

Key terms in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010)

Annotations by undergraduate students in Professor Peter Schmidt's "U.S. Fiction 1945 to the Present" English 52B class, Swarthmore College, Spring 2013 Swarthmore, Pennsylvania USA

The following key terms in the novel are annotated in the attached pdf (see the link below). If you want to use these annotations, PLEASE give credit to this page and to the students who authored the annotation(s) that you use.

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AlliedWasteCVSCitigroupCredit: two annotations. The first is by Shen Wang and Christian Carcione; the second, by Stephanie Lechich and Paul Vernon

By Shen Wang and Christiane Carcione

AlliedWasteCVSCitigroup is a term referring to Anuj's workplace on pg. 132. It is used to symbolize the globalization of big corporations in today's society and the merger of these corporations to create even more powerful and influential entities. Merging all the names of the corporations together shows that the futuristic society has become even closer-knit at the global levels. Big companies begin controlling all aspects of our lives, as Allied Corporation is a chemical company that produces chemicals and plastics, Waste Management is the major waste treatment company in the U.S. today, CVS is the major drugstore/pharmacy/convenience store, and Citigroup is a major entity in our financial institutions. All these companies probably have some form of investment in each other and it is unsurprising that they could be merged to consolidate their power in the future. Shteyngart is satirical of the future of global corporations and their attempts to gain more power.

We found interesting that Shteyngart puts Citigroup at the end. The name Citigroup implies that the corporation has interests in multiple areas. Putting the word "group" at the end to describe the corporation amalgam conveys to the readers that this is one corporation formed from four of their more familiar corporations.

By Stephanie Lechich and Paul Vernon

One of *Super Sad True Love Story's* dystopian conglomerates, "AlliedWasteCVSCitigroupCredit" (p. 86) is an American bank that collapses and requires a government bailout to survive. The bailout itself alludes to the recent economic recession in the United States, in which corporations deemed 'too big to fail' were bailed out by American taxpayers through the US government. The name itself refers to a merger of three separate large American businesses (Allied Waste, CVS Pharmacy, and Citigroup) which all faced the challenge of maintaining autonomy and avoiding complete downfall during the recent economic crisis.

This struggle is particularly true for Citigroup, a multinational financial services corporation that suffered huge financial losses in 2008 and was the beneficiary

by a massive stimulus package by the US government, including the guarantee of 300 billion dollars' worth of troubled assets and a direct injection of 20 billion dollars. Citigroup is currently the second largest bank in the United States and the 20th largest corporation in the world. CVS Pharmacy is the largest pharmacy chain in the United States, handling nearly ten percent of all prescriptions filled in the United States via more than five thousand stores. Allied Waste is the second largest non-hazardous solid waste company in the United States, serving more than 10 million customers and operating more than 355 collection companies, 167 landfills, and 65 recycling facilities.

By grouping these three corporations together, Shteyngart seems to be implying that they cannot stand independently despite the fact that they serve vastly different functions. This effect is also achieved by the choice of a company with the word 'allied' in its name and the company with the word 'group'. The unification of these four companies is further emphasized by the placement of these words at the beginning and end of the name of this mega-corporation.

American Restoration Authority (aka ARA). Three sets of annotations: the first by Taylor Hodges and Rachel Fresques; the second, by Karan Ahluwalia and Mame Bonsu; the third, by Andrew Dorrance, Natalie Gainer, and Natalie Giotta

By Taylor Hodges and Rachel Fresques

First appearing early in the novel, the American Restoration Authority (ARA) is a propagandist phrase that, for its full effect, is repeated frequently throughout the novel. The ARA serves as America's KGB, a secret police whose three-letter name becomes charged with the same sort of fear throughout the novel as its real-life Russian counterpart. The ARA seems to be modeled off of Orwell's thought police, an omniscient organization dedicated to 'protecting' America.

Shteyngart's use of ARA is not particularly notable, but the phrase itself says much about the world of SSTLS. The reader first encounters the phrase on page 8 when Lenny ventures to the U.S. embassy: "a pixelated version of the plucky otter shuffled onto my äppärät screen, carrying on his back the letters ARA, which dissolved into the shimmering legend: American Restoration Authority." Though the novel hasn't yet been set in America, the name "American Restoration Authority", particularly the word "Restoration," provides a good idea of where the country has gone since 2013: America is a diminished nation nonetheless keen on recapturing its former glory. The America of SSTLS isn't willing to forfeit its status as a world leader, an attitude that foreshadows the ARA's desperate maneuvers to reclaim the nation's global prominence.

