SYMBOLS AND THE SOUL:
Hyperreality, Dissensus, and Sacred Humanism
in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*

by

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mum, who has listened to my big ideas
so lovingly for so many years.

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Abstract

In his 2003 novel, *Pattern Recognition*, William Gibson explores the potential for humanizing change in the post-9/11, globalized world. This thesis will first argue that *Pattern Recognition* depicts a dehumanizing version of Jean Baudrillard's "hyperreal" where people are reduced either to workers or consumers as their bodies integrate with mass-produced machinery and simulated, commodity-based identities. The culmination of this dehumanization can be seen in events like those of September 11, 2001 (9/11) where people are killed for symbolic effect. *Pattern Recognition* imagines how the outcomes of violence could provoke a response against dehumanizing global capitalism. I will then argue that *Pattern Recognition*'s fictional phenomenon "the footage" is a conceptualization of 9/11 as a moment of dissensus. Gibson uses religious language to describe both the footage and its followers, suggesting that the footage has spiritual power in *Pattern Recognition*'s technologized and globalized landscape. This thesis will use this idea of "sacred humanism" to explain how *Pattern Recognition* imagines that the novel's political moment (2002-2003) could spark a humanizing change in contemporary culture.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"How do you think we look […] to the future?" interjects Hubertus Bigend in one of *Pattern Recognition*'s opening sequences (55). Bigend, the CEO of an ultra-modern advertising corporation in William Gibson's 2003 novel, is obsessed with the present – the "we" in his question. *Pattern Recognition*'s protagonist, Cayce, answers Bigend by explaining that "they won't think of us" (58). Cayce claims that "The future is there […] trying to make sense of the fiction we have become" (57) just as another character will explain later that "it is always another world" (306). This conversation foregrounds one of *Pattern Recognition*'s central concerns: how does the present look from the outside? Do we exist at a historical turning point – a present wholly separate from both past and future – or is the distinction that we draw between different cultural moments simply an arbitrary (and present-driven) separation of time? *Pattern Recognition* asks these questions as the novel itself explores its post-9/11 present. The novel was written (and is set) in the year after September 11, 2001. After writing three science fiction novels set in a distant future, Gibson tackled the uncertainty of his present culture with *Pattern Recognition*. The novel explores how the world in 2002 differs from the world in 2000, and whether those differences are tied to a single, dramatic cultural shift or to the transient, unfolding nature of culture over time.

Gibson approaches this present by considering it through the experimental lens of speculative fiction. For this reason, scholars including Fredric Jameson (244), Brian Jarvis (238), and Hamilton Carroll (53), have argued that *Pattern Recognition* is a work of science fiction. As Carroll puts it:

Representing the present in (and as) its own near future, Gibson's speculative

fiction encodes in its formal, linguistic, and thematic structures the very temporal

disruptions that mark the present moment. In this expansion of the real, the work

of Gibson and others offers a different form of realism, one grounded not only in

the representation of the everyday lives of characters, placed in a clearly

recognizable world, but also in the reframing of that world in relation to itself.

(63)

According to Carroll, *Pattern Recognition*'s science fiction techniques dislocate the

contemporary world from its contemporary readership (53). Gibson's descriptions

highlight the absurdities and dangers of present culture, thus providing the "outsider"

perspective that Bigend seeks. *Pattern Recognition* displays the overwhelming simulation

and dehumanization undergirding twenty-first-century globalized capitalism and suggests

that the violence of 9/11 exposes this dehumanization. Against this contemporary

dystopia, Gibson also considers how characters might reclaim human values outside of

profit-based capitalist structures. Gibson's science fiction conceptualization of an

underground film phenomenon known as "the footage" becomes *Pattern Recognition*'s

indirect consideration of 9/11. Through a speculative fiction perspective, Gibson

imagines how September 11, 2001 could result in a perceptual shift for someone who

could recognize its violence as an extension of the dehumanizing hyperreal. This

alternative perspective emphasizes trauma's potential to create change. Gibson thus

considers his 2002 present as a potentially pivotal moment for capitalist violence.

Gibson indicates the potential for humanizing change in the post-9/11 world

through *Pattern Recognition*'s emphasis on spiritual values in a technologized and

globalized setting. Critics have written about *Pattern Recognition*'s portrayal of the post-9/11 world, the twenty-first-century global city, the internet cultures of the new millennium, and the conditions of global marketing and branding in late-capitalism.[1] Gibson draws these concepts together into a cohesive narrative about Cayce's global pilgrimage towards her post-9/11 trauma. However, one aspect of *Pattern Recognition* that has been little discussed is the book's persistent use of religious language and supernatural or spiritual incidents. This thesis will use the idea of "sacred humanism" to explain how *Pattern Recognition* imagines that the novel's political moment (2002-2003) could spark a humanizing change in contemporary culture.

Pattern Recognition's protagonist, Cayce Pollard, is a thirty-something, cool hunter and marketing consultant from New York City. Cayce uses her extreme sensitivity to style to help corporations commodify street trends and re-brand their products. *Pattern Recognition* begins when Cayce is in London consulting for the fictional advertising firm Blue Ant on a running shoe logo. While there, Cayce becomes involved in Blue Ant's secret project to find the maker of a series of internet-distributed film clips known as "the footage." Cayce is a "footagehead" or a follower of the footage; she is part of an online community that is obsessed with these mysterious videos (4). Each video clip is without any branding, fashion, marker of time or place, language, or dialogue. The clips appear mysteriously online, dropped into the Net without explanation or obvious origin. Blue Ant's CEO, Bigend, wants to commodify the footage because he thinks he could profit from the attention that the phenomenon has garnered. For Cayce, the quest for the

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[1] These critics include Hamilton Carroll, Alex Link, Brian Jarvis, Karin Hoepker, and Lee Konstantinou.

footage's creator—referred to as "the maker"—is more personal (20). The footage

captivates her, and she describes the online forum where she discusses it as "a second

home" (65). As Cayce travels through New York, London, Tokyo, Moscow, and Paris,

the footage and footage-head community anchor her "post-geographic" experience (6).

Cayce, then, embarks on a global pilgrimage in search of the source of her virtual home.

Her journey reveals a world overwhelmed by simulated, mediated and commodified

experiences, and Cayce encounters the global militarization, surveillance culture, and

dehumanizing technologies of the contemporary world. Throughout this journey, Cayce

is torn between these forces of global capitalism and a personal desire for more

humanitarian values. Her oscillation between a dehumanizing world and humanizing

instincts forms the core of *Pattern Recognition*'s plot.

Cayce's experience is tied directly to the post-9/11 world as she reels from the

loss of her father in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York City. Although she thinks that

her father, Win, is dead, she also feels unable to grieve him, which leaves her lonely and

isolated. It is only after Cayce meets the footage's makers – twin sisters, Stella and Nora

– that she is able to confront her own grief for her father and for human history, "weeping

for her century, though whether the one past or the one present she doesn't know" (356).

Cayce discovers that the footage is the outcome of a brain injury that filmmaker Nora

Volkova received in a Russian terrorist attack that killed her parents. Nora's twin, Stella,

facilitates Nora's creation of the footage, which Cayce describes as Nora's "speaking"

wound (305). The art that flows from Nora's trauma ultimately helps Cayce address her

own trauma. The novel thus reveals, alongside its catalogue of capitalist and military

global violence, the potential that violence can have for breaking its own patterns and

resurrecting human values. In the post-9/11 context, Gibson's use of the fictional footage becomes a way to explore the potentiality of violence in the post-9/11 climate.

This thesis will first argue that *Pattern Recognition* depicts a dehumanizing hyperreal where people are reduced either to workers or consumers as their bodies integrate with mass-produced machinery and simulated, commodity-based identities. Gibson foregrounds the homogenization of geography, history, and identity for profit-based corporate agendas in the contemporary world. Global dehumanization culminates in visible acts of extreme violence – such as 9/11 – where people become significant only as global symbols regardless of their unique existences. Gibson considers the violence of 9/11 indirectly in *Pattern Recognition* through his exploration of subtler ways in which people in Cayce's world lose agency and identity through global capitalist homogenization.

