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**THE SEVENTIES ACCORDING TO MURIEL SPARK:
SPACE AND THE NOVEL
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PHD MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE,
CULTURE AND THOUGHT
UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX
APRIL 2015**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

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SUMMARY

In this thesis I read a selection of novels by the Scottish writer Muriel Spark as participating in a broader 'spatialization' of fictional and aesthetic production consolidated during the 1970s, through which they refract the decade's socio-cultural change. My intention is to establish a richer historical and theoretical context than that in which Spark's fiction has traditionally been understood, such that its distinctiveness will both emerge from and in turn shed light upon this wider background. In particular, the stylized, economical spatiality of Spark's work in this period seems at odds with the most influential accounts of spatialization as either an attenuation of historicity or an expression of an unconscious and broadly realist 'mapping' impulse (these being the poles of Fredric Jameson's diagnoses of the spatial turn). What I consider Spark's more reflexive 'miniaturism' reaches towards a condensation of the historical referent, while bringing into focus the discrepancy between container and contained; the playful collision of spatial scales in these postmodern allegories grants them a fabulist and gendered dimension distinct from Jameson's more expansive and totalizing 'cognitive mapping'. Beyond situating Spark within a pre-existing context, then, approaching these novels theoretically and historically opens up a different perspective on the 'spatial form' of much postmodern fiction. More broadly, I argue that it is through this parallel formal evolution within the longer history of the novel, with its particular limits and potentials for fiction's 'utopian imagination', that these texts critically mediate (and not merely reflect) a perceived 'cultural closure' in the years after 1968 – a teleological spatial metaphor which recent histories of the seventies have begun to contest.

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The Seventies according to Muriel Spark: Space and the Novel

Introduction

This thesis explores how Muriel Spark's 1970s fiction responded to the decade's cultural and political upheavals.¹ While Spark's seventies novels often narrate then-topical events such as the economic crises of 1973 and the Watergate scandal (in *The Takeover* (1976) and *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974) respectively), my more theoretical argument is that these texts mediate the period's historical change as much through their pronounced spatiality (formal and diegetic) as their temporal or narrative unfolding. I thus view Spark's work in this period in light of the broader 'spatial turn' in aesthetic and theoretical production consolidated during the decade. With this periodizing approach, my intention is to establish a richer historical and theoretical context than those in which Spark's fiction has traditionally been understood, such that its distinctiveness will both emerge from and in turn shed light upon this wider background. Within Spark studies, a more contextualized approach admits new interpretations which exceed the religious and narrowly-postmodernist parameters of much existing criticism (see 'Historicizing Spark' below). More broadly, the stylized, economical spatiality of Spark's seventies novels seems at odds with the most influential accounts of the 'spatialization' of postmodern culture since the 1960s (outlined in 'Postmodernism and the Spatial Turn'). Fredric Jameson for example tends to view this 'new predominance of space' as a loss of the temporal and historical potentials of earlier (realist and modernist) cultural forms, now reduced to an unconscious impulse to 'map' the social totality.² As I discuss later on, this Marxian (or Lukácsian) view of time as the privileged dimension of historical change often results in symptomatic readings of postmodern spatiality. For Jameson, E.L. Doctorow's postmodern novel *Ragtime* (1975) exemplifies the fate of historical fiction by the 1970s, registering a 'weakening of historicity' characteristic of our spatialized postmodern present.³

¹ Dame Muriel Spark (1918-2006) was an Edinburgh-born writer who produced 22 novels during her lifetime, many short stories and poems, and several plays and critical works (for a full-length biography and bibliography, see Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010)). In my discussion of Spark's seventies novels (listed in the next section), I omit *Territorial Rights* (1979), which I see belonging more to the final third of her career than the 'middle' period I am interested in here, but include *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963) as prefigurative of her concerns during the subsequent decade.

² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp.1-54, 364

³ *Postmodernism*, pp. 5-6, 20-4

Conversely, what I call Spark's 'miniaturism' comprises distinctively spatial forms which adapt more reflexively to the period's historical change.⁴ The novels I will be discussing attempt a condensation of the historical referent – they aim, like some miniatures, to model entire social worlds – while knowingly exposing the discrepancy between container and contained. In other words, these texts often assume a meta-historical and allegorical relationship to the seventies, which I distinguish from Jameson's more expansive, residually-realist version of postmodern allegory. In particular, the playful collision of spatial scales in Spark's work acquires a fabulist and explicitly gendered dimension which exceeds Jameson's framework of 'cognitive mapping'.⁵ My close-readings trace a recurrent concern with the incongruity and resistance of the female body within various would-be utopian spaces; the body, a conventional measure of scale, here denaturalizes space and refuses containment.⁶ Beyond situating Spark within a pre-existing context, then, a more historical and theoretical approach to these novels can open up a new perspective on the 'spatial form' of much postmodern fiction.⁷ Contrary to the symptomatic view of 'spatialization', I argue that this formal shift within the history of the novel implies both new limits and potentials for fiction's 'utopian imagination'. While the form's temporal or strictly narrative dimension is the source of its historical potency for critics like Lukács, the novel's spatial dimension comes to the fore in attempts to represent utopia – to embody alternative worlds as a historical possibility.⁸ As such, Spark's 'miniaturism' responds to its historical moment less through reflection than by negotiating a perceived 'closure' of utopian possibility in the years after 1968. 'The Seventies as Closure' (the penultimate section of this introduction) outlines this notion, which provides a wider cultural context for the individual chapters which follow. I suggest that this popular-historical narrative, which has been contested in recent work on the seventies, functions as a teleological spatial metaphor; it implies a static space devoid of possibility or

⁴ Elaborated in my reading of *The Girls of Slender Means*, the concept of 'miniaturism' (as distinct from minimalism) comes from Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 375-6.

⁵ *Postmodernism*, pp. 1-54

⁶ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p.xii

⁷ Discussed below in the context of postmodernism, the term 'spatial form' comes from Joseph Frank, 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Two Parts', *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (1945), pp.221-240

⁸ György Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe', *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), Arthur Kahn trans., p.130

change.⁹ The close-readings then explore the ways in which Spark's fiction confronts this sense of impasse, alongside other spatialized postmodern artefacts from the decade.

Spark in the Seventies

From the references to the feminist and student movements in *The Driver's Seat*, to the spectres of urban and economic crisis in *The Hothouse by the East River* (set in a moribund seventies New York) and *The Takeover* (whose narrator heralds a global 'sea-change' beginning in 1973), Spark's seventies novels are immersed in the cultural and political atmosphere of the period.¹⁰ Biographer Martin Stannard offers a picture of Spark creatively invigorated by the international crises of 1973, in the midst of her composition of *The Takeover*:

[A]pocalyptic events were jamming the news media: another Israeli war; Russia threatening to send troops to support the Arabs; Nixon placing American forces on standby alert; the oil crisis apparently heralding Western economic collapse. Muriel was fascinated and not at all alarmed.¹¹

Stannard describes her 'obsessive reading' of newspapers during this period (the Watergate affair, which she satirized in *The Abbess of Crewe*, particularly interested her); indeed much of her seventies fiction, he suggests, 'derived from press reports'.¹² But the first half of the decade also sees a formal shift in Spark's fictional production, which results in 'five abrupt works, all complex experiments often written in the present tense'.¹³ Composed mostly in Rome where she lived from the late sixties (born in Edinburgh, she had spent the early part of her career in London and New York), these books were, in Spark's words, 'nearer to poetry', and inspired less by 'the English novel' than by the French *nouveau roman*.¹⁴ The six novels discussed here encompass this distinctive 'middle' period of her career, whose miniaturism I see prefigured in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963), with its 'slender' form and thematics, developed through *The Driver's Seat* (1970), *Not to Disturb* (1971), *The Hothouse by the East*

⁹ The concept of cultural closure is discussed at length in the penultimate section of this introduction, but see Peter N. Carroll's *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982) for both a summary of the popular-historical narrative and the beginning of the revisionist critique.

¹⁰ Muriel Spark, *The Driver's Seat* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), pp.71-2; Muriel Spark, *The Hothouse by the East River* (London: Penguin Books, 1975); Muriel Spark, *The Takeover* (London: MacMillan, 1976), p.127

¹¹ Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), p.398

¹² Stannard, pp.363-4

¹³ Stannard, p.418

¹⁴ Martin McQuillan ed., *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 215; Stannard p.172

River (1973) and *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), and delimited by *The Takeover* (1976), Spark's 'first long novel in eleven years' which saw her 'spreading herself more comfortably in third-person narrative again'.¹⁵ If the preceding 'abrupt works' both register the 'apocalyptic events...jamming the news media' and counteract this excess with their concentration and minimal spatial form, *The Takeover*'s more expansive, journalistic realism opens itself up to the period's 'sea-change'. The brevity and perpetual present-tense Stannard refers to, like the frequent use of prolepsis, call for such a spatial vocabulary; though these are recurrent features of Spark's metafiction in general, their experimental heightening in this period throws into definition the spatiality of the novel form, its internal patterning and simultaneity as much as its temporal unfolding. This thesis will attempt to show that it is through this new spatiality, and not only its evident topicality, that Spark's fiction confronts the decade's upheavals, in parallel to the wider 'spatial turn' within postmodern culture and theory from the late 1960s.¹⁶ Together with the periodizing category of 'the seventies', this 'spatializing' conceit provides a theoretical and discursive framework for the individual close-readings; in each chapter, I attempt to make lateral or horizontal connections, as well as emphasising points of *disconnection*, within this broad field, considered as a larger textual space in which these novels exist as much as a determining historical context.¹⁷

Historicizing Spark

With this approach, I hope to extend the belated theorization and historicization of Spark's work. Perhaps the most influential single book of criticism on Spark remains *Theorizing Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction*, a collection of essays from 2001 edited by deconstructionist critic Martin McQuillan. In his introduction to the volume, which reflects on the history of Spark criticism up to that point, McQuillan argues that 'The task of "theorizing Muriel Spark"...is long overdue'.¹⁸ Criticizing her

¹⁵ Stannard, p.418

¹⁶ For a thorough account of the spatial turn, see Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

¹⁷ As Stannard's reference to 'the news media' might suggest, the emblematic 1970s events he refers to can be considered always-already textual, such that their 'writing' in cultural, theoretical and media discourse forms a crucial part of the seventies context from which Spark's novels emerge.

¹⁸ McQuillan, p.7

early reception as a ‘Catholic writer’¹⁹ and practitioner of ‘the English novel’ (despite being Scottish), he directs attention to the “‘experimental”, or postmodern’ qualities of Spark’s fiction, which he argues ‘is inextricably bound up with the conditions of postmodernity’.²⁰ While the imperative to liberate her work from ‘doctrinal criticism’ has surely passed since the publication of *Theorizing Muriel Spark*, this thesis builds upon the reorientation of Spark criticism signalled by McQuillan’s book; at the same time, the limits of its theoretical approach have given way to more recent attempts to ‘historicize Spark’ within the field. It is perhaps testament to its success that McQuillan’s central thesis – that Spark ‘shares the concerns of the critical thinking which is gathered together under the term “literary theory”’ – now seems uncontentious; at several points in his introduction, her novels are reduced to dramatizing or anticipating concepts proposed on a more theoretical plane (regarding *The Takeover*: ‘contrapuntality allows Spark to identify in 1976, what Derrida calls in 1994, the “appropriation of Jerusalem.”...Spark, in 1976, is in fact recognizing the importance of 1973 to the “cultural logic of late capitalism.” 1973 is the date which both Jameson and Harvey give as constitutive of certain postmodern discourses in art and society’).²¹ This correlative approach to theorizing Spark recurs in several of the essays in McQuillan’s book and much subsequent work in the field; as well as making frequent links between Spark’s work and post-structuralism, critics have argued for a Foucauldian Spark and a post-colonial Spark, for example.²² While critical encounters between postmodern fiction and theory often result in such one-to-one correspondences, I would suggest that the perceived belatedness of Spark criticism – the need to argue for the postmodernism and contemporaneity of her work against the anachronistic parameters of religious and humanist interpretations (‘Spark is a writer...of the present’, writes McQuillan. ‘Her

¹⁹ Spark’s conversion coincided with the beginning of her writing career, and many of her 22 novels touch on religious concerns; early critics, of which McQuillan singles out Malcolm Bradbury as ‘perhaps the greatest sinner’, tended to affiliate her with Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene, both contemporary ‘Catholic writers’ of ‘the English novel’ and supporters of Spark’s work. See McQuillan, pp.1-5.

²⁰ McQuillan, p.4

²¹ McQuillan, pp.11, 17-8

²² For a Foucauldian reading of Spark, see Lewis MacLeod, ‘Matters of Care and Control: Surveillance, Omniscience, and Narrative Power in *The Abbess of Crewe* and *Loitering with Intent*’, in David Herman ed., *Muriel Spark: Twenty-First-Century Perspectives* (Baltimore: JHU press, 2010), pp.203-224. Eleanor Byrne discusses Spark in post-colonial contexts in ‘Muriel Spark Shot in Africa’ in McQuillan ed., pp. 113-126. The chapter on Spark in Michael Gardiner’s *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp.45-71, takes a deconstructionist approach in line with McQuillan’s. Gardiner praises *Theorizing Muriel Spark* and follows McQuillan in privileging aspects of Spark’s work which seem to prefigure later theoretical concepts. One problem with this teleological approach is that fiction, though cast as prescient, is valued insofar as it accords with existing theory.

novels are a conductor for all the signs and meanings in circulation in the contemporary scene') – has tended to produce readings which evoke the authority of 'theory' without raising Spark's undoubted affinity with 'postmodern thought' at the level of historical inquiry.²³ Her writing has thus been located, as Marina MacKay puts it, in a 'conceptual space where the more abstract preoccupations of Roman Catholic theology overlap with the metafictional and fabulist concerns of postmodernism'.²⁴ It is partly in response to such abstract readings, I would argue, that recent criticism has moved towards historicizing and periodizing Spark's postmodernism; in addition to several theoretical analyses which draw comparisons to Derrida, Deleuze and Foucault, a 2010 collection of essays on Spark notably includes a section entitled 'Situating Spark in Postwar Culture' (in which MacKay's contribution, for example, views 'Spark's postmodernist...concern[s]' as inextricable from 'the political betrayals that dominated midcentury British culture').²⁵

Postmodernism and the Spatial Turn

My concerns here are partly theoretical, then, but like MacKay's they are also historical; I aim less to read Spark 'through postmodern forms of knowledge' – to apply postmodern theory to the fiction contemporary with it or vice versa – than to view them as differing responses to the 'conditions of postmodernity' (whose relevance to Spark's work McQuillan rightly emphasises) as they developed within the 'thicker' cultural context of the 1970s. I thus refer to the 'spatial turn' not as a body of theory or even a set of shared concerns, but a broad historical shift which manifested itself in the cultural sphere in diverse ways. In this respect I draw from Jameson's account of the 'spatialization' of both capitalism itself and much aesthetic production from the 1960s, a thesis he sets out most clearly in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*.²⁶ Jameson's work informs the understanding of space which runs through this thesis, but I also want to acknowledge a more methodological debt in my broader attempt to read Spark's work historically. His maxims 'always historicize' and 'we cannot not periodize' have already been a tacit influence on my framing of the debates introduced

²³ McQuillan, p.5.

²⁴ Marina MacKay, 'Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason' in Herman ed., p.95

²⁵ MacKay, in Herman ed., p.110

²⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992)

thus far, and it is in light of Jameson's double negative ('acknowledging the objections to periodization as a philosophical act' while affirming its 'inevitability' as a historical tool) that I understand his characterisation of postmodernism, adapted from Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, in terms of a new 'predominance of space' – a notion that 'attempts... to unify, both horizontally and vertically, hosts of realities whose interrelationships must remain inaccessible and unverifiable'.²⁷ Spatialization for Jameson is in other words not only a process but a hermeneutic device upon which his own attempts to historicize postmodernism depend. Significantly, Jameson sees structuralism and post-structuralism as symptoms of spatialization (as synchronic modes of thought), such that one immediate advantage of this conceit is to remove 'theory' from an abstract, ahistorical plane and bring it into a potentially more dynamic relationship with the spatialized cultural production of the 60s and 70s – something particularly necessary, I have suggested, within the field of Spark studies. On the other hand, reconsidering postmodernism and the spatial turn from the perspective of Spark's fiction – an almost antithetical vantage point to *Postmodernism*'s, whose evidential approach draws cultural artefacts (many of them from the 1970s) into its totalizing pattern of 'interrelationships' – is likely to cast both in a different light. If Spark is perhaps too 'minor' a novelist to feature even as a footnote in Jameson's book, the (often physical) slightness of her work, I have already implied, is part of what distinguishes her fictional and historical vision, and offers an oblique perspective on the terms of Jameson's monumental study. As Hal Foster notes in *The Return of the Real*, his own reconsideration of postmodernism's historical 'deferred action', 'the Jamesonian version of postmodernism was sometimes considered too totalizing, not sensitive enough to cultural differences of many sorts'; many of the early critiques of Jameson's book came from feminist critics, as in Doreen Massey's argument that what he called 'postmodern space' described a specifically gendered experience.²⁸ More recently, in 'Historicizing Postmodernist Fiction' – the introduction to a special edition of *Narrative*, which reflects on the emergence of 'international postmodernisms' beyond the purview of the field's early Western-orientation – Wang Ning evokes Jean-François Lyotard's influential dichotomy to suggest that in the years since Jameson's

²⁷ Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), pp.28-9; *Postmodernism*, p.363

²⁸ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2001), p.206; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.259

study, ‘the grand narrative of (global) postmodernism has finally been relocated to different (local) “*petites histoires*”’.²⁹ Whereas *Postmodernism* was on one level a diagnosis of the (then) present, Ning suggests that the term now refers to ‘a past event that can only be described using the tools of historical research’.³⁰ Many contemporary studies on the culture of the 1960s and 70s, decades which have been the subject of a growing body of work in the humanities in recent years, can be seen in this light, as ‘*petites histoires*’ of postmodernism – a concept which, consolidated during these formative decades, continues to speak to the concerns of the present but from a new historical distance.³¹ I have suggested that Spark criticism similarly shows signs of moving towards a more fine-grained historicization of her postmodernism, such that it might not simply affirm existing ‘grand narratives’ of the period. But if the novels I will be discussing seem to slip through the net of totalizing categories like ‘postmodern space’, they also reflect on (no less than Jameson) the ‘intolerable’ yet ‘inevitable’ procedure of closure itself. As will be seen in the chapters that follow, Spark’s enclosed spaces continue to speak of an unassimilable ‘outside’ in their very insistence on spatial purity; their miniaturization suggests less an assertion of local difference than a drastic reduction of urban, national or global meta-narratives, which foregrounds the novelistic operation of narrative closure. While such a concern with closure (spatial and narrative, but also semantic) is often associated with postmodernism in general, I will go on suggest that the concept gains particular resonance in the context of 1970s culture, arguing that Spark provides a specifically metafictional engagement with this common problematic alongside the period’s postmodern theory.³²

The Abbess of Crewe (1974)

First though I want to briefly discuss *The Abbess of Crewe*, both as a concrete example of the spatiality of Spark’s seventies fiction – including this recurrent concern with closure – and to further situate my argument and methodology; rather than offering a close-reading of the text, I aim to position it in relation to the main interpretative parameters mentioned above (represented by McQuillan and Jameson), before pointing

²⁹ Wang Ning, ‘Introduction: Historicizing Postmodernist Fiction’, *Narrative* vol.21, number 3 (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, October 2013), pp.263-270

³⁰ Ning, p.265

³¹ Two such studies focusing on the 1970s are Stephen Paul Miller, *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) and Kathy Battista, *Renegotiating the Body: Feminist Art in 1970s London* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

³² Linda Hutcheon provides a concise summary of the postmodern concern with closure in *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.59

to a productive overlap with Nina Auerbach's feminist reading of Spark from the 1970s. As a satire of the Watergate affair published when the events were still unfolding (1974 was the year Nixon resigned), the novel embodies the almost journalistic topicality which characterises much of Spark's writing in this period.³³ Equally characteristic is that this overtly public and mediatic subject-matter should be displaced to the insular space of the Benedictine abbey where the novel is set – to a nuns' convent in which the theft of a thimble and its attempted cover-up stands in for the political scandal. Whether this plot makes for 'high theological comedy' or a 'cute joke', as critics have variously described it, the slightness of the content is self-conscious, stylized through an 'abrupt...present tense' narration of the sort that Spark had been developing since the 1960s (as usual, the text is just over 100 pages long).³⁴ According to Stannard, the idea occurred to Spark when she saw the front page of a newspaper while visiting Sri Lanka:

The lead story was an indignant report of an [Indian] M.P., summoned in a hurry, attending parliament without his shirt being buttoned. A downpage item was a tiny paragraph on Watergate. She saw it all in proportion...A metaphor had clicked into place.³⁵

In spatial terms, then, the novel's satirical operation seems to be one of reduction; McQuillan argues that '*The Abbess of Crewe* ridicules Watergate, by reducing it allegorically to a squabble over a nun's thimble':

The use of the insular community as a setting for the novel allows Spark to comment on the inadequacies of closure as a totalizing trope in literary and social narrative. It is also, of course, a comment on the insularity of the United States as it is introspectively scandalized by human behaviour while ignoring its own international scandals.³⁶

While my argument follows from McQuillan's claim that the 'insular' spaces of Spark's fiction often foreground the procedures of closure and totalization, this reading (like much work on metafiction) stresses their 'intolerable' side. As his use of 'allegorically' might imply, *The Abbess of Crewe* simultaneously embodies the 'necessity' of closure, not only in its setting but in the brevity and simplification of its spatial form, which might evoke the 'tiny paragraph on Watergate' in the Sri Lankan newspaper as much as the traditional or modernist novel in its more durational forms; Spark's 'comment on the inadequacies of closure' emerges precisely from her condensation of the entire Watergate affair into 100 pages.