By Karan Ahluwalia and Mame Bonsu

The term American Restoration Authority (ARA) appears throughout the novel, particularly in instances where Lenny is out in public. The ARA is never explicitly defined in the novel but we can infer from its name as well as the contexts in which it appears what its intention is.

On page 43 we witness a highway sign next to a tank that reads, "It is forbidden to acknowledge the existence of this vehicle ("the object") until you are .5 miles from the security perimeter of John F. Kennedy International Airport. By reading

this sign you have denied existence of the object and implied consent.” On page 54 another highway sign directs different groups on people on how to spend their money. On page 130 Lenny and Eunice watch as the ARA moves homeless people from an area in order to make it seem more presentable to Chinese bankers.

Much of the novel calls into question what America really is in this dystopia, and therefore, what exactly is being authoritatively restored.

The word “restoration” implies that something has been lost, destroyed, or otherwise lacks a previously held worth. America in the novel is no longer the semi-fiscally sound nation it once was. In order to make its way back to some level of economic security it must control not only how citizens spend, but how they live and behave. Equally, slogans like “Together We’ll Repare [sic] This Bridge” recalls kitschy propaganda that intends to maintain the image of national community that is now fragmented and deeply divided.

The true satire comes in the fact that a law enforcement organization exists to maintain a false sense of security. Here, “authority” is understood as the power to unilaterally control and dominate a people. The ARA asks that citizens deny the existence of objects such as tanks as well as conversations between representatives and citizens because acknowledging their existence brings to light the fact that America is not the safe land it likes to call itself. The restoration of the national myth of strength requires that law enforcement and politicians actively repress any sense of instability of America’s restoration.

By Andrew Dorrance, Natalie Gainer, and Natalie Giotta

The phrase “American Restoration Authority” encapsulates many of *Super Sad True Love Story*’s main themes, and can help shed some light on many tensions that arise throughout the book. The novel emphasizes the idea of “restoration” using an interesting mix of nostalgia for the past and an obsession with the future. In Shteyngart’s world, when we restore something, we are going back to the past. Characters who are trying to maintain youth are trying to return to their past, youthful selves, yet this is paradoxically what constitutes each character’s own future. Lenny wants to return to his childhood – this is stated throughout his interactions with his parents and the book generally – and he believes that he can do this by living forever. The American Restoration Authority demonstrates this contradiction of past and future throughout the book. In this way, it pulls apart the precise tensions of “restoration,” exactly what it means, and exactly how it is achieved.

With respect to America, this organization is trying to make the country last forever by trying to restore it to its glory days before it was controlled by Chinese money. In this respect, we see an old-world focus on nations as discrete entities – something that, in the book’s own reality, is certainly fading into an outmoded past. It seems that Lenny himself, as our representation of this past, is overly focused on nationality as a unit or classifying structure; he mentions the nationality of nearly everyone he meets, again in a way that is almost nostalgic. In this respect, the ARA’s emphasis of its very *Americanness* is reflecting the tension in Lenny’s views of the world as divided into units that are simply ceasing to matter.

On page 43, we see our first example of the ARA’s regime. They tell the public that they “have denied existence of the object and implied consent.” The idea of “authority” in this organization is one that ought be emphasized; it is from this concept that it gains all of its coercive strength. There is a certain ominous quality given both by its insistence on authority and the somewhat coercive “agreements” it uses to enforce this authority. The fact that restoration is taking place through the authority of imposition from above – imposition that somehow also requires secrecy and complicity – is important to the novel’s conception of the march of time. Lenny feels that time is moving forward without his input or ability to control what’s going on; this is analogous to the loss of control experienced by the average citizen when faced with all-consuming state control. The ARA, in its very mission, is an excellent lens for analysis of many of the novel’s most important themes, and much of what troubles its central characters.

Äppärät, Äppäräti, by Jack Harnett and Danny McMahon

In *Super Sad True Love Story* phones have been replaced by Äppäräti, an umlaut-laden form of the word apparatus. Äppäräti mimic the current status of smartphones due to their social media-like capabilities; in fact there are many parts in the novel where Äppäräti seem to be directly symbolic of iPhones. They are described as having the capability of bringing in, and advertising, mass amounts of information. Äppäräti replace human interaction, and have the ability to quantify physical traits and attributes such as “hotness” in the RateMe and RateMe Plus applications.