The second and third chapters of my thesis will consider the damage that results from this dehumanizing landscape, and the humanizing potential that *Pattern Recognition* ties to incidents of trauma. Gibson's speculative reimagining of the post-9/11 world demonstrates Cayce's desire for human intimacy and spiritual connection in the aftermath of violence. "The footage" is *Pattern Recognition*'s conceptualization of how 9/11 footage could be read or received if it inspired people like Cayce to detach from the violent constructions of capitalist societies and form communities around more human values. I will argue that the footage promotes "sacred humanism" – a belief that the human person has inherent worth outside of monetary evaluation. Cayce's journey towards the footage, then, becomes a spiritual journey towards human significance and

human intimacy. This pilgrimage eventually allows her to grieve her father and to detach from the corporate culture that has driven her career.

Pattern Recognition does not suggest that sacred humanism is the inevitable consequence of mass violence, nor does Gibson imply that such violence is justified if it prompts a more compassionate world. Instead, the novel imagines alternative ways forward from its own post-9/11 present. If global terrorism is the most obvious manifestation of contemporary dehumanization, then maybe its overt violence could reveal the violence that sustains the rest of global capitalism. Maybe the magnitude of 9/11 could rupture current ways of thinking and lead to a more humanizing perception of the world. Maybe, as a consequence of 9/11 trauma, people like Cayce could recognize the inherent value and sanctity of all human life. These possibilities suggest that the post-9/11 present is a turning point in global history, although *Pattern Recognition*'s ambiguous ending and ominous figures (like Bigend and Volkova) indicate that this potential may not be actualized. Nonetheless, the novel determinedly explores the possibility of the present. Will the new century continue the dehumanizing, homogenizing systems of the twentieth century, or will it develop ways to resist these forces of global capitalism? While other science fiction novels ask, 'what will the future look like', *Pattern Recognition* directly accesses post-9/11 anxieties by asking: what will we look like to the future? The novel thus exposes the powerful uncertainty of a culture in the wake of trauma.

Chapter 2: Simulation and Dehumanization

Pattern Recognition explores the connection between profit and dehumanization in contemporary capitalism through Jean Baudrillard's theories of hyperreality and simulacra. Gibson depicts Cayce's world as a version of Jean Baudrillard's hyperreal, where simulation is no longer about referencing the real but instead it generates "models of the real without origin or reality" (a hyperreal) (Baudrillard 1). These models, in turn, "engender reality," or a simulated replacement for reality that we assume to be real (Baudrillard 1). Baudrillard's 1981 treatise *Simulacra and Simulation* argues that the late-capitalist environment is so thoroughly simulated that it is no longer possible to distinguish what is real from what is a replication or representation. The real is exchanged for a patchwork of intersecting imaginings of itself, which Baudrillard describes as "a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (2). Baudrillard also explains how this hyperreal operates through a "systems of signs" (2) that simulate, and ultimately replace, reality. Brands, trademarks, icons, currency, media and other signs become a short-hand that individuals use to navigate space and identity in the contemporary hyperreal. Gibson focuses on this shorthand in *Pattern Recognition* to demonstrate the prevalence of this "system of signs" in Cayce's life. Gibson demonstrates that characters' real selves are overwhelmed and co-opted by a hyperreal culture that views them primarily through derivative global signs such as brand names.

Pattern Recognition begins in a hyperreal fashionable London, where Cayce's surroundings are more simulated than authentic. Cayce's ultra-rich colleagues and

contemporaries engage in self-simulation using the signage of fashion and branding. The term "self-simulation," here, refers to the act of simulating how one wishes to appear rather than exposing one's real experience. This simulation relies on the system of hyperreal signs, like fashion, that codify self-expression based on specific cultural expectations. For example, Bernard Stonestreet's hair "might be the result of his having slept on it that way, but is more likely the work of some exclusive barber" (9). Stonestreet uses this "new but slept-in look" to simulate a casual and careless style that he, in fact, cares a great deal about (54). Stonestreet's actress wife, Helena, also blends the real and artificial as she continues to look like her "character on *Ark/Hive 7*'s lone season" even when she is at home and off camera (56). Cayce notices that Helena continues to seem scripted in her home life because Helena is – at least in part – playing the role of "Helena" rather than simply being herself. Cayce also encounters a Heinzi employee, Dorotea Benedetti, who tries to "out-minimalize" Cayce in their initial meeting (10). Dorotea's minimalist outfit fails, however, as it "is still trying to say several things at once, probably in at least three languages," thereby highlighting the nuances of self-simulation (10). When Dorotea uses fashion to try to say nothing about herself, she ends up employing a dress that acts as a signifier for "several things at once." The dress becomes part of the branded network of simulated signs through which Dorotea replicates a certain appearance and thereby communicates a simulacrum of herself.

A self-simulating person is motivated more by how their actions and choices appear than by what those actions and choices are; self-simulation thus detaches a character from their agency and responsibility. Even when Cayce is genuinely typing an email, she describes herself as a "privately sarcastic imitation of a woman imagining that

she is actually accomplishing something" (256). When she substitutes a fictional, generic idea of an unnamed woman, instead of recognizing that she is a woman in a park writing an email, Cayce's act of self-simulation distances her from her present and from her personal reasons for writing to "stellanor@amraz.ru" (256). Dorotea's dress, Helena's performance of herself, Stonestreet's hair, and Cayce's imitation of a woman writing an email turn these characters into simulacra. Each person creates an imagined version of themselves, based on another (often imagined) idea, image, or signifier.

Pattern Recognition's depictions of self-simulation emphasize that these imagined selves contribute to a person's de-individualization and dehumanization. Cayce's reactions demonstrate this blurring between the authentic and the simulated among her peers. Upon meeting a person, Cayce often compares them to a simulacrum of something else. A waiter reminds her of an emoticon (19). One character, Hobbs, reminds her of a portrait of Samuel Beckett (30), and another, Marina, looks to Cayce "like a prop from one sequel or another of *The Matrix*" (187). These comparisons may seem to dehumanize these characters, but instead, they demonstrate Cayce's awareness that these characters have already dehumanized themselves through self-simulation. When Cayce describes Marina as "like a prop," Cayce is not comparing a person to a simulacrum; she is comparing two simulacra (187). By seeing Marina as a simulacrum of herself Cayce judges Marina's branded and simulated identity. Cayce's description does not react to Marina as a nice person, mean person, rich person, poor person, or a person with or without taste. Cayce's first impression is not of the real Marina but of who the simulacrum of Marina appears to be. As Cayce identifies self-simulation throughout *Pattern Recognition*, Gibson demonstrates the extent to which Cayce's world is

hyperreal. Cayce meets people who remind her of an imitation (emoticon, portrait, or prop) of yet another thing. Essentially, she encounters constructed identities that are deeply derivative. These original or unique selves are being subsumed by copied identities, and these self-simulating people seem more like objects than like human beings. Through these characters, *Pattern Recognition* demonstrates the dehumanizing and de-individualizing effects of hyperreal contemporary culture.

Moreover, these self-simulating characters are themselves traversing a landscape that erases human history through simulation. Cayce finds that "whatever faintly lived-in feel" exists in Damien's apartment "is the work of a production assistant" (2). Cayce and Bigend drive by a pub "of such quintessential pub-ness that she assumes it is only a few weeks old, or else recently reconfigured to attract a clientele its original builders could scarcely have comprehended" (70). The pub is not pub-like because it is a pub, but because it has been simulated to look like a pub. Through design, it has been made into a simulacrum of itself, just as Damien's apartment is a simulation of an inhabited space. Cayce even describes this pub as a "terrifyingly perfect simulacrum" (70). "Perfect" because of its accurate accordance with the expectations that hyperreal culture has for how a pub should look, and "terrifying" because, in this perfectly derivative re-imagining of itself, this pub has completely replaced what was created by its "original builders" (70). Thus, the copies that abound in Cayce's world do damage as they replace and reconfigure real history. Another simulated space in *Pattern Recognition* arises when Cayce encounters global "Starbucks clones" (142, 155, 190). She visits a Starbucks in Tokyo (142) and then in London (190), and her companion Parkaboy acknowledges that they might not have Starbucks yet in Moscow but "[t]hey will" (276). Cayce notes that

the Starbucks have "exactly the same faux-Murano pendulum lamps they have in the branch nearest her apartment in New York" (207). These Starbucks are all "Starbucks clones" because they do not replicate a real original, but instead, imagine themselves and each other as part of a global network of same-ness. The Starbucks clones erase geography for Cayce, as she experiences the same drinks, service, and "faux-Murano pendulum lamps" across the globe (207). Invading cities with unique cultures and histories, these franchises consume that unique space for a homogenized global market. Thus, although Cayce may notice London's "weirdly flavoured […] tap water" (189) or Moscow's "nationally specific […] petro-carbons" (268), her global travels mostly expose her to the erasure of culture, history, and difference as global cities imitate each other's products, designs and franchises to the point of homogeneity. These simulated landscapes emphasize the corruption of human cultural space for globalized capitalist space.

