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MOVEMENT

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In the Realm of Ends: The Fate of Moveable Type

Daniel Lewis

There is something strange, perhaps, in producing a journal called 'Moveable Type' that has never appeared in print, or been anywhere near a press. How or why the editors of the first volume landed on the name is lost to history, or at least in need of some research. But what is certain is that the journal, born (enrolled?) in the (academic) year 2004-5, is a child of the Internet. A thoroughly digital native; assembled, uploaded, published, downloaded and read—one hopes—online. There is, perhaps, a further irony in the fact that, until recently, *Moveable Type* was a repository for papers delivered at the UCL English Department's annual graduate conference, and so a record of the spoken word. And last year, the journal made a tentative move into the realm of podcasts. From the oral to the written to the digital, from written record to sound recording. We appear to be leaving the Gutenberg Galaxy.[1]

Of course, most people in formal education or work today will still find themselves within that galaxy's gravitational pull; with at least one foot still caught in the Gutenberg Parenthesis: an exceptional period in human history when the vast majority of knowledge was formed not orally but through literate learning, set in motion by Fritz Gutenberg's adaptation of the ancient technology of the screw press, for more lucrative purposes, nearly 600 years ago.[2] Even as we transition into an 'age of 'secondary orality'', as claimed by Walter J. Ong—a new oral culture, propelled by telecommunications and the Internet, with some of the charm and danger of the old, 'in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas'—we remain under the influence of the written word, whether printed or processed.[3] And nowhere is this 'more deliberate and conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print'[4] more conscious and deliberate, or expected to be, than in higher education and in departments such as ours where we are still very much under the sway of the relatively sobering technology of the book—or its conceptual descendant, the text—as well as the duty, as the Book of Common Prayer has it, to 'read, mark, learn and inwardly digest'.[5] But how long will its reign, and regime, last?

Marshall McLuhan, for whom the printing press is the prime mover of our galaxy—the instigator of our current *Weltanschauung* (and possibly *Weltschmerz*)—has noted that long

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[1] See Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

[2] See Lars Ole Sauerberg, 'The Gutenberg Parenthesis — Print, Book and Cognition', *Orbis Litterarum*, 64 (ii), (2009), 79-166. Early on, Gutenberg used his press to produce indulgences—grants which were offered and often sold by the Catholic Church for a reduction in the punishment one would have to undergo for one's sins in Purgatory. The abuse of indulgences came under attack by Martin Luther, a theology professor at the University of Wittenberg, whose *Ninety-five Theses* or *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* of 1517 has long been considered the spark of the Protestant Reformation, thanks in large part to the new possibility of rapidly reprinting and publishing the document.

[3] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 2, 133.

[4] Ibid., p.133.

[5] *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662), the Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent.

practical and conceptual hangovers have always accompanied the arrival of radically new technology. The motorcar was once considered a 'horseless carriage'. In the early eighteenth century, he notes, 'a "textbook" was still defined as a 'Classick Author written very wide by the Students, to give room for an Interpretation dictated by the Master, &c, to be inserted in the Interlines' (O.E.D.).', which reveals the survival of an essentially monastic tradition whereby the classroom 'tended to be a scriptorium with a commentary' and the student 'an editor-publisher.'[6]

Perhaps the long half-life of these old tools and systems should come as no surprise. Old technologies do not disappear overnight or, it seems, over two centuries. As Derrida has said of the book, 'there is and there will be co-existence and the structural survival of past models at the very moment when the genesis of new ones is opening up new possibilities.'[7] Nothing is entirely lost to history. However, we should not mistake the partial survival of these models for the congeniality of the new conditions. Technologies, when they are really new, and not just gimmicks, are and often aim to be disruptive. They save time; they reduce labour (though not necessarily work); and they create value, while ruthlessly and relentlessly questioning the value of all that went before, as well as the values of those who have yet to come to terms or to grips with them.

As McLuhan writes elsewhere, in 1962:

> In the electronic age which succeeds the typographic and mechanical era of the past five hundred years, we encounter new shapes and structures of human interdependence and of expression which are "oral" in form even when the components of the situation may be non-verbal.[…]It is not a difficult matter in itself, but it does call for some reorganisation of imaginative life. Such a change of modes of awareness is always delayed by the persistence of older patterns of perception. The Elizabethans appear to our gaze as very medieval. Medieval man thought of himself as classical, just as we consider ourselves to be modern men. To our successors, however, we shall appear as utterly Renaissance in character, and quite unconscious of the major new factors which we have set in motion during the past one hundred and fifty years.[8]

Could it be that we are just beginning to feel the shocks of the Information Age on our shores, here, at the university, and particularly those of us in the humanities, that great (re)invention of the Renaissance? Have we underestimated, for example (and a trivial one at that), the impact the Ctrl+F 'search' function has had on our understanding of books and what they are for, especially those deemed to be of literary value? Are they to be pored over and intuited, or unpicked, harvested and mined? And if both, in what order and to what extent?

At the turn of this century, the literary theorist Franco Moretti openly embraced the large-scale 'distant reading' practices information technology would make possible, suggesting that what has kept the study of literature back, and from understanding what it is for, is a lack of understanding about what it is—the nature of the beast. This shortcoming he largely attributes to literary departments' (utterly Renaissance?) provincialism: their confinement to a few key texts in the Western canon, and those works produced in its shadow, as well as to their own hallowed methods of interpretation. Perhaps even their devotion to interpretation itself.

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[6] McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (London: Routledge, 1997), p.173.

[7] Derrida, qtd. in Martyn Lyons, *The Typewriter Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), p.5.

[8] *Gutenberg Galaxy,* p.3.

A frustration with literary criticism's sample size has been echoed by others in the academy, even at the institution largely responsible for making close reading standard practice. The late Eric Griffiths, a fellow at Cambridge, once complained to his students of a general 'over-concentration on a narrow range of examples, and how such over-concentration warps our thinking' when 'the collection of an appropriately wide range of instances is essential to making progress in conceptualization'.[9] Yet if, in principle, what we need is 'a keener attention to a greater variety of examples', how are we to source a sufficient pool of them in the time allotted us not only as an undergraduate or professor, but on Earth?[10] We certainly need something more than a working knowledge of one or two foreign languages, as Griffiths had, and the age-old time-saving device of the canon. If, in terms of literary data, bigger is better then, as Moretti writes, 'Reading 'more' seems hardly to be the solution'.[11] But then again, once computers are brought into play, neither does reading itself.

A precursor to Moretti's ideas, the psychologist Colin Martindale, attempted to demonstrate that, 'in principle, one could study the history of a literary tradition without ever reading any of the literature', arguing (or boasting) that 'the main virtue of the computerised content analytic methods I use is that they save one from actually having to read the literature.'[12] In the face of such claims, Moretti's assertion that 'world literature is not an object, but a *problem*', as well as his advocacy of applying models borrowed from economic history to the study of literature, becomes itself increasingly problematic for those seeking, not to save their students from actually having to read the literature, but to save their departments and their own methods from being swallowed up by other disciplines.[13] When does such text analysis go from being a means to an end—an aid for testing its limits and 'evaluating the robustness of the discussion that a particular [interpretative] procedure annunciates', as Stephen Ramsay has more recently written—to being an end in itself?[14]

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[9] Eric Griffiths, *If Not Critical,* ed. by Freya Johnston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.83.

[10] Ibid. p.84.

[11] Franco Moretti, 'Conjectures on World Literature', *New Left Review* 1 (2000), 54-68 (p.55).

[12] Colin Martindale, *The Clockwork Muse* (Basic Books, 1990), p.14.

[13] Moretti, p.55.

[14] Stephen Ramsay, *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press: 2011), p. 17. Ramsay is somewhat more conciliatory in his approach than Martindale in suggesting the continuities between computer-aided text analysis and traditional interpretative methods. He argues elsewhere 'that critical reading practices already contain elements of the algorithmic. Any reading of a text that is not a recapitulation of that text relies on a heuristic of radical transformation. The critic who endeavours to put forth a "reading" puts forth not the text, but a new text in which the data has been paraphrased, elaborated, selected, truncated, and transduced. This basic property of critical methodology is evident not only in the act of "close reading" but also in the more ambitious project of thematic exegesis. In the classroom one encounters the professor instructing his or her students to turn to page 254, and then to page 16, and finally to page 400' (p. 16). However, as my later comments suggest, there is a school of thought that would replace emphasis on the recapitulation of texts as a way of evaluating our readings. Writing a year before Ramsay, Timothy Bewes advocated for 'reading with the grain' based on the implication of the writings of Badiou and Ricoeur—the first to identify the Marx-Freud-Nietzsche 'school of suspicion'—that 'we see (or read) most clearly, most truthfully, when we acknowledge that the only moment that can be said to contain the truth of the object, or the text, is the moment of our encounter with it.' This requires rereadings attentive to the temporal rather than spatial (extractable) aspects of the text. Timothy Bewes, 'Reading with the Grain: A New World in Literary Criticism', *differences* 21 (iii) (2010), 1-33 (p. 11).

Such an external threat to the humanities in general but to the study of literature in particular, and especially English literature, might be a caveat to those who believe the threat to be largely internal, the result of a particular way of reading perceived as cool and distant: the method often referred to as critique which, with roots in the work of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, looks to demystify an author's ostensible project or an audience's understanding of it—and which the sociologist Bruno Latour thought, twenty years ago, had 'run out of steam'.[15] One of the most his vocal acolytes, Rita Felski, has herself critiqued such 'critical detachment' as 'not an absence of mood but one manifestation of it—a certain orientation toward one's subject, a way of making one's argument matter.'[16] A mood influenced, one might add, possibly since the turn of the millennium by an ongoing sense of individual and collective anxiety, at a time when 'knowledge producers within and without the academy are challenged to articulate why they do what they do—and, we suggest, when they might be done', as Seth Rudy and Rachael Scarborough King have recently written.[17]

What has been deemed self-defeating critique may have been adopted by scholars, however unconsciously, precisely under the pressure of being forced to contemplate their purpose and survival—their 'ends'. Such cool professionalisation and intellectual streamlining may be our most effective tool for showing not only that our interpretations are more than run-of-the-mill but also that they get us somewhere. If 'a firm sense of both purpose and outcome could help scholars demonstrate how they are advancing knowledge rather than continuing to spin their wheels',[18] then it is possible that the answer to 'the humanities quandary', as Judith Butler has written—'in which no one knows who is speaking and in what voice, and with what intent'—has been with us for some time.[19]

The greater irony, however, is that the 'low-key affective tone' Felski attributes to critique may in fact be the heritage of the printed word, as McLuhan would seem to argue in a passage worth quoting in full for its continuing relevance to our contemporary debates.[20]

> Perhaps the most significant of the gifts of typography to man is that of detachment and noninvolvement—the power to act without reacting. Science since the Renaissance has exalted this gift which has become an embarrassment in the electric age, in which all people are involved in all others at all times. The very word "disinterested," expressing the loftiest detachment and ethical integrity of typographic man, has in the past decade been increasingly used to mean: "He couldn't care less." The same integrity indicated by the term "disinterested" as a mark of the scientific and scholarly temper of a literate and enlightened society is now increasingly repudiated as "specialisation" and fragmentation of knowledge and sensibility. The fragmenting and analytic power of the printed word in our psychic lives gave us that "dissociation of sensibility" which in the arts and literature since Cezanne and since Baudelaire has been a top priority for elimination in every program of reform in taste and knowledge. In the "implosion" of the electric age the separation of thought and feeling has come to seem as strange as the departmentalisation of knowledge in schools and universities. Yet it was precisely the power to separate thought and feeling, to be able

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[15] Bruno Latour, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004), pp.225-48 (p.225).

[16] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p.6.

[17] Seth Rudy and Rachael Scarborough King in *The Ends of Knowledge* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), p.1.

[18] Ibid. p.7.

[19] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), p.129.

[20] Felski, p.6.

to act without reacting, that split literate man out of the tribal world of close family bonds in private and social life.[21]

It is significant, in this context, that in her latest book Felski should argue we should turn our attention to our involvement with works of art—the way we get 'hooked' on or by them; to keep in mind 'the phenomenological thickness of aesthetic response'.[22] For Felski, this is explicitly a search for solidarity, a greater involvement with other people—an attempt to bridge the 'gulf between scholarly and lay response', between what 'we' do and what 'other people do (the naïve, the unschooled, the sentimental)'.[23] But it is also, we might say now, a search for a second innocence: an attempt to bridge the gulf between thought and feeling; to return to a time before we knew what we wanted, or lacked, or knew exactly what we were doing. In her own way, Felski wants an end to a certain kind of knowledge; the end of an era, even. Many of her case studies fall outside the realm of the strictly literary: Matisse, Joni Mitchell's 'River', *Thelma and Louise*. We are not in fifteenth-century Mainz anymore.

But even this project owes a debt to print. Pursuing an impossible task, Felski finds herself engaging in the literally extraordinary (extra-ordinary) thing that we, not just on this side of gulf, have the inclination to do: go back, go over, recap, research. McLuhan strangely downplays our appetite and ability—particularly as post-typographic man, with our manifold ways of storing the past—to think twice. To go from first thoughts to having second ones. 'Print taught men to say, "Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead!"', McLuhan claims, but it has also given him the opportunity to turn back.[24] The printed word may have been the 'architect of nationalism', giving us a sense of space while also motivating us to travel across it and take it up—regardless, in many cases, of who or what was already there—but, if so, it also enabled us to dismantle the concept and condemn the atrocities perpetrated in its name.[25] If, as a result of compromising single-mindedness to be of two minds, humanity is more 'hampered and hesitant', it is also, to revive Ong's terms, more conscious and deliberate.[26] We are Janus-faced people, heading into the future even while looking into the past; slowing down, or trying to, even as we speed up. We almost no longer need to be told to 'inwardly digest'; we have the appetite for it.

The speed of change can make us lose that appetite or feeling—even our feeling for (a lost sense of) feeling—making us unresponsive, or responsive in narrow, predetermined ways, like a train on its tracks. The sheer fact of speed itself can, along with rampant individualism, 'deaden the modern body', as Richard Sennett has claimed E. M. Forster foresaw in his depiction of life in London in *Howards End*.[27] But—or as a result—it can also compromise, or warp, our thinking. A passage from another book based in a bustling metropolis, Berlin, and published on the other side of the First World War—*Fates Behind Typewriters,* a 1930 autobiographical novel by the German author Christa Anita Brück—makes this point clearly.

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[21] *Understanding Media,* p.173.

[22] Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), p.25.

[23] Ibid. pp.4, 79.

[24] *Understanding Media,* p.178.

[25] Ibid. p.170.

[26] Ibid. p.178.

[27] Richard Sennett, *Flesh And Stone* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company: 1994), p.324.

Tempo, Tempo, faster, faster.

Man funnels his energy into the machine. The machine, which is he himself, his foremost abilities, his foremost concentration and final exertion. And he himself is machine, is lever, is key, is type and moving carriage.

Not to think, not to reflect, on, on, fast, fast, tipp, tip, tipptipptipptipptipp tipp. . .[28]

This heady passage summons history, or tempts fate. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see where this particular runaway train of thought(lessness) is headed: more war, which happens to be what accelerated the development of the typewriter in the first place. The first serialised models were produced by the gunmakers Remington during a slow sales period after the bonanza of the American Civil War. 'The typewriter became a discursive machine-gun', claims Friedrich Kittler. 'A technology whose basic action not coincidentally

'The super-fast Olivetti'. An advert from 1923

[28] Christa Anita Brück qtd. in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,* trans. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p.222.

consists of strikes and triggers proceeds in automated and discrete steps, as does ammunitions transport in a revolver and a machine-gun, or celluloid transport in a film projector.'[29] It is perhaps not coincidental either that the production of typewriters should have been fostered by companies which also manufactured modes of transport, especially cars, which we might place next in the line of exhilarating but potentially deadening technology. The typewriter which graces our front cover was developed by Adler (German for eagle) which is often credited with producing the first truly streamlined commercial car, the Adler 2.5-litre, the most talked about model at the 1937 Berlin Motor Show and much admired by Adolf Hitler. In fact, the car was nicknamed the 'Autobahn Adler' after the recently turbocharged construction of Germany's motorways, the majority of which still have no official speed limits. 'Germany is a motor-minded country', said a British reviewer.[30]

Yet the typewriter is also clearly linked to a much older piece of technology: it is essentially 'nothing but a miniature printing press'.[31] But also, in reality, nothing less than that; the greatest advance on that technology since Gutenberg's modifications and nearly as revolutionary. In fact, it sparked something of a sexual revolution. For several reasons, women to began to enter for the first time in their thousands into the workplaces that had previously been all-male environments—not least because the typewriter's longest lasting innovation, the keyboard, happened to be particularly suited to the generations of women who had been kept busy at home with piano lessons. 'Prior to the invention of the typewriter, all poets, secretaries, and typesetters were of the same sex', Kittler notes elsewhere. 'The Gutenberg Galaxy was thus a sexually closed feedback loop.'[32] Taking over as secretaries and amanuenses, women broke the old discursive loop as well as out of those close family bonds. Brück, writing from the perspective of one of the liberated 'New Women' of the Weimar Republic, addresses her book to those 'women who are not interested in motherhood', the kind the Nazis would seek to suppress.[33]

But, as is evident from the tonally ambiguous passage above, the dangers of unthinking forward motion, as of certain political movements, were already present. As words get transposed into pure rhythm and sound, it becomes increasingly hard to tell who is in charge—who is conducting and who is the conductor, user and thing used. Just as with 'the opacity of agency in car driving', the typewriter deadens the body by giving the impression of turning living matter into plastic and metal, and vice versa, worrying the dividing line between man—or, rather, woman—and machine.[34] For a time, this (con)fusion was registered linguistically: in English, the word typewriter referred both to the machine and to the one typing—'a source of countless cartoons' in mid-century America.[35] An advert from the same period, for the 1959 Chevrolet Biscayne, draws out a family resemblance between these seemingly discrete 'extensions of man' (man being decidedly gendered here): the car, the typewriter and the…typewriter.[36]

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[29] Kittler, p.191.

[30] Anon., 'Berlin's Great Exhibition', *Motor Sport* 8 (iv), (March 1937), 134-36 (p.134).

[31] Hubertus Streicher qtd. in Kittler, p.228.

[32] Kittler, p.184.

[33] Brück qtd. in Kittler, p.222.

[34] Adam Gopnik, 'The Driver's Seat', *New Yorker* 90 (46) (2015), 48-55 (p.52).

[35] Kittler, p.183.

[36] *Understanding Media,* p. 3.

A 1959 advert for the Chevrolet Biscayne

Like many adverts, though, it also plays on or into the daydreams, or thoughts, of a working population who now included women possessed of newfound agency and dissatisfactions. It could be a fantasy of remote work (before its time) or, perhaps, of authority; being able to write without being dictated to. It also promotes a fantasy of stillness; of not moving or, perhaps, of not being moved. Such an impression is obviously an effect of the medium, not to mention more than a modicum of twenty-first century nostalgia. To a certain extent, as John Berger once noted, all 'publicity is essentially *eventless*' and 'extends just as far as nothing else is happening'.[37] But it also feels like an effect of the typewriter which seems to have ground everything to a halt; the stationary as a sort of

[37] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008), p.153.

model for that which stays still while the world reforms around it.[38] The still point of a turning world. Consequently, it is tempting to make something of a talisman of this image, one of Bartelby-esque resistance on the cusp of a countercultural decade: the newly socially mobile woman who decides to vacate the vehicle, choosing to get out rather than get ahead. A modern-day scrivener, a century after Melville's creation, who would prefer not to do as she is told.

In her disinterest in the gleamingly symbol of the mobile future behind her, we could place her next to the *Angelus Novus* or 'angel of history' as described by Walter Benjamin—one of the architects of critique, writing just ten years after Brück in 1940, the year he would took his own life to avoid capture by the Gestapo. Another emblem of resisting and refus(e)ing history's forward march, of turning (one's) back:

> His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us, he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm.[39]

This moment of suspended animation and active recuperation, in the midst of unrest, mirrors the situation of our woman who, finding this storm anything but irresistible, chooses to weather it by making words, or forming thoughts, in a moment of rest—which makes it equally tempting to make her representative of the scholar or, at least, the thinker, whose definition could be: one who *takes time*—to reflect, revise, look into, look back, ponder, pause, freeze, stop.[40] Taking time to get (back) a sense of it.

It is this activity which seems to link what we do across different disciplines as well as what 'we' do and what people outside of the academy do, and which transcends the more obvious differences in what we choose to look at, watch, listen to or read. And, for now, within the humanities at least, many of us are also bound by the fact that a lot of the time we take is devoted to the painstaking work of making sentences, as well as working them out. Writing and reading, rewriting and rereading, again. A task which may look or feel, to all intents and purposes—or to those pressing them on us—like spinning our wheels.

Of course, such activity is what we have been engaged in in putting together this journal, though rarely in such Arcadian surroundings as our typist. (No plug sockets in paradise). As if to justify our ways, in our final article Liam Kennedy-Finnerty mounts a defence of the time-consuming, labour-intensive art of essay writing—and, by implication, marking and

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[38] One obvious objection here, apart from the typewriter's much-touted portability, is that it is a piece of technology that, like the printing press, only made a difference in the manner in which it was used. But what Friedrich Kittler achieves in his writing on the device is to show the impact the typewriter had on the course of material and intellectual history even as an idea. His series of case studies—sketches towards an 'unwritten literary sociology' of the 20th century based on the machine—showing the relationship of various (male) writers and thinkers with their typewriters, human and non-human, is compelling. (p. 214). See especially pp. 214-231.

[39] Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940,* trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others, eds. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2003), p.392.

[40] This is, after all, the principle of the sabbatical, as of the sabbath: rest with a purpose.

editing—against the rise of AI text generators such as ChatGPT. Concurring with Elaine Scarry's belief in the 'lifesaving' nature of beauty, Kennedy-Finnerty argues our writing should not only bear witness to our existence in time and space but in bodies. Something which, of course, AI cannot do (yet). While in effect bringing us full circle—Kennedy-Finnerty also invokes Benjamin and Felski, though to slightly different ends—the article acts as a counterbalance to our penultimate piece which is a refreshingly positive evaluation of the integration of AI in the theatre. Linking the latest technology to the age-old use of puppetry and marionettes, and focusing on a trio of recent productions reimagining Shakespeare—perhaps the byword for traditionalist theatre—Abhik Maiti aims to demonstrate how AI enables actors, directors and even audiences to achieve performances on stage bodies alone cannot.

Both of these articles help to underline concerns readers will find threaded throughout the entire journal. The pieces display an interest in ends and limits—spatiotemporal, bodily and mental, real and imagined—while our articles seem particularly preoccupied with how technology might bind us to or free us from them, which is appropriate as we choose the topic of "movement" to nod to our title in celebration of our fifteenth publication. Jennifer Kenyon finds E. M. Forster and Louis MacNeice attempting to cross national and personal borders in their radio broadcasts to India either side of 1947—that is, just before the end of British rule and the Partition, and just after the beginning of independence respectively. While MacNeice manipulated the medium to create a sort of sonic utopia, Forster drew attention to his physical presence in the studio 'as a means of highlighting the possibility of more transcendent connections'. However, Kenyon argues, both writers' projects suffer from their unacknowledged or unrealised limitation of having been launched from the heart of a flagging empire seeking to spread its soft power. Mike Fu similarly examines people trying to foster communities unrestricted by geography, in this case, through the medium of the print magazine. Drawing on interviews and exchanges with the founders of *Banana* and *Sine Theta,* Fu traces the efforts of young members of the Asian diaspora reaching out for connection both within and beyond the places they call home and how the publications' emergence intersects with the 'shifting cultural politics' of the past decade.

Questions of identity also come to the fore in a couple of pieces that aim to relate the much contested limits of the self to racial identity. Of what do they consist, how are they formed and how do they maintain their integrity—and should they? Lisa Van Straten applies Stephen Clingman's notion of navigational identity, whereby the self is intimately tied to the movement of bodies in space, to Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* to demonstrate how its protagonist 'seems to construct for herself a liminal, container-space to serve as a foundation for and reflection of her in-between white creole identity, even though this containment simultaneously gives rise to a paranoid sense of being closed-in' and leads to a self-denying 'state of paralysis'. Van Straten goes on to nuance Clingman's concept to include the gaze, how one is looked at and looks, as integral to the understanding of identity and the self. This expanded idea of the self as grounded in yet also exposed to the vagaries of interpersonal exchange bears similarities to Nancy Selleck's model of the early modern self as not primarily in opposition to but interchangeable with an other. Thomas Langham makes use of this model in his examination of *Othello* and its 1962 film adaptation, *All Night Long,* which transposes the action to a London warehouse and utilises jazz as a site of collective identity formation imperilled by white appropriation and ownership of performance spaces. However, the film shows the survival of black creativity and

community, Langham argues, though its revision of one of the most well known deathly endings in theatre.

Deathly endings and dead ends on screen are also considered in our first two articles. Emily Round considers two seminal horror flicks, the original *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *It Follows,* both of which prominently feature cars and foreground the vulnerability of bodies, especially women's. While exploring the significance of the films' post-industrial settings—the forgotten corners of rural Texas and the dilapidated centre and the more well-to-do suburbs of Detroit, respectively—Round shows how their characters are engaged in the habit of trying to run away from or outrun the very present threat of economic precarity and ruin. Ultimately, the 'films present the collective crisis of capitalism as the ultimate horror' in its 'constant process of deferring disaster by sacrificing the stability of some to guarantee the security of others.' Christopher O'Hara considers what happens when local economic horror becomes global and ecological, through the lens of the post-apocalyptic novel *On the Beach* (1957) by the Australian author Nevil Shute and its film adaption, released in 1959—the same year as our Chevrolet Biscayne—in which the inhabitants of Melbourne are awaiting the fallout of a nuclear war that has decimated civilisation. Here, nobody runs, partly because there is nowhere *to* run, but cling to their old way of life; the debris of capitalism, especially cars which function as 'social cocoon[s]' providing the comfort of nostalgia, protection from confronting the present and false hope for the future. O'Hara reflects on our current precarious moment which might be defined less by hyper-mobility than 'hyper-stasis'; by staying put and waiting for the inevitable rather than valiantly fighting on.

Nestled in among these pieces is Laura Thorn's article on private and public space in *The Changeling* which brings us back to a consideration of liminality and containment, but also to the place of the book in the early modern period. Thorn investigates the role the domestic and the spaces within it—especially boxes and closets—play in the seventeenth-century tragedy, relating them to contemporary notions of enclosure and disclosure and the readability of women's bodies, which Thorn finds exemplified in the tradition of the 'closet book' which partook in the 'popular early modern process of publicly establishing something as a secret' in order to reveal it.

Being entrapped—whether in the place you live or the body you were born in—is a thread picked up in our reviews section. *Asylum,* a memoir by Edafe Okporo, offers 'an in-depth exploration into the often-hidden parts of the asylum process' which are particularly fraught for a gay black man from Nigeria, as Alisha Mathers shows. Exposing the limits of international refugee rights, Okporo also shows the political limitations of his new home, the United States, where one might shed one's status as queer or as a migrant but not one's race. Violet Kupersmith's *Build Your House Around My Body* also seeks to display the lingering effects of a dark past, uncovering the history of French colonisation and Japanese occupation in Vietnam which is 'particularly written on the bodies of women' through a reworking of the tropes of Gothic fiction. Although, Alex Carabine writes, the way the novel summons its ghosts 'speaks to metamorphosis, rather than restraint. It may be true that the past is ever present, but the ways in which the characters bear the weight of their past is transformative.'

Carabine rings the brighter note that can be heard elsewhere in this section. Jordan Casstles bears witness to the dissolution of Gruppo di Nun, an Italian collective with feminist roots, in a review of *Revolutionary Demonology*—a collection of anti-cyber-fascistic 'theoryfiction' (to which Casstles offers a helpful introduction for those unfamiliar with the genre)—but also to the creative supernova that so often accompanies such disbanding. As

Casstles writes, the 'sheer poetry' and 'linguistic pyrotechnics on display within this book are worth the price of admission alone.' Similarly, William Burns gains entry into and finds much space for thought in Ian Patterson's 'ambulatory poetic[s]' and lively enjambments in *Shell Vestige Disputed*—a title and collection which holds out the possibility, however worn or faded, of breaking out of confinement and launching on to a different future. And our reviews editor Olivia Ho assesses Emma Warren's *Dance Your Way Home,* a consideration of dance floors, dancehalls and general dance spaces across the world, concluding that—with nightlife in many places under siege—to 'move with each other is vital to a sense of shared humanity'.

Our two creative pieces, too, refuse to stay still. Karen Jane Cannon's fleet-footed verse in 'The Forest Navigator' generates a sense of lyrical uplift, even while studying a creature found 'hanging upside down', while 'Cost of Living', a short story by Mark Gorham about working the supermarket floor, is a *perpetuum mobile* of ennui-busting antics and mental fidgeting. A sense of playfulness is also sustained by the photographs which punctuate the journal: shots of Casa Battló by Antoni Gaudí, an architect whose imagination was captured by a sense of nature's infinite variety. (He once declared his magnum opus, the Sagrada Familia—under construction now for 141 years—would have no straight lines.) In a closing commentary, the photographer Chelsea Ko links the images of the house to the French philosopher Georges Bataille's thoughts on the ecstatic 'merry-go-round' of sexual desire in his theory of eroticism—'a movement that struggles, against the will to restrain it, to its impossible completion.' And so the wheel keeps turning.

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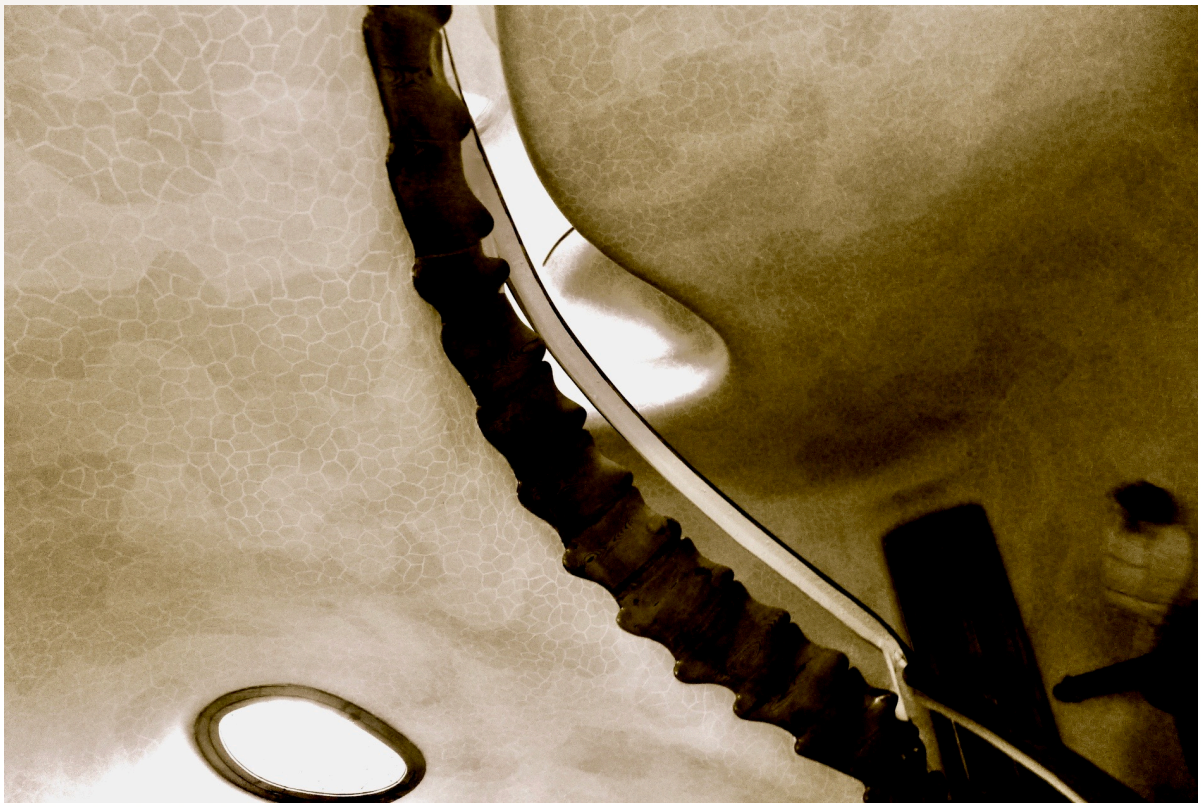

Dead Ends: Ruin, Redundancy, and the Horrors of Precarity in *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *It Follows*

Emily Round

While Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974) and David Robert Mitchell's *It Follows* (2014) ostensibly focalise their films' narratives upon the imminent threat of bodily violence which endangers their respective protagonists' lives, a deeper analysis of both films illuminates the terror at the heart of the narratives: economic precarity and immobility. Both Hooper and Mitchell deliberately situate their horror films within settings that are haunted by the past hope of prosperity and which have corroded into ruins, left to rust and rot under the hostile conditions of post-industrial capitalism. These rents in the socio-economic fabric are intimately registered on a corporeal level, as the bodies of both *Chain Saw* protagonist Sally Hardesty and *It Follows* protagonist Jay Height become the sites onto which the capitalist horrors of unequal prosperity and labour redundancy are violently enacted. In Hooper's film, the rural backwoods of Texas play host to a brutal confrontation between a working-class family—made redundant by the rise of automation and thus embodying the industrial atrophy of the American South—and a group of drifting, unfettered young people, represented by Sally and her friends. This encounter signifies a catastrophic friction between outsiders and locals, and between mobility and stagnation. Similarly, in *It Follows*, the territorial tension between the urban ruins of Detroit and its surrounding suburbs haunts the central conceit of the narrative. The suburbs are dislocated as a site of stability and invulnerability, and are instead *followed* by the threat of precarity, by the economic disintegration and social stagnation which the city signifies. In both films, these crises are crystallised through the motif of mobility; the car is imbued with promise of escape, as the means by which one may mitigate the perils of precarity. Yet, in *Chain Saw* and *It Follows*, this promise of unrestricted movement is swiftly substituted with dead ends, abruptly undermining the illusion of control over one's social and bodily security. Rather than individual tales of terror, Hooper and Mitchell's films present the collective crisis of capitalism as the ultimate horror, as an economic system predicated on precarity, requiring a constant process of deferring disaster by sacrificing the stability of some to guarantee the security of others. It is precisely this process which Sally and Jay exemplify, as they become the latest bodies in a chain of sacrificial substitutions. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* and *It Follows* convey the same capitalist logic: the debt must be paid by *somebody*.

Inherent to the the concept of precarity is the impossibility of extricating the body from the external conditions within which the body exists. As Judith Butler contends, 'it is not possible first to define the ontology of the body and then to refer to the social significations the body assumes. Rather, to be a body is to be exposed to social crafting and form, and that is what makes the ontology of the body a social ontology'.[1] Precarity thus articulates how corporeal vulnerability is necessarily entwined with uneven and disparate socio-economic positioning: precarity 'designates that politically induced condition in which

[1] Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 23.

certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death'.[2] This is perhaps most powerfully expressed in *It Follows* through the deliberate mapping of violence onto spaces of precarity. Crucially, Mitchell locates the catalysing scene in which Jay acquires and then learns of her new vulnerable condition in the ruins of Detroit's urban centre. As the camera pans downwards from the exterior of Detroit's notorious abandoned Packard Automotive Plant to Jay and Hugh having sex in the backseat of his car in the desolate parking lot, Mitchell is 'visually cementing the link between the horrific and Detroit's urban decay'.[3] Despite Jay residing in the suburbs, it is within the crumbling, rusting, and graffitied structure of the abandoned plant that *It Follows* reveals its disturbing premise. Hugh informs her that she is now the host of a sexually transmitted curse, and as a result will be perpetually followed by a slow yet inexorable, shape-shifting monster. As he explains: 'This thing, it's gonna follow you. Somebody gave it to me. And I passed it to you'.[4] Mitchell thus inextricably connects the film's monstrous entity with its aesthetic of postindustrial decay, bearing witness to a legacy of economic stagnation and unemployment.

Once a hopeful symbol of the rapid expansion and growth promised by the automobile industry, the Packard Automotive Plant has instead become a microcosmic site of Detroit's post-industrial landscape, a haunting 'icon of post-Fordist, post-Golden Age, Rust Belt decline'.[5] Jay's corporeal precarity and enhanced vulnerability in this scene, immobilised and bound to a wheelchair as the monster creeps closer and closer, therefore becomes a bodily registration of a social wounding. As the mise-en-scène reverberates with the 'slow yet steady intensification of vulnerability in postindustrial America'[6], Jay's terrorisation by the monster becomes a manifestation of the encroaching peril of precarity, of the 'unstoppable forces of decay' which threaten to metastasise from Detroit's metropolis to its suburbs .[7] It is significant, then, that as the danger of the monster becomes apparent, Jay and her friends flee north to Greg's lake house attempting to find some site of safety. This movement echoes Jay's earlier nostalgic recollection of her childhood daydreams: 'I had this image of myself holding hands with a really cute guy […] driving along some pretty road, up north maybe […] just having some sort of freedom'.[8] This comment evokes Detroit's history of 'white flight' wherein 'white residents in the urban areas began

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[2] Butler, p. 23.

[3] David Church, 'Queer Ethics and the Urban Ruin-Porn Landscape: The Horrors of Monogamy in *It* Follows', in *Post-Horror: Art, Genre and Cultural Elevation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), pp. 181-212 (p. 199).

[4] *It Follows*, dir. by David Robert Michell (Radius-TWC, 2014) in Amazon Prime Video <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Follows-Maika-Monroe/dp/B00ZPFBCCU> [accessed 24 April 2023].

[5] Sianne Ngai, 'It Follows, or Financial Imps', in *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), 145-174 (p. 153).

[6] Casey Ryan Kelly, '*It Follows*: Precarity, Thanatopolitics, and the Ambient Horror Film', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34.3 (2017), 234-249 (p. 235) <doi:10.1080/15295036.2016.1268699>.

[7] Mark Binelli, 'How It Follows Uses Detroit to Explore the Horror of Urban Decay', *Slate*, 1 April 2015, <https://slate.com/culture/2015/04/it-follows-how-the-new-movie-uses-detroit-to-explore-the-horror-of-urban-decay.html> [accessed 23 April 2023].

[8] *It Follows*.

moving north'[9] during the 1940s, contributing to the city's crisis of depopulation. As Bill McGraw writes of the city's recent history, 'emptiness is a major part of Detroit's contemporary condition'.[10] Of course, Jay's northern migration proves futile and—as the film's title mandates—the entity follows her nonetheless, irrespective of the illusory borders which demarcate class divisions. The monster of *It Follows* exceeds an individual threat of bodily violence, manifesting instead the feeling that 'everyone who grew up in the shadows of a city left for dead knows in their bones: that all things must pass, and that your city (or town, or suburb) is next'.[11] Just as the curse itself represents a collective, rather than individual, crisis in its reliance upon perpetual transference, the monster—as the physical manifestation of the curse—further resists the fixed identity of a singular threat. The entity continuously shapeshifts, sometimes appearing as people known to the victim it is following, therefore dispersing the danger that it poses. At all moments, anyone could be carrying the curse, and anyone could be the entity following you, destabilising the illusion of individual protection and socio-economic immunity. Indeed, Jay's attempt to mitigate her precarious condition through a drive up north to an ostensibly 'safer' region meets an abrupt dead end, as she crashes the car while attempting to flee the monster yet again. Thus, just as Detroit's population and urban landscape is haunted by the decaying corpse of its automobile industry, mobility again becomes a deceptive fantasy of escape from the terror of precarity.

This same sentiment is perceptible from the outset of Hooper's *Chain Saw*, found in the opening crawl which falsely frames the film as a representation of true events, proclaiming that 'the film which you are about to see is an account of the tragedy which befell a group of five youths' when 'an idyllic summer afternoon drive became a nightmare'.[12] This prologue subtly introduces the film's undercurrent of class confrontation, an encounter between locals and outsiders, between 'people who are tied to one place and those who are "just passing through"'.[13] The five youths are enjoying a leisurely drive in their van through rural Texas, evoking a 'naïve, drifting, hedonistic lifestyle'— the antithesis of Leatherface's rooted and stagnant working-class family.[14] As Sally and her brother Franklin visit the old family home, Hooper establishes the Hardestys as a family who have ostensibly attained some level of upward mobility, now removed from that desolate region of Texas to which Leatherface and his family remain tied. The friction of this familial 'economic breach'[15] is made immediately clear as the young travellers retch as the stench of 'the old slaughterhouse'— where, as Franklin explains, 'Grandpa used to sell his cattle'—

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[9] Stacy Rusnak, 'The Slasher Film and the Final Girl Get Makeovers: *It Follows* and the Politics of Fourth Wave Feminism', in *Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture*, ed. by Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 115-133 (p. 121).

[10] Bill McGraw, 'Life in the Ruins of Detroit', *History Workshop Journal*, 63 (2007), 288–302 (p. 293).

[11] Binelli, 'How It Follows'.

[12] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, dir. by Tobe Hooper (Bryanston Distributing Company, 1974) in BFI Player, https://player.bfi.org.uk/subscription/film/watch-the-texas-chain-saw-massacre-1974-online [accessed 24 April 2023].

[13] B.M Murphy, 'Backwoods Nightmares: The Rural Poor as Monstrous Other', in *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp.133-177 (p. 142).

[14] Naomi Merritt, 'Cannibalistic Capitalism and other American Delicacies: A Bataillean Taste of The Texas Chain Saw Massacre', *Film-Philosophy*, 14.1 (2010), 202-231 (p. 212).