In many ways the idea of Äppäräti forebodes the death of privacy. In the beginning of the chapter titled “The Only Man For Me”, Eunice discusses her feelings about a recent trip she took to Rome with Ben. She talks about how much she is attracted to Ben, but despite her attraction to him she frequently insults the way he looks. In her description of this interaction she very nonchalantly reveals the extent to which Äppäräti can give one information on another person. In response to her insults Eunice says Ben would “get all into on me, turn down the community access on his Äppäräti so that I wouldn’t know where the fuck his mind was.”

We see here that access to one’s thoughts and feelings is expected, and usually attainable. While many today seem to believe that our thoughts and feelings about certain things are kept private, witnessing moments like these throughout the novel force us to question how much we still do keep to ourselves with the existence of social media, and whether or not our society is on the path to an “Äppäräti”-dominated culture.

FAC: Form A Community: Two annotations. The first is by Annie Tvetenstrand, Anita Castillo-Halvorssen, and Elaine Zhou; the second, by McClery Philbin and Estefania Brambila

By Annie Tvetenstrand, Anita Castillo-Halvorssen, and Elaine Zhou

FAC (Form A Community) is, as Vishnu puts it, "a way to judge people. And let them judge you" (88). The EmotePad on the äppärät "picks up any change in your blood pressure. That tells her how much you want to do her" (88). FACing is a way for people to determine their attraction to others and to communicate that attraction. It quantifies that attraction in terms of Fuckability, Personality, and Anal/Oral/Vaginal Preference without direct input from the user. In addition, FACing alerts the subject that they have been FACed.

FACing does not require permission or consent. Anyone can be FACed. Shteyngart intentionally made this term seem similar to the word "fuck," yet gives the acronym a more euphemistic quality. The word "fuck" conjures up visceral images of sex and suggests crudeness to the act of FACing. In placing such an emphasis on the body, it hints at dissociation from an emotional relationship. However, the phrase "Form A Community" is ambiguous, though it connotes a positive connection. It remains distanced and aloof from any concrete meaning. Its vagueness divorces it from a bodily connection and conjures up the image of a sterile environment.

The humor in this term lies in the juxtaposition of the obscene "fuck" and intellectual "Form A Community." Nominally, users direct their äppärät towards the subject to gather information on their compatibility with one another. In actuality, it's a method for vividly imagining sex with strangers as well as digging up very personal information on them. The intellectual term empowers users to perform the act of FACing guilt free. To opt out of FACing is to remain community-less, technologically outdated, and ultimately alone.

By McClery Philbin and Estefania Brambila

The term FACing is first used on p. 88 in the chapter "Rate Me Plus" when Vishnu suggests to a girl in the bar: "Let's FAC," which Lenny misinterprets as "Let's Fuck."

FACing is a tool used to rank people's fuckability, personality, anal/oral preferences, sustainability, and personality among other things in the app RateMePlus available on the AppStore. FAC is an acronym for "Form-a-Community," a seemingly innocent sounding idea with a much more sexual emphasis. In order for the app to work, you place your finger on the emotepad which picks on any changes in your heart pressure, which in turn alerts your subject regarding "how much you want to do her." (88)

This is just another example in the book where self-worth and human interactions all boil down to sex. In various instances throughout the novel, the characters often talk about their fuckability scores, which can change depending on who you're around. Lenny's score often gets higher when he is seen around Eunice. Lenny also typically tends to be among the ugliest men in the room despite his high personality and sustainability levels. His self-worth is ultimately highest when his fuckability levels are highest, and rankings regarding intellect are often perceived as inferior to those involving sex.

Fox Liberty Ultra/Fox Liberty Prime, by Julia Thomas and Anita Desai

Fox Liberty Ultra/ Fox Liberty Prime (example on page 41)

In the novel's world, Fox is the only news source available. Fox is a cable news station, which indicates to readers that it is more accountable to outside forces and advertisers than a public news source might be. Furthermore, Fox is notorious for extremely biased reporting and often twisting and misleading viewers. The novel makes clear that very little reporting is done for the news network, but rather that people "stream" the news constantly. When Lenny reminds Noah that reporters used to go to the scene of an event and investigate the news for themselves, Noah laughs at him. This clearly shows the transformation that has taken place in reporting.

