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Late 20th Century American Part 1 list

In this list, I consider these thirty novels as loose responses to the ideologies of American neoconservatism, initially produced from a reaction against 1960s counter-culture but did not come into primacy until the Reagan and Bush administrations. I am not interested in texts that espouse neoconservative ideals, but rather, texts that interrogate the narrow sense of postwar American identity that neoconservatism produces. I use the term neoconservatism to describe the set of social and governmental ideologies that in American domestic policy envisioned a society stratified between economic agents and welfare recipients, and in foreign policy sought to narrowly define America's unilateral role as the postwar bastion of liberal democracy. Defined in this way, I see neoconservatism as a narrative of American exceptionalism that is enabled by but in turn helps reify ideologies that

1. Imagine the nation as a body whose interventions occupy a proper historical time. This is not so much the Hegelian and later Marxist view of history as teleological, but rather, one conditioned upon a sense of America's exceptional timeliness in its arrival at its precise moment of geopolitical intervention. Precipitated by America's intervention in WWII and buoyed by the perceived "domino theory" successes in South America and Asia from the 50s to the 80s, this sense of timeliness is at best a form of hubris and at worst what Fabian called in a different context the "denial of the coeval." Under such a view, the "end of history" (whether used to describe the ultimate threat of WWII or the Cold War) can be avoided by those who "arrive just on time," while those who are "saved" are restricted to the bimodal historicity of pre / post-liberation.
2. Biopolitically link a nation's economic health with that of its population.
3. Stratify society between workers and non-workers. The American post-industrial society's boom in labor demand reified the social schism between those who worked and those who didn't (or couldn't). Under the neoconservative view, the welfare state thus increasingly became the wedge that drove itself between the growers and the takers.

In my readings of the following texts, I hope to attend to details that hyperbolize the anxieties undergirding neoconservative ideologies. These include:

1. The fear of arriving too late. The dystopian / utopian novels and historical fictions on my list play out this fear to its narrative conclusion. If post-1945 America saw itself as constantly arriving on time, then it was arriving in time to save time – which is to say, to stave off a history-ending event. In this case, the anxiety of not arriving in time is not just the fear of arriving too late chronologically, but moreover, the fear of arriving too late eschatologically. I am interested in how the temporality of the speculative becomes more charged with possibility when each present moment carries the threat of total annihilation. Under such a view of history, the narratives forming the hypothetical (the "what if's") and the conditional (the "could have been's") become powerful counterarguments against the insistent sense of timeliness that must, conversely, constantly disavow the

- possibility of being too late. To a lesser extent, I am interested in the narrativity of war trauma and the traumatic experience of being stuck in time.
2. The fear that late capitalism has become sick. If the twentieth-century biopolitical state puts a stake on the health of its population in order to maintain a healthy labor force to maximize economic productivity, then the shifts in late capitalism to multi-national corporations and away from human labor rendered the former biopolitical model obsolete. What does a multinational, cybernetic biopolitics look like? While this is yet unclear, many of the texts on my list depict it, at least initially, as a form of sickness. This is unsurprising; if the primary biopolitical metaphor is one that ties population health to the invented concept of national health, then it follows that the shifts in modes of production appears as first sign of national malaise, and subsequently a form of sickness in its people.
 3. The fear of social contamination. If the neoconservative social vision was of an America split between workers and welfare recipients, then their greatest anxiety was of the blending together of these elements. In other words, the poor, the lazy, drug users, and minorities collectively represented an existential threat of contamination – the economic prosperity integral to America’s position in the world was under domestic threat of internal malaise, the culture of idleness that needed to be kept in check.

Taken together, these three areas of focus will hopefully provide a framework by which I can examine both the nation and how it relates to the individual. While I tried to develop a line of inquiry that touched on as many of the books on my list as I could, there are some still some outliers.