³³ Muriel Spark, *The Abbess of Crewe* (London: MacMillan, 1974)

³⁴ Stannard, p.401; Judy Little, *Comedy and the Woman Writer: Woolf, Spark, and Feminism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), p.168

³⁵ Stannard, p.398

³⁶ McQuillan, pp. 18, 24

It is here that Jameson's arguments on the new significance of spatiality and allegory in postmodern culture prove useful, specifically in their ability to grasp such allegorical spaces as expressions of both a crisis in representation and the continued desire to think in terms of totality and closure – or in this context, how 'the most random, minute, or isolated landscapes' provide 'a figurative machinery' through which Spark grapples with this national and ultimately global news event (as its manifestation in Sri Lanka would suggest).³⁷ In *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, Jameson explores this allegorical function of postmodern space through a close-reading of *All the President's Men* (1976), a conspiracy thriller about Watergate released two years after *The Abbess of Crewe*. He argues that this subject-matter in Alan J. Pakula's film at once displaces and allegorizes a latent 'cognitive mapping' impulse – an intention, generally tacit and unrealizable in postmodern culture, to grasp the social totality in an era of its 'unthinkable' scale and complexity.³⁸ As McQuillan intimates in the quotation above, Spark's explicit allegory of Watergate itself brings the process of allegorical condensation and displacement to the surface; representing different vantage points on this characteristically '1970s' narrative raw-material, and thereby on postmodern allegory, *The Abbess of Crewe* exists in productive tension with the more emblematic *All the President's Men*. Spark's metafictional and fabulist narrative, no less than Pakula's 'realist' Watergate, responds to the formal qualities of this particular subject-matter, and to this mid-seventies cultural and historical juncture. Jameson suggests that 'one of the peculiarities of Watergate...was that it turned from the outset on information and representation rather than anything substantive'.³⁹ In the 'positing of a "crime" as informational and media-centered as its own solution', Pakula's film (which features a proliferation of texts and 'writing materials') transforms 'the traditional detective story...into a complementary and unimpeded circulation'.⁴⁰ Significantly, the narrative of *The Abbess of Crewe* is circular in a more self-reflexive and formal sense. In perhaps the most direct Watergate reference, readers are reminded throughout the narrative that the characters' conversations are being tape-recorded, a fact which motivates the recurrence of earlier moments of dialogue towards the end of the text. Observing Spark's fondness for 'self-referential endings' (he argues that the typewriter at the end

³⁷ *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p.5

³⁸ Ibid., pp.79-82

³⁹ Ibid., p.68

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of *The Driver's Seat*, discussed in the third chapter here, 'ticks out' the preceding narrative), McQuillan notes that in the final pages, '*The Abbess of Crewe* is revealed as the edited transcripts published by the Abbess'.⁴¹ In light of Jameson's comments, this self-begetting structure can be seen as both an autotelic device and a crude reflection of the textuality of Watergate itself. In line with my methodology throughout this thesis, I read it as a distinctively spatial form (as much as a metafictional one) whose reflexive exploitation of its specific medium can be clarified in relation to Pakula's 'spatialization' of Watergate. Within Pakula's inherently spatial medium, as Jameson stresses, texts and writing exist at the 'micro' end of an 'axis of scale' which runs all the way up 'to the social totality'; in this sense, *All the President's Men* assimilates the textual and 'media-centered' elements of Watergate to the spatial-visual coherence of film.⁴² By contrast, with the revelation of the 'edited transcripts', *The Abbess of Crewe* finally lays bare the textuality of all literary space and the artificiality of its closure. If the novel's initial reduction of Watergate 'to a squabble over a nun's thimble', its diversion of 'an international newspaper scandal' through the 'strictly enclosed' space of a convent, playfully engages the micro- and macro-cosmic scales which express a tacit 'mapping' impulse in Pakula's film, this ending draws the austere limits of the text itself into Spark's interrogation of closure.⁴³ But just as the Abbey's insularity heralds its drastic expansion ('By now the scandal occupies the whole outside world'), so this metafictional encounter with the limits of the text is also the moment at which the novel is 'cast before the public' – 'entitle the compilation *The Abbess of Crewe*', are the final words – as the reader is returned to the seamless whole of the published book and the larger object-world in which it exists.⁴⁴

Keeping in mind both sides of Jameson's conception of allegory (as a symptom of representational crisis which also expresses an 'intent to totalize'), I suggest that the concern with closure McQuillan identifies in Spark implies not only a satiric or deconstructive impulse (whether a comment on the insularity of the U.S., or on the 'informational' nature of Watergate as a kind of self-generating text) but a more utopian one, which bears comparison to the 'cognitive mapping' Jameson sees at work in *All the President's Men*. In *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (1978), a literary-

⁴¹ McQuillan, pp.107, 3.

⁴² *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p.77

⁴³ *The Abbess of Crewe*, pp.13, 77

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.128

historical study of novelistic representations of ‘sisterhood’ which includes an early consideration of Spark’s relationship to feminism, Nina Auerbach argues that the collapse of the microcosm or miniature community in Spark’s fiction coincides with a return to history and the macrocosmic.⁴⁵ While Auerbach comments only briefly on *The Abbess of Crewe*, the overlap between her implicit conception of allegory and Jameson’s framework usefully contextualizes the (anti-)utopianism of Spark’s ‘communities’. Reframing the concern with spatial closure I have been discussing, Auerbach’s broader narrative is that Spark’s communities are not ‘pure’ utopias, but dramatize ‘the destruction of the woman’s world as a haven of separate, cherished values’:

[Spark’s] communities incorporate a dimension traditionally denied to women – the violence of history and religion...[T]heir world [is] no longer a remote Utopia or Gorgon-haunted dystopia, but one in league with its time and with our own. The autonomous and self-sustaining communities of nineteenth-century women, perforce cooperative because deprived of outside reality and power, lose focus and perfection with this acquisition of previously masculine territory. In moving through the window of “domestic life” to “the war going on outside,” female communities take increasingly abstract and asymmetrical shapes.⁴⁶

Although she does not use the word, Auerbach seems to privilege the properly allegorical nature of the spaces in Spark’s fiction; as with the totalizing potential of Jameson’s ‘random, minute, or isolated landscapes’, ‘[t]heir geographical separatism is the irony of their identity, allowing them to embody with greater intensity the historical and spiritual violence that surrounds them’.⁴⁷ And yet in contrast to the seamless shifts between ‘the *jouissance* of the miniature’, as Jameson describes Pakula’s presentation of the Watergate building, and the film’s ‘impossible vision of totality’, Spark’s spaces ‘lose focus and perfection’ to the degree that they become allegorical in this broader historical sense.⁴⁸ Auerbach’s description of a morphing of the micro-community into ‘an amalgam of abstract giant forms’ implies a dialectic of the miniature and the gigantic of the kind described by Gaston Bachelard. Susan Stewart meanwhile notes that the miniature and the gigantic have acquired respectively female and male cultural associations.⁴⁹ For Auerbach, the miniaturized female community, originally excluded

⁴⁵ Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women: An Idea in Fiction* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 1998)

⁴⁶ Auerbach, pp.182-4

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.182

⁴⁸ *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, pp.75-8

⁴⁹ See Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p.71, and Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), Maria Jolas trans., pp.148-182.

from a 'gigantic' public realm (in which 'apocalyptic' media events like Watergate would certainly reside), loses proportion as it comes to 'embody' greater and greater historical meaning; allegory thus fails to function as it does in *All the President's Men*, whose 'well-nigh ecstatic glimpse of the paradisaal' (conveyed through codified forms of spatial manipulation and visual pleasure⁵⁰) conversely posits an imaginable or once-existing integration of the viewer's generalized 'postmodern body' with the (Marxian) social totality.⁵¹ Auerbach's characterisation of the 'abstract and asymmetrical' communities in Spark's fiction, I suggest, implies something like a gendered division of allegorical space, such that the utopian, meta-historical vocation Jameson points to here appears as a kind of *decentring*, an exhilarating loss of former coordinates.⁵² Indeed Auerbach stresses that *The Abbess of Crewe*, beyond 'reducing' Watergate 'to a squabble over a nun's thimble',

supersedes and makes gorgeous the masculine history it seems to emulate...the nuns...rise through their involuted duplicity to an epic, absolute status never approximated by...Nixon's community of men at the Watergate...Having lost its humanity to become an amalgam of abstract giant forms, the Abbey of Crewe resembles the Brodie set [from Spark's earlier *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961)] as a cubist painting.⁵³

Significantly, then, allegory's ostensible failure does not leave Spark facing the inadequacy of all closure and totalization, but takes the form of an 'absolute' break from the real, as the diegesis 'supersedes' rather than merely mirrors the germ of reference (the 'real' of Watergate) which Pakula expands into 'sweaty close-up social reality'.⁵⁴ This argument also reframes Spark's metafictional concern with textuality, which if it reflects that of Watergate itself, equally implies a re-writing of this 'masculine' text

⁵⁰ The mid-seventies period I am concerned with here also saw the publication of Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (*Screen* 16.3, 1975).

⁵¹ *Postmodernism*, p.412. More generally, as Massey and others have pointed out, Jameson's characterisation of 'postmodern space', and the contemporary decentring and disorientation which allegory can serve to symbolically mitigate, only makes sense in relation to a once-existing centrality – 'an older kind of existential positioning of ourselves in Being – the human body in the natural landscape, the individual in the older village or organic community, even the citizen in the nation state' (*Postmodernism*, p.126). Jameson acknowledges the gendered spatiality implicit in *All the President's Men* (a 'pornographic' dimension to its visual logic, and a reliance on 'the older gender-hierarchical office style and business management characteristic of the Nixon ethos' (*The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, pp. 73, 78)) but doesn't extent this analysis to the final 'wondrous' image of totality.

⁵² In Ann Heilmann, Mark Llewellyn eds., *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), Dianna Wallace argues that 'women's relationship to history has been radically different from men's and...therefore different narrative forms, both literary and historical, are needed'. Though she does not mention *The Abbess of Crewe*, Wallace suggests that 'the convent, both prison and refuge, womb and tomb, acts as a figure for the specificity and difference of women's relationship to history, symbolizing their marginality and/or exclusion from history' (pp.159-69).

⁵³ Auerbach, pp.179-80

⁵⁴ *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p.79

within the Abbess's 'self-created sphere' (what she calls 'a plane of absolute created myth').⁵⁵ If Jameson values Pakula's 'realist' Watergate insofar as it displaces an even deeper realism (that of 'cognitive mapping'), what is displaced in Spark's fabulist narrative is the historical referent itself, the real of history embodied by Watergate; for Auerbach, the text's more triumphant allegory refers to the actual scandal only in order to imaginatively decentre that 'previously masculine territory'.

The Seventies as Closure

Auerbach's study sheds light on Spark's work in this period, then, but also on the period itself, having emerged from the same 1970s discursive context I am interested in here. Her book ends by situating Spark at the culmination of a historical tradition of 'female communities' in fiction, but one which gains contemporary resonance with the rise of second-wave feminism, canonisation of women's writing and resurgence of the utopian genre during the decade. And yet just as she honours the 'idea' of Auerbach's title only by envisioning its 'destruction', Spark 'keeps aloof from the pieties and conventions that have evolved in recent feminist literature', and even 'seems to stand alone as an architect of communities of women today'.⁵⁶ Written towards the end of a decade of feminist utopianism – whose literary production included Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), amounting to what Jameson calls a 'gender turn of the Utopian imagination' – this comment may seem surprising; and yet Auerbach's vision of an ambivalent end of utopia reflected in Spark's fiction points to a broader narrative of 'cultural closure' associated with the seventies, which I want to outline in this section.⁵⁷ An argument which runs throughout the thesis is that Spark's metafictional concern with 'the inadequacies of closure...in literary and social narrative' can be understood in relation to this wider 1970s context, as her rewriting of Watergate – one of many cultural texts from the decade which tends to connote a dystopian aftermath of the sixties – would suggest. Indeed Mark P. Williams's recent revaluation of the period's literary history argues that '70s texts' have often been read in terms of 'their attempt to write a narrative of ending for the 1960s', a notion that combines 'closure' as a narrative and historical

⁵⁵ *The Abbess of Crewe*, p.180

⁵⁶ Auerbach, p.30

⁵⁷ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p.140

(or periodizing) trope.⁵⁸ Following Caren Kaplan's efforts to query and historicize spatial metaphors, I interpret the figure of cultural closure in an almost literalistic sense, as implying a space within which 'the seventies' have been traditionally contained.⁵⁹ The remainder of the introduction then moves beyond Spark's fiction to detail this informing cultural and historiographic narrative (where it intersects with the theoretical concerns introduced above), before I return to Spark with the chapter summaries.

While the notion of a closure of utopian thinking (whether synonymous with a political theory like socialism, or some less-defined radical impulse in the sense that Ernst Bloch has defined it) has often been seen as constitutive of the neoliberal period in general, an 'end of the sixties' version of this narrative crystallized within cultural production and media discourse during the 1970s, and continues to inform our understanding of the latter decade in terms of 'assimilation, containment, and delimitation'.⁶⁰ The seventies have come to serve as an explanatory 'pivot' between sixties radicalism and the diminished possibilities of eighties neoliberalism, a view which recent histories have begun to complicate.⁶¹ The former decade is often imagined performing an operation of 'closure', a term which encapsulates a spatialized narrative of the seventies. Whereas this spatiality goes unacknowledged in historiography of the period (as with similar terms like 'containment'), in much French critical theory after 1968, closure is an explicitly spatial and historical dilemma, such that it offers a particularly vivid (and

⁵⁸ Mark P. Williams, 'Selective Traditions: Refreshing the Literary History of the Seventies', in Nick Hubble, John McLeod, Philip Tew eds., *The 1970s: A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p.18

⁵⁹ Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p.26

⁶⁰ Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), Anthony A. Nassar trans. The latter quotation is from Miller, p.6. Angelika Bammer's *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* (New York: Routledge, 1991) summarises the 'closure' narrative and criticizes it from a feminist perspective (pp.1-2). It remains influential in contemporary accounts of the seventies, as in Jameson's suggestion that 'it is tempting to assign the years around 1974 (the oil crisis, the end of the Vietnam war) as the closing of a Utopian period which began in that other banner year 1968, only to be replaced by a second Cold War' (*Archaeologies of the Future*, p.133). In 'The River of Time' (*New Left Review* 26, March-April 2004), Perry Anderson chooses 1976 as the year of 'closure', with the publication of Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*...perhaps the last utopian work of wide resonance to have been produced in the 20th century...not just the political but the utopian itself has been in general suspension since the mid-seventies'.

⁶¹ See, for example, Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and its Aftershocks* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2002) and Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber, 2009). Peter N. Carroll's, *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1982) began the effort to counteract what I am calling the closure narrative with an emphasis on the period's continued cultural expansion and progressive struggles (the decade saw the consolidation of second-wave feminism, gay rights movements and environmentalism, for example).

early) example of this discourse. The context is a formative one for the theoretical 'spatial turn' (what Edward W. Soja in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989) describes as a 'reassertion of space in critical social theory') – Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974), for example, an inaugural text for the emergent field of Marxist geography, was shaped by his involvement in the events of May '68.⁶² I have already mentioned Lefebvre's influence on Jameson's concept of spatialization; here I want to note that in positing an increasingly prevalent 'dominated space', which technology has rendered 'closed, sterilized, emptied out', but more critically in references to a 'despairing attitude' in much leftist thought after May which 'attributes a hermetic or finished quality to the "system"', *The Production of Space* registers a certain closure of the political which is on one level a literal 'closing down' of space.⁶³ Michel de Certeau, another French theorist influenced by May '68, similarly described a 'capture of speech' and 'closure of reason' as the events passed into reaction and codification:

[O]ne month separates the "liberation" of the Sorbonne from its "reoccupation". Up to the smallest detail, the second event repeats the first and inverts it, as if parentheses were imagined closed when the moment was brought back to a zero point. Tracks are covered. Cobblestones are paved over.⁶⁴

In his essay 'A Writing of Space', contemporary critic Tom Conley sees this kind of textual-spatial imagery as characteristic of French critical theory in the early seventies – he describes

a concurrent labor born at the same moment and of a different texture than Lefebvre's: an activity that I would like to call a *writing of space*, a labor by which authors of different formation engage and invent alternative or other spaces within the texture of their own reflections on space. Like Lefebvre, they respond to an anxiety about the condition of space in which they live, but unlike him, they embody, in the gist of their own writing, spaces alternative to those in which they live.⁶⁵

Conley argues that French theory responded to 'a sudden return to order' after May with 'a rewriting of the utopian vision of the events through the lens of their closure and aftermath in the early 1970s'.⁶⁶ While he views this shift from a late sixties politicization (or 'opening up') of urban space to a focus on writing itself – the creation of 'discursive figures of space, discursive *places*, *topics*' – as a displacement of the site

⁶² Soja, pp.47-59

⁶³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), Donald Nicholson-Smith trans., pp.56, 165

⁶⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Capture of Speech and Other Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), Tom Conley trans., p.29

⁶⁵ Tom Conley, 'A Writing of Space: On French Critical Theory in 1973 and Its Aftermath', *diacritics* 33.3/4 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p.190

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.200

of resistance, for critic Peter Starr among others, it is one which only confirms the closure of the political in its fetishization of textual or literary space.⁶⁷

Whether its stance is conceived as imaginative resistance or affirmation, French theory after 1968 posits a closed, static space which embodies the end of the 1960s. Jameson's *The Prison-house of Language* (1972) was published in this period, a critique of French structuralism's inability to accommodate historical change except as a succession of (spatial) models.⁶⁸ Reacting against structuralism's reliance on such 'synchronic frameworks', poststructuralism has been associated with a rejection of semantic and systemic closure; indeed its 'rhetoric of mobility' and frequent use of geographical metaphors tend to oppose any sense of space as closed, static or 'total'.⁶⁹ As Conley notes, this early seventies period also saw the publication of 'Gilles Deleuze's first essays on nomadic thinking'.⁷⁰ In *Questions of Travel*, Kaplan analyses such 'postmodern discourses of displacement': '[w]hen Deleuze and Guatarri pose a "nomadology" against "history"', she argues, 'they evince nostalgia for a space and a subject outside Western modernity, apart from all chronology and totalization'.⁷¹ More broadly, a philosophical 'valorization of mobility' and 'repudiation of locatedness' envisioned interstitial forms of resistance to the carceral 'total system', as posited by such contemporary theorists as Baudrillard and Foucault (whose *Discipline and Punish* (1975) is often associated with such controlled spaces).⁷² Even the tourist, an unlikely emblem of resistance (as discussed in my chapter on *The Driver's Seat*), appears in Dean MacCannell's structuralism-informed *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976) as a 'nomadic, placeless' figure 'striving for a transcendence of the modern totality'.⁷³ Conversely, Kristin Ross has noted the incursion into French theory after 1968 (she mentions Foucault and Althusser) of various 'police figures', agents of the state and 'total system':

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.195; Peter Starr, *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory After May '68* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p.28

⁶⁸ Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-house of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972)

⁶⁹ Elizabeth A. Pritchard, 'The Way Out West: Development and the Rhetoric of Mobility in Postmodern Feminist Theory', *Hypatia*, Volume 15, Number 3, Summer 2000, pp.45-72; Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1983), p.77

⁷⁰ Conley, p.196

⁷¹ Kaplan, p.89

⁷² Pritchard, p.45; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin, 1991), Alan Sheridan trans.

⁷³ Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), pp. xvi, 13

In the work of '68, a period of repressive concern with public order and its breakdown, when the government's tangible fear of the population taking to the streets again had manifested itself in a dramatic increase of police presence everywhere...philosophy and Theory begin to bear the trace of that presence.⁷⁴

Ross describes the emergence of 'an antidialectic of absolute difference and total opposition – a relation of “pure violence”’ between the state and its political opponents.⁷⁵ This violent closure of the political realm – what in the 1970s would constitute an entire 'logic of failed revolt', in Starr's phrase – is the precondition for the 'radically decentered theoretical space' which is its imaginative resolution.⁷⁶ As Starr puts it:

[The] practice of constructing the political as a specular impasse in order ultimately to justify the vision of a revolutionary *non lieu* [non-place] was...a commonplace (a *lieu commun*) in theoretical discourse of the period centered around May '68.⁷⁷

The rhetoric of space in other words becomes a 'third term' which overcomes the binary (Ross's 'total opposition') between the revolutionary and the police, revolt and its inevitable recuperation. But insofar as the liminal space or 'non-place' is conceived as outside time and history, 'apart from all chronology and totalization', the closure of the political as such is only confirmed, its energies displaced to 'a destination, an "elsewhere"', or in effect to the literary or philosophical text.⁷⁸ Despite the police repression and polarization Ross points to, Starr charges French theory with 'constructing the political as a specular impasse' in order to resolve the dilemma on a theoretical plane.⁷⁹ Regardless of the actuality of French politics 'after May', what is significant here is the way the 'discursive figures of space' which proliferated in this period bear the trace of spatialization more broadly, despite their reflexive resistance to stable reference. French theory's spatial metaphors, oscillating between the nomad and the police, between the deterritorialization of the desert and the incarceration of the 'total system', seem to circle around the contradictions of 'postmodern space' as it emerged from the 1960s – what Jameson describes as a moment 'in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism – the last vestiges of noncommodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world – are now

⁷⁴ Kristin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p.24

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.27

⁷⁶ Starr, p.87

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.28

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.118, 7

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.28

ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn'.⁸⁰ As Jameson puts it in 'Periodizing the Sixties', this transformation also produced a great 'unbinding of social energies', a dialectic of 'internal and external' *decolonization* made explicit in such phenomena as left third-worldism – notably in decline by the latter sixties, as decolonization gave way to neo-colonialism and counterrevolution in many independent nations.⁸¹ In light of what Kaplan views as the uneasy overlap between colonial discourses and the Deleuzian valorization of 'the desert as border or margin, linked to "underdevelopment," "*patois*," and a "third world"', such theoretical rhetoric both continues the utopian investment in an 'elsewhere' or 'outside' characteristic of the first world sixties, and suggests that such a space was becoming increasingly hard to imagine (except as a negative image of 'the system').⁸² Exceeding any sense of political impasse in France, this more abstract desire for an outside can also be read as a desire to extend the sixties themselves, beyond the spatial and narrative closure they seemed already to have engendered by the turn of the decade.

