as to 'recycle the information. They use it to try to impress the next person they meet' (ibid: 85).

When Cayce hears that this '[w]ord of mouth meme thing' is being used to promote the footage, she feels as though something is 'infecting everything. Hubertus. Trans...' (ibid: 88, 95). Cayce's authority as a critic of 'infection' is, however, compromised by her role as a viral agent in the fashion industry and consequent involvement with 'the money people' (ibid: 2). The main 'money people' in *Pattern Recognition*, Bigend and Volkov, offer two distinct faces to transnational capital. Bigend's father was an 'industrialist [from] Brussels' (ibid: 65), but the son heads into a postindustrial and transnational future that includes summer in Cannes, a British boarding school followed by Harvard, independent film production in Hollywood, a hiatus in Brazil and then the 'emergence of

Blue Ant, first in Europe, then in UK and New York' (ibid: 65). Cayce notes that Bigend has 'less accent of any kind than she can recall having heard before in any speaker of English... it makes him sound directionless, like a loudspeaker in a departure lounge' (ibid: 56). The repeated emphasis on Bigend's teeth and a desire which is 'constant and ever-shifting' (ibid: 61) underscore his status as the personification of a vampiric capitalism. Whilst Bigend is highly conspicuous, Volkov is the 'invisible oligarch. The ghost. Very possibly the richest of them all. He rode out the Bankers' War in ninety-three, untouched, then emerged to take even more' (ibid: 313). Volkov's roots are in oil and organised crime, but he has diversified and was 'particularly farseeing, in his recognition of the importance of computing' (ibid: 337). When Volkov meets with Bigend, Parkaboy senses '[a] lot of information being exchanged' (ibid: 330). Volkov and Bigend are last seen together on television alongside the U.S Secretary of the Interior and it is clear that their partnership represents a menacing consolidation on the financescape.

When Volkov hosts a dinner, Cayce is surprised that it 'isn't a Russian meal':

Perhaps it's a meal in that country without borders that Bigend strives to hail from, a meal in a world where there are no mirrors to find yourself on the other side of, all experience having been reduced, by the spectral hand of marketing, to price-point variations on the same thing (ibid: 341).

Having earlier denied her involvement in this process, Cayce progressively comes to experience a sense of guilty complicit[y]

in whatever it is that gradually makes London and New York feel more like each other, that dissolves the membranes between mirror worlds. She knows too much about the processes responsible for the way product is positioned, in the world, and sometimes she finds herself doubting that there is much else going on (ibid: 194).

Although she sees England as America's 'mirror-world', Cayce suspects that 'it's not going to be that way much longer. Not if the world's Bigends keep at it: no borders, pretty soon there's no mirror to be on the other side of' (ibid: 106). In Gibson's global imaginary, the financescape seeks to colonise all space and subjectivity. Although we cannot see the global flows of capital itself, we can see the signs. The urban landscape in *Pattern Recognition* is a 'logo-maze' (ibid: 18). The signifiers of transnational capital are so pervasive that landscape elides with brandscape. Cayce has a 'compulsive memory for brandnames' (ibid: 27) and compiles an exhaustive inventory on her travels that includes: clothing, shoes and accessories (*501's, Agnes B Homme, Armani, Barbour, Benetton, Ben Sherman, Buzz Rickson, Converse, DKNY, Dr Martens, Duffer of St. George, Fogal, Fruit Of the Loom, Gucci, Laura Ashley, Louis Vuitton, Mont Blanc, Paul Smith, Prada, Rolex, Tommy Hilfiger, Tony Lama and Versace*); gadgets, software and websites (*Casio, Cube, eBay, Google, Hitachi, Hotmail, iBook, Mac, Nintendo, Palm, Sanyo and the Sinclair ZX81/Timex 1000*); food and drink (*Bisto, Bikkle, Coca-Cola, Fanya, Holsten Pils, Medaglia d'Oro, Pepsi, Perrier, Tuborg and Weetabix*); cigarettes (*Gitane,*

Marlboro, Mild Seven and Silk Cut); cars and tires (*Hummer, Jetta, Mercedes, Michelin, Vauxhall and Volvo*); assorted others (*Aeroflot, Ashai, British Airways, FedEx, Fimo, IKEA, Hello Kitty, Kohler, Kleenex, Kogepan, Lego, Parco, Tiger Balm and Visa*); as well as the franchised shops in which these brands are sold (*Dean & DeLuca, Fred Segal, The Gap, Harvey Nichols, McDonalds, Selfridges, Starbucks and Virgin*). It is worth itemising the brandscape in this way since ubiquity is the key to its practical invisibility. These names are so much a part of everyday life that Cayce almost always uses the brand name without bothering with an accompanying definition of the product.