[15] John Kenneth Muir, *Eaten Alive at a Chainsaw Massacre: The Films of Tobe Hooper* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2002), p. 64.

infiltrates the van. [16] Sally in particular attempts to distance herself from the family's former profession, remarking 'I like meat, please change the subject'.[17] However, a hitchhiker they pick up (later revealed to be Leatherface's brother) reveals the economic fate of those who remained—a dead end of redundancy and impoverishment. As he goes on to explain, 'my brother worked there. My grandfather too. My family's always been in meat.' The hitchhiker emphasises the working-class family's singular dependence upon the industry for economic security, a security revealed to be intensely precarious.[18] Refining a singular set of skills for generations only to be abruptly rendered obsolete, the hitchhiker bemoans the forces of mechanisation – 'that gun's no good. The old way with a sledge. See, that was better [...] with the new way, people are put out of jobs'.[19] Redundancy therefore becomes a crucial impetus for the horror of *Chain Saw*, as Leatherface's family comes to represent 'an exploited and degraded proletariat' adapting their labour skills towards new, cannibalistic enterprises.[20]

The central horror of *Chain Saw* depicts a desperate attempt to postpone inevitable crisis and maintain the fantasy of security by violently transferring one's precarity onto a sacrificial body. The portrayal of Leatherface and his family repeatedly emphasises their delusional refusal to accept their precarious condition, instead remaining in a nostalgic fantasy of 'the good old days […] before the economic slowdown of the 1970s and the threat of automation destroyed livelihoods'.[21] This is most clearly epitomised through the family's attempts to recapitulate their redundant labour in the form of cannibalistic commerce – the flesh of the young tourists becomes the sacrificial substitution for the animal flesh which once offered the family a sense of economic security. Pam's body, hanging from a meat hook, becomes 'helplessly embroiled in the transgressive excesses of capitalism', a monetizable commodity to be sold.[22] Confronted with the precarious terror of unemployment, Leatherface's family simply re-enact the capitalist compulsion of relentless and unceasing productivity in the belief that this will restore some semblance of security from the horrors of economic stagnation, averting the crisis of redundancy by shifting their looming vulnerability onto naïve outsiders who seemingly represent a social and economic mobility which they have not attained. Furthermore, by converting the bodies of their targets into the commodity which once ensured their livelihood—meat—Leatherface and his family unwittingly demonstrate the blindness of capital, whereby all bodies can be substituted or exchanged in the pursuit of profit. This sentiment is further highlighted in the mise-en-scène of the Leatherface family home where the floor is lined with both animal feathers and human skulls, while from the ceiling hang both caged chickens and the meat hooks which the family use to hold human bodies. Animal and human flesh therefore become equated and commercially interchangeable; when the former no longer offers the family protection from economic precarity, the latter is substituted in its place.

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[16] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Robin Wood, *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2018), p. 70.

[21] Muir, p. 64.

[22] Merritt, p. 225.

Significantly, the mobility of the Hardestys in relation to the stagnation of Leatherface's family is undermined by the very forces of desiccation and degeneration which they initially evaded. Forced to stop at the gas station by their depleting tank, the group are told by the attendant 'I got no gas'[23], further solidifying the depiction of rural Texas as a barren wasteland. Hooper highlights oil (or, more precisely, the *lack* of oil) as a principal signifier of socio-economic precarity from the film's opening: as the credits roll, the car radio reports that 'oil storage units continue to burn out of control at the huge Texaco refinery', while violence has erupted from the 'continuing squabble of South American governments over oil rich regions'.[24] These depleting and diminishing reserves point to the 'material presence of a national energy crisis [which] haunts *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*'.[25] Indeed, it is this scarcity which disrupts their travels, destroys their means for escape, and incites the group's demise: Kirk, the first member of the group to enter the Leatherface family home, does so from the hope that he can purchase oil from them, shouting 'Gasoline!' as he hears the fateful whirrs of the generator.[26] Therefore, in *Chain Saw*, just as in *It Follows*, cars and the mobility they signify are positioned as a fragile illusion of freedom which ultimately fail to protect one from and actively places one in the grasp of precarity. The predicament the young people find themselves in strongly resonates with Butler's observation that 'no amount of will or wealth can eliminate the possibilities of illness or accident for a living body, although both can be mobilized in the service of such an illusion'.[27]

It Follows engages with this notion rather explicitly, through the chain of bodily exchange and the perpetual deferral of crisis which underpins the mechanism of the film's titular monster, as well as through the illusion of security afforded by cars, fueling the notion that one can 'outrun' their precarity. As Hugh plainly explains to Jay: 'if you drive far enough, you can buy yourself some time to think'.[28] Importantly, Hugh's phrasing here extends beyond its idiomatic meaning. Attempting to physically outrun the threat does not mitigate, but merely prolongs it, though the extent to which one is able to temporarily evade the entity is of course dependent upon one's monetary access to the means of travel. However, as Hugh goes on to establish, the logic of the curse dictates that the only way to rid oneself of the constantly encroaching peril is to 'pass it along', sexually deferring one's bodily precarity onto another.[29] Yet, even this is a temporary assurance, as the death of the host triggers a reversal, the monster following the chain upstream for its next victim. As Hugh explains, 'if it kills her, it gets me, and goes straight down the line to whoever started it'.[30] Therefore, *It Follows* becomes an allegorical embodiment of the entrapping mechanisms of capitalism which produce a state of anxiety and perpetual vulnerability. The curse articulates the unstable conditions of credit which, like the film's narrative and actions of

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[23] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Chuck Jackson, 'Blood for Oil: Crude Metonymies and Tobe Hooper's Texas Chain Saw Massacre (1974)', *Gothic Studies*, 10 (2008), 48-60 (p. 51).

[26] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

[27] Butler, p. 23.

[28] *It Follows*.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

those within it, become merely 'an effort to hold crisis off'.[31] The conceit of the film distinctly mirrors Annie McClanahan's observation that 'when credit works, it lives only in the future, transfixing in its seemingly magical power to move itself ever forward. But when it fails, credit is pulled back into its own uncanny past […] confronted with the material limits it thought it had overcome'.[32] The threat induced by the monster embodies this very logic, the unstable illusion of 'endlessly transferrable deferrals' which at any moment threaten to collapse in on itself and return in a catastrophic reckoning.[33] As Hugh explains to Jay: 'It's very slow but it's not dumb'.[34] The debt may be temporarily evaded, but not deceived or escaped. The act of *passing* the curse, furthermore, as a form of 'sacrificial exchange in which someone else temporarily takes on the corporeal burden of another's precarity', enacts the mechanisms by which capitalism necessarily renders some bodies more vulnerable in order to protect others, wherein mitigating one's own precarity merely bestows this condition onto another.[35] Thus, in both *It Follows* and *Chain Saw*, when economic stability is undermined and the mechanisms of capitalism fail to provide support or safety, the result is a crisis in which 'humanity has begun literally to "prey upon itself"'.[36]

The delusion of averted crisis is also perceptible in *Chain Saw* through the figure of the Grandpa—the macabre, cadaverous patriarch of Leatherface's family. Hooper highlights the misguided faith that the family maintains in his viability as a patriarchal breadwinner, as Leatherface's father declares the grandfather's previous glory and proficiency as a slaughterer: 'Grandpa is the best killer there ever was', he says, honouring him with the task of butchering Sally.[37] Yet, in a pitiful display of frailty, Grandpa repeatedly drops the hammer and fails to perform the killing, a failure which ultimately enables Sally's escape. The grandpa thus embodies a perversion of the myths and institutions in which those in the American South invested their faith, and which now threaten to disintegrate. The patriarch is depicted as 'a living corpse who is kept around as a reminder of the old days before the new transformation of labor',[38] an embalmed relic of the past who has decayed into an impotent representation of 'the aridity and degeneration of postindustrial civilization'.[39] He shatters the notion that hard work alone can guarantee social security, and the rural family of *Chain Saw* have therefore attempted to hold off crisis by mummifying the figure which once embodied solidity and economic potency. This is subtly reinforced by the earlier totemic image of a watch with a nail driven through the face which hangs from a tree on the family's property. Hooper lingers on this loaded symbol, denoting the family's desire not merely to suspend time, but to avert crisis by entering an illusory state of atemporality. Further, the

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[31] Ngai, p. 166.

[32] Annie McClanahan, *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), p. 133.

[33] Ngai, p. 160.

[34] *It Follows*.

[35] Tyler Bradway, 'Slow Burn: Dreadful Kinship and the Weirdness of Heteronormativity in It Follows', *Studies in the Fantastic,* 9.1 (2020), 122-144 (p. 128).

[36] Wood, p. 99.

[37] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

[38] Christopher Sharrett, 'The Idea of Apocalypse in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*' in *Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film*, ed. by Barry Keith Grant and Christopher Sharrett (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2004), p. 317.

[39] Sharrett, p. 205.

punctured, broken clock forms an image of a perpetual present which contains within itself the dissolution of a different future. The family can seemingly do nothing but endlessly perform their cannibalistic labour, unlike the Hardestys who experience the suspension of time in its inverse form – through the luxury of 'free time'. Similarly, the 'car graveyard' which Kirk discovers on the property signifies the stagnation and immobility that befell the populations of the rural South, entrapped in the dead end of economic decline. [40] The image also gestures towards a certain resentment: by violently arresting the mobility of naïve outsiders such as the Hardestys, Leatherface and his family enact a form of revenge, imposing their own immobilised condition onto those visiting populations. The graveyard of rusting cars in *Chain Saw* is thus 'a monument to the fixity and arrested development' of post-industrial rural Texas, just as the Packard Automotive Plant in *It Follows* is a monument to Detroit's urban decay.[41] Both films are ultimately, therefore, a 'statement about the dead end of American experience', a pessimistic vision of encroaching and perpetual precarity.[42]

It Follows clearly intertwines the geography of precarity with the body, as the film's characters are frequently depicted *passing across* spatial borders whilst attempting to expel their corporeal burden. Significantly, as Jay and her friends attempt to track down Hugh to discover more about the curse, Mitchell delineates the 'zones of security and sacrifice' perceptible in Detroit's landscape.[43] As they leave the boundary of the suburb and drive into the city, the camera lingers on images of deindustrialisation, urban abandonment, and erosion. The group pass the rusting remnants of Detroit's once gleaming past as the Motor City —'the centre of America's industrial heartland'.[44] The abandoned factories and dilapidated houses with boarded-up windows confront the suburbanites with the proximate threat of the city, 'and all it had come to represent: unplanned obsolescence, crime, and, of course, unchecked blackness'.[45] This journey into the city is in fact one of the few scenes in the film in which the black population of Detroit is visible. It is revealed that Hugh was merely squatting in a derelict abandoned house, presumably with the hopes of passing on the curse anonymously to enable a 'return to his extraordinarily privileged life in the opulent outer suburbs'.[46] This further highlights the film's depiction of the discarded inner city as a 'sacrifice zone' excessively exposed to risk, against which the illusion of (predominantly white) suburban security is maintained.[47] Mitchell subtly reinforces this notion later on in the film: after Jay's friend Paul willingly takes on the curse to alleviate her burden, he is shown driving into the city, passing two women implied to be sex workers. While Mitchell does not reveal the outcome of this interaction, the scene tacitly suggests that Paul is contemplating passing his new vulnerable condition onto those he deems sexually accessible and socio-economically vulnerable, thus representing to him an 'easy'

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[40] Murphy, p. 172.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Sharrett, p. 318.

[43] Kelly, p. 242.

[44] Katherine Lizza, 'It Follows and the Uncertainties of the Middle Class', in *Dark Forces at Work: Essays on Social Dynamics and Cinematic Horrors*, ed. by Cynthia J. Miller and A. Bowdoin Van Riper (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), p. 294.

[45] Binelli.

[46] Kelly, p. 239.

[47] Steve Lerner, *Sacrifice Zones: The Front Lines of Toxic Chemical Exposure in the United States* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010), p. 7.

escape from his peril. This moment articulates the conditions of capitalism in which the restoration of 'the fantasy of invulnerability requires classes of disposable persons to take on the burden of precarious life'.[48] As the characters of *It Follows* transgress the spatial borders which segregate the suburbs and the city, Mitchell stages a confrontation 'between sacred and disposable populations',[49] reproducing the horror of capitalist precarity in which 'certain lives are deemed worth living, protecting, and grieving and others not'.[50] The mechanism of bodily exchange upon which the film's plot is predicated enacts the destructive effects of neoliberal capitalism upon those most harmed by Detroit's industrial decay. Indeed, as David Church contends, 'because neoliberalism emphasizes individual responsibility instead of public interest, Detroit's most vulnerable citizens (not its outsourced corporations) shoulder the blame for the city's postindustrial decline'[51]. Essentially, the premise of sacrifice is essential to maintaining the apparent stability of supposedly sacred lives, populations, and spaces—'one way or another, someone must suffer'.[52] Yet, in *It Follows*, Mitchell systematically disrupts the notion of the suburbs as a sacred space, as the threat is never *truly* transferred, the deferred crisis always threatening to return and demand repayment and shatter the fantasy of invulnerability.

Significantly, the fear of 'urban contamination', in which the same forces of precarity which doomed the city begin to infect the suburbs, is epitomised within the film by the 8 Mile Road.[53] The road which 'famously demarcates racialized and economic segregation in Detroit' is employed in *It Follows* to highlight the solidification of geographic divisions as a barrier against vulnerability.[54] As Jay's friend Yara explains: 'When I was a little girl, my parents wouldn't allow me to go South of 8 Mile. And I didn't even know what that meant until I got a little older, and I started realising that that's where the city started and the suburbs ended'.[55] This subtle moment establishes the myth of suburban invulnerability; the suburbs as a utopian safe space formed in opposition to the city's danger. Yet, Mitchell unsettles this myth, depicting Jay's home and suburb as an entropic site of dissolution. *It Follows* presents the force of deterioration which seems to be drawing the residential peripheries back into Detroit's ruined urban centre, in a kind of retributive reversal of the 'white flight' which accelerated the city's decline. The opening shot of the film initially situates the encroaching threat of the monster within a pristine, clearly affluent suburban neighbourhood, before relocating to the suburbs where Jay and her friends reside which is marked, by contrast, with a comparative degree of disorder. Roaming over the cracks in the pavement, the camera fixates upon detritus, the litter and cigarettes which lie in the streets, while Jay's house also exhibits evidence of disorder and structural deterioration. As the film once more relocates to the inner city to unveil its horrific premise, *It Follows* maps a journey of increasing precarity, moving steadily inwards, inching closer to the epicentre of economic crisis.

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[48] Kelly, p. 241.

[49] Ibid., p. 238.

[50] Butler, p. 111.

[51] Church, p. 206.

[52] Bradway, p. 128.

[53] Kelly, p. 242.

[54] Bradway, p. 130.

[55] *It Follows*.

Importantly, the endings of both *It Follows* and *Chain Saw* refuse to re-establish or smooth over the conditions of precarity, and instead reinforce the fears which emanate from their respective sites of economic vulnerability. In the case of *It Follows*, the final shot is one of profound uncertainty and paranoia, as it remains unclear whether the group's plan to destroy the entity is successful. As the foreground of the frame displays Jay and Paul walking along the suburban streets hand in hand, a figure walks slowly behind the couple. The couple have returned to the suburbs, but no sense of safety has been restored. Similarly, *Chain Saw*'s ending 'recuperates little or nothing […] the chainsaw maniac remains free, his tool still active, raging in psychotic frustration'.[56] Indeed, although Sally—the sole survivor—manages to escape in a passing truck, the mechanical whirrs of Leatherface's weapon overwhelm the final shot of *Chain Saw*. Sally has regained the means of mobility, whilst Leatherface's movement is compromised by his injured leg, desperately limping after the fleeing truck. However, the concluding image of the chainsaw thrashing against the desolate rural landscape as the sun rises is one of dread. It remains the film's resounding, haunting impression, a reminder of the threat lurking in the socio-economically desiccated peripheries of the American landscape.

These final shots gesture towards a kind of broader, imaginative dead end which haunts both films: the 'dead end' of what Mark Fisher terms 'capitalist realism', wherein capitalism has 'seamlessly occupied the horizons of the thinkable' that therefore 'it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it'.[57] This sense of imaginative impotence, the occlusion of alternative possibilities constitutes the narrative impasse of both *It Follows* and *Chain Saw*, as their protagonists continue, bloodied and bruised, unable to escape the bind of precarity which perpetually pursues them. The figure looming behind Jay, and Leatherface's raging chainsaw, respectively dispel the possibility of salvation, and the vulnerable bodies which have been relentlessly imperilled throughout both films are replaced by a disturbing vision of capitalism's *invulnerability*, which seems to continue undeterred, reproducing precarity without itself being rendered precarious. In neither film is the originating horror of precarity stabilised; rather, Mitchell and Hooper extend this threat onto populations who naively perceive themselves as immune from it. Both directors produce narratives in which, as Butler writes of precarity's certitude, 'there are no invulnerable bodies', and their endings leave us only with defunct dreams and dead ends.[58]

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[56] Wood, p. 61.

[57] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), pp. 2, 8.

[58] Butler, p. 40.

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Automobility in the Age of Apocalypse: *On the Beach*, Nuclear Nostalgia, and Atomic (Im)Mobilities

Christopher O'Hara

In the 1966 animated short film *What on Earth!,* viewers are presented with a news-reel styled broadcast—ostensibly from the 'National Film Board of Mars'—detailing Martians' first glimpses of alien life on Earth.[1] As a car enters from the right, the narrator announces: 'And then, the big news: there *is* life on Earth!' The 'cameras on our orbiting spaceship' then follow these Earthlings through their daily rituals: 'at dinner' (fuelling with petrol), taking 'shelter for the night' (parking in a garage), and 'browsing in curiously designed libraries' (driving through a region inundated with billboards). Yet this colourful, comedic, slightly surreal animation takes a sinister turn towards its end as we glimpse the human occupants of the vehicle for the first time. As a dog and several children leave the vehicle, the narrator says:

> It seems odd that such a highly developed civilisation has not yet found a way to combat parasites. These pesky little creatures build huge hives or nests which often block or slow down the orderly progress of the Earthling, however, the Earthling seems to have this matter in hand. The eradication of these pests is obviously a top priority job for the working class.

The image of the human as parasite, the city's buildings as hives/nests, and of the car as the dominant species which will become the killer of humanity seems to presage our very modern conundrum: humanity's imminently doomed future. Indeed, it seems now in the twenty-first century that our obsession with mobility has, quite literally, turned the carbon dioxide we produce into the pesticide that will kill us. While *What on Earth!* is decidedly *not* an apocalyptic narrative, it carries an apocalyptic weight, as human 'eradication' seems to be the cars' 'top priority.' This film—a piece of odd ephemera from 1966—connects us today, as we recognise our impact on our environment, with an older tradition of ecologically-informed, apocalyptic narrative built on the tension between movement and stasis.

Apocalyptic narratives in the films of the immediate post-war era seem to fall into two general categories: the hyper-mobile and the hyper-still. The former category is the fodder of high-octane action films and pulp fiction which rely on the mobility of people and goods to generate their conflicts. Anindita Banerjee gestures towards this when she describes a significant proportion of contemporary science fiction as 'little more than technologically up-cycled frontier fantasies whose templates were laid out in nineteenth century: survival myths featuring larger-than-life individuals in post-apocalyptic environments [...] from endless generations of star wars and starships to the eternal quest

[1] *What on Earth!*, dir. by Kaj Pindal and Les Drew (National Film Board of Canada, 1966).

for water and gas in the deserts of the *Mad Max* franchise.'[2] The invocation of *Mad Max* here seems very telling of the ways in which we conceptualise the apocalypse: humans fight bitterly to the end, using the last of our precious resources to extend a rapidly dwindling timescale until death. Characters, in this first category, move from place to place rapidly, trying to find the remnants of some decaying past, whatever it might be. The second category, though, opposes the mobility of the first by relying on stillness instead of hyper-mobility. In this type of apocalyptic narrative, people wait, they go about their lives patiently —if unhappily—with some dignity until the end. The apocalypse is slow, and changes are gradual: there is a storm in the distance, and it *will* make landfall, but not *yet.* This is the static apocalypse. Unlike, say, *Mad Max,* these stories are discreet, minute, intimate.

This paper argues that these two categories of apocalypse—the hyper-mobile and hyper-still—coalesce in nuclear fictions to tease out the paradoxically technological nature of the apocalypse. What we find in the time of late capitalism—the period of decline (and, eventually, despair) immediately following the period of mass-abundance which characterised the post-war West[3]—is a totalising scarcity. This scarcity is caused by the hyper-mobilised forces which usher us into late modernity while the technologies of mobility themselves provide some small, largely static, comfort in the face of impending doom. By attending to automobiles, we can extrapolate the role that the car plays in comforting us and cocooning us, physically and psychologically, from the danger of the apocalypse. Further, by looking at narratives which stress the impermanence of the human species, we can come to understand an apocalyptic shift *away* from the sanctity of human life and *towards* the sanctity of the durable goods humanity has created, undermining notions of futurity and replacing it with capitalist nostalgia.

First, I must make a brief point regarding what, precisely, I mean when I talk about hyper-mobilised forces. The nuclear age coincides neatly with an era of twentieth century geological history broadly called the Great Acceleration, in which 'the curves for countless parameters went from linear to exponential growth over the course of the 1950s', stemming largely from 'the rapid increase in energy consumption as well as mass motorization after the war.'[4] It would seem that the consumer society of the global North spearheaded the Great Acceleration with its emphasis on motorisation, disposable commodities, and over-production: what Andreas Malm has persuasively named the 'Capitalocene.'[5] Yet this era is likewise punctuated by atomic blasts and the 'spread of artificial radionuclides from surface A-bomb explosions',[6] from which it has been suggested that the specific moment marking the beginning of the Anthropocene might be '05:29:21

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[2] Anindita Banerjee, 'Fiction', in *Anthropocene Unseen: A Lexicon*, ed. by Cymene Howe and Anand Pandian (Santa Barbara: Punctum, 2020), 185-189 (p. 186).

[3] This definition, while my own, owes a great debt to both Jürgen Habermas, particularly his essay 'What Does a Crisis Mean Today? Legitimation Problems in Late Capitalism' which, among other things, outlines three crises (ecological, anthropological, and international) endemic to late capitalism; as well as Murray Bookchin's *Post-Scarcity Anarchism,* which both historicises late capitalism (although he does not use the word, the sentiment is remarkably similar) as a product of the post-war west and explores the peculiarities of capitalist alienation in a society of abundance.

[4] Helmuth Trischler and Fabienne Will, 'Technosphere, Technocene, and the History of Technology', *Icon*, 23 (2017), 1–17 (p.4).

[5] Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016), p.391.

[6] Jan Zalasiewicz et al., 'When Did the Anthropocene Begin? A Mid-Twentieth Century Boundary Level Is Stratigraphically Optimal', *Quaternary International*, 383 (2015), 196–203 (p.199).

Mountain War Time (± 2 s) July 16, 1945', that is, the precise time of the first atomic blast on record.[7] Indeed, as Joseph Masco persuasively argues, natural disasters, like Hurricane Katrina, are 'only understandable to America's political leadership, and many of its citizens, in terms of nuclear catastrophe', implying a foregrounding of nuclearity in public psychology and government action which blurs the line between climate change and nuclear war, replacing one mobile force (Co2) with another (radiation).[8] As such, what we call the 'Anthropocene'—a geological survey of human impacts on *global* environments—is characterised both by fossil fuel emissions rapidly changing the climate *and* atomic radiation fundamentally changing the background radiation and elemental makeup of the Earth. This time, then, is an era of pervasive mobility: the mass movement of people at unprecedented levels—from rural to urban settings, locally with the aid of automobiles, and internationally through a range of technologies—which contribute to carbon emissions; the movement of goods, capital, and the advent of 'globalisation' and cheap consumer goods; *and* the movement of tiny, almost imperceptible radioactive particles, which contaminate the environment on a global scale. (Indeed, one of the primary reasons for the 1963 'Test Ban Treaty' was to 'put an end to the contamination of man's environment by radioactive substances.')[9] It seems, then, that the anthropogenic apocalypse will likely be the result of hyper-mobility, in all of its forms—individual, capitalist, atomic. Yet the effects of that apocalypse will be hyper-stasis.

Nevil Shute's 1957 novel *On the Beach* is an apocalyptic novel in which the tension between mobility and stasis is brought to the fore. It follows the daily lives of its five central characters—Lieutenant-Commander Peter Holmes, his wife Mary, Captain Dwight Lionel Towers, Moira Davidson, and John Osborne—as they await a cloud of radiation that will wipe out Melbourne, Australia, the last major city on Earth still unaffected by radiation sickness, as a cloud of radioactive dust moves further and further south. We are told that the war which precedes the events of the novel was 'short, bewildering [...] the war of which no history had been written or ever would be written now, that had flared all round the northern hemisphere and had died away with the last seismic record of explosion on the thirty-seventh day.' This brief history is immediately followed with an indication of the new, post-war scarcity as Peter Holmes, who had been at sea during the war, returns 'to Falmouth to his Mary and his Morris Minor car. The car had three gallons in the tank; he used that unheeding, and another five that he bought at a pump, before it dawned upon Australians that all oil came from the northern hemisphere.' As oil and petrol are scarce, the people of Melbourne adopt different systems of transport: bicycles become prevalent, the electric tram becomes popular, horses as a means of transport return to the modern world, and cars have their engines removed and are pulled by oxen.[10] These forms of transport suggest that, in some capacity, mass mobility, even on a small scale, is a necessary component of twenty-first century capitalism as these people *must* move, even when the modern conveniences of late capitalism are taken away. As such, *On the Beach* presents an apocalyptic narrative in which the hyper-mobile and the hyper-still collide, as the people find new ways to move, but more slowly, for shorter distances, and with great difficulty.

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[7] Zalasiewicz et al., p.200.

[8] Joseph Masco, 'Bad Weather: On Planetary Crisis', *Social Studies of Science*, 40.1 (2010), 7–40 (p.27).

[9] 'Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water Between the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union', 1963, National Archive of the United States, p.1.

[10] Nevil Shute, *On the Beach* (London: Heinemann, 1957), pp. 3-6.

This impression is reinforced visually in the novel's film adaptation. In the 1959 Stanley Kramer (but Shute-advised and Melbourne-filmed) film of the same name, we see a partially destroyed car early in the film's running time.[11] A car—the reasonably new Holden FJ—appears in its disuse *before* any character mentions the fuel shortage, indicating, subtly, the public movement away from automobiles in a time of scarcity. Indeed, the car—the symbol of convenience and mobility—becomes an inconvenience, and an impediment to public mobility as we see a man push the door out of the pedestrian path.[12] The camera then pans left and pulls out to show the busy street of the metropolis filled with bicycles, horses, and an electric tram.[13] But there are two elements of the filmic portrayal of *On the Beach* that stand out in particular: the abundance of non-petrol vehicles, and the remaining presence of disused petrol-using motor cars.

The presence of non-petrol transportation is easily explained by the scarcity caused by the apocalypse. However, the remaining presence of these now-useless machines is an altogether more complex structure of interwoven ideologies of consumerism and identity. Shute, in *On the Beach,* considers the ways in which mid-century identity is inextricably linked to one's status as consumer, and the state of consumer-identity in times of scarcity. Indeed, when Peter sees the bullock pulling the car with its engine and windscreen removed, he thinks about doing the same to his Morris Minor but 'it would break his heart to do so' because this was 'the first car he had ever owned, and he had courted Mary in it.'[14] Likewise, Commander Towers dreams of a red Oldsmobile which fades from his memory, Moira's parents mention her previous lover's Austin-Healey, John Osborne buys a Ferrari, despite not having any petrol, and even Moira measures time itself in terms of trinkets, guessing that she must have had a pogo stick when she was seven because 'it came after the tricycle, after the scooter, and before the bicycle.'[15] As Shute's biographer Julian Smith writes, '*On the Beach* envisions a world destroyed by gadgets, but this world still loves the gadgets which have destroyed and will outlast their makers.'[16] Further, Smith reduces this relationship between man and gadget to a simple admission of humanity's inescapable love for material goods, writing that 'Shute is not criticizing; he is only saying that man seems unable to reject the creations of his machine culture.'[17] Yet the man-machine relationship in the apocalypse of *On the Beach* is far more complex than Smith allows, as it represents the intersection between nostalgia and futurity, abundance and scarcity.

Drawing out this paradigm in slightly sharper relief is a conversation between Commander Towers and Moira Davidson about Towers' socks which need mending. Moira offers to mend his socks, but he declines, saying:

> "It's time I got more, anyway. These are just about done."

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[11] *On the Beach*, dir. by Stanley Kramer (Kino Lorber, 1959). Because of the difficulty of obtaining rights to reproduce stills from the film, each following citation from the film will include a timestamp which will indicate the scenes I mention, should a reader wish to see the scene themselves. The film is also widely available online and through libraries.

[12] Ibid., 9:33.

[13] Ibid., 9:38.

[14] Shute, pp. 3-4.

[15] Ibid., p.135.

[16] Julian Smith, *Nevil Shute* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), p. 127.

[17] Ibid., p. 128.

> "*Can* you get more socks?" She asked. "Daddy can't. He says they're going off the market, with a lot of other things. He can't get any new handkerchiefs, either."
> Peter said, "That's right. I couldn't get socks to fit me, the last time I tried. The ones I got were about two inches too long."
> Moira pressed the point. "Have you tried to buy any more recently?"
> "Well—no. The last lot I bought was some time back in the winter."[18]

It might be that Towers, being American—not Australian—genuinely fails to realise the scarcity that impacts Melbourne at the time, but this belies the psychological distancing he is trying to perform. What Towers illustrates here is an attempt to disguise the present state of scarcity through an insistence on the permanence of past systems of disposable commodification. In failing to recognise the present for what it really is—the end—and the future that that present presages/predicts (that is, one without humanity), he imposes a misguided nostalgic notion of the abundance of the previous world onto the present. As Dipesh Chakrabarty writes in 'The Climate of History: Four Theses':

> The discipline of history exists on the assumption that our past, present, and future are connected by a certain continuity of human experience. We normally envisage the future with the help of the same faculty that allows us to picture the past.[19]

As such, Towers' nostalgia—the way he looks at the past, where he imagines his home and his family still alive—is a projection of an idealised future in which humanity continues to believe. Towers is misplacing time, removing it from its temporal shackles and insisting on a 'continuity of human experience.' This normalises an unbearable future by making a certainty *feel* unlikely and thus 'inuring us to it,' to borrow a phrase from Susan Sontag.[20] The presence of and fascination with cars proposes the automobile as a symbol of the past, and of who these characters could be in the past: it is a way for the characters in a bleak present to conjure a more pleasant past (that is, one in which the future can still be imagined). It is a temporal stasis, where time must be stilled and we can remain in this space of relative fixity. Yet time is always mobile, slowly moving them towards certain death. Fred Erisman suggests that this is simply Shute's interest in 'the little man' who will 'go on about their business, with matter-of-fact gallantry, until the end.'[21] Likewise, Carlton W. Berenda writes that 'the triumph of man lies in his complete realization that whatever he does is ultimately without meaning and that he finds his real significance in his devotion to mythic symbols. He creatively gives meaning to his trivial world by his dedication to such symbols.'[22] The cars in the film thus continue to wield an immense power, producing a tangible effect on the lives of its characters. They are symbols which psychologically protect the characters from fully recognising the annihilation of their future, allowing them, in some

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[18] Shute, p. 121.

[19] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry*, 35.2 (2009), 197–222 (p. 197).

[20] Susan Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster', in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), pp. 209–25 (p. 225).

[21] Fred Erisman, 'Nevil Shute and the Closed Frontier', *Western American Literature*, 21.3 (1986), 207–17 (pp. 215-217).

[22] Carlton W. Berenda, 'The Meaning of Man in Nevil Shute's *On The Beach*', *Books Abroad*, 34.3 (1960), 232–33 (p. 233).

sense, to move out of and beyond time as the symbols metonymically stand-in for the past, which, as Chakrabarty notes above, helps us 'envisage the future.'

We might extend this reading and suggest, with Gijs Mom, that the car functions as a type of 'cocoon' which protects the motorist from the outside world, becoming a 'multisensorial 'room on wheels,' which [is] dominated by vision.'[23] Mom extrapolates that the car-as-cocoon developed after the car-as-capsule, that is, automotive design shifted from the open-tourer style, to an enclosed style, and then eventually to the cocoon which is, essentially, an enclosed car built with comfort in mind. The car as cocoon—with its sturdy walls and windows, suspension systems, power steering, radios, and (eventually) air conditioning—not only mediates passengers' experiences with the outside world, but it mitigates them; the car as cocoon creates a clear distinction between self and other, which becomes almost entirely dependent on visuality whereby the motorist's perception is artificially suspended by the line-of-sight limitations imposed by the car's body. Yet this visuality is reciprocal. While Mom largely focuses on perception from within the vehicle, the other—who is outside of the vehicle—perceives the automobile and the passengers as one unit, as likewise other. As such, cocooning takes on a psychological as well as physical significance. The car has always been a kind of mythic symbol, but when the car becomes a cocoon, it serves not only to symbolise mobility and convenience, but also that which it cocoons. The car-as-cocoon seems to function in some sense as social armour, or as a social façade: it comes to symbolise the passenger and their desire to be perceived in one way or another.

John Osborne, the stereotypically boring scientist of *On the Beach*, brings the idea of the automobile as a social cocoon into focus with a custom racing Ferrari. The Ferrari is, at first, a past dream pulled into the present; Osborne says that motorcar racing is 'what I've always wanted to do, but there's never been any money.'[24] Yet the pleasure of actually racing the machine, of fully realizing his dedication to the symbol, temporarily eludes him as a result of petrol scarcity, which he avoids by purchasing a car which uses a special ether-alcohol mixture. Nevertheless, the car tangibly changes Osborne's life. We are told that 'he was not very well accustomed to taking personal risks, to endangering his life, and his life had been the poorer for it [...] The Ferrari altered that. Each time he drove it, it excited him.'[25] And, as he crashes, running off the road and spinning out, he finds that he is not afraid of death, but rather 'deeply ashamed that he had treated his car so'—mythologising and deifying the vehicle as above his own life.[26] Of course, Osborne is not the only man—and it *is,* except for one, *only men*—in the novel to consider the vehicle above human life. When petrol finally begins to leak out of people's stockpiles, the Australian Grand Prix is held, but the venue is moved from Albert Park to a private track in Tooradin because:

> Nobody worried very much about the prospect of a car spinning off the course and killing a few spectators, or the prospect of permission to use the park for racing in future years being withheld. It seemed unlikely, however, that there would be sufficient marshals ever to get the crowds off the road and away from the path of oncoming cars, and, unusual though the times might be, few of the drivers were

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[23] Gijs Mom, *Atlantic Automobilism: The Emergence and Persistence of the Car, 1895-1940*, Explorations in Mobility, 1 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), p. 375.

[24] Shute, p. 147.

[25] Ibid., p. 161.

[26] Ibid.

> prepared to drive straight into a crowd of onlookers at a hundred and twenty miles an hour. Racing motor cars are frail at those speeds, and a collision even with one person would put the car out of the race.[27]

With the end so close in sight—at this point in the novel, we are told that it will be a month—human life loses its sanctity, becoming an inconvenience to the motor race. Indeed, human life loses value except in its potential to 'put the car out of the race', symbolising a cultural shift away from concerns with futurity. That is, the recognition of a future without humanity catalyses an alteration to how humans think about themselves in relation to their material culture: they are no longer the dominant force, ruling over their surroundings. Rather, their objects, machines, and gadgets rule over them. These people will, like us in the twenty-first century surrounded by plastic, be outlived by their industrial creations. Instead of a world in which consumer goods are abundant, and, as such, disposable, the only abundance of this new world is humanity, and so humanity itself becomes disposable. After the first qualifying race, of which only seven of the nineteen cars finish, Peter mentions that:

> "They're certainly racing to win …"
> "Well, of course," said the scientist. "It's racing as it ought to be. If you buy it, you've got nothing to lose."
> "Except to smash up the Ferrari."
> John Osborne nodded. "I'd be very sorry to do that."[28]

It seems, then, that the commodities have taken on a permanence that the consumer cannot hope to achieve. The continuity of human history is replaced by the continuity of material culture. Instead of the technological obsolescence which typifies modernity, we now enter the era of human obsolescence which is marked by a deep nostalgia for materiality.[29] As Alfredo González-Ruibal writes on material nostalgia:

> Material nostalgia is a demand for continuity. We need continuity amid endless threats of discontinuity […]. The experience of historical fragmentation and alienation from history echoes a similar fragmentation and alienation in our identities. Many of us can no longer see ourselves in the time of our grandparents and even in our own childhoods. The sense of loss is not just related to a vanished past, but to the broken links between present and past, which is also a traumatic rupture in our biographies.[30]

The durable goods of capitalist production—those symbolic gods which rule our material worlds—become the force of continuity when humanity's understanding of itself becomes discontinuous. Osborne's car will outlast him, Peter and Mary's house will still stand when there is nobody to inhabit it, and Moira's pogo stick will last until it rusts into dust. Yet, in the apocalyptic world, material nostalgia does not simply reflect a fragmentation of the linkage between our past and present, but also the fragmentation of a future which will not

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[27] Shute, pp. 232-233.

[28] Ibid., pp. 235-236.

[29] c. Mark Goble, 'Obsolescence', in *A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism,* ed. by Eric Hayot and Rebecca L. Walkowitz (New York: Columbia University Press 2016), pp. 146-168.

[30] Alfredo González-Ruibal, 'What Remains? On Material Nostalgia', in *After Discourse: Things, Affects, Ethics*, ed. by Bjørnar J. Olsen and others (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 187–203 (p. 198).

come to be. To have material nostalgia is to propose one's position in a chain of temporality, to say 'I am here, in this time, and it has come after and before other times.' But material nostalgia in an apocalypse holds onto the past very tightly. It alters the chain of events and suggests that 'I am not here, in this time, *but I am then*, in that time: that time when we had a future.' Moira, who, we should remember, measures time in terms of her toys and trinkets, refuses this new schema of automotive fetishism that seems to have overtaken the men of the end-times, saying, "'They *can't* go on. It's like the Roman gladiators, or something.'"[31] But Osborne provides a key to understanding this new blood-sport, as he thinks that dying in this race would be preferable to 'vomiting to death in a sick misery in less than a month's time. Better to drive like hell and go out doing what he wanted to.'[32]

And Osborne eventually *do*es die on the altar of his automotive god. As radiation sickness tears through Melbourne, he spends his final moments preparing the Ferrari for long-term storage—raising the car, draining the fluids, disconnecting the battery terminals —before putting on his driving helmet and goggles and sitting in the car for the last time. Shute writes:

> It was comfortable there, far more so than the club would be. The wheel beneath his hands was comforting, the three small dials grouped around the huge rev counter were familiar friends. This car had won him the race, that was the climax of his life. Why trouble to go further?
>
> He took the red carton from his pocket, took the tablets from the vial, and threw the carton on the ground beside him. No point in going on; this was the way he'd like to have it.
>
> He took the tablets in his mouth, and swallowed them with effort.[33]

Osborne's self-euthanising in the seat of his Ferrari deifies the vehicle one last time, as he prepares it for an existence without human life. The Ferrari becomes a temple of the past he wanted, and of the future that could be; Osborne becomes the sacrifice.

The film, however, portrays a slightly different end for Osborne. In the 1959 *On the Beach,* Osborne does not ready the Ferrari for storage but, rather, uses it as the agent of his demise. In a slow, ponderous scene, he seals the entrance to his garage with a tarp before sitting in the seat, turning on the engine, and letting the exhaust overtake him.[34] This ending perhaps positions the vehicle into a more reciprocal role than Shute's, as the gadget itself becomes fatal, paralleling the nuclear gadgets which have hurled humanity directly into apocalypse. As such, this scene proposes a vehicle which is all-consuming in its violence: not only does the Ferrari directly assist in Osborne's suicide, but without Osborne's preparations, the Ferrari itself will be destroyed in time, rusting before turning to dust. But this destruction is one final attempt to be comfortably cocooned at life's end. Fred Astaire's Osborne smiles—and his smile grows—as he revs the engine and the fumes build. Motoring, for Shute, and for Kramer, then, leads directly to pleasure, even under circumstances in which pleasure seems unconscionable. The motorcar, in a time of petrol scarcity and impending doom, becomes a symbol of a better past with a brighter future, and

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[31] Shute, p.236.

[32] Ibid., p. 237.

[33] Ibid., pp. 297-298.

[34] Kramer, 2:04:40-2:05:47.

the nostalgic pleasure of motoring—of the union between man and gadget—leads to a deified car which consumes everybody and everything.

The automobile, we have seen, is a dual symbol of futurity and nostalgia which is all-consuming and totalising in its cocooning psychological force. On the one hand, the car moves us into the hyper-mobile future, while, on the other hand, it cocoons us in a psychological stasis built from an ahistorical nostalgic yearning for a time in which the future seemed guaranteed. To move this argument into the present, however, into the twenty-first century, is crucial. Our twenty-first century deified technology—with all-consuming symbolic power—is not simply the car: it is the car, the plane, the train, the bicycle, the ship; it is the plastic in our packaging, in our oceans, in our bodies; it is the circulating energy on which modernity is built. In short, our all-consuming technologies are those which both move and move us: the technologies that will kill us are those which circulate—which move goods, people, pollutants, radioactive fallout—despite or in spite of us, but which also comfort us, cocoon us, make us feel safe, mobile, productive, clean, and durable. Thus, thinking through *our* current cultural fears—militaristic, pandemic, climatic and beyond—in relation to nuclear annihilation, and its relationship to mobility and stasis, becomes increasingly necessary as we move into new unmapped territories of globalisation and techno-apocalyptic thinking.

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Jazzy Ontology: Representations of Fractured and Racialised Identity in *Othello* and *All Night Long*

Thomas Langham

Through an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* (1603), Basil Dearden's *All Night Long* (1962) reconfigures the play's constructions of self to approach a conversation about racial identity in diasporic communities and how appropriation modifies and threatens selfhood.[1] In *Othello*, Shakespeare conceives the self as something created and modified by the Other through interpersonal exchange. He stretches and explores to its limits such a construction of self, showing how it tends towards tragedy and how, through a manipulation of the eye and what it perceives, the singular self can fracture into multiple. For Dearden, jazz presents itself as a suitable body of work to probe and engage with this theme in several ways. Jazz is a cultural product of black diaspora which functions, in part, to nurture black identity and community in the face of racial delegitimisation by dominant white populations. That is to say that jazz performance exists both as a mode of creation and interpersonal exchange. Furthermore, its storied appropriation by white popular culture presents a second degree of engagement with identity, and one that mirrors closely the threat of fracture that Shakespeare explores. Dearden approaches jazz as an arena in which to engage with Shakespeare's *Othello* whose theme of identity he transposes into an exploration of racial identity and appropriation in America in the mid-twentieth century. He engages with Shakespeare's conception of the self in *Othello* as an interpersonal product subject to fracture, while altering the play's ending in order to paint a vision of the self which might be able better to resist those outside forces that threaten its existence. Therefore, Dearden adapts Shakespeare to show the integrity of jazz as a black cultural product in the face of its white appropriation.