Gibson emphasizes that the simulacra around Cayce are perpetuated by a profit-making culture that seeks homogenized consumer markets. *Pattern Recognition*'s portrayal of the hyperreal demonstrates the intense connection between simulation and profit. The above examples – Starbucks, the pub-like pub, the "immaculately disheveled suit" (200), or the dress "trying to say several things at once" (10) – all demonstrate that places and people become simulacra through their relationship with money. Such self-simulating characters as Dorotea and Stonestreet have been left with derivative and de-individualizing options for self-expression in a culture dominated by changing trends and conspicuous consumption. Consumers compose an image of themselves to feel original, but they are drawing from a common signage that, in fact, erases their individuality. The

film and television industries, as well as consumer marketing and advertising, all encourage individuals to identify themselves with certain products and places. Moreover, the proliferation of identical consumer spaces, like Starbucks, across the globe enables this derivative lifestyle. People are de-individualized through homogenized products and the global distribution of these identical products separates people and places from their unique histories. *Pattern Recognition* ultimately demonstrates that the erasure of human identity, history, culture, and geography in the globalized world is the direct consequence of consumer culture and profit-making systems.

Pattern Recognition's discussion of labor further emphasizes the dehumanizing patterns of global capitalism. When Cayce vetoes a Heinzi logo in an early chapter, she considers

> 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, this bouncing sperm? Would it work its way into their dreams eventually? Would their children chalk it in doorways before they knew its meaning as a trademark? (13)

Cayce recognizes that her choice (to approve or veto the new logo) is part of a process that extends to the lives of the "countless Asian workers." She, like them, produces the hyperreal. She knows that this symbol will become part of how consumers simulate their own lives, but also part of how workers integrate their bodies and minds with a product. Thus, at the levels of both production and consumption, a trademark affects human dreams. *Pattern Recognition*'s quest for the maker also connects to the novel's interest in labour and production in the globalized twenty-first century. Even the title given to the

mysterious source of the footage – "the maker" – highlights the act of production. This maker is significant because the output of their labour (the footage) is unique and non-derivative. A person producing wholly original work is remarkable in a world where hyperreal networks, by their nature, erase the signs of individual effort. The production of thousands of identical shirts, for example, disguises the work of a unique labourer through the product's uniformity. Derivative homogenized production hides its own modes of production, just as globalized labour markets keep the producers anonymous in their number ("countless") and nationality ("Asian"). Gibson's investigation of homogenized and mechanized global labour demonstrates that the conditions of production in the hyperreal are dehumanizing, as the work of human hands and minds disappears in a haze of simulacra. Human work, like human identity, is subsumed by symbols in the contemporary hyperreal.

Pramod Nayar notes that, because the real and hyperreal intersect in *Pattern Recognition*, the logos and brands become infused with materiality (Nayar 53), and human bodies become tools that facilitate spread of global signage. Cayce's work as a brand consultant, for example, concerns this "materialization of signage [… which] demands a [in this case, Cayce's] body" (53). For Nayar, the hyperreal means "assembling the organic body with the flows of information around it" (53), which results in a human body (like Cayce's) being understood in mechanical or robotic terms and reduced to a tool for the spread of hyperreal signage (Nayar 53). Cayce's brain becomes a link in the corporate machine, as her semi-psychic instincts inform the branding and commodification of products. Similarly, Magda's human body is used for commercial purposes when she spreads brand information by word of mouth (Nayar 55). Nayar

argues that the integration of people with corporate or cyber information networks is dehumanizing and results in trauma on the material bodies that must accommodate the forces of an immaterial network (Nayar 55; 60). Through interacting with machines and through acting as part of the global information network machine, human minds and bodies in *Pattern Recognition* are further removed from their unique selves. Their importance as people is subsumed by their importance as bodies and as tools.

Hubertus Bigend, *Pattern Recognition*'s spokesperson for global capitalist interests, views people primarily as malleable objects to be transformed into consumers. Bigend's focus on the materiality of the human body – and how that body can be influenced – demonstrates his disregard for individual agency. Bigend explains to Cayce that Blue Ant's aim is to connect with a consumer's "limbic brain" – their unconscious, illogical, and emotional centre of human instinct (69). When Cayce explains what she knows "in her heart," he corrects her and explains the neuro-biology behind these feelings (69). Similarly, while Cayce explains jet-lag as the displacement of her soul by global travel, Bigend explains that "[it] shrinks the frontal lobes. Physically […] Clearly visible on a scan" (60). Bigend is determined to understand the human experience as a biological one, which perhaps explains why Cayce says he "seems to somehow understand emotions without ever having partaken of them" (293). Moreover, by understanding the human brain as a physical receptacle for well-placed influence, Bigend can instrumentalize consumer minds. People become his tools, and Cayce is no exception. Cayce's sensitivity to fashion makes her into a "very specialized piece of human litmus paper" for logos, and her extreme and adverse reactions to branding exaggerate the effect that subconscious brand messages have on all limbic brains (13).

Bigend, therefore, uses Cayce's material body to test how a logo will work on subsequent consumer bodies. Blue Ant manipulates individuals' natural instincts, feelings, and hungers for profit. This process is done without any regard for any human agency. Blue Ant only wants to "make people buy things" (69). Bigend's technical language suggests the cold and calculating approach he takes to human instinct and emotion. People are fragmented into bodies and brains and homogenized into consumer demographics. Bigend symbolizes the interests of the twenty-first-century capitalist, and his dehumanizing approach to labourers and consumers emphasizes the dehumanizing attitude of global markets.

Given that, as a labourer and a consumer, Cayce is used as a tool for others interests, it is unsurprising that her actions are often described as mechanical or puppet-like. Not only is Cayce surrounded by "robotic" hotel drapes in Tokyo (134), and Damien's robot girl movie props in London (5), but Cayce mechanizes her own body through her interactions with machinery. She takes a part from one of the "robot girls" in Damien's apartment to defend herself and notes that it "fits neatly and solidly into her hand," integrating comfortably with her body (41). Cayce also integrates with the Pilates machines that she uses in various global cities, as she repeats angular stretches "to the gentle twanging" of reformer springs (93). When talking with Stonestreet, she puts herself on "auto-nod" (15), and, when talking with Dorotea, she manages a "mechanical grimace" (98). This mechanical Cayce suits a world where people resemble objects (or replicas of objects) more than they resemble people, and where Cayce interacts daily with mechanical objects – vending machines (156), coffee machines (21), elevators (275), computers (3), telephones (126), and other mechanized parts of life in late-capitalism.

Pattern Recognition's use of robot and cyborg imagery reinforces the worrying

connection between the spread of global capitalism and the dehumanization of

individuals. When Cayce is a "puppenkopf" (315) or Marina is a "prop" (187), they are

reduced to bodies whose mental or physical presence serves profit-making systems.

While this "puppet" status reduces characters' individuality and agency, it also disguises

their involvement with overwhelming corporate powers. Self-simulating characters

foreground their appearance rather than their action, which detaches them from a sense of

responsibility for their actions. Even a character like Cayce, who is attuned to the

simulacra around her, is described as a puppet because her ability to identify these

dehumanizing systems is not enough to help her resist them. This dehumanization of

consumers and labourers creates a culture of complicity.