The global city in *Pattern Recognition* is swamped by cloned stores, branded objects and homogenised fashions. In the empty mirror of the brandscape, one name stands out as the pinnacle:

This stuff is simulacra of simulacra of simulacra. Tommy Hilfiger is a diluted tincture of Ralph Lauren, who had himself diluted the glory days of Brooks Brothers, who themselves had stepped on the product of Jermyn Street and Savile Row, flavouring their ready-to-wear with liberal lashings of polo knit and regimental stripes. But Tommy surely is the null point, the black hole. There must be some Tommy Hilfiger event horizon, beyond which it is impossible to be more derivative, more removed from the source, more devoid of soul (ibid: 17–18).

Cayce's critique here offers a seriocomic counterpart to Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000) which, like *Pattern Recognition*, specifically targets Tommy Hilfiger, The Gap, Starbucks and Nike (who are never mentioned by name but are alluded to as the anonymous athletic footwear corporation who consult Blue Ant about a new logo). According to Klein, the new corporations aim less at the production of things than 'images' of their brands. Their real work lay not in manufacturing but in marketing' (Klein 2000: 4). Gibson might almost be ventriloquising Klein when Bigend explains to Cayce that '[f]ar more creativity, today, goes into the marketing of products than into the products themselves, athletic shoes or feature films' (Gibson 2003: 67). Instead of creativity, however, the hyper-sensitive Cayce sees only sterile and standardized urban landscapes. In Clerkenwell, for example, there is 'nothing much to distinguish any very individual 'hoodness... Street level is routine London retail and services' (ibid: 59). Distinctive geographical markers are recycled as touristscape: 'A red double-decker grinds past, registering less as mirror-world than as some Disney prop for Londonland' (ibid: 52). When she leaves London for Tokyo she is greeted by 'a remarkably virtual-looking skyline, a floating jumble of electronic Lego' (ibid: 127) which includes 'the Coca-Cola logo pulsing on a huge screen, high up on a building (ibid: 125) and a 'Gap sign' (ibid: 132). Subsequently, the Aeroflot flight to Moscow begins with Cayce noting that 'Russia serves Pepsi' (ibid: 266) before she is bombarded by logos at Sheremetevo-2: 'there seems to be advertising on virtually every surface... the density of commercial language here, in this airport at least, rivals Tokyo' (ibid: 268). Driving from airport to hotel her cab passes '[b]illboards for computers, luxury goods, and electronics... increasing in number and variety as they approach the city', a McDonalds the size of a train station and a 'huge Prada logo' (ibid: 271). When Cayce finally makes it into the inner sanctum

of the maker her first impressions are not of artistic sanctuary but rather the bric-a-brac of globalization: IKEA desks, Macintosh computers, a 'plastic Garfield' and a Coca-Cola place mat commemorating 9/11 (ibid: 302-3). Even hundreds of miles north of Moscow, at the isolated prison where the footage is rendered, the inmates look 'as though they all shop at The Gap and nowhere else' (ibid: 344).

Pattern Recognition insists that whilst this global 'mall' is rampant it is still far from being complete. The identity of the cosmopolis may be under siege by the signifiers of transnational capital, but it has not entirely succumbed to placelessness. Gibson's global imaginary recognises both the drive towards homogenization and the persistence of place in residual and resistant pockets of diversity and hybridization. The '[g]enius loci' (ibid: 257) (to borrow a phrase from Parkaboy) endures. Along with her hyper-sensitivity to logos, Cayce is also attuned to the distinct spirit of place and instinctively registers those local differences from which the everyday urban landscape is composed. When Boone Chu suggests that London is only a pale copy of an American city - '[t]his is just more of our stuff' - Cayce corrects him: 'No... different stuff' (ibid: 105). Walking the streets she is confronted viscerally by the 'age of the city, the depth of its history, the stubborn vastness of it' (ibid: 118). London stretches back 'long before the Roman city. [Primrose] hill a place of worship, of sacrifice, of executions... That Druid thing' (ibid: 69). Cayce recognizes, this is not simply 'a place that consisted of buildings, side by side, as she thought of cities in America, but a literal and continuous maze, a single living creature (because it still grew) of brick and stone' (ibid: 195-6). Inside this urban ecology, Cayce repeatedly notes subtle but significant distinctions: the 'mirror-world' has its own cars, license plates and traffic, plugs and electricity, street lamps and telephone handsets, sash bolts on windows and pop stars on TV, the water and milk tastes different, lager cans come in unexpected sizes and there is a unique ensemble of morning snacks available on British rail trains. Camden Town may have Starbucks and McDonalds, faux French cafe cafés and touristy Greek restaurants, but one can also find the odd 'sandwich shop, small and preglobalized' (ibid: 195). Cayce is overwhelmed by the 'logo-maze' of Harvey Nichols, but later explores antique dealers and grubby backstreet markets 'away from the sun' (ibid: 83) selling unbranded historical curios.