In *Interpersonal Idiom* (2008), Nancy Selleck discusses notions of the self in early modern culture. She argues that, in the absence of 'a vocabulary for abstract, subjective, autonomous selfhood—terms such as individual, self, character, and identity', the self is contextualised and finds its source in the other.[2] Her epigraph quotes Shakespeare's Cressida: 'I have a kind of self resides with you'.[3] Cressida is not just acknowledging that the other can perceive her differently to the way she understands herself, but she takes ownership ('I have') of a self that is informed by and exists within the other. Selleck positions herself in relation to Stephen Greenblatt, who argues for a model of self-fashioning that is always 'achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile'.[4] Thus, Greenblatt constructs a notion of the early modern self that demands a foil,

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[1] *All Night Long*, dir. by Basil Dearden (Rank Organisation, 1962).

[2] Nancy Selleck, *Interpersonal Idiom in Shakespeare, Donne, and Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 3, 2.

[3] Ibid., p. 1.

[4] Ibid., p. 2.

'the alienated other', to understand itself.[5] But Selleck thinks this model limiting and aims to move beyond such a dichotomy to reach an understanding of the other and the self as interchangeable. She argues that the other can 'penetrate and alter the self' and that the other's 'perspective can shape and constitute the self'.[6] And so, whereas contemporary notions of self might understand identity to be a self-reflective process dependent on understanding one's interiority, in the early modern era, the self is understood as existing in exchange. Shakespeare explores such a construction of self through *Othello*, breaking down and showing the process itself.

Shakespeare foregrounds discussion about self in Othello, allowing Iago to lead the conversation. We see Shakespeare take the theme on in the first scene of the play, when Iago delivers a monologue on masters and followers. In approaching this subject through such terms, Iago engages with a model of interpersonal selfhood whereby each self is identified by a relationship to an other.[7] Iago suggests that his self, the 'follower' who is perceived as such by the 'master', presents a 'visage of duty' (1.1.7) and thus he does not define his selfhood in isolation but acknowledges the power of the other's perception of him and his own power in influencing that perception. In this way, he emphasises the agency he has over his self. Therefore, when he cryptically tells Roderigo, 'Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago' (1.1.56), he understands the gravity of his social context in informing his self. Another version of the line could read, 'If I were the master, I would not be the follower'. The use of proper names in the original line makes it clear that these particular categories of self—master and follower—are in this moment inseparable from the subjects they define. And further, by abstractly blurring the lines of self, Iago presents the interdependence of two selves yoked in such a fashion. That is to say that both Iago and Othello are formed through exchange with each other.

Greenblatt's model of the early modern self could be applied to Iago's line, if we read into the abstraction of identity Shakespeare allows Roderigo and Iago to take part in by calling Othello 'The Moor'. Kim F. Hall has commented on this habitual abstraction, suggesting that, 'rather than trying to pin down Othello to a specific geographic location, Shakespeare took advantage of the rich and at time disturbing network of allusions associated with "Moor"'.[8] However, even if Othello is considered an abstract other, or Other, against which to define white European Christianity, Iago locates the site of exchange at which the self is formed. That is to say that interpolation does not happen in just one direction, but that Iago informs Othello's self just as the opposite can be said to be true. If Othello is othered by Iago, then Iago is othered in turn. This stance holds more weight if we remember that Othello is abstract neither to the characters within their reality nor to the audience watching, who have nevertheless been given the identity of the moor through the name of the play. Therefore, Shakespeare constructs a notion of self that reads more similarly to the interpersonal model suggested by Selleck. In his study, *The Improbability of Othello* (2010), Joel B. Altman offers a reading of Iago's line, 'I am not what I am' (1.1.64) which would seem to concur with Selleck's model. Arguing that the phrase 'what I am' 'refers to that aspect of self that is historical, stabilised, identifiable, and hence

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[5] Selleck, p. 2.

[6] Ibid.

[7] William Shakespeare, *Othello* ed. by E.A.J Honigmann and Ayanna Thompson, 2nd edn. (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), 1.1.43-44. Subsequent references are to this edition and are provided in the text.

[8] Kim F. Hall, 'Othello and the Problem of Blackness' in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works, Volume 1*, ed. by Richard Dutton and Jean E. Howard (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 357–374 (p. 360).

probable', while 'I am not' 'refers to that aspect of self in flux, *in potentia*, improbable insofar as it is not yet any of those things', Altman dismisses the notion that this line can simply be taken to mean 'I am not what I seem', for that seeming is crucial in defining 'what I am'.[9] When Shakespeare has Iago make this statement, he posits the mutability of the self. At the same time, with a foreboding self-awareness, he suggests that with such power to understand how he is perceived, he has great agency in mutating the selves of others.

Through Iago, then, Shakespeare exposes a self that is highly vulnerable to fracture through manipulation. We see this potentially unsettling multiplicity of the self when Othello stands over the sleeping Desdemona as he prepares for murder. In his line, 'If I quench thee, thou flaming minister' (5.2.8), Othello seems to refer to Desdemona, who he thinks has betrayed him. In this vein, 'quench' would seem to mean 'extinguish', effectively rendering the line a repeat of Othello's previous statement, 'put out the light!' (5.2.7). This would also make sense in the context of the other references to fire in this scene, such as 'flaming minister', 'Promethean heat' (5.2.12) and 'light relume' (5.2.13). Othello makes the argument that to kill the Desdemona he sees in front of him, he acts to preserve the 'monumental alabaster' (5.2.5) of the Desdemona he once perceived. To put out her light gives him agency to relume that light and reclaim the self that he married. Yet we might also read the 'thee' in Othello's line as a reference to himself in the third person. In this case, the word 'quench' would take its meaning, to satiate, and thus Othello would be implying that to engage with his desire for revenge is to restore his own light, his pride. Shakespeare repeatedly falls on this metaphor of consumption for revenge. A few pages later Othello says of Cassio, 'Had all his hairs been lives / My great revenge had stomach for them all' (5.2.73). This reading could also prompt a reinterpretation of the preceding line, 'Put out the light, and then put out the light!' (5.2.7), where one light refers to his revenge and the other to Desdemona.

This fracturing of Othello through the multiple valencies of the pronoun 'thee' is given greater weight when Desdemona awakens moments before her death and insists, 'A guiltless death I die' (5.2.121) and identifies her killer as 'Nobody' (5.2.124). Earlier, near the beginning of the play, Desdemona had claimed that she 'saw Othello's visage in his mind' (1.3.287) but here, in the anticipation of her murder, being deprived of her self–the very light by which Othello was able to recognise *his* self–she is not able to recognise her husband as such. Desdemona repeatedly utters 'O' in this scene, as if having reached the very limit of language, of articulating her self, but the exclamation also gives dimension to Desdemona's final, 'O, farewell!' (5.2.123). Here, it is as if Desdemona is trying to say Othello and yet can muster only a single syllable, the rest being obscured.

These terms clearly recall one of the central dichotomies of *Othello* which Dearden approaches in *All Night Long* to explore the construction of race identity in America. In the film, jazz is portrayed as a black cultural space under the threat of white siege. Yet its use also serves to activate and compliment explorations of the Other and the interpersonal both through the cultural history and significance of the form, as well as the practices and experience of the music in the present moment. Langston Hughes described jazz as the 'inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world… pain swallowed in a

[9] Joel B. Altman, *The Improbability of Othello Rhetorical Anthropology and Shakespearean Selfhood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 17.

smile'.[10] When Hughes references the 'Negro soul' here, he does not allude to an innate African-ness and thereby engage in an act of Othering that perceives race as more than socially constructed. The 'Negro soul' refers, rather, to an experience of shared struggle and adverse positionality that is activated through performance and bolsters racial validity, identity and community. However, while jazz has an extensive history within communities of the African diaspora, from where it originates, it has also become subject to delegitimisation by systematic appropriation by majority white culture as well as whitewashing.

This is first made clear through the adaptation of *Othello's* Cyprus, a cultural melting-pot in the early modern world, into a London back-alley warehouse. Paul Skrebels comments in his essay on *All Night Long* that, through its immediate transformation of setting, the first act of the play is missing from the film.[11] This is for the most part true, the significant action beginning in the locale that remains the setting throughout the adaptation. However, we are given a transition between settings during the opening credits that can be said to thematically replicate the movement from Venice to Cyprus in the play. Shakespeare often used geographic movement to interrogate and destabilise his characters and, 'in Othello, the geographic split seems to signify the movement from Christian civilisation to an unstable outpost'.[12] At the beginning of the play, we see Cyprus as a place pulled between the influence of Venice and the Ottomans. What is currently Christian has the potential to become non-Christian. Despite this threat being mitigated before the primary action of the play, Shakespeare still positions his characters in a locale in which there is greater opportunity for the Christian self to fracture. In *All Night Long*, the opening shots of the film show us Roderigo's equivalent, Rod, leaving his butlered townhouse. He drives from the wide-open spaces of wealthy central London, across the river, and to his warehouse in the narrow streets of a less wealthy locale. Therefore, Dearden activates a similar site of tension by positioning the film's locale as morally unstable in comparison to the homes of the wealthy, decidedly white London elite. He emphasises this fact with the clap of thunder as Rod arrives, signalling to the audience through this trope that this site is ominous. By extension, when Rod arrives at his club, the African American jazz double-bassist Charles Mingus is already there.

It is significant that it is Rod, rather than the black musician who already occupies the space, who should be the one who owns the club. In the *Black Atlantic* (1993), Paul Gilroy argues that 'while the black vernacular tradition undoubtedly drew upon performances, texts and styles from Africa, as a result of enslavement those performances, texts and styles were reshaped into new forms'.[13] Furthermore, 'by the time jazz had been transposed to the northern states of the US […] it had become virtually synonymous with miscegenation'.[14] Through such perceptions of jazz, along with its association with black rights, it became thought of by dominant white culture as morally questionable. In undermining its validity as an artform, while also taking ownership of it, the dominant

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[10] Langston Hughes, 'The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain', in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Angelyn Mitchell (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 55–59 (p. 59).

[11] Paul Skrebels, '"All Night Long": Jazzing Around with "Othello"', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, 36.2 (2008), 147–156 (p. 150).

[12] Ayanna Thompson, 'Introduction' in *Othello*, ed. by E.A.J Honigmann and Ayanna Thompson, 2nd edn. (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), pp. 1–114 (p. 22).

[13] Paul Gilroy, quoted in Paul Williams, *Paul Gilroy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), p. 88.

[14] Skrebels, p.152.

culture protects itself from supposed dilution. Therefore, Dearden presents a setting of moral ambiguity and at the fringes of acceptability; a locale that is white-owned but which signals toward a cultural product perceived as socially dangerous by white normative culture. Later, a white man responds to his wife disapproving of the warehouse: 'Haven't you heard honey. Jazz is noisy, you can't have an all-night session in Mayfair'. If Dearden had previously reminded us that jazz is of black origin, then this line can be taken to infer that black culture is disruptive to white culture (not necessarily from the perspective of the guest but by the social stigmas that inform him). Another guest comments, 'Wow. This is spook city'. His inflection implies he means 'spook' as in scary rather than 'spook' as in the racial slur, but the double meaning nevertheless contributes to the coding of this space as black. As such, it exists in a similar discursive space to Shakespeare's Cyprus. However, this black social space that is perceived as threatening, already under white ownership, is also under the threat of whitewashing. Aside from Rex (Othello), the party is almost entirely made up of white musicians. If in Shakespeare's text Iago functions to destabilise identity, then Dearden broadens his scope for the presentation of such a dynamic. He shows a setting of appropriation that has already been subject to a kind of identity theft and fracture. Therefore, when Johnny Cousin (Iago) is motivated toward challenging Rex's status as bandleader, he is emblematic of social forces and trends that are already in process.

Dearden adapts Iago into a figure emblematic of how dominant culture appropriates black identity. Similarly to Shakespeare's Iago, Dearden's Johnny Cousin is acutely aware of and concerned with the self. Johnny brings his own drum set to the party, despite Rod's telling him he could use his. The drum set is branded with his name, indicating early on a predilection to the presentation of his image. Skrebels compares Johnny Cousin to Paul Whiteman, 'the self-proclaimed king of jazz … a white man who sought to 'clean up' jazz by divorcing it from its black roots'.[15] This comparison is representative of wider trends in the history of jazz, '[a] white appropriation [that] extends the civilising project involving colonisation and economic exploitation'.[16] Johnny Cousin is drawn towards usurping Rex (literally 'king') and his position of acclaim within the jazz community of this film. Johnny's attempt to assert himself as a jazz authority goes as far as to his explicit identification with a minority group of 'white American jazz musicians'. Through trying to present himself as living with adverse positionality, it could be said that he attempts to position himself as identifying with the origins of the culture. Considering the status of jazz as a site of interpersonal exchange of shared adverse positionalities, in depicting himself as such he tries to justify his belonging within that culture. This becomes evidently untrue when one considers that Rex (with the brief exception of Charles Mingus) is the only black musician with a speaking role in the film. Even though Johnny's comment on white American jazz musicians is presented as a joke, other more earnest lines in the film such as, 'Walk out on me like all the others did', give context as to the reality of his perception as existing in a minority position. Dearden highlights this absurdity through the sheer predominance of white people in the film.

Furthermore, Johnny's privilege and attempts at appropriation are what enable his malicious agency in the film. Skrebels describes how Johnny 'uses Rod's expensive new recording equipment to secretly tape and re-edit separate conversations among himself, Cass, Delia and Benny into a single tape that he plays back to Rex as 'proof' of Delia's

[15] Skrebels, p.151.

[16] Ibid.

deceit'.[17] Therefore, the tools of manipulation are accessible only to those who can afford them. In comparison with Iago, it is apparent that Johnny's malicious intent and the enacting of his plan is considerably more improvisational. Whereas Iago preempts his plot by telling the audience how he plans to act, Johnny realises an opportunity for manipulation in the moment and takes it. For example, at 00:54:34, a panning zoom on Johnny's face shows the spark of inspiration immediately before he starts to record Cas's conversation with Benny (Bianca) so that he can later edit the tape. This relatively minor change in character, Johnny's inclination toward improvisation, mirrors the subject of the film's setting. Rob Wallace describes the source of the contemporary culture of improvisation as 'African American culture and the musical forms which would eventually be called jazz'.[18] Johnny's edited tape mirrors, and perhaps mocks the experiential exchange of selves inherent in the culture of jazz. His desire to install himself in the place of the black bandleader takes form through a weaponised mode of improvisation. Whereas the collective experience of group performance nurtures interpersonal identities, Johnny's manipulation of Rex through improvisational means produces a similar effect but with negative and fractious results. Johnny is presented as a force of interpolating fracture that is enabled by the privilege of his whiteness and through a practice of appropriation.

Having identified these disruptive forces in *All Night Long,* Dearden ends his film in a manner which provides resistance against such forces, revising both the play's ending and reimagining Shakespeare's presentation of self. As previously shown, in Shakespeare's text, the self is presented as mutable and vulnerable to fracture. Cynthia Marshall speaks to the 'so-called birth of subjectivity' by suggesting that narratives of self-shattering offered a return to 'the unstable and poorly defined idea of selfhood familiar from humoral psychology'.[19] Selfhood in Shakespeare's *Othello* is vulnerable to what Marshall describes as emotional contagion, an idea that resists 'the emergence of the modern autonomous self'.[20] Dearden's *All Night Long* engages with such a depiction of self, only to reject it in favour of something more fixed and resistant to collapse. Dearden alludes to this potential to fracture when he transposes Othello's seizure as Rex's headache following Johnny Cousin's drum performance. We are not told about the headache until later, but during the performance Rex is shown touching his temples in a semi-transparent shot laid over another shot of Johnny playing the drums. For Dearden, music is given the potential and power to inform and interpolate self. Johnny's drum literally occupies a space within Rex and lingers through the form of a headache. This moment, in presenting the potential for fracture and the split of Rex's self, is given more power through *All Night Long*'s nature as an adaptation. Dearden uses the expectation of fracture created by Shakespeare but speaks back to him when he refuses to fully engage with his plot to the end.

The largest change made to Shakespeare's plot is that Delia (Desdemona) is not killed, and thus Rex never commits suicide. Dearden does not entirely ignore the tragedy's murder-suicide; he goes as far as to show Rex strangling Delia and asking, 'What have you done to me?' As a result, at this moment, Dearden engages with such ideas of self that Shakespeare investigates, implicating a fracture of Rex's self as he perceives a fracture

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[17] Skrebels, p. 149.

[18] Rob Wallace, *Improvisation and the Making of American Literary Modernism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 2.

[19] Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2002), p.4.

[20] Marshall, p. 5.

between the Delia he married and the one falsely presented to him by Johnny. It is not long before this scene that Rod introduces Delia's performance by telling Rex of 'an aspect of her personality which you never suspected… I give you the new, the true, Delia Lane.' When Rex leaves Delia motionless on the bed, the audience is led to believe that the film is faithful to the play's plot, the machinations of Johnny Cousin's Iago fulfilled. Imagining for a moment that the film does end here, Dearden would seem to give validity to the racist associations of jazz with 'illicit sex'.[21] Skrebels recalls how jazz nightclubs 'were regarded as places where black men preyed on white women, and the facility with which the races mixed through the medium of jazz was seen to be "lowering the tone of the whole national identity"'.[22] Such a perception is signalled towards when Cass suggests jazz is 'pure libido symbolism'. And so, when Dearden has a black man strangle a white woman in a jazz club, he very much includes himself in a conversation that sought to undermine both jazz and interracial relationships. Therefore, when Delia emerges alive, the drama of getting so close to a replication of the play's events brings greater attention to the film's refusal of a 'faithful' adaptation. In the final scene between Rex and Delia, Rex touches her bruised neck and looks to his hand in horror before intimately touching her face. Rex engages with his potential toward violence and disregards that version of self formed through the manipulation of Johnny Cousin. When, in the final shot of the film, Rex puts his arm around Delia as they walk off, the audience is led to believe that they have survived something that threatened fracture, but they remained as one. The self is therefore conceived in *All Night Long* as having greater power against disruption. Skrebels takes this further, asserting that 'Rex's throwing off of Johnny's control is given extra symbolic force, as representing something more than the triumph of a heroically individual will'.[23] That is to say that Rex's resistance against fracture is emblematic of the continuation of black identity through jazz despite the attempts to whitewash and undermine its validity in popular music culture.

The final moments of each production does well to summarise the distinctions I have already identified. In Othello, Lodovico tells us that he will return to Venice to report the events of the play. Othello has just killed himself and Lodovico says to Cassio, 'Myself will straight aboard, and to the state/ This heavy act with heavy heart relate' (5.2.368). Just as the fractured self of Desdemona is killed, only for the 'true' Desdemona to be briefly reanimated, Othello attempts to reclaim some part of his pre-fractured self through suicide. However, Shakespeare asserts that it is not Othello that gets the final say in his presentation of self. Instead, this power is given to Lodovico through his telling of the story back in Venice. Othello's self is extended beyond the time frame of the play, its mutability projected into the future. The awkward construction of this final line emphasises this, the 'heavy act' modified by Lodovico's 'heavy heart'. The final word 'relate' captures the essence of Shakespeare's theme, not in the story but in the act of telling the story, the power of point of view in constructing self. On the other hand, *All Night Long* finishes with a conversation between Johnny and Emily. He tells her, 'I love nobody, don't even love Johnny. Get out Emily. Go find somebody else to love'. We then watch as he plays the drums to an empty warehouse. Thus, in his attempts to push beyond his station, Johnny becomes isolated from his community, his wife and himself. In taking advantage of the interpersonal nature of jazz, Johnny achieves the opposite of his goal, failing to fully interpolate Rex's self and becoming presumably cut off completely from the community in which he was trying

[21] Skrebels, p. 152.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

to claim a position of prestige. Therefore, while both constructions of self are interpersonal, Dearden presents it as a stable category of which the individual has control and which can provide resistance against corruption.

Thus, Dearden adapts Shakespeare as to create an expectation of fracturing identity only to destabilise such a model in favour of one that perceives the self as having greater strength against mutability. Shakespeare frames his notion of the early modern self as something informed by and conceived in the eye of the other, more in line with Selleck's model of early modern selfhood than Greenblatt's. We see that when the self can take the place of the Other, and vice-versa, the creation, maintenance and mutation of self is an ongoing interpersonal process. Like Shakespeare, Dearden conforms to a notion of self that is interpersonal and in part formed through exchange. This is evident from his use of jazz and his presentation of music as a modifying force. The film's difference presents itself when Dearden teases Shakespeare's ending only to choose an alternative, constructing a model of self that resists unwarranted mutation. In this way, in *All Night Long,* Dearden makes a valuable contribution to and intervention in the discussion of minority racial identity in the US and the destabilising threat of its appropriation. Dearden presents this threat as real and the self as truly susceptible to fracture, but through his rewriting of Shakespeare, he also presents a self with the agency against the eye of the other.

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Going Nowhere, Being No One: Navigating Space and Identity in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Lisa van Straten

Identity has arguably been the most prominent theme in the works of postcolonial theorists and has been approached from various viewpoints that generally fall into two groups: a melancholic idiom of 'in-betweenness' or a celebratory focus on hybridity and multiculturalism.[1] These conceptions of identity implicitly rely on notions of (cultural) space as largely homogenous and demarcated by boundaries, which can either (I) exclude, resulting in artificial, essentialised identities and in-between non-identities, or (II) include, enabling connections that can result in multicultural assemblages. As such, they seem to reflect what Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu in their work *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative* (2016) have called the two principal ways for conceptualising space: space as container and space as network.[2] For writer and theorist Stephen Clingman, however, these abstractions fail to reflect the complexity of reality in which spaces, and by extension identities, are culturally entangled rather than determined by a single culture or a composite of cultures. Consequently, he seeks to transcend these categories by emphasising identity as a *trans*cultural process of linguistic and physical navigation; an idea he maps out in his revolutionary work *The Grammar of Identity* (2009) aided by an analysis of several novels, including Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966).

In this paper, I will revisit Clingman's concept of navigational identity in relation to Rhys's novel in a way that combines his theory with concepts from the field of spatial literary studies, thus showcasing the fruitfulness of bringing this up-and-coming field into dialogue with postcolonial theory. This merged approach will subsequently form the basis of an alternative analysis of the novel that focuses on how the novel's heroine, Antoinette, ultimately proves unable to construct her identity precisely because she cannot move past this dual conceptualisation of space—an inability that is mirrored by her bodily movements which alternate between self-contained stillness and multicultural crossing. Moreover, through this analysis, I will attempt to refine Clingman's theory by foregrounding how navigation as a process of identity is not only concerned with a movement of the body (or mind) through (conceptual) space, but is also intrinsically connected to a movement of the gaze, which is central in perceiving boundaries as either transitive or intransitive, both between different places as well as between the self and the other. So, to start, I will briefly outline Clingman's views on identity and space before moving on to relating his theory to the two central space-metaphors emerging from spatial literary studies. I will, then, discuss *Wide Sargasso Sea* by exploring the intertwinement of Antoinette's psychological identity-

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[1] Stephen Clingman, *The Grammar of Identity: Transnational Fiction and the Nature of the Boundary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 6.

[2] Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote and Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), pp. 18-19.

navigation and her literal movements through space as a marginalised, white creole woman in 1890s Jamaica.

As touched on before, Stephen Clingman introduced his conceptualisation of identity as an act of navigation in order to promote an understanding of identity that 'recognise[s] difference without assuming anything like hard and fast boundaries, [and] […] cater[s] to the reality of differentiation without cutting off the possibility of connection'.[3] For him, this idea of navigational identity is fundamentally connected to movement as he considers there to be a direct 'correlation between how the self is put together and how we navigate ourselves through space and time'.[4] A strong indicator of this correlation is that a child's linguistic abilities develop concurrently with his/her ability to walk, which, more than functioning as an evolutionary mechanism of survival, seems to indicate a fundamental interconnection between movement, space and language in establishing a sense of self. Consequently, he argues, the construction of identity as a simultaneously mental and physical process is governed by an underlying structure similar to that of a 'grammar' or 'syntax'; a system that allows meaning to emerge out of a multitude of possible meanings based on a literal and abstract movement across and along material and linguistic boundaries constructed by differences, divisions and gaps.[5] In that sense, identity as 'a kind of meaning' in itself must not be understood as depending on intransitive boundaries and static same/other binaries as entrenched by earlier postcolonial conceptions of identity.[6] Rather, it underlines how identity relies at its core on *transitive* boundaries that mark both the distance of 'encounter [as well as] combination within and between selves' in a complex dynamic between nearness, difference and (inter)relatedness.[7]

Additionally, in foregrounding this interplay between movement and identity both in language and in reality, Clingman also seems to work towards a new conceptualisation of space. Rejecting earlier notions of space as determined by singularity and static perimeters, he emphasises its metonymic nature, arguing that landscapes are always 'confused and cross-cutting', marked by 'transition and transitivity'.[8] Therefore, he argues, they must be understood as 'environment[s]' as opposed to 'fixed place[s]'.[9] However, such a shift in perspective does not call for a conceptual eradication of boundaries as their very existence as markers of difference allow meaning, as well as identity, to exist, as they do in language. Instead, it entails a rethinking of those boundaries as diffuse and ambiguous, as forming a web of overlapping and entangled cultural identities that reflect both the space's own particular nature as well as its inherent interconnection with other places.

In doing so, one could say that Clingman attempts to combine and transcend the two principal conceptualisations that, according to spatial literary theorists, humans have used to 'come to grips with the abstract notion of space': (I) space as container, which 'present[s] space as a bounded environment that encloses the subject', thereby carrying connotations of 'security and attachment […] [or] passivity and entrapment', and (II) space as network, which presents it as 'a dynamic system of relation that allows movement, and

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[3] Clingman, p. 6.

[4] Ibid., p. 11.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 23.

[7] Ibid., p. 15.

[8] Ibid., pp. 5, 23.

[9] Ibid., p. 23.

that is often actively created by the subject'.[10] Clingman's understanding of space relies on the conceptual boundaries that transform spaces into containers, but reinvents those as ambivalent borders that reflect both the marked singularity of a space as well as the dynamic points of crossing into the other spaces that exist beyond. Space is thus conceived of as simultaneously grounded and bounded as well as dynamic and constructed through movement in a process where 'contiguity, difference, modulation and transformation [continually] unfold'.[11]

As such, Clingman also diverges from scholars who have attempted to formulate theories of space from a deconstructionist or postcolonial perspective, many of whom worked from the 'assumption that borders […] are inherently problematic'.[12] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, for example, placed 'smooth' space in opposition to striated space, namely space as divided 'by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures' that marks the space of the 'polis, politics, the policed, and the police'.[13] Another example is Edward Soja's notion of 'Thirdspace', which is '*a space of radical openness,* a vast territory of infinite possibilities and perils' that lies beyond conceptualisations of space rooted in binary structures, such as centres and peripheries.[14] However, even though these theorists acknowledge how space is always multi-layered and never conceptually singular, their emphasis on complete borderlessness creates the pitfall of ignoring difference in favour of a too insistent emphasis on fluid interconnectedness. As such, they move too far into the direction of understanding space as a network and ignore the meaning the notion of space as container enables, a potential danger that Clingman seeks to evade.

By exploring a perception of space that relies on boundaries which simultaneously reflect difference and connection, Clingman's theory of identity as an act of navigation begins to come into focus more clearly. Rather than seeing identity as a static attribute connected to one's motherland or as a cultural hybrid without a centre of gravity, Clingman visualises it as a process of traversing boundaries whilst staying grounded, as a 'being in the space of crossing […] accepting placement as *displacement,* position as *disposition*'.[15] According to him, such a perspective is needed to shed light on how our sense of self is ultimately based much more on space as determined by routes—broken, obscure, linking yet distancing—than roots. Clingman's (re)interpretation of movement and space thus fundamentally supports his understanding of identity, to use Françoise Vergès' and Carpanin Marimoutou's words, as 'anchored' in specificity 'yet [continually] travelling' within and without the self.[16]

In applying his theoretical framework to *Wide Sargasso Sea,* Clingman places particular emphasis on how Jean Rhys's own experiences of being condemned to a state of

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[10] Clingman, p.19.

[11] Ibid., p. 23.

[12] Dustin Crowley, 'Transgression, Boundaries, and Power: Rethinking the Space of Postcolonial Literature', in *Spatial Literary Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Space, Geography, and the Imagination,* ed. by Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2021), p. 207.

[13] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, '1440: The Smooth and the Striated', in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), p. 353; Crowley, p. 207.

[14] Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 208.

[15] Clingman, p. 25.

[16] Françoise Vergès and Carpanin Marimoutou, 'Moorings: Indian Ocean Creolisations', trans. by Stephen Muecke and Françoise Vergès, *Portal Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies,* 9.1 (2012), p. 15.

unbelonging are reflected in the character of Antoinette, who shares her paradoxical position as a white, creole woman. Born on the Caribbean island of Dominica and coming 'from a long-standing slave-owning Dominican patrimony', Rhys was profoundly traumatised by her continual state of cultural in-betweenness as she was never truly accepted by the black island population nor the white community of European settlers.[17] Even her time spent in England and on the European continent could not diminish this intense despair, which drove her to the brink of suicide in her conviction that: 'I would never belong anywhere, and I knew it, and all my life would be the same, trying to belong and failing […] I am a stranger and I always will be'.[18] As such, in many ways, this inability to 'conjoin the different parts of her life' can be said to have left a mark not only on her own life story, but also on that of Antoinette, who is depicted as likewise occupying what Clingman calls 'the non-place of identity, between but not connective, contiguous but not transitive'.[19] Almost as Rhys's alter ego, Antoinette keeps getting confronted with seemingly intransitive boundaries, racial and otherwise, that mark a division 'across which acts of normalisation and suppression take place', leading her to experience in a similar manner a 'breakdown in personal geography, without continuity, transition, connection'.[20]

As Clingman points out, these boundaries are most prominently symbolised in the novel through the series of rejections Antoinette encounters from the people in her life. These include her mother as well as Rochester, but also the little girl Tia, who, despite her metaphoric embodying of 'possibilities of connection' as Antoinette's mirror image, ends up hitting her with a rock in the ultimate gesture of repudiation.[21] Since, as Clingman argues, the opportunities for creating horizontal bonds are thwarted and with it 'any version of equality, connection, [and] transitivity', Antoinette becomes condemned to a 'vertical containment' characterised by 'substitution and repression' based on 'desire [and] fear'.[22] This is particularly the case in her relationship with Rochester, who, threatened by the many likenesses between himself and Antoinette, represses both her as well as parts of his own identity. Refusing to perceive the literal and figural space between them as transitive, he puts up boundaries in an attempt to keep her out and himself closed in, as if no ties connected them. As such, he exhibits, as Clingman indicates, how '[a]cknowledging points of contact between the self and another can be immensely difficult—especially when internal differentiation is not accepted' and no mental or physical navigation is attempted.[23]

Even though Clingman's analysis of Rhys's novel is based on an abstract conceptualisation of movement and identity, his alternative understanding of actual space nonetheless appears at its foundation. As he indicates, the geographical locations in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are continually overlain by 'a transnational cartography of the psyche' which foregrounds how every space is always inextricably connected—through emotions, experiences, associations and thoughts—with other places.[24] In this 'dreamworld', as Clingman calls it, 'navigations […] can only be obscure' as the concept of differentiating

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[17] Clingman, p. 136.

[18] Qtd. in Clingman, p. 138.

[19] Ibid., pp. 138-139.

[20] Ibid., pp. 138-139, 147.

[21] Ibid., pp. 148-150.

[22] Ibid., pp. 28, 155-156.

[23] Ibid., p. 23.

[24] Ibid., p. 156.

borders is fundamentally problematised.[25] Consequently, the characters seem forced to shift their perspective on identity as determined by seemingly stable, singular spaces or multicultural hybridity towards an understanding of identity as a continual journey that is determined by their moorings as well as their transcultural connections. Yet adopting this attitude of accepting difference whilst embracing similarity and entanglement seems to be too much for them, just like for Rhys herself, who, in being confronted with seemingly impenetrable social walls throughout her life, was no longer able to envision a way past the boundaries that condemned her to otherness.

Although Clingman's reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is insightful and original, his analysis seems to disregard how Antoinette's psychological attempts to construct a sense of self are intertwined with her literal movements throughout the novel, in which not only her body but also her gaze is of central importance in negotiating self-other boundaries. As I will demonstrate in the next part of this paper, Antoinette's continual experience of rejection leads her not only to have trouble in establishing a sense of self, but also profoundly impacts how she moves and, both literally and figuratively, looks at the world. Finding her attempts at physical and psychological navigation repeatedly thwarted by people who block her way and perceive her as an absolute other, Antoinette at intervals ceases all efforts to explore her surroundings and, by extension, the multilayered reality of her own self. As a result, she often adopts a state of paralysis to gain a grounded sense of static, singular identity. In doing so, she seems to construct for herself a liminal, container-space to serve as a foundation for and reflection of her in-between white creole identity, even though this containment simultaneously gives rise to a paranoid sense of being closed-in that blurs her gaze, leading her to see all others as a threat. Nevertheless, she is confronted time and again with the impossibility of immobilising and homogenising identity as it can only meaningfully emerge in an ongoing dialogue of connection with, even in the midst of a rejection of, other spaces and people. Consequently, Antoinette cannot escape the realisation that the identity she attempts to construct is no more than a non-identity, one that ultimately becomes her only way out.

This complex process of identity-construction starts in Antoinette's childhood as she begins navigating different spaces as a symbolic exploration of herself; a quest that is continually obstructed through her encounters with people who refuse to accept her. For example, she looks at and moves towards Tia to affirm her black identity at the bathing pool in the forest—a space that for her represents the female, black community as the 'women all [brought] their washing down [there]' with their 'skirt[s] hitched up' like Christophine—but is deserted by the girl in angry scorn.[26] Likewise, she seems to venture in the direction of Spanish Town, the island's principal European settlement, to strengthen her connection to her white identity, but is harassed by 'a little girl', who 'follows [her] singing, "Go away white cockroach, go away, go away"' (8). On both these occasions, Antoinette flees to Coulibri estate, her home, which becomes for her a refuge, a container-type space marked by the physical border of 'the old wall […] covered with green moss soft as velvet' (8). It is a space that resembles and safeguards her, situated between the native forests of Jamaica and Spanish Town, as a symbol of her being in-between the black and white communities. Moreover, this desire for containment is also quite literally mirrored in her process of (non-)navigation as she begins to adopt a state of paralysis, saying: 'I never wanted to move again. Everything would be worse if I moved' (8). This is also

[25] Clingman, p. 156.

[26] Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (London: Penguin, 2011), pp. 9, 81. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

exemplified by the fact that she feels most secure lying still in bed, having to look only at her 'friendly furniture' without an alien face in sight (3). In other words, she wishes to cease her process of painfully navigating *routes* in both body and gaze by clutching at the seemingly stable *roots* of her home. However, in doing so, she is unaware that the security she is looking for is just an illusion; a mirage based on a disregard of how Coulibri itself, being spatially overlain with different identities and cultures, actually embodies the transcultural entanglement between the black, the white and the white creole that characterises her own identity.

Additionally, Antoinette attempts to affirm this artificially singular and fixed identity of in-betweenness by strengthening her connection with her mother, who occupies in a similarly paralysed way the same liminal space and identity. As 'a Martinique girl' who married an English slaveowner, she has become a pariah of society, condemned to isolation and invisibility: 'They didn't look at us, nobody see them come near us' (9). Consequently, Annette, like her daughter, eventually gives up all efforts to navigate her surroundings and connect with people, which leads her to 'refuse to leave the house at all' and spend her days resting listlessly or 'walk[ing] up and down the *glacis*' like a caged animal, unable to be at peace with herself or her environment (3, 5). Recognising their mutual predicament and trying to create a stronger sense of self from their shared position as outcasts, Antoinette continually seeks to be near her, imagining her mother's hair to be a 'soft black cloak' that is able to 'cover [her], hide [her], keep [her] safe' from the world outside, much like Coulibri's walls (8). However, in response to her daughter's implicit appeal to acknowledge her and identify with her, her mother time and again averts her gaze or pushes her away, thereby symbolically marking the futility of Antoinette's attempted static identity-construction.

Moreover, by assuming this fixed position, Antoinette, like her mother, relinquishes the agency that is at the core of navigation, thereby investing others with excessive power as they are granted the ability to either approach or leave her at will. This is reflected most prominently in the first part of Antoinette's narrative which abounds in terms like 'abandoned', 'left' and 'marooned' (7, 8, 10-11). Additionally, her immobile position also fosters a static *psychological* relation to her environment, as she quite literally keeps seeing places and people from the same perspective, causing her to adopt a rather rigid perception of the world, singularly focused on difference and tainted by paranoia. In a sense, Antoinette drives herself into a corner, from which everyone who comes near is seen as a threatening other, leading her to no longer be able to look people in the eye and make connections based on a self-assured acknowledgement of shared attachment. Consequently, in her paralysis, she repeatedly looks away or closes her eyes in order to ignore the fact that in standing still, she is running away from the necessarily painful process of navigating the complex landscape of difference and similarity.

The period after the burning down of Coulibri—the spatial metaphor for her artificially homogenised white creole identity—marks a period of transition for Antoinette, one that seemingly forces her to reconsider her experience of space. This transformation is marked by her deathly fever, which can be interpreted as a symbolic sickness resulting from her impossible identity-process, and which afterwards leads her to acknowledge the importance of moving within space both literally and figuratively for constructing a sense of self. As such, this sudden illness can be said to break through the illusion of immobile security that is upheld by her aunt, who insists "'But you are safe with me now. […] You must stay in bed though. Why are you wandering about the room?'", which is subsequently rejected by Antoinette: "'I got up because I wanted to know where I was'" (28). However, soon after, this renewed agency is challenged, as she is accosted by two children on her way

to the convent. Their hateful behaviour prompts her to resort to her old tactic of ignoring her surroundings, which does not go unnoticed by the girl: "'You don't want to look at me, eh, I make you look at me'" (32). Thereupon, Antoinette runs to hide within the walls of the convent, collapsing again in a state of paranoid immobility.

The convent becomes a place of rehabilitation for Antoinette as she learns to navigate the private world that exists within its walls, alternating between immobility and movement almost as a simulation for how she must proceed in the real world. However, here, she begins to learn to see those around her not in an anxious and blurry daze, as other, but as potential connections that are necessary for constructing her own identity. This is best exemplified by her first moments in the convent, where she is welcomed by a nun who emphasises the need for truly looking at your environment in order to minimise the diffuse feeling of threat that emerges when difficult encounters with others are evaded: "'You are Antoinette Cosway, that is to say Antoinette Mason. Has someone frightened you?" "Yes." "Now look at me," she said. "You will not be frightened of me'" (33).

However, as Antoinette becomes part of the nuns' community, she begins to realise that her gaze has no value within this bounded space where not only navigational agency but also difference is wholly eradicated. Within the convent, the girls are all encouraged to become one and the same, and any marker of individuality is eliminated—a fact reflected by the convent's lack of mirrors—or pressed on the group as a whole to make them into anonymous servants of God. This is the case, for example, when the nuns urge the girls to all adopt the same hairstyle and deportment as well as dental hygiene. As such, one could say that Antoinette's time at the convent is comparable to her periods of lying in bed at Coulibri as she is similarly paralysed, surrounded by a sense of sameness and familiarity without others to challenge her gaze. Yet, even though this situation brings her more joy than ever, it also instills in her a profound feeling of threat: 'I felt bolder, happier, more free. But not so safe' (38). When in the past she experienced this state of immobility and lack of otherness as a relatively peaceful refuge from all the rejections of others, now the sheer lack of encounters with difference makes her increasingly anxious and aware of the impossibility of constructing an identity without it, leading her to long more and more for the solid non-identity that resides in death.

In the second part of the novel, the estate of Granbois functions in many ways as a mirror image of Coulibri as Antoinette again attempts to construct a sense of self by navigating the Jamaican and English sides of her identity. However, this time she determinately moves and acts as a medium between the Jamaican servants and Rochester, with the house itself—an imitation of an English summer house run by Creole people—as a symbol of her carefully constructed hybrid identity. However, in conceiving of her identity as a multicultural composite that is part black and part white, she again invests others with the power to accept or reject her, and thus, to potentially eradicate her sense of self. Consequently, Antoinette puts herself again into a profoundly vulnerable and unstable position, which is reflected in her explosive reactions when she is met with rejection from people representing those two sides of her character: on the one hand, from the servant girl Amélie, who calls her a 'white cockroach', followed by Christophine, who leaves to live in her own house, and on the other Rochester, who cannot accept a connection with her and increasingly refuses to come near her and look at her. Moreover, by adopting this perspective, she disregards the way in which her identity is not *multi*cultural—product of a combination of cultures—but fundamentally ambiguous and *trans*culturally entangled, which leads her relation to these cultural groups to be far more complex, characterised by

similarity as well as difference; a relationship that will always make their full acceptance of her impossible.

Thus, unable to find some form of stability in this continual process of exploration and displacement, Antoinette becomes incapable of perceiving the boundaries she encounters as transitive, leading her again to feel closed-in and condemned to cease all movement. In a manner that recalls her childhood, she once more chooses to spend her time lying in bed as if to adopt a state of non-identity. This lifeless state is reflected in Rochester and Christophine's characterisations of her as doll-like, asleep or even as dead. The only way out of this misery seems to be, like Christophine indicates, to 'pack up and go', to reclaim her own navigational agency and recognise the strength of her own body and gaze in moving through space (82). Only then would she be able to recalibrate her psychological course in a way that would allow her to acknowledge the particularity of her own self whilst embracing the transitive self-other boundaries as a compass for meaningfully negotiating connections. As such, Christophine seems to warn Antoinette against both perceiving others as a threat out of anxious paranoia as well as adopting a state of stifling isolation and paralysis in which she no longer wants to acknowledge those around her. In doing so, she seems to draw attention to a key idea of Frantz Fanon's work, as summarised by Homi Bhabha: 'to exist is to be called into being in relation to an Otherness, its look or locus'; an observation that again underlines the importance of thinking about navigation both in terms of the body and of the gaze.[27]

However, when Rochester completely takes away her agency and forces Antoinette to leave Granbois, she has lost all ability to see, leading her to look out at the world with 'blank, lovely eyes' (135). Moreover, when she becomes literally condemned to immobility in her prisoner's cell in England with no way to orient herself, her own gaze becomes blurred and fixated more on objects than people. This ultimately leads her to become incapable of differentiating between her own self and the other, which is symbolised by her misrecognition of her own face in the dream-mirror. Consequently, when she does manage to break free from her confinement, she has lost all sense of direction and time, saying 'They tell me I am in England but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? I don't remember, but we lost it' (144). Moreover, in her dreams she cannot escape the feeling that she is being chased by a 'ghost of a woman', unaware that this ghost is actually her projection of the unknown self that has haunted her throughout her life: 'someone was following me, someone was chasing me, laughing' (150). She has become a mouse caught in a trap; at first one of her own making, but now one forced upon her, which, previously leading her to imitate death in her paralysed stillness, now forces her to become it. As such, it seems almost unavoidable that she plummets in flight from her own face onto the shiny surface of the stones that she imagines to be 'the pool at Coulibri' where she first felt herself to be a stranger (152).