Keywords: bodies, contamination, nationhood, postmodernism, historical fiction, utopia, dystopia, late capitalism, biopolitics

Novels (chronological):

1. Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. 1952
2. Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. 1953
3. Burroughs, William. *Naked Lunch*. 1959
4. Dick, Philip K. *Man in a High Castle*. 1962
5. Pynchon, Thomas. *V*. 1963
6. Denby, William. *The Catacombs*. 1965
7. Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. 1968
8. Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse Five*. 1969
9. Reed, Ishmael. *Mumbo Jumbo*. 1972
10. Le Guin, Ursula. *The Dispossessed*. 1974
11. Hong Kingston, Maxine. *Woman Warrior*. 1975
12. Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*. 1977

13. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. 1982
14. Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. 1984
15. Gibson, William. *Neuromancer*. 1984
16. McCarthy, Cormac. *Blood Meridian*. 1985
17. DeLillo, Don. *White Noise*. 1985
18. Sterling, Bruce. *Islands in the Net*. 1988
19. Piercy, Marge. *He, She, and It*. 1991
20. Stephenson, Neal. *Snow Crash*. 1992
21. Wallace, David Foster. *Infinite Jest*. 1996
22. Yamashita, Karen Tei. *Tropic of Orange*. 1997
23. Powers, Richard. *Gain*. 1998
24. Whitehead, Colson. *The Intuitionist*. 1999
25. Ozeki, Ruth. *My Year of Meats*. 1999
26. Danielewski, Mark. *House of Leaves*. 2000
27. Cunningham, Michael. *Specimen Days*. 2005
28. Chabon, Michael. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. 2007
29. Diaz, Junot. *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. 2007
30. Bacigalupi, Paolo. *The Windup Girl*. 2009

Novels (alphabetical)

1. Bacigalupi, Paolo. *The Windup Girl*. 2009
2. Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 451*. 1953
3. Burroughs, William. *Naked Lunch*. 1959
4. Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. *Dictée*. 1982
5. Chabon, Michael. *The Yiddish Policemen's Union*. 2007
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28. Whitehead, Colson. *The Intuitionist*. 1999
29. Wolfe, Tom. *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*. 1968
30. Yamashita, Karen Tei. *Tropic of Orange*. 1997

Criticism

1. Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. 1966
2. Beck, Ulrich. *Risk Society*. 1986
3. Buell, Frederick. *From Apocalypse to Way of Life: Environmental Crisis in the American Century*. 2004.
4. Cohen, Edward. *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body*. 2009
5. Esposito, Roberto. *Immunitas: The Protection and Negation of Life*. 2011
6. Foucault, Michel. *Birth of the Clinic*. 1974
7. Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. 1991

8. Heise, Ursula. *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: Environmental Imagination of the Global*. 2008.
9. Jameson, Frederic. *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. 2005.
10. Sadowski-Smith, Claudia. *Border Fictions: Globalization, Empire, and Writing at the Boundaries of the United States*. 2008

Alternate novels:

Bellow, Saul. *Henderson the Rain King*. 1959
Butler, Octavia. *Dawn (Xenogenesis trilogy)*. 1987
Dick, Philip K. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 1982
Doctorow, E. L. *Ragtime*. 1975
Ellis, Bret Easton. *American Psycho*. 1991
Foer, Jonathan Safran. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. 2005
Gibson, William. *Pattern Recognition*. 2003
Hejinian, Lyn. *My Life*. 1987 (2nd ed.) (poetry)
McCarthy, Cormac. *The Road*. 2006
Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita*. 1955
O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. 1990
Oates, Joyce Carol. *Them*. 1969
Piercy, Marge. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. 1976
Powers, Richard. *Plowing the Dark*. 2000
Powers, Richard. *The Echo-Maker*. 2006
Pynchon, Thomas. *Gravity's Rainbow*. 1973
Pynchon, Thomas. *Mason & Dixon*. 1997
Roth, Phillip. *American Pastoral*. 1997
Roth, Phillip. *The Plot Against America*. 2004