Whilst London has history, Cayce has 'almost never seen anything genuinely old, in Tokyo' (ibid: 161). In contrast to London's earthiness, Tokyo appears purely simulacral and Cayce speculates that there might be 'nothing beneath the pavement but a clean, uniformly dense substrate of pipes and wiring' (ibid: 130). However, Boone Chu later takes her beyond the parts of the city which were rebuilt after U.S firebombing in the second world war to a 'prewar apartment building' (ibid: 161). Cayce first notes '[c]ooking smells she can't identify' - something off the olfactory map of international cuisine - and then,

looks out at gently sloping rooftops that seem, impossibly, to be partially covered in knee-deep moss, but then she sees that this is something like the kudzu on Win's farm in Tennessee. No, she corrects herself, it probably is kudzu, kudzu where it comes from. Kudzu at home... A large tan insect strobes through the communal patch of light, vanishes. 'This is an amazing place', she says.

'There aren't many left' (ibid: 161-2).

Although the 'neon carnival excess' in the rest of the city does not compare to the singularity of this scene, Cayce can still detect traces of cultural difference and hybridity on the brandscape (ibid: 131). Alongside the 'logos of corporations she doesn't even recognize', more familiar labels lose their power to unsettle her as they are 'mysteriously recontextualized' by the Tokyo cityscape (ibid: 127).

Cayce goes on to make similar discoveries in Russia. Beyond the generic brandscape, Moscow is idiosyncratic in ways that both excite and unsettle her. To begin with, everything is 'far larger than it could possibly have any need to be' (ibid: 269). Cayce resorts unsuccessfully to a tourist reflex:

staring at the streetscape of this old residential neighbourhood, [she] is acutely aware of her mind doing the but-really-it's-like thing it does when presented with serious cultural novelty; but really it's like Vienna, except it isn't, and really it's like Stockholm, but it's not, really... (ibid: 276).

Faced by the grandeur of the Moscow Metro she tries to map it onto Oxford Street tube in London, but 'the match-up module fails' (ibid: 310). Whilst her first taste of Russia was the Pepsi served on the plane, Cayce later looks out of a hotel window past a glass cooler stocked with 'much Pepsi' at a skyline of 'ancient-looking apartment buildings, white spires, and one amazing crenellated orange-and-turquoise bell tower. In the deeper distance, golden onion domes' (ibid: 275).

From an early age, Cayce is shown to be susceptible to what lies beneath the glossy surfaces of the brandscape. On a trip to Disneyland as a child, she recalls how

Pirates of the Caribbean had broken down and they'd been rescued by staff wearing hip-waders over their pirate costumes, to be led through a doorway into a worn, concrete-walled, oil-stained subterranean realm of machinery and cables, inhabited by glum mechanics reminding Cayce of the Morlocks in *The Time Machine* (ibid: 110).

As an adult, Cayce retains this concern for concealed infrastructure. Whilst consulting on the aesthetics of a new logo she does not lose sight of that other key symbol, the dollar sign and 'all those billions in athletic-shoe sales' (ibid: 83). And briefly she also

imagines the countless Asian workers who might, should she say yes, spend years of their lives applying versions of this symbol to an endless and unyielding flood of footwear. What would it mean to them..? Would it work its

way into their dreams, eventually? Would their children chalk it in doorways before they knew its meaning as a trademark? (ibid: 12)

Cayce's speculations here on a brand of subliminal indigenization should be connected to her subsequent discovery, at a private prison factory called the 'Dream Academy', of sixty inmates tirelessly rendering each frame of the footage on a post-industrial assembly line. The root cause of Cayce's logophobia is never explained, but it seems to be linked to an affinity for the secret history of exploitation and violence encrypted in signs and objects. At the themed restaurant, 'Charlie Don't Surf', she is less interested in her Californian cabernet than the prints on the walls of

close-up black-and-white photographs of 'Nam-era Zippo lighters, engraved with crudely drawn military symbols, still cruder sexual motifs, and stencilled slogans. These reminded Cayce of photographs of tombstones in Confederate graveyards, except for the graphic content' (ibid: 14).