Thus, in portraying Antoinette's inability to conceive of the boundaries between herself and others as transitive, Rhys seems to showcase how physical and psychological movement not only relies on the body, but also on the gaze in acknowledging points of contact and distance between ourselves and the world beyond. As such, her novel suggests that even though Clingman's conceptualization of space, movement and identity is a step towards a more complex, conceptual framework of reality, more work still needs to be

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[27] Homi Bhabha, 'Foreword: Remembering Fanon', in Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 1986), p. xv <www.monos-kop.org/images/a/a5/Fanon_Frantz_Black_Skin_White_Masks_1986.pdf> [accessed April 26 2023].

done in order to better understand how we position ourselves in relation to the world outside and the world within. Because despite what Clingman seems to indicate, identity emerges not only from stepping out into the world and establishing connections with other people and places, but also relies on having the courage to see and be seen, even if that means at times finding no recognition in someone else's eyes.

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‘But within are secrets’: Space in Thomas Middleton and William Rowley’s *The Changeling*

Laura Thorn

> Serious-minded people may then say with the poet, ‘It’s a marquetry casket, and that’s all.’ Echoing this reasonable opinion, the reader who is averse to playing with inversions of large and small, exterior and intimacy, may also say: ‘It’s a poem and that’s all.’ ‘And nothing more.’ In reality, however, the poet has given concrete form to a very general psychological theme, namely, that there will always be more things in a closed, than in an open, box. To verify images kills them, and it is always more enriching to *imagine* than to *experience*.[1]

In his analysis of spatial imagery in poetry, Gaston Bachelard calls attention to the suggestiveness of an enclosed space that has not been opened yet. Using what he calls ‘topoanalysis’, he uses spaces and especially ‘the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul’.[2] *The Changeling* is a play full of enclosed spaces, many of which are strongly guarded. The reasons for this secrecy, however, are often complicated.

The play begins by a church outside Vermandero’s castle where Alsemero falls in love with Beatrice-Joanna. When she asks her father to grant Alsemero access to the castle, he replies:

> VERMANDERO With all my heart, sir.
> Yet there’s an article between: I must know
> Your country. We use not to give survey
> Of our chief strengths to strangers; our citadels
> Are placed conspicuous to outward view,
> On promonts’ tops, but within are secrets.[3]

From the very first scene, the ‘conspicuous’ exterior and the ‘secrets’ ‘within’ an enclosed space are set up as opposites which subsequently run throughout the play. Alsemero does not take his decision to enter the castle lightly: ‘How shall I dare venture in his castle | When he discharges murderers at the gate?’ He decides, ‘I must on, for back I cannot go’ (I. 1. 215-17), which sets off a series of inward movements from the open outdoors into the depths of the castle.

By considering the historical and metaphorical space of the closet as well as the textual space of the book, this essay will explore how spaces and the secrets that are contained within them function dramatically in *The Changeling,* and how Middleton and

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[1] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* trans. by Maria Jolas (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), p.108.

[2] Ibid., pp. 30, 21.

[3] Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling,* ed. by Michael Neill (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2006), I. 1. 152-58. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Rowley's use of space takes part in wider discussions about concepts of space and privacy in the early modern period. The analysis rests on the premise that space has a social dimension. Henri Lefebvre argues that '*(Social) space is a (social) product*': 'in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power'.[4]

In a 2006 article, Donald Hedrick and Bryan Reynolds identified a conceptual shift in the understanding of place and space during the early modern period. With the onset of the Scientific Revolution, the idea of place departed from the Aristotelian notion of a local 'abstraction of containment', which in combination with Christian theology often granted places specific powers, towards an idea of place that is 'a mere location on the expanse of a grid' of infinite space which can be as expansive as the imagination allows.[5] This caused an anxiety of 'placelessness'. Hedrick and Reynolds identify this anxiety in *The Changeling,* particularly in the final scene in which De Flores and Beatrice-Joanna are in the closet: 'whatever happens there in effect happens in no place, unseen to the audience, so that undefinition of infinite space ultimately prevails'.[6]

At the same time as the concept of space shifted, England also saw major architectural change. During 'The Great Rebuilding' between 1570 and 1640, the manor house became separated from the surrounding communities, larger living spaces were divided into individual rooms and galleries, and a new kind of room – the closet – became popular in domestic spaces.[7] The closet was a small room which had a range of different functions. The *OED* lists a variety of uses for the term, including a 'space devoted to private study or speculative thought', 'a private chapel', 'a repository of curiosities' and 'a hidden or secret place, […] a place in which to hide, or in which to conceal something, esp. a secret'.[8] These varying functions of the closet depended on the user's social status and gender. Not only did closets contain secrets, but they were often also themselves hidden inside walls, at the centre of houses or in basements.[9]

In her study on boxes in the early modern period, Lucy Razzall argues that it is important to study the material environment depicted in literature, especially the various forms of containers:

> Containers and receptacles are important because they are associated with so many human activities, including 'opening, closing, pouring, filling, emptying, wrapping,

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[4] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p.26.

[5] Donald Hedrick and Bryan Reynolds, 'I Might Like You Better If We Slept Together: The Historical Drift of Place in *The Changeling*', in *Transversal Enterprises in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries,* ed. by Reynolds (London: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 112-123 (p.122). See also, Koen Vermeir and Jonathan Regier, 'Boundaries, Extents and Circulations: An Introduction to Spatiality and the Early Modern Concept of Space', in *Boundaries, Extents and Circulation:. Space and Spatiality in Early Modern Natural Philosophy,* ed. by Vermeir and Regier (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), pp. 1-32 (p. 9): 'And the less material a place was, the more powerful. This meant that incorporeal places were more powerful than the physical objects inside them. Objects therefore got their power to a great extent from the places they occupied in a hierarchised cosmos.'

[6] Hedrick and Reynolds, p. 122.

[7] Melissa Auclair, 'Coming into the Closet: Spatial Practices and Representations of Interior Space', *Shakespeare* 13.2 (2017), 147-154 (p. 148).

[8] 'closet', in *OED Online*. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/34625?rskey=ZnIVET&result=1&isAdvanced=false>[accessed March 15, 2023].

[9] Alan Stewart, 'The Early Modern Closet Discovered', *Representations* Spring 50 (1995), 76-100 (p. 80).

> regulating, maintaining the envelope or the limits, removing the blockages that prevent the transit of substances, mending leaks, forming a queue'[10]

Bachelard interprets the poetic image of 'small boxes, such as chests and caskets' as 'very evident witnesses of the *need for secrecy*, of an intuitive sense of hiding places'.[11]

Scholars have associated the privacy that spaces like the closet created with an increase of individual subjectivity, which could be observed around the same time. Mark Girouard, for example, has argued that the closet constituted the only space where people could be entirely on their own. Others however, including Patricia Fumerton, have refuted this idea, asserting that 'privacy could never be achieved'.[12] Mary Thomas Crane offers an alternative reading, suggesting that privacy was most likely attained outdoors. Open-air spaces, such as cultivated gardens, resisted an absolute distinction between indoors and outdoors. She speaks of an 'exteriority' or even "outdooriority" of the self' that relocates private and especially illicit activities to the outdoors.[13] In her analysis of Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania,* Helen Hackett sees Pamphilia's withdrawal to her closet or to secluded places in nature as a prerequisite for her literary activity. The 'creation of an intellectually and socially respectable persona for a female writer' ultimately leads to 'the enabling of psychological interiority and subjectivity' in the heroine.[14]

Like other texts of its time, including some by Lady Mary Wroth and Margaret Cavendish, *The Changeling* is interested in questions of privacy and, particularly, how privacy should be reflected in domestic spaces. However, early modern understandings of the terms 'private' and 'public' differed from their usage now.

> [W]e should understand the public sphere in the sixteenth century principally in terms of office-holding. […] It is this sense of the public which defines its opposite, the private, not so much in the specific economic terms of private possession as in the broader social terms of an absence of public duties and responsibilities.[15]

'Public' thus does not necessarily denote the opposite of 'domestic' but is mainly defined through its association with official duty, implying that the 'public' was not exempt from private households. In fact, closet activities are sometimes described as acts of 'public privacy': The closet is 'a place of utter privacy, of total withdrawal from the public sphere of the household – but it simultaneously functions as a very public gesture of withdrawal, a very public sign of privacy'.[16] The early modern house, through its 'semi-public nature',

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[10] Lucy Razzall, *Boxes and Books in Early Modern England: Materiality, Metaphor, Containment* (Cambridge: University Press, 2021), p. 13.

[11] Bachelard, p. 102.

[12] Stewart, pp. 80-81.

[13] Mary Thomas Crane. 'Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9.1 (2009), 4-22 (pp. 5, 17).

[14] Helen Hackett, 'A book, and solitariness': Melancholia, Gender and Literary Subjectivity in Mary Wroth's *Urania*', in *Renaissance Configurations: Voices, Bodies, Spaces, 1580-1690,* ed. by Gordon McMullan (New York: Palgrave, 1998), pp. 83, 64.

[15] Neil Rhodes, 'Versions of the Common', in *Common: The Development of Literary Culture in Sixteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 3-27 (pp. 14-15).

[16] Stewart, p. 81.

adopted an increasingly public nature in which the microcosmic home mirrored the macrocosmic state, ultimately becoming 'an index for an ordered State'.[17]

In many ways, the indoor spaces of *The Changeling,* especially the castle in the main plot and the madhouse in the sub-plot, are paradigmatic early modern domestic spaces which also invite thoughts on contemporary debates surrounding these spaces. When Alsemero enters the castle, he is provided with a closet. This private space is mirrored by Lollio's wardrobe in the sub-plot. In the first production of *The Changeling* at the Cockpit/ Phoenix theatre, a small indoor theatre in London, both the wardrobe and the closet would have probably been represented by the same discovery space at the end of the stage or by the same stage-door, further connecting the two enclosed spaces in performance.[18]

Alsemero's closet is an important space in the play, being both the site of the virginity test in scene 4.1 and the room where Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores are locked up at the end. Even though critics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have been somewhat ill at ease with the virginity test, it is central in the context of early modern discussions about the role and allocation of privacy in the early modern household.[19] Alone in Alsemero's closet, Beatrice describes her surroundings:

> BEATRICE here's his closet,
> The key left in't, and he abroad i'th'park –
> Sure, 'twas forgot; I'll be so bold as look in't.
> Bless me! A right physician's closet 'tis.
> Set round with vials, every one her mark too.
> Sure he does practise physic for his own use,
> Which may be safely called your great man's wisdom.
>
> (IV. 1. 17-23)

Noticing the medical equipment and its systematic placing, Beatrice-Joanna calls attention to the fact that this closet is being used by a man. Apart from their everyday work, men in the period were mainly depicted as using their closets for religious practice and scientific experiments. 'Indeed, private architectural spaces, reserved for the business of men, are given a special kind of prominence in Middleton and Rowley's play'.[20] This gendered use of the closet emphasises that Beatrice-Joanna is trespassing by being in Alsemero's closet. However, her understanding of medicine, which has been hinted at earlier in her conversation with De Flores when she offers to make him a 'water' to 'cleanse' 'the heat of the liver' (II. 2. 80-86), also implies that she has previous knowledge that is not necessarily considered typical of an aristocratic woman.

In Alsemero's closet, she discovers a book:

> BEATRICE: What manuscript lies here? *'The Book of Experiment,*
> *Called Secrets in Nature'* – so 'tis, 'tis so:
> 'How to know whether a woman be with child or no' –
> I hope I am not yet – if he should try though!

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[17] Robert W. Daniel and Iman Sheeha, 'Door-Bolts, Thresholds, and Peep-Holes: Liminality and Domestic Spaces in Early Modern England', *Early Modern Literary Studies,* 29 (2020), 1-8 (pp. 1-2).

[18] Neill, *The Changeling,* 92n44-47.

[19] Ibid., p. 110.

[20] Bruce Boehrer, 'Alsemero's Closet: Privacy and Interiority in *The Changeling*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 96.3 (1997), 349-368 (p. 356).

> Let me see: folio forty-five – here 'tis,
> The leaf tucked down upon't, the place suspicious:
> […]
> Ha! That which is next, is ten times worse:
> 'How to know whether a woman be a maid, or not.'
> If that should be applied, what would become of me?
> Belike he has a strong faith of my purity,
> That never yet made proof; but this he calls
> 'A merry sleight, but true experiment' –
> The author 'Antonius Mizaldus'.
>
> (IV. 1. 24-45)

The book seems to be a manuscript compilation owned by Alsemero. Although there is a text by the French scholar Antonius Mizaldus entitled *De Arcanis Naturae,* the content of this entry points more towards his *Centuriae IX. Memorabilium.*[21] Beatrice-Joanna opens this particular page because she finds 'the place suspicious'. This page is the culmination of her personal inward movement in the play, from the outdoors into the castle, into the closet, to the book and finally to this page and the texts it contains. Here, at the centre of these nesting enclosures, Alsemero has hidden his suspicion against women. His 'pretty secret', as he refers to it when talking to Jasperino, is his supposed ability to gain insight into women's secrets (IV. 2. 111).

Bruce Boehrer argues that the "'imagery of enclosure" lends geographical expression to masculine efforts to control the female body'.[22] In this play, the female body is fraught with secrets which must be concealed, both because their value is at stake and because they are perceived as dangerous. '[W]hat is hidden is at one moment a source of contamination that must be contained, and at another a treasure or "relique" that needs to be protected'.[23] In a trope deriving from medieval allegory, Beatrice-Joanna's body is figured as a castle to be conquered and closely associated with Vermandero's real castle.[24] When she falls in love with Alsemero, she immediately asks her father to grant Alsemero access. Conversely, the men who are in love with women in *The Changeling* seem to aspire to enclose them.

> ALSEMERO My Joanna,
> Chaste as the breath of heaven, or morning's womb
> That brings the day forth, thus my love encloses thee!
> [*Embraces her*]
>
> (IV. 2. 147-50)

Alsemero describes Beatrice-Joanna as a 'womb', a spatial enclosure in herself, but he also thinks his 'love' encloses her in turn, possessing her and whatever secrets she may contain. Similarly, Alibius tells his love, 'In my arms and bosom, my sweet Isabella | I'll lock thee up most nearly' (IV. 2. 240-41). Keys symbolise 'significant practical control over domestic

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[21] Neill, *The Changeling,* 76n24-25.

[22] Boehrer, p. 356.

[23] Neill, "'Hidden Malady": Death, Discovery, and Indistinction in *The Changeling*', *Renaissance Drama* 22 (1991), 95-121 (p. 102).

[24] Neill, *The Changeling,* p. 9n68.

space'[25] and the ritualistic passing over of keys between men can be found both in the main plot when Alsemero asks Jasperino to fetch the test, and in the sub-plot of the play when Isabella is given the key to Lollio's wardrobe to change into the costume of a madwoman. Beatrice-Joanna only gains access to the closet because Alsemero has forgotten the key in the lock.

While Beatrice-Joanna's movement can be described as a relatively straightforward path towards interiority, De Flores' movement is more complicated. Early in the play, he is described as 'out of his place' (I. 1. 137). This is a reference to class: originally a 'gentleman', 'hard fate has thrust [him] out to servitude' (II. 1. 48-49). Sometimes, however, he is also more literally *out of place*. This is particularly obvious in the stage direction for the interval just after scene 2.2: '*In the act-time* Deflores *hides a naked rapier'*. This very unusual stage direction demonstrates De Flores' ability to move around the castle freely and even break out of the act-time and stage space in order to prepare his ensuing murder. As a private indoor theatre, the Cockpit/Phoenix would have had instrumental music during the act breaks, indicating that De Flores might have also broken the aural atmosphere of the interval.[26] Throughout the rest of the play, his spatial movements follow an inwards and downwards path towards locations of intimacy, ultimately transforming them into sites of violence.

De Flores uses his knowledge of the castle to lure Alonzo into a place where he can murder him, using the labyrinthine paths themselves to entice him: 'And if the ways and straits, | Of some of the passages be not too tedious for you, | I will assure you, worth your time and sight, my lord' (II. 2. 158-61). The 'ways and straits' of the castle foreshadow the mental 'labyrinth' Beatrice-Joanna finds herself in at a later point in the plot when she realises that De Flores will not be contented with money alone (III. 3. 72). The labyrinth is part of a series of motifs that invoke the labyrinth in Greek mythology which was built by Daedalus for King Minos of Crete to hold the Minotaur. The sub-plot uses the same reference in a more comical setting:

> [Antonio *falls*]
>
> ISABELLA He's down, he's down! What a terrible fall he had!
> Stand up, thou son of Cretan Daedalus,
> And let us tread the lower labyrinth;
> I'll bring thee to the clew.
>
> (IV. 3. 97-100)

Isabella's exaggerated reaction to Antonio's fall entangles Icarus' fall with Theseus' escape from the Labyrinth using the 'clew', a ball of thread given to him by Minos' daughter, Ariadne.[27] It could be speculated that the difference between the labyrinths of the main plot and the sub-plot is the lack of this guiding thread in the main plot, which might have helped the protagonists find their ways out of the labyrinth again.

Isabella employs language that emphasises the downward movement of the fall when she speaks of the 'lower labyrinth', repeats 'He's down, he's down' and stresses that the 'fall'

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[25] Razzall, p. 12.

[26] Lucy Munro, 'Changing Musical Practices in the Shakespearean Playhouse, 1620-42', in *Shakespeare, Music and Performance,* ed. by Bill Barclay and David Lindley (Cambridge: CUP, 2017), pp. 99-113 (p. 101).

[27] Neill, *The Changeling*, 95n100.

is 'terrible'. This imagery appears throughout the play: Franciscus, disguised as a madman, sings 'Down, down, down a-down a-down', and in the last scene Alsemero accuses Beatrice-Joanna: 'A ground you cannot stand on, you fall down | Beneath all grace and goodness' (IV. 3. 148 and V. 3. 45-46). The 'fall' recalls the Fall of Man, a Christian doctrine that is repeatedly referenced throughout the play. However, the fall is also interesting as a spatial downward movement. Hedrick and Reynolds have attempted to trace Beatrice-Joanna's moral movement, concluding that she progresses from 'a traditional moral movement of descent or decline' to a kind of 'morally *exploratory*' wandering in the later part of the play which links place to 'moral decay and ambiguity'.[28] While Beatrice-Joanna is falling both morally and mentally, De Flores leads Alonzo downwards into the depths of the castle, allowing us not only to explore the descent itself but also the space that can be found at the end of it.

In his analysis of the space of the house, Bachelard maps out the vertical polarity of cellar and attic:

> Indeed, it is possible almost without commentary, to oppose the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar. […] As for the cellar […] it is first and foremost the *dark entity* of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces.[29]

De Flores seems to be attuned to the 'irrationality of the cellar'. This is the place he chooses for the murder, putting himself in the spatial position of the Minotaur before committing his crime. He promises Alonso: 'My lord, I'll place you at a casement here | Will show you the full strength of all the castle' (III. 1. 16-17). A casement is a 'vaulted chamber built in the thickness of the ramparts of a fortress, with embrasures for the defence of the place'.[30] It is interesting that De Flores murders Alonzo in a room with a vaulted ceiling because, according to Bachelard, 'a vaulted ceiling […] is a great principle of the dream of intimacy. For it constantly reflects intimacy at its centre'.[31] De Flores chooses a room which is not only in the depths of the castle, but also spatially reflects back to him: he chooses a space of intimacy for his act of violence. This is repeated in Diaphanta's murder. After taking Beatrice-Joanna's place during the wedding night, Diaphanta stays too long in Alsemero's bed which leads Beatrice-Joanna and De Flores to set fire to her 'lodging chamber'. This pattern of connecting violence with intimate spaces could be seen as the spatial equivalent to Christopher Rick's 1960 reading of the double meanings of words such as 'act' and 'deed' which conflate the language of intimacy with violence.[32]

This fusion of spatial intimacy with violence seems to suggest a desire in De Flores, if not in the play, to disturb privacy and to uncover secrets through violence, making these intimate spaces very vulnerable. In the course of *The Changeling,* the role of the closet changes from a place that grants Alsemero privacy to the location of murder and potential rape. This could be seen as a reflection of the broader cultural change in the understanding of space that has been described earlier. Rather than holding power inherently through their enclosure, places are now merely a section of infinite space, defined through the

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[28] Hedrick and Reynolds, p. 117.

[29] Bachelard, p. 39.

[30] Neill, *The Changeling*, p.49n16.

[31] Bachelard, p. 45.

[32] Christopher Ricks, 'The Moral and Poetic Structure of *The Changeling', Essays in Criticism* 10 (1960), 290-306 (p. 299).

action that happens within them rather than their particular, local purpose. De Flores, as someone who is *out of place* from the outset, is able to make use of this, redefining places in ways that suit him. The consequence of this understanding of place is that spaces such as the closet which hold secrets are no longer inherently protected by their function.

This pattern of newly defining spaces and violently revealing their secrets does not only have architectural consequences but also leads to changes in the understanding of textual space and *The Changeling* as a printed play. These changes can be explored via the book found by Beatrice-Joanna in Alsemero's closet. It is a kind of commonplace book, 'a collection of recipes and remedies designed for household use, culled from various sources, and supplemented with the user's own observations', which was often called 'a closet'.[33] A popular format in the seventeenth century, titles include *The Queens Closet Opened* (1683), *The Closet of Sir Kenelm Digby Opened* (1669) and *The Accomplished Ladies Rich Closet of Rarities* (1687).

One early example is *The Treasury of commodious Conceits, and hidden Secrets: Commonly called The good Huswyves Closet of provision for the health of her housholde*, which was published anonymously in 1586. Although it is aimed at 'wives' and 'maydes', it shares several elements with Alsemero's book.[34] Like his miscellany, *The Treasury*'s subtitle claims that it is 'Gathered out of sundrye experyments, lately practised by men of great knowledge'. Alsemero too, wishes to develop a 'great man's wisdom' and is considered by Beatrice-Joanna to be a 'master of the mystery' (IV. 1. 38). *The Treasury* contains a variety of recipes, such as 'To make a conserve of Strawveries, with the vertue of the same'[35], which always include a purported special power. In his preface to the reader, the printer promises that this 'closet' will provide information about remedies for housewives, regardless of social status:

> Good Huswives here you have a Iewell for your ioy,
> A Closet meete your huswivery to practise and imploy.
> As well the gentles of degree, as eke the meaner sort,
> May practise here to purchase helth, their household to confort
> And as the proverbe proveth true, to remedy each griefe,
> Amonst the rest of Phisicks helps, the huswives help is chefe
> […]
> Good medcines for present helth, in closet here you have
> To maintaine life, & keep ye yong the chefest thing ye crave[36]

The book claims to hold solutions to a wide variety of domestic issues. Not all of the printer's promises can actually be found in the book, however. Located between 'To keepe Damasines in sirop' and 'To make a Barren woman beare Children', there is 'To know

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[33] Boehrer, p. 354.

[34] *The Treasury of commodious Conceits, and hidden Secrets. Commonly called The good Huswyves Closet of provision for the health of her housholde*, published by Henrye Car (London: 1586), sig. A2v.

[35] Ibid., sig. C7v.

[36] Ibid., A2v.

whether a woman shal ever conceive or not'.[37] This test, as unlikely to yield accurate results as Alsemero's virginity test, points towards a general trend of men attempting to reveal women's secrets through domestic experiments, even if the women themselves could not possibly know the answer. There are parallels between the exposure of women's secrets in closet books and the violent desecration of secret spaces in *The Changeling*.

Razzall argues that there was a very clear connection between the box in its various forms and the book 'as objects that each have the capacity to contain and enclose, and to open and reveal', exposing an early modern anxiety for these closet books to 'bring order to its content'.[38] One part of the attraction of the closet is that it claims to reveal secrets and Alan Stewart, who considers it to be a transactional space between men, concludes that, rather than keeping contents secret, 'the closet paradoxically draws attention to those relationships and transactions and marks them off as socially and even ethically problematic'.[39] The closet book is the textual equivalent of this popular early modern process of publicly establishing something as a secret and then revealing it.

As a result of this, intimate knowledge is no longer protected in the world of *The Changeling*, neither in the closet nor in the closet book. Beatrice-Joanna's appropriation of Alsemero's secrets leads Boehrer to conclude that *The Changeling* as a text is Beatrice-Joanna's book of secrets and that by publishing the play, Middleton and Rowley reveal her secrets in turn.[40] He argues that, unable to hold any physical private space, Beatrice-Joanna's 'sense of self settles in an alternate territory: that of the figurative enclosures generated by language itself'.[41] The many asides in the play are also a visual and psychological testament to Beatrice-Joanna's innermost thoughts. However, these linguistic and textual spaces holding Beatrice-Joanna's sense of self become ineffectual when *The Changeling* is read as her book of secrets. Not only is the content of the asides revealed in a published and performed text, but considering that the original printed text of 1653 did not mark the asides, Beatrice-Joanna's supposed subjectivity has been dependent on editors' and readers' interpretations since its first publication.[42] What is revealed in this book can at most be somebody else's interpretation of her subjectivity.

Unlike in other Elizabethan tragedies, Beatrice-Joanna's murder in the final scene is not seen by the audience. She dies in Alsemero's closet, the enclosed private space she herself opened when she explored his experiments and books. Her exclamations '(*Within*) 'Oh, oh!' (V. 3. 142) are ambiguous, being potentially sexual or violent. They once again conflate intimacy with violence, but this time there is no revelation of secrets. Returning to Bachelard and the closed box that contains more than the open box, the desire to reveal the enclosed space is ultimately relegated to the audience. Beatrice-Joanna's murder remains a dramatic closed box, a final enclosure that points towards its own secrecy but questions the wish to reveal what is hidden.

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[37] *The Treasury,* C8v. The instructions are: 'Take of the ruine of a Haire, and having frayed it and consumed the hote water give it the woman to drink in the morning at her breakfast, then let her stand in a hote bathe: if there come a greef or pain in her belly she may conceive: if not, she shall never conceive.'

[38] Razzall, pp. 20-21.

[39] Boehrer, p. 355. Stewart, p. 93.

[40] Ibid., p. 355.

[41] Ibid., p. 359.

[42] Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The changeling as it was acted (with great applause) at the Privat house in Drury-Lane, and Salisbury Court / written by Thomas Midleton, and William Rowley, Gent.*., printed for Humphrey Mosely (London: 1653).

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Within and Beyond: Indie Magazines and the Asian Diasporic Subject

Mike Fu

As a resident of New York City during my twenties and early thirties, I lived through a cascade of cultural eras that exemplified America's complex and oftentimes contradictory character. Certain palpable shifts coincided with major political events: my time in the city was bookended by the election of Barack Obama as president in 2008 and Donald Trump's last year in office in 2020. Other changes were more subtle or cumulative in nature, broader trends that took shape around me as I grew into my adult identity and found footing within various communities. Millennials and Generation Z began to stake positions in public discourse with their idiosyncratic worldviews and economic or political grievances, all while Internet 2.0 developed in step with the proliferation of smartphones and the rise of social media. Amidst this wholesale reshaping of human experience by technology, I started to become aware of the independent magazine as a site of representational discourse and collective identity formation, especially for the Asian American community.[1]

Banana appeared on my social radar sometime in the mid-2010s, and by the end of the decade there seemed to be a veritable deluge of other such platforms: *Burdock*, *FAR–NEAR*, and *Slant'd*, just to name a few physically based in New York. Of course, this spate of publications was not breaking completely new ground, per se; a number of Asian American indie magazines, such as *Giant Robot*, *Hyphen*, and *Yolk*, enjoyed their heyday in the 1990s and early 2000s.[2] But this new wave of cultural platforms seemed to speak to, for, and of younger generations of the Asian diaspora. Moreover, I became interested in three particular characteristics of recent magazines: their emphasis on grassroots cultural production across an array of creative fields; the spaces for online and offline networking and community-building they offered; and their transnational movements and connections to communities outside of North America.

Before I wade into this topic, I must state that I am far from a neutral party. I am a co-founder of *The Shanghai Literary Review*, an English-language independent magazine that I helped launch in 2017 with colleagues based in China. *TSLR* is a traditional literary journal,

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[1] In this paper, I have chosen to omit the hyphen from the demographic term Asian American, as is common practice now to denote minority communities in the United States. This seemingly minor shift to use a space instead of a hyphen effectively places the weight of the compound noun on 'American', while 'Asian' is reduced to an adjective, rather than a discrete identity and/or marker of origin that merits equal emphasis, as suggested by 'Asian-American'. While my own cultural identity may be closer to the hyphenated form, I have made this choice out of respect for the contemporary discourse of minority identities in America today.

[2] Lou Fancher, 'Giant Robot magazine feted in new Oakland exhibit', *The Mercury News* (11 April 2014) <www.mercurynews.com/2014/04/11/giant-robot-magazine-feted-in-new-oakland-exhibit/> [accessed 9 May 2023]. The Story of Hyphen Magazine, Hyphen (n.d.), <hyphenmagazine.com/about> [accessed 9 May 2023]. Jyni Ong, 'For The New Generasian': A Look Back On Long Lost Design Treasure, Yolk Magazine, *It's Nice That* (2019) <www.itsnicethat.com/features/yolk-magazine-publication-graphic-design-180219> [accessed 9 May 2023]

rather than a platform specifically for Asian American writing, but I would be remiss not to provide this crucial context for my own interest in the broader topic. I have also been a writer or editorial contributor for several of the other publications mentioned above, including *Banana*. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to think that my intimate knowledge of and access to the processes and people of indie magazine publishing is an advantage, rather than a liability. Nonetheless, I recognise the risk of my judgment or opinion being clouded by my proximity to the topic.

What I propose to narrativise here is not a comprehensive history of Asian diasporic publishing, but a much more focused comparison between two print magazines with provocative resonances and dissimilarities: *Banana*, founded in 2014 by Vicki Ho and Kathleen Tso in New York City, and *Sine Theta*, founded in 2016 by Jiaqi Kang, Iris Lang, and Michelle Tay, who were then based in Switzerland, England, and Singapore respectively. While *Banana* positions itself as 'a lifestyle and culture magazine centred around all things Asian' in its website's search engine description, *Sine Theta*'s 'About the Mag' page professes a much more focused mission to '[connect] and [empower] members of the Sino diaspora'. *Sine Theta* is not an Asian American magazine per se and has a globally dispersed team, but I believe it to be a relevant subject for comparison due to its Anglophone audience and inclusion of several North America-based editors.

In this paper, I offer an overview of how both platforms construct an Anglo-Asian diasporic creative community through their publications and associated activities. I examine the professional or creative ambitions of diasporic youth as conveyed by the curated content of the magazines. Finally, I synthesise textual analysis with anecdotal data, interviews, and correspondences to juxtapose the publications' unique histories and ethos, extrapolating what their thematic concerns may portend for Asian minority subjectivities in an era of shifting cultural politics.

Artefacts in the Making

Four decades ago, political scientist Benedict Anderson argued that the phenomenon of nationalism emerged from a combination of mass literacy, the advent of the printing press, and a global capitalist framework through which stories and texts could be circulated. Imagining oneself as part of a mass readership sowed in the reader the first seeds of cultural affiliation, which would later transform into ardent passions and self-sacrifice premised upon the 'deep, horizontal comradeship' of the nation-state.[3] Since Anderson first published these ideas, the world has been dramatically transformed by the development and proliferation of modern communications technology. Human civilisation in the 21st century is defined by 'rapidly increasing *transnationalism* and multimedia exposure as a means of negotiating kinship and connection' (emphasis added).[4] Cultural identities and notions of belonging are no longer tied to or centred on local, regional, and national media per se. Subjectivities have been stretched or distended, rendered porous and pliant, as the Internet has closed the gap between the farthest reaches of the world while flattening the experience of the quotidian through digital interfaces. 'In a postmodern and globalised age,'

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[3] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 7.

[4] May Friedman and Silvia Schultermandl, 'Introduction', in *Click and Kin: Transnational Identity and Quick Media*, ed. by May Friedman and Silvia Schultermandl (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), pp. 3–24 (p. 3).

observe May Friedman and Silvia Schultermandl, 'the notion of kinship is intertwined with ideas about the self-in-relation and of place as a node of multiple and contradictory cultural currents.'[5] And yet, despite the complexities of our technologised present, the printed word retains some of its power.

Enter *Banana*. Established in 2014 by Vicki Ho and Kathleen Tso, this magazine's title playfully reappropriates a term familiar to many Asian Americans as a pejorative for 'first generation Asians growing up in a Westernised world ("yellow" on the outside, "white" on the inside).'[6] In their inaugural issue, Ho and Tso articulate a mission to 'create a voice for contemporary Asian culture' and to highlight 'Asian talent across the globe' while navigating the so-called blurred boundaries between East and West. Both in their early twenties at the time, Ho and Tso brought together around two dozen contributors to produce a volume with nearly the same quantity of visuals (photographs, artwork, design elements) as text. Across eleven stories and 118 pages, including the front and back covers, *Banana*'s first issue offers a millennial take on traditional Chinese recipes for post-menstruation herbal soup; a profile of a newly opened bike shop in Manhattan's Chinatown; an illustrator's reminiscences of her maternal grandmother; conversations with Asian diasporic fashion designers and artists; a spotlight on Southeast Asian socialites; and even a feature on the cultural implications of Asians sporting bleach-blonde hair. This last topic would be taken up in a *New York Times* column four years later, affirming in a small measure the prescience of *Banana*'s youth perspectives.[7]

Sine Theta's inaugural issue was released in 2016 and prominently featured the Chinese character 始 (shǐ) on the cover and front matter, translated into English as 'Beginnings'. The magazine opens with a letter from editors Jiaqi Kang, Michelle Tay, and Iris Lang that describes the incident that incited this collaboration. As teenagers who desired to 'help empower members of the Sino diaspora like [ourselves],' the three of them organically decided to start a magazine based on the enthusiasm and momentum from a single conversation thread on the microblogging website Tumblr. They chose to produce a print magazine as it offers 'a different kind of permanence' that they hoped could serve as a physical token of community solidarity.[8] Kang, who uses they/them pronouns, says that the magazine's stylised title of $\sin\theta$ is a 'visual play' on the term Sino, a prefix denoting 'Chinese'.[9] Seven individuals contributed a total of nineteen works—seven written and twelve visual pieces—to this issue of 44 total pages (including front and back covers), with each contributor's location noted beneath their byline, ranging from Switzerland to Saratoga, Guangdong to Texas. The youngest of them was only sixteen years old at the time, 'a half-Swiss half-Chinese exchange student,' while the oldest appears to have been in college.[10]

The editors of *Banana* and *Sine Theta* diverge in median age by less than a decade, but this gap places them squarely into the discrete demographic categories of millennial and

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[5] Friedman and Schultermandl., p. 8.

[6] Vicki Ho and Kathleen Tso, 'Editors' Letter', *Banana*, 1 (2015), p. 5.

[7] Andrea Cheng, 'Why So Many Asian-American Women Are Bleaching Their Hair Blond', *New York Times*, 9 April 2018 <www.nytimes.com/2018/04/09/fashion/why-are-so-many-asian-american-women-bleaching-their-hair-blond.html> [accessed 7 May 2023].

[8] Jiaqi Kang, Michelle Tay, and Iris Lang, 'Letter from the Editors', *Sine Theta*, 1 (2016), p. 4.

[9] Jiaqi Kang, email to Mike Fu, 21 January 2022.

[10] 'Contributor Bios', *Sine Theta*, 1 (2016), p. 41.

Gen Z.[11] Despite the common ground they share, the magazines' origin stories and self-conscious positionalities bespeak particular trends and infrastructures that shaped their generational experiences. Deborah Wong contends that Asian America at the turn of the millennium was already firmly situated within 'a globalised circuit of Pacific Rim exchange'.[12] The Asian American youth of the early 2000s had been exposed to diverse forms of mass media and, as a result, consumed prolifically and created a hybrid culture in turn. Wong's sketches of some of her students ring relevant today, especially in their fluid conceptions of identity, belonging, and even generational naming. Her insistent usage of the label 'GenerAsian' to describe Asian American youth of the era, however, feels contrived at best and unrecognisable at worst to the contemporary reader.[13]

Wong also delves into the nuances of the slang term 'AZN', which indeed has persisted—*Banana* even uses this on their website's splash page, where the header 'All Things AZN' is emblazoned. This playful (and tongue-in-cheek, depending on who you ask) designation is a direct inheritance from the Asian American online culture of the early 2000s described by Wong. Though *Sine Theta* avoids this term, the fact that this publication was conceived on Tumblr demonstrates the continuing importance of the Internet and social media to the formation of youth identity. Per Kang, who now leads *Sine Theta* as editor-in-chief, the Internet provided a space where geographically dispersed teenagers 'juggled anonymity and authenticity' and interrogated their sense of cultural belonging. Finding peers of similar backgrounds and interests helped Kang continue to workshop a nascent feeling that Chineseness 'could be something good and interesting, rather than something to be ashamed of'.[14]

While Kang and their teen conspirators connected in the digital space of Tumblr, millennials Vicki Ho and Kathleen Tso encountered each other in a decidedly more traditional manner: as young professionals working in the fashion industry in New York City. Tso initially met Ho through the video project of a mutual friend, and they bonded as the only two Asian girls on set. Tso said in a phone interview that 'Black creative culture was really on the rise' in downtown Manhattan of the early 2010s, and the grassroots events that were coalescing around a creative agency called Street Etiquette partly inspired her and Ho to stake out their own cultural space for the Asian American community.[15] The decision to create a print publication arose naturally from the duo's combined experience in writing and digital media. Like *Sine Theta*'s editors, Tso envisioned the atemporal potentiality of the magazine-as-artefact, the idea that the fruits of their labour could be

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[11] Millennials can be defined as those born between the years of 1981 and 1996, while Gen Z denotes those born in the following fifteen years (1997–2012), according to Michael Dimock, 'Defining generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,' *Pew Research Center*, 17 January 2019 <www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/> [accessed 7 May 2023].

[12] Deborah Wong, 'GenerAsians Learn Chinese: The Asian American Youth Generation and New Class Formations', in *Art in the Lives of Immigrant Communities in the United States*, ed. by Paul DiMaggio and Patricia Fernández-Kelly (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2010), pp. 125–54 (p. 126).

[13] Referring to Asian American youth born in the 1980s (who thus came of age around the turn of the 21st century), Wong claims that "'GenerAsian" is more and more widely used by members of this generation to self-identify' (Ibid., p. 131). Though I fall into the age group she narrativises, this neologism was totally unfamiliar to me; an informal survey of my Asian American friends of the same generation revealed a similar ignorance.

[14] Jiaqi Kang, email to Mike Fu, 21 January 2022.

[15] Kathleen Tso, WhatsApp interview with Mike Fu, 2 December 2021.

retrospectively seen as 'an encapsulation of what was going on in our world, our community at the time'.

Since its founding in 2014, *Banana* has produced a total of seven glossy-covered print publications. In style and content, the magazine resembles *VICE Magazine* with its countercultural bent and hip posturing. Issue 005, for example, includes three features on Asian entrepreneurs working in the cannabis industry, as well as a story on the flourishing drag performance scene in Taipei's gay nightlife. Unsurprisingly, New York City features heavily in the pages of the publication and also plays a large role in offline community-building for the *Banana* editorial team.

In addition to this hyperlocal scene, the magazine also offers interviews with Asian or Asian American cultural figures who have achieved mainstream recognition in their industries. The profiles of diverse musicians, entertainers, and businesspeople in the pages of *Banana* establish a new paradigm for Asian American ambition beyond the staid notions of the model minority or perpetual foreigner and collectively convey a cultural cachet attractive to generations of young readers. Consider, for example, Issue 006's interviews with diasporic comedians such as Bowen Yang, *Saturday Night Live*'s first Chinese American featured player, and Ronny Chieng, an actor who appeared in *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) and went on to release his own stand-up comedy special via Netflix. Within the same issue is an extensive interview with Los Angeles-based Malaysian musician Yuna, who talks about her cultural and religious identity in relation to her songwriting practice, among other topics. Asian artists, restaurateurs, and designers are regular fixtures in the world of *Banana*, tacitly affirming the desires of younger generations who may have their sights set on professions outside the traditional STEM fields typically prized by immigrant families.[16]

Tso and Ho both still hold full-time careers in advertising, and the offline social dimension of *Banana* reflects the urbanite lifestyle that informs their ethos. The magazine's first event was a fundraiser at a Lower East Side art bar called Beverly's, while in subsequent years the team has organised (oftentimes with corporate and/or local vendors as sponsors) a Halloween party, a Lunar New Year karaoke night, a fried chicken happy hour, and launch parties for each issue featuring various Asian diasporic artists, craftspeople, and performers. Tso agreed with my assessment that in-person events are a critical component of the platform fashioned by *Banana* in New York. The physical magazine itself is 'just a vehicle to bring us together,' she explained over email, and went on to enumerate the various logistical hurdles related to printing and distribution.[17] In-person events are thus a core activity for the *Banana* community—no longer merely imagined through circulation numbers or social media, but a physical reality that affords opportunities for mutual

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[16] In 2013, Youyoung Lee and An Xiao wrote about the relatively high percentage of Asian Americans represented in the so-called creative class, a departure from the 'doctors and lawyers their parents may have once groomed them to be.' In a similar vein, sociologist Jennifer Lee called for Asian diasporic communities to broaden their perspectives on professional success in an opinion column for *The Guardian* the following year. Youyoung Lee, 'In America, A New Asian Creative Class', *HuffPost*, 27 August 2013, <www.huffpost.com/entry/in-america-a-new-asian-creative-class_b_3822813> [accessed 6 May 2023]. An Xiao, 'America's Newest Creative Class: Asian Americans', *Hyperallergic*, 17 September 2013, <hyperallergic.com/81614/americas-newest-creative-class-asian-americans/> [accessed 6 May 2023]. Jennifer Lee, 'We Need More Asian American Kids Growing Up to Be Artists, Not Doctors', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2014, <www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/16/asian-american-jobs-success-myth-arts> [accessed 8 May 2023].