I want now to touch on a version of the cultural closure narrative more immediately relevant to *Spark*, one which informs the critical history of the postmodern novel and its 'spatial form'. In comparison to the explicitly temporal concerns of high modernism, much postmodern fiction from the 1970s (the decade in which it was first theorized as such) evinces 'a new predominance of space'.⁸³ While the novel is more obviously a temporal medium, concerned with duration and the unfolding of narrative over time, critics had noted the increasing use of 'Spatial Form in Modern Literature' since at least Joseph Frank's 1945 essay of that name. For modernist writers like Proust and Joyce, Frank argued, 'understanding was less a process unfolding in time than the reconstruction by the reader of a pattern in space'; the intricate, self-reflexive structures of modernist form aspired to a 'simultaneity of perception'.⁸⁴ If modernism is nonetheless more often understood in terms of time, the heightened spatiality of postmodern fiction suggests that Frank was recognizing a general tendency in the twentieth-century history of the novel (which as Bakhtin had already noted in another early account of novelistic spatiality, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the

⁸⁰ Fredric Jameson, 'Periodizing the Sixties', *Social Text*, No. 9/10 (Durham: Duke University Press, Spring-Summer 1984), p.207

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.183

⁸² Kaplan, p.86

⁸³ *Postmodernism*, p.263

⁸⁴ Frank, p.15

Novel' (1938), is always a spatio-temporal form).⁸⁵ While Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972) and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) are two prominent examples of 1970s postmodernism often discussed in terms of their distinctive spatiality, I want to focus on the emergence of literary minimalism in the U.S. during this period – not because I see Spark forming part of this loose movement (associated with Frederick Barthelme, Ann Beattie, Raymond Carver, Bobbie Ann Mason and others), but because its critical reception exemplifies the broader equation of spatialization and cultural closure I am outlining here.⁸⁶ '[C]haracterized by a neo-Hemingwayesque aesthetic of terseness and excision' and preference for short-story form, minimalism was often presented as a reaction against the expansive fictional modes employed by contemporary novelists like Pynchon and Robert Coover.⁸⁷ Some critics encountered the stark spatiality of minimalist works as a loss of the temporal and historical potentials of earlier forms of fiction:

By emphasizing concrete metonymic details and examples; by framing the narrative with metaphors that act as wholes, shelters for the parts; and by requiring the readers to suspend meaning-making until the end of a scene or the end of the story when they can perceive the relationship between the parts and the metaphoric pattern, these short story writers attempt to exaggerate the synchronicity inherent in the genre of the short story. Moving further and further away from the novel and away from a world full of possibility, Mason and Carver spatialize the world of their texts to match the lives many Americans live.⁸⁸

Whether explicitly or implicitly, minimalist form was often received in such terms, as allegorical of a post-sixties cultural closure – for Barbara Henning here, as a space hermetically sealed from both 'the American dream and the myth of progress' and the history of the novel considered as a teleological progression of forms. Just as Henning sees minimalism expressing 'a world with reduced economic and emotional possibilities', John Barth's 'A Few Words About Minimalism' (published in 1986 in *The New York Times Book Review*) connected the movement to '[t]he more or less coincident energy crisis of 1973-76, and the associated reaction against American

⁸⁵ M. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' in Michael Holquist ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist trans., pp. 84-258

⁸⁶ For a discussion of Calvino and Pynchon's work in the context of postmodern spatiality, see for example Brian McHale's *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1987), especially the chapter on postmodern 'worlds' (pp.43-98).

⁸⁷ Andrew Hoberek, 'Foreign Objects, or, DeLillo Minimalist', *Studies in American Fiction*, Vol. 37, Issue 1, Spring 2010, p.103

⁸⁸ Barbara Henning, 'Minimalism and the American Dream: "Shiloh" by Bobbie Ann Mason and "Preservation" by Raymond Carver', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 35, Number 4, Winter 1989, pp.696-7

excess and wastefulness in general', along with a 'national hangover from the Vietnam War, felt by many to be a trauma literally and figuratively unspeakable'.⁸⁹ A moralizing version of this argument diagnosed minimalist fiction as a symptom of what Tom Wolfe in 1976 called 'The Me Decade' – a 'vast withdrawal from public life, as people drew inward to focus on personal preoccupations: religion, meditation, yoga, diet, exercise'.⁹⁰ Mark McGurl's more recent account of U.S. minimalism in *The Programme Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* summarises this view:

[M]inimalism can seem to be a form of retreat or self-concealment...from the open and pervasive politicization of identity in 1960s literary culture into the smallness, privacy, and racial homogeneity of domestic life in the late 1970s and 80s.⁹¹

Once again, the open/closed binary posits a static, depoliticized space constituted against time and history, as in the assumption that 'minimalist stasis is a way of warding off or managing change'.⁹² In such conceptualizations, there persists a modernist or Marxist privileging of time as the dimension of change and fecundity, which in this literary context might be traced back to Lukács's favouring of narration over description in his essay 'Narrate or Describe':

Description contemporizes everything...Narration recounts the past. One describes what one sees, and the spatial "present" confers a temporal "present" on men and objects. ...static situations are described. States or attitudes of mind of human beings or conditions of things – still lives.⁹³

As early as the nineteenth-century, then (Lukács is writing here about Flaubert), the novel was already becoming too spatial, which increasingly divorced it from the dynamism of historical experience. If a version of this argument plays out in the early reception of U.S. minimalism, the common charge that its spatialized worlds represented a 'retreat' from the political realm at the same time tended to position the

⁸⁹ John Barth, 'A Few Words About Minimalism', *New York Times Book Review*, p.1. Dec. 28, 1986.

⁹⁰ Kim Phillips-Fein, 'Decisive Decade: Re-evaluating the Seventies', *Dissent*, Volume 58, Number 1, Winter 2011, p.91

⁹¹ Mark McGurl, *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p.315. McGurl's book goes on to distinguish between minimalism and 'miniaturism' – in what follows I find the latter, associated with world-mastering condensation rather than a turning away from history, a more useful term for the spatialization of Spark's fiction (as in my discussion of *The Abbess of Crewe* above): 'Cramming a great deal of detail into a small space, literary miniaturism might be described as maximalism in a minimalist package, or, in the Deleuzian idiom, as the becoming-maximal of Carverian minimalism. Its literary progenitors are writers like Jorge Luis Borges, whose story "The Aleph" offers a kind of metaphysics of the miniature, and Donald Barthelme, whose explosive smallness and overt (if surreal) politicality had never quite fit the minimalist mold' (pp. 375-6).

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.379

⁹³ György Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe', *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), Arthur Kahn trans., p. 130

form as a national allegory; its domestic smallness was diminished as apolitical, ‘deadening’ and devoid of ‘possibility’ yet held up as emblematic in this very aspect. In retrospect, such tensions betray a sense that when historical experience itself is increasingly spatial, the supplementary spatiality which for Lukács distorts the novel’s historicity becomes its privileged dimension.

In its spatialized ‘stasis’, minimalism contributes to the social imaginary of what Jane Elliott has called ‘static time’ – a perceived stalling of temporal progress which first crystallized around the ‘closure and impasse associated with the end of the 1960s’, and reflects a broader loss of faith in ‘American history as a unified teleological process’.⁹⁴ Drawing from Jameson’s conception of allegory, Elliott’s *Popular Feminist Fiction as American Allegory: Representing National Time* (2008) reads the static (and spatialized, although Elliott’s concerns are mainly temporal) private and domestic lives depicted in various post-sixties feminist novels as more than mere symptoms of a retreat from the political and public realm, but sites for working through this purported closure within a wider national context. As Julia Kristeva argued in ‘Women’s Time’ (1979), for many feminists after 1968, the refusal of ‘linear temporality’ – which Kristeva associates with history and the nation-state – was itself a political act, but one which coexisted with a desire for ‘insertion’ into that history; Angelika Bammer similarly sees feminist utopias from the 1970s expressing a contradictory impulse ‘to step out of history in order to step into it’.⁹⁵ As in Auerbach’s reading of *Spark*, the closure of such utopias thus becomes problematic in both a spatial and temporal sense, given that a truly separate ‘female otherworld’ could only be established through a negation of time and history:

To the extent that utopias insist on closure, both on the level of narrative structure and in their representation of a world complete unto itself, their transformative potential is undermined by the apparatus of their self-containment... if utopia is “an end condition”... then it more closely resembles the stasis of death than the dynamic process of living.⁹⁶

Bammer’s aptly-titled *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* concludes that utopian writers responded to this dilemma (which was historical as much as formal) by ‘replac[ing] the idea of “a utopia” as something fixed, a form to be fleshed out, with the idea of “the utopian” as an *approach toward*, a movement beyond set

⁹⁴ Jane Elliott, *Popular Feminist Fiction as American Allegory: Representing National Time* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), pp. 4, 41

⁹⁵ Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, *Signs*, Vol. 7, No.1 (Autumn, 1981), p.20; Bammer, p.144

⁹⁶ Bammer, pp.17-8

limits to into the realm of the not-yet-set'.⁹⁷ While such concerns were particularly pressing for the reinvigorated feminist utopianism Bammer discusses (Simone de Beauvoir had already noted in *The Second Sex* that 'women have never constituted a closed and independent society...they always set it up within the frame of the masculine universe'), this solution is redolent of the poststructuralist rhetoric mentioned above, and indeed Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible* points to a wider postmodern reinvention of the utopian genre in this period.⁹⁸ If these 'critical utopias' tacitly reject the cultural narrative of the post-sixties era as one of diminished possibilities, they do so by refusing the 'traditional[ly] closed and unitary' nature of their genre in favour of 'ambiguous utopias which are still struggling to come to be' (Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) is subtitled 'An Ambiguous Utopia').⁹⁹ For utopian studies critic Peter Fitting, this critique of closure extended to that of the reading process, as Marge Piercy and Joanna Russ 'sought to implement their utopian politics through a break with the isolation and passivity fostered by the reading experience'; such efforts recall modernist estrangement techniques, but also 'the deconstructionist problematization of reading itself' which attempted 'to open the frame and leave us elsewhere'.¹⁰⁰

Indeed the new spatiality of postmodern culture in the 1970s often entailed not a modernist attention to the physical properties of the medium (such as the space of the canvas itself) but an attempt to dissolve or reframe such intrinsic formal boundaries, a procedure which 'tends to leave us high and dry in space itself' as Jameson puts it.¹⁰¹ Feminist and conceptual artists, building on sixties experiments, 'moved art out of the predictable confines of the gallery, both exposing the work and forcing a reflexive framing of it in the new space it occupies' – when New York artist Lawrence Weiner made 'reference to the spatial reality beyond the edge of the canvas', for example, he aimed to evoke 'the entire cultural context' as opposed to 'an aesthetically contracted space'.¹⁰² Discussing such New York conceptual art, the critic Lucy R. Lippard identifies a 'dematerialization of the art object' between 1966 and 1972, a trajectory

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.7

⁹⁸ Cited in Auerbach, p.183; Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York and London: Methuen, 1986)

⁹⁹ Peter Fitting, 'Positioning and Closure: On the "Reading Effect" of Contemporary Utopian Fiction', *Utopian Studies*, No.1 (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1987), p.36

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.; *Postmodernism*, pp.156-7

¹⁰¹ *Postmodernism*, p.157

¹⁰² Battista, p.17; Anne Rorimer, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004), p.83

which might suggest minimalist ‘self-concealment’ at its outer limits.¹⁰³ But as I have argued for literary minimalism, conceptual art could take on wider allegorical and utopian meanings beyond registering a contraction of post-sixties culture. In surrendering the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the traditional artwork, or what could be considered its embodiment of utopian space, conceptual artist Robert Gober instead aimed to produce ‘the *concept* of such space’, in Jameson’s phrase, again anticipating rather than offering a representation of utopia.¹⁰⁴ Such spatial and temporal displacements of utopia, beyond not only the here and now but the limits of the work itself, tend to cast the very medium of representation as a fixed and closed space, which needs to be exceeded or derealised if something genuinely new is to manifest itself. In this respect, as much as the art and theory I have been discussing could embody the perceived cultural closure of the 1970s, the other side of this allegorical function was a more utopian impulse to ‘open the frame and leave us elsewhere’, or to admit the kind of futurity and diachrony which seemed to many commentators to have been placed in suspension.

Chapter Summaries

The novels I will be discussing, then, together with *The Abbess of Crewe*, allegorize the seventies through their stark thematization of the problem of closure – the struggle to contain their ‘gigantic’ subject-matter within a contracted spatial form, which I have been arguing provided the site for a symbolic negotiation of the period’s cultural and historical change. In comparison to the feminist or ‘critical utopias’ which emerged from the late sixties, what Jameson describes as the ‘properly spatial Utopias in which the transformation of social relations and political institutions is projected onto the vision of place and landscape, including the human body’, Spark’s metafiction of this period is ‘critical’ not only in respect of some new ambiguity or provisionality but in the way it brings into focus the very act of utopian projection, and the materiality of space and body it presumes (united in the feminized spatiality of *chora*, as Julia Kristeva and Elizabeth Grosz have shown in their adaption of Plato’s term).¹⁰⁵ The broad refusal of closure here takes the form of a play with spatial scales which stresses the discrepancy

¹⁰³ Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1973)

¹⁰⁴ *Postmodernism*, p.164

¹⁰⁵ *Postmodernism*, p.160; Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Woman, *Chora*, Dwelling’ in Iain Borden, Barbara Penner, Jane Rendell eds., *Gender, Space, Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (New York: Routledge), pp. 210-222

between container and contained, without entirely forgoing the macrocosmic ambitions of earlier modes of fiction. In a book on feminist utopias, Frances Bartowski argues that the space of utopia is ‘marked by abundance’, by ‘a sense of the spatial as infinitely expandable – a world in which there is room to move’.¹⁰⁶ The first two novels I will be discussing, *The Girls of Slender Means* and *The Hothouse by the East River*, locate their critical utopias at the opposing (and for Bartowski, dystopian) pole of economy, scarcity and lack, in constricting domestic spaces whose possible allegorical expansion (to stand for a larger urban and national unity in Spark’s vision of post-war London and the latter ‘New York novel’) is the focus of this metafictional concern with closure. Following Stephen Paul Miller’s assumption that ‘the seventies inevitably refer to the sixties’, I argue that Spark’s developing concern with the space of utopia – and with ‘the *jouissance* of the miniature’ in particular – originates in her 1963 novel *The Girls of Slender Means*, whose depiction of London in the aftermath of World War II reflects on the legacy of post-war utopianism from its early sixties moment.¹⁰⁷ The chapter thus begins by discussing two interrelated contexts: what Richard Hornsey calls the ‘spatial management’ of London during its post-war reconstruction, and the emergence of a broad opposition to the social and architectural space of modernism by the early sixties. My close-reading focuses on the novel’s May of Teck Club, an austere but utopian ‘community of women’ which comes to serve as a problematic miniature model of the reconstituting urban and national community. But the way the Club’s final destruction coincides with an intimation of its spectral persistence as an ‘atopia’ posits a third term beyond scarcity and abundance, the microcosm and the macrocosm.

I read *The Hothouse by the East River* as a loose companion piece which returns to many of the same concerns at a decade’s distance, and in doing so works through specifically post-sixties limits to the ‘utopian imagination’. In this chapter I take the discursive construction of New York’s 1970s crises as an informing context for Spark’s claustrophobic vision of the city; the pervasive trope of New York’s ‘death’ in this period formed part of a rhetorical reversal of urban community into dystopia, such that the city came to symbolize a new era of ‘limits’. I read the architect Rem Koolhaas’s *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (1978) alongside Spark’s novel as spatialized seventies artefacts which both reflect the city’s apparent decline and

¹⁰⁶ Frances Bartowski, *Feminist Utopias* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p.152

¹⁰⁷ Miller, p.34

provide a kind of utopian compensation; for these writers, New York is a space where the contemporary fate of utopia, and the ‘death’ of modernism in particular, becomes visible. Developing from the spectral conclusion of *The Girls of Slender Means* by literalizing the cliché of New York’s death, Spark figures the city as an anachronous ‘death-world’, reduced to a single overheated apartment (the ‘hothouse’ of the title) which like the May of Teck Club is demolished – but also ‘erased’ in a textual and metafictional sense – in the final scene. Rather than aspiring to a realist-style plenitude and urban totality, Spark’s minimal spatial form here performs a kind of derealisation; although this narrative arc invites topical and allegorical associations, the possibility of a microcosmic relation between the hermetic apartment and the wider city is disrupted by its radical untimeliness within the urban fabric, as the anachronous building seems to ‘haunt’ contemporary New York. And yet this ghostly coexistence, like Koolhaas’s ‘retroactive’ manifesto, can be read in terms of futurity and utopian anticipation – the impossible overlap of urban layers, I argue, substitutes material density for an unrepresentable excess of possible forms imagined to resist the closure of novelistic setting itself. In this way, the erasure or derealisation of fictional space – of ‘any kind of positive representation’ or ‘sketch for an "affirmative" architecture’ – allows a non-figurative conception of utopia to emerge in the margins of the text.¹⁰⁸

In *The Girls of Slender Means* and *The Hothouse by the East River*, then, an anti-utopian critique culminates in the destruction or erasure of the main represented space; and yet in both texts, I argue, a kind of spectral materiality or negative image of form resists literal and imaginative containment. In *The Driver’s Seat* and *The Takeover*, the novels discussed in the final two chapters, this intimation of a space outside the closed, even carceral territory of traditional utopia takes the form of an investment in the potentials of mobility and the global. Beyond the urban and national scales of the first two chapters, these texts can be read as allegories of globalization – a word ‘entirely unknown before the mid-1970s’ according to David Harvey – whose Italian settings (mainly in and around Rome) serve as crucibles for fully international metanarratives which circulated during the crises of the early seventies.¹⁰⁹ In *The Driver’s Seat* chapter, I view the ostensibly apolitical and genderless figure of ‘the tourist’ as the grounds of the novel’s intervention into this wider cultural and discursive context, in parallel (but

¹⁰⁸ *Postmodernism*, pp.162-4

¹⁰⁹ David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p.12

not reducible) to theorizations of tourism provided by Dean MacCannell and Henri Lefebvre. If such contemporary spatial theory provides a means of thinking about Spark's novel and its relation to its historical moment, I also argue that *The Driver's Seat* sheds new light on the 'early postmodern figure' of the tourist as constructed within 1970s culture. The protagonist's tourist journey to a semi-anonymous 'southern city' (probably Rome) appears as a 'story of the global village' which struggles to bear such allegorical weight; as with the shifting scales discussed in the previous chapters, Lise's expansive, potentially-liberating mobility turns inwards to become a form of abnegation within a fundamentally closed and static space. While Lefebvre and MacCannell both suggest that tourism represents the division between work and 'non-work', I draw from later analyses of the gendered nature of space and mobility (and in particular from Meaghan Morris's 1988 essay 'At Henry Parkes motel') to argue that despite her unfettered movement, Lise's interpellation as a tourist and consumer confines her activity to a feminized realm of surfaces, which excludes true production and 'non-productive expense' alike. By foregrounding the closure of the tourist world it contains within its airtight spatial form, *The Driver's Seat* points less to an all-encompassing order of simulacra than to a symbolic order which reduces the subject's activity to a depthless (but material) image. I conclude that the novel speaks to the 'situatedness' of the figure of the tourist at this 'end of the sixties' moment.

The Takeover, which narrates an international 'sea-change' beginning in 1973, returns to mobility and globalization as sites of utopian investment. As Stannard notes, Spark's 'first long novel in eleven years' marked 'a turning point in [her] writing and life' – what I would describe as the end of her minimalist period (she would never again write anything as pared down as *The Driver's Seat*) in favour of a more expansive, broadly realist mode.¹¹⁰ But as with its nineteenth-century precursors (I read *The Takeover* as a postmodern renewal of Balzacian realism), the novel's characteristically 'bourgeois' fantasy of time-space mastery – though here in the very different context of the 1970s upheavals – rests on the microcosmic grounds of what I call 'privatopia'. I begin the chapter with a discussion of this term as presented in David Harvey's work (among others), which argues that if the post-sixties era has produced utopian visions of globalization, they have been built upon a 'permanent foundation' of private property

¹¹⁰ Stannard, p.418

rights. I then revisit the literary-critical argument that the novel has historically presupposed a ‘common world’ of bourgeois privacy in its very formal apparatus. Spark’s vision of privatopia – which I analyse through a close-reading of a ‘Palladian villa in the Veneto’ owned by ‘Italian nobleman’ Berto – provides a miniature model of totality which momentarily registers the global ‘sea-change’ as it seems to pass through this ‘harmonious’ architectural space. Unlike the austere domestic spaces featured in the first three novels, whose closure and allegorical functions are brought into critical focus, Berto’s lavish property works to symbolically reconcile private and public realms, just as the text itself accommodates the mediatic crises of the first half of the 1970s to the private worldview and fictional means of nineteenth-century-style realism. It is this formal manoeuvre as much as its topicality which positions *The Takeover* as an early ‘neoliberal novel’, a category which testifies to what Franco Moretti calls the ‘solidity’ of realism.¹¹¹ I understand the latter not only as realism’s ability to survive in untimely fashion following the challenges to its dominance from the late nineteenth-century, but equally to become timely again at later historical moments (Moretti also refers to its ‘flexibility’) – in the case of *The Takeover*’s realism, to incorporate postmodern assumptions and devices while continuing to assert its ‘symbolic hegemony’ as a custodian of the historical novelty ushered in by the 1970s. If the post-’73 period is very much ‘a world in which there is room to move’ for the novel’s wealthy characters – an exterritorial elite who herald the space of neoliberalism which emerged from the decade’s upheavals – the apparent novelty of this utopia thus appears as an ‘infinitely expandable’ version of privatopia, grounded in realism’s traditional worldview.