As well as haunting restaurants, the ghosts of war manifest in fashion and technology. Damien wears a 'flecktarn' camouflage jacket (ibid: 188) and Boone Chu has a 'M-1951 U.S. Army fishtail parka, an embroidered red-white-and-blue RAF roundel on its back, like a target' (ibid: 142). The most prized possession in Cayce's wardrobe is a Buzz Rickson 'museum-grade replica of a U.S. MA-1 flying jacket... created by Japanese obsessives' (ibid: 10-11). When this jacket is damaged she orders a new one in the same city, Tokyo, that was destroyed by the U.S Air Force in the second world war. The jacket is paid for by Bigend, who drives a Hummer (originally a military vehicle) and who also foots the bill for Cayce's flights on planes that, in her dreams, will always be associated with the 9/11 attacks. Wearing her Buzz Rickson on the Portobello Road, Cayce approaches three men gathered around the trunk of a car and thinks she glimpses '[g]renades. Black, compact, cylindrical. Six of them, laid out on an old grey sweater' (ibid: 28). In fact, these are antique dealers with a collection of Curtas:

'Calculators... It is a precision instrument... performing calculations mechanically, employing neither electricity nor electronic components... It is the smallest mechanical calculating machine ever constructed... It is the invention of Curt Herzstark, an Austrian, who developed it while a prisoner in Buchenwald' (ibid: 28-9).

Whilst Curta was designing his calculator, the U.S military was developing ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator and Computer), the world's first electronic digital computer. Subsequent increases in the numbers of computers led to the concept of a network. ARPANET, the forerunner of the internet, was funded by the U.S Department of Defense in the 1960s and according to cyber-lore was designed as a communications system that could function in the wake of nuclear war.

Communications devices, computers and the net are of course key features on contemporary techno- and mediascapes and each of these is prominent throughout *Pattern Recognition*. Around half of Cayce's communication in the novel is mediated by technology: practically every chapter includes several phone calls, e-mails and visits to online chatrooms. Paul Virilio, amongst others, has offered a strident critique of the displacement of face-to-face communication by 'simulators of proximity' (Virilio 2002a: 41). According to Virilio's critique, the proliferation of screen interfaces not only produces alienation, but also threatens to dematerialize the city: 'the architectonic element begins to drift and float in an electronic ether' (Virilio 2002b: 442). In each city she travels through, Cayce is permanently framed by a variety of screens which cumulatively contribute to the hegemony of the hyperreal. Landscape, people and events are filtered through the lens of media culture: Tokyo is 'Bladerunnered' (Gibson 2002: 146); Bigend looks like Tom Cruise; Cayce acts as though she is in a James Bond film and when she is rescued by Parkaboy it becomes a scene from a cowboy movie. Most disturbingly, Cayce's experience of 9/11 is reshaped by CNN: 'though she will know she must have seen people jumping, falling, there will be no memory of it. It will be like watching one of her own dreams on television. Some vast and deeply personal insult to any ordinary notion of interiority' (ibid: 137). The destabilization of identity on and by the mediascape is evident in other areas as well. The virtual city is populated by impersonators. Parkaboy and his friend Darryl create a fake identity online as 'gender bait' for a Japanese games designer who has information about the watermark. Using a combination of online chat, text messaging, 'Anime Magic' and 'Photoshop', they successfully generate a Japanese schoolgirl persona called 'Keiko' (ibid: 129). Cayce's nemesis, Dorotea Benedetti, similarly infiltrates and spies on F:F:F under the guise of 'Mama Anarchia'. The virtual landscape is under constant surveillance by various parties: 'American intelligence have a system [Echelon] that allows for the scanning of all Net traffic' (ibid: 244), Bigend's and Volkov's people monitor the web and Cayce's e-mails, online chat, keystrokes and cell phone conversations are all recorded.