[17] Kathleen Tso, email to Mike Fu, 26 January 2022.

connection, after the fashion of Tso's and Ho's first meeting.[18] Their online presence is strong in spite of their relatively sparse posts, with over 17,500 Instagram followers as of August 2023, more than five times *Sine Theta*'s roughly 3,300 followers.

If *Banana* could be said to operate within the realm of Asian American popular culture—on the streets of New York, thriving through its multitude of connections to fashion and entertainment and nightlife—*Sine Theta* occupies a very different psychic space as an independent platform that exists outside and beyond any one city or country. *Sine Theta* is fundamentally a transnational literary-artistic society for anyone of self-identified Chinese heritage, and the scope of their activities primarily targets Anglophone youth who engage in poetry, prose, and visual art as mediums of creative expression. The editors are highly active online and skew quite young, though they have advanced from their late teens to early twenties in the years since the publication's founding.[19] Rather than brick-and-mortar parties, the magazine invites interaction through online activities such as Zoom events, film tournaments, and contests judged by established Chinese American writers, such as fantasy novelist Rebecca F. Kuang (*The Poppy Wars*) and poet Chen Chen (*When I Grow Up I Want to Be a List of Further Possibilities*).

Despite the geographical distances that separate them, the editors have had opportunities to connect on the ground in places such as Beijing, San Francisco, and Oxford, demonstrating the tremendous degree of mobility that characterises their diasporic experience. In addition, one or more editors have represented the magazine at book fairs such as the London Radical Bookfair, the Asian American Literary Festival, and the Kuala Lumpur Art Book Fair. While Kang told me that the team hopes to have more physical engagements, they are hampered by the financial costs of preparing for events—such as the production of merchandise or the gathering of physical issues to sell—and the logistical hurdles of being dispersed around the globe. On the other hand, the focus on online activity has allowed *Sine Theta* to flourish even during the Covid-19 pandemic: they have maintained a steady clip as a quarterly magazine, releasing an impressive fifteen issues since 2020. In fact, the editorial team looks more robust than ever, now numbering twenty-three individuals across four continents.

Casual Cosmopolitanism

In his seminal essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', sociologist Stuart Hall identifies two divergent notions of cultural identity that inform the contemporary world. The first is an essentialist interpretation that seeks commonality over disparity, integral to concepts such as Aimé Césaire's 'négritude' that call for anti- or postcolonial solidarity. The second, while recognising some degree of shared understanding between marginalised peoples, foregrounds the 'critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute "what we

[18] *Banana*'s sixth issue was released in 2020 in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic. Recent conversations with Kathleen Tso have suggested that a seventh issue is forthcoming in 2023.

[19] I would like to note that *Sine Theta* has roughly the same number of followers on Twitter (around 3,000) as Instagram (around 3,300), but on the former platform they outnumber *Banana*'s audience fivefold. *Banana* has not tweeted with any regularity since 2019; *Sine Theta*'s Kang and other editors have sustained regular interaction and engagement on Twitter and skilfully use the platform to publicise the magazine's initiatives and activities.

really are'".[20] This latter view acknowledges the ruptures and asynchronies in the experience of the colonised subject and posits that their identity is shaped by and produced in relation to a shifting present and potential future, as much as the irrecoverable past. The Asian minority subjectivity of today's independent magazines treads between these two modes, simultaneously calling for kinship while sensitive to myriad economic, social, linguistic, and political disparities within the imagined community. But what does Asian or Sino diasporic solidarity portend for the decades ahead?

For Kang, the cosmopolitan composition of *Sine Theta*'s editorial team is one of its major assets. Kang grew up in Switzerland and says that Asian identity and experience in continental Europe is still necessarily 'mediated through an American and [Anglophone] lens'. Conversely, the publication intentionally avoids privileging North American perspectives as far as possible. Their raison d'être is to showcase the diversity of the Sino diaspora, and they have made good on this promise across more than two dozen issues. All of the contributor bylines include location, revealing at a glance the diffusion of writers and artists from across the United States—California, New York, and many places in between—as well as Canada, England, Chile, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, and elsewhere. Each issue also includes a glossary of Chinese terms that appear in the text, aphorisms and vocabulary words alike. Both Mandarin and Cantonese romanisations are provided, along with a definition or gloss. The magazine intuits the multiplicity of Chineseness in this manner, suggesting that this singular ethnic category belies a diversity of embodiments that spans languages and lineages around the globe.

Despite the emphasis on New York in the pages of *Banana*, the magazine has also looked farther afield and inflects transnationality in the style described by anthropologist Aihwa Ong in her book *Flexible Citizenship*. Issue 006, released in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, prominently showcases the artwork of Taiwanese artist SAITEMESS on the cover and includes a profile of her work by New York-based Taiwanese writer Nadia Ho. The same issue sketches the fraught history of indigenous shamanistic practices in Korea as context for a narrative about Helena Choi Soholm, a Seattle-based Korean American 'neoshaman' whose hybrid practice draws on her training in Western psychotherapy. Meanwhile, the feature 'Vietnam Voyeur' revisits the streets of Saigon and the bucolic countryside through photography by Vincent Trinh, juxtaposed with poetry by Diana Khoi Nguyen, both Vietnamese Americans. Issue 005 of *Banana* also showcased the trajectories of a handful of Vietnamese Americans who returned to their country of ancestry to build businesses or jumpstart creative careers. Cultural fluidity and cosmopolitan belonging are now more a part of the Asian American experience than ever, the magazine conveys through these stories. These themes and subjects deftly encapsulate Aihwa Ong's notion of transnationality as a sense of 'cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space' and a series of intersections, exchanges, or passages between identities under global capitalism.[21]

Diasporas and migration effectively '[destroy] the concept of the nation-state or of national belonging,' says Kang, and this phenomenon should be embraced as an alternative to hegemonic discourses of identity. Case in point: Kang's preferred usage of the term Sino, in lieu of Chinese. Rather than a single definition of an ethnic category, Kang locates power

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[20] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. by Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 257–71 (p. 259).

[21] Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 4.

in the actions of individuals and groups who create communities, plural, that are 'constantly shifting and morphing'. Furthermore, the malleability and potentiality of terms such as 'diaspora' or 'queerness' lend themselves to an entire ecosystem of dialogue, positioning *Sine Theta* in adjacency to many other communities and platforms. Meanwhile, the editorial decision to centre each issue's theme on a single Chinese character, emphasising a poetic interpretation over a literal one, speaks to the magazine's goal of reading and rereading language, culture, and ethnicity from an original and perhaps defamiliarised perspective.[22]

For an incredibly heterogeneous group like the contemporary Asian American diaspora, I believe that Hall's second framework—emphasising the difference and heterogeneity of minority cultural identities—is urgent and necessary to speak meaningfully of the community at large, not to mention its substrata and subcultures. While solidarity may have been the basis for the establishment of the Asian American as a category of personhood during the 1960s civil rights movement, today's discourse is much more fractured by virtue of the globalisation, transnational mobility, and digital mediations that characterise human society in the 21st century. As *Sine Theta* attests, the Sino diaspora alone contains multitudes. In their academic work as a PhD student at the University of Oxford, Kang has begun thinking about this narrative of mobility and dispersion from China as a history of capitalism itself. In this way, the Sino diaspora 'can help tell a story about the world' that Kang hopes 'would ultimately inspire all sorts of people to imagine a better future.'

I asked the editorial teams of *Sine Theta* and *Banana* to share their reflections on current trends in global cultural dynamics and how the world might change in the coming decades. Unsurprisingly, processes of globalisation and the popularity of transnational media were commonly cited as major influences on human civilisation today. *Sine Theta*'s managing editor Chi Siegel expressed her hope that 'non-Western sources of media [could become] more mainstream […] decentering Hollywood as the default locale for "prestige" film and TV,' while Kang highlighted the need to maintain 'hyperlocal cultural scenes and production modes' to resist monopolisation by corporate media entities such as Netflix, Amazon, and Disney. Tso of *Banana* thinks that exposure to international perspectives through the Internet and other media will continue to increase the visibility of minority communities. Though diversity and inclusion are hot topics nowadays in the United States, Tso notes that there is a bit of 'repetitiveness' as companies continue to workshop their approach to such matters.[23]

'There is this joyous strength' in the Asian diaspora, declares writer Xuan Juliana Wang in a nonfiction piece for Banana's sixth issue, reflecting on her return to Los Angeles and discovery of a much more vibrant creative community—'my fellow Asian degenerates'—than she recalled in her teenage years. 'It creates this strange feeling—what is it called? Is it belonging? Is it happiness?'[24] As of September 2023, Banana is poised to release its seventh issue while Sine Theta has already published its twenty-eighth. Their latest works offer diverse views onto the field of Asian diasporic cultural production, highlighting cast members on American reality TV shows and queer Asian painting to

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[22] Some of *Sine Theta*'s Chinese character themes are more literal than others, such as 始 (shǐ) for 'Beginnings' (#1) and 泥 (ní) for 'Mud' (#7). On the other hand, I enjoy their rendering of 口 (kǒu) as 'Gate' (#11), 香 (xiāng) as 'Perfume' (#14), and 角 (jiǎo) as 'Vertex' (#15), in lieu of more straightforward definitions as 'mouth', 'fragrance', and 'corner' for these respective characters.

[23] Jiaqi Kang, Chi Siegel, and Kathleen Tso, responses to a short Google Forms survey, 30 October 2021.

[24] Xuan Juliana Wang, 'LA Spawn', *Banana*, 6 (2020), p. 124–27 (p. 126).

profiles of novelists and textile artists.[25] As the United States enters another presidential election cycle and ideological tensions simmer across the globe, the mundane stories in the pages of these independent magazines become a form of escapism and utopian yearning. Were it so simple that finding community and belonging, whether online or in the city, could offer protection from racial enmity and violence. These platforms demonstrate nonetheless the potential of camaraderie beyond borders, a solidarity that is more than the sum of its parts. In an era of widespread discord and dissent, this hopeful narrative is a much-needed salve.

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[25] 'PRE-ORDER: ISSUE 007', *Banana* (n.d.) <www.banana-mag.com/shop/pre-order-issue-007> [accessed 26 August 2023]. 'ISSUE #28 "SOUND 音"', *Sine Theta* (n.d.) <sinetheta.net/28.html> [accessed 26 August 2023].

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Connecting with India: E. M. Forster's 'Some Books' and Louis MacNeice's 'India at First Sight'

Jennifer Kenyon

In 1942, in a radio talk broadcast to India on the BBC's Eastern Service, E. M. Forster noted that, while the time in the London recording studio was 'quarter to two', in India, the clock 'points to some other hour, which prompts in me the fancy that the connection between us is a connection outside time'.[1] Forster broadcast 145 talks on the BBC between 1928 and 1963, embracing radio's power to move beyond physical borders in order to explore the possibility of a deeper relationship between speaker and listener.[2] While critical studies initially focused on Forster's broadcasts for British audiences, the publication of a selected edition of his BBC talks in 2008 marked the beginning of a growing interest in his transmissions to India.[3] Most episodes ran under the self-effacing title 'Some Books', though they shared recommendations and reviews of a wide range of plays, music, and exhibitions alongside fiction, biographies, and histories. Forster was optimistic about the potential for 'connection' between Britain and India, yet his Eastern Service career began in 1941, just six years before the Partition of India and the dissolution of the British Raj. While this period was defined by volatility and political unrest, critics of 'Some Books' have tended to disregard the problematic power dynamics inherent in the act of broadcasting from the centre of the empire to a colony under British control.

Part of this critical blindness is due to a general lack of emphasis on the nature of Forster's talks as radio broadcasts. Initial critical responses to the 2008 edition of Forster's BBC talks tended to treat them as extensions of Forster's prose rather than a generic category in their own right. Zadie Smith's review for the *New York Review of Books* relegated the volume to prose that readers might leaf through during 'a lazy afternoon in an armchair'.[4] Similarly, William H. Pritchard credited the selected edition with providing a new explanation for the mysterious 'thirty-six years of silence' from Forster the novelist after the publication of *A Passage to India* (1924); describing the edition as a 'volum[e] of prose', Pritchard draws a link between the 'confiding ease' of Forster's broadcasts and his previous 'decades of shaping and cultivating a 'personal' voice in his novels' which risks interpreting

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[1] E. M. Forster, *The BBC Talks of E. M. Forster, 1929-1960: A Selected Edition*, ed. by Mary Lago, Linda K. Hughes and Elizabeth MacLeod Walls (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), p. 187. Further references to this volume are indicated in parentheses.

[2] Mary Lago, 'E. M. Forster and the BBC', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 20 (1990), 132-51 (p. 134).

[3] Forster, *The BBC Talks*. Studies of Forster's broadcasts to British listeners include Kate Whitehead, 'Broadcasting Bloomsbury', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 20 (1990), 121-31, and Todd Avery, 'Common Talkers: The Bloomsbury Group and the Aestheticist Ethics of Broadcasting', in *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 33-74. The *Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster* makes no reference to Forster's radio broadcasts, either to Britain or India; *The Cambridge Companion to E. M. Forster*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[4] Zadie Smith, 'E. M. Forster, Middle Manager', *New York Review of Books*, 14 August 2008, p. 8, reprinted in Smith, *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), pp. 14-28 (p. 27).

these radio talks as substitutions for novels, eliding the importance of their construction, performance, and mediation through the airwaves.[5]

Tellingly, by eliding such mediation, reviews of the selected edition also frequently disagreed in their assessment of the sincerity of Forster's professed intimacy of connection with his listener. For Smith, Forster's broadcasts reveal an 'anxious' character that stooped to 'empathetic condescension' of listeners in India and was 'apt to assume too much'.[6] For Judith Herz, conversely, Forster's manner is 'quiet, conversational, sometimes whimsical and a bit sentimental but never condescending'.[7] While the relationship between speaker and listener in Forster's broadcasts is far from simple, Forster worked to create a more deliberate narrative voice than Smith or Pritchard give him credit for. Forster's Eastern Service talks represent a developing, complex exploration of the interplay between radio communication and interpersonal connection at a time of immense political transition within Indian society.

Similar interpretative difficulties are a feature of the critical reception of Louis MacNeice's 'India at First Sight', transmitted in the aftermath of Partition on 13 March 1948, just a year after the final episode of Forster's 'Some Books' was broadcast. MacNeice was already an established scriptwriter and producer when he was dispatched to India by the BBC Features department in 1947 to report on and commemorate the moment of Partition. Jon Stallworthy's biography of MacNeice describes how, on arriving in Delhi on 9 August, scenes of political turmoil and violent upheaval prompted MacNeice to set aside the copy of Forster's *A Passage to India* he had been reading and turn instead to 'an armful of newspapers'.[8] MacNeice's experiences resulted in three dramatic radio features: 'India at First Sight', 'Portrait of Delhi' and 'The Road to Independence', broadcast to British audiences on the BBC's Third Programme between March and August 1948.[9] Like Forster's talks, MacNeice's features were concerned with the potential for radio to facilitate connections between Britain and India that might override geographical, political or perceived cultural differences.

Despite these far-reaching ambitions, MacNeice's interest in and experience of India has been placed within narrow limits, and a connection is seldom made between MacNeice and Forster's broadcasts. Though Melissa Dinsman's *Modernism at the Microphone* (2015) identifies MacNeice's 'need to forge communication and connection between the artist and society', her focus is on the poet's transatlantic broadcasts and voyages, and the volume makes only glancing reference to Forster's radio career.[10] Ashok Bery is one of the few critics to address MacNeice's relationship to India, identifying how his conception of life as 'dialectical' results in 'a productive instability', a 'consciousness of similarity and awareness of difference' common to both his experience of Britain in the context of his Irish heritage

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[5] William H. Pritchard, 'Forster as Broadcaster and Critic', *The Hudson Review*, 62.2 (2009), 337-44 (pp. 337-38).

[6] Smith, p. 20.

[7] Judith Scherer Herz, 'Forster's BBC Talks', *ELT*, 52.4 (2009), 479-83 (p. 480).

[8] Jon Stallworthy, *Louis MacNeice: A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), p. 356.

[9] Alongside the scripts for these features held in the Bodleian Library's MacNeice archive, a digitised recording of 'India at First Sight' is accessible at the British Library's Sound & Moving Image Archive. Recordings of MacNeice's other broadcasts on India, 'Portrait of Delhi' and 'The Road to Independence', have also recently been digitised by the British Library, and warrant further study.

[10] Melissa Dinsman, *Modernism at the Microphone: Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics During World War II* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 76.

and his impressions of India.[11] Aasiya Lodhi goes further, recognising MacNeice's attempt to evoke 'the space-binding nature of radio, its links to notions of imagined community' and its potential to convey 'a transnational, cosmopolitan post-empire vision of the nation'.[12]

This vision informs both broadcasts, despite their obvious differences. On the surface, MacNeice and Forster's broadcasts about and to India would appear to have divergent audiences and aims: Forster's talks speak to an Indian listener about culture, while MacNeice's dramatic feature attempts to share impressions of the country with a British audience after Partition. On closer inspection, however, both pieces are preoccupied with the potential for connection; while Forster uses the relationship between speaker and listener to explore the possibility of bonds that transcend borders, MacNeice employs a polyphony of shifting voices to communicate the subjective and changeable nature of human perception in the face of direct experience of a country and its inhabitants. Where 'India at First Sight' uses radiogenic sonic effects to call attention to the mutability of boundaries of space and time, 'Some Books' highlights the artifice and technological trappings of broadcasting to emphasise the distanced relationship between Forster speaking in London and his imagined listener in India. Although both authors are cognisant of the formal peculiarities of the radio medium, the issues they address continue to speak to—without necessarily being able effectively to speak about—the problematic nature of the colonial relationship between the two countries.

Forster's BBC career began on the Home Service in 1928, but it is the talks for the Eastern Service, commencing in 1941, that truly captured his attention. In a draft letter to George Barnes, then Director of Talks at the BBC, Forster explains:

> I can try my best overseas, and with hopes of ~~doing it with~~ freshness and ~~success~~ punch, because I'm ~~left to myself~~ let to rip and even allowed to be obscure if I want to be so.[13]

Forster's edits to the letter emphasise the creative and connective potential he saw in the broadcasts. Rather than being 'left to myself', he delights in the opportunity to 'let […] rip'. Forster sees being given free rein to determine his own subjects for the talks ('even' to be 'obscure') as freeing him from an obligation to select texts that might be considered required reading for listeners who were also subjects of British Imperial rule. Similarly, by revising his goal from 'success' (we may ask, as Forster himself seems to, what 'success' might have looked like here) to the more forceful opportunity of 'letting rip', Forster aspires to a far more vibrant, spontaneous communication style than the radio talk may have been thought to allow.

Since its inception, the genre of the radio talk has proved both difficult to define and the provocation of much debate. Hilda Matheson, the first BBC Director of Talks, who invited Forster to give his first series of broadcasts to British audiences in 1928, described how 'early experiments with broadcast talks' showed that 'it was useless to address the microphone as if it were a public meeting'. Instead, the listener demanded an intimate

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[11] Ashok Bery, 'Louis MacNeice, Ireland and India', in *Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Poetry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 74-100 (p. 86).

[12] Aasiya Lodhi, '"Countries in the Air": Travel and Geomodernism in Louis MacNeice's BBC Features', *Media History*, 24.2 (2018), 226-38 (p. 234).

[13] Forster, draft letter to George Barnes, c. 25 February 1944, quoted in Lago, 'Forster and the BBC', p. 149.

connection, 'expecting the speaker to address him personally, simply, almost familiarly'.[14] Todd Avery's account of the BBC Talks Department's style shifting from a 'personal mode of address toward a more impersonal style' after Matheson's resignation in 1931 does not tally with the continuation of Forster's distinctly personal approach.[15] Kate Whitehead's argument that radio played a significant role in cementing a 'cohesive image' of the Bloomsbury group draws a direct line from the genre of the written essay to that of the radio talk, 'a carefully scripted piece read out by the author', but this lineage does not allow either for the unique qualities of the talk nor the development of Forster's radio persona as distinct from his authorial voice.[16]

As noted above, Forster moved away from the novel form after the publication of *A Passage to India*, which has often led critics to assume that he turned his back on fiction in general.[17] Indeed, Forster's own reflections towards the end of his life imply as much: 'I can only suggest that the fictional part of me dried up'.[18] In his 2020 study of the Eastern Service, Daniel Morse has argued that, to the contrary, Forster's later work for radio 'pushed the boundaries of what was representable in fiction', though this 'has been overlooked because he did so from without the novel rather than from within'.[19] Nevertheless, in labelling the work as 'fiction', and in juxtaposing the 'inherited' genre of the talk with the 'maximalist' radio feature—itself a mix of documentary, news reportage and drama—Morse's attempt to reconsider Forster's broadcasts risks neglecting the creative potential of the talk itself.[20] Instead, I would argue that Forster continued to explore the radio talk for such an extended period because the genre offered a unique combination of creativity and criticism, a freedom of intimacy and connection, a tantalising combination of writing, editing, and speaking his own words aloud to be broadcast across the airwaves. The combination of convivial comment, instruction, quotation, and personal anecdote that make the radio talk so hard to define are precisely what gave Forster the freedom to 'let rip'.

Furthermore, by focusing on the perceived relationship between speaker and listener, I would suggest that a new mode of expression can be heard in these talks, one that falls between criticism and fiction, setting up a supposedly personal line of communication that Forster envisaged between himself and his imagined Indian listener that he used to explore his aesthetic, political, and ethical interest in connecting beyond geographical borders. As Morse argues elsewhere, foregrounding both the intimacy and the

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[14] Hilda Matheson, *Broadcasting* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1933), p. 75.

[15] Todd Avery, 'Common Talkers: The Bloomsbury Group and the Aestheticist Ethics of Broadcasting', in *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 33-74 (p. 50).

[16] Kate Whitehead, 'Broadcasting Bloomsbury', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 20 (1990), 121-31 (pp. 131, 121).

[17] For example, Jesse Matz, "You Must Join My Dead": E. M. Forster and the Death of the Novel', *Modernism/Modernity*, 9.2 (2002), 303-17. Even as Gordon Bowker is reviewing the Lago, Hughes and Walls 2008 selected edition, he casts Forster's talks as limited, lesser creations than his prose. While Bowker acknowledges that 'the idea that Forster abandoned fiction simply because he dried up is only partly true', he concludes that during his radio career Forster 'became a creative writer restricted to reflect critically on the creations of others'. Gordon Bowker, 'Radio Reviews', *TLS*, 19 September 2008, p. 23.

[18] Forster, letter to Wilfred Stone (18 February 1966), in *Selected Letters of E. M. Forster*, ed. by Lago and P. N. Furbank, 2 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), II, p. 289.

[19] Daniel Ryan Morse, *Radio Empire: The BBC's Eastern Service and the Emergence of the Global Anglophone Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), p. 93.

[20] Ibid., p. 22.

considered nature of Forster's Eastern Service broadcasts, Forster desired to establish 'a sense of personal connection, even as he acknowledged the physical and cultural distance between himself and his listeners'.[21]

Such distance was precisely what the Eastern Service was engineered to bridge or elide at the time. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 resulted in a 'wholesale reorganisation' of the British public broadcaster around the war effort.[22] By 1942, the success of Axis forces in Asia, alongside Britain's failure to secure Indian support for the Allied campaign, resulted in 'the strategic need for a strong voice—sympathetic to Britain—to be broadcast to South Asia and the Far Eastern theatre'.[23] While the Eastern Service was allowed to operate with a relative amount of autonomy, Ministry of Information memos to the BBC still instructed that overseas broadcasts should project 'the *democratic* character of British society' and 'the *Universal* character of British civilisation and culture'.[24] In this way, Ruvani Ranasinha interprets the BBC's output to India as deploying '"high culture" as an instrument of imperial didacticism'.[25] Until recently, criticism of 'Some Books' has tended to disregard the power dynamics inherent in broadcasting to and about India in the 1940s. Mary Lago identifies Forster's awareness of his 'cultural and political responsibility' as a broadcaster, while Stuart Christie aligns Forster's 'interests in freedom of expression and antifascism' with his move from the private sphere of novel-writing into the public sphere of radio.[26] Peter Fifield's analysis of Forster's talks does incorporate some of the broadcasts to India, and acknowledges radio's ability to enforce existing power structures, but does not extend this to examine the tension between Forster's anti-imperialist views and the ambiguities of BBC broadcasts to India.[27] I propose that Forster's work for the Eastern Service in particular presented not simply an opportunity for him to express his 'liberal politics and […] long-held ennoblement of personal intimacy and intercourse', as Fifield argues of Forster's broadcasts in general, but also a challenge to those politics and beliefs.[28]

From the start of his Eastern Service career, Forster called attention to the physical distance between speaker and imagined listener as a means of highlighting the possibility of more transcendent connections. From the first of his broadcasts to India, in October 1941, Forster frequently gives the impression of interrupting himself to clarify that this distance is geographical rather than emotional: he is 'talking to people as far away as you are—that is to say as far away in space, for it is quite possible that we may be close together in our hearts' (150). While the Ministry of Information's internal memoranda took pains to

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[21] Morse, 'Only Connecting?: E. M. Forster, Empire Broadcasting and the Ethics of Distance', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 34.3 (2011), 87-105 (p. 102).

[22] Lago, Hughes and Walls, 'General Introduction', in *BBC Talks*, pp. 1-47 (p. 18).

[23] Ruvani Ranasinha, 'South Asian Broadcasters in Britain and the BBC: Talking to India (1941–1943)', *South Asian Diaspora*, 2.1 (2010), 57-71, p. 61.

[24] Lago, Hughes and Walls, p. 21. Italics in original Ministry of Information memo.

[25] Ranasinha, p. 57.

[26] Lago, 'Forster and the BBC', p. 132. Stuart Christie, 'E. M. Forster as Public Intellectual', *Literature Compass*, 3.1 (2006), 43-52 (p. 43).

[27] Peter Fifield, '"I Often Wish You Could Answer Me Back: And So Perhaps Do You!": E. M. Forster and BBC Radio Broadcasting', in *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*, ed. by Matthew Feldman, Erik Tonning and Henry Mead (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 57-77 (p. 69).

[28] Ibid., p. 74.

emphasise the 'universal' nature of British civilisation as a tool to be deployed by the BBC in the interests of maintaining the cohesion of an empire under attack, Forster seems to be saying something more subversive here: that while Britain might control the airwaves, the possibility may remain for a more personal, emotional connection binding speaker and listener, one that might transcend the dominant colonial power dynamic. In March of the same year, the frustrations of physical distance and a one-way flow of information are again acknowledged, only for Forster to build alternative aural and imaginative ties:

> To-day its [sic] just my voice that goes East and reaches India: the rest of me stays sitting in a London Studio—worse luck—and it's only by an effort of the imagination that I can guess where you're sitting and what thoughts are in your minds. I often wish you'd answer me back: and so perhaps do you! (174)

By highlighting the inability for the speaker in the studio and the listener in India to see or converse with each other, Forster posits a shared sense of frustration, which, conversely, creates a sense of community. Forster extends this in the episode of 'Some Books' broadcast on 19 August 1942, where he imagines 'an Indian, aged about thirty, educated in India but interested in Western civilisation' (203). Forster constructs this specific persona in order to make a further imaginative leap, placing both speaker and listener together in a London theatre to watch the play *Watch on the Rhine* (1941). A mutual appreciation of culture across geographical and cultural boundaries is designed to be the antidote to Hitler 'trying to do us all in' (204). Yet Forster is also aware of the similarly totalitarian potential of Allied propaganda, especially when it is broadcast on the radio, and carefully destabilises his own rhetoric to expose this contradiction.

At the very start of the talk, the power of the broadcaster is criticised: 'you know how fond broadcasters are of employing the word 'you' […] 'you' ought to do this or that' (202). Forster aligns himself more closely with his audience by emphasising that he, too, is a consumer of radio: 'when I switch on myself, and become a listener instead of a speaker' (202). Similarly, while describing his Indian listener, he acknowledges alternate options at every turn, from the figure's likely age to their gender. Even when he deals directly with the play's message, Forster undermines his own authority by noting that, as an audience member, he 'fight[s] shy of propaganda plays […] I don't want to pay money to hear actors and actresses tell me this: they might just as well listen to me' (204). By highlighting the perspectival overlap between broadcaster/propagandist and listener/audience member, Forster demonstrates the complexity of interpersonal connection in the face of the threat of fascism, and the difficulty of broadcasting about cultural connection via the medium of radio, where propaganda was of the utmost importance for both Allied and Axis forces. Nevertheless, although Forster's attempts to break down the barrier between 'I' and 'you' and acknowledge the inherent power of his position are striking, they remain limited by the one-way flow of communication, and Forster's privileged status as a British intellectual broadcasting to, rather than listening to, Indian subjects.

While Forster worked to undermine his own potentially dictatorial position, in Louis MacNeice's 'India at First Sight', personal and social preconceptions prevent objective interpretation. As the introduction to the broadcast, penned by MacNeice and voiced by the BBC announcer, explains:

> The following is based on the author's own impressions when he visited Pakistan and India for the first time in 1947. It does not therefore claim to be objective. The sub-continent [...] is seen—or rather glimpsed—solely through Western eyes while the visitor is attended by

> the Western familiars of his mind. For it is only gropingly and fleetingly that any such visitor can cope with: India at First Sight.[29]

MacNeice prepares the audience for an experience characterised by uncertainty and shifting perspectives. The feature's protagonist, Edward, wants to 'forget all my own preconceptions, everything I've heard and read' in order to 'get my own impressions' (6). Nonetheless, MacNeice uses a polyphony of voices – Edward's 'Western familiars' – to destabilise this attempt. Edward's Nanny begins by voicing a judgemental, othering standpoint, suspicious of India: 'Oh, they're not like us, Master Edward' (1). Her perspective subsequently hovers between the reactionary views she would usually espouse and an implied deeper level of understanding:

> Now there are persons—and I'm one of them—that just can't stomach the way these Indians do things. And yet if one could see it from an Indian angle—which speaking for myself I can't—well, there's some method in their madness. (30)

Although Nanny claims to be 'speaking for' herself, MacNeice uses her to express not only opposing views of India but the essential instability and unreliability of any judgement or 'angle'. As Forster simultaneously affirms and undercuts the personas of speaker and listener, MacNeice destabilises his characters' identities and points of view to call into question the veracity of preconceptions about India.

In 'Some Books', Forster similarly uses the voices of others to refine his personal standpoint. A chance meeting with a 'young air-mechanic' is used to communicate Britain's desire to relate to India. We may wonder whether the character is a figure of Forster's imagination, fabricated in order to make his point. Indeed, Forster's initial quotation feels forced: the airman, apparently looking to read 'a cheap book on the Religions of India' exclaims "I want to know about them […] I've heard they're great!'". This jarringly jolly tone is soon abandoned in favour of a distinctly Forsterian register: 'I don't want to condemn anything before I've understood it' (157). The air-mechanic's comments affirm the links between conversation and interpersonal connection, the fight against fascism and the importance of literature:

> That seemed to be the true spirit of civilisation—the spirit the Nazis have missed. Not to condemn until you understand, and books help us to understand. (157)

Later talks employ more obviously fictional voices in order for Forster to position himself against their prejudices. In 1943, he can 'almost hear' the reactionary cartoon character Colonel Blimp 'saying "'ndian culture? Gad, sir, nothing but a few old curios'" only for Forster to retort 'but to some of us it means much more' (232). In Forster's 1946 talk 'India Again', originally broadcast during his second visit to India, Blimp has multiplied into a 'chorus of indignant colonels' who are 'overheard exclaiming "What next! Fancy sending out old gentlemen who fall ill and can do no possible good"'.[30] In the same way that earlier broadcasts deconstructed an imagined listener persona, Forster rebuts the colonels' exclamations: 'old I am, gentleman I may or not be, ill I was not'. Having dispensed with superficial physical and social judgements, Forster asks himself, 'did I do any good? Yes, I did.

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[29] MacNeice, 'India at First Sight', Oxford, Bodleian Libraries, MS 10641/41 5(c), p.1. Further references to this script are indicated in parentheses.

[30] Forster, 'India Again', in *Two Cheers for Democracy* (London: Edward Arnold, 1951), pp. 327-35 (pp. 334-5).

I wanted to be with Indians, and I was, and that is a very little step in the right direction'. As the airman promotes companionship beyond boundaries of religion, race, and geography, Forster's response to the colonels reinforces his argument that 'the only thing that cuts a little ice is affection'.[31]

MacNeice similarly employs the figure of a reactionary, outdated colonel to demonstrate the unsupportable, unsustainable rigidity of these kinds of perspectives. When we first meet Edward's Uncle Howard, MacNeice quickly establishes his viewpoint—a totemic administrator intent on maintaining colonial power structures. Howard celebrates the 'fine old times we had' only to interrupt himself to clarify the separation of British and Indian communities: 'What! What's that! Was he an Indian? Good Lord, no! Didn't I say in the Club?!' (2). But the uncle is not just a figure for Edward to compare his own views against. As with many of the characters in 'India at First Sight', Uncle Howard's prejudices and presumptions undergo something of a transformation as the narrative develops. After grudgingly acknowledging that it may be better for Indians 'to run their own show', MacNeice uses Howard to link the 'atrocities' perpetrated by Hitler with the British occupation of India and subsequent violence during Partition (28, 29). While Forster enters into imagined dialogues with the reactionary colonels in his talks, MacNeice destabilises his characters' points of view from within their own internal monologues. Howard acknowledges that his more inclusionary ideas could only be realised with a deeper understanding of his own emotions: 'That's my opinion—or it would be if I could read my own heart' (30). By emphasising that, like Nanny, Uncle Howard is a fictional construct—a voice in Edward's mind and the listener's ear—that can be made to express a reverse opinion, MacNeice reminds the audience tuning in that their views, too, have the potential for change.

The (inter)changeability of our attitudes is conveyed in part by MacNeice's manipulation of radio's most basic resource as a medium: sound. By the time MacNeice travelled to India, he had already written and produced several successful experimental pieces that eroded some of traditional conventions of radio drama. Although Aasiya Lodhi argues that MacNeice's 'post-war broadcasts mark a departure in his feature-making through an explicit engagement with the concept of going abroad', the use of sound to transgress boundaries in 'India at First Sight' represents a development of MacNeice's style, rather than a total departure from it.[32] As in MacNeice's 1946 radio drama *The Dark Tower*, 'India at First Sight' uses the sonic opportunities afforded by radio to transport the audience. In *The Dark Tower*, MacNeice works 'a motif of self-consciousness into the actions of the characters', using orchestral sound to, for example, 'fling up' the four walls of a pub.[33] While 'India at First Sight' does not employ an orchestra, MacNeice still uses sound to signal changes in location. A combination of a sitar being played and the noise of aeroplane engines running announces Edward's arrival in India; the Islamic call to prayer, translated into English, establishes a scene in the mosque at Benares (3, 25). As in *The Dark Tower*, MacNeice's use of sound is not just a practical signposting device. Instead, in employing these radiogenic elements, 'India at First Sight' links the aural cacophony of travel with the shifting viewpoints of MacNeice's characters, and the merging of Edward's memories of home with his experiences in India. Sound has a destabilising effect: as Nanny sings the

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[31] Forster, 'India Again', p. 335.

[32] Lodhi, p. 226.

[33] Paul Long, "'Ephemeral Work": Louis MacNeice and the Moment of "Pure Radio"', *Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, 7 (2009), 73-91 (p. 81). MacNeice, *The Dark Tower* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), p. 39.

Christian hymn 'Shall We Gather at the River' her viewpoint shifts into that of an Indian nurse recounting stories about the Ganges (23). In this way, MacNeice inextricably aligns radio and sound with the possibility for associations that move beyond the boundaries of space, time, and an individual character's consciousness.

Forster, like MacNeice, consistently called attention to the artificial and technological aspects of his talks. A belief in the value of 'connection with India' is frequently expressed through destabilising allusions to broadcasting's technological, spatial, and temporal realities (187). In April 1942, Forster informs the listener that 'I have popped on to a seat lately occupied by a previous speaker and now I must vacate it in my turn' (187). The colloquial 'popped' belies the complex processes involved in broadcasting talks on the BBC during this period: scripting, reviewing, editing, rehearsal, and then broadcasting. Forster emphasises the clock 'on the wall of the studio' that dictates when he must 'stop', but even this reminder of the temporal constraints of the radio schedule is skilfully intertwined with Forster's ability to foster a sense of intimacy between broadcaster and listener. As quoted above, while it is 'quarter to two' in Britain, Forster acknowledges that in India the clock 'points to some other hour, which prompts in me the fancy that the connection between us is a connection outside time' (187). For Forster, a connection 'outside time' was not just a difference in physical location or hour of day. By highlighting how radio waves facilitate contact across time zones, Forster raises the optimistic possibility of mutual understanding beyond geographical, political, or chronological constraints. Similarly, in June 1943, Forster pejoratively describes how he is now required to record his talks in advance onto a gramophone disc: 'it seems to me to interpose an extra piece of machinery between us, between you and me' (227). This process is distancing and depersonalising: if the listener now wishes to 'visualise' Forster, he instructs them not to 'think of a human face. Think instead of a needle moving down a groove, in a studio, for that's what's making the noise' (227). Despite the 'impediment' of the gramophone apparatus, Forster still reaches out across the airwaves to connect with his listener: 'I salute you, and would remind you that civilisation rests upon direct personal intercourse [...] that broadcasting, even at its best and most intimate, is only a makeshift' (227). At the same time as Forster acknowledges the limitations and frustrations inherent in his chosen medium, he is able to take the listener into his confidence, emphasising the value of interpersonal connection.

Like the 'authoritative' clock on the wall in 1942 and the 'impediment' of the 'spinning black gramophone disc' in June 1943, in December 1943 Forster turns his arch, disparaging tone on the microphone itself to express the potential for kinship beyond the confines of the studio (187, 227). Forster notes that receiving books from his Indian listenership:

> remind[s] me that links between culture here and culture your end do exist, and that the microphone, which hangs before me now like a petrified pineapple, is capable of evoking a human response. (258)

By emphasising the potential for communication and cultural exchange between Britain and India, Forster reminds us that alliances are possible despite geographical or technological barriers. However, the exchange is not necessarily mutually beneficial, as exemplified by the image of the 'petrified pineapple' which teeters between the humorous and endearing and the condescending, as it recalls the distance between a freshly grown, tropical fruit and its petrified, transmogrified appearance in the London radio studio where Forster is speaking to subjects of the British empire using an object resembling a symbol of exported, exploited, exotic bounty. As Morse notes, the ribbon microphones adopted by the BBC in

the 1930s extended the frequency range captured by broadcasts, improving the verisimilitude with which Forster's talks could be transmitted.[34] The indented cover of the ribbon microphone is indeed reminiscent of the textured surface of a pineapple, but the simile also evokes the colonial transportation of goods. While the pineapple was not native to India, it was exported by Portuguese colonisers to India from the sixteenth century onwards and, despite British horticulturalists' best efforts to grow the fruit in cold-weather conditions, most pineapples consumed in Britain were imported from colonies including India.[35] While Forster intended to strengthen intellectual and cultural links, it is crucial to recognise the underlying power dynamics of his broadcasts from Britain to India.

'India at First Sight' also reinforces the unbalanced relationship between imperial centre and colony, between the privileged traveller and the foreign land he attempts to interpret. Although MacNeice gives India a voice, the act of attempting to represent the country as a character is an inherently distancing one—a disjunction reflected in the variance between the character being named 'India' in the version of the script held in the Bodleian Library's MacNeice archive but designated, strikingly, as 'the Other' in all three *Radio Times* listings for the original broadcast and its repeats.[36] Similarly, while MacNeice's dialogue can destabilise prejudicial viewpoints, it frequently reinforces them. When India/the Other asks, 'can you imagine how I felt' during the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the Still Voice —the character that MacNeice uses to give voice to Edward's innermost thoughts—admits that Edward 'often thought of you as if you were an aborigine, a savage' (19). Instead of working against this offensive imagining, the voice of India/the Other reinforces it, affirming: 'Sometimes I am. There are many millions of me away in the forests and the bad lands' (19). While MacNeice touches on 'social, economic reasons' for 'the gulf' between Muslims and Hindus, he quickly moves on to describe two Indian 'sons who were poets. One was a Hindu, one was a Muslim' (36). But this allusion to Rabindranath Tagore and Muhammad Iqbal does not go far enough to address the breadth or depth of Indian culture, the complexity of Indian religious divisions, or the British exploitation of differences in the service of maintaining their dominance. For a broadcast that acknowledges its limitations and tries to vocalise a range of opinions, 'India at First Sight' often falls back on stereotypical characterisation and fails to recognise the impact of Imperial rule.

For Paddy Scannell, broadcast media's reliance on the listener or viewer creates a 'complex phenomenological projection which is unobtrusively but pervasively embedded in programme output'.[37] However, MacNeice's 'India at First Sight' and Forster's 'Some Books' explicitly call attention to the experience of listening. Through complex shifts between assertion and negation, these broadcasts aim to promote the value of human partnership beyond perceived geographical, racial, social, or cultural frontiers. MacNeice and Forster attempted to encourage 'more equitable relationships of exchange rather than exploitation'.[38] Moreover, both broadcasters use language and sound in strikingly similar ways to reveal both the power of communication to foster connection and the persistence

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[34] Morse, *Radio Empire*, p. 25.

[35] Ruth Levitt, "'A Noble Present of Fruit": A Transatlantic History of Pineapple Cultivation', *Garden History*, 42.1 (2014), 106-119 (p. 107).

[36] *Radio Times*, 5 March 1948, p. 21. See also 26 March 1948, p. 19, and 23 April 1948, p. 13.