The second term, Liberty, is a classically American word. Even though America has clearly lost its position as a world superpower, the phrase liberty harkens back to the days of American greatness and exceptionalism. Americans, even in their now dilapidated state are proud of their freedoms. However, the use of liberty is ironic as well because the America in the novel is incredibly dependent on other countries. Their money is yuan-pegged and they are at the mercy of other, stronger nations.

Ultra appeals to the culture's obsession with what is new and cool. It advertises the news as extreme - the best, most liberty-filled source of information available. Similarly, prime appeals to the culture's obsession with rank and hierarchy. In this extremely classist society, where people are judged based upon their public credit scores, a news station advertised as "prime," or of the highest rank, attracts the most viewers.

Both stations appeal to similar societal obsessions and present stories from an angle that promotes the Bipartisan party's agenda. It's interesting that there is even a distinction made between the two stations. Today, news stations such as MSNBC and Fox are both biased, but they occupy opposite ends of the political spectrum. The similarity between Fox Liberty-Prime and Fox-Liberty Ultra shows the loss of this world's political spectrum at a federal level (there are still rebel political groups). David brings up this loss in one of his messages to Eunice, writing that "I think that's where we went wrong as a country. We were afraid to really fight each other, and so we developed into this Bipartisan thing and this ARA thing." (pg. 177)

A common complaint of our two-party system is that the constant quarreling between the Republicans and the Democrats slows the democratic process, almost to a point where the federal government gets little to nothing done. The consensus amongst moderate America is that the federal government needs to make more “bipartisan” decisions, but should we be wary of what we’re wishing for?

Harm Reduction, by Brad Lenox and Jenni Lu

Appears on page 95 and throughout. Refers to a company program run by the Wapachung-Staatling Corporation that operates under the pretense of protecting vulnerable citizens. For example, on page 309, low-income and elderly citizens living near the waterfront are relocated to abandoned housing in New Rochelle because of "global warming." However, Harm Reduction seems to propagate the harm that it claims to be working to reduce by eliminating and displacing those that do not fit into the WS vision for the future. The "harmful" effects of Harm Reduction become most clearly manifest in the "Rupture" that occurs later in the novel after LNWI and former National Guard riot.

The term itself sounds vaguely financial, as if it were used by a stockbroker who aims to "reduce" harm to a portfolio. This usage is supported by the narratives concern with individual credit, financial worth and fiscal value, such as LNWI (Low Net Worth Individual) and HNWI (High New Worth Individual). Moreover, it is very euphemistic due to the ambiguity of its language. The meaning of both "harm" and "reduction" are very different for members of the Wapachung-Staatling Corporation and for the average citizen of the United States.

HNWI: High Net Worth Individuals. Two annotations: the first by Alice Laughlin, Joyce Han, and Chris Capron; the second by Jena Gilbert and Cecilia Paasche

By Alice Laughlin, Joyce Han, Chris Capron:

The phrase "High Net Worth Individual" first appears on page 5 (Chapter 1) and recurs throughout the novel. It refers to wealthy individuals, much as we would refer to people of high socioeconomic status. In today's world we often disdain the "1%" and often do not directly refer to people's income - the billionaires that are loved today are those that have pledged to give their money to charity. In contrast, in Shteyngart's dystopia people of wealth are esteemed and wealth is something openly displayed, either by projecting it with an *äppärät* or on Credit Poles, which display people's financial status for the world to see. Interestingly, the ultra-elite and wealthy do not wear *äppärät* (or don't project their information) and as such show that they are above society's demand for information. The ultra-rich are the only ones who don't have to demonstrate their wealth, which is a big problem for people like Lenny who have to scout for HNWIs. These people don't need a ranking to realize their worth and their only apparent shortcomings are revealed when they have to undergo the barrage of tests that Lenny administers to see if they qualify to have their lives extended at Post-Human Services.

Financial status also seems to matter a lot in terms of valuing a person: when the "Rupture" happens, it seems that only the HNWIs do well and all those who were middle class are reduced to almost nothing. In addition to that, David, the ex-soldier, tells Eunice to not "give in to High-Net worth thinking", making it an additional class distinction that defines how the rich view the world. This kind of ranking (where individuals are rated based on their credit ratings) reflects the larger satire and commentary of the book, where people commit suicide when they can no longer rank themselves or connect with their *äppärät*. The exception to this, once again, are the ultra-rich who don't need to be ranked.