Panopticism is also routine outside the virtual city: Cayce spies surveillance cameras at airports, in hotels and on the city streets. Gibson recognises this as one of many dangers on the techno- and mediascape, but the global imaginary in *Pattern Recognition* resists the temptation of a causally dystopian response. Nora works with '[m]ere scraps of found video' from surveillance cameras so the footage leads both into but also back out of the carceral city (ibid: 305). Bricolage can make art even from the disciplinary infrastructure of the surveillance state. A similar aesthetic is practised by others in *Pattern Recognition*: Damien leaves behind the glitzy world of music videos and commercials to make a documentary about a world war two plane he finds buried in the 'unfrozen swamps past Stalingrad' (ibid: 72); and Voytek creates an installation by recycling retro computers (Sinclair ZX-81s and Timex 1000s). For Gibson, then, technology and aesthetics can converge on what Appadurai terms the 'artscape' (Appadurai 1996: 33). Cayce's attraction to artscape of the

footage is fuelled by its promise of an escape from the brandscape: 'Worlds. Places to retreat to' (ibid: 94). Nora's independent film-making spreads virally across the globe without the 'infection' of marketing. In this regard, the footage represents the mirror image of the branded 'black hole' of Tommy Hilfiger. The aura of the anti-commodity attracts a global subculture of followers: the 'footageheads' flock to the forums which Cayce sees as a 'way of being at home... The forum has become one of the most consistent places in her life, like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones' (Gibson 2003: 4-5). Although the threat of surveillance and faked identity cannot be ignored, neither, Gibson suggests, can the possibilities for new forms of sociability and even intimacy. The footageheads do not inhabit a purely virtual community: 'the universe of F:F:F is everting. Manifesting physically in the world' (ibid: 198). There are stills from Nora's work posted all over the city and Cayce randomly encounters and engages in conversation with other followers: a waiter in a cafe and a woman on the New York subway. Her romance with Parkaboy begins online and even the 'gender bait' ruse eventually results in a genuine transnational courtship between Taki and Judie (who had unwittingly posed for the doctored photograph of 'Keiko'). Returning briefly to his cyberpunk roots, Gibson intimates that the virtual landscape might offer opportunities for adventure.

Hack into the system. Merge with it, deep enough that it, not you, begins to talk to us... it's like Coleridge, and De Quincey... it's shamanic... we may all seem to just be sitting there, staring at the screen, but really, some of us anyway, we're adventurers. We're out there, seeking, taking risks. In hope... of bringing back wonders (ibid: 255).

This is Parkaboy's philosophy, one which complements his self-image as a digital Huck Finn who can 'lit out for the territories' (ibid: 74). However, whilst Parkaboy dreams of pioneering in cyberspace, Cayce is anxious about becoming a cyborg. In Damien's apartment she repeatedly stares at a group of lifeless 'robot girls', left over from a music video, who seem perhaps to mirror her own 'lack of autonomy' (ibid: 171). She refers ironically to her outfits as 'CPUs', or 'Cayce Pollard Units' (ibid: 8), performs her robotic Pilates regime and often finds herself on auto-pilot: 'content... to go along for the ride' (ibid: 25), to 'go with the flow' (ibid: 37). Her grimace is 'mechanical... [h]er legs feel wooden' (ibid: 98), she sees a 'disjointed puppet' (ibid: 3) in the mirror and worries that she may be Hubertus's 'puppenkopf' (ibid: 309). Employed by the Blue Agent agency, Cayce's paranoid suspicion is that she has little agency of her own. Is she anything more than a relay in the transnational networks of capital and consumerism, image and information? For Appadurai, agency panic takes place when the subject sees past the surface of the ideoscape:

the consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows (and the mediascapes, especially of advertising, that accompany them), into a sign... in Baudrillard's sense of a simulacrum which only asymptotically approaches the form of a real social agent... Global advertising is the key technology for the worldwide dissemination of a plethora of creative and culturally well-chosen ideas of consumer agency. These images of agency are increasingly

distortions of a world of merchandising so subtle that the consumer is consistently helped to believe that he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser (Appadurai 1990: 307).

This emphasis on systems of global control challenges the contours of the contemporary ideoscape with its insistence on 'freedom' and 'democracy'. Post-9/11, these terms dominated an ideoscape whose centrepiece was Ground Zero. Aside from an oblique reference to oil in the middle east, Gibson largely sidesteps global geopolitics in the early twenty-first century. In place of Islam and the War on Terror, *Pattern Recognition* offers a more intimate response to 9/11 - a psychogeographical mapping of the topography of trauma.