Brian Jarvis argues that this mechanization of human labour and thought in the

hyperreal is an extended metaphor for human complicity with capitalist systems. Jarvis

explains that Cayce is "becoming a cyborg" in *Pattern Recognition* because of her lack of

agency in the global system that she navigates (254). Cayce herself expresses her fears of

being complicit:

> Leaving Neal's Yard and the Pilates studio, she tries to become just another lost
>
> tourist, though she knows she'll never be one […] Cayce knows that she is, and
>
> has long been, complicit. Though in what, exactly, is harder to say. Complicit in
>
> whatever it is that gradually makes London and New York feel more like each
>
> other, that dissolves the membranes of the mirror-worlds. (194)

In this passage, Cayce recognizes her participation in globalization as it homogenizes

separate geographies (London and New York) and erases distinct human culture and

history in a profit-making enterprise. Jason Haslam argues that Cayce's guilt and complicity drive both the plot and the resolution of *Pattern Recognition*, and that, by the end of *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce herself has succumbed to the silencing of history and to dehumanizing systems (Haslam 102). Haslam and Jarvis highlight how Cayce is entrenched in capitalist modes of production, but their arguments do not examine how Cayce's spiritual instincts develop throughout the book to help guide her away from this complicity with globalized consumer culture. The second part of this thesis will consider how Cayce's soul offers an alternative to her puppet-self. Nayar, Jarvis, and Haslam demonstrate that Cayce's body and mind are complicit in *Pattern Recognition*, but they do not explore the possibility that Cayce's route to agency might be spiritual.

Thus, *Pattern Recognition* presents a world overrun by dehumanizing simulacra and symbols. Simulated spaces, self-simulating bodies, and mechanized bodies disguise the importance of human individuality as they serve capitalist interests. Cayce's encounters with the erasure of human labour or human experience serve as minor examples of a more overwhelming problem wherein people are understood as objects, bodies, symbols, and data, rather than unique (and uniquely important) human lives. The world that Bigend represents is one in which Cayce herself feels complicit, especially when she realizes that her career has taken "the path of least resistance" against the overwhelming forces of corporatization (94). As much as Cayce tries to avoid branded baggage in her own fashion choices, she is ultimately a part of this system. *Pattern Recognition* explores the totality of the dehumanizing hyperreal as Cayce confronts the extent of its power over herself and her world.

At the heart of *Pattern Recognition* is a single major event that demonstrates how human lives are subsumed by global symbolism: September 11, 2001. As Jacques Rancière explains, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City were symbols of "American power" and of "one nation's desire for world domination" (99, 97). The attacks on September 11 were not simply about carnage (although carnage was an integral part of the terrorists' goals); they were an attack on a symbol. The individual lives in the towers were not being attacked as individual lives (an act intended to kill a specific person). Instead, these lives were American bodies in an American building, and they were destroyed for symbolic effect. The lives of the Al-Qaeda hijackers were similarly disposable because their existence was subsumed by their perverse labour as they produced a horrific symbolic event. *Pattern Recognition* does not focus on these symbolic labourers and their symbolic victims, but Gibson's exploration of dehumanized and symbolic bodies in the novel parallels those bodies were killed in the World Trade Center, in the Pentagon, and on United Airlines Flight 93 on September 11, 2001. *Pattern Recognition* uses 9/11 as the ultimate example of dehumanization in the contemporary world. Alive or dead, human beings are reduced to objects and manipulated as tools by distant, calculating strangers.

Pattern Recognition's approach to this tragedy considers the potential that this violence had to change dehumanizing global systems. Rancière's writing on 9/11 concludes that "the gruesome death of thousands of innocents" did not defy pre-existing ways of talking and thinking about American power, world relations, and life in general. Rancière argues that the event could easily be understood within the established "symbolization of American togetherness and of the state of the world" (98). The attacks

were absorbed by a dehumanizing hyperreal, where human lives were categorized as friend and foe, and human bodies became disposable units in the War on Terror. Rancière points out that the American response to 9/11 "did not find the symbolic deficient" for explaining the event, as "On the evening of the same day, the president already had the words on hand to capture [… how] the forces of evil had attacked the forces of good" (98). Even though the attack on the Twin Towers was clearly intended as an attack on the West, Rancière explains that both the American government and the terrorist attackers were using the same dehumanizing symbolic language (99). As such, Rancière argues that 9/11, apart from being a tragedy of exceptional magnitude, did not change the symbols of twenty-first-century globalization.

When Rancière says that 9/11 did not "indicate the effraction of the non-symbolizable real," he is arguing that the attacks on September 11 did not constitute a moment of "dissensus" for their global audience (98). Dissensus is Rancière's term for "a demonstration of a gap in the sensible itself" (38). Effectively, a moment of dissensus will rupture conventional ways of seeing and understanding the world. In the case of the hyperreal, a moment of dissensus would break the system of signs and symbols to reveal the reality that they conceal or replace. Dissensus involves a revelatory perceptual shift for which both human individuality and personal agency is necessary. After all, the enemy of dissensus is consensus – an unquestioned ordering of the world that, Rancière argues, controls human experience by policing social norms and hierarchies (42-3). For a moment of rupture to take place, an individual mind must experience a shift in perspective that gives them a new and dissident perspective. Societies function through consensus and demand a at least some order and conformity in how their members view

the world. A disruption in a person's perception of this consensus can destabilize this homogeneity, especially if that person communicates their perceptual shift to others. Rancière's example of dissensus is a public protest, which transforms a consensus-designated space, where "the space for circulating is nothing but a space for circulation," into "a space for the appearance of a subject: the people, the workers, the citizens" (Rancière 37). The protest re-figures the public space and brings political subjects (protesters) into a space that is not designated as political. Dissensus disrupts our understanding of the established order of our world, and shows us the gaps in our sensibilities. Presumably, there are ways of thinking outside of our own, but it takes a rupture or re-figuring to expose these "gaps" (Rancière 37). Given this definition, Rancière thinks that 9/11 did not effect change on a global scale. The American response to the attacks involved a good-versus-evil narrative that worked directly with a consensual view of American power and hyperreal symbolism.

Pattern Recognition, however, explores the potential for dissensus in the aftermath of trauma. Gibson places very little emphasis on the patriotic media that Rancière cites as evidence of post-9/11 consensus. The War on Terror and Al-Qaeda are never mentioned in *Pattern Recognition*, and Gibson never uses the word "terrorism." Even though the novel is driven by 9/11, as Cayce and other characters reel from the trauma and loss of the event, Gibson purposefully avoids a consensus-based narrative of 9/11. Instead, through his discussion of spirituality, individuality, and 'the footage,' Gibson presents an alternative dissensual perspective on 9/11 that considers the inherent value of human life. The remainder of this thesis will consider how *Pattern Recognition*

imagines September 11 as a moment that had the potential for dissensus and

humanization in late-capitalism.

Chapter 3: The Footage and Sacred Humanism

Beyond exposing the dehumanization in contemporary culture, *Pattern Recognition* explores alternatives to current realities. The novel exaggerates ideas and experiments with them to provide a fresh perspective on the present. Gibson's greatest experiment in *Pattern Recognition* is the footage – an alternate conceptualization of 9/11, its aftermath, and the change it had the potential to invoke. Just as *Pattern Recognition* connects global capitalism to homogenization and violence, the novel considers how the outcomes of this violence could, on a large enough scale, provoke a response against dehumanizing global forces.

William Gibson's approach to 9/11 in *Pattern Recognition* suggests that the terrorist attacks inspired personal and emotional retaliation against the hyperreal. 9/11 forms the quiet centre of the novel as Gibson does not discuss the event at length, but its violence textures the entire plot. Gibson discusses 9/11 indirectly through Cayce, her father Win, and through the footage. In each situation, Gibson tries to personalize and humanize the experience and the aftermath of 9/11. For example, Cayce remembers the attacks not based on what she watched through the media, but from the details of her personal experience. At the time of the first plane's impact on the North Tower, Cayce is standing in front of a Spring Street antique store, staring at its window display. The distant crash, which Cayce explains as "one of those unexplained events in the sonic backdrop of lower Manhattan" prompts a single petal to fall from a dried rose in the window display (135). Gibson describes Cayce as the "sole witness to this minute fall" (135). The petal's fall becomes part of how Cayce remembers the event, a memory

further augmented by her memory of how "the exploding fuel burns with a tinge of green that she will never hear or see described" (137). Cayce's "duck to the face mantra" – based on the story of a pilot who collides with a duck during a flight ascent and ends up with a "hurricane" in his cockpit and a fragment of glass lodged in one eye – is also connected to the attacks, as Cayce thinks about how "the world itself had […] taken a duck in the face" on the impact of the first plane with the North Tower (34,135). The duck to the face, like the falling rose petal, becomes a private symbol of 9/11.