As the above summaries indicate, the novels I will be discussing are organized not chronologically but thematically; the two halves of the thesis correspond to the shifting spatial scales (culminating in the latter ‘global’ texts) through which Spark’s fiction in this period tests and exploits the ‘figurative machinery’ of allegory and narrative closure. Insofar as ‘the seventies’ have been contained within a particular discursive space and arranged into familiar narrative order, this more obviously metafictional problematic is the means by which these texts mediate or work through wider cultural concerns. In common with much of the aesthetic and theoretical production discussed above, Spark’s work in this period does not so much ‘attempt to write a narrative of

¹¹¹ Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (New York: Verso, 1999), pp.191-3

ending for the 1960s', as both embody and contravene such closure through its very spatiality; its hermetic, finished quality is what motivates the more utopian impulse to 'open the frame and leave us elsewhere', or in narrative terms, to write the seventies as a continuation or reinvention of the sixties rather than their abrupt conclusion. In this sense, Spark's reflexive 'miniaturism' knows it cannot contain or even 'map' the period, but only grasp it through its ongoing rewriting, a process I try to convey in the readings that follow.

1. The Utopia of the Miniature in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963)

This chapter argues that through the ‘miniature’ space of The May of Teck Club and its imaginative condensation of the London of 1945, Spark’s 1963 novel *The Girls of Slender Means* sheds light on the post-war ‘utopian imagination’ (in Herbert Marcuse’s phrase).¹¹² Arguing that this meta-historical novel is enriched by an awareness of the wider cultural context(s) it arises from and reflects on, I aim to view the miniature not as a purely aesthetic or psychological category – as in Gaston Bachelard’s influential discussion in *The Poetics of Space* (1958), for example, or Susan Stewart’s notion that it serves ‘as a metaphor for the interior space and time of the bourgeois subject’ – but as a historical trope, whose utopian charge or *jouissance* (as Jameson describes the miniature in a different context) here implies a form of ‘spatial citizenship’ within the rebuilding post-war nation.¹¹³ Describing the miniature’s dialectical bind to ‘greatness’, Bachelard writes: ‘The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it... values become condensed and enriched in miniature’.¹¹⁴ As in *The Poetics of Space*, *The Girls of Slender Means* implies a whole ‘miniaturized metaphysics’, but one which, as the figurative means of Spark’s exploration of domesticity at the end of the war, extends beyond the poetic and phenomenological space Bachelard takes as his object of study.¹¹⁵ His observation that ‘Miniature worlds...are dominated worlds’ here resounds with a concrete historical context, as the diminutive domestic world of the Club is annihilated in the greater urban and national community it attempts to microcosmically contain.¹¹⁶ Put another way, the ‘values’ that are ‘condensed and enriched’ in the Club are those of the wider post-war social world, of which it provides a simplified model, while bringing into focus that process of reduction (Bachelard by contrast brackets the referential or realist potentials of the miniature in favour of what he sees as its fantastical, irrational nature).

¹¹² Muriel Spark, *The Girls of Slender Means* (London: Penguin Books, 1966); Cited in *Archaeologies of the Future*, p.289

¹¹³ Bachelard, pp.148-182; Stewart, p.xii; Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p.16

¹¹⁴ Bachelard, p.150

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.161

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

On the one hand, then, my reading of *The Girls of Slender Means* aims to complicate existing theories of the literary miniature, while on the other, it views the latter as the means by which Spark reflexively reframes the utopian moment of 1945 from the historical vantage point of the early sixties (indeed that both moments are present in the text, as will be seen, contributes to the novel's reflexivity and what I am calling its meta-historical dimension). I thus begin with a short section discussing what Richard Horsney calls the 'spatial management' of London during its early post-war reconstruction, before describing the emergence of a broad opposition to the space of social and architectural modernism by the early sixties, interrelated contexts which I see the novel transforming in miniature. While *The Girls of Slender Means* presents the London of 1945 as the formative site of Spark's concern with the space of utopia, it is during the early sixties – a later utopian moment which saw the beginning of the spatial turn and the rise of distinctively urban movements like the Situationist International (as mentioned below in the British context) – that this thematic, which runs through the chapters that follow, first comes into critical focus. In the next chapter I discuss *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973) as a loose companion piece, which returns to many of the same concerns at a decade's distance; here the flashbacks to the war counterpoint a similarly reduced, though more dystopian, vision of early seventies New York (where Spark in fact wrote *The Girls of Slender Means*).¹¹⁷ Between the two texts, the more historical significance of the miniature emerges as a form of postmodern allegory – as a means of achieving provisional closure over the period's 'gigantic' public and mediatic events, as with Bachelard's totalizing notion of the miniature: 'The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it'.¹¹⁸

In *The Spiv and the Architect*, his study of social modernism and male homosexuality in post-war London, Richard Hornsey describes a historical 'moment of opportunity' for social reformers, town planners and administrators in the aftermath of the German bombing. Outlining the emergence of various 'strategies of spatial management' of post-war metropolitan life, Hornsey's account of this period stresses

exactly how crucial the administration of everyday space and time was to the mechanics of postwar reconstruction... London's planners sought to actively ameliorate the pressing contradictions of mid-twentieth-century capitalism and expunge its most obvious forms of social disharmony. The reformed urban

¹¹⁷ Stannard, p.296

¹¹⁸ Bachelard, p.150

environment was the vehicle through which such tensions might be resolved...Reconstruction planners sought to instill in ordinary Londoners a specific spatial sensibility, a purposive appreciation of their remodeled city that would propel them into an ongoing mode of active participation and consensus.¹¹⁹

Significantly for what follows, Hornsey argues that domestic space was a key site for such 'spatial management', which conceived the home as a locus of national citizenship benevolently overseen by 'public experts'.¹²⁰ Interpellation within the rebuilding post-war nation thus played out at multiple spatial scales: '[a] sense of local collectivism worked to disavow its more impersonal production at the level of national policy by institutional technologies of state'.¹²¹

In line with the shifting allegorical scales discussed in the general introduction, I will argue that *The Girls of Slender Means* focuses precisely on the too-hasty identification of local and domestic with urban and national spaces, as Spark foregrounds what precedes and exceeds the myth of social consensus Hornsey sees forcibly materialized in the built environment. As much as the post-war reconstruction and 'spatial management' of London thus provides an important informing context for the novel (that of the time and place of its setting), it also seems significant that Spark's vantage point on this 'moment of opportunity' is the cresting of such state-driven modernism in a second utopian moment – 1963 being the year often regarded as the symbolic beginning of the sixties in Western nations.¹²² To the extent that the vision of bombed-out London as a *tabula rasa* (a version of which begins the novel, as will be seen) gave way to the spatial and temporal logic of the Fordist-Keynesian period – particularly its drive towards a total production of space, in Lefebvre's phrase – by 1963 this image was no longer one of blank potentiality, but coloured by knowledge of this intervening history.¹²³ Following the relative affluence and 'expanding consumer economies' of London during the later fifties, the sixties represented both the pinnacle and the beginning of the crisis of post-war modernism and the Fordist-Keynesian order it

¹¹⁹ Hornsey., pp.3-4, 10-11

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.201

¹²¹ Ibid., p.14

¹²² Sally Banes states that 'In 1963 what we now call the Sixties began' (*Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p.10). While noting the earlier Third World origins of the sixties, Jameson writes: 'for many white American students – in particular for many of those later active in the new left – the assassination of President Kennedy played a significant role in delegitimizing the state itself and in discrediting the parliamentary process' ('Periodizing the Sixties', p.183).

¹²³ See Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

facilitated.¹²⁴ In architecture, for example, a new generation of British critics like Reyner Banham, who was influenced by the expansive youth culture of ‘swinging London’, had come to see present-day modernism as ‘tired and passé’, less a vision of the future than a petrified orthodoxy.¹²⁵ The rise of the Situationist International in this period, whose British members included Spark’s contemporary and fellow Scot Alexander Trocchi, embodied a deeper rejection of the very social space of state modernism and Fordism. In ‘A Revolutionary Proposal: Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds’ (1963), for example, Trocchi proposed an ‘anti-university’ on the outskirts of London, conceived as a form of ‘spontaneous architecture and eventual *town planning*’, whose present functionalism the Situationists criticized as coercive; Trocchi’s ‘community-as-art-of-living’ was presented as an alternative to the kind of ‘spatial management’ described by Hornsey: ‘At present, town planning is determined by and tends to reinforce conventional functions, conventional attitudes’.¹²⁶

Spark wrote *The Girls of Slender Means* in New York, where this early sixties critique of Fordist modernism converged with the emergence of second-wave feminism in the U.S. The post-war reassertion of traditional conceptions of gender, domesticity and the ‘nuclear family’ (key elements of social modernism as Hornsey stresses in the British context) culminated in what Alice Echols calls ‘the ultradomestic fifties’, while also effectively generating its own opposition by the sixties.¹²⁷ The publication (and popularity) of Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) crystallized rising anti-modern sentiments, particularly in relation to ‘top-down’ planning and its perceived indifference to the daily, street-level experience of urban space. Although Jacobs does not adopt an explicitly feminist perspective, Elissa Rosenberg has shown that the book’s argument for ‘mixed use’ challenges the gendered separation of domestic and public realms (including the traditional spaces of Fordist production), something modernist functionalism only accentuated.¹²⁸ Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), an inaugural text of second-wave feminism in the U.S.,

¹²⁴ Hornsey, p.259

¹²⁵ Jared Langevin, ‘Reyner Banham’, *Architectural Theory Review*, 16: 1, 2-21 (April, 2011), p. 18; Walter L. Adamson, *Embattled Avant-gardes: Modernism’s Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 339, 333.

¹²⁶ Alexander Trocchi, ‘A Revolutionary Proposal: Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds’, *Internationale Situationniste* #8 (January, 1963)

¹²⁷ Echols, p.63

¹²⁸ Elissa Rosenberg, ‘Public and Private: Rereading Jane Jacobs’, *Landscape Jnl*, 13 (1994), pp. 139-144

more explicitly criticized (middle-class, white) women's confinement to domestic space.¹²⁹ In her study of New York avant-garde performance art, centred on the year 1963, Sally Banes describes a widespread rethinking of 'community' in U.S. culture, often comprising a rejection of traditional notions of family and domesticity as codified and petrified during the preceding years of post-war affluence.¹³⁰ Coinciding with the inaugural sixties events such as the civil rights March on Washington, the escalation of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the nuclear test ban treaty, Banes sees 1963 as a utopian moment at a more micro-scale, in which numerous 'groups of individuals' proposed new 'models of daily life', anticipating 'the countercultural utopian communes of the later Sixties'.¹³¹ For Banes, a conservative rhetoric of 'the breakdown of the family' in journalism of the time marked a real historical shift, the culmination of 'the disruption of domesticity brought on by changing gender roles during World War II'.¹³²

Significantly, the novel frames itself as a historical and retrospective vision of 1945, as Jane Wright, investigating the death of the 'girls' mutual friend Nicholas Farrington, telephones the other members of the Club in the narrative present of 1963 – their conversations thus intrude intermittently into the main narrative (or 'motivate' its analepsis). Though Stannard's brief reading of the novel in *Muriel Spark: The Biography* appropriately refers to 'Girl's double time-focus' and 'chronological complexities', pointing to contemporary readers' knowledge of the Cold War, the fading of the 'glory' of the Allies' victory in the years after 1945, and the unfolding turmoil of the early sixties, his argument suggests that these contexts all refer back to Spark's Catholicism, as signs of 'humanist delusion' (his comment that 'Everything is contextualized by eternity' sums up the methodology of theological readings of Spark's fiction, as criticized by McQuillan and others).¹³³ Drawing from the overlapping contexts I outline above, the close reading that follows positions the allegorical expansion Auerbach identifies in Spark's fictional communities (from "domestic life" to "the war going on outside", in the words of the passage I quoted in the general introduction) in the historically specific context of the 'spatial citizenship at once

¹²⁹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (London: Penguin Books, 2010)

¹³⁰ Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993)

¹³¹ Banes, pp.1-2, 36.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Stannard, pp.293-298

localized and national' Hornsey sees inhering in London's post-war reconstruction, a history which weighs heavily on Spark's depiction of the Club.¹³⁴ But from the proto-postmodern and feminist vantage point of the early sixties, Spark imagines this shift of spatial scales (whose deformation is implicit in what Auerbach calls the 'abstract and asymmetrical shapes' of Spark's communities), and the national interpellation it implies, in corporeal, even violent terms. If Spark in this sense envisions what Banes calls the war's 'disruption of domesticity' unambiguously contained within the very utopian imagination of 1945, I conclude by suggesting that the novel also imagines the emergence from the literal ashes of the Club of an alternative, more 'conceptual' than figurative space of reinvented community (as in Jameson's reading of conceptual art discussed in the introduction).

The novel begins with a descriptive passage which presents the 'bomb-ripped' London of 1945 in terms of an opening up of urban and domestic space:

The streets of the cities were lined with buildings in bad repair or in no repair at all, bomb-sites piled with stony rubble, houses like giant teeth in which decay had been drilled out, leaving only the cavity. Some bomb-ripped buildings looked like the ruins of ancient castles until, at a closer view, the wallpapers of various quite normal rooms would be visible, room above room, exposed, as on a stage, with one wall missing; sometimes a lavatory chain would dangle over nothing from a fourth- or fifth-floor ceiling; most of all the staircases survived, like a new art-form, leading up and up to an unspecified destination that made unusual demands on the mind's eye.¹³⁵

The disruption of the traditional separation of domestic and public space (as discussed above) is here literalized; it is as if the war has already collapsed the distinction, as the threshold between these realms becomes a permeable 'danger-zone'. The description's roving, exploratory gaze aestheticizes the familiar image of post-war 'ruins', seeming to appreciate estranged details of interiors more than lamenting the destruction. Indeed the intimation of a birth of the 'new' from the 'ancient' urban fabric (compared to 'decay' which has been 'drilled out', like the Victorian slums Hornsey describes) presents the city as a *tabula rasa*, a space awaiting transformation.¹³⁶ As the narrator's surprisingly positive tone anticipates – 'There was absolutely no point in feeling depressed about the scene', she goes on – this moment reveals itself as a utopian one, the beginning of the

¹³⁴ Hornsey, p.16

¹³⁵ *The Girls of Slender Means*, p.7

¹³⁶ Hornsey, p.14

novel's exploration of 'the disruption of domesticity' and gender roles precipitated by World War II.¹³⁷

The May of Teck Club – a Kensington hostel described in its 'Rules of Constitution' as 'exist[ing] for the Pecuniary Convenience and Social Protection of Ladies of Slender Means below the age of Thirty Years, who are obliged to reside apart from their Families in order to follow an Occupation in London' – is the site of utopian investment in the novel, a community 'outside the family' and the focal point of post-war hopes for a 'new future' and a 'new order of things'.¹³⁸ Such a desire for novelty and futurity, though, is ironized even in this initial reference, as the rules are said to be 'drawn up at some remote and innocent Edwardian date', though they 'still applied more or less'. The Club immediately appears as an anachronism of the pre-war era, an impression reinforced by a remainder of members who 'had been permitted to stay on past the stipulated age-limit of thirty, and had resided at the May of Teck Club since before the First World War at which time, they said, all members had been obliged to dress for dinner'.¹³⁹ The continued presence of these 'three spinsters' is presented as a kind of historical inconsistency, the narrator commenting that 'Even the committee did not know why the three remained. It was now too late to turn them out with decency. It was too late even to mention to them the subject of their continuing residence'.¹⁴⁰ The motif of the Club as not a utopian fragment of the future but an anachronism – notably the building itself is 'a spacious Victorian one', hardly changed 'since the days when it was a private residence' – culminates in its destruction in the belated explosion of a bomb which has lain buried in the back garden since 1942.¹⁴¹ The Club's persistence, 'cracked on the inside and shakily hinged within' amidst the 'bomb-ripped buildings' of the opening passage, thus appears as an anomaly which the trajectory of the plot serves to correct or erase; a description of the site after the explosion sees the Club reduced to 'one of the familiar ruins of the neighbour-hood, as if it had been shattered years ago by a bomb-attack'.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ *The Girls of Slender Means*, p.7

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.9, 17

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.9, 14

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.26

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.136

In this way, the destruction of the Victorian building might be said to herald the post-war reconstruction of London discussed above. Notably though, it is the traditional institution itself which appears as utopian prior to its collapse, not its presumably modern successor – specifically for Nicholas Farrington, an anarchist and poet who sees in his visits to the Club ‘a miniature expression of a free society...a community held together by the graceful attributes of a common poverty’.¹⁴³ The word ‘miniature’ (and later ‘microcosmic’) not only presents the Club as a synecdoche but figures its diminutive proportions as what Nicholas considers ‘an aesthetic and ethical’ virtue.¹⁴⁴ Contrary to Bartowski’s comment, in her study of feminist utopias, that whereas ‘utopian thought is founded on a premise of abundance, the dystopian is tied to the rhetoric and economy of scarcity, lack, hopelessness’, Nicholas valorises the Club’s austerity – the product of war-time rationing – as ‘[t]he beautiful heedless poverty of a Golden Age’.¹⁴⁵ The novel alludes to the popular-historical narrative of World War II as a time of national unity in confronting a common enemy, present in ‘miniature’ in the way rationing engenders a culture of cooperation and sharing within the Club; ‘Tell me about the borrowing and lending of clothes’, Nicholas asks Jane, seeing in their habit of exchanging a fashionable Shiaparelli dress a faint utopian dimension.¹⁴⁶ The ‘slender means’ of the title, and indeed the diminutive ‘girls’, thus attains a symbolic resonance far beyond economic austerity, most significantly in the form of a literal bodily slenderness which I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

First though I want to say more about the physical space of the Club itself, to which Bartowski’s study again provides a counterpoint; she suggests that in utopian thought, ‘marked by abundance are not only an affective plenitude but also a sense of the spatial as infinitely expandable – a world in which there is room to move’.¹⁴⁷ What I characterised above as the unexpected utopian charge of the description of bombed-out London emerges from the reduction of surrounding space to ‘ruins’, which is what reveals not an ‘infinitely expandable’ space but an abundance of internal structure – the very spaciousness of the house is estranged as a gaping ‘cavity’ which had to be ‘drilled out’, while simple verticality, the placing of ‘room above room’, appears gravity-

¹⁴³ Ibid., p.83

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.86

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p.65; Bartowski, pp.131-2.