The cryptic watermark encrypted in the footage is first thought to be the map of an unknown city before it is revealed to be the contours of the T-shaped fragment of shrapnel embedded in a Nora's brain. Although Gibson foregrounds the visibility of traumatic experience (the footage is a silent film and Cayce's memories of 9/11 merge with CNN coverage), echoes can still be heard in the language of *Pattern Recognition*. In their gothic revision of classical psychoanalysis, Abraham and Torok proposed the investigative method of 'cryptonymy' for understanding trauma. Cryptonymy is a mode of textual excavation that seeks not 'a *metonymy of things* but a *metonymy of words*' and we might add of numbers and letters (Abraham & Torok 1986: 19). Cayce imagines that she, like the footage, is watermarked: 'Eyes closed, she finds herself imagining a symbol, something watermarking the lower right-hand corner of her existence' (Gibson 2003: 78). This symbol is two numbers - 9/11 - which we arrive at by following an odd sequence from the final piece of the footage, no. #135 (1-3-5-7-9-11). Letters are encrypted here as well. The first initial of each twin sisters' forename is ghosted by the image of the Twin Towers (Nora/North Tower and Stella/South Tower). The World Trade Centre, headquarters of global finance, was destroyed by twin (T-shaped) planes with the first explosion and fall uncannily mirroring the second. This event is embedded in the collective psyche of Americans and in *Pattern Recognition* is doubly lodged as a traumatic fragment in Cayce's memory as the day she lost her father. Like the footage, 9/11 is replayed as fragmented images in the bereaved daughter's memory. The landscape of trauma is incorporated within the self. Ground zero is literally *inside* Cayce: 'images called up by Damien's e-mail. Heaps of bone. That initial seventeen stories of twisted, impacted girder. Funeral ash. That taste in the back of the throat' (ibid: 79). Cayce's compulsive repetitions - the exercise regime, the chanting of a peculiar mantra ('a duck in the face') and the repeat viewings of the footage - are typical manifestations of PTSD. In the closing paragraphs of the novel, Cayce (presumably wearing her customary black CPU) completes the symptomatology by engaging in a symbolic ritual of mourning. Before leaving Russia she visits the site of Damien's war documentary outside Stalingrad:

[s]he found herself, out of some need she hadn't understood, down in one of the trenches, furiously shovelling grey muck and bones, her face streaked with tears. Neither Peter nor Damien had asked her why, but she thinks now

that if they had she would have told them she was weeping for her century, though whether the one past or the one present she doesn't know (ibid: 355-6).

Although she testifies that her mourning is generic, this act seems compensatory for a specific subject: the fact that she was unable to recover her father's body from the ruins at ground zero.

The global imaginary of *Pattern Recognition* offers an energetic dramatisation of tensions on and between ethnoscapas, financescapas, technoscapas, mediascapas and ideoscapas. Gibson eschews the easy rhetoric of cyber-utopianism and anti-globalization in favour of a deft tracing of patterns. Cayce Pollard is positioned precariously in a complex economy of global flows: a node in the network of people and power, finance and commodities, art and machines, images and information. Although she is unable to map the totality of this network, Cayce exhibits a fierce sensitivity to its contours and configurations. In the aftermath of 9/11 and at the dawn of a new century, it is not clear to her how these patterns will develop but Cayce, like Stella Volkova, senses that it will not be 'our parents' story. Not their world. It is another world. It is always another world' (ibid: 308).

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ABSTRACT

No account of the contemporary relationship between landscape and identity can afford to ignore the impact of globalization. Understanding the intricate imbrications of space and subjectivity increasingly requires a global perspective. This essay examines tensions in the global imaginary as they are articulated in William Gibson's novel, *Pattern Recognition* (2003). The framework for this reading is taken from Arjun Appadurai's essay, 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy' (1990), in which he divides the 'imagined worlds' of globalization into five overlapping categories: ethnoscapas, financescapas, technoscapas, mediascapas and ideoscapas. The heroine of Gibson's novel, Cayce Pollard, moves across and into each of these *-scapes* and finds herself positioned precariously in a complex economy of global flows: a node in the network of people and power, finance and commodities, art and machines, images and information.

KEY WORDS/AUTHORS

ARJUN APPADURAI

BRANDSCAPES

CONSUMER CAPITALISM

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GLOBALIZATION

GLOBAL IMAGINARY

MANUEL CASTELLS

TRANSNATIONAL

VIRTUAL LANDSCAPE

WILLIAM GIBSON