[37] Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television, and Modern Life: A Phenomenological Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 14.

[38] Morse, *Radio Empire*, p. 113.

of boundaries and prejudices it must traverse or transgress. As Forster reflected in 1931, at the start of his broadcasting career, radio talks:

> remind listeners that the world is large and the opinions in it conflicting, and they make the differences vivid and real to him because their medium is the human voice and not the printed page.[39]

However, both Forster and MacNeice frequently struggled with, or else failed to recognise, the inherent power of their position, broadcasting from the centre of the British Empire to a current or recently liberated colony. Both writers hoped to harness the ability of radio waves to transcend geographical borders in order to forge, in Forster's words, a 'connection outside time'. Entrenched power structures prove far more challenging to move beyond.

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[39] Forster, 'The Freedom of the BBC', *New Statesman and Nation*, 14 April 1931, pp. 209-10 (p. 210).

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From Strings to Sensors: Movement Representation in AI Theatre

Abhik Maiti

On February 26, 2021, Daniel Hrbek, the director of Svanda Theatre in Prague, helmed a novel theatrical production titled 'AI: When a Robot Writes A Play'. This event, the first-ever theatrical work generated by an artificial intelligence, or AI, system, marked a significant milestone in the realm of performing arts.[1] The play achieved widespread acclaim beyond Prague, reaching stages in London, New York, and Chicago where it garnered praise from publications such as *The Daily Telegraph, The Times,* and the *British Theatre Guide*.[2]

The assimilation of AI technology into theatre practices has inaugurated an expansive frontier of possibilities for both thespians and spectators. In terms of movement, this involves the use of avatars, which inhabit a customary screen milieu (encompassing three-dimensional in-world scenography) that necessitates simultaneous consideration of a tridimensional theatrical space and coexisting performers, within a moment of real-time inception and interconnectedness. This complex confluence raises questions pertaining to the 'avatarisation' of corporeal embodiments on the theatrical stage and the consequent emergence of novel performative methodologies.[3] Within AI-enabled performances, the use of motion capture technology, commonly known as 'mocap', entails the recording of skeletal data from physical actors, referred to as 'mocaptors', who wear a geo-spatial system for motion capture. This is then translated into digital data that can subsequently be used to animate digital characters or avatars.

This paper seeks to analyse the use of AI within the theatre, in particular how it enables the representation of movement through wearable biomechanics, and how the use of this technology contrasts with its customary deployment in conventional theatrical productions. While conventional theatre frequently has to grapple with the limitations of representing human motion due to the physical constraints of human actors, AI theatre possesses the capacity to enhance and manipulate these constraints. Consequently, it empowers actors to execute movements that substantially depart from the confines of human physical capabilities.

The use of advanced motion capture technology enables the development of highly customised avatars tailored to specific theatrical performances. For instance, an avatar can be programmed to execute a particular dance routine or portray a specific character, with the ability to adjust its movements or dialogue in response to the audience or other

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[1] 'The First Theatre Play Written by AI', Czech Universities, 2021 <https://www.czechuniversities.com/article/the-first-theatre-play-written-by-ai#:~:text=His%20famous%20play%20R.U.R.%20premiered%20in%201921%20and,Physics%20in%20cooperation%20with%20%C5%A0vanda%20Theatre%20and%20DAMU> [accessed 10 August 2023]

[2] c.Arifa Akbar, 'When a Robot Writes a Play', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2021 < https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2021/mar/01/on-the-scene-like-a-sex-obsessed-machine-when-a-robot-writes-a-play-ai> [accessed 17 August 2023]

[3] c.Rudolf Rosa et al, 'THEaiTRE: Artificial Intelligence to Write a Theatre Play' (2020) <ArXiv, abs/2006.14668> [accessed 10 August 2023]

performers. This flexibility and adaptability make motion capture technology a potent tool for creating dynamic and interactive performances that can respond in real time to the audience's requirements.[4] Beyond the technical aspects of redefining movement through the use of wearable biomechanics, this concept has the potential to revolutionise theatre by blurring the boundaries between the real and the virtual, humans and machines, and the physical and digital worlds. By employing AI to generate virtual limbs and body parts, performers can explore unprecedented forms of artistic expression and storytelling and engage with audiences in new ways.[5] As theatre continues to evolve and new technologies emerge, the integration of wearable biomechanics has progressively assumed a more crucial function in creating diverse expressions of movement that deviate significantly from those seen in traditional theatrical presentations.

To articulate this distinction between conventional and AI theatre, I will consider three recent productions that incorporate biomechanics: *Dream* (2021) and *The Tempest* (2016), both by the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC); and *Play the Knave* (2017), which was developed as part of a research project at the University of California, Irvine. My choice of productions based on Shakespearean material is deliberate: Shakespearean plays have long garnered acclaim for the depth and complexity of their characters, their broad and nuanced emotional range and their intricate narratives, making them an ideal testing ground for the exploration of how AI might contribute to the art of acting and storytelling as well as faithfully replicate subtleties of human movement, expression, and emotion. Within Shakespearean plays, there exists a diverse array of dramatic moments that challenge AI to adapt convincingly to their portrayal, ranging from passionate love scenes to intense battles and profound soliloquies that delve into the deepest recesses of human emotions, and so these case studies endeavour to illuminate the particular set of choices facing creative practitioners and theatrical directors seeking to employ AI as a means to explore the frontiers of technological innovation and artistic representation. Ultimately, I hope to suggest paths for future developments within this exciting field, offering novel approaches to the seamless integration of AI into the world of performing arts.

Creating Organic Movements through Puppets

The practice of imbuing life into inanimate puppets originated with English theatre practitioner Edward Gordon Craig in the 1800s and the early 1900s.[6] It was further developed into the concept of biomechanics by Russian theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold, who drew inspiration from Konstantin Stanislavski. Meyerhold incorporated the mechanical movements of the über-marionette derived from puppet theatre into the performance of live actors, resulting in a style of acting that appeared mechanical and distinct from the prevailing naturalistic acting of the period. By deconstructing the actor's body into separate components, he aimed to create a more expressive and dynamic

[4] c.Antonio Pizzo, 'Introduction: Drama and Artificial Intelligence' <https://iris.unito.it/retrieve/handle/2318/61616/7774/pizzo_intro_drama_ai.pdf> [accessed 10th August 2023]

[5] c.Wu Zhen and Lian Luan, 'Physical World to Virtual Reality—Motion Capture Technology in Dance Creation', *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1828 (2021), 12–97.

[6] c.Rachael W. Guy, 'Enlivening the Uncanny: On Existential Mirrors and the Anthropomorphic Impulse in Adult Puppet Theatre' (2013) <https://www.academia.edu/9948540/Enlivening_the_Uncanny_On_existential_mirrors_and_the_anthropomorphic_impulse_in_adult_puppet_theatre> [accessed 10 August 2023]

performance. Drawing from *commedia dell'arte* and kabuki traditions, as well as Craig's writings, Meyerhold's system emphasised pantomime over verbal communication and guided actors to move in puppet-like postures under the director's instructions.[7] Rather than replicating human biomechanics, the puppet captures the essence of movement.

Meyerhold's ideas were further integrated into live performances with the incorporation of technology by American choreographer Merce Cunningham, who pioneered the use of motion capture technology, body sensors, and computer software in dance to push the boundaries of the human body. This revolutionary approach had a significant impact on the notion of movement in modern performance.[8] One notable example is the use of DanceForms software, which facilitated the modelling and animation of human movements on a computer screen, subsequently translated into physical performances by dancers. Cunningham employed motion capture technology to go beyond corporeal constraints and generate ethereal visual manifestations within a digital realm.[9] By attaching sensors to a person's body to capture their movements and project them onto a digital character or avatar in real-time, the performer gains control over the avatar's movements, analogous to a puppeteer manoeuvring a puppet through bodily movements.

Within the context of AI theatre, the concept of the puppet and the über-marionette assumes a renewed significance whereby avatars serve as digital representations of performers, programmed to execute specific movements and actions. The interaction between performer and avatar underscores the interplay between the organic and the artificial, as well as how these elements intertwine. While the performer's physical body is crucial for creating the avatar, the avatar exists independently of the performer's corporeal form. This raises questions about the avatar's performative nature and the extent to which it is entwined with the physical body. The director's artistic vision determines how the avatar should move and express itself. Thus, the performer becomes a conduit for the director's vision, further blurring the boundaries between the organic and the artificial. Consequently, in AI theatre, the performers may be likened to über-marionettes, with the director assuming the role of the puppeteer and the AI system, including motion capture and wearable biomechanics devices serving as the imperceptible strings guiding the movements of the über-marionettes.

This relationship contrasts sharply with those found in traditional theatre where performers theoretically possess complete control over their movements and actions on stage, enabling them to infuse their own interpretation of the character into the performance. In AI theatre, the performer's autonomy is often supplanted by the director and the AI system which is based on codified algorithmic instructions that govern the movements of the avatars. These instructions can either be pre-programmed or generated in real time, taking into account external factors such as audience response. The director may employ these instructions to guide the performers, exerting even more control over their movements and actions. Moreover, the AI system itself can suggest instructions,

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[7] c.Chloe Whitehead, 'An Explanation and Analysis of One Principle of Meyerhold's Biomechanics', *Tormos, Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 8.1 (2017), 89–102.

[8] c.Thecla Schiphorst, 'A Case Study of Merce Cunningham's Use of the Lifeforms Computer Choreographic System in the Making of Trackers' (unpublished masters thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1986) <https://www.academia.edu/177957/A_Case_Study_of_Merce_Cunninghams_use_of_the_Lifeforms_Computer_Choreographic_System_in_the_Making_of_Trackers.> [accessed 10 August 2023]

[9] c.Roger Copeland, 'Cunningham, Collage, and the Computer', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 21.3 (1999), 42–54.

introducing unexpected or unique elements into the performance, thereby engendering an unpredictability and dynamism that may not be attainable solely through human-controlled performances.

Dream (2021), based on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, illustrates this. This British production—a collaboration between the RSC, art collective Marshmallow Laser Feast, and the Philharmonia Orchestra—offered a compelling connection between puppet theatre and AI-driven performance. Through the implementation of AI, *Dream* introduced pioneering forms of movement that deviated from traditional norms. Its heightened kinetic configurations drew inspiration from puppet theatre and Meyerhold's biomechanical principles, further amplifying the production's unique fusion of traditional and innovative elements. Clad in motion-capture suits, the actors enlivened their virtual avatars through their performances, establishing a unique rapport between the tangible and the digital. This unconventional approach provided the audience with an opportunity to engage directly with AI-generated avatars on the screen, crafting novel movement patterns.[10] Spectators transitioned into active contributors who could reshape the AI-generated avatars on screen, combining and altering movements to create their own distinctive sequences. This interactive collaboration transformed the production into a dynamic, ever-evolving experience, where each viewer's manipulation generated fresh arrangements of movement and artistic expressions in real time.

Another Shakespeare production that similarly redefined movement through the use of AI is *The Tempest* (2016). Through the fusion of traditional stage design with AI technology, the RSC, in collaboration with Imaginarium Studios and Intel, created an immersive virtual reality experience for this performance.[11] This multidimensional viewing experience extended movement beyond the physical realm into virtual reality, offering audiences a real-time encounter that blurred the boundaries between the live and the digital. Anchuli Felicia King's examination of this production illuminates the synergy between the hardware and software used by RSC and Intel as they interact with Ariel's textual portrayal as a supernatural entity, mirrored in the seamless, fluid movements of the digital puppet.[12] As avatars and projections move seamlessly through the virtual space, the idea of movement becomes unusually fluid, transcending the limitations of physical space and gravity. The AI generation of virtual appendages and body components, such as Ariel's virtual wing, also enabled innovative configurations of physicality. Thus, through the use of digital puppetry, achieved through live motion capture techniques, introduced a new dimension to movement on the stage.

The Metamorphosis of the Performers: AI and the Über-Marionette

The integration of motion capture technology in AI theatre underscores the significance of the über-marionette paradigm within contemporary performances, one

[10] c.Boyd Branch, Piotr Mirowski, and Kory Mathewson, 'Collaborative Storytelling with Human Actors and AI Narrators', *Event Report* <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2109.14728.pdf.> [accessed 10 September 2023]

[11] c.Michael Billington, 'The Tempest Review – Beale's Superb Prospero Haunts Hi-Tech Spectacle', *The Guardian*, 18 November 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/18/the-tempest-review-simon-russell-beale-rsc> [accessed 7 September 2023]

[12] Anchuli Felicia King, 'Digital Puppetry and the Supernatural: Double Ariel in the Royal Shakespeare Company's The Tempest', in *Shakespeare and the Supernatural*, ed. by Victoria Bladen and Yan Brailowsky (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 70–84.

balanced between increased control and increased unpredictability. Empowering performers to manipulate digital characters in real time, using their physical movements as a foundation for their performances, motion capture technology enables performers to generate digital characters that instantaneously respond to their movements and actions, granting them a level of precision and control that is unattainable through traditional human performance. Simultaneously, the avatar's movements are not constrained by the physical limitations of the performer's body; instead, they are governed by the digital technology underlying the performance which allows for input from multiple sources, thereby enhancing the contingency of dramatic performance.

The Shakespeare project *Play the Knave* (2017) blended technology, theatre, and video-gaming to explore the potential of AI in the theatrical representation of movement. Developed as part of a research project at the University of California, Irvine, it provided a platform for participants to engage with and perform scenes from Shakespearean plays within a virtual environment. Participants would step into the roles of actors and employ motion capture technology to interact with virtual avatars inhabiting a Shakespearean world. The motion capture technology tracked participants' movements, allowing them to exert control over the avatars' actions and gestures. The incorporation of works such as *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* into a technological framework sought to explore how modern technology could not only adapt but also enhance engagement with theatre classics.[13]

The production used the motion capture mechanisms of the software Kinect to allow participants to influence the behaviour of characters or even take on roles themselves in enacting scenes from Shakespeare's plays, via the following process:

1. Depth sensing: Kinect's depth sensors emit infrared light and measures the time it takes for the light to bounce back. This process creates a depth map of the physical space and the participants within it.

2. Skeletal tracking: Kinect's advanced skeletal tracking capability identifies and tracks the movements and positions of individuals in real time. It recognises joints and body parts, creating a virtual skeleton for each participant. This skeletal data is crucial in understanding how participants are engaging with the Shakespearean scenes.

3. Gesture recognition: Kinect can identify specific gestures and poses made by participants. In *Play the Knave*, this feature enabled users to interact with the characters or manipulate the scenes by gesturing and moving in ways that corresponded to the theatrical narrative.

4. Real-time interaction: Kinect processes the captured movement and gestures in real time. This data is then used to dynamically influence the progression of the Shakespearean play.

A pivotal facet of this engagement pertained to the latitude afforded to participants in generating innovative kinaesthetic expressions. Every participant bequeathed their

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[13] c. Gina Bloom, Sawyer Kemp, Nicholas Toothman, and Evan Buswell, 'A Whole Theater of Others: Amateur Acting and Immersive Spectatorship in the Digital Shakespeare Game Play the Knave', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 67 (2016), 408–30.

distinct corporeal disposition to the performative tableau, thus generating an array of variegated movements and affectations. This collaborative mode of movement contributed diversity to the characters and scenarios, as participants invested the performance with their individual personas and emotions. Participants could experiment with diverse gesticulations, stances, and ambulations that may not have traditionally been associated with the characters they were enacting. The avatars become extensions of the participants' corporeal entities.[14] The interplay between the corporeal interactions of the participants and the digital simulacra of their avatars serves to obfuscate the boundaries between actuality and artifice.[15] This dynamic interlocution plunges participants into a milieu wherein their gestures wield palpable ramifications, thereby amplifying the emotive reverberations of the performance.

Play the Knave also employed 'glitchy mechanics', or inadvertent aberrations or anomalies that manifest in the operational behaviour of AI-driven entities or components in a theatrical production. The erratic and quasi-spasmodic movements generated by these glitches, which arose from coding issues, were seamlessly integrated into the performance, contrasting starkly with the smooth and synchronised motions typical of theatrical avatars. This disrupted the seamless cadence of movements in ways that challenge established norms of movement representation within theatre. The movements showcased on stage were imbued with a distinctive digital aesthetic, characterised by their unpredictability and unconventional fluidity. Much like the unpredictability of a puppet's gestures, which can yield movements that are surprising, disjointed, and even surreal, the glitch-induced irregularities of *Play the Knave* bestowed upon the avatars a certain surreal quality, enabling them to transcend physical boundaries and execute movements beyond the capabilities of the human body.

While pursuing a notably digital aesthetic, the incorporation of these glitches also harken back to the declamatory style employed by ancient rhetoricians and early modern theatres, characterised by grandiose, formalised gestures momentarily suspended for dramatic effect. Matthew G. Kirschenbaum's observation that digital technology involves the segmentation of continuous motion into discrete, abstract representations also bears on this style of performance which employs gestures to convey emotions or states of action in an attempt to actualise the immaterial.[16] In *Play the Knave*, the performers simultaneously navigate the domains of corporeal entities (wherein they are physical actors capable of executing various movements), and abstract symbols (as on-screen avatars serve as visual indicators of those movements), concurrently inhabiting the domains of reality and abstraction.[17] This coexistence serves as a reminder that the avatar is a digital representation of the performer, rather than a direct embodiment of the performer themselves. Through the use of the wearable biomechanics, the performer's movements and expressions are translated into digital data points, which in turn animate the avatar.

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[14] c.Luca Befera and Livio Bioglio, 'Classifying Contemporary AI Applications in Intermedia Theatre: Overview and Analysis of Some Cases' <https://ceur-ws.org/Vol-3278/paper4.pdf.> [accessed 10 August 2023]

[15] c.Befera and Bioglio, 'Towards Intelligent Interactive Theatre: Drama Management as a Way of Handling Performance' <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1909.10371.pdf.> [accessed 17 August 2023]

[16] Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Bitstreams: The Future of Digital Literary Heritage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), pp. ix, 145.

[17] c.Radu Teampău, 'Emergence and Artificial Intelligence in the Performing Arts', *Theatrical Colloquia 12* (2022), pp. 105–13.

Consequently, the avatar assumes the role of a digital manifestation of the performer's idealised form, encapsulating the essence of the performer's performance while surpassing the physical limitations of the human body.

This notion of movement generated through the über-marionette becomes particularly salient in the context of digital avatars' performances within AI theatre productions. Within these theatrical presentations, the avatars demonstrate a capacity for executing motions that diverge from the capabilities of human actors while at the same time encapsulating the otherwise imperceptible aspects of their movement, as did the early 'moving' pictures of Eadweard Muybridge. AI theatre has given rise to a unique declamatory performance style, resulting in a distinctive form of movement that sets it apart from while also reintegrating it within the history of theatre. In the context of *Play the Knave*, the performers exist as both entities and metaphors, embodying real beings and narrative constructs, coexisting in a hybrid state of the human and the non- or supra-human. This is made possible through the concept of the empowered performer, who propels the narrative forward rather than being subordinate to the author and who possesses the capability to reinterpret the narrative in their own distinct ways.

The distinct declamatory movement style generated by *Play the Knave's* glitchy mechanics thus further reinforces the disparity between AI theatre's movement aesthetics and established norms.[18] While traditional theatrical performances rely on the physical abilities of actors to execute choreographed sequences, often grounded in realism, *Play the Knave* generates a synergy between technology and performance, yielding movements that are not merely distinctive but arguably transformative in nature. Movement in AI theatre, while not inherently superior to that of traditional theatre, exhibits distinct characteristics unlike the conventional paradigms of movements executed by human performers. Although AI-generated performances may not yet convincingly replicate the entire range of human emotions and subtleties of expression, they present unique movement forms which are otherwise unattainable by human actors. The future of movement in theatre will likely involve a blend of human and AI-generated performances.

Next Steps: The Future of AI in the Theatre

AI theatre has the potential to reconfigure the traditional paradigms governing theatrical movement representation. It can challenge and enrich the conventional understanding of movement in the performing arts by expanding the horizons of human movement, redefining choreographic authorship and integrating technology with audience participation. This transformation is not without apprehension, however. While AI theatre offers the potential to transcend traditional human performance boundaries, however, it concurrently raises pressing concerns about the displacement of human actors and its repercussions on employment prospects. As AI systems advance, they may encroach upon roles previously exclusive to human performers, potentially diminishing the demand for human actors and disrupting industry employment.

These concerns are exemplified by recent events such as the 2023 strikes organised by the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA), which included protests against receiving a single payment for the perpetual use of

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[18] c.Gina Bloom, *Reimagining Shakespeare Education: Teaching and Learning through Collaboration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 251–64.

an actor's image in AI applications without additional compensation or retention of image ownership rights. This would pose a significant threat to actors' livelihoods. The urgency of these protests underscores not only the immediate impact on screen actors' job prospects but also the broader implications for the performing arts community. Unchecked integration of AI technologies into mainstream theatre may compromise the core elements of human creativity, emotional engagement and the distinctive interpretative abilities of human actors.

While the juncture of wearable biomechanics and motion capture represents a pivotal paradigm shift in the landscape of performance, it is imperative to emphasise ethical considerations when integrating AI into human performance.[19] Moreover, transparency is paramount. The audience should be apprised of the deployment of AI in a performance context, enabling them to distinguish between human-generated and AI-generated elements. Such transparency not only respects the audience's right to be informed but also elevates the artistic experience, inviting a contemplation of the interplay between technology and human expression. AI algorithms and data sources should be scrutinised to ensure they do not inadvertently reinforce discriminatory practices or circumscribe the diversity of artistic expression.

Ultimately, the industry must engage in a thoughtful examination of the ethical dimensions of AI-theatre integration, fostering a dialogue that navigates the evolving landscape while safeguarding the livelihoods of human performers. This necessitates exploring collaborative opportunities between AI and human actors, using AI as a complementary tool rather than a replacement, and ensuring that the ethical, creative, and emotional aspects of theatre remain integral to its evolution. Only thus can the paradigm shift that AI theatre enables truly enrich our understanding of movement representation in the performing arts.

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[19] c.Mária Tajtáková, 'Theatre in the Digital Age: When Technology Meets the Arts' (2014) <http://www.cutn.sk/Library/proceedings/km_2014/PDF%20FILES/Tajtakova.pdf> [accessed 10 September 2023].

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Deep Learning: Institutions of Beauty in the Age of Algorithmic Reproduction

Liam Kennedy-Finnerty

Why does one begin an academic paper with a rhetorical question? It is a technique I have noticed in the papers of first-year students, often used in an attempt to denote authority. The technique performs confidence, yet its lack of commitment renders its tone uncertain and amateurish. The piece can feel more like a brainstorm than a finished product, and instead of reading like a question the writer is asking us, it reads like they are questioning themselves. The thought process is something to be hidden in the humanities; rarely in an English essay prompt does the phrase 'show your working' appear. Instead, we perform the illusion that the work appeared out of thin air, that the thought process and the finished product are one and the same. While we know that this is not the reality of writing, we perform it nonetheless because in literary criticism the grade of an essay reflects the end product regardless of the process.

The question that opens this essay, of course, has an answer: we demand that amateurs perform the end result of professional training, but students then imitate what they believe academic professionalism should sound like. But if and when students realise that they will be rewarded for merely generating a finished product, then how does the university dissuade them from simply doing so—bypassing the process for the product—when it results in academic, and economic, validation? When AI can reliably produce professional sounding papers better than an amateur writer can, then the currency of knowledge, if knowledge is in fact a currency, will become completely decentralised.

In February of 2023, a student asked me if I would accept essays written with an AI text-generator called ChatGPT. Though I do not recall the answer I gave, I do remember the horror I felt when I realised I had quite possibly trained myself in a dying field. Each A grade I assigned henceforth would be asterisked because the work I was rewarding was potentially AI-generated. Rita Felski argues that one of the reasons the humanities 'find themselves in the throes of a legitimation crisis' is because suspicious, distanced reading practices have taken precedence over the genuine appreciation of literary beauty.[1] With art criticism, and the work of literary art itself, now under the constant suspicion of its very humanity, the problem of legitimation will only worsen. English studies will become increasingly illegitimate if any person can generate passable criticism at the push of a button. The reward of good grades for the amateur performing professionalism now means nothing because performing knowledgeability no longer requires the knowledge institution or, even, the amateur.

Following that tutorial, I played out a series of imaginary arguments between myself and this student. 'What does it say about how you view your own intelligence,' I'd retort, 'if you are willing to outsource your creativity to a computer?'; 'This software can produce first-year papers at about a B level, so what will happen when you need to write an upper-year paper and you have not developed your skills?'; 'How will you ever appreciate a work of art if you do not, and then cannot, put in the effort to articulate your own thoughts

[1] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p.14.

about it?' The answers I received went: 'What difference does it make if I write the paper as long as an original paper gets written?'; 'This software can write a competent essay now, and it will soon write one better than your master's thesis'; 'Reading is too hard anyways. I can barely sit through a film. Why would I bother consuming content I do not enjoy?' Clearly, the 'student' responses here are my own projection. The real student is probably polite and good-natured, more curious about the potentialities of new technologies than malicious towards the humanities and beautiful art. And there is no way they would have called a movie a 'film.'

This essay takes a decidedly amateur approach to scholarship to depict my own relationship to the amateur essay, which I believe should be the result of and bear witness to an embodied process of appreciating beauty rather than a performance of accumulated knowledge. I reveal my investment in a distinctive feature of beauty as described by Elaine Scarry in *On Beauty and Being Just*: beauty as 'lifesaving'. As Scarry contends, 'Beauty quickens. It adrenalizes. It makes the heart beat faster. It makes life more vivid, animated, living, worth living.'[2]Alongside Walter Benjamin's concerns about the changing nature of art in his 1935 essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', I utilise Scarry's concept of beauty and the crucial role it plays in creative culture to argue that the mutual understanding of a work's embodied history within a specific place and time—which Benjamin argues is the source of an artwork's 'aura'—merges the creator and receiver of the art object into one continual process, which necessitates, both practically and philosophically, an appreciation of beauty in literature as synonymous with embodied, amateur learning. The amateur essay thus denotes and perpetuates lifesaving beauty when it fuses its process with its product. As such, AI's removal of process from the essay is a removal of its 'aura', rendering the interpretation of art mechanically reproducible and perpetuating a narrow vision of professionalism. The amateurish appreciation of beauty that scholars such as Felski, Scarry, Derek Attridge and Aarthi Vaade argue for saves the first-year essay from mechanical reproduction by moving it away from a performance of a prescribed image of professionalism for academic validation to documenting a process of appreciating beautiful art that is in fact synonymous with the existence of beautiful art itself.

Section I: The First-Year University Essay in the Age of Algorithmic Reproduction: Withering Performances of the Academic Professional

Although written nearly a century ago, Benjamin's essay remains eerily relevant to contemporary discussions about the use and value of AI-generated art. Towards the beginning of his essay, Benjamin writes, 'Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be'.[3] When the work of art is removed from the authenticity of its containment within a fixed temporal and spatial moment, its appeal changes. As Benjamin argues, 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art'.[4] The audience sees the value of the work of art not as contained in itself, but in its

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[2] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.24.

[3] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends,* 3rd edn, ed. by David H. Richter, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2016), pp. 713-728 (p. 714).

[4] Ibid., pp.714-715.

reproducibility. As a result, artists adapt to this shift in the audience's perception, so that 'the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility'.[5]

While some sense of imitation has long been a feature of creative culture, the emergence of reproducibility Benjamin delineates marks a radical shift in creativity which was formerly motivated by what Scarry calls 'replication'—a crucial component of her concept of beauty.[6] Unlike reproducibility, which is a response in the first instance to a work of art it merely regenerates, replication is a response to a particular instance of beauty which itself begets imitation. As Scarry writes, 'the beauty of Beatrice in *La vita nuova* requires of Dante the writing of a sonnet, and the writing of that one sonnet prompts the writing of another'.[7] Thus there is a fundamental difference between replication and reproducibility: while the former is an ongoing process of action and reaction, the latter is concerned with its end result. But, more than this, replication—a 'homely word' which 'recalls the fact that something, or someone, gave rise to their creation and remains silently present in the newborn object'—places emphasis on the creative process as embodied; a thoroughly corporeal history.[8]

Comparing these two terms begins to reveal the extent of the crisis AI poses to creativity. A disembodied, artificial consciousness is freed from a restricted temporal growth process—such as all humans, and works of art, undergo—and therefore eliminates the humanity previously implied by the existence of the art object. The work of art's commodification, in this sense, is no doubt a feature of Benjamin's analysis. The work's abstraction from a particular time and space kills its quasi-spiritual 'aura' but it also renders the end product completely alienated from its creation process. Its sheer efficiency makes it uncanny: it has the illusion of humanity while containing none. Moreover, mechanically generated art frames art as an object that exists only to serve its eventual 'owner'—the audience (or beholder) or buyer. AI software alleviates the labour involved in creativity and interpretation by generating the product of this labour instantaneously.

But the reality of AI begins to exceeds even these concerns. One element of the AI-generated work of art that Benjamin's argument, despite its continued relevance, cannot capture is its separation from a human touch even at the moment of its initial creation. In the case of AI-generated texts, though prompts must be entered into a text generator, what is being reproduced is not a specific work of art, which once had an 'aura' that has been displaced, but creative thought itself—the idea, or ideal, of a work of art. Because the art object was previously understood, following Benjamin's argument, as deriving from a particular human consciousness within a spatial and temporal moment of creation, but also, following Scarry, as part of an embodied creative process which is integral to any understanding of a work of art as beautiful, the AI-generated text runs the risk of being unintelligible either as a work of art or a work of beauty.

This state of affairs poses a larger problem for the reception of beauty as such. The creation of art from the artist and its embodied perception from the viewer are part of the same process, one whose authenticity rests on a human embodiment within a particular time and space. Beauty, as 'a contract between the beautiful being (a person or thing) and

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[5] Benjamin, p. 716.

[6] Scarry, p. 3.

[7] Ibid., p. 5.

[8] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

the perceiver', as Scarry writes, necessitates an interaction between bodies to exist.[9] The argument for beauty as an interaction holds true for the beholding of beautiful objects created by a person does as it does for beholding a beautiful person since that beautiful object is an extension of its creator's body. Both sides of the contract, artist and audience, must actively engage with the work. Beauty becomes inspiring and, indeed, vital—'lifesaving'— when both participants actively embody a relationship to the beautiful. ChatGPT may eventually generate a serviceable recipe, but it will never need to eat to survive. The relationship becomes unjust and imbalanced: because it is not a specific, embodied conscience, AI has no stake in beauty, while its human recipients depend upon it. This 'aliveness' of and to beauty is what distinguishes, for example, the desire to write from the desire to have written. It is the desire to experience a moment regardless of its external value—regardless of anything that it might produce or might be produced from it —that bestows a work with authenticity for the perceiver on the other side of the contract.

Taking note of this contractual agreement between artist and audience, as between reader and writer, might help to account for a surprising feature of Benjamin's essay: his reticence on the subject of print. The degree to which moveable type printing is to be considered reproduction in the context of creativity is, in Benjamin's essay, not made entirely clear. Charles Berret notes that 'Benjamin's treatment of print is so brief in the 'Work of Art' essay that it is difficult to judge how much distance he means to place between print and more recent technologies of mechanical reproduction'.[10] Benjamin's avoidance of the topic, in favour of film and photography, is definitely curious considering his essay is itself a reproducible work of printed art and even more odd considering the impact that the advent of moveable type printing had on writing conventions. Down to the standardised forms of language that the printing press allowed, this technology made writing more formulaic. However, writing, reproduced or not, remains a document of a thought process limited to a once embodied time and space; it can be trusted to have been written by a human being. Thus, the aura of a novel or poem is diminished more so by a lack of a human author than by the reality of the printing press. On a broader scale, it is perhaps true, too, that contemporary digital distribution models for art alienate the perceiver more than the standardisations of the printed word.

Much of the contemporary alienation from audio-visual art stems from the reduction of art to 'content' as produced for and disseminated by algorithms. Content prohibits the embodiment of beauty by reducing art to an economy of entertainment and knowledge. The two terms are nearly interchangeable because the content market they exist in renders them as such by placing the value the value of a piece of content strictly on its utility and efficiency. Aarthi Vaade and Saikat Majumdar write that the participatory culture of social media turns knowledge into a form of currency, blurring the distinction between creator and audience and turning the production of art into an economic exchange between creators who often reside outside of established institutions.[11] Further, the knowledge economy powering the digital realm engenders hostility to the perceived inauthenticity, or pretensions, of established institutions. However, this reactionary attitude

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[9] Scarry, p. 90.

[10] Charles Berret, 'Walter Benjamin and the Question of Print in Media History', *Journal of Communication Inquiry,* 41 (2017), 349-367 (p. 350).

[11] Aarthi Vaade and Saikat Majumdar, 'Introduction', in *The Critic as Amateur*, ed. by Majumdar and Vaade (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), pp. 1-28 (p. 5).

disregards the value of art just as it claims to democratise art by removing art's institutional dependance.

Online dissemination systems promise empowerment for amateur artists, while treating their work as disposable. Consequently, instead of institutionalised professionalism determining the value of knowledge, it is instead the digitised performance of authenticity that decides the value of a piece of content. Art as 'content' renders the audience and the performer one and the same, yet it is inherently disembodied since both the distributors and the primary targets of the performance at hand are algorithms. The reproduction of online art—what is promoted in people's feeds— is arbitrated by a nonhuman entity. This distribution model encourages AI-generated art: AI art matches to a mathematical degree the inhuman touch of online dissemination systems.

Benjamin's assertion that '[m]echanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art'[12] is increasingly relevant when considered alongside Vaade's articulation of digital knowledge as an economy. The algorithmic reproduction of art has rendered beauty into knowledge, to be exchanged with ruthless efficiency. The processes of the interpretation of works of art that established institutions request are, or should be, incongruous with those of the algorithm, and yet the performance of professionalism that universities demand, with their rigid expectations of what qualifies as good work, and the emphasis on higher education as job training, do not exactly dissuade students from viewing their studies as a knowledge economy. If the internet is more efficient at distributing that knowledge, then the value of a discipline such as literary criticism within academic institutions is economically, in every sense of that word, worthless.

Felski's analysis of the legitimation crisis in the humanities in particular further articulates institutions' collective failure to perpetuate and promote the embodied process of appreciating beauty as a value in itself over the potential economic gains of the performance of that appreciation. Felski considers the humanities' rejection of the consideration of beauty in favour of the hermeneutics of suspicion, which tends to produce highly specialised, often jargon-laden critiques designed to unmask a particular work or author's ideological inconsistencies or 'bad' intentions. Carefully avoiding connection to a work of art, the hermeneutics of suspicion 'shades into tireless tautology, rediscovering the truth of its bleak prognoses over and over again'.[13] The emotional detachment from art that this critical stance demands ascribes professionalism to the 'low-key tone of academic argument' that now renders essays mechanical in both their tone and conception.[14] Part of the impetus for the adoption of this tone is, perhaps ironically, to legitimise the humanities in the intellectual marketplace. Suspicion renders an essay a safe investment, a measurable display of a student's understanding of a work of art's 'content', providing a reliable return in the form of good grades and eventual employment.

The crisis that Felski outlines is fundamentally the result of regarding the interpretation of art as an accumulation of knowledge, rather than an account of a genuine absorption into a work of art. Consequently, the humanities market themselves as an institution providing a knowledge transfer, run by and producing professionals who hold a wealth of expertise. Those hostile towards the humanities might contest that because knowledge is a currency, and we all in theory have equal access to intellectual resources, then the institution that holds that knowledge has no special power in the wielding of it. I

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[12] Benjamin, p. 14.

[13] Felski, p. 35.

[14] Ibid., p. 20.

would argue that if the performers of academic professionalism take pleasure at the expense of the amateur, then this mass exodus is justified. With the continued funding of the STEM fields, though, it is clear the crisis does not extend to all forms of learning and does not derive purely from intellectual insecurity. People still pursue degrees in math and engineering, despite the challenges involved. There is a technocratic anti-intellectualism in ChatGPT's proponents that seems to attack much more aggressively the institution of the arts. When the expectations for reproducibility, efficiency, and reliability in the sciences are thrust upon the humanities, as they so often are, then the inefficiencies of learning about beauty are hidden by administrators to ensure their survival.

Recruitment for English departments, for instance, understandably often presents the job opportunities afforded to students upon graduation. Dalhousie's 'English Academics' website states, 'Studying English teaches you essential written and oral communication expertise valuable in every field of work', before stating that it also 'broadens your mind, kindles your interest in the world and connects you to the wealth of great literature created in English, both past and present'.[15] Without attacking the well-intentioned practicality of this paragraph, I argue that advertising the 'interest in the world' that literature kindles as secondary to the job training it provides highlights the crisis at hand. Interest in the world is not practically useful insofar as it does not generate capital as efficiently as possible. Therefore, the experience of beauty that humanities programs hide in favour of its emphasis on research and academic rigour renders it, regardless of intent, subservient to the ideology of the knowledge economy. Derek Attridge has argued that English criticism must reimagine its 'subservience to the world of facts',[16] and instead remember the 'moment of engagement' that attracts readers.[17] But university administrators cannot take the student's absorption into a work into account because those feelings are fundamentally transitory and essentially ungradable and unmonetisable. So, systems of academic validation evaluate 'writing' as a noun rather than a verb. Departments measure the success of a student's education in a way that justifies it financially, considering knowledge and writing skills as goods to be traded in the labour market.

Given the replicative and lifesaving power of beauty, as argued by Scarry, the humanities might in fact stand a better chance of securing of their relevance and a future by promoting the interpretation of works of art as a creative and embodied process. Students' desire to produce AI-generated papers is a response to institutions that view interpretation as something mechanically reproducible. Viewing interpretation of a work of art as a mechanical, and not a creative process, negates the reality that essays are, by definition, works of art. As Scarry writes in her essay, 'By perpetuating beauty, institutions of education help incite the will toward continual creation'.[18] Perhaps marketing English programs (for lack of a better verb) as opportunities for students to take part in the continual creation of beauty facilitated by reading works of literary art will spur more participation than imagining them as job training.

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[15] *Why Study English at Dal?* ([n.d.]), *Dal.ca,* < https://www.dal.ca/academics/programs/undergraduate/english.html > [accessed March 2023].

[16] Derek Attridge, 'In Praise of the Amateur', in *The Critic as Amateur*, pp. 31-48 (p. 42).

[17] Ibid., p. 38.

[18] Scarry, p. 8.

Internally, departments might even begin by validating and rewarding amateur performance. Though perhaps the word 'performance' might denote a falsified version of professionalism by the amateur imitating the academic tone of their professor, the sustained and embodied process implied in the term might also suggest a temporal moment of creativity that is inseparable from the purpose of studying works of art, even within the academic institution. Felski writes, 'That identification and attunement are not listed as course learning goals or pondered in the pages of *PMLA* does not mean they do not affect academic life'.[19] Rewarding beauty as an embodied process, rather than a product, is urgent when the imitation of its production is now so easy for disinterested students. Though I do not pretend to know the specifics of this necessary overhaul English departments in particular would require, I argue that current evaluations of the knowledge supposedly acquired by the interpretation of literature render its study increasingly illegitimate. In the age of the critical process as mechanically reproducible, we must amplify more than ever 'the relation of the universities to beauty', and of the study of beauty as a beautiful object: a continual process of embodiment, contained in itself and wholly irreplaceable.[20]

Section II: 'Approving of the Course He Had Taken'[21]

I am making myself an amateur in writing this paper, in part because as I write this, there exists almost no English scholarship on ChatGPT. While the race to publish on this topic is no doubt underway, AI is quickly reshaping not only my entire discipline, but my entire society's understanding of creativity and our relationship to beauty. This paper is becoming more a document of panic than the surefooted argumentation I attempted to perform in Section I might suggest. Hence, I rely more on my own subjective memories and experiences than I would usually dare to in an academic paper. By recreating and grading my own undergraduate work using ChatGPT, I will attempt to illustrate that the fraught relationship with creative thought that the rigorous academic paper demands renders the 'contract between the beautiful being […] and the perceiver' an artificial performance.[22]

The first university essay I wrote was a 1000-word close-reading of James Joyce's 'A Painful Case.' In the paper, I point towards some key turns of phrase throughout my selected passage, as well as some creative punctuation Joyce implements, to make my argument. There are the predictable formatting errors one might expect from a first-year student: I often fail to include page numbers for my quotations, my syntax is awkward, and I do not outline my analysis in my introduction. I distinctly remember writing this paper. I spent hours building my outline, rereading my passage, taking notes, writing, rewriting, eventually arriving at a product that I would now assign a high B to a low A. Before revisiting the paper, I could not recall its content. Instead, I remember the writing process specifically because it was new to me.

I wrote the essay when most professors still asked for hard copies, and so I had no choice but to rewrite it manually. If, as Elaine Scarry writes, beauty promotes its replication,

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[19] Felski, *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), p. 4.

[20] Scarry, p. 8.

[21] James Joyce, 'A Painful Case', in *Dubliners,* ed. by Robert Scholes and A. Walton Litz (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 107-117 (p. 116).

[22] Scarry, p. 90.

it is telling that I felt absolutely no desire to transcribe this paper. I note this because the first paragraph of the essay is a transcription of Joyce's story. In writing these words I now barely recognise as my own, I am locked into a temporal moment of recognition. What I document while criticising this paper is an embodied understanding of the first-year experience of a student performing academia with as little direction as possible.

At first glance, this paper exudes a confidence reserved only for the accomplished academic or the total amateur. There is a quality to this confidence that I almost admire, documented by a student discovering new ways of reading as though they are the first to find them. The second paragraph begins:

> On initial reading, one might think this story is told from the perspective of an omniscient, objective narrator. James Duffy is not speaking directly to us, and we are instead given a third-person account of his story, creating an illusion of objectivity. However, the narrator is not omniscient or objective, but instead a third-person reflection of James Duffy's thought process.

Another way of saying this might be: 'Joyce uses free-indirect discourse.' I remember learning the term in Dr. Brouillette's class later that year and cringing at the revelation that I was not, in fact, the discoverer of a new literary device. This prolonged explanation of a basic writing technique, though embarrassing, shows a distinct excitement at the potential of literature. Excitement, as well as labour, fuels the learning process of someone who continues to read and write.