¹⁴⁶ *The Girls of Slender Means*, p.65

¹⁴⁷ Bartowski, pp. 131-2

defying, an erection ‘over nothing’ which makes ‘unusual demands on the mind’s eye’.¹⁴⁸ But this ‘nothing’ comes into view as ‘something’, as the space which structures and delimits the buildings and vice versa; the ‘new’ dimension of the inside, in constant tension with the outside, appears as if for the first time. The passage can in this light be read as an anticipation of the Club’s reduced but utopian space, and Nicholas’s philosophy of a renewed daily life springing from limitation and scarcity. The first full description of the Club (at the start of the third chapter) slowly ‘pans’ from the basement to the roof, articulating an interior cross-section of the building as if it were, in the words of the opening description, ‘exposed, as on a stage, with one wall missing’ (the Club’s exterior is never described in any detail). The coming into focus of interior space hinted at in the earlier passage is here fully realized in the form of a detailed description of that domestic ‘inside’, conveying the abundance not of an ‘infinitely expandable’ space but of a delimited one complexly subdivided. Equally, while the movement from bottom to top evokes an abundant verticality, it is again one conceived in terms of internal structure rather than external monumentality. The traditional Victorian building remains intact, but it has been reorganized to accommodate the Club’s ‘forty-odd women’ – the ‘enormous ballroom’ from ‘the former days of private wealth’ has become ‘an enormous dormitory...curtained off into numerous cubicles’, above which ‘five large bedrooms’ have been ‘partitioned by builders into ten small ones’ (in line with Nicholas’s austere aesthetics, the walls of these rooms are ‘grey and stricken’ or ‘mud-brown...penitential in tone’).¹⁴⁹ The anachronism of the building is in this sense in accord with its purported utopianism after all, suggesting a functional and collective repurposing of a space of nineteenth-century wealth and decadence. But beyond practical necessity, there is a suggestion that what Nicholas sees as the utopian particularity of the Club’s living arrangements emerges in part from this spatial delimitation and subdivision, as if it accentuated the distinctive properties of each space, which nonetheless add up to a knowable and harmonious totality. The necessity of shared living quarters produces a (literally) vertical but non-hierarchical organization of space, as small, non-familial groups based on age and disposition have ‘congregated, by instinctive consent’ on each floor.¹⁵⁰ While the narrator’s upward movement from floor to floor reveals the variety and diversity of the Club, these social groupings are also, in

¹⁴⁸ *The Girls of Slender Means*, p.7

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.26-7

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.29

this opening description, individually-coherent and unified; the narrator assigns to one group, for example, a single voice, ‘the voice of the dormitory’ which speaks in ‘collective euphony’.¹⁵¹ Feelings are similarly impersonal, as when we learn that the occupants of the top-floor rooms are ‘filled with deeper and deeper social longings of various kinds, as peace-time crept over everyone’, the last clause extending this collective mood to encompass the entire nation, in line with the Club’s ‘microcosmic’ function (a subject I will return to in what follows).¹⁵² The novel never delves into these ‘longings’ but, characteristically for Spark, remains on the surface, at a distance from any individual subjectivity. This impersonality is at its most pronounced in the moments when the narrator refers to ‘the girls of slender means’ as a single protagonist, almost a collective spirit or will, as in this early characterisation which seems to reach beyond the category of discrete character altogether: ‘few people alive at the time were more delightful, more ingenious, more movingly lovely, and, as it might happen, more savage, than the girls of slender means’.¹⁵³

But I have also described the Club as diverse and composed of distinct groups, and it would not be utopian in the same way were its unity not shown to be based on the smallest and most concrete affiliations, on just the connections between general and particular which the opening ‘cross-section’ of the Club serves to establish. This view is an interior one in the additional sense that the narrator appears an ‘insider’ privy to, and yet set apart from, the habits and particularities of the different social groupings; the cross-section is in this respect a form of totalizing knowledge, conveyed through Spark’s meticulous description and characterisation, whose minor details each assume their proper place within the structure of the Club as a whole. Significantly, this form of knowledge is less visual or psychological than social, anecdotal and rooted in daily life. The precision and minuteness of detail suggests a desire to isolate common features of each group which are at once concrete and supra-personal, as in the narrator’s comment (relating the discussions of men amongst the youngest members) that ‘A Battle of Britain record aged a man in the eyes of the first-floor dormitory, in the year 1945’.¹⁵⁴ Again the occupants of the first-floor are as one, and yet the narrator’s precise

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.28

¹⁵² Ibid., p.30

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.9. Indeed the narrative presents events from a supra-individual perspective throughout, distributing its attention fairly evenly across the principal members of the Club.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p.27

observation is also dated and localized, indicating that the coherence of community is a matter not of a levelling of difference but of local and concrete affiliations. Such precision, and the factual neutrality of the statement, may seem incongruous given the seeming triviality of the content; and yet I want to suggest that even read as lightly ironic, such observations convey the utopianism of the 'miniature' community on the level of style. Throughout the text, detail is lavished on the daily life of the Club, the habits and opinions of its members, with a sense of remove which implies less a mockery of their triviality than a manner of attending to the trivial and the ordinary as experienced in a group environment. The novel, that is, finds its own stylistic vehicle and equivalent for the Club's accommodation and magnification of the kind of domestic smallness which Nicholas valorizes as utopian. The smallness of the detail or observation in this respect stands for that of the community itself, for the abundance of lived, shared experience arising from the delimitation of its domestic interior.

And yet the text repeatedly undercuts this valorization of its small-scale community, and particularly its 'microcosmic' function, with a more reflexive form of anti-utopianism whose critique, contrary to the above examples of the Club's reconciliation of the general and the particular, is often directed at the too-hasty identification of the part with the whole. Elaborating Auerbach's notion that the autonomous 'community of women', including the feminized conception of domestic smallness I have just outlined, encounters 'the violence of history', I read Spark's depiction of VE Day and VJ day (8 May and 15 August 1945 respectively, being the dates which frame the historical narrative) as moments which connect the 'local collectivism' of the Club with 'its more impersonal production' at the national level (to return to Hornsey's terms), such that domestic space appears less as 'a miniature expression of a free society' than a site of interpellation and social consensus.¹⁵⁵ The narrator describes the VE day celebrations in the opening chapter:

the whole club, forty-odd women...had gone like swift migrants into the dark cool air of the park, crossing its wide acres as the crow flies in the direction of Buckingham Palace, there to express themselves along with the rest of London on the victory in the war with Germany. They clung to each other in twos and threes, fearful of being trampled. When separated, they clung to, and were clung

¹⁵⁵ Hornsey indeed discusses 'the repeated use of public exhibitions to promulgate official visions of reformed national cohesion. Events such as *Britain Can Make It*...and the various components of the Festival of Britain...promoted the values of one-nation ideology via a controlled mode of spatial participation' (pp.14-15).

to by, the nearest person. They became members of a wave of the sea, they surged and sang until, at every half-hour interval, a light flooded the tiny distant balcony of the Palace and four small straight digits appeared upon it: The King, the Queen, and the two Princesses...The huge organic murmur of the crowd, different from anything like the voice of animate matter but rather more a cataract or a geological disturbance, spread through the parks and along the Mall...Many strange arms were twined round strange bodies. Many liaisons, some permanent, were formed in the night, and numerous infants of experimental variety, delightful in hue of skin and racial structure, were born to the world in the due cycle of nine months after.¹⁵⁶

If the notion of the Club ‘as a microcosmic ideal society’ already appears on the level of content in Nicholas’s idealizations, here Spark reflexively dramatizes that function, as if to include and interrogate it as an interpretative possibility. The Club’s diffusion into the urban and national community symbolized by the patriotic London crowds starkly realizes the collision with history and ‘the outside world’ Auerbach heralds in Spark’s fiction. The delimitation and subdivision of the Club is replaced by progressively vast and undifferentiated spatial imagery – ‘wide acres’, ‘a wave of the sea’, ‘a cataract or a geological disturbance, spread[ing] through the parks and along the Mall’ – as if the loss of closure produces inexorable enlargements of scale. As with the rhetoric of the sublime, this uncontrolled expansion suggests both terror and awe, or more relevantly here, both utopian and dystopian dimensions. The Club’s suggestion of an annihilation of individuality is here radicalized as the reduction of bodies to so many particles colliding and separating as in some chemical process. But the latter, contrary to the non-familial ‘community of women’, appears in the final sentence as sexual reproduction, described in impersonal, pseudo-scientific language: ‘numerous infants of experimental variety, delightful in hue of skin and racial structure, were born to the world in the due cycle of nine months after’. Here then Spark evokes the beginning of the post-war ‘baby boom’, but narrates it from a top-down, almost anthropological perspective, as the narrator seems briefly to ventriloquize the institutional language of the modern state. Hornsey describes a renewed national emphasis on ‘the child and the nuclear family’ in this period, including the ‘social imperative...of heterosexual procreation’, following the disruption of traditional domesticity and declining birth-rate of the war years.¹⁵⁷ On the one hand, the organic imagery here conveys domestic, urban and national scales integrated within a natural order, as in the ‘organic formalism’ (influenced by new technologies of ‘scientific visualization’) which shaped contemporary planning

¹⁵⁶ *The Girls of Slender Means*, p.17

¹⁵⁷ Hornsey, pp.16, 81, 93

ideology.¹⁵⁸ Overseen by the emblematic royal family (themselves elevated ‘digits’ of the social body), the splitting apart and re-coupling of the community of the Club – first ‘to each other’, then to ‘the nearest person’, whose ‘strange bodies’, the final sentence would suggest, are male – evokes the reassertion of reproduction as the pull of a natural, almost gravitational force. On the other hand, the deformation of the well-proportioned smallness of the Club as it merges with the formless expanse of the park (figure of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation) reflexively allegorizes this process as a ‘fearful’ and potentially violent one, far from ‘a harmonious symbiosis between mankind and nature’.¹⁵⁹

The thematics of the body and violence, and their relation to the anti-utopian critique of community, become clearer in the VJ night celebrations which end the novel:

Jane, Nicholas and Rudi were suddenly in difficulties, being pressed by the crowd from all sides...A seaman, pressing on Jane, kissed her passionately on the mouth; nothing whatsoever could be done about it. She was at the mercy of his wet beery mouth until the crowd gave way...another seaman, observed only by Nicholas, slid a knife silently between the ribs of a woman who was with him. The lights went up on the balcony, and a hush anticipated the Royal appearance. The stabbed woman did not scream, but sagged immediately. Someone else screamed through the hush, a woman, many yards away, some other victim...The crowd began to roar again...Nicholas tried unsuccessfully to move his arm above the crowd to draw attention to the wounded woman...The seaman was shouting accusations at his limp woman, who was still kept upright by the crowd. These private demonstrations faded in the general pandemonium. Nicholas was borne away in a surge that pressed from the Mall.¹⁶⁰

This moment clearly parallels the VE Day celebrations, and resolves the theme of the Club’s encounter with ‘the violence of history’, as Auerbach puts it, at the level of national allegory. The violence arises as the exhilarating self-annihilation figured in the earlier passage turns into a frightening loss of individual agency. The sexual freedom of the ‘many liaisons’ here reverses into Jane’s revulsion at the seaman’s ‘wet beery mouth’, as the crowd literally presses them together, while the geological and chemical imagery of diffusion now refers to the spread of seemingly random violence. Stannard sees in the novel’s ending an anticipation of the continued violence of post-1945 history (despite this celebration of peace), in the form of the Cold War and its escalation in the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.70

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ *The Girls of Slender Means*, p.141

early sixties.¹⁶¹ But as Auerbach's reading suggests, in accommodating this historical and allegorical dimension, the Club takes on 'abstract and asymmetrical shapes'; its merger with the national space here evokes a generalized, bodily violence inherent in the formation and reproduction of community. The way the unnamed woman's 'sagg[ing]' and 'limp' body is 'pressed' and 'kept upright by the crowd' (which also works to constrain and silence Nicholas's protests), suggests that the organic whole of the larger urban and national collective is held together by a masculine violence, unspoken or unspeakable within discourses of national unity. The body is not here a point of concrete affiliation, retaining its particularity while providing the basis for unity, but the undifferentiated 'animate matter' which constitutes and underpins 'the mass', or in the language of the previous passage, its 'geological' structure. These parallel scenes can thus be read as a fictional exploration of the real and conceptual space in which community is reproduced, both socially and sexually. If the earlier passage, corresponding to VE day and the idyllic opening description of the Club, holds out the possibility that the process will be a utopian one, VJ day marks a moment of disillusionment, representing in Stannard's reading an anti-utopian reflection of former hopes for a peaceful post-war order. By this point in the narrative, the Club has burnt down and revealed its foundations in the girls' 'savage' qualities (as the narrator puts it at the beginning of the novel) – qualities which the violence of VJ day, a formative moment of post-war national identity, seems to reiterate in gendered terms. In this respect, as much as this final scene sees the annihilation of a small-scale community in an urban and national one, it also implicitly proposes the Club's fate as a microcosmic model which prefigures the nation's post-war trajectory, the community appearing in this sense as a fragment of a dystopian future. This dystopian dimension running through Spark's depiction of both the May of Teck Club and the national community suggests not so much 'a vision of the world governed by the inevitability of death', as Stannard sees it, as a critique of the formation of community as presuming a deformation and colonization of the body, a subject I want to discuss further before coming to *The Hothouse by the East River*.¹⁶²

The idealization of the 'slender' discussed above is pushed to its limits in relation to the bodies of Selina and the other members of the Club. The novel's most overt anti-

¹⁶¹ Stannard, p.295

¹⁶² Ibid., p.295

utopianism focuses on Nicholas's investment in a view of the community 'as an aesthetic and ethical conception...[a] lovely frozen image', recalling perhaps the most common criticism of utopian thinking as the projection of an ideal onto a living reality: 'he was imposing upon this society an image incomprehensible to itself.'¹⁶³ The narrator repeatedly stresses the stubborn indifference of that reality to Nicholas's visions, noting that Selina 'did not see the May of Teck Club as a microcosmic ideal society; far from it. The beautiful heedless poverty of a Golden Age did not come into the shilling meter life which any sane girl would regard only as a temporary one until better opportunities occurred.'¹⁶⁴ And yet it is Selina's 'extremely slim' frame which embodies Nicholas's entire vision of the Club, representing for him a kind of *tabula rasa*.¹⁶⁵ Early on, the narrator notes that '[t]he question of weight and measurement was very important to the top floor', this quantification forming part of the 'shilling meter life' of wartime austerity – the members of the Club count calories and measure their hips, comparing their 'ability or otherwise to wriggle sideways through the lavatory window... one of those tests that only went to prove the club's food policy to be unnecessary fattening'.¹⁶⁶ In his visits to the Club, Nicholas falls in love with Selina, who besides being 'extremely slim' and 'feel[ing] starved all the time' is said to be 'exceedingly beautiful'.¹⁶⁷ The narrator dryly notes that as much as Nicholas is 'enamoured of the May of Teck Club as an aesthetic and ethical conception', Selina is 'the centre and practical focus of his feelings in this respect', 'a common effect of [the Club] on its male visitors'.¹⁶⁸ As his obsession grows, sexual and utopian desire become conflated, and his identification of Selina with his own vision of the Club leads him to view her body as itself a utopian space:

With the reckless ambition of a visionary, he pushed his passion for Selina into a desire that she, too, should accept and exploit the outlines of poverty in her life. He loved her as he loved his native country. He wanted Selina to be an ideal society personified amongst her bones, he wanted her beautiful limbs to obey her mind and heart like intelligent men and women, and for these to possess the same grace and beauty as her body...It was incredible to him that she should not share with him an understanding of the lovely attributes of dispossession and poverty, her body was so austere and economically furnished.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ *The Girls of Slender Means*, pp.71, 86

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.65

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.32

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.32

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.34, 31

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 71

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.92

Elizabeth Grosz suggests that space has traditionally been conceived ‘as container, as envelope, as that which surrounds and marks the limits of men’s identity’.¹⁷⁰ Grosz’s comment that ‘Woman is/provides space for man, but occupies none herself’ aptly describes the paradoxical imagery in this passage, which envisions Selina’s body ‘personif[ying]’ an entire ‘society’ – not only the Club, but the utopia of the nation (‘native country’) – precisely on the basis of its meagreness, as if Nicholas’s imaginative expansion and idealization of the female body relied upon its physical emaciation.¹⁷¹ As in the expanding spatial scales in the VE day scene, which strain the limits of the Club’s microcosmic function, the narrator clearly signals the excessive symbolic weight that Selina’s ‘slender’ frame is being made to bear. The near-incoherence of the third sentence suggests a stylistic shift inflected by Nicholas’s ‘reckless’ desire, switching several times between wanting Selina to possess the attributes of his ‘ideal society’, and wanting that society to assume the attributes of Selina’s body, as if uncertain which is the utopian model and which is the reality to be transformed. This confusion (recurring in his complaint in the final line, effectively that her body does not understand itself) could be expressed as one between ideality and actuality, their elision in each successive clause implying a sinister assertion of their equivalence.

Following a fire at the Club caused by an unexploded bomb, the novel’s climax turns out to hinge on ‘the ability or otherwise to wriggle sideways through the lavatory window’ – ‘extremely slim’ Selina manages to escape to safety (and indeed returns to save the Schiaparelli dress, embodying the ‘savage’ side of the Club and presenting a ‘vision of evil’ which completes Nicholas’s disillusionment), along with the other members, while a small group remain trapped within the lavatory, forced to wait for firemen attempting to rescue them through a skylight.¹⁷² As the Club begins to collapse, the narrowness of the window thus presents a mortal physical test, presented as a kind of gauging of corporeality:

It was known all through the club that thirty-six and a quarter inches was the maximum for hips that could squeeze themselves through it, but as the exit had

¹⁷⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture From the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), p.159

¹⁷¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.99

¹⁷² *The Girls of Slender Means*, p.140

to be effected sideways with a manoeuvring of shoulders, much depended on the size of the bones, and on the texture of the individual flesh and muscles, whether flexible enough to compress easily or whether too firm.¹⁷³

Joanna Childe ('a daughter of a country rector') is one of those who cannot fit through the window, being the physical opposite of Selina; 'large' and 'well-built', Nicholas at one point 'admire[s] her big bones'.¹⁷⁴ Joanna's physicality here appears as a form of resistance, an intractable excess at odds with the diminutive proportions of the Club. While this corporeality precipitates Joanna's death as the building collapses, I want to suggest that it also figures an oblique afterlife of utopia, an alternative to Nicholas's crude utopianism, the Club's dystopian end, and indeed to more religious visions – several critics have seen his conversion during this scene as cementing Spark's theological intentions.¹⁷⁵ Joanna's death undoubtedly evokes a form of martyrdom, the 'vision of good' complementing Selina's 'vision of evil' in Nicholas's religious epiphany – as the building collapses, the former 'mechanically recit[es] the evening psalter of Day 27', while her recitations earlier in the novel include 'The Wreck of the Deutschland', a Christian poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins describing the martyr-like death of a group of Franciscan nuns.¹⁷⁶ That the novel explores religious themes, principally through the character of Joanna, thus seems clear, and yet what I see as her 'haunting' of the coda which follows the destruction of the Club complicates any doctrinal reading (McQuillan has elaborated the problems with criticism which takes Spark's reputation as a 'Catholic novelist' as their ultimate horizon of interpretation).¹⁷⁷ Joanna is 'training to be a teacher of elocution' and recites poetry, both religious and secular, throughout the novel: 'She had a deep feeling for certain passages of the authorized version of the Bible, besides the Book of Common Prayer, Shakespeare and Gerard Manley Hopkins, and had newly discovered Dylan Thomas'.¹⁷⁸ Various lines and verses echo through the Club and the text as she gives her lessons, providing both with a sense of spatial simultaneity and unity, through their sound rather than their meaning; the 'vibrations' of her voice, the 'stresses and throbs' of the metre, are 'felt to add tone and style to the establishment'.¹⁷⁹ Indeed in her final recitation, the remaining girls listen 'automatically...as they always had done' as the building starts to collapse,

¹⁷³ Ibid., p.123

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 11, 21, 102

¹⁷⁵ E.g. Stannard, p.295

¹⁷⁶ *The Girls of Slender Means*, pp.140, 126

¹⁷⁷ McQuillan, pp.1-5

¹⁷⁸ *The Girls of Slender Means*, p.11

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.11

feeling calmer without absorbing ‘the actual meaning of her words’; Joanna equally speaks ‘mechanically’ and ‘compulsively’, Spark twice in this scene describing the words coming from ‘her lips and tongue’ (with the emphasis on the physical articulation as befits an elocution teacher).¹⁸⁰ The recitation of the psalms, initially unidentified as such, first constitutes a purely aural phenomenon, ‘mesmeric’ in its fragile materiality, which seems here to merge with that of the building itself – ‘a new sound, faint, because of the continuous tumble of hose-water, the creak of smouldering wood and plaster in the lower part of the house... This new sound rose and fell with a broken hum’.¹⁸¹

Following the collapse of the Club and Joanna’s death, her recitations subtly return in a kind of ghostly coda. First Nicholas seeks out a tape-recording he had made of her reciting ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ to play back to Joanna’s grieving father, only to find that even this trace has been effaced – following her death in the diminutive space of the Club due to a kind of bodily excess, now her ‘declamatory’ voice, a final residue, ‘ha[s] been erased for economy reasons, so that the tape could be used again. That is how things were in 1945... It must have been wiped by someone at [Nicholas’s] office’.¹⁸² But following this factual statement, and as if to contradict it, several lines from ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ intrude without introduction or clear diegetic motivation:

Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened
Me flesh,

And after it almost unmade, what with dread,

Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh? ¹⁸³

As Nicholas and Joanna’s father return to the site of the Club, short fragments of the poem intersperse their discussion of her death. It would be possible to interpret them as flashbacks, Nicholas’s memories of Joanna, and yet the little interiority present in the text up to this point has been clearly labelled as such (i.e. reported rather than the free indirect speech or stream-of-consciousness this moment would imply). Far more pronounced, as I have suggested, has been the novel’s aural and rhythmic qualities on both a thematic and compositional level, which seem by this point to need no

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp.127-9

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p.127

¹⁸² Ibid., p.129

¹⁸³ Ibid., p.131

motivation beyond their accumulated inner logic. Previously intruding with such frequency as to threaten to derail the prose narrative, but always explained by reference to Joanna's lessons, the poetic incursion here appears rather as an overtly textual echo, which completes the novel's internal patterning more than it reflects any diegetic or narrative justification. In describing this device as ghostly, then, I mean that word in a similarly textual sense (I am not arguing that Spark means to posit Joanna's literal ghost), to convey its untimely return in relation to the narrative's dominant linear time. But this 'becoming-specter' also implies a contradictory 'return to the body' of the kind that Derrida discusses in *Spectres of Marx* (1994), insofar as the lines concern not only divine creation but corporeality, the 'bound bones' and 'fastened...flesh' evoking the gauging of 'the size of the bones, and...the texture of the individual flesh and muscles' in Joanna's death, and suggesting a return of the very oral tactility of her recitations.¹⁸⁴ That corporeal excess thus remains, in the form of interruption and untimeliness, even after its ostensible erasure or martyrdom within the austere dystopia of the May of Teck Club. If the Club was for Nicholas an embodiment of a utopian ideal, his tape-recording of the recitation can equally be seen as a representation of the community on its behalf, as with its impersonal assimilation to the 'imagined community' of the nation; the 'mesmeric' quality of this echo of Joanna's voice thus emerges from the tape's erasure, suggesting an exceeding of representational limits. This moment is thus also a metafictional one, the lines seeming to float inaudibly in the interstices of the dialogue between Nicholas and Joanna's father, while appearing to the reader in textual form; in Bammer's description of feminist utopias, they implicitly 'situate the utopian not in a separate or separable sphere outside of existing reality, but on the boundaries where the real and the possible meet'.¹⁸⁵ At the same time, I have suggested that Joanna's recitations stand for the Club's unity as well as the text's, and this 'echo' simultaneously implies a tentative persistence of the community's utopian dimension, following the destruction of the physical building, the dispersal of 'the girls of slender means' and Nicholas's disillusionment. But it is a ghost with a body, and not a living body, which seems to return – not the organic unity of Nicholas's vision of the Club (which I have connected to the 'organic formalism' of contemporary planning

¹⁸⁴ In a discussion of a passage of Marx's, Derrida writes: 'For there is no ghost, there is never any becoming-specter of the spirit without at least an appearance of flesh...For there to be a ghost, there must be a return to the body, but to a body that is more abstract than ever'. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp.157-8.