By Jena Gilbert and Cecilia Paasche:

The way that characters rate each other and reduce individuals to HNWI or LNWI satirizes the way we value money. The words "Net Worth" suggest someone's financial situation, but this rating system goes much further. The terms indicate that one can measure the *worth* of a person, something so subjective and nuanced. In the age when everyone has their own platform for expressing their

opinions, it is ironic that standards of judgment should become standardized.

The fact that someone's worth is measured in "net" terms, as opposed to individual, specific characteristics, is telling of this society's inattention to detail, and the broad, generalizing nature of their modes of communication. One only exists in broad terms and comparable attributes.

Very often, the thing we can measure becomes the thing we care about. In this case, someone's credit—or financial net worth—can be measured, but is then used as a measurement of someone's value as a person. The rhetoric of finances is adopted to refer to and stand in for a given person's worth or value, and this in many ways reflects this futuristic culture's pervading concerns.

JuicyPussy, by Danielle Seltzer & Sarah Coe-Odess

JuicyPussy is a recurring term that comes up on pages such as 45, 48, and 176, usually in the context of Eunice's Global Teen posts. While Eunice uses the term literally as a nickname for the couture brand Juicy, Shteyngart also uses the term to symbolize the overtly sexualized and corrupted youth in the novel — and consequently in society. Eunice and her friend "GrillBitch" use terms such as this one and AssLuxury so naturally that it emphasizes the desensitized youth and their inability to distinguish what is crude from what is appropriate. There is some irony in the idea that the youth of the novel are the ones who use these vulgar phrases, since youth is often synonymous with innocence. This dichotomy is consistent with the satirical tone of the novel.

JuicyPussy, as well as other brands mentioned — OnionSkin, AssLuxury, and TotalSurrenders — provides commentary on the high abundance of sexualized brands that are ingrained in society. Through their interactions, it is clear that Eunice and her friend prioritize shopping, particularly at these brand stores. Because of the vulgarity of these names, the way these girls buy into the sexual nature of society is through consumerism. In this way, they're not only buying the clothes but also the values associated with the brands.

The term "JuicyPussy" is a facade, as juicy usually implies that the subject involves substance. The brand, as well as the conversations about it, however, is extremely superficial. Also contradictory to Eunice's constant use of the phrase is the fact that she is not entirely sexualized or comfortable with her appearance and her sexuality. That Eunice employs these terms in private conversations with her friend reveals the pressure she feels to expand her comfort with her sexuality. The idea of privately conforming to sexual expectations comes up again on page 226, when Eunice reminisces about the "porns" she and her friends watched in kindergarten.

PhD: Pretty Huge Dick, by Beth Martin and Kate Wiseman

This phrase is used by GrillBitch in her GlobalTeens post to Eunice. She says "He's gotten his PhD--Pretty Huge Dick!" ("The Only Man for Me", p. 46 in paperback edition). In our world, a PhD is a measure of someone's educational achievement and intelligence, but in the world of the novel it has become a measure of genital size. Today, someone with a PhD is generally very highly respected, but in the world of the novel the object of respect is not one's education but rather sexual prowess. People are more positively rated by how transparent their jeans are rather than how many books they have read.

This abbreviation and its implications remind us of other moments in the book, such as when Eunice marvels at the fact that a man is streaming *The Chronicles of Narnia*; or on p. 188, when Lenny recalls Eunice's description of Dr. Suk ("A smart man, she had said proudly, but then the dead smile came on, as if to say, See how little 'smart' means to me?"); or the moment on p. 235 when Amy is angry "at the fact that Noah wasn't planning to get her pregnant, that all she had was her hard-driven career." All of these examples show us the esteem granted to physical achievements and the devaluation of intellect and learning.

RateMe and RateMe Plus, by Sean Mangus and Brian Kaissi

One aspect of the book that hit a little too close to home is the RateMe and RateMe Plus applications for the äppärät. We recently heard of an iPhone app linked to a person's Facebook account that allows people to give scores to people based on their interactions or assumptions. When we heard about this app, we could not help but its parallel to Shteyngart's RateMe and RateMe Plus.