For me, reading this paper also conjures memories of deep insecurity, fuelled by my desire as an amateur to impress experts. This insecurity underscores the performative aspects of the paper that lessen its impact. One paragraph begins: 'Further building up this exaggerated version of Mrs. Sinico, Duffy attempts to [...]' There is a pencilled line underneath '[f]urther building', and the feedback, 'awkward syntax.' Besides using 'further' as an attempt to highlight the transition in my argument, I suspect that I was also using the word to convey a tone of formality. The awkward syntax here feels like the product of a failed performance, an attempt to sound like an academic by constructing sentences radically different from the way I actually speak. There's nothing inherently formal about the word 'further,' obviously, nor in disjointed sentence structuring. However, this particular combination of the two reveals an attempt at a persona, and a desperation to be taken seriously at the bottom of a hierarchy.

Whenever I set ChatGPT the same task I was set in my first year, it often produced a paper that was better than mine, according to most of my own grading rubrics. I entered the command: 'write a 1000-word essay on the theme of isolation in James Joyce's "A Painful Case,"' to which the program responded with a paper that reads like a first-year student's impression of an academic. The first paragraph begins: 'James Joyce's short story "A Painful Case" is a haunting exploration of the theme of isolation, as seen through the life of Mr. Duffy, a solitary man living in Dublin'.[23] Though generic, the sentence contains no spelling mistakes and highlights a key theme in the work. Its syntax is also notably less awkward.

However, ChatGPT failed to replicate adequate quoting. It wrote, 'The narrator notes that he had "never entered into relations with any woman"',[24] quoting a line that

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[23] *ChatGPT* (2022), *OpenAI*, < https://www.chat.openai.com > [accessed 12 April 2023].

[24] *ChatGPT* [accessed 12 April 2023].

does not appear in the story. When I asked, 'What are the page numbers for those quotes?', ChatGPT responded, 'I apologize for the oversight in my previous response. As an AI language model, I do not have the specific page references for quotes as the format may vary depending on the edition or source of the text'.[25] Before I could accept its apology, it continued: 'However, the quotes used in my essay are all taken from James Joyce's "A Painful Case," which can be found in various collections of his short stories or in the original publication'.[26] Fabricating a quote in an academic essay would constitute plagiarism, so my paper certainly has the edge in this regard. If one does not read the story, or at least select quotes from it to substantiate an AI-generated argument, then relying purely on the software will likely result in a failing paper, even if universities accept the use of AI as a permissible writing tool.

However, there is reason to believe that ChatGPT will not generate fake quotes after its next update, which will make an AI paper passable once again. ChatGPT's essay concludes: 'The story highlights the devastating impact of isolation on the human psyche and serves as a warning about the dangers of withdrawing from the world'.[27] Though it is not a particularly original thesis, this sentence is far clearer than ones that often appear in a first-year paper. I would grade each of the technical aspects of this AI paper—its clarity, cohesion, diction, transitions, punctuation, and grammar— an A. My paper concludes that 'the line '[he] had no difficulty now in approving of the course he had taken'[28] is not an affirmation of Duffy's choice to reject connection, but a dishonest declaration of Duffy's in an attempt to convince himself that his detachment will be fulfilling.' Though hopefully a bit more original than the AI's conclusion, this sentence contains needless repetition, awkward phrasing, no citation, and faulty punctuation. If a rubric grades the mechanics of writing for more than half of its criteria, then a ChatGPT paper (with real quotations) will produce similar grades. If not a grade-A work, ChatGPT's papers are technically proficient enough to be more than passable insofar as they adhere to expectations of proper grammar, spelling, formatting, and tone. Although, or perhaps because detached, they feel uncannily professional.

It is precisely this generic quality that denotes the presence of AI. OpenAI writes on their homepage, 'We build our generative models using a technology called deep learning, which leverages large amounts of data to train an AI system to perform a task'.[29] Their texts are an amalgamation of public thought, or a reproduction of the average sentence written on its subject online. Their responses to English prompts read like Wikipedia entries—they dryly display a broad scope of knowledge about the text at hand. Benjamin writes, 'With the extension of the press, letters to the editor, etc. the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character'.[30] Here, the fusion of the author and the public becomes literalised when ChatGPT generates the average of all public thought documented online. Its rigidity of form that perfects its spelling and grammar makes it, mathematically, intensely predictable. Grading based on mechanics alone will inevitably make institutions of learning irrelevant if students only care to obtain a degree. In the end, I

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[25] *ChatGPT* [accessed 12 April 2023].

[26] —— [accessed 12 April 2023].

[27] ——[accessed 12 April 2023].

[28] Joyce, p. 116.

[29] *Research* (2022), *OpenAI* < https://www.openai.com > [accessed 11 April 2023].

[30] Benjamin, p. 721.

graded my paper an A- and ChatGPT's a B+, which is hardly a matter of concern for a student expecting a C. The performance of the academic professional is no longer a practice measurement of learning. We must consider the English essay a work of art if we want it to survive.

Conclusion

Though this paper understands beauty as embodied to argue for its future, I still feel sick knowing that I will someday be moved by an essay or a poem written using AI. If ChatGPT can eventually produce a flawless essay that creates great work for an institution, must its value be reconsidered? If it possesses Eliot's depersonalised 'historical sense'[31] to a point where its literary skills match those of a human artisan, can the work's internal artistic value override the fact of its nonhuman creation? Perhaps we will mistake AI poetry for the real thing too many times and become disinterested in embodiment to a degree that redefines the feeling of beauty. Besides, why is human creativity, rooted in a knowledge tradition and in associations between already-known works, fundamentally different from computer-generated creativity when we suspend the assumption of a soul differentiating the two? I freeze during an imaginary argument when a student asks me why it would matter if a paper was written by a human if it spurs real, and therefore human, feelings. Then, perhaps love letters written by ChatGPT are just as meaningful as one your partner wrote for you. After all, their intent was to create something that expresses their feelings; why should it matter that they've expedited the process? And if I discover that a nuanced, evocative, and insightful essay was written with AI, can I truly consider it a betrayal? As we move into the immediate and unknown future of English studies, I conclude by admitting that my questions here are, unfortunately, far from rhetorical.

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REVIEWS

‘Something like words for | motion’: Ian Patterson’s *Shell Vestige Disputed*

William Burns

Shell Vestige Disputed. By Ian Patterson. 28 February 2023. 81pp. £8.99 978-1-915079-59-6

Collecting four sequences of poems composed over the last three years, including the largely unpublished ‘Home James’, Ian Patterson’s *Shell Vestige Disputed* unashamedly sets us the task of making sense of it. We are left with hints and guesses:

> The street took all sense but he didn’t pass the
> end so much as gain consciousness of a question
> reflected such as to step on another state he found.
>
> Time on the spot would connect the object matter
> in a letter so far as the question was back, studied
> and cold, each closer day dreamed as apprehension.[1]

What should we make of this series of opaque observations and reflections, composed in what might strike an unfamiliar reader at first as a peculiarly rapid form of shorthand? Looked at again, these stanzas constitute two remarkably sustained syntactical performances, whose respective hypotaxis and parataxis are, however, hard to construe: a crisscrossing of a remembered past tense and second-order commentary that in each case leaves their speaker’s temporal location uncertain. This figure’s spatial movement in the first stanza, although similarly occluded, provides one route into the poem, while at the same time introducing its own form of hesitancy. I find myself liable to fall foul of ‘to step on’, with what might be sensed as its apparently incomplete preposition, and leaning into it conversely seems to risk trampling over the poem entire.

Nonetheless, the poem’s preoccupation with the dynamics of bodily movement might point to its potential connection to that of verse; much like the work of another poet, it appears energised by ‘what [might] happen if rhyme came back in to do a lot of the running’, as in the wonderful rattle created here between ‘matter’ and ‘letter’.[2] Daunting, even minatory at first (affects neatly registered by the volume’s title), the poems collected here may perhaps sustain other modes of reading that can dispense with these adjectives. Thinking about the particular transitions enabled by the movements of verse, with its simultaneously intuitive and abstracted relationship to bodily motion, I would like to suggest, might provide one way into reading these poems differently.

Of course, the primary location in which this kind of avant-garde practice has been read and disseminated is the academy, and, until his retirement in 2018, Patterson seems to have enjoyed a fruitful mutuality between his work as a poet and his employment as

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[1] From ‘Implacable Grasp’, *Shell Vestige Disputed* (Fair View: Broken Sleep Books, 2023), p. 16. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

[2] R.F. Langley, ‘Note’ (1994) in *Complete Poems*, ed. by Jeremy Noel-Tod (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2015), xvii.

lecturer in English at Cambridge. In addition to his poetry's obvious sympathies with that of the so-called Cambridge School (a loose affiliation of poets including J.H. Prynne, Veronica Forrest-Thompson, Peter Riley, Denise Riley, Andrew Crozier, and Anna Mendlessohn, possibly), much of his teaching appears to have been directed by the particular problems posed by contemporary poetry. Attending a graduate seminar run by Patterson entitled 'Reading Difficult Poetry', Emily Witt recalled his 'grave but friendly demeanour' in teaching Louis Zukofsky's 'A'-9.[3] Drawing on the example of the French surrealists, and perhaps as well their few contemporary followers in England (David Gascoyne, Hugh Sykes Davies, George Barker), Patterson's early poetry consorts with the dislocations of sense and essentially playful attitude to language these writers encouraged.[4]

This sort of poetry, a late or belated modernism, must have seemed more marginal then than it does now, when much of contemporary poetry can be seen to inherit its 'state of uncertainty about the meaningful statements', and itself operates within 'a state of questioning what sort of object […] language has become'.[5] Patterson's repeated querying of language has also found its sustenance from another quarter, in his work as a translator of texts including Charles Fourier's *The Theory of the Four Movements* (Cambridge, 1996) and the sixth volume of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, entitled 'Finding Time Again' (Penguin, 2003). As in Proust's prose, the poems collected here pivot around the mind's efforts to recover past reality out of the elaborate distortions of memory:

> Silly desire for instant stress care pushed the will past any
> ground of his feet so the word might be only measure
> or manner formed like sense rising in arms and legs by resort
> to vision, staring up his sleeve, to appeal for company as
> shade breath on impressions of motion.
> […]
> Patch over feet in time, save the present show to breathe
> instant means in the measure of chill felt from talking about
> being minded to figure a body lurking and wanting in time
> by the nick of fear. Renewal of vision, the house in the lapse
> already out with why the world looked ill.
>
> ('Tight Orbits', 24-5)

Largely forgoing punctuation, the poem offers rhythm as the primary means for readers to orient themselves in this journey through 'the revenant logic of things returned to us, but not in the way we expected'.[6] Connections appear lighted upon via prosody, as the poet takes his line for a walk, circling an elusive 'present'. Yet while we might therefore see the beginnings of an ambulatory poetic emerge here—not dissimilar to Wordsworth pacing up and down the garden of Dove Cottage or Wallace Stevens composing on his walks to and from the insurance office—the verse-movement of these hexameters is insistently syncopated, jogged out of an accompanying regularity of step.

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[3] Emily Witt, 'That Room in Cambridge', *N+1*, 11, 2011.

[4] Much of Patterson's early poetry is handily collected in *Time to Get Here: Selected Poems, 1969-2002* (Cambridge: Salt, 2003). A *Collected Poems* is forthcoming from Broken Sleep Books.

[5] Peter Middleton, 'Warring Clans, Podsolized Ground: Language in Contemporary UK Poetry', in *Modernist Legacies: Trends and Faultlines in British Poetry Today,* ed. by Abigail Lang and David Nowell-Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 17-36 (p. 36).

[6] Ian Penman, *Fassbinder: Thousands of Mirrors* (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2023), p. 71.

As a result, the poem's first line seems to not so much gracefully stride (*enjamber*) as lurch over the line-break into its successor, likening its speaker's uncertain perceptual field to the poem's unsettled prosodical one. If, as T.J. Clark has argued, the attention of certain painters to 'the contact between upright man and the groundplane' can be seen to reveal the latter's role as 'a limit condition of the human […] a world in itself, level and yet not level, firm and yet locally unreliable, fissured, fractured, intricate', might something similar be said for certain negotiations of poetic form, poised between metrical groundplan and the individual poem's grounding in a singular movement of feet?[7]

The observation of a strict identity between stanzaic limits and syntactical closure in much of the sequence provides one means of throwing such rhythmic figures into relief. Between the iconic dimension of the poems' stanzas, as shapes or layouts, and the dynamic rhythmical assemblages that unfold within them, we seem to arrive at a doubled-sided idea of poetic form as at once time-bound and timeless. On the one hand, 'form stops us in our tracks […] and inserts itself in that moment'.[8] On the other, it reveals itself, in rhythm, as 'the improvisation that moves each limited body in play with a world'.[9] Their contention is that poetic rhythm is something that we might think with, and that, in order to do so, we have to see its relationship to bodily motion anew.

In a recent interview with Keston Sutherland, Patterson characterised the poems as 'attempts to complicate the fairly simple business of thinking, but not to offer the results of thinking. I want them to *be* thinking, not to *have* thought'.[10] This off-the-cuff remark itself carries something of what he had earlier described as his poems' habit of 'doing both', a double pun worth unpacking. The poems are not containers for 'thoughts' or completed acts of cognition past perfect, but rather harbour thinking in progress, themselves constitute a form of thinking. This sense of thought as peculiarly entangled with bodily movement, as itself in constant motion, falls in with another touchstone Patterson cited in this interview, namely Maurice Merleau-Ponty's suggestive remarks on 'the strange mode of existence enjoyed by the object behind our backs'.[11] Estranging everyday perception along such lines, the poems plot a disorientating path through orientated space, tracking the doubled capacity of the world throughout this progress to both reveal itself and render itself opaque:

> Air as element laid bare past service, dropped straight
> from a kind time, missing turns in a deeper care as
> time sank in price tables despoiled without the aid of style.
>
> Brush shadows into shapes like iron and oak, held moments

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[7] T. J. Clark, *Painting at Ground Level: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, delivered at Princeton University April 17-19, 2002, p. 135. Accessible here: https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/c/clark_2002.pdf.

[8] Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 21.

[9] Lisa Robertson, *The Baudelaire Fractal* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2020), p. 184.

[10] 'Ian Patterson & Keston Sutherland: Shell Vestige Disputed', *London Review of Books,* 28 February 2023 https://www.londonreviewbookshop.co.uk/podcasts-video/podcasts/ian-patterson-keston-sutherland-shell-vestige-disputed [accessed 1 August 2023]

[11] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012 [1945]), p. 29.

> Saved in so far as they suggest sparse render in lived wrong things
> a tongue above all matters to test as it happened.
>
> ('Lapsed Step', 18)

Their bipedal metric in this way involves the possibility of the reader wandering erroneously, 'missing turns' and subsequently having to retrace their steps. The poem's packed collocations force us into a vexed positionality, making us wonder whether, for instance, we should regard 'brush shadows into shapes' as an imperative or a present-tense action, or both. We walk the line and in the process arrive at incommensurable aspects of it. Likewise 'in so far', presented in its original, uncompounded form, seems to flicker between its prepositional, adverbial and conjunctive components. Patterson's 'busy prepositions', as for Wordsworth, serve 'as the stride of his thought', but in following on their trail here we are likely to be pulled up by them.[12]

A 'lapsed step' consequently serves as a fitting analogy for these moments of deliberate semantic or prosodic disbalancing; it was with the latter in mind that Coleridge described such disruptions as 'like that of leaping in the dark from the last step of a staircase, when we had prepared our muscles for a leap of three or four'.[13] However, in a Benjaminian essay on selling his library for the *London Review of Books*, Patterson used this figure differently to illustrate the workings of involuntary memory, characterising the loss of these objects as being 'caught unawares by things that weren't there any more. Stretching out my hand to turn on the red anglepoise on my desk when I'd already taken it home was like missing the last step when you're going downstairs'.[14] 'Home James' also partakes of this uncanny relationship to past reading. As related in Patterson's interview with Sutherland, the sequence was composed using words taken out of a copy of Henry James' *The Sacred Fount* (1901); a more radical extension of the compositional procedure (or *procédé*) of textual bricolage he has used throughout his career (see in particular the wonderful sequence 'Hardihood' (2003), written out of words taken solely from Thomas Hardy's *Collected Poems*). This peculiar provenance need not invalidate readers' experience of the sequence without this knowledge (one reason to broach it here last), but it does perhaps force us to ask questions about how it alters our engagement with them. In order to do so, we should have a look at the strange mode of existence enjoyed by the text behind these poems.

Limiting the vocabulary of the sequence to words drawn from James' novel functions as a form of aleatory constraint, the eye scanning the page desultorily and selecting the words which will make up the poem (perhaps with some latitude; 'mirage', 'payee', 'bovine', and 'cell-effect' all seem to have come from elsewhere). Yet it may also be seen to open up an intertextual relation between the two texts, and with it the possibility of one text misrecognising or misremembering another:

> [M]ark your mind while I speak as I say, being so on the spot.
> Where consciousness did grow up to the outer state, crude
> symptom of some note of observation given for the fact
> of exposure, these pressed each recognition of what surged up

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[12] John Jones, *The Egotistical Sublime: A History of Wordsworth's Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1954), p. 206.

[13] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 254.

[14] Ian Patterson, 'My Books', *London Review of Books*, 41(13), 4 July 2019.

as apprehension as if pursued by that glare, a disguise reflected.

A gasp for weight, transparent spots blur the light, walls in
The dark reach things and pinch even to face the idea
of balance, poor spark to complain of spirit shade and piece
words from the ground, the object world of broken touch.

('Bedevilled Terms', 31)

Fragments of what we may or may not recognise as Jamesiana ('on the spot', 'some note of observation', 'consciousness') in this way seem to interpolate a prior, semi-remembered text ahead of our engagement with these lines. Reading as a result seems to undergo a process of distraction, 'at once an abstraction from […] surrounding objects, and therefore capable perhaps of linking them conceptually', which nonetheless can only relate them as moments in time, as an unspooled series of implications embodied in the flow of the line.[15] Such connections point inward, to an introjected 'object world of broken touch'. In an article for *Thinking Verse* concerning John James' poetic sequence *Letters from Sarah* (Street Editions, 1973), a series of misheard and fragmentary translations from Tristan Tzara, Patterson discussed the possibilities opened up by such attempts at 'making a readable poem out of a hallucinated reading of another poem'.[16] As a form of 'carrying-over', not from Tzara's French to James' English but from the Master's prose to Patterson's particular cadence, we might see 'Home James' as implying a wider movement of temporal progression in addition to the local routes sketched out of the poems' ambulatory rhythms.

Similar acts of transmission were integral to the initial formation of poetic modernism, ranging from Baudelaire's translations of Poe and Laforgue's adaptions of Whitman to Pound's later persona-driven versions of ancient Chinese lyric and classical elegy in *Cathay* (1917) and *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919) respectively. As Patterson has written, this 'historical or mythological ventriloquism' should be seen as 'not merely a response to or a reflection of modernity, but an expression of a new historical epistemology, a need to be situated in an open relation to futurity'.[17] Like the other sequences in *Shell Vestige Disputed*, with their interest in repurposing the sonnet form ('To Account For') or probing pastoral convention ('A Space Based on Hearsay', 'Imaginary Sky'), 'Home James' consequently seems to revisit the late modernist form of the free or experimental translation. If such attention paid to prior, possibly outmoded forms provides, as Edward Allen observes, 'a crucial countermeasure to the activity of periodisation', then we might see the translational techniques employed in *Shell Vestige Disputed* as offering similar resistance to linear historicisation.[18] Risking the dated, Patterson's late style here instead contemplates the reader's role in ensuring the poems' temporal progress.

That this anachronism is ultimately generous rather than minatory might then be put down to the sequence's participation in this adaptive lineage, and the particular mode of reading it encourages. Clive Scott, a fellow writer in this tradition, conceptualises translative

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[15] Anne Stillman, 'Distraction Fits', *Thinking Verse,* 2 (2012), 27–67 (p. 28).

[16] Ian Patterson, 'Langue-in-Cheek', *Thinking Verse* 4 (ii) (2014), 67–79 (p. 69).

[17] Ian Patterson, 'Time, Free Verse, and the Gods of Modernism' in *Tradition, Translation, Trauma: The Classic and the Modern*, ed. by Jane Parker and Timothy Matthews (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 175–90 (p. 178).

[18] Edward Allen, 'Too Late for Lyric Studies?', in *Forms of Late Modernist Lyric*, ed. by Allen (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), pp. 1–12 (p. 10).

reading in terms of the '[s]ensory involvement in text' manifested in the work of translation, defined in contrast to what he disapprovingly names 'the web of concessive interpretation'.[19] Rather than solicit the ultimately antagonistic process of decoding and ratifying polysemy commonly afforded texts in the wake of literary criticism's modernisation, akin to the 'ruthless analysis' practiced by James' narrator (a not so distant relative of the Governess in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)), 'Home James' likewise seems to actively invite the reader's physical involvement in tracking across its opaque surface.[20] As a modality of translation, reading thus serves as 'the vehicle by which the [poem] makes progress through the time and space it did not know at its birth'; 'For progress occurs through re-inventing | These words from a dim recollection of them', as John Ashbery has it.[21] It is by such means that the sequence, as one of its concluding poems has it, offers us

> the issue of thought in light and
> proportion about conscious hours repeated as
> perversity again, passing sharply after an instant
> exposed to fear, to flutter more than his lips could tell.
> Each well-kept approach would help free our exchange
> of touch and find the world ready in divided awkwardness.
>
> ('Peep Contact', 35)

Warding off the inevitable anxious "'flutter" to get the difficult poem right, to fix its flux, *Shell Vestige Disputed* looks to the collaborative exchange between writer and reader as the form in which poetry's spatiotemporal mobility might be embodied. Drafting in this way might be a condition of reading as well as writing, requiring that we wager misrecognising ourselves as well as the text before us. In doing so, we might find ourselves stepping out of the poem and into the world, seeing it afresh, resplendent in 'divided awkwardness'.

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[19] Clive Scott, *Translating Rimbaud's* Illuminations (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), p. 18.

[20] Henry James, *The Sacred Fount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 21.

[21] Scott, *Translating*, p. 31; John Ashbery, 'Blue Sonata' (1977), *Collected Poems 1956-1987*, ed. by Mark Ford (Manchester: Carcanet, 2010), p. 533. (One Proustian poet in the hands of another).

Haunted Transpositions in Violet Kupersmith's *Build Your House Around My Body* (2021)

Alex Carabine

Build Your House Around My Body. By Violet Kupersmith. 2021. Paperback, 2022. £8.99. Oneworld Publications. 978-0-86154-416-5

Twisting and uncanny, *Build Your House Around My Body* is a kaleidoscopic hallucination of a novel. Its story fits uneasily in multiple genres, from the Gothic to the *bildungsroman*, and it is told via the seemingly contradictory—yet ultimately sympathetic—techniques of magical realism and historical fiction. The primary protagonist of the book is Winnie, an American-Vietnamese woman whose biracial identity has alienated her from her dual cultures but also, crucially, from her self. Through her narrative we learn not only the histories of the characters around her, but also the recent history of Vietnam. The novel charts a sinuous and haunting movement across time, space and identity, creating a complex yet fascinating book of shifting narratives and meanings.

The story begins with Winnie's arrival in Saigon from America. Young, unmoored and in undefined emotional distress, Winnie has moved to Vietnam ostensibly to live with distant relatives and spend some time as an English teacher, albeit a lacklustre one. However, it becomes clear that her relocation to Saigon was a decision not so much to find herself, but rather to escape her fragmented identity. In claustrophobically close narration, the novel exposes how Winnie feels too American to be authentically Vietnamese, yet too Vietnamese to belong in America. If the Gothic is a negotiation between the Self and the Other, here is Winnie, Othered from her Self, struggling to discover a way to live with (or perhaps, within) her divided heritage. Ultimately, Winnie's narrative is not one of unification.

Like Winnie, Kupersmith is herself of American and Vietnamese descent. She has published a short story collection, *The Frangipani Hotel* (2014), and in her first novel one senses that she wants her readers to be off-balance during their initial experience of the book. The novel begins with a crucial bit of disorientating information, tucked at the top of the page as the first chapter's heading: 'June 2010, Saigon, nine months before Winnie's disappearance.'[1] The movement of the narrative ricochets across timelines from this point on, with each chapter beginning with a heading that locates the temporal events of that chapter in relation to Winnie's inevitable disappearance. As such, the mystery of what has happened, or will happen, to Winnie remains the only anchor in the plot, even as characters' lifetimes weave across the colonial history of Vietnam. Connections between seemingly disparate people and events develop slowly, threadlike, over time. How they connect to the fate of Winnie is left to the reader to piece together on their own.

The blurb leads the reader to expect a binary narrative: it states that 'Two young Vietnamese women go missing decades apart. Both are fearless. Both are lost. And both will

[1] Violet Kupersmith, *Build Your House Around My Body* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2021), p. 3. All future references will be made in the body of the review.

have their revenge.' Yet, as the novel slowly discloses its primary cast of characters, it becomes clear that the text is not binary, but kaleidoscopic, as the novel traces the lives of no fewer than seven subjects. Besides the mysteriously vanished Winnie, there is Binh, a ferocious young woman; the brothers Tan and Long; an enigmatic Fortune Teller and his First Assistant; and, finally, Mrs Ma, whose family live alongside the rubber tree plantation that acts as the background to so many of the book's events. All intersect through the plot of the novel, but readers meet the characters out of chronological order at different, disjointed moments of their lives. For example, Binh is introduced for the first time as a child from the perspective of the Fortune Teller. Several chapters—and narrative fragments—later, the book shifts to the Fortune Teller's youth, where he meets Mrs Ma before she was ever married. Kupersmith expects the reader to hold all the threads in their mind, making connections and remembering interactions until the author brings them together at the end. Only in the final chapters can the reader hope to piece together how all the characters and events are related as the narrative has moved, labyrinthine, through time, and the reader will only be successful in understanding the full plot if they have managed to keep hold of all the threads.

Kupersmith is a deft storyteller of compelling human narratives, and she achieves this intricate plotting against the backdrop of the colonisation of Vietnam by the French, and its occupation by the Japanese during World War II. *Build Your House Around My Body* shows the movement of history through its effects on people, collapsing time so that the past is never safely removed from the present; rather, it is a constant presence, its effects palpable and inescapable. Even Winnie, whose childhood in America ought to have insulated her from Vietnam's cultural trauma, is left reverberating with the echoes of history, and is unable to reconcile the multifaceted nature of her identity as a result. As Prasad Pannian notes in *Edward Said and the Question of Subjectivity,* 'the multifaceted and multivalent ideological state apparatuses of colonialism do not simply disappear as soon as the colonies … [gain] their independence from their former colonisers'.[2] Despite growing up outside of the colonised space of Vietnam, these apparatuses linger spectrally for Winnie, affecting her interactions with the world around her. Sixty-two years before her disappearance, the characters Jean-Pierre and Gaspard are introduced. Immigrants from France, they moved to Vietnam with an eye to becoming farmers. When they discuss the land they wish to buy, the pair have an exchange in which they justify the colonisation of Vietnam:

> But are we not taking their land? countered Jean-Pierre.
>
> Gaspard shrugged dismissively. Well, perhaps. But at least we brought doctors, Jesus and coffee along with us.

The colonial history of Vietnam is intrinsically intertwined with the plotlines of Winnie, Binh and Mrs Ma, and the tragedies and victories of the characters are framed by the country's past. Though Gaspard and Jean-Pierre are the protagonists of this particular chapter (and, indeed, their phantasmatic presence goes on to influence other incidents of the novel), it is their neighbour Louis 'L'Anguille' that exposes some of the particular horrors of Vietnam's experience of European colonialism.

A dissolute epicurean, Louis constructs a lavish French mansion on the landscape of Vietnam, which he fills with the tusks of elephants and eerie taxidermy. His prized

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[2] Prasad Pannian, *Edward Said and the Question of Subjectivity* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 13.

possession is a scrapbook containing single strands of hair from all the women he has abused, which he calls his 'specimens' (p. 240). The term is significant, as it conflates the bodies of women with those of the taxidermy animals, thereby exposing how both women and the environment can be exploited and mistreated under colonial rule. The Vietnamese woman who acts as cook to Louis, whom he renames Odile, is displayed alongside the dead, indigenous animals of Vietnam, creating a taxonomy of categorisation and display that dehumanises Odile and turns the Vietnamese fauna into a private museum-like display. Vietnamese culture is thus exotically Othered from within the borders of Vietnam itself, the culture of the country essentially emptied of its own individual meaning by the white gaze of the French colonists. The entitlement and rapaciousness of the colonial project coalesces in the character of Louis, who disgusts Jean-Pierre and Gaspard, forcing them to reassess their position as to the positive effects of colonialism.

Of course, it is not simply doctors, Jesus and coffee that the West has imported, but also the novel's primary genre: the Gothic. Through this traditionally Western mode, Kupersmith explores aspects of the Gothic that will be familiar to both the casual reader and the dedicated aficionado of the genre. In Mrs Ma, we recognise the female Gothic, wherein women struggle against patriarchal oppression. Through the Fortune Teller's attempts at exorcism, we see the haunted Gothic, where the malevolent past intrudes into the protagonist's present. There is also the uncanny Gothic double that forces the protagonist to confront their unstable identity through the presence of the Other, represented in the novel by the two-headed snake—a symbol of the inextricable entwinement between the subject and the Other. Because of its European origins and American adoption, the Gothic cannot meaningfully be severed from the West; but, as Judie Newman argued in her piece 'Postcolonial Gothic: Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and the Sobhraj Case', it can 'retrace the unseen and unsaid of culture,' and thus 'the Gothic is very well adapted to expressing the untold and unspeakable stories of colonial experience'.[3] *Build Your House Around My Body* is just such a Gothic adaptation. In her approach to the mode's tropes and their transposition to an Asian setting, Kupersmith skilfully wields the Western mode in order to explore specifically Vietnamese wounds, turning the Gothic on itself to act as a critique of the West.

Gothic is an effective means of exploring moments of transition, negotiating a point poised between the past and the present, the old and the new. It expresses the strain and the fear that can accompany such a precarious and liminal position. Vietnam occupies this position of liminality as a result of its historical occupations, and the characters of the novel teeter on various brinks. Ghosts come back from the dead, chapters contain displaced time and characters return, disappear, and return again in new avatars, new jobs, new personas. Yet, fundamentally, Kupersmith turns the expectations of the Gothic return inside out by having the Vietnamese past rise up against the colonial Other in a way sympathetic to the reader, and Vietnamese history (in the form of monstrous folklore) rise up against the foreign occupiers of the country.

Kupersmith keeps the text tightly personal, and the political ramifications of the plot are suggested without feeling laboured. Readers are led to witness the line of cause and effect between cultural conflict and colonisation through the personal devastation of Winnie and the other Vietnamese characters of the plot, all of whom must negotiate their

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[3] Judie Newman, 'Postcolonial Gothic: Ruth Prawer Jhabvala and the Sobhraj Case', in *Modern Gothic: A Reader,* ed. by Victor Sage and Allen Lloyd Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 171–87 (p. 171).

traumatised cultural history with their own individual, present struggles. The Gothic history of the novel is particularly written on the bodies of women: through the triad of Winnie, Binh and Mrs Ma we witness female victimhood, female rage, and, ultimately, female vengeance.

The very title of *Build Your House Around My Body* inverts the expectation of haunted house narratives, as it positions the ghost at the core of the home, rather than as the supernatural parasite with which audiences have grown familiar. Classic Gothic novels end with the containment of the Other, and yet the conclusion of Kupersmith's text speaks to metamorphosis, rather than restraint. It may be true that the past is ever present, but the ways in which the characters bear the weight of their past is transformative. Winnie's struggle to come to terms with her self shows how we can be haunted by aspects of our own myriad identity. Yet her ending, though fantastic, gives her a new way of existing that makes her crisis obsolete. We, the readers, are left with nothing but questions and a lingering sense of having interacted with something strange, wonderful, and haunting. Ghosts may never be fully laid to rest in the novel; likewise, the book will leave its own spectral presence with the reader long after the cover has been closed.

Enter the Luciferous Hexichasm: On the Savage Theoryfiction of Gruppo di Nun in *Revolutionary Demonology*

Jordan Casstles

Revolutionary Demonology. By Gruppo di Nun. 2022. 1st edition. 345p. £20.00. Urbanomic Media Ltd.
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Theoryfiction: weird, reality-warping hybrid born of critical theory, esoterica, Qabala, cyberpunk and Gothic horror. More than mere academic auto-fiction or an intellectual strain of hysterical realism, theoryfiction deliberately attempts to actively infect and colonise the 'real world' with its own twisted vision: it is ambivalent *in extremis* towards the limitations of consensus reality, proving to be capable of incubating accelerationist philosophies and acting as a vehicle to reshape conscious reactions to culture simultaneously. In 1940, Jorge Luis Borges' short story *Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius* predicted the form; between 1997 and 2003, the experimental cultural theorist collective Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) brought it into being, only for English philosopher Nick Land to lead the group from a state of cyberfeminism to a growing neoreactionary cyberfascism.

Now in the age of 'fake news', theoryfiction has been given a vicious new edge by the Italian collective Gruppo di Nun (GdN), first recorded to have emerged in 2019. The group's name takes Italian far-right philosopher Julius Evola's collective Gruppo di Ur and stands it on its head, inverting the fiery masculine into the chthonic and watery feminine of the Egyptian goddess Nun. GdN present within their latest text, *Revolutionary Demonology*, their attempt to 'respond to nihilism […] without succumbing to either despair or fascism'. In so doing they stand in stark defiance to the growing cyber-fascistic leanings espoused by Land's 'Dark Enlightenment' movement and its adherents, from former White House strategist Steve Bannon to Brenton Harrison Tarrant, the manifesto-penning mass shooter of Christchurch.

The book's introduction alone acts as both invocation and gateway into the unsettling yet liberating new dimension of reality that GdN invite the reader to enter. This is a world in which our conception of a singular, comprehensible reality in which stability exists is no more than 'a thermodynamic abomination we have nurtured for too long' and where all hope of civilisation's continuation is 'nourished on the blood of the ancient dragon, wailing, crucified in the heart of the world'. We bear witness to a grand synthesis, wherein Babylonian (and Babalonian) mythology, combinatorial algorithmic analysis, cultural theory and the Hindu concept of the Kali Yuga unite within a mere six pages in order to create a near-hypnotic induction into the rest of the text to come, and establishes the foundation upon which the other mysterious members of GdN will proceed to build.

Due to the mysterious nature of the formation, function, and eventual disbanding of the group, the specific identity of each piece's author is unknown—at best, gnomic initials at the end of each essay act as a brand upon the work, providing the secrets only to those in the know. Despite this, however, the collected writings do point towards some more

general concepts and ideas that GdN are repeatedly drawn towards. In 'Catastrophic Astrology', the near-apocalyptic arc of the asteroid (99942) Apophis leads into a discussion of the constancy of destroyer-deities across history and humanity's collective fascination with its own inevitable demise. Elsewhere, in 'Spectral Materialism', the slow-burning tale of an alchemical stellar death-cult that has taken root within an experimental chemistry laboratory intertwines with an in-depth comparative analysis of the Right and Left Hand Paths within the occult as equivalent to physics and chemistry respectively (i.e. the outlining of the physics experiment as Hermetic 'confirmation or refutation of a theoretical hypothesis formulated in advance', in contrast to the 'intrinsically productive and transformative nature' of the chemical experiment in '[generating] a new form of matter'). It also interrogates H. P. Lovecraft's approach to terraforming in his short story 'The Color Out Of Space' (1927) and combines this with an exegesis on the concept of the *azoth*—both the Italian name for nitrogen and the alchemical code to understanding the Great Work of occultism—and its circularity across history.

Perhaps the two most provocative pieces that *Revolutionary Demonology* has to offer for the discerning scholar of theoryfiction are 'Gothic Insurrection' and 'Lifting The Absolute'. The former piece is a direct and aggressive attack on modernity, declaring in the very first sentence that 'we are sinking into a new Middle Ages' and detailing how 'the Promised Land, peacefully and skilfully governed by cybernetics, is turning into a cybergothic nightmare marred by conflict, bigotry, and superstition'. Rather than turning to fascism or despair, however, the author instead invokes the potency of the barbarian—the 'warrior-shaman' dwelling on 'the wrong side of the boundary' demarcating civilisation—as conveyed through European black metal, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and the savage poetry of Rimbaud. Over the course of the piece, three metabolic processes of development—'the rewriting of barbarian geneaologies', 'lycanthropic proliferation' and 'atmospheric metamorphosis'—are presented as methods by which those destined to become barbarians of the cybergothic age may generate the 'double vampiric-hauntological spiral' needed to destabilise and upend the neoreactionary theoryfictions currently at work within our culture.

'Lifting The Absolute' is a curious anomaly within *Revolutionary Demonology*, and a testament to GdN's dedication to the theoryfictional form. It poses not as an essay, but rather as an extract from the fictional book *The Search for Absolute Fitness: Plato as a Bodybuilder*, complete with a date of release and the non-existent publisher 'Agharta'—the legendary kingdom contained within the Hollow Earth of Theosophist thought. 'Lifting The Absolute' presents the reader with a unique challenge. The authorial voice in this piece is not merely strong but as undeniably muscular as its imagined source: "'Bronze Age Collapse'", a pseudonym created to be the 'catastrophic Nemesis to the Sun of erstwhile alt-right Internet phenomenon and bodybuilder "Bronze Age Pervert"'. The material does not so much straddle the line between bombastic pastiche and sincere declaration of cosmic devolution as execute Van Damme splits across the void while performing barbell reps with primordial iron: 'If God were a lobster, and if the lobster were the yardstick for every human action and every rule of law, every true hero would prefer to be a star, a supernova or a black hole—to be able to glow from a great distance, or to devour the whole world with his soul'.

If there is a single key element that elevates *Revolutionary Demonology* above and beyond other works of its ilk (e.g. Reza Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia*, the CCRU's *Writing*s, and Cergat's *Earthmare*), it is the sheer poetry of the pieces that are contained within it. A description of Bram Stoker's depiction of Dracula's castle determines it to not simply be a

Gothic structure or metaphor for power, but rather 'an alien catastrophe suspended in time'. The readers are not merely invited to attempt initiation through understanding apocalyptic futures and lost potentialities simultaneously, but are instead reminded that 'to become chrono-warriors, we must strive to acquire both magical eyes.' In a synopsis of the movie *Halloween* (2018), the character Michael Myers is described as having 'been locked up in prison for decades, perpetually engrossed in his luciferous hexichasm'. In a similar—though arguably more gilded, yet energetic—style to the works of the CCRU, the linguistic pyrotechnics on display within this book are worth the price of admission alone.

Yet to commend the text on its dynamic stylisation alone would be to ignore a crucial factor: that is, that *Revolutionary Demonology* marks a distinct movement within the theoryfictional current as a whole. Between 1997 and 2019, the current flowed through the CCRU and the neoreactionary 'Dark Enlightenment' movement, taking it from a state of cyberfeminism and cultural exploration to a harsh form of cyberfascism and hyperracism. Now, as this text clearly demonstrates, this conceptual current is shifting and moving beyond the bounds of Anglocentric accelerationist philosophy and becoming something wilder, weirder, and possessing infinitely more potential to change the wider culture in ways as yet unimagined. Whilst one may find oblique references to CCRU texts in sources as varied as the notes of an ex-White House strategist or the screed of a manifesto penned by a mass murderer in New Zealand, determining where references to the works of GdN may emerge in the future is near-impossible—in part due to their subversive co-opting and undermining of the methodologies practised by those original parties.

The final page of the book provides a coda to the existence of GdN: though they 'disbanded only a short time after the period of intense and sustained collaborative effort that furnished these texts', they are said to have succeeded in 'tracing a path toward an alternative esotericism, questioning the fundamental premises of the Western magical tradition […] and offering a model of cosmogenesis based on an entirely different logic to that of the heterosexual desire that has for centuries inhibited the ability of magical practitioners to really and truly "traffic with the outside"'. Indeed, this text provides a gateway for the works of theorists, occultists, and theoryfiction writers seeking to tap into the queer, the alien, and the inorganic, in order to flourish and bloom like eldritch cancers in the gradually decaying body of the status quo. Such a hypnotic declaration of the power held by the truly unknown and the glorious Cosmic Love can be witnessed only in absolute dissolution.

Moving Together, Sharing Space in *Dance Your Way Home* by Emma Warren

Olivia Ho

Dance Your Way Home: A Journey Through the Dancefloor. By Emma Warren. 2023. ix + 400p. £16.99. Faber. ISBN 9780571366033

Italian has two words for dancing, *ballare* and *danzare*. The former refers to the informal, everyday dancing one does with family and friends; the latter means dancing of a high level, the kind that usually requires years of formal training. British author Emma Warren observes that the conflation of both these meanings into the single English verb 'dance' comes at the cost of nuance; for one to be defined as a dancer, the assumption follows that one is good at dancing. In her vibrant non-fiction book *Dance Your Way Home: A Journey Through the Dancefloor,* she seeks to decouple these meanings: if one dances, she argues, then one is a dancer, no matter how excellently or terribly one dances.[1] Her book is concerned not with professional dance but with the ordinary movement of bodies together to music, the spaces this shapes, and the communities this creates. She writes: 'Moving together to music, I realised, allows us to form new relationships with ourselves and with the wider world' (7).

Among intellectual circles, social dance has long carried the whiff of stigma. *New York Times Magazine* writer Carina del Valle Schorske observes that much of today's best writing about social dance remains confined to the academic disciplines of anthropology and performance studies; she laments: 'In the traditional hierarchy of art forms, social dance doesn't even rank.'[2] This is a hierarchy that Warren, a journalist who documents grassroots music culture and whose debut book was *Make Some Space: Tuning into Total Refreshment Centre* (2019), sets out to ignore.

The dancefloor, which she defines as 'the ground upon which the dancers dance' (11), could be youth clubs, school discos, reggae dancehalls, raves, and many, many other places. It could be getting down to acid house on a nightclub floor; it could be bopping with your siblings to *Top of the Pops* in your front room. Warren refracts her research through her own personal dancefloor experiences to produce a clarion call for embracing collective dance as a crucial aspect of community. 'We absorb or reject each other's movement in order to signify that we're part of a community, or to indicate that we're not,' she argues. 'It shapes us, as we make shapes' (16).

A dancefloor requires a physical space, and the construction and control of such cultural spaces are inextricable from the political and economic pressures they exist under.