¹⁸⁵ Bammer, p.7

ideology), but its final, frail materiality as ‘the creak of smouldering wood and plaster’, or in the imagery of bodily making and unmaking in ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’, a physical space ‘almost unmade’.¹⁸⁶

Auerbach refers to ‘the anti-humanism of Spark’s societies’:

though Selina’s return to the burning Club to rescue the Schiaparelli dress the girls have lovingly passed back and forth between them is the vision of evil that drives Nick to conversion, her apparent betrayal is also an act of salvation: in stealing the dress and leaving the girls to burn, Selina has rescued the symbol of their community, a truer memento of the Club than any individual member would have been...the shared elegant dress is the unity of vision to which the Club aspires. The community was never ‘held together by the graceful attributes of a common poverty,’ but by the dress that was their common dream of transcending it. In choosing to rescue the soul of the community rather than its perishable, discrete bodies, Selina, like the Brodie set, triumphantly denies facile male humanitarianism in favour of the emblem, myth and vision of a female world.¹⁸⁷

I would argue that the intimation of ‘post-human’ community in this scene resides rather in the overcoming of the separation between the ‘discrete’ body and the ‘soul’ of the Club, Joanna’s verbal embodiment standing for a collective unity and loss of identity only hinted at in the earlier characterisations of ‘the girls of slender means’ – rather than a wistful return of the individual character, her persistence figures a utopian logic inseparable from death, beyond ‘the accidents of individual existence and the inevitability of its giving way’.¹⁸⁸ But it also seems notable, in line with the ambivalence regarding utopia in the novel, that it is a commodity which Auerbach sees holding together the community, ‘emblem’ of its ‘unity of vision’ and supra-personal desire. In line with the overlapping historical moments present in the text, this luxury item appears as an anachronism in the context of 1945 austerity in two senses – as a utopian fragment both of the Club’s ‘former days of private wealth’ (the dormitories repurposing an ‘enormous ballroom’, as I mentioned) and of the relative affluence and ‘expanding consumer economies’ of ‘swinging London’, which Spark from her early sixties vantage point insinuates between the lines of the text. To the degree that the post-war national community will be structured around the commodity, the pivotal re-appearance of the dress from the flames of the Club, almost a return of the repressed amidst ‘the shilling meter life’, implies something closer to a dialectic of scarcity and

¹⁸⁶ The body that returns in Derrida’s spectre is not ‘living’ but ‘more abstract than ever...*another artifactual body, a prosthetic body*’ (p.158).

¹⁸⁷ Auerbach, p.179

¹⁸⁸ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.123

abundance, as with Nicholas's imaginative expansion of the 'slender'. Read as a continuation of this dialectic, the dress is a more problematic 'emblem...of a female world' than Auerbach allows, the 'unity of vision' it heralds being that of the triumph of the commodity on the grounds of the Club's 'perishable, discreet bodies'.

The ambivalent fate of the Club, then, embodies the novel's critical and reflexive vision of post-war utopia. Its more anti-utopian dimension, I have argued, focuses on the effacement and yet appropriation of the female body, Nicholas's unnervingly corporeal visions and Joanna's final 'martyrdom' in the contracted space of the Club seeming connected by association if not causation. While anarchism is the form of utopianism named in the novel, *The Girls of Slender Means* reflects on a historical moment which was in many respects a modernist one. Writing at the beginning of the sixties, but equally in the shadow of 'the ultradomestic fifties' (the pinnacle of the state-driven modernism and consumerism of the post-war decades), Spark presents 1945 as a moment of unfulfilled possibility, whose opening up of space and 'disruption of domesticity' was at best a partial and (like 'the shilling meter life' for Selina) 'temporary' utopia.¹⁸⁹ I have pointed to the subsequent reassertion of traditional conceptions of gender and the 'nuclear family', along with the deployment of domestic space as a site of national citizenship, as informing contexts for this anti-modernist or proto-postmodernist critique. More generally, postmodern critics have often argued that the modernist revolution, despite at times advancing notions of *tabula rasa* and the annihilation of history, built on entrenched ideologies and distinctions.¹⁹⁰ This subsequent post-war evolution of modernism inflects *The Girls of Slender Means* not so much on the level of content, as in the way its reflexive and spatial approach to utopia indicates an early-sixties awareness of precedents, of the legacies of former utopianisms, its more archaeological emphasis on the spatial and corporeal underpinnings of utopia embodying its own alternative to and refutation of the modernist *tabula rasa*. If Spark, from the vantage point of the early sixties, narrates the war's 'disruption of domesticity' as a partial and temporary affair, the novel's ending speaks of a desire for a more fundamental disruption, conceptual as much as literal. The final image of the Club on the point of collapse implies a reduction of the plenitude of

¹⁸⁹ Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p.63

¹⁹⁰ See for example Hutcheon, p.25

the domestic interior (as evoked in the earlier cross-section), not to the *tabula rasa* or spatial purity of modernist architecture, but to a kind of ‘degree zero’ of place, both a residue and a pregnant potential of forms. The image seems to linger on the boundary between the narrative’s projection and erasure of the utopia of the Club, evoking what McHale calls a flickering or opalescent world, albeit one ‘motivated’ by the terms of a realist verisimilitude.¹⁹¹ This intimation of a more negative and corrosive view of space prefigures the fully anti-spatial logic of *The Hothouse by the East River*, discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁹¹ McHale, p.32

2. The Afterlife of New York in *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973)

A decade after *The Girls of Slender Means*, Spark returned to the problem of post-war utopia in *The Hothouse by the East River*. The ambivalently utopian war-time period which returns in tangible detail in the earlier historical novel is here reduced to a spectre, in a specifically urban ghost story (literally a haunting of and by a city) I see developing from the final spectral image of *The May of Teck Club*. Reading this reduction in terms of a post-sixties crisis of historicity and perceived closure of utopia (as discussed in the general introduction) emblemized by crisis-stricken seventies New York, my aim is to historicize this oblique yet topical ‘New York novel’ in light of the purported ‘death’ of the city in the socio-economic turmoil and mediatic rhetoric of the early seventies. I begin by sketching out this political and urban background, drawing principally from David Harvey’s analysis, before discussing how the city’s multiple crises were figured in journalistic discourse from the time. Rem Koolhaas’s book-length manifesto *Delirious New York* (1978), whose critical or postmodern utopianism also intervenes into this cultural context, provides a distinctively spatial mediation which I read in parallel to *The Hothouse by the East River*; as an architect, Koolhaas’s fictional ending and mirroring of the Manhattan grid via ‘spatial form’ textualizes space from a different perspective than Spark. Specifically, I argue that the novel’s slightness sets it apart from Koolhaas’s more expansive spatial imaginary, and indeed this chapter returns to the distinctive condensation of Spark’s spatial form. Despite its hermetic form and setting, *The Hothouse by the East River*’s concerns go beyond the purely metafictional (the focus of most existing readings of the text), yet nor are they historical in the manner of nineteenth-century fiction; my argument is rather that by thinking about the novel as a contribution to the spatial imaginary of this emblematically ‘1970s’ cultural and discursive context (to a broader field of representations of this time and place), the specificity of its allegorical containment and transformation of the real becomes clearer. It is through its radical condensation of seventies New York and the ‘gigantic’ public narrative of its decline that the text attests, with Koolhaas, to a less-remarked counter-narrative of utopian compensation – as if this hyper-congested allegedly ‘moribund’ space provided not only a crucible for ‘neoliberalization’ (as Harvey argues) but for a reconceptualization of utopia which emerged in the wake of modernism during the seventies. As such, the novel complicates

the historical ‘closure’ narrative of the seventies I discussed in the general introduction – Spark literalizes the sensationalized death of New York City to envision its spectral afterlife, a provisional utopianism capable of surviving within its saturated postmodern space.

New York’s seventies fate is often taken as emblematic of a decade of crisis, retrenchment and diminished possibilities. In his *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, Harvey sees the city’s crises and restructuring during this period – most significantly, the fiscal crisis of 1975, which he views as ‘a coup by the financial institutions against the democratically elected government of New York City’ – as prefiguring the decade’s broader trajectory, namely the constitution and eventual national and global spread of neoliberalism.¹⁹² While the fiscal crisis was still emergent in the early seventies, long-term processes of deindustrialization, suburbanization and impoverishment of inner-city regions, and the social unrest of ‘marginalized populations’ during the preceding decade, had cemented a narrative of decline and ‘urban crisis’ in New York and other U.S. cities.¹⁹³ In retrospect, President Nixon’s declaration in 1973, against the backdrop of a growing recession, that the urban crisis was over, was less a reflection of reality than a performative ‘speech act’ heralding a turn away from the ‘the expansive and expensive urban programs of the Great Society era’.¹⁹⁴ Nixon thus inaugurated a break with sixties conceptions of the city and the state’s role in ensuring its welfare, anticipating later, explicitly neoliberal urban policy. Historian Joshua Freeman suggests that following the rise of welfare and civil rights group in the 1960s, New York’s seventies crises allowed financial and real estate interests to reverse the trend: ‘In the recession and the budget crisis, financial leaders saw an opportunity to undo the past, to restructure New York along lines more [to] their liking than those drawn by decades of liberalism and labor action’.¹⁹⁵ Harvey similarly suggests that the various meanings which had become attached to the city’s ‘welfare’ during the preceding decades were gradually narrowed to ‘corporate welfare’ and ‘[t]he creation of a “good business

¹⁹² David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.45

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Arnold Richard Hirsch, Raymond A. Mohl eds., *Urban Policy in Twentieth Century America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993), p.19

¹⁹⁵ Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), p.258

climate”’, arguing that the ‘neoliberalization of culture’ during the seventies and eighties ‘erased the collective memory of democratic New York’.¹⁹⁶

Harvey and Freeman then both identify a shift in the collective meaning of the city during this period. Whereas a text like Jane Jacob’s *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) had presented New York ‘community’ as threatened but recuperable at the beginning of the sixties (the vibrancy of Greenwich Village being a hopeful sign for Jacobs), the rhetoric of the seventies was often outright dystopian and apocalyptic. Having moved to New York in 1962 (frequently publishing her work in the *New Yorker*), Spark herself began to spend less time there from the late sixties because (in her words) ‘New York was beginning to decay...it was getting dangerous, dirty’.¹⁹⁷ Major cutbacks to urban programs and services during the seventies only worsened the long-term deterioration of social and physical infrastructures, as ‘crime gripped whole neighbourhoods...fires gutted whole blocks...and garbage littered the streets’.¹⁹⁸ But the sense of crisis was also constructed in popular discourse of the time, as in the renowned *New York Daily News* headline – ‘Ford to City: Drop Dead’ – referring to President Gerald Ford’s refusal to grant a bailout at the peak of the fiscal crisis.¹⁹⁹ Indeed the city’s ‘death’ was a common trope in the eschatological rhetoric which characterised New York’s seventies nadir. Writing in 1975, economist Robert Zevin stated that

New York is not quite dead, but death is clearly inevitable. Death for a city is not physical destruction as befell Carthage or Hiroshima. It is the loss of those things which define a city’s vitality: the culture and ferment, material pleasures and comforts, exploration and invention, growth of old activities and creation of new ones...New York is moribund, encrusted with decaying, old West Side Highways and decadent, new World Trade Centers...To increasing numbers, New York’s parks and streets, subways, lobbies, elevators and apartments are places of danger and fear.²⁰⁰

At the beginning of *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (1978), Rem Koolhaas noted ‘the torrent of negative analyses that emanates from Manhattan about Manhattan and that has firmly established Manhattan as the *Capital of*

¹⁹⁶ *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p.47

¹⁹⁷ Stannard, pp.163, 269

¹⁹⁸ Cited in Lynne A. Weikart, *Follow the Money: Who Controls New York City Mayors?* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), p.113

¹⁹⁹ *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, p.47

²⁰⁰ Roger E. Alcaly, David Mermelstein eds., *The Fiscal Crisis of American Cities: Essays on the Political Economy of Urban America with Special Reference to New York* (New York: Random House, 1988), p.11

Perpetual Crisis'.²⁰¹ Though Koolhaas offers his own book as a counterpoint, even his more exuberant 'manifesto' for New York architecture ends with a 'Postmortem', conceding that the city 'passed into premature senility before its "life" was completed. This is why I had to provide my own ending'.²⁰² Like Zevin above, Koolhaas mourns the city's 'moribund' state, its passing into anachronism and decay symbolized by 'the disintegrating curtain walls of the *cheap skyscraper*', which he calls a 'contradiction in terms'.²⁰³ For Koolhaas, it is architectural modernism in particular that is anachronistic in 1970s New York. A year earlier, the architect Charles Jencks (in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977)) had declared 'the death of modern architecture', which he dated 'to a precise moment in time...Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri, on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 p.m. (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final *coup de grace* by dynamite'.²⁰⁴ Since all modernist buildings did not of course suffer this 'sudden extinction', Jencks acknowledged that 'many people didn't notice [modernism's death]...the fact that many so-called modern architects can still go around practising a trade as if it were alive can be taken as one of the great curiosities of our age' – modernism lived on, in other words, as anachronism, or as architectural historian Joan Ockman puts it, 'a past vision of the future'.²⁰⁵ In *Learning from Las Vegas*, Brown, Venturi and Izenour similarly bemoaned 'the irrelevant and distorted prolongation of that old revolution'.²⁰⁶ Echoing Koolhaas, Wiseman notes that by the late sixties, the 'pristine surfaces' of modernist buildings had begun to suffer: 'Weather streaked the concrete and stucco, and urban grime dulled the shiny curtain wall of glass and steel...the 'new' buildings actually began to look rather old'.²⁰⁷ As 'the modernist city of the twentieth century', the purported death of New York in the seventies was bound up with that of modernism itself, both architecturally and in terms of the broader social and utopian ideals which had shaped the city's post-war development.²⁰⁸

²⁰¹ Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: A Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1994), p.11 (author's italics).

²⁰² Ibid., p.11

²⁰³ Ibid., p.287

²⁰⁴ Charles Jencks, *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1977), p.9

²⁰⁵ Peter Madsen, Richard Plunz eds., *The Urban Lifeworld: Formation, Perception, Representation* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.199

²⁰⁶ Cited in Carter Wiseman, *Twentieth-century American Architecture: The Buildings and Their Makers* (New York: Norton, 2000), p.xii

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.202

²⁰⁸ Douglas Tallack, *New York Sights: Visualizing Old and New New York* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p.15

Before I come on to *The Hothouse by the East River*, I want to say more about *Delirious New York*, since both texts respond to the supposed ‘death’ of New York (and the related death of modernism) during the seventies with their own reflexive narratives about the fate and possibility of utopia. This reflexivity is apparent in the way Koolhaas introduces his book, asking: ‘How to write a manifesto – on a form of urbanism for what remains of the twentieth century – in an age disgusted by them?...This book...is a *retroactive manifesto* for Manhattan’.²⁰⁹ The concept of retroactivity, which recurs throughout the book in a variety of figures, can be seen as Koolhaas’s solution to the untimeliness of utopian thinking he evokes here. The term implies a temporal unhinging of traditional conceptions of utopia, but one concretely grounded in seventies New York. The book is ‘a *retroactive manifesto*’ in the sense that it views

Manhattan as the product of an unformulated theory, *Manhattanism*, whose program – to exist in a world totally fabricated by man, i.e., to live *inside* fantasy – was so ambitious that to be realized, it could never be openly stated...this book describes a *theoretical* Manhattan – *Manhattan as conjecture* of which the present city is the compromised and imperfect realization...Only through the speculative reconstruction of a perfect Manhattan can its monumental successes and failures be read.²¹⁰

This approach reverses the movement from theoretical plan to built reality, and indeed the utopian movement into the future, presumed by the conventional architectural manifesto. If post-modern utopianism, as I suggested in the previous chapter, is shaped by an awareness of precedents, utopia for Koolhaas is very much a subject for historical inquiry, his study comprising an excavation of utopian elements within New York’s architectural past which appears as the precondition for the more future-oriented ‘blueprint’ in the final section of the book. To take one example of this process: if the skyscraper had lost its novelty by the 1970s, both physically (as suggested above) and conceptually – and perhaps nowhere more so than in ‘utterly over-built’ midtown Manhattan – in a chapter entitled ‘The Double Life of Utopia: The Skyscraper’, Koolhaas attempts to restore its initial strangeness and utopian charge.²¹¹ He aims to isolate the ‘promise and potential of the New York skyscraper (as distinct from the reality of its now common performance)’:²¹²

Early in the century “the people” intuit the promise of the Skyscraper more profoundly than Manhattan’s architects, [engaging in] a subterranean collective

²⁰⁹ Koolhaas, p.10

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp.9-11

²¹¹ Fredric Jameson, ‘The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation’, in *New Left Review*, I/228, (March-April, 1998), pp.25-46

²¹² Koolhaas, p.83

dialogue about the new form from which the official architect is excluded...The subversiveness of the Skyscraper's true nature – the ultimate unpredictability of its performance – is inadmissible to its own makers; their campaign to implant the new giants within the Grid therefore proceeds in a climate of dissimulation...From the supposedly insatiable demands of “business” and from the fact that Manhattan is an island, the builders construct the twin alibis that lend the Skyscraper the legitimacy of being *inevitable*...Manhattan has no choice but the skyward extrusion of the Grid itself; only the Skyscraper offers business the wide-open spaces of a man-made Wild West, a *frontier in the sky*.²¹³

There is a sense in which Koolhaas is describing his own project here, specifically his imaginative opening of a utopian ‘frontier’ within postmodern, hyper-congested New York, where the skyscraper is now a ‘common performance’ serving commercial ends. His argument that the skyscraper resolves an essentially spatial (and thus neutral) dilemma – ‘as a utopian formula for the unlimited creation of virgin sites on a single urban location’ – and his insistence throughout the text that Manhattan expresses a collective unconscious, irreducible either to its ‘official architect[s]’ or the ‘demands of “business”’, implies a kind of ideological decontamination of former utopianisms.²¹⁴ On the one hand, the emphasis on a more ‘democratic’ architecture in this passage – its proposal of a popular but ‘subterranean’ discourse ‘from which the official architect is excluded’ knowingly inverting the alleged elitism of modernism – connects *Delirious New York* with other foundational texts of postmodernism such as *Learning from Las Vegas*. On the other hand, this discourse refers not to the baldly commercial and ‘vernacular’ styles privileged by Brown, Venturi and Izenour, but to modernist buildings themselves, ‘retroactively’ aligned with what Koolhaas calls ‘Manhattanism’ and definitively separated from the social and ideological ambitions of European modernism. In this way Koolhaas (re)theorizes the depoliticization of modernism associated with its post-war manifestations in the U.S.,²¹⁵ viewing the more ideological expressions of Manhattan’s architectural history as so much ‘dissimulation’ and ‘tactical diversion’; significantly, this includes capitalist ideology, as in his insistence that ‘the demands of business’ represent an ‘alibi’ which conceals the skyscraper’s ‘subversiveness’ (a word that suggests a neutralized residue of modernism’s utopian and transformative ambitions). *Delirious New York* then, unlike an emphatically postmodern text like *Learning from Las Vegas*, provides a more ambivalent reassessment of New

²¹³ Ibid., pp.85-7

²¹⁴ Ibid., p.87

²¹⁵ See, for example, Madsen, p.187

York modernism, sifting its history for utopian elements conceived as purely spatial and architectural feats.

This historical narrative finally leads Koolhaas to present-day New York, and to a more familiar, future-oriented utopianism in the form of the projects proposed in the final section of the book. It is in this sense that *Delirious New York* is ‘a blueprint’, ‘an argument for a second coming of Manhattanism’ which the creeping anachronism of contemporary New York makes all the more necessary.²¹⁶ Retroactivity thus indicates not a simple process of retrospection but a necessary historical detour intended to ‘activate’ the present, causing the city to appear as an afterlife of former utopias. But as much as Koolhaas’s study, ‘published at the very moment of the decisive rejection of modern architecture and city planning in the late 1970s’²¹⁷, preserves ‘a certain spirit’ of U.S. modernism, the book’s selective and depoliticizing history works to erase earlier architectural conceptions of the city as a site of social intervention, the emergence of postmodernism being part of the broader shift in urban discourse during the seventies – inaugurated by Nixon’s 1973 declaration that the urban crisis was over and culminating in what Harvey calls the ‘neoliberalization’ of New York. What is distinctive about Koolhaas’s postmodernism though is precisely his insistence on a continued (but reinvented) utopian function for architecture, contrary to the more acquiescent, commercial applications privileged in contemporary manifestos like *Learning from Las Vegas*. In this characteristic example, he positions the architect as an essential and even heroic mediating figure between the demands of business and ‘the people’:

Manhattan’s knowledge was stored in the brains of architects who made the businessmen foot the bill – ostensibly for their own myths of hyper-efficiency, but in fact for the erection of a Culture of Congestion, distilled by the architects from the desires of the population.²¹⁸

Such recurrent gestures suggest that the book’s reassessment of modernism is in part an effort to carve out a valid social function for architects and architecture given the crisis in the older models emerging during the sixties and seventies – specifically one which would preserve something of the privileged utopianism of earlier practitioners, while circumventing both the by-then pervasive charge of elitism and subordination to the market. ‘Manhattanism’ is on one level Koolhaas’s solution to this dilemma – a kind of

²¹⁶ Koolhaas, p.10

²¹⁷ Nathaniel Coleman, ‘Utopic Pedagogies: Alternatives to Degenerate Architecture’, in *Utopian Studies* Vol.23, Number 2 (2012)

²¹⁸ Koolhaas, p.285

architectural unconscious which can only be discovered ‘retroactively’ (as a ‘doctrine of indefinitely postponed consciousness’).²¹⁹ As will be clear from the quotation above, this psychoanalytic structure divests architects of the responsibility of engaging with social problems – since knowledge of the collective unconscious is necessarily deferred – and repositions them as figures who, funded by the oblivious businessmen, automatically realize the submerged ‘desires of the population’.²²⁰ The utopian dimension of retroactivity then is that it envisions social tensions as ‘always already’ resolved on the level of architecture, conceived as the expression of a unified collective unconscious, a social and urban totality in which the interests of business, architects and ‘the people’ are in perfect accord. In the context of post-fiscal crisis New York, and what Harvey sees as finance capital’s increasing hold on the city at the expense of ‘[t]he city government, the municipal labour movement, and working-class New Yorkers’, such a solution can be seen as doubly utopian.