On page 70, Lenny is told to become familiar with the RateMe application on his äppärät: he is expected to "learn to rate everyone around you" and "get your data in order." His new äppärät has RateMe Plus installed, and he uses it several times throughout the book. On page 88, it seems as if Noah is impressed not only with Lenny's new äppärät, but also his RateMe Plus. He mentions that he is "going to stream that shit fucking close-up." He sees a girl he is attracted to and learns that "your äppärät runs [the girl's information] against the stuff you've downloaded about yourself and then it comes up with a score." Shortly after, Lenny is humiliated by being rated the ugliest guy at the bar they are sitting at, but he has good "SUSTAINABILITY" (lots of money). His scores are low, which Noah calls "getting his ass handed to him by the RateMe Plus" (92).

In the end Lenny discovers an interesting fact. While everyone seems to be interested in having high scores and being ranked high, "the truly powerful don't need to be ranked," according to Howard Shu (320). In a world obsessed with rank, the most powerful are exempt because of their status. This is eerily reminiscent of a world where the super-wealthy and powerful are trend-setters above the law.

The Ranking application RateMe and RateMe Plus already exist on some level. Here a seemingly harmless satire is all too real!

ROFLAARP, by Emily Sullivan and Joe Boninger

ROFLAARP stands for Rolling On the Floor Looking At Addictive Rodent Pornography. It is an expression that Eunice uses in Rome on page 22. Lenny explains the term on page 33, trying to prove his knowledge of slang, and it is used again by Lenny's coworkers on page 58. We find this term interesting because it satirizes a couple of different societal trends in one word – ROFLAARP is a play on society's tendency toward sexualization and its tendency toward crassness, as well as being a logical extension of the abbreviation ROFL (rolling on the floor laughing) that pokes fun at the constant use of abbreviations as slang. Part of what Shteyngart could be suggesting here is that abbreviations can be trendy, but are not always practical linguistic shortcuts.

It seems significant that the differences between ROFLAARP and ROFL involve sex and crudeness. One of the recurring themes throughout *Super Sad True Love Story* is the sexualization of almost every aspect of daily life, from the newcasters that simultaneously broadcast homemade porn, to articles of clothing such as Onionskin brand see-through jeans and nipple-exposing bras. ROFLAARP adds to this theme in a subtle yet effective way by demonstrating how even mundane conversations are punctuated by words and phrases that, when analyzed closely, add nothing to dialogue except grotesque, sexual imagery.

While ROFLAARP derives from ROFL, they have different connotations. ROFLAARP does not really make sense as a slang term. We can assume that people are not actually rolling on the floor while watching rodent pornography. ROFL, meanwhile, makes more sense, as it details a normal – albeit exaggerated – human response to something humorous. This is an example of the book's tendency to make ridiculous extensions of normal slang terms to the point where they no longer have any meaning. The abbreviations become clunky and long without adding much to conversations.

United ContinentalDeltamerican, by Richard Scott and Madison Garcia

“United ContinentalDeltamerican” is the monopolistic airline company that is referenced several times throughout the novel (pp. 1, 41). It is one of numerous future business conglomerations.

The name of the company combines four separate contemporary major airlines—Delta, American, Continental, and United. In a modern-day world where business mergers are not uncommon, Shteyngart implies a foreseeable continuation of mergers until there exists a single national airline.

United ContinentalDeltamerican is one of many consolidated corporations in *Super Sad True Love Story*. Other major conglomerations include Allied Waste CVS Citi Group (30, 132), Land O’Lakes GMFord (37), and ColgatePalmoliveYum!BrandsViacomCredit (85). While United ContinentalDeltamerican emphasizes the modern-day potential for airline monopoly, these other corporations suggest the potential for cross-industry control of money and markets. Shteyngart outlines the possible result of current trends of ownership. If Dove—empowering women—and Axe—objectifying women—are owned by the same company, and 30 Rock’s Jack Donaghy can be Vice President of East Coast Television and Microwave Oven Programming, it seems feasible that current companies known for butter and automobiles can team up to be a major player among credit agencies. Though methods of ownership might not be different from those of today, the combination of these current companies muddles brand identity. Shteyngart’s fictional conglomerations foreshadow the tangled American capitalist market of the future.

Video Spray, by Peter Schmidt

This term "video spray" is used on p. 330, in the novel's last chapter, "Welcome Back, Pa'dner." Italy is sponsoring its own version of the now-famous "Lenny Heart Euny" story. "Video" tells us that this re-enactment of the original "non-streaming media artifact" story will now stream digitally to many different viewing devices. As for the quality of its acting and its vision, you can get a good sense of that from the comically bad Italian actors Lenny meets who will play "Larry" and "Euny": see pp. 329-331.