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[1] Emma Warren, *Dance Your Way Home: A Journey Through the Dancefloor* (London: Faber, 2023), p. 33. All citations hereafter will be in-text.

[2] Carina del Valle Schorske, 'Dancing Through New York in a Summer of Joy and Grief', *New York Times Magazine*, 15 September 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/15/magazine/dancing-new-york-summer.html> [accessed 26 August 2023].

Warren looks mostly at British and Irish dancefloors, particularly those frequented by the working class, youth and/or minority groups, from 1930s Irish dance halls squashed by moral panic to the Northern dancefloors of the early 1990s and their policing. In one especially striking image, Warren describes how riot-ready police would turn up in Manchester clubs in a show of strength, moving across the dancefloor in a strict line with hard hats and shields in 'the copper conga' (194).

Warren is of the view that 'downward pressure can create the dance, like pressure turns carbon into diamond' (97). Control—whether exerted by authoritarian governments, religious leaders or restrictive families—often takes the form of curtailing the movement of bodies in space. Yet the need for that movement remains and may come out 'sideways', manifesting as dancefloors that exist as spaces of resistance. That said, while Warren makes much of the dancefloor as a safe space, she dwells less on unsafe dancefloors—there are fleeting references to drug culture, but not the harassment that women often experience in some of these spaces.

This book is not academic in nature, though it draws on a considerable breadth of academic research across multiple disciplines, from history to psychiatry. There is an amusing detour into what might have constituted the earliest English dancing; Warren cites Martha Bayless' assertion that the engraving on the ninth-century Fuller Brooch is a depiction of Anglo-Saxon dancing, which seemed, among other things, to revel in rudeness (30-1). She also marshals an array of scientific studies about the benefits of everyday dance, from Swedish research on the effects of collaborative dance class on the physical and mental health of teenage girls, to a paper on the effects of prenatal dance intervention on foetal neurodevelopment (164; 240). But her roster of interviewees ranges far and wide, from big names on club circuits to family, friends and acquaintances she once shared a dancefloor with. Toni Basil, best known for her 1981 hit song, 'Mickey', but also a dance historian in her own right, repeats to Warren a phrase by Henry Link of hip-hop dance crew M.O.P.T.O.P: 'Dance your history' (18). This is echoed in Warren's later interview with veteran London DJ and producer Frankie Valentine, who says: 'When people listen to music, they dance their story' (177).

'Dance your history' and 'dance your story' may be said to be *Dance Your Way Home*'s defining ethos, and also its limiting factor. Unlike other titles that deal with collective dance —most notably Barbara Ehrenreich's *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (2007), which looked more broadly at spontaneous group celebration in phenomena such as dancing, feasting and the carnivalesque through the ages—Warren eschews range in favour of grounding her writing in her own lived experience. This is the safest approach one can take towards such a culturally sprawling subject, but it also circumscribes it. The sensitivity Warren brings to the project is laudable, but it does mean its scope is sorely narrowed. Warren, a Londoner with Irish ancestry, describes herself as a 'white, middle-class, middle-aged woman' (5). This means that the majority of the dancefloors featured in this book are British or Irish, with some exceptions, such as a jaunt across the pond to the clubs of Chicago's South Side. A chapter on 1970s and 1980s reggae dancehall begins with the apologetic caveat: 'I should say here that I didn't dance under these particular red bulbs, and might not have done so even if I'd been the right age' (79). The Arabic group of dances called *raqs sharqi*—more familiar to the layperson as 'belly-dance'—makes an appearance, but only to bolster an argument for the positive effect of dancing during pregnancy and labour (242). *Raqs sharqi*'s association with childbirth is significant, but it is a pity that this is the only one of the genre's myriad aspects—and certainly not the one most pertinent to the rich span of Arabic dancefloor culture—to be highlighted here.

In another rare mention of a non-Anglo-centric dancefloor, Warren recounts a visit to Rwanda's Hôtel des Mille Collines, where she observes at the back of a disco room 'a small handful of young men dancing Jamaican dancehall-style, dipping down and winding their waists in a manner I perceived as gendered, in the sense of being associated with the way women move'. She adds obliquely that any assumptions she made about their sexuality 'says more about me than it does about their reality or the way they might identify' (317-8). There is a point she seeks to make here about the universal nature of dance as a form of celebratory expression, but it is obscured by her overt consciousness of her outsider status, keen to get on the floor but hesitant to tread on any toes.

Where the book benefits most from the approach of memoir is in its exploration of the body as instrument and limit. Warren's father was disabled; the increase in her caregiving responsibilities as a teenager coincided with her introduction to club culture. 'My need for movement increased in tandem with his decreasing strength,' she observes (179). Later, she herself develops dyspraxia, a 'condition in which poor balance affects co-ordination', resulting in her inability to learn dance steps. Dance class helps her understand, however, that her symptoms are a standard experience for the non-neurotypical (311).

A photographer who works with professional dancers tells Warren about something she calls 'a con': 'the constant deferral that comes with bodily connection', especially for women; the time that you can enjoy or appreciate your body always out of reach (342-3). Warren argues that spontaneous, everyday dance gives one a chance to inhabit the body as it is in the moment, arriving at a version of the self 'less tainted by the illusions that society places upon individuals based on ability, gender, sexuality, class or ethnicity' (343). Some individuals benefit from these illusions more than others: Warren cites Maxine Leeds Craig's *Sorry, I Don't Dance: Why Men Refuse to Move* (2014), positing that the cliché 'white men can't dance' came about because white middle-class men are rarely reduced to their bodies. She wonders if they have thus somehow absorbed the idea that 'moving freely presents a risk to status and social standing' (44).[3]

Warren realises she cannot separate herself from her body; now she wants an 'embodied life, in which the self sits in the soft inside of an elbow or in our muscles, not just in our brains' (214). She speaks with Brian Belle-Fortune, DJ and author of *All Crews: Journeys Through Jungle/Drum & Bass Culture* (1999), who recalls a scene in the documentary *All Junglists: a London Someting Dis* (1994) that included a man in a wheelchair on the dancefloor: 'I knew that if something horrible happened to me, I'd be on the dancefloor too' (237). Belle-Fortune, who now uses a wheelchair due to the progressive effects of multiple sclerosis, has similarly remained on the dancefloor, inhabiting his body with whatever he has got (238).

Much threatens the proliferation and survival of dancefloors today—authoritarian regimes, capitalist profiteering, and most recently the Covid-19 pandemic, which turned the collective joy of moving together in a shared space into something deadly. In the face of such pressures, Warren makes a compelling case for the dancefloor in everyday life. To move with each other is vital to a sense of shared humanity. 'Are we human or are we dancer?' sang Brandon Flowers, questionably and ungrammatically, in The Killers' 2008 song 'Human'. This book's answer is that it is precisely because we are human that we are dancers.

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[3] Maxine Leeds Craig, *Sorry, I Don't Dance: Why Men Refuse to Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Sexual/Orientation: Navigating the Asylum System as a Queer Black Man in Edafe Okporo's *Asylum* (2022)

Alisha Mathers

Asylum: A Memoir & Manifesto. By Edafe Okporo. 2022. 211p. £18.99. Simon & Schuster. ISBN 9781982183745.

Unable to live in his homeland of Nigeria because of his sexuality, Edafe Okporo fled to America. Seeking asylum in the so-called Land of the Free, however, proved harder than he expected. In his memoir and manifesto *Asylum,* Okporo traces his search for refuge from Nigeria to New York City. The result is a harrowing tale of loss, detailing Okporo's tiresome fight to find refuge from persecution.

Recent ethnographic studies have explored the experiences of queer refugees, specifically how queer community groups have supported and excluded queer refugees in asylum, but also how the safety of queer refugees within the asylum system is extremely precarious. *Asylum,* however, provides a rare insight into an asylum system from a queer refugee's perspective. The narrative also offers an in-depth exploration into the often-hidden parts of the asylum process, such as his initial moments of exile and life in detention in the United States.

Okporo's recollections function not just as a memoir, but also a manifesto. By grounding the discourse around immigration laws and political debates on migration in his own lived experience, Okporo positions *Asylum* as a 'blaring call to action' to reform the world's approach to refugees.[1] Okporo, who founded the charity Refuge America and whose previous works include the play *Edojah: Risking It All For Freedom* (2019) and political book *Compassion Is Worth More!: Using Your Civil Power to Create Change* (2020), continues in *Asylum* to marry his personal experiences with a broader call for a more compassionate response to refugees globally. His memoir employs the language of directionality, alignment, and spatiality to articulate his experiences of being othered as a gay Black refugee, relaying a relentless, ongoing navigation towards freedom in the face of discrimination and bigotry. 'I wasn't ready to give my life for my freedom,' he writes. 'I wanted both' (53).

Okporo, who is gay, grew up surrounded by homophobic rhetoric. His attempts to explore his sexuality led to violent attacks. Even after moving away from the small village of Warri, where he was born, to the city of Abuja, the spaces where he sought refuge could not protect him against the country's escalating anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments. The Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, signed in 2014, criminalised same-sex-relationships as well as activism and groups supporting gay rights. This threatened Okporo's life as a gay man and his job as a program officer for a campaign to improve sexual health. Though it was his sexuality that caused him to be discriminated against back home, Okporo experienced

[1] Edafe Okporo, *Asylum: A Memoir & Manifesto* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2022). Subsequent citations will be cited parenthetically in the text.

other kinds of hatred upon his arrival in America, predicated upon not just his queerness, but also his Blackness and new status as a refugee.

Okporo recounts how, beginning in Warri, his life was planned out for him before he had a chance to know what he wanted. While 'outrageous displays of masculinity' colour his boyhood, he is not considered 'a true Warri boy' (10). Okporo's father grows uncomfortable with his son's behaviour, such as playing with dolls and preferring to be in the company of women. Told to 'man up', Okporo is made aware that his performance of masculinity deviates from the norm (14). This results in his parents sending him away to an all-male boarding school—the first of many moves that, while not a displacement in a refugee sense, would come to represent the rejection of his identity within a particular space.

Though not yet fully aware that he is gay, the teenage Okporo is cognisant of the repercussions of even questioning his sexuality and the direction it would force his life to take:

> I would have to change my sexual orientation, by way of starving the demon within me by fasting, praying, and forcing myself to sleep with women. I was too young to sleep with a woman, but I was introduced to a wife-to-be—Esther—whom I would wed when I was old enough to marry. (19)

As a spatial term, orientation often refers to how one is positioned and directed within a particular space. Sexual orientation, according to intersectional theorist Sara Ahmed, is no different. Ahmed argues that the term sexual orientation does not 'position the figures of the homosexual and heterosexual in relation of equivalence', but rather, 'it is the homosexual who is constituted as having an "orientation": the heterosexual would be presumed to be neutral'.[2] Okporo's family attempt to force him towards heterosexuality by literally directing him to marry a woman; his behaviour and sexuality are treated as a deviation. To be straight, Ahmed writes, is to be considered 'in line', aligning oneself with the family's desire to continue the 'reproduction of the family line'.[3] Sexual 'orientation', therefore, like any other form of displacement, is out of the subject's control.

Okporo's relationship with his sexuality becomes one of shame and self-punishment. Part of his attempts to 'mask' his sexuality involves becoming a student pastor (24). Though he wants church to 'change' him, he continues to explore his sexuality; he must be 'seen as upright: but being *seen* as upright didn't mean always having to *be* upright' (25). The notion of uprightness, synonymous with straightness and correctness, is embedded in Okporo's exploration of his sexuality at this point in his life. Identity being inextricable from directionality, Okporo living as his true self would have been deemed as not just *going* in the 'wrong' direction, but rather, *being* wayward.

Due to the 'anti-gay messages' spread by the Church, Okporo decides to leave his role as a pastor out of fear of his safety (25). His attempt to have a tryst with a man also leads to him being 'kitoed', a common scam within the gay community in Nigeria in which people pretend to be gay only to violently ambush those they connect with (27). In this attack, Okporo is held hostage and suffers verbal and physical violence while the attackers rob his bank account. Though difficult to read, this passage reveals the necessity of queer

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[2] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 69.

[3] Ibid., p. 74.

refugee protection and in doing so, problematises the omission of fleeing in fear of persecution for one's sexuality in the 1951 Refugee Convention.

After the attack, Okporo flees for Abuja and the brutality of his persecution is laid bare. In a passage that further emphasises how he was conditioned to associate straightness with moral righteousness and homosexuality with directional deviancy, he writes:

> I was struggling to be somebody I wasn't—I wanted to be upright and righteous, yet popular and accepted, also with a desire to be free of the burden I carried […] Opening up would be a reminder that I don't fit in on the path I was expected to follow. (32)

In Abuja, Okporo experiences a sense of belonging that he could not find in Warri. Living with members of the queer community, he feels 'seen [and] welcomed' for perhaps the first time in his life: 'I knew immediately that night that there was no way I could return to Warri. Abuja was the place for me' (38). However, he is still subject to the stigma of being a gay man in Nigeria. Outside his living space, he experiences verbal abuse from 'vigilantes' 'who attempt to scrutinise and punish homosexuality in the lack of police presence (47). This level of surveillance throughout the community leads him to attempt to hide and police his sexuality once more: 'Getting dressed in the mornings, I'd ask myself if I looked passing enough. Passing is dressing as a masculine man, which meant not deviating from gender norms' (47). 'Passing' echoes Ahmed's concept of the 'line' as an act which attempts to realign oneself to the direction dictated by heteronormativity. The growing homophobia around Okporo makes his space smaller, forcing him to hide in fear of being killed and eventually causing him to flee Nigeria altogether; 'the farther, the better' (50). This heartbreaking recollection emphasises the often-unseen battle people go through to remain in the country they consider to be home.

The moment Okporo decides to seek refuge elsewhere, another layer is added to his identity: asylum seeker. On his arrival at JFK airport in New York, he realises there is simply 'no guidebook for seeking asylum' (57). Pulled aside by airport security, he is questioned and searched. Upon discovering his birth documentation, the security staff suspect Okporo's intentions to seek asylum; after he admits his status, he is sent immediately to the Elizabeth Detention Center in New Jersey. Confined within an 'abandoned warehouse' with only a single sunroof through which one can catch a glimpse of the outside, Okporo describes feeling a sense of spatial puzzlement (63). He recounts that inside the centre, 'your name is replaced with a nine-digit alien number' and that 'after seven days, I had lost my name and my sense of time. I became disoriented' (67). His feelings of disorientation as a refugee add another dimension to the spatial limitations imposed on him. Here, the memoir exposes the physical and mental toll of detention; though technically in America, Okporo is forced to occupy a liminal space between two states: potential deportation to the place which threatens his life, and the chance to rebuild a new one.

To attain the latter, Okporo attempts to prove his credibility as a refugee in conjunction with the 1951 Refugee Convention—a case that takes months to complete.[4]

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[4] UNHCR, 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951), *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*. https://www.unhcr.org/media/28185 [accessed 21 April 2021], p. 3: 'A refugee, according to the Convention, is someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.'

He sees the process as 'clearing [his] path to freedom' (76). The procedure is difficult enough to navigate for all asylum seekers, but queer refugees face additional complexities. In this section of the book, Okporo's writing moves in the direction of a manifesto: he highlights the history of anti-queer immigration legislature in the US in the last century, from the Immigration Act of 1917 to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. He observes that 'homosexuality is illegal in nearly seventy countries' (61), extending his criticism towards the global extent of queer displacement. He also notes that as the 1951 Refugee Convention does not specifically mention people fleeing persecution for their sexuality, queer refugees must fit their cases into the 'particular social group' category. However, queer refugees are often more vulnerable than those part of a 'particular social group' as 'queer identity […] often alienates individuals even from their immediate family, which is not usually true of people who belong to persecuted religious or political groups' (61).[5] In so doing, he highlights the gaps in the 1951 Refugee Convention through which queer people like himself often fall.

To make things worse, Okporo's case places him in a precarious position within the detention centre, revealing the lack of support available for queer refugees in detention. The success of his case hinges on his ability to prove that he has a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted' as a gay man in Nigeria. Being open about his sexuality at the centre exposes him, however, to discrimination from other inmates or staff who believe his homosexuality to be a myth. He writes: 'I felt like I was reliving my life in Nigeria, fearful to express myself' (71). The detention centre not only spatially disorients Okporo by disconnecting him from time and the world outside, but also allows for a continuation of the hostility he fled. He observes that the centres are 'designed to derail and detour us, to break us down, to abandon our hope for safety in the United States' (94). Okporo proposes here that detention is created not just to detain and impose limits, but in fact to deter the asylum seeker from even attempting to navigate it.

In America, Okporo is identified not only by his queerness and migrant status, but also his race: 'It wasn't until I arrived in America that I came to understand it was no safe haven—not only as a gay man, but as a Black gay man' (147). He adds:

> Any American who visits Nigeria is not considered white or Black; they are all considered Americans. When a Black person travels to America, he may be Haitian or Nigerian, but first and foremost, he is Black. (149)

He finds himself oriented once again as an Other, someone who is misplaced and does not belong.

Anti-Blackness is not, however, entirely new to Okporo. He recounts his first encounter with whiteness as a child attending a wedding in Nigeria; he wanted to be close to the white bride as he 'felt important in her presence, civilised in a sense' (142). This goes on to reshape his perception of others; he admits that he 'started arranging people in my mind across an invisible line—those who had seen a real white person and those who had not' (142). Whiteness is seen as 'the best way to live life' (141). If one cannot be white, then at least one can achieve proximity to it.

Okporo's actions here reiterate Ahmed's understanding of orientalism and power, that being 'orientated around something means to make that thing central'.[6] Okporo

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[5] UNHCR 1951 Refugee Convention.

[6] Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 116.

internalises the Orientalist gaze, reorienting others in his mind as being more Other than himself. He believes that the way to succeed in America is to 'adopt whiteness in all its forms […] now I have to ask myself how I dress based on my race' (150). As with his attempts to mask his sexuality in Nigeria, his adoption of what he considers 'whiteness' is not simply a choice but a strategy for survival. He details the pushback that he and his partner Nicolas, a white man, both receive for dating outside their races.

Okporo ultimately orients his narrative towards hope. He writes of his future with his partner in the US:

> I will be getting married one day. We will build a family. We will fight for equality, together. […] I carry that hope with me in my work for a better future […] I believe our love is a radical activism, challenging the concept of love beyond skin colour. (165)

He tempers this hopefulness, however, with the tragic fates of others like him, such as Daunte Wright, a young Black man shot and killed during a traffic stop in Minneapolis in 2021 (165). He reminds the reader that even after his resettlement, nationwide systemic issues stand in his path towards 'freedom'.

Refugee studies scholar Andrew Nelson argues that 'refugee resettlement' is 'a tragedy of enduring displacement'.[7] Okporo's detailed and distressing stories of persecution pre-exile and discrimination post-exile deepen this conceptualisation of displacement. Non-fictional stories of refugee resettlement—especially those found in cookbooks and documentaries—tend to not only romanticise the process but also frame the attitude of their subjects as one of unqualified gratitude for the refuge they have received. Okporo's story reveals, however, that striving towards 'freedom' has been a constant battle for him even after resettling in the US, thus drawing attention to the complexities of refugee resettlement. The book concludes that the fight for his safety—and that of refugees globally—is far from over. It closes with a request for compassion, 'to see [refugees] for who we are and to give us a genuine opportunity to build a life of our design' (208-9). Okporo uses his story to make a compelling, unignorable plea for change in policies and laws, to ensure that his experiences of suffering and rejection are not repeated.

[7] Andrew Nelson, 'From Romance to Tragedy: House Ownership and Relocation in the Resettlement Narratives of Nepali Bhutanese Refugees', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 34.4 (2020), 4053-71 (p. 2).

CREATIVE

The Forest Navigator

Karen Jane Cannon

is a cartographer
of rolling sound
a mapper
of sonar valleys circumnavigating
grid references
fine as hair

I open the leather-bound book
of night feel its heartbeat
shudder
between fingertips
tease out ariel ears tune in
to the forest's
high frequency —

I am lost
within
spectral
overlaps

swoop flit flutter
words
of impermanence

You skirt the material world boundaries
of space draw shapes of trees
through echoes
clicked rhythms bounce
a body pulsing
its topographies

Who are you?
you are who?

what3words resound

I find you hanging upside down wings loosed
emptying all you have heard
I shrug
on map-creases of your skin
take flight
chart my own
sightless
coordinates

Cost of Living

Mark Gorham

like how a trolley rams into another trolley in the line of trolleys outside, its cagey nose – no it's a headbutt through the other trolley's backside and all the trolleys look like this when they're lined up covered from rain awaiting the next customer trolley smacked into the queue. Nick says he once saw an angry guy still carrying his satsumas do a run up and dive through the rear trolley flap and make it through perhaps like three clanking trolleys' arses before his momentum died. And trolleys take breaths when they're not bunched together like that, when they're being pushed around the supermarket, wonky-wheeled, sticky handlebar the kid in the seat based on the mousetrap design unwrapped that before mum'd paid for it. Nick and the boys once put cheese on one of those seats (don't tell their manager, he's called Tim, been here since 2005, it was shop cheese, unexpired) they left it overnight to see if there'd be a nibbler in the morning and if there was I guess their laughter and jostling would dampen as the lads considered while communicating without communicating, if you know what I mean, if they really were gonna slam the seat against the frame. But when they got in the people who restock overnight had put it all away even though they said on the group chat (Tim isn't in it) not to.

There was the time *I* put a carrier bag over my head and ran down the aisle with the freezers feeling for my head as if I'd really lost it shouting I've lost my head, I've lost my head but I'm unsure if I could be heard because all I could hear was rustling and every time I breathed in a sucked tent of plastic brushed the back of my throat, lips wrapped, it's called poison. After two or three laps, I felt probably a man's hands grab my shoulders and I was forcibly led yes *inside* one of the freezers and I contorted my body to fit between the boxes I couldn't even see, everything was a dull white light colour. Inside the boxes, it turned out, upon my release, when I could see again, security took the bag off me: chicken breasts. This was a vertical freezer I wasn't lying down. My overwhelming memory was of how not very cold it was in there, and I remember brushing my fingertips against the frosty tops of the chicken breast boxes. I picked up a box, rattled it, a block knocked about inside. Who'd led me inside the freezer? my first question to the new security guard, started last weekend. Maybe he'd been drunk on power, or maybe he was just joking – you can joke with me, if I ask why you can make a joke of it. But I don't know him very well yet. *I led you inside*.

Ah, the charity box. There's that charity box thing by the exit that when you put your penny in, it spirals down into the hole mouth. Or this was a thing when I was growing up. I haven't seen it in years. Chained to the wall. Rotund. A cloudy glass dome that had the little slot for the coin. Normally a bright yellow or green colour. Red on occasion. A mix of colours, actually. You'd insert the coin and watch as physics took control and it (coin) remained vertical (somehow) and yes spiralled lower and lower getting faster and faster as it approached the mouth and it'd basically hurl itself into the mouth as physics became too much and entertainment became donation. The sound it made as well – a great sound. Customers brushing by as your eyes track the penny and your smile is faint. You were the height of this thing back then. You'd press your peachy hands against the dome (so that's why it was cloudy) as you watched. When I was a little boy I poured the entire contents of a till inside. Here's how I did it: when the cashier wasn't looking I opened the register and tipped everything into the coin slot and then the most amazing thing ever happened – the

coins went as expected but the notes spun the *opposite* way as if the mouth was spitting them out or blowing on them to keep them up in the donation box's upper atmosphere. A storm was brewing in there; the shop's lights catching the coins as they spiralled coulda caused this but I'd swear lightning was flashing as the notes blew wildly. I gripped the emptied till extra tight for a weight in case I was sucked into this – well it was a different planet at this point.

I'm used to when the team go on their breaks. Pete goes at midday, Evan at half past twelve, Becky at two. I know all of them. Was it Sue that told me they get a staff discount on the food? For Christmas I got the whole shop a clock with their bodies and faces painted on to act as the hands and they were pointed at the times they eat.

Tomorrow it's Monday, I'll bump into Amy. Tomorrow I'm planning on picking up an egg or a tin if they don't have one and going to one end of the supermarket where the toiletries are and overarm throwing it over the rows of aisles and running to the other end where the veg is to catch it before it lands. I'll obviously stop to ask Amy how she is but I'll be fidgety like I need the toilet because I know the egg is in orbit meaning time is of the essence. I'll ask her how her violent sons are. I've met her violent sons before; I caught Fin I think stealing a videogame but I told nobody until I saw Amy and I told her confidentially. I could tell she appreciated it. She was with her other violent son at the time, he tugged at her arm and laughed, she hissed at him, I bent down to give him a cookie from the bakery section. He thanked me so can't be all bad. I don't know if they knew I hadn't paid for the cookie, but they walked out with it. Amy reckons her sons are violent due to what they see online, we've had brief chats about this. To try to reassure her I've said to her, but Amy, the internet wasn't here for either world war. She smiled, put something in the trolley; true. I joined her as she put other things in her trolley she was texting with the other hand; I guess I mean they're on the internet all day and it's impossible to get them out the house, which was why I recommended she tell them about our supermarket. *Crack*.

I've done my duty on plenty of occasions, of course. If I see an empty basket I'll put it back on the rack. I once saw a stray dog sniffing the biscuits so took it through to the staff room. It was hilarious they all jumped – Becky, Janine, Pat – Pat almost choked on her sandwich. Pat asked the really weird question of how I knew the code and I looked to Becky and Janine as if to say, well duh… is she really asking that?

I have a running joke at the booth where they sell the scratch cards. I always buy one and I always say: I'll take the winning one, please. They always laugh, but I don't laugh with them I'm already scratching I can sense in my peripheral any queue behind me has dispersed the cashier too backs off giving me elbow room. I have no coin: I use my nail. You'll draw blood if you're not careful Elaine has said to me before I peered up at her *scratch scratch scratch*. She recoiled and continued restocking gum at the other side of the counter. They leave me to it these days.

I like to give people a thumbs up when they step out of the changing room to show their boyfriend or whoever what they look like in it. My supermarket sells clothes and has a changing room it's a bit tatty though. I've tried on socks in there before; I poked my feet out from under the curtain and wiggled my toes.

How long have I been a customer? Ok, I'll tell you how it all started – at the bookshop. I'm going there now actually, it's eleven I always leave the supermarket at eleven. Today's schedule? Supermarket, bookshop, café I go to four of them between midday and one; normally I'll pop into an electronics shop, ask if they sell VHS players anymore. Probably a couple of the clothes shops. Pretty much home time after that. Oh, I must tell you, I was inspired the other day by something I read in here. Come, come in, I'll show you

the history section, there's a book there about merc-an-til-ism, about how, you know, the 'buccaneers' as they were called used to sail the *seven seas* from one port to another, buying and selling stuff. 'Goods' is a word I learned from this book. Not that *I* sell anything. Apologies for the dog-ears; oh, there's Sharon, hello! That's the manager waving at me there. She'd wave if she had her lenses in. Here, page eight, you see, they'd sail all over the globe, like I said, from port to port, buying and selling, as it says here, 'goods'. I don't think I have anything people would want to buy, but you know… come here I'll whisper it to you… sometimes I wonder if they put the heating on in this shop just for me.

Moveable Type 15 (2023-24)

Batlló and Bataille

Four photographs

Chelsea Ko

'Eroticism', says French philosopher Georges Bataille, 'is assenting to life up to the point of death.'[1] The word denotes a quality of the sexual that is beyond the pleasure principle: it is self-loss approximated at the height of life. Communication, of which eroticism is one, entails a provisional imperilling of selfhood, a moment of 'risk taking' that, in Bataille's description, places the being 'at the limit of death and nothingness.'[2] A sexual communication, which Bataille likens to a religious festival, 'provokes an outward movement in the first place.'[3] Unable to accomplish self-loss, this movement inevitably calls for a 'retraction and a renunciation.'[4] But it is the rule with eroticism that this initial recoil 'organises the merry-go-round' and, as Bataille concludes in *Eroticism* (1957), ensures the 'return of the forward movement.'[5]

To the ecstasy of sex is thus added a measure of anguish, without which, in an unlikely consequence, desire would be satiated, self-loss completed, and the movement brought to a definite stop. Anguish fulfills the double role of stimulus and deterrent, for it 'assumes the desire to communicate—that is, to lose myself—but not complete [sic] resolve […] anguish is evidence of my fear of communicating, of losing myself.'[6] Failing to transcend anguish, eroticism is nonetheless caught up in the act of transcending it: between the losing myself (release) and the fear of doing so (retraction), that which lies beyond the edge of tangible experience is dimly perceivable, albeit ultimately inaccessible to human understanding.

This encapsulates Bataille's central thesis of eroticism: its failure to achieve self-loss is key to its link, however tenuous, with death. The underlying rationale of such reasoning hinges on another key notion: that eroticism is not a one-way street leading to a given goal, but a *movement*. It is a movement charged with an antipathy against stability, against the dictates of rules and reason. Bataille calls it a 'wild turmoil' that is 'given in the "little death"'—a little death that is a 'foretaste of the final death.'[7]

Any representation that does not adhere to the extreme empiricism of Bataille's thought can only succeed no more than sketching a fuzzy outline of it. These photographs, which I took on a visit to Antoni Gaudí's Casa Batlló in Barcelona many years ago, are no exceptions. Admittedly, they were the results of a happy coincidence: the genius of Gaudí, it is true, confers on every image an aestheticism that is at once solemn and delirious. Upon

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[1] Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. by Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), p. 11.

[2] Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. by Bruce Boone (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 19.

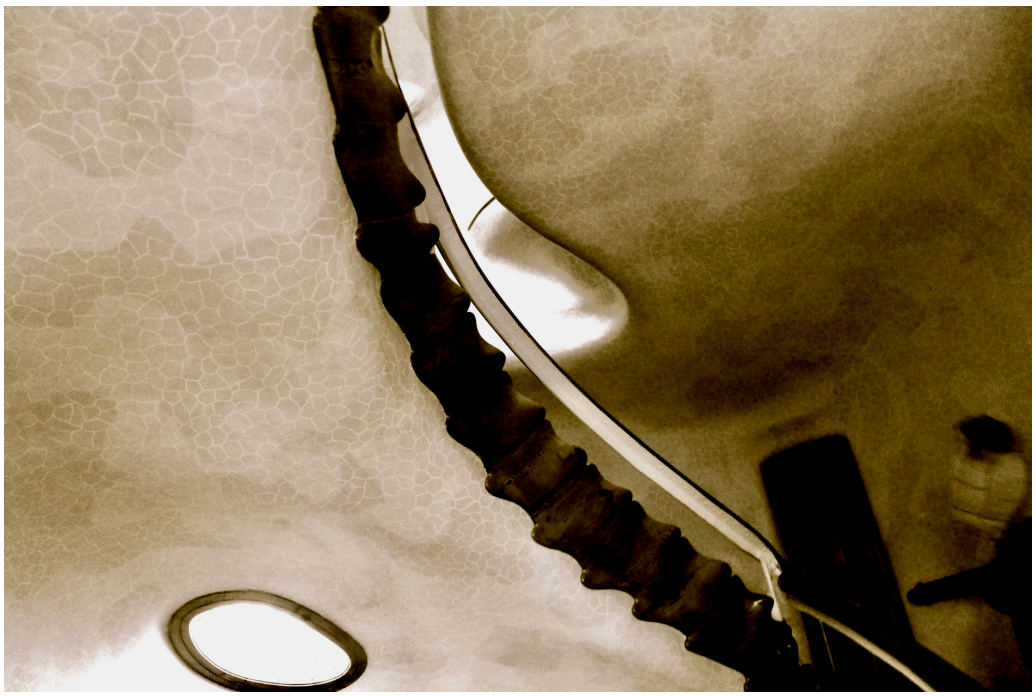
[3] *Eroticism*, p. 207.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

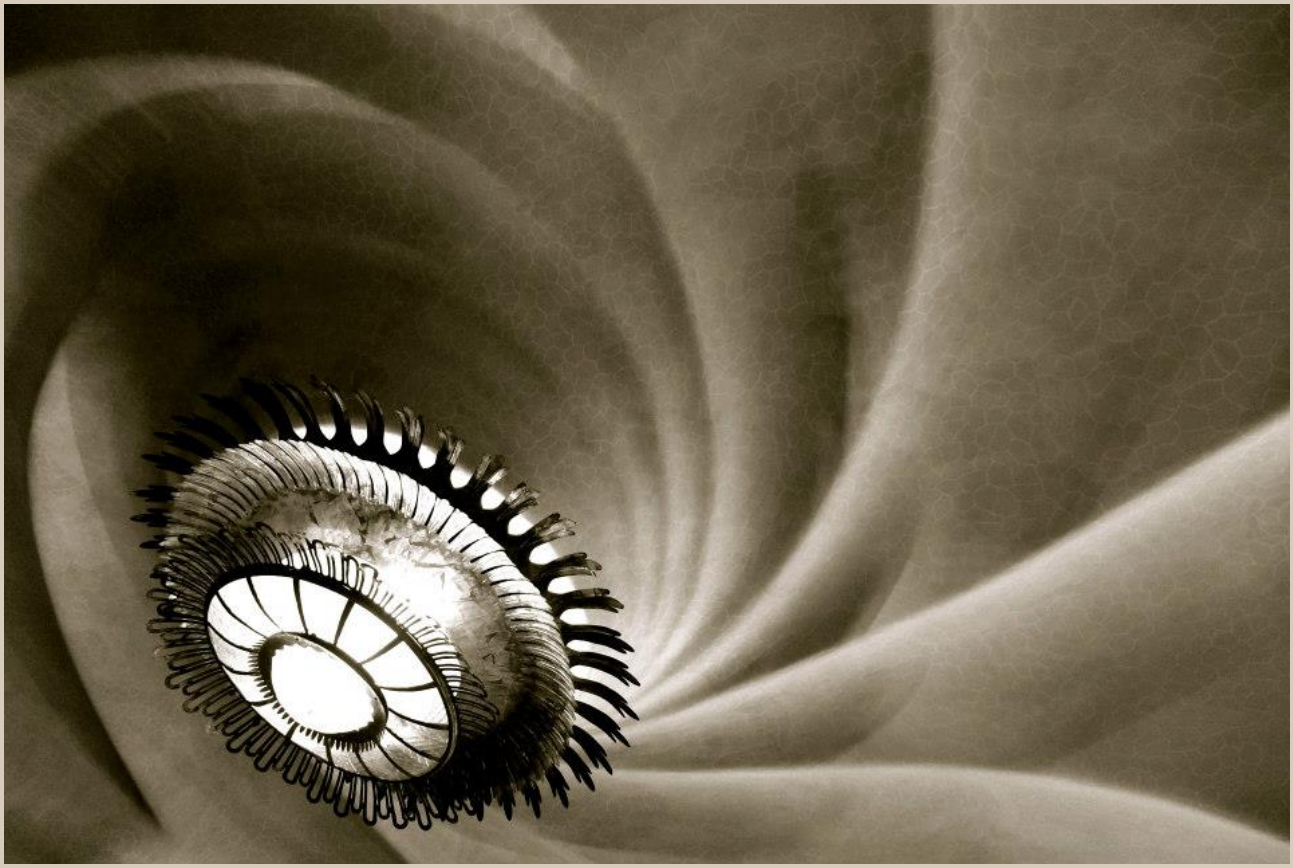
[6] Bataille, *Inner Experience*, trans. by Leslie Anne Boldt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 54.

[7] Bataille, *The Tears of Eros*, trans. by Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1989), p. 20.



entering Casa Batlló for the first time, my awe of its entrancing beauty was translated into the automatism of snapping away.

Looking at those photos now, I detect what seems to me a resonance with the Bataillean conception of movement: the sinuousness of the architectural lines—the swirls and whorls—all symbolise a tendency away from structural order while, at the same time, a sense of equilibrium is maintained precariously by an inner harmony between these architectural elements and the space in which they are enclosed. Sensuous is a term that is frequently applied to the description of Gaudí's designs, and it is an element of his work that is further intensified by its constant strife between order and chaos. And therein lies the essence of Bataille's theory of eroticism: a movement that struggles, against the will to restrain it, to its impossible completion.



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Alex Carabine is a final year PhD candidate in the Department of English at the University of Liverpool. She graduated top of her classes in 2018 and 2019, won multiple awards for academic excellence, and was granted the competitive School of the Arts Studentship to fund her research. Her aim is to uncover the submerged influences of medieval culture in Gothic literature, and her work on the evolution of the witch from medieval culture into Victorian Gothic fiction will appear in the upcoming Routledge collection, *Past as Nightmare*. Alex has had short stories published in the *Gramarye* and *Gothic Nature* journals, and she is currently writing a novel inspired by her research.

Jordan Casstles is a PhD student at the University of Liverpool. His doctoral thesis focuses on investigating depictions of surveillance within post-9/11 speculative fiction. His research interests include modern and postmodern receptions of classical mythology, the interplay between occult studies and culture theory, aleatoric literature, and bizarre fiction. Beyond the realm of academia, he has experience working as a bookbinder, printing assistant, scriptwriter, proofreader and columnist.

Karen Jane Cannon is a poet and Creative PhD Candidate at the University of Southampton, researching poetry and place. *The Salterns*, her third poetry pamphlet, is due to be published in 2024 by *Nine Pens Press*. She was the winner of The Poetry Society's *Hamish Canham Prize* 2022, commended for the *Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine* in 2021, shortlisted for *The Bridport Prize* in 2023 & 2019, and a finalist in the *Mslexia Poetry Competition* 2017. Karen was longlisted for the *Nan Shepherd Prize* in 2021 for her nonfiction nature writing. Her novel *Powder Monkey* was published by *Phoenix* in 2003.

Mike Fu is a writer, editor, and Chinese-English translator based in Tokyo. He cofounded the English-language literary journal *The Shanghai Literary Review* and teaches translation in the MFA Creative Writing program at Antioch University Los Angeles. He is currently a PhD candidate in cultural studies at Waseda University.

Mark Gorham is undertaking a PhD in English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. His thesis explores the 'good' half of the good/evil divide as narrated in Gothic literature, to enable an investigation into the role of ideology—and ideology's potential dependence on false notions of 'goodness'—in the development of English imperialism.

Liam Kennedy-Finnerty is a master's graduate in English literature from Dalhousie University. Since 2022, he has contributed to academic conferences across Canada with work on Richard Van Camp and John Milton. His work reflects his abiding interest in literary texts that enable their own futurity by necessitating embodied reading practices. His current research explores intersecting representations of voice and vapour in early modern literature, investigating how ideas of a shared literary atmosphere reflect historic sociologies of reading.

Jennifer Kenyon is a graduate researcher whose work considers the impact of radio on representations of the self in the long 1930s. She is currently studying the relationship between Patrick Hamilton's radio dramas, prose, and stage plays. Jennifer received her BA from the University of Cambridge and her MA from University College London.

Chelsea Ko, also known as Tung-Wei Ko, was born and bred in Taiwan. She is a PhD student of the University of Kent. Her thesis examines the intellectual parallel between Bataille and Nabokov. She also writes about film at Chelsea the Cinéaste.

Thomas Langham will be graduating his MA degree with distinction in English Literature at Warwick University in January 2024. He is currently researching the cultural history of drums in early modern English drama between 1500 and 1700. He hopes to start his PhD in the subject in 2024.

Alisha Mathers is an SWW DTP AHRC-funded PhD student in English at the Universities of Southampton and Bristol. Her research examines representations of refugee homemaking practices in the UK in contemporary narratives, specifically focusing on the politics of romanticisation and dramatisation of refugee experiences within such depictions. She has published articles on the representation of refugees and migrants in film, fiction, and poetry.

Abhik Maiti is a scholar whose research explores the intersection of literature, technology, and popular culture. He recently submitted his doctoral thesis on video game adaptations of Shakespeare's plays as part of the requirements for his Doctor of Philosophy degree at The University of Exeter, United Kingdom. Aside from his academic pursuits, Abhik is a Teaching Assistant, and he enjoys the company of his best friend, a very fuzzy cat with three legs who quite disapproves of his scholarly endeavours.

Christopher O'Hara is a PhD candidate at the University of St Andrews, where he works on the relationship between technologies of mobility (cars, bicycles, etc), narration of space, and community construction. He has previously published reviews in *Forum for Modern Language Studies,* and has presented work for the Modern Studies Association, Midwest Modern Language Association, and Victorians Institute among others.

Emily Round is an MA English Literature student at the University of Warwick, where she also completed her undergraduate degree in English and Comparative Literary Studies. Her piece for this journal is taken from an essay written for her BA module in American Horror. Her research interests include climate fiction, ecological horror, and petrocultural studies.

Laura Thorn completed her undergraduate degree in English at UCL and has recently started a PhD at the University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on connections between music and space in early modern literature.

Lisa van Straten is a current cum laude student in the research master's program Comparative Literary Studies at Utrecht University. She is part of the editorial board of FRAME, the leading student-run literary studies journal in the Netherlands and works as the general assistant of the ERC project 'Remembering Activism' led by Prof. Dr. Ann Rigney. In her research, she focuses primarily on narrative identity in relation to (cultural) memory studies and trauma theory by exploring how literary texts (de)construct individual and communal identity. Her current project is concerned with the rewriting of classical myth in auto-fiction by Eastern European authors in the twentieth century.

EDITORIAL TEAM

Reviews
Olivia Ho is pursuing a PhD in English at UCL, where she is examining the interstitial city in urban speculative fiction from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* onwards. She has a BA in English from UCL, where she was awarded the 2013 John Morley Prize and two John Oliver Hobbes Memorial Prizes, and an MSc in Literature and Modernity from the University of Edinburgh. Before returning to academia, she spent eight years in journalism, most recently as arts editor and chief book reviewer of *The Straits Times*.

Editor-in-chief
Daniel Lewis is in the final year of his PhD at UCL where he also completed his MA following a BA at King's College, Cambridge. His thesis looks at the legacy of civil disobedience and resistance to political, literary and critical authority in the work of the novelist Henry Green. He also works as an arts writer and reviewer for various publications.

Creative
Ilona Mannan is a final year doctoral candidate at UCL, where she also obtained her BA and MA in English Literature. Her thesis, 'Henry James and the Art of Venice', considers the significance of the city to James both professionally and personally; her research aims to prove that James's interest in Venice stemmed from his conviction that the metropolis could be used as a lens with which to examine America's identity as a republic.

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