These details prove that Cayce's understanding of 9/11 is an inherently personal one. She does not use the generalizations made by the thousands of other New Yorkers who watched the destruction in real time, nor does she base her experience of 9/11 on the public footage that millions (if not billions) of people have witnessed worldwide. Cayce's memory of the attacks involves the personally constructed symbol (a petal falling) rather than the national symbolic order invoked by the attack in world media. In this moment of tragedy, Cayce maintains her personal and individual connection with a direct and unique experience. Hamilton Carroll explains that Cayce experiences 9/11 on a personal level "refracted in the miniaturized image of the falling petal and remembered through the prism of her father's disappearance" (47). Carroll argues that Gibson mines this imagery to demonstrate how events of 9/11's magnitude must be understood through an individual's personal "micro" frame (47). Cayce's experience of the attacks is conveyed through her personal lens to demonstrate a humanized version of 9/11 imagery and to help *Pattern Recognition* establish a symbolization of the event outside of widespread hyperreal conventions.

Gibson's handling of 9/11 is complicated by the difficulties of discussing a

national tragedy without exploiting it, and he seems to navigate this terrain by examining

9/11 indirectly. *Pattern Recognition* was the first novel about 9/11 published by an

American-born author.2 As a novelist, Gibson could be accused of profiting from 9/11 in

the way that the "signifiers of patriotic consumption […like] tea towels, mugs, souvenir

postcards" that proliferated in the wake of 9/11 did (Carroll 46). Therefore, the novel is

faced with the challenge of portraying 9/11 and considering its aftermath without turning

the fall of the towers into a voyeuristic spectacle or a melodramatic exaggeration.

Christopher Palmer uses Baudrillard's writing on obscenity to explore this problem.

While Baudrillard claims that obscenity ends interiority, Palmer argues that Gibson

maintains Cayce's interiority as the character keeps her loss and experience very vague,

personal, unspoken, and interior (475). Palmer concludes that Gibson's choice to avoid

the "most explicit image production" around 9/11 means that he avoids glorifying it

(475). Palmer also notes that Gibson displaces his discussion of twenty-first-century

global violence by withholding details or explicit imagery. The novel does not discuss the

War on Terror, but rather it focuses on the Cold War (Palmer 474); the novel does not

fixate on or recreate the images of 9/11, but rather it fixates on the footage (Palmer 475);

the novel simultaneously examines tragedy and mourning while also gorging itself on

descriptions of luxury and wealth (Palmer 476). Gibson's detailed discussion of

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2 Gibson retains his dual citizenship and is both an American and a Canadian citizen. He
was born in South Carolina and raised in Virginia, but has lived and worked in Canada
since 1967. To my knowledge, Pattern Recognition may even be the first novel ever
published about 9/11 (with its release date in February of 2003) although it was shortly
followed by the French novel *Windows on the World* by Frédéric Beigbeder (published in
August 2003), which deals more directly with the events of 9/11. For more information,
see Gary Westfahl's biography of William Gibson.

consumer culture, for example, becomes a way for *Pattern Recognition* to talk about "the

prevalence of spying and surveillance, coding and decoding, in the world of consumer

commerce" (Palmer 477). In Palmer's words: "The world of consumption replicates

many of the conditions of politics, but in a context that enables us to take a calmer look at

them" (477). This "calmer look" describes much of how Gibson manages to displace his

discussion of the turbulent and recent cultural trauma into other parts of the book. *Pattern

Recognition*, in its very title, encourages readers to make these lateral connections

between these fictional events in the book and the real occurrence of 9/11. Given *Pattern

Recognition*'s suggestion that hyperreal or media depictions of 9/11 fail to capture their

human story, it follows that Gibson does not replicate conventional descriptions of the

September 11 attacks. Through indirect fictional stories in the novel, Gibson considers

9/11 without reproducing its images or exploiting its tragedy.

Similarly, both Brian Jarvis and Mark Oxoby consider the footage as an

experimental and fictional reimagining of 9/11 footage. The twins who produce the

footage, Nora and Stella, invoke the North and South twin towers, and the sequence of

numbers on the final piece of footage ("1-3-5-7- 9-11") emphasize 9/11 and how it has

watermarked "the lower right-hand corner of [Cayce's] existence" (Jarvis 255). Jarvis

explains the footage as "a more intimate" depiction of 9/11 that focuses on the

"psychogeographical mapping of the topography of trauma" (255). Oxoby explains that

the footage and the images of 9/11 are both "contextless," "powerful," "alluring," and

"bereft of meaning and of depth" (109), and he concludes that "virtually everything that

Gibson's [sic] writes about the online footage must be read with the imagery of 9/11 in

mind" (Oxoby 109). Oxoby and Jarvis both suggest, as Palmer does, that Gibson uses the

footage as a way to take another "calmer" look at 9/11 imagery without replicating or exploiting real images.

I will argue that these examples, especially the footage, are more than fictional substitutions for 9/11. Rather, the footage is *Pattern Recognition*'s conceptualization of 9/11 as a moment of dissensus. For practical reasons, Gibson's exploration of 9/11 would have been hindered by a direct depiction of 9/11 because such a depiction could have been voyeuristic and exploitative. However, *Pattern Recognition*'s lack of conventional 9/11 descriptions also avoids the ways in which such images were part of a dehumanizing symbolization of the attacks. Perhaps, writing eight years before Rancière's publication of *Dissensus*, Gibson also felt that pre-existing symbols and narratives of 9/11 did not rupture or reorder the dehumanizing effects of globalization as they should. Alternately, *Pattern Recognition* (which was written in the direct aftermath of the attacks) aimed to provoke a more thoughtful and humanizing response to the violence than the War on Terror. As such, Gibson uses the phenomenon of the footage to consider what the violence of 9/11 would look like if it caused a person (like Cayce) to reconsider the importance of "the human." From this perspective, Gibson's exposure of the dehumanizing hyperreal in *Pattern Recognition* is tied to the book's efforts to re-humanize 9/11 and the twenty-first-century global world. Gibson uses the footage to hypothesize on what a global audience shaped by personal trauma and a belief in the inherent value of human life would look like in the post-9/11 world.

Gibson's descriptions of the footage in *Pattern Recognition* suggest that it marks a dissensus for its followers as the non-symbolizable or non-sensible real breaks through the hyperreal haze and refigures their perspective. Few footage followers can explain

why the footage has the effect that it does, but Cayce is convinced that it does have a "powerful effect" on many viewers (109). Boone describes this effect as "lonely," which Cayce says "deepens [and] becomes sort of polyphonic" (109). If we read the footage as Gibson's dissensual re-imagining of 9/11 then the reaction of its audience is the measure of its rupture. Rancière explains that "[t]he decisive point for identifying the occurrence of a rupture becomes one of the event's reception, that is, the ability of those it affected and of those charged with uttering its significance (the American government and media conglomerates) to ensure its symbolic capture" (97-98). Rancière concludes that the American public, government, and media were able to compute 9/11 using existing symbolization, but *Pattern Recognition* shows an audience that sees a new world through the footage. Cayce's experience of the footage makes everything else seem "Off Topic" (46). Gibson also describes how the footage "has a way […] of transgressing the accustomed order of things" (20), and Cayce finds in the footage "a sense of […] opening into something. Universe? Narrative?" (109). These descriptions emphasize the experience of rupture that Cayce and other footageheads find in the internet film. Although this group may not know how to identify the meaning that the footage offers them, *Pattern Recognition* suggests that this meaning is nonetheless present and that it opens possibilities for new perspectives on the world.