As much as *The Hothouse by the East River*, like *Delirious New York*, imaginatively engages with the city’s seventies nadir, I want to start my discussion of Spark’s ‘New York novel’ by stressing its consciously oblique perspective on this subject matter, which distances it not only from an architectural history like Koolhaas’s, but from the avowedly urban realism of earlier ‘city novels’. In *Muriel Spark*, Stannard suggests that the novel was initially conceived as

a big New York City book on the scale of [Spark’s 1965] *The Mandelbaum Gate*...She talked of researching ‘the draft riots in the Civil War, when black men were hung from lamp posts’...It was a surprise, then...when *Hothouse* eventually appeared eight years later, that it was so brief. No draft riots. No sense of the city’s history.²²¹

The novel instead presents a foreshortened view of present-day New York, as Stannard notes: ‘We see little more of New York now than the interior of an overheated apartment...visual information is minimal. The material world has dissolved into voices, memory and, possibly, glimpses of the future’.²²² Even more than the domestic miniaturism of *The Girls of Slender Means*, then, *The Hothouse by the East River* tends towards condensation and brevity. As Stannard’s comments imply, the text thus refuses the expansive spatiality of the traditional realist or historical novel (a tradition evoked

²¹⁹ Ibid., p.110

²²⁰ This architect is in this sense not analogous to the psychoanalyst, but constructs the ‘dreams’ of the populace, realizing their unconscious wishes.

²²¹ Stannard, p.318

²²² Ibid., p.394

by Spark's earlier *The Mandelbaum Gate*); and yet in line with the historical potentials of the miniature, the absence of any 'sense of the city's history' does not prevent this setting from acquiring allegorical and referential dimensions. Despite its attenuation, the apartment or 'hothouse' is recognizable as a version of Spark's New York residence, 'a modern furnished apartment in the Beaux Arts Hotel at 310 East 44th Street' which she leased from 1962, and in which '[p]icture windows framed the UN Building, the East River and spectacular sunsets'.²²³ Indeed the UN Building and the East River of the title, along with 'glimpse[s]' of the Pan Am Building, Welfare Island, and a Pepsi-Cola sign, constitute a referential residue of 'real' New York; the 'material world' is thus not fully 'dissolved' but reduced to unstable visual details seen through the apartment window: 'The Pan AM sign on the far bank of the river flicks on and off. [Elsa] seems to be catching a sudden unexpected glimpse of the United Nations building, which has been standing there all the time, and she shudders', just as later the East River 'quivers with the ink-red reflection of the Pepsi-Cola sign on the opposite bank'.²²⁴ Such nominal details are at once overt signs of the real and seemingly on the brink of derealisation, hovering between diegetically-motivated spatial distortions (the ripple of a reflection in water or a sign flicking on and off) and a kind of attenuation and destabilization of the fictional world itself (has the UN Building 'been standing there all the time' or has it 'sudden[ly]' appeared?) – something closer to an 'ontological oscillation', as Brian McHale puts it in *Postmodernist Fiction*, a 'flickering' or 'opalescent' world 'neither true nor false, suspended between belief and disbelief'.²²⁵

On one level, Spark's New York, as in much contemporary writing on the city, is in a state of physical decline (Elsa even compares it to Carthage, like Zevin above); the apartment which is the novel's main setting is repeatedly described as 'antiquated', 'an old building' whose malfunctioning central heating turns it into a suffocating 'hothouse' and makes 'the air quiver' – just as outside, 'the highways have buckled, many places' due to the heat.²²⁶ And yet the recurrence of words like 'quivers', 'shudders', 'flicks', 'glimpse' and 'buckled' also implies a more fundamental destabilization of the space and time of fictional representation; in the final scene, the apartment building is not only demolished but 'erased' in the sense that McHale describes:

²²³ Ibid., p.269

²²⁴ *The Hothouse by the East River*, pp.9-10

²²⁵ McHale, p.33

²²⁶ *The Hothouse by the East River*, pp.9, 33, 87

Spark in *The Hothouse by the East River* constructs the familiar, comfortable world of a group of upper-middle-class New Yorkers which...deteriorates before our eyes. Inconsistencies and improbabilities begin to creep in, inexplicable events occur. This,...it turns out, has been a death-world, but one initially coinciding at every point with the real-world Manhattan. Spark's dead, victims of the 1944 V-2 blitz of London, act out a perfect simulacrum of the life they *would have lived* had they survived until the 1970s...This conditional existence starts breaking down from the moment when the dead begin to realize that they have been dead all along; Spark's world...erases itself.²²⁷

More overtly than the predominately realist *The Girls of Slender Means*, then, *The Hothouse by the East River* is a metafictional ghost story, in which the entire narrative is revealed as an anachronous 'death-world' surviving beyond its proper time. The flickering and erasure McHale describes is thus not only an oscillation 'between belief and disbelief' but a temporal one, which I will argue (picking up on Stannard's suggestion that the novel provides 'glimpses of the future') implies a spectral materiality in excess of the traditional ghost story's return of the past. More than the archetypal haunted house, the 'antiquated' apartment both haunts and is haunted by seventies New York, the narrative comprising an impossible overlap of spaces and times (which McHale only hints at here). Beyond the metafictional implications of this device, I will suggest that it is in part Spark's present which is estranged as 'conditional' in the coincidence of the characters' 'death-world' and 'the real-world Manhattan'. Such a narrative structure, that is, causes the present to appear not as the history of an imagined future – as in Jameson's reading of science-fiction – but as the 'spectral' future of a lingering past, the new is struggling to be born despite the death of the old; the novel's temporally-ambivalent utopianism can in this respect be compared to Koolhaas's retroactive approach to the present. My argument, then, is that what McHale rightly sees as the novel's metafictional and self-referential dimension is in constant tension with its referentiality – that Spark's postmodern ghost story is on one level a way of writing about New York in the early seventies, what I see as a playful literalization of the city's much-reported 'death'.

Elsa's 'unnaturally'-falling shadow is the most obvious of the 'inconsistencies and improbabilities' McHale refers to above, signifying the anachronism and ultimate 'erasure' of the diegetic world. I want to start by analysing this motif broadly in line with McHale's reading of the novel and other concepts drawn from his *Postmodernist*

²²⁷ McHale, pp.50, 64

Fiction, before suggesting that its spatial figures of overlap, superimposition and flickering can here be understood in a more diachronic and future-oriented way. Elsa's shadow is introduced via a fairly conventional description of the space of the apartment:

Sometimes there is a marvellous sunset pouring in the west window... The sunset from the west spills the shadows of Elsa's palms and ferns all over the floor, all over Elsa and the curtains by the east window. Out of the west window, on good days at sunset the Manhattan rooflines are black against the brilliance while the sky over the East River darkens slowly.²²⁸

The metaphorical fluidity of light and shadow here remains ostensibly 'realistic', but already hints at a dissolving of matter into optical and spatial distortions. The passage then shifts to encompass Elsa's husband Paul:

He is standing in the middle of the room. She is sitting by the window, staring out over the East River. The late sunlight from the opposite window touches her shoulders and hair, it casts the shadow of palm leaves across the carpet, over her arm. The chair she sits in casts a shadow before her.

There is another shadow, hers. It falls behind her.

Behind her, and cast by what light? She is casting a shadow in the wrong direction.²²⁹

In this way, the neutral, deliberate survey of the apartment encounters a sheer contradiction, the narrator asserting the existence of a visual detail while declaring it 'wrong' and later 'unnatural'. The spatial anomaly or anatopism of Elsa's shadow also implies anachronism; it indicates that she 'inhabits some counter-dimension, a positive to this world's negative' as Stannard puts it,²³⁰ while equally suggesting that the sun is elsewhere for Elsa than for Paul:

Her shadow spreads from her chair across the carpet in the weak light and, although at this hour of the morning it happens to fall at precisely the correct angle relative to the risen sun, it will certainly continue to fall in this direction all day, wherever she may be.²³¹

The narrative enacts this sense of time 'out of joint', for which the shadow serves as a spatial figure, like a (somehow malfunctioning) sun-dial – repeated present-tense descriptions of its orientation within the apartment, often prefixed with a deceptively punctual 'now', in fact correspond to a perpetually dilating present, with which the narrative seems to intersect almost at random. Like the unstable referential details of New York, then, the shadow conveys what McHale calls an ontological 'flickering effect', but one that is from the beginning both temporal and spatial.

²²⁸ *The Hothouse by the East River*, p.14

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.14-15

²³⁰ Stannard, p.145

²³¹ *The Hothouse by the East River*, p.100

This inconsistency proves disruptive, posing a problem of interpretation both for the reader and within the diegesis. Elsa's analyst Garven, the focal point of the novel's parody of psychoanalysis, views the shadow as a mental problem (New York is described as 'home of the vivisectors of the mind [and of] those...habitually wondering about their states of sanity'), Spark's inclusion and rejection of this hermeneutic possibility serving to underscore the shadow's general resistance to interpretation and meaning (except, I will suggest, on a textual or purely spatio-temporal level).²³² Garven declares that Elsa has 'externalized', implying a literalization of the psychoanalytic term, while Paul similarly worries that 'The schizophrenic has imposed her will. Her delusion, her figment, her nothing-there, has come to pass'.²³³ But such a realization of a mental state would of course undermine the category of the discrete self, along with the surface/depth and cause/effect oppositions upon which traditional psychoanalysis depends; Elsa slyly comments that though Garven is writing a book about her, 'He hasn't got his material yet. He's looking for the cause, and all I'm giving him are effects'.²³⁴ This typically Sparkian refusal of interiority then forces us to seek an explanation on the surface – Elsa's shadow and other spatial distortions appear as symptoms not of a damaged psyche but of an overlap between 'incommensurable and mutually exclusive worlds'.²³⁵ This last phrase is from McHale's study, in reference to the 'heterotopias' or 'zones' common to much postmodern fiction. Of particular relevance here is what he calls a strategy of

superimposition. Here two familiar spaces are placed one on top of the other, as in a photographic double-exposure, creating through their tense and paradoxical coexistence a third space identifiable with neither of the original two – a zone.²³⁶

Rather than one space determining or assuming priority over another (as in surface/depth or cause/effect models), 'superimposed' spaces together generate a kind of surface complexity. In *The Hothouse by the East River*, Elsa's 'counter-dimension' seems to encompass 'The window-bay of the room, jutting out fourteen stories above everything' and the glimpsed space beyond the window (discussed in what follows), while Paul is usually 'in the middle of the room behind her', the rest of the apartment

²³² *The Hothouse by the East River*, p.11

²³³ *Ibid.*, p.15

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.48

²³⁵ McHale, p.44

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.46

appearing as ‘his’ space.²³⁷ As the visibility of the shadow would suggest, it is as if Paul can see only the reverse of Elsa’s world – she is always ‘looking away – out across the East River as if he were standing in the air beyond the window pane’; her face appears perpetually ‘in profile’ or ‘averted towards the river’.²³⁸ Having approached the window-bay, Paul at one point ‘withdraws, sideways and backwards, and stands at a distance from the window between one sofa and another’, his oblique retreat conveying an uneasy, even territorial coexistence of spaces (Princess Xavier, a friend of Elsa’s, ‘walks respectfully round Elsa’s shadow to avoid treading on it’).²³⁹

Significantly, Paul and Elsa see different versions of New York from the apartment window, each being invisible to the other:

[Paul] says, ‘A lot of mist this evening.’

‘Really?’ she says, as if she cannot see for herself the heat-fog that has lowered over the city of New York all day.²⁴⁰

Paul interprets Elsa’s time spent at the window as reflecting some mysterious affinity she shares with the distant city. This time it is Paul who ‘cannot see’ New York:

One day he thought he had caught her, in profile, as he moved closer to her, smiling at Welfare Island as if it were someone she recognized. The little island was only a mass of leafage, seen from the window. She could not possibly have seen a person so far away down there.²⁴¹

On another occasion, Paul is convinced she is ‘concealing a smile at the red Pepsi-Cola sign on the far bank of the river’; she also ‘shudders’ when glimpsing the UN Building (as quoted above).²⁴² Such moments suggest that Elsa maintains, from within the hermetic apartment, an ambiguous relationship with ‘her’ space beyond the window – at times a tenuous social connection, as when she appears to recognize someone or addresses her comments ‘to the East River’, and at others a degree of disconnection, distance and even repulsion in ‘shudders’, the opposite extreme to her concealed smiles (and occasional laughter) at the city.²⁴³ Beyond its affective content, though, the word ‘shudders’ forms part of the novel’s imagery of ‘flickering’ and ‘opalescence’; it is as if she ‘shudders’ between the overlapping spaces, fully present in neither. At times there is

²³⁷ *The Hothouse by the East River*, pp.5, 14

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.5, 7

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.28, 34

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.28

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.6

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p.7

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.10

a hint of a 'subterranean' dialogue (as Koolhaas posits in relation to the skyscraper) between Elsa and the distant city:

What is she looking at?

He looks. Welfare Island. The borough of Queens across the river. The river moving past a moored barge... There is no beam of light coming in from the East River or the sky. But she goes on looking and receiving; perhaps she's begun to smile.²⁴⁴

Here the more diachronic and utopian aspect of the novel's overlapping spatiality becomes clearer. The reference to a hypothetical 'beam of light' is Paul (relayed through free-indirect style) looking for an explanation to the 'unnatural' orientation of Elsa's shadow, but also evokes a religious, perhaps messianic apparition; the narrator later refers to 'the Nothing beyond the window, high above the East River' in similarly spiritual or mystical terms. At the same time, this moment raises more representational or metafictional questions. The statement that 'There is no beam of light coming in from the East River or the sky' (followed by 'But...') is a characteristically 'oscillating' one, insofar as it creates a possibility while appearing to refute it; if Paul inhabits a different space-time to Elsa he would presumably not be able to see the beam of light, which here stands for or points to something arriving – or given the recurrent concern with light and looking, appearing – from beyond the limits of his present. Paul, like the reader, sees only the shadow it casts, which serves an indexical or designating function, alerting us to the existence of the world 'beyond the window' without offering it in the form of a full representation. This positing of the signs and preconditions of visibility while withholding the object itself suggests a concern with the 'becoming visible' of representation as a process. Since a shadow, as I have stressed, has a temporal dimension, here that process appears in terms of deferral and anachronism. Elsa's shadow, that is, marks not a static coexistence but a (temporal) disjuncture between 'incommensurable' worlds, whose absence of priority applies equally to chronology – the hypothetical beam of light, I suggest, foregrounds precisely this issue, raising such possibilities as a manifestation of the 'other' space beyond the window somewhere along the temporal axis of Paul's world, or even a transformation of one into the other.

In line with this more radical temporal disjuncture, the apartment is revealed to be not simply 'antiquated', but of the same order of uncanny persistence as the characters themselves, surviving beyond its implied 'death'. Towards the end of the novel, we

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p.15

learn that it was on a wartime trip to New York that Paul conceived of living there during peacetime; his friend Melly had promised to keep the apartment vacant.²⁴⁵ With the knowledge that the main narrative is the post-war afterlife of victims of the Blitz, this minor detail suggests that Paul and Elsa's 'death-world' is partly based on pre-1945 New York. Spark's insistence that the apartment is 'an old building' can thus be read as hinting at the more drastic untimeliness of its paradoxical survival into the seventies; its final destruction indeed is presented as a resumption of the proper course of history.²⁴⁶ In this respect, the apartment is literally 'a past vision of the future' (as Ockman describes modernism's anachronism in the seventies), a would-be utopia projected from an earlier historical moment, whose 'haunting' by seventies New York results in a spatial overlap which is also a temporal and historical matter: 'How long, cries Paul in his heart, will these people, this city, haunt me?'.²⁴⁷ Stannard aptly describes the narrative as 'Basically a ghost story', but one which 'turns the usual inside out in that here it is the dead who are troubled by spectres of reality'.²⁴⁸

If the apartment, which is very much Paul's distorted utopia, can thus be understood as being from the past, itself a kind of spectre, Elsa's space I have associated with the present-day city and 'possibly, glimpses of the future' (as Stannard puts it), her shadow registering this temporal disjuncture within the domestic interior. Significantly, the motif of the shadow is predicated on its tension with the apartment's architectural language of light, space and transparency. As I discussed above, the precise, almost geometrical description of the 'marvellous sunset pouring in the west window' as it 'touches [Elsa's] shoulders and hair...casts the shadow of palm leaves across the carpet, over her arm' – what might be characterised as an attention to the visibility of form in space akin to 'the masterful, correct, and magnificent play of volumes in light' famously admired by Le Corbusier – gives way to the perversely anti-spatial logic of Elsa's shadow, stubbornly visible sign of a space which somehow remains invisible, its appearance missed or perhaps 'to come'.²⁴⁹ Exploiting the tension between fictional reference and its 'flickering' nature, Spark establishes a semi-autonomous literary space which forms the negative image of visually-regimented architectural space. In her essay

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p.138

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p.111

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p.88

²⁴⁸ Stannard, p.141

²⁴⁹ Le Corbusier, *Toward an Architecture* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2007), John Goodman trans., p.246; *The Hothouse by the East River*, p.127.

‘The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism’, architectural historian Beatriz Colomina describes architecture as ‘a viewing mechanism’ which instils ‘regimes of control inside the house’; she argues that Adolf Loos’s designs invite an ‘inward gaze’ across their domestic interiors (as with the ‘open’ interior spaces of much modern architecture), while for Le Corbusier, the windows of the modern skyscraper facilitate a ‘horizontal gaze’ which visually masters the external world: ‘From our offices we will get the feeling of being look-outs dominating a world in order... The skyscrapers concentrate everything in themselves’.²⁵⁰ Notably, it is ‘the man [who] looks at the “world”’, as Colomina stresses, while ‘the woman is placed “inside”’, ‘[e]nclosed by a space whose limits are defined by a gaze’.²⁵¹ Again, I am not arguing that *The Hothouse by the East River* is ‘about’ modernism or its then-emergent critique, but that the novel’s postmodern play with visibility results in a space which registers the presumed transparency and perceptibility of architectural space as a kind of negative impression. The apartment is very much ‘a viewing mechanism’, and it is here Elsa who ‘looks at the “world”’ from the window-bay; and yet looking, I have suggested, appears less as a form of mastery than receptivity and utopian anticipation. More than an inversion of the dynamics of visual control within the house, the division of space I have described implies that Elsa resides neither fully inside nor outside the apartment, but inhabits an overlap between worlds which exceeds total visualization, and particularly the delimitation of Paul’s gaze – whether directed inwards, at Elsa and her visible but anomalous shadow, or outwards at the visually-unstable city.²⁵² The shadow registers a discrepancy between the two views (from Paul’s perspective), and heralds both Elsa’s existence beyond the confinements of domestic space and a partial internalization of the otherwise invisible space beyond the window. The relationship between the inside and outside of the apartment is thus no longer a ‘moral’ or ‘honest’ one, as Koolhaas describes Western architecture’s traditional ‘humanistic assumption’, as the visual

²⁵⁰ Beatriz Colomina, ‘The Split Wall: Domestic Voyeurism’, in Beatriz Colomina ed., *Sexuality and Space* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp.76, 112

²⁵¹ Ibid., pp.104, 80

²⁵² Laura Mulvey describes ‘the private sphere, the domestic’ as ‘an essential adjunct to bourgeois marriage... It is the mother [and wife] who guarantees the privacy of the home... as essential a defence against outside incursion or curiosity as the encompassing walls of the home itself’ (cited in *Sexuality and Space*, p.82). By contrast, Elsa destabilizes the boundaries of the domestic space Paul has chosen for their post-war married life.

information gleaned from the window bay fails to corroborate the interior view – in Colomina's terms, horizontal and inward gazes appear misaligned.²⁵³

Moreover, recurrent imagery hints at the becoming-substantial of the shadow itself, as more than an effect of light and volumetric form. The description of the 'palms and ferns' quoted above turns out to prefigure a 'spilling' of materiality beyond its usual limits, as when Elsa's shadow appears as 'a webby grey cashmere shawl that has been left to trail and gather dust untouched for a hundred years', and later as 'the train of an antique ball-dress' – in both images, its associations of untimeliness become literal and physical.²⁵⁴ This shadow does not simply define or mirror its object, but attaches to it as a kind of accretion, whose indeterminate materiality and associations with dirt and dust defy 'the white walls and clean lines of modern architecture'.²⁵⁵ In line with the notion of two worlds sharing the same space without one being submerged beneath the other, this accretive aspect of the shadow implies a temporal 'depth' spread out horizontally, as a 'webby...trail' or 'train'. The shadow contravenes what Barbara Hooper (in a feminist reading of 'the utopian longings of Le Corbusier') sees as 'a persistent fantasy of modernity and its urbanisms: the production of a pure, clean, rational space – a utopian space'.²⁵⁶ Feminist critics have argued that such a space often rests on an effacement of 'the gendered and sexualized body':

If the modern approach to space begins with mapping, its culmination might be in the white walls and clean lines of modernist architecture, which make visible the notion of space as a blank field for play. Planning and design...have been notorious in their failures to take into account the lived experiences, limitations and sheer quirkiness of bodies, the unexpected uses to which desiring subjects put their surroundings.²⁵⁷

Elsa's 'improper' occupation of the domestic interior, like Joanna's in *The Girls of Slender Means*, constitutes a form of physical resistance to a distorted post-war utopia. Contrary to 'the notion of space as a blank field for play', the shadow's intractable material presence within the apartment serves as a constant reminder of the building's state of impossible coexistence. Insofar as its untimeliness also hints at a more utopian futurity, the shadow threatens to body forth the 'other' space within the apartment itself;

²⁵³ Koolhaas, p.100

²⁵⁴ *The Hothouse by the East River*, pp.34-6

²⁵⁵ Amy Bingaman, Lise Sanders and Rebecca Zorach eds., *Embodied Utopias: Gender, social change, and the modern metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p.6

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.55

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 6

and yet Spark does not envision some form of ‘embodied utopia’ (to evoke the title of the study quoted above), the full restoration of ‘the gendered and sexualized body’. Elsa’s shadow is not an organic ‘trace’ of habitation of the kind Benjamin describes in his account of the emergence of the domestic interior in the nineteenth-century.²⁵⁸ As with Joanna’s ghostly return in *The Girls of Slender Means*, the shadow is not a living body opposed to Paul’s ‘death world’, but itself partly spectral in its indeterminate materiality, which resides somewhere between a normal shadow and a physical body.