"Spray" is the most intriguing (and wittiest) word here. It suggests something beyond just old-fashioned movie or TV "broadcasting," where the Italian "Cinnecità" corporation (this production's sponsor) got its start in the 20th century. "Spray" suggests a new distribution regime beyond even our current online streaming capabilities complementing cable, TV, etc. Instead of merely print/digital publishing (16th-21st centuries), or "broadcast" images (20th century), or even streaming (in the early 21st century sense), "spray" suggests almost infinite access points for digital video content spread among many different kinds of scanning devices and online archives.

"Spray" also suggests how unstable, even vaporized and shifting, are the identities of "characters" in stories. The Italian "translation/adaptation" is just one of many transformations of the "original" content of the Lenny / Eunice story that we read in our print or digital hand-held version of the original book. And in this final chapter, a kind of postscript set in the future after the book's primary action has taken place, a major character we thought we knew has changed his name from "Lenny Abramov" to "Larry Abraham" when escaping collapsing America during the Rupture. The last chapter of *Super Sad True* that we're reading turns out to be "Larry"'s introduction to—or private notes on?; it's a little unclear—the People's Literature Publishing House's print version of the story we thought we knew, published *at some unspecified date in the future* simultaneously in Beijing and New York. The title of the text we read is also changed: it's now called the *Lenny Abramov Diaries*. Although Eunice's writing is rightly praised in the book's reviews quoted in this final chapter, she has been erased as a co-author of the whole—by whom? Lenny/Larry? Unnamed editors at the People's Literature Publishing House? The irony is especially strong here, for "Larry" mentions in his introductory notes [p. 327 top] that Euny's "messages" are a main part of the published text and contain some of the book's most unforgettable writing. They are a key part of its appeal, yet in this new edition her voice and presence is erased from the title. It's one of many hidden changes that new readers won't know about and won't miss. Disturbingly, Shteyngart suggests here that new versions don't just revise past texts but *erase* key parts of them, so that we can't have a sense of what is changed, much less how those changes alter the fundamental meaning of the story.

It's not just that Eunice is erased as one of the story's "authors." Lenny too is changed. Just who *is* "Larry Abraham," really? He sounds very different in this final chapter from *Super Sad's* Lenny, beginning with the absurd and clichéd neo-cowboy lingo and swagger in the final chapter's title. In this brave and scary new world, authorial identities and "voices" are subjected to voice-overs, avatar changes, rewrites. Lenny's authorial control over his voice in the privacy of his diary have been vaporized when the text was sold to and then remade by a multinational corporation.

In short, the final chapter reveals that novel called *Super Sad True Love Story* that we've just read actually doesn't "exist." It's the raw sources (diaries and blog posts) that were later taken and edited—in ways that are carefully left vague—as the text was reshaped into "Lenny Heart Euny" the best-seller. The People's Literature edition may be close to identical to the book we've read, or quite different. There's no way to know, much less what difference the changes, if any, make. Thus we have just had an impossible glimpse into the characters, identities, and memories that Lenny and Eunice had that are quickly being overlaid with all their new incarnations and implanted memories, as they change from being Lenny and Eunice to becoming pop culture icons and types infinitely reproduced and changed each time a "copy" of them is made.

Does such a conundrum make *Super Sad True Love Story*, the novel published in 2010, pathetically belated and out-dated, a vestigial form and story soon to be left behind and irrelevant? Maybe. Or, just maybe, Shteyngart gets the last laugh. For after all, it's ONLY his satire that can teach us to remember, to think historically and skeptically, to ask what's been lost in all the transformations as characters and stories that we thought we knew are sold and then made into something almost unrecognizable. His text has taught us to laugh at and resist the glittering phantasmagoria that passes for the "real." Instead of "denying the existence of the object" and silently "implying consent" (the ARA's mantra for mind control), Shteyngart's book *may* have done the opposite, giving us ways to affirm the value of what existed while refusing to consent to history's erasure. Shteyngart's text resists the allure of the future as video "spray."

Shteyngart thus has invented an ending to his "post-American" novel that rewrites the whole while also depicting some of the many ways in which the book's story may be translated, mangled, and misunderstood in the future, far beyond what's already been done to it by the People's Literature version. "Lenny Heart Euny" has found its own possibilities for "dechronification" or immortality. But at what cost?