The footage also creates a new space – Fetish: Footage: Forum – for a group of "footageheads" who are seeing the world in a ruptured way. Cayce describes the comfort that this group brings her as they reach out to each other online and become a community. F:F:F. becomes a constant in Cayce's life –as "familiar as a friend's living room" – and this cyberspace is also where Cayce meets her close friend and eventual

romantic interest Parkaboy (3). Cayce finds comfort in the number of unknown others who might be following the footage at any given time. During the New York anthrax scare, Cayce recognizes a footage frame-grab pinned to the jacket of a fellow footage follower, and with a nod from this stranger, she is "rescued from inner darkness by this suggestion of just how many people might be following the footage" (52). *Pattern Recognition* uses the footage to describe an underground need for intimacy and community felt by people living in the "polyphonic loneliness" of the post-9/11, globalized world. Through "the footage," the novel imagines an alternative to the alienating mass media coverage of 9/11, which reinforced global symbolisms and national narratives. If 9/11, instead, caused a rupture in people's perspectives (like "the footage" does), then it might provoke the formation of new spaces, relationships, and communities as people's response to a shared experience of dissensus.

The film's "nascent meaning," which footageheads sense but cannot grasp, is the footage's acknowledgement of the inherent value of human life (76). Gibson shows that the footage is dissensual because its ethical and aesthetic focus is on the inherent value of the human person. The footage, therefore, ruptures a dehumanizing hyperreal that attempts to mask human work, human history, and human individuality and ultimately exploits human life. In a concrete way, the footage itself sustains a single human life. *Pattern Recognition* reveals that the footage is a lifeline for its creator, Nora. Through video-editing, Nora can be "present" in the world, and the footage is described as the product of her speaking wound – an unintended consequence of her severe brain injury (301). Neither a marketing ploy nor a product, the footage is the extension of a unique person. Nora's existence and trauma produce artwork that, in turn, engenders connections

between other people. The community of footageheads in *Pattern Recognition* find one another because of their shared response to Nora's lifeline. The footage also has no plot, no time-period, no recognizable or specific goal. Instead, the film centres on the routine actions of anonymous people as they catch a train or kiss a lover. Nora's editing process involves paring down anonymous surveillance footage to highlight simple human actions in a beautiful way. The figures in the footage originate in images of men and women from around the globe who have been stripped of hyperreal signifiers (like fashion, brands, landscapes) and made universally human. If the hyperreal superimposes a simulacrum onto a person, Nora reduces the extraneous features of a scenario to highlight the footage's "everyman" characters. Nora's art also emphasizes the value of human intimacy when the man and woman kiss. The embrace is one of the few human actions represented in the footage, and its inclusion in the sparse film highlights the significance of intimacy to the bare human experience. The footage is a text that emanates from human trauma, sustains human (Nora's) life, and evinces that human life has inherent and irrevocable value. This value may seem obvious, but *Pattern Recognition* has established how globalization and global capitalism erase human labour and human individuality, and the events of September 11, 2001 (as well as its bloody aftermath – the War on Terror) signal the ways in which human lives can be devalued into symbols. For the footage to exist, then, is a radical rupture in this symbolization of the world. The global hyperreal's symbolic gestures override these human values, which explains why the footageheads crave the footage's exaltation of human life.

Understanding the footage as a text dedicated to 'the human' explains why the film evades co-optation into mainstream hyperreality. When Bigend describes the footage

as "[t]he most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century" (65), he assumes that the footage promotes a product. Instead, the footage promotes a human value that is a basic, enduring, and cross-cultural idea about human life and its worth. This value does not mesh with a hyperreal system that deliberately erases human history, human labour, and human individuality. Because the footage does not sell anything, it slips beyond the radar of major media networks. Dehumanizing hyperreal organizations cannot readily access a phenomenon that (through its content and its source) so clearly foregrounds the value of a person's existence.

From here onwards, I will describe the value that the footage places on human life as "sacred humanism." Beyond simply indicating that human life is important, the footage sanctifies human existence. Gibson's use of religious and spiritual terminology to describe the phenomena emphasizes that what is breaking through the contemporary hyperreal is something ancient: the sacred. *Pattern Recognition* thus develops the idea of a twenty-first century "sacred humanism" born from the need to ascribe value to human life in dehumanizing global circumstances. The footage has the mystery and meaning ascribed traditionally to sacred objects and phenomena. It is described as "crossing boundaries" (109) and it has some "mystery" that "you can't explain […] to someone who isn't there" (76). Cayce is convinced that it "matters in some unique way" and that the "nascent meaning" that she finds in it is more than "an illusion of meaningfulness" (76, 115). Gibson also directly ties the footage to various religious institutions and groups. There is an ongoing conspiracy that someone in the Vatican is following the footage, which leads Parkaboy to the exclamation: "Do you know that the Pope is a footagehead?" (89). This information comes to light after a group in Brazil supposedly

ascribes the creation of the footage to the Devil, and a statement is issued "from Rome to the effect that it is the Vatican's business to say which works are the works of Satan's [and …] that the matter of the footage is being taken under consideration" (89). This side-plot in *Pattern Recognition* signals that the footage is a new occurrence of the sacred and that it is, therefore, being "taken under consideration" by existing religious infrastructure.

Cayce's first experience with the footage is also introduced with religious imagery:

> that previous November […] she'd noticed two people huddled on either side of a third a turtlenecked man with a portable DVD player held before him in the way that crèche figures of the Three Kings hold their gifts.
>
> And passing these three she'd seen a face there on the screen of his ciborium. She'd stopped without thinking and done that stupid duck dance, trying to better align retina to pixel. (53)

In this description, three strangers introduce the film to Cayce as if they are the magi and she is the Christ child, which is suggestive given Cayce's own supernatural abilities and her significance in the quest for the footage. Cayce finds the footage in a screen that Gibson describes a "ciborium" – a chalice-type vessel used to hold a symbolic offering of the body of Christ during Holy Communion. Gibson's loaded Christian terminology again suggests that Cayce is receiving something through the footage that will provide ritual salvation for her soul, just as the Communion host is believed to offer salvation. Cayce is also drawn to this "ciborium" by "a face" that she sees there, emphasizing that the draw of this spiritual artefact is its depiction of the human in a sacred way. Gibson's

language here highlights that the footage itself is a sacred text or offering that offers a spiritual path to Cayce.

References to the footagehead community also continuously describe them as spiritual groupings with "cults" (4) and "subcults" (4). Watching the footage is described with the mystical phrasing "giving yourself to the dream" (23). Cayce's friend Damien even suggests that "followers of the footage comprise the first true freemasonry of the new century" (20). Through the F:F:F's constant conflicts, Gibson demonstrates that the footage's dissensus does not produce another profit-driven institution or another consensus-based organization (like organized religion). *Pattern Recognition*'s depiction of the sacred is specifically non-institutional or doctrinal. Instead, the various individual perspectives on F:F:F show that unique people are having unique reactions to the dissensus that the footage brings. The community exists and comforts characters like Cayce, but it does not govern her perspective, which she has the agency to explore independently.

Pattern Recognition also describes some of Cayce's experiences of 9/11 in a similar theological way, further connecting the footage with the September 11 attacks. When she is pinning up posters of her father's missing face, for example, she is "making the stations of some unthinkable cross" (186). As with the footage, Gibson employs Christian imagery alongside the depiction of a human face (in this case, Win's face) suggesting that the sacred is contained within the individual. In this situation, Cayce's "stations of the cross" are about the ritual dedication to a figure – in this case, Win – who is of sacred importance. Yet, Cayce also completes these stations with countless other grieving families, each dedicating its actions to another unique person. The Easter

metaphor here suggests that in this post-9/11 sacred humanism every individual is worthy of honour and ritual because every human person is inherently valuable. Gibson's Christian terminology – although it is associated with consensus-based, organized religion – relates to ancient spiritual tenets that argue that a human person has inherent worth beyond their mind or body. Gibson calls on the idea of the human soul. *Pattern Recognition* therefore, draws on established spiritual and sacred doctrines that establish human value outside of monetary values in order to explore the birth of a new sense of the sacred humanism in the aftermath of violence.

Chapter 4: Cayce and The Potentiality of Violence

Assuming that 9/11 and the footage are the source of rupture, *Pattern Recognition* can be read as an account of the aftermath of that rupture. The book asks whether the human values in the rupture are enough to overcome the contemporary world's overwhelming dehumanization. For the perceptual shift to be complete, one person – even only one person – must escape the confines of hyperreal puppetry and find a new way of seeing or understanding the world through sacred humanism. In *Pattern Recognition*, that person is Cayce. The novel marks Cayce's journey away from the dehumanizing hyperreal and towards sacred humanism. Through the footage and her quest for the maker, Cayce can approach her own grief, her supernatural instincts and abilities, and her need for human connections. These changes are facilitated both by her growing acknowledgement of the value of human life and by her slow escape from complicity with global capitalism. Cayce's story exposes the potentiality of violence to create change in the contemporary world.

Cayce's hypersensitivities demonstrate that her character is an exaggeration of the average consumer who is affected on a psychological level by branding and marketing. Cayce, more than anyone, feels the "pressure" exerted by brands and fashion that lead to self-simulation. For this reason, Cayce's clothing is brandless and anonymous and she considers herself "allergic" to fashion (8). However, Cayce's allergies do not stop her from being complicit with the system that commodifies unique aspects of human culture and turns them into derivative hyperreal signifiers. As mentioned above, Cayce is a cool hunter. She was the first person to spot someone wearing his baseball cap backwards. But she takes this information and sells it, thereby degrading its unique value. Cayce's

employment is transforming the world into a place where she can live less and less, given her allergy and aversion to no-content marketing. As such, the protagonist in *Pattern Recognition* has an above-average interest in defying the dehumanizing forces of capitalism as they consume unique cultures and identities.

In small ways, at the beginning of *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce has already developed methods with which to resist the power of global capitalism and honour sacred humanism. In the white-washed cave of her tenement apartment, Cayce's floors are painted in an ancient shade of blue from Northern Spain that is believed "to keep flies away" (91). Cayce is drawn to the superstitious faith surrounding this colour. This shade of blue originates in a unique place and culture rather than the world of fast-fashion. Her Buzz-Rickson's jacket is the result of otaku makers who are also "driven by passions having nothing at all to do with anything remotely like fashion" and "the product has become […] the result of an act of worship" (11). These examples demonstrate Cayce's attraction to illogical and idiosyncratic elements of people's beliefs. Cayce partakes in an ancient Spanish superstition and in the Japanese-otaku-makers' worship through these products that highlight humanity's attraction to the sacred. Cayce also turns to these products because of her unique sensitivities and her "allergy to fashion" (8). Gibson demonstrates the disparity between the human sacred and the dehumanizing world of consumerism through Cayce's sensitivities.

Cayce also expresses her dedication to the sacred humanism in her discussion of "the soul." Mostly, when Cayce refers to her soul, it is in the context of "soul-delay," which is her friend Damien's explanation of jet lag. Yet Cayce also talks about soul to Bigend in their initial discussion of history. When he asks, "How do you think we

look…to the future," Cayce responds by saying: "They won't think of us…any more than we think of the Victorians. I don't mean the icons, but the ordinary actual living souls" (57-8). She acknowledges that hyperrealizing history reduces it to Victorian icons and ignores the reality of human souls. She also believes that even in the hyperreality around her there are "ordinary actual living souls" who have inherent individual value that will not be remembered by the future. Cayce uses the term "soul" to refer to a person's inherent realness. This realness is separate from a brand-able body or hyperrealized culture. In *Pattern Recognition*, the soul moves more slowly than the speeding planes of the globalized world, perhaps because so-called realness acknowledges the geographic distances between places that the global hyperreal tries to erase. As Cayce is increasingly jet-lagged, she feels that her soul is more and more distant from her – contributing to her feelings of exhaustion, loneliness, and confusion. Cayce also finds the Tommy Hilfiger store, the ultimate symbol of self-refracting hyperreality, "devoid of soul" (18). Tommy Hilfiger is separate from any realness and is so derivative that it erases human history and human culture. Cayce's reaction, then, is to the hyperreal's erasure of souls. The word "soul," again, invokes religious imagery and indicates Cayce's reverence for the real. *Pattern Recognition* deliberately uses this terminology to designate a person's individuality, realness, and inherent worth as sacred.

Despite her attempts to honour sacred humanism in small ways in her life, Cayce's journey towards the footage is the only thing that helps her escape her puppet-like complicity with dehumanizing systems. At the beginning of *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce feels unable grieve her missing father. Her inability to confront her father's death comes, perhaps, from the fact that his death is not confirmed, yet Cayce explains to others

that she is certain he is dead. Alternately, Cayce cannot grieve because she struggles to confront these human emotions while she navigates the dehumanizing hyperreal. While Cayce is a tool of Blue Ant, a robot on a Pilates reformer, or set on "auto-nod" while talking to her self-simulating employer, the dehumanizing global hyperreal inhibits her access to her grief. She is not able to access her own humanity or Win's humanity enough to engage with her emotions. As *Pattern Recognition* unfolds, however, Cayce travels around the world, and she feels her soul disengage from her labouring body. Cayce shifts from being part of the labouring consensus in Bigend's world, and into her own dream-world – the world of the footage. On her own "Cayce Pollard Central Standard" time, she remembers more of her father (253). She thinks of him, dreams of him, hears his voice, and eventually feels his presence while she traverses the toxic desert of a Russian environmental disaster alone. The process of Cayce's grieving suggests that she needs personal space and a recognition of humanity in order to face her father's death. Similarly, only after Cayce's return to London from Tokyo – when she is severely jet-lagged or soul-delayed – does she recognize that "she is, and has long been, complicit […] in whatever it is that gradually makes London and New York feel more like each other" (194). *Pattern Recognition* uses Cayce's experience of grief to suggest that a personal and unmediated perspective is necessary to really connect with the human losses on 9/11. *Pattern Recognition*'s depictions of 9/11's aftermath emphasize the way in which hyperreal symbolism, national narratives, and media images fail to connect with real, personalized experiences of tragedy. Moreover, Cayce's capacity to recognize her own feelings and actions aligns with the disruption of her "soul" in the novel. Gibson

suggests that Cayce must detach from her body and her day-to-day life to recognize the hold that dehumanizing capitalist systems have over her.

Cayce's emotional journey is augmented by her abilities as a psychic or medium, which can be read as an exaggeration of the average person's capacity for intuition. Named after the (real) mystic Edgar Cayce, "the Sleeping Prophet of Virginia Beach," Cayce is signaled as a "dowser in the world of marketing" from the beginning of the novel (31, 2). Yet Cayce's supernatural ability also develops to encompass more than branding-related instincts as the novel progresses. At first, Cayce's sensitivities are only linked with her cool-hunting abilities. She also dismisses her mother's obsession with Electronic Voice Phenomenon, saying that it "creep[s her] out" (265). However, as Cayce nears the origin of the footage, she begins to have prophetic dreams. Eventually, Cayce even channels Win, hearing his voice and seeing his image. As she explains to her mother: "I dreamed of [Win] recently and he seemed to give me a very specific piece of advice, which I acted on and which proved correct" (265). These developments suggest that when Cayce is separate from the world of branding and advertising, the sensitivities that she uses to help Bigend can also connect her to greater emotional and instinctive knowledge. Whether the advice from dream-Win is her subconscious re-working of acquired information or whether her dead father is speaking from the spirit world, Cayce discovers her own supernatural capacity on her quest for the footage. When Cayce's abilities stop being capitalist tools, they become ways for Cayce to navigate her own emotional world. Moreover, as Cayce finds the source of the footage, she also finds the ability to accept her father's death and grieve him. Her pilgrimage to Stella and Nora becomes a personal journey to understand the reverence for the human. Through Cayce's

journey to sacred humanism, Gibson models the potential for self-discovery that any person could have if they served their own spiritual and emotional needs rather than contributing these energies to a dehumanizing machine.

Cayce's mission is defined by what Oxoby determines as her "double quest" – a search for the maker of the footage and a search for Win (or for her grief for Win) (109). Significantly, in both cases, this quest is sparked by an event of incredible violence that leads to a moment of dissensus through which Cayce can access the human sacred. Nora's wound, in part, produces the footage, and the footage segments are mapped onto the shrapnel from the Claymore mine lodged in her head. The damage done to Stella and Nora's family and to Nora's health by the terrorist weapon also transforms Nora's way of interacting with the world and produces her art, which is a vessel for the affirmation of human value. Similarly, the trauma inflicted on Cayce by 9/11 and the loss of her father serves as a turning point in her own quest to affirm the inherent value of human life. Gibson thus exposes how violence can cause the rupture necessary to end its own creation. If we read 9/11 as the greatest expression of dehumanization and dangerous symbolization in the contemporary world, then we can also hope that its magnitude could inspire a retaliation against that symbolism and value-set. *Pattern Recognition*'s double-quest, therefore, seems to be Gibson's experimentation with ideas about how a society can learn from violence and use that trauma to develop a more compassionate and human-based understanding for the world.

Near the end of the *Pattern Recognition*, Gibson describes Cayce crying in Union Square after 9/11 and Win's disappearance:

She had while producing her own posters, watched the faces of other people's

dead emerging from adjacent copiers at Kinko's, to be mounted in the yearbook

of the city's loss. She had never, while putting hers up, seen one face pasted over

another, and that fact, finally, had allowed her to cry. (186)

Cayce is moved by the lack of competition among these broadcast images, as loved ones

acknowledge that each missing individual is as important as their own. These images

pasted side-by-side stand in contrast with the world of global marketing which always

aims to overwhelm, outsell, or out advertise competing images. This "yearbook of the

city's loss" may also have prompted Cayce's fascination with faces – the thing that draws

her to her first experience of the footage. Even in London, a year later, Cayce sees a

frame-grab of the footage on a lamp-post and thinks, "He looks out, as from depths. /

Works at Cantor Fitzgerald. Gold wedding band" (22). Cayce transitions from

considering the face of the footage into remembering another face, the face of a missing

Cantor Fitzgerald employee who likely died during the World Trade Center attacks. In

the flyers for New York City's dead Cayce sees the same stripped-down humanity that

she finds in the footage. These bare faces foreground human vulnerability and human

value and prompt a moment of dissensus for Cayce as she comes to recognize her

unwillingness to participate in or endure the global hyperreal any longer. After her

experience of crying in Union Square, Cayce "trashes" the software on her computer that

allowed her to watch CNN (186). Faced with real expressions of human grief, Cayce

could not bear to see the exploitative and hyperreal symbolization of 9/11 perpetuated by

the mass media. Ultimately, it is Cayce's experiences of trauma (or second-hand

experience of Nora's trauma, in the case of the footage) that provide her with the

transformative lens through which to reevaluate the global hyperreal. Through Cayce, Gibson demonstrates the power of trauma for creating rupture and exposing sacred humanism.

Cayce's journey towards sacred humanism is complicated by the shadow of her financer: Hubertus Bigend. The footage's cult-type following attracts Bigend's attention because Bigend's company is interested in trying to replicate the conditions of human faith for marketing purposes. In the footage, Bigend sees "attention focused daily on a product that may not even exist" (65). Bigend's description of daily attention and something that "may not even exist" indirectly compares the activity of footageheads with the daily rituals (like prayer) of devoutly religious people. Bigend clearly wants to be able to inspire that kind of daily, faithful attention through branding and marketing. Blue Ant is aiming to simulate a natural human experience in order to make profit, just as his company Trans (a sub-set of Blue Ant) hires Magda to promote products through word of mouth, thereby capitalizing on the natural human process of spreading information through casual conversation. Ultimately, Bigend wants to inspire the powerful forces of the human heart and mind – including the human capacity for faith – because they "make people buy things" (66). When Bigend recognizes that the footage seems to motivate this faith, he describes it as "guerilla marketing" (65) and sends Cayce on her quest after its technique. Presumably, Bigend's hope is to replicate parts of the footage's production and dissemination in order to make a profit. Bigend's interest in the maker and in Cayce's journey complicates her spiritual quest. In fact, Bigend's presence in *Pattern Recognition* represents the pressure of a consensus-based hyperreal system waiting in the wings to reabsorb a point of rupture. Bigend and Cayce's competing

interest in the footage forms a central tension in *Pattern Recognition*. Will Cayce be able to use the footage to regain autonomy before Bigend commodifies the phenomenon and recaptures this point of rupture in globalized consensus?

Whether Cayce surrenders to her guilt at the conclusion of *Pattern Recognition* is not clear. As mentioned before, Jason Haslam explains that when she falls asleep in the final moments of the book she is "lulled into a dark, closeted space of unconsciousness" because she has accepted the dominance of corporate globalization and its violence (Haslam 102). However, at the end of the book, Cayce has also lost her allergy to brands and trademarks. She suggests that her changed perceptions might affect her ability to work for corporations (355), which would effectively end her use-value as a node in Bigend's information network. Her labour would no longer directly result in global homogenization. Cayce's final scene also mirrors her first appearance in *Pattern Recognition*, and the differences between the two scenes demonstrate her transformation in the novel. *Pattern Recognition* begins with Cayce waking to the "ever-circling wolves of disrupted circadian rhythm" and her brainstem's "reptilian demands for sex, food, sedation […] none really an option now" (1). Cayce is lonely, jetlagged, and waking to an unfriendly and foreign world. By the end of the novel, however, Cayce is still in a foreign city "close to the wolfing hour of soul-lack," but she reassures herself that her soul is "reeled entirely in on its silver thread and warmly socketed" (356). In the final line of the novel, Cayce kisses Peter/Parkaboy's "sleeping back and falls asleep" in a final gesture of intimacy and security. Perhaps, as Haslam suggests, Cayce is closing her eyes on a world that she no longer wishes to understand. I think it is more likely, however, that the book ends when Cayce has finally resolved her feelings of detachment and developed intimate

and safe relationships with herself and her surroundings. Interpreted this way, Cayce's final act in the novel – a kiss – is an act of resistance against a dehumanizing and hyperreal system that disconnects people from themselves and one another. When Cayce finds the footage and confronts the human source of this human sacred, she is released from the consensus-based global hyperreal that had stunted her grief and mechanized her abilities. Cayce is no longer lonely, puppeted, and divided by the dehumanizing forces of late-capitalism. Bigend may be lurking in the background with control over the footage and a new connection in the Russian oligarchy, but the effect of the footage's dissensus for one character have been a world-shifting and self-finding victory.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Rather than debating whether Cayce or Bigend ultimately gains control of the footage, I consider their struggle over this rupture as Gibson's portrayal of the challenges of understanding 9/11 in its aftermath. What *Pattern Recognition* does not resolve, it poses to its reader. What would it look like if, following the loss of 2,977 American lives, the American people dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to the sanctity of human life? How can we ascribe value to the human person in a contemporary culture where simulation and commodification have overwhelmed human bodies and minds? How do we connect with others in a world where people are reduced to objects? What does it take to break free from this cycle?

Pattern Recognition explores these questions through an alternative depiction of contemporary reality. Gibson exaggerates the simulation and corporatization of the global world to emphasize the absurdities of globalization. His protagonist, similarly, has a pseudo-supernatural ability that exaggerates how every human mind is susceptible to influence and instincts beyond logic. *Pattern Recognition* likens the modern world to a mechanized dystopia in order to draw attention to global instances of dehumanization. While Gibson may highlight these incidents of structural violence in the corporate world, he does not exaggerate the violence of 9/11 – the tremendous event that has defined so much of the twenty-first century already. Instead, Gibson explores what 9/11 shares with so much of contemporary culture and connects their violence and dehumanization. Gibson sidesteps a factual discussion of 9/11's aftermath to focus on the footage, and (through the footage) *Pattern Recognition* imagines alternative ways of dealing with the trauma of contemporary violence. Gibson's speculative reality explores not just the

tragedies of the modern world, but the potential that the current moment creates for change. At its core, *Pattern Recognition* contains the anxieties of a culture reeling from trauma as it confronts a new century. Gibson's fiction does not cure these anxieties; *Pattern Recognition* is not a post-9/11, globalization guidebook. Instead Gibson exposes the interconnectivity of contemporary violence and suggests that this violence could become a turning point. Even as *Pattern Recognition* depicts a dehumanizing dystopia, it draws attention to the possibility for a more humanizing and compassionate world.

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