To elaborate this distinction, I want to return briefly to Koolhaas’s book, and its account of the relationship between New York architecture and the gendered body. In his discussion of Manhattan’s Downtown Athletic Club, whose ‘first 12 floors [are] accessible only to men’, he describes the building’s utopian restoration of ‘the human body’:

[F]or the true Metropolitan, bachelorhood is the only desirable status. The Downtown Athletic Club is a machine for metropolitan bachelors whose ultimate “peak” condition has lifted them beyond the reach of brides. In their frenzied self-regeneration, the men are on a collective “*flight upward*” from the specter of the Basin Girl.²⁵⁹

The latter figure appears in an earlier passage, subtitled ‘WOMAN’:

Architecture, especially in its Manhattan mutation, has been a pursuit strictly for men. For those aiming at the sky, away from the earth’s surface and the natural, there has been no female company. Yet among the 44 men on the stage [at the 1931 costume-ball for Beaux-Arts graduates in New York], there is a single woman, Miss Edna Cowan, the “Basin Girl.”

She carries a basin as an extension of her belly; two taps seem even further entwined with her insides. An apparition straight from the men’s subconscious, she stands there on the stage to symbolize the entrails of architecture, or, more precisely: she stands for the continuing embarrassment caused by the biological functions of the human body that have proved resistant to lofty aspirations and technological sublimation. Man’s rush to the *n*th floor is a neck-and-neck race between plumbing and abstraction. Like an unwanted shadow, plumbing will always finish a close second.²⁶⁰

The psychoanalytic inflection of Koolhaas’s arguments here brings him close to the then-emergent feminist view that modern architecture entails a repression of the female body, and particularly its biological and maternal associations. As part of his reflexive reassessment of New York modernism, this passage playfully acknowledges such

²⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), Michael W. Jennings trans., pp.38-9

²⁵⁹ Koolhaas, p.158

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p.131

critiques, writing the 'Basin Girl' into the margins of his manifesto as 'specter', 'apparition' and 'unwanted shadow'. These metaphors of course resonate with Spark's novel, except Koolhaas employs them as secondary terms, such that the real Edna Cowan has become pure symbol, a mental by-product of the architects' 'lofty aspirations'. In this way Koolhaas lightly ironizes the masculine orientation of 'heroic' modernism at the same time as he embraces it as rhetorical and stylistic performance, heralding a Futurist-style transcendence of reproduction (the bachelors' 'self-regeneration') and the formation of a universal, almost post-human 'Man' or 'Metropolitan'. Read as similarly inflected by the convergence during the seventies of an expiring modernism and rising second-wave feminism, *The Hothouse by the East River* represents a contrapuntal resolution, not in the sense that Spark writes the 'Basin Girl' back into being, restoring the corporeality and 'biological functions' sublimated in modern architecture, but rather in the novel's contravention of the dichotomies of Koolhaas's analysis, which he inherits from modernism itself (even if he performatively caricatures them to some extent). The metaphorical common ground ('specter', 'apparition', 'unwanted shadow') points to the way Spark's novel, rather than restoring the primary term (the body, the real, 'the earth's surface and the natural'), employs the secondary term or abstraction as if it were primary. The most obvious example is the shadow, usually a secondary manifestation of physical presence (and of the absence of light). I have already described how Elsa's shadow hovers between ideality and actuality (or 'plumbing and abstraction', in Koolhaas's phrase), resisting interpretation as a subconscious 'apparition', but equally exceeding the optical and physical laws of the apartment; mental and architectural space, perfectly synchronised within *Delirious New York*'s architectural unconscious, are here both cast as insufficient. If the shadow is nonetheless as real as anything in the diegesis, that reality lies not in its reference to a more stable physical presence, a preceding or underlying order, but in the reality it begins to materialize within the domestic interior – a 'counter-dimension' which I have argued is present only as a break from the narrative present. Stannard's notion that the novel envisions 'spectres of reality' might thus be interpreted as a return of the real *as* spectral, as a 'flickering' materiality which seems to hover on the threshold of representation.

The novel's anticipatory logic evokes less a fully realized (or 'embodied') utopia than a 'becoming' of representation itself, conceived as at once real and spectral in its

ambiguous virtuality. In other words, the apartment, which I have characterised as ghostly in the traditional sense of being ‘from the past’, is itself haunted by the more radical untimeliness and potentiality embodied by the shadow, arriving from a possible future which is also the then-present of seventies New York. The unstable referential details of the contemporary city with which I began are precisely ‘spectres of reality’; it is in this sense that the narrative structure works to temporally-estrangle the present as a ‘conditional’ or emergent future, implying a reversal of the procedure Jameson associates with science-fiction. On the one hand, this spectral real points to just the reification of the present which makes such an estrangement necessary in the first place. Noting that ‘[t]he ghost story is...virtually the architectural genre par excellence, wedded as it is to rooms and buildings ineradicably stained with the memory of gruesome events’, Jameson speculates what a postmodern version would look like:

[J]ust as the sense of the past and of history followed the extended family into oblivion...so also urban renewal seems everywhere in the process of sanitizing the ancient corridors and bedrooms to which alone a ghost might cling...One scarcely associates ghosts with high-rise buildings....yet perhaps the more fundamental narrative of a ghost story ‘to the second power’, of a properly postmodern ghost story, ordered by finance-capital spectralities rather than the old and more tangible kind, demands a narrative of the very search for a building to haunt in the first place.²⁶¹

The logic of a double haunting suggests a collapse of the conventional opposition between the realms of the spectral and the real, as if the latter – the ‘material structures’ whose historical continuity grounds the traditional ghost story – were no longer present or directly accessible. The spectres of contemporary Manhattan which haunt the diegesis thus suggest not some less mediated historical reality breaking back into the narrative ‘death-world’, but a real which has already been hollowed-out, and can itself only be accessed in representational form. That the flickering urban details are often literally signs suggests a pre-constituted real, a city that represents itself, as Koolhaas indeed implies in his description of the Manhattan skyscraper’s ‘automonumentality’ or sheer self-symbolization; the novel’s representation of the urban is on one level reduced to incorporating those prefabricated signs and references (Pepsi-Cola, Pan Am and so on), which conspicuously fail to accumulate to an urban plenitude of the sort associated with the realist ‘city novel’.²⁶²

²⁶¹ ‘The Brick and the Balloon’, pp.45-6

²⁶² Koolhaas, p.100

On the other hand, the text's spectral logic does more than passively register this dilemma. If the novel's setting evokes a city emptied of its materiality, oscillating between representational presence and absence, I have also argued that this movement assumes a temporal dimension – what I see as an opening up of a future horizon from the flickering of the pre-existing image or sign. Koolhaas sees 'the Manhattan skyscraper as a utopian formula for the unlimited creation of virgin sites on a single urban location...the skyward extrusion of the Grid...offers business the wide-open spaces of a man-made Wild West, a *frontier in the sky*'.²⁶³ More broadly, he identifies in Manhattan's architectural history a 'Culture of Congestion', which aims to 'solve congestion by creating more congestion...By aiming for a new order of the colossal, one would break through this barrier and suddenly emerge in a completely serene and silent world'.²⁶⁴ Rather than a vertical colonization of a formerly empty space, the novel's utopian frontier emerges from its fictional exaggeration of Manhattan's congestion, refigured as an impossible coexistence of worlds (whose superimposition within the very same space is neither a vertical nor horizontal arrangement) – from an excess of signification rather than the creation *ex nihilo* Koolhaas presumes here.

To pick up Jameson's phrase, then, Spark's postmodern ghost story is not only symptomatic but implies a utopianism 'to the second power' (indeed Koolhaas's chapter on the skyscraper is entitled 'The Double Life of Utopia', though I have stressed its distance from the novel). Given the novel's inversion of the visual ordering of architectural space, this utopian dimension in turn presumes a spectral or second-hand relationship to modernism. Notably, the flickering signs which minimally figure contemporary New York are often real-world modernist buildings. The UN Building (a glass skyscraper designed by Wallace Harrison and Le Corbusier, and built 1947-50) and the Pan Am Building (designed by Walter Gropius, completed 1963) recurrently glimpsed from the apartment are renowned examples of U.S. post-war modernism, built during a period of 'frenzied real estate development' in Manhattan in the decades after World War II.²⁶⁵ Initially appearing as background setting or a residue of reference, to the degree that the apartment's retroactive existence becomes apparent, they emerge as destabilizing 'spectres of reality', symbols of the subsequent history which the

²⁶³ Ibid., p.87

²⁶⁴ Ibid., pp.10, 177

²⁶⁵ Madsen, p.177

illusionism of the diegetic ‘death world’ must keep out. If the apartment is literally a fragment of pre-1945 New York, details like the UN Building, which did not yet exist and indeed symbolizes a constitutive moment in post-war history that had yet to take place, signify a disruptive untimeliness. If the text on the one hand literalizes the ‘death’ of New York, envisioning a demolished building coming back to haunt the contemporary city, this move also implies a logic of utopian redemption, presenting the latter (from the perspective of the anachronous apartment) as itself a ghost of the future – once again a *novum*, a partially-figured alternate world into which Elsa appears literally to gaze. In this way, Spark estranges the overbearing signs of present-day New York, reversing the symbolic plenitude of the existent (as in Koolhaas’s ‘Automonument’, which celebrates its own ‘disproportionate existence’) into future-oriented potentiality – into a New York ‘to come’ lingering at the threshold of representation.

By a utopianism ‘to the second power’, then, I mean something similar to the reflexivity and awareness of utopian precedents I identified in *The Girls of Slender Means*, whose relationship to post-war modernism provides a point of comparison here; I want to place both texts within the wider cultural context of the emergence in the late sixties of what Tom Moylan calls the ‘critical utopia’. I read the earlier novel as reflecting on some of the legacies of post-war utopianism, through a narrative which shuttles between 1945 and the early sixties moment in which it was written. *The Hothouse by the East River* similarly encompasses both a distorted vision of the future emerging from World War II, and spectral glimpses of a world corresponding to Spark’s present, only here these historical moments paradoxically coexist in space. This spatialization suggests at once the impossibility or inadequacy of the kind of realist historical narrative employed in the earlier novel, and an attempt to rewrite its critical utopianism in terms of space and setting – or rather to consider ‘setting’ as properly diachronic. Indeed the brief stretches of historical narration present in *The Hothouse by the East River* – the characters’ memories of ‘the summer of 1944 [when] there was a war on’ – suggest an exhaustion and ironization of techniques employed confidently in *The Girls of Slender Means*, something acknowledged in Paul’s limp assertion that ‘life was more vivid than it is now. Everything was more distinct... There was a war on’.²⁶⁶ The repetition of such

²⁶⁶ *The Hothouse by the East River*, p.29

nostalgic clichés conveys just the opposite: the extension into the past of the narrative present's creeping unreality. This shift is also a formal and stylistic one, insofar as the naturalistic mode employed in the flashbacks appears increasingly incompatible with the overtly anti-realistic spatiality of the rest of the text, such that its connotation of a 'vivid' and 'distinct' world residing in the past itself seems to suffer a kind of overexposure, its realism tipping toward pastiche. But the diachronic movement of the earlier novel, its shifts between historical moments via analepsis and prolepsis, is refigured as the ongoing interaction, spatial distortion and ultimate negation of non-contemporaneous worlds I have described, a process which (given the dearth of conventional plot) effectively becomes the main narrative – less a structured sequence of events than an experimental hypothesis akin to the estranged worlds of science-fiction.

Such a movement on the level of setting indeed evokes the intrinsic spatiality of the utopian genre at its limits of reflexivity and minimization of content: 'What in the realist novel would be considered "mere" background setting becomes in traditional utopian writing the key element of the text... The alternative world tends to absorb many of the actions and causations normally reserved for characters in a realist narrative'.²⁶⁷ This quotation is from Tom Moylan's *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986), which argues that a 'new utopian phase began with Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (written in 1968 but not published until 1974) and continued on through Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and Samuel Delany's *Triton*'.²⁶⁸ He names such science-fictions (often influenced by feminism) 'critical utopias', describing a self-reflexive reinvention of the genre comparable to what I have been arguing for *The Girls of Slender Means* and *The Hothouse by the East River*:

the 1960s revival of sf provided the initial space for...address[ing] what had become the fate of utopianism in the twentieth century...the new utopias confronted the contradictions that pervaded utopian expression itself...Influenced as much by experimental, postmodern fiction as by sf, many spun out self-reflexive formal manoeuvres that called attention not only to their content but to the way in which they were formally produced...A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian

²⁶⁷ Moylan, pp.36-7

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p.41

tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream.²⁶⁹

While Moylan does not dwell on this relationship between utopian sf and ‘experimental, postmodern fiction’ (a connection McHale also makes on a purely formal level), the Spark novels I have considered so far suggest that the parallel emergence of metafiction and the critical utopia in this period reflects not just a general turn to postmodern self-reflexivity, but a broad reimagining of the space of post-war utopia. The ‘overlapping worlds’ device I have described is comparable to the incorporation, in several critical utopias of the sixties and seventies, of ‘two utopian programs...pitt[ed] against one another’.²⁷⁰ With this device, as in Spark, the inherent spatiality of the genre is inflected by, and becomes the primary means of, fictional self-reflexivity, of a utopianism ‘to the second power’ whose double-logic is not only a symptom of postmodern culture but ‘creates a dynamic tension that enables a critical double movement’.²⁷¹ In a recent article in *Utopian Studies* which draws on Moylan’s concept, Mark A. Tabone describes ‘a perspectival “play” created by the interaction between the two possible future worlds’ in Samuel R. Delany’s work from the late sixties: ‘Each of the utopian worlds represented in the text is presented not as an end in itself but as a means to critically problematize the other in aid of directing the reader through and past both toward a utopian horizon beyond either of them’.²⁷²

In *The Hothouse by the East River*, the historical ‘double movement’ of Spark’s 1963 novel is subject to a ‘spatialization of time’ akin to the accretion of temporal layers within urban space; Moylan describes how in the critical utopia, ‘The individual text now contains what Ernst Bloch termed a synchronic “uneven development” as the older utopian elements coexist and conflict with the contemporary elements’.²⁷³ Spark’s reflection on ‘the fate of utopianism in the twentieth century’ is here pictured as an uneven development of modern New York, but one pushed beyond a ‘realistic’ overlap of urban layers and into the realm of science-fiction’s ‘cognitive estrangement’ or recontextualization of the familiar, as in the incongruous juxtaposition of

²⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.82-3

²⁷⁰ Mark A. Tabone, ‘Beyond *Triton*: Samuel R. Delany’s Critical Utopianism and the Colliding Worlds in “We, in Some Strange Power’s Employ, Move on a Rigorous Line”’, *Utopian Studies*, Volume 24, Number 2 (2013), p.191

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid., p.187

²⁷³ Moylan, p.43

nonsynchronous Manhattan buildings.²⁷⁴ The doubling of the setting can thus be understood as a rejection of realism necessary to grasp utopia's relationship to the present as at once historical and untimely; rather than connecting utopian precedents within a linear narrative, Spark's postmodern ghost story wrenches a fragment of utopia from historical sequence, travestying the teleology of its purported 'death' by literalizing it – that is, by insisting that death for a city is less a matter of 'sudden extinction' (Jencks on modernism) than of spectral persistence and coexistence, an uneven development of urban visions.

To literalize, and so estrange, the commonsense, journalistic metaphor of New York's 'death' is itself an operation redolent of sf, as in Delany's argument (in the appendix to *Triton*) that 'Science fiction "redeems" language from the "merely metaphorical, or even the meaningless," in order to construct a fictional foreground that casts a "language shadow" over new areas of imaginative, critical space'.²⁷⁵ In this light, what I have characterised as the novel's science-fictional estrangement of the present can be seen as defamiliarizing the false realism and presentism of journalistic language in particular. As in Koolhaas's evocation of 'the torrent of negative analyses that emanates from Manhattan about Manhattan', New York appears in the novel as subject to a discursive saturation and exhaustion, most obviously in an interminable list of the city's 'serious problems' (Annie is another of Elsa's perplexed analysts):

'The hell with her shadow,' says Annie. 'Haven't we got enough serious problems in this city? We already have the youth problem, the racist problem, the distribution problem, the political problem, the economic problem, the crime problem, the matrimonial problem, the ecological problem, the divorce problem, the domiciliary problem, the consumer problem...' ²⁷⁶

This list can be seen as an example of the tactic of 'ridicule' Spark employs in her seventies novels, and theorizes in her address to the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, 'The Desegregation of Art' (1970); rather than soliciting our sympathy for these urban 'problems' in the manner of earlier social realisms – a strategy her speech criticizes as no longer effectual – this passage parodies the apocalyptic rhetoric applied to seventies New York, and more broadly, what I described above as a 'modern'

²⁷⁴ Tabone outlines 'cognitive estrangement' as 'Darko Suvin's widely known genre-defining characteristic of sf, whereby texts "defamiliarize" subject matter that yet remains familiar enough for a reader to "see all normal happenings in a dubious," that is to say, *critical*, "light."' (p.191)

²⁷⁵ Cited in Moylan, p.189

²⁷⁶ *The Hothouse by the East River*, p.108-9

view of the city as a site of social intervention and amelioration.²⁷⁷ But if we take the list seriously (as Annie seems to), it is Elsa's shadow that appears unserious relative to these more familiar urban pathologies – unrealistic, in excess of their rationalizing logic, but also tacitly utopian in its provisional existence beyond the weary discourse of 'urban crisis'. Significantly, the latter appears to be permanent, a perpetual present marked by the proliferation of sociological categories (as with Koolhaas's '*Capital of Perpetual Crisis*'). In this sense, the anomalous nature of the shadow – itself a realization of a metaphor²⁷⁸ – ultimately figures the text's utopian break from the existent via its untimeliness and contravention of realism. As in the procedure Delany associates with science-fiction, the novel's fundamental ability to depart from simply reproducing the real in its deceptive immediacy redeems the contemporary city (then the subject of dystopian crisis rhetoric) through a logic of utopian compensation. The initially 'realistic' rendering of the city as "mere" background setting' or empirical milieu – through which the novel form has historically contributed to a sociological and journalistic apprehension of the real – is contradicted and negated by the shadow, emblem of a space-time extraneous to realism's own perpetual present.

Significantly then, the double-logic of the novel's setting does not, like Moylan's critical utopias, consist of two 'fully articulated utopian visions'; the oblique rendering and partial erasure of both worlds suggests that what is at stake in this narrative structure is less the comparative, didactic juxtaposition of utopian content figured in a novel like *The Dispossessed*, but rather their formal 'conditions of possibility', as what Tabone calls a 'perspectival play' between worlds here focuses on the contingent nature of utopian vision itself. Though the alternative space Elsa seems to inhabit appears only glancingly at the very end of the novel, the signs and preconditions of its visibility (the flickering skyline, the shadow, the play of light and shade) destabilize the limits of the apartment; the overlapping worlds conceit envisions an overwhelming of closure, both spatial (in the case of the 'hothouse') and representational (in the case of the narrative itself). In this way the device thematizes the process of 'cognitive estrangement', the shift between the familiar and its inassimilable other. The latter is of course

²⁷⁷ Muriel Spark, Penelope Jardine ed., *The Golden Fleece: Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2014), pp.26-31; *The Hothouse by the East River*, p.11

²⁷⁸ In addition to its general hovering between ideality and actuality (or psychological symptom and material reality), Elsa's shadow is jokingly associated with 'shadowing', as in following and observing (p.68).

emblemized by Elsa's shadow, whose insubstantiality relative to science-fiction's fully-articulated alternative worlds embodies Spark's more formal and reflexive orientation – the shadow is less a leap into new imaginative territory than the smallest break from the real sufficient to bring it into focus as such. What I have characterised as its utopian function is not to open up an empty, unblemished space or frontier but to manifest itself within the existent, representing the 'double exposure' of Paul's anachronous utopia, its gradual loss of integrity and distortion into something qualitatively different.

As with Moylan's discussion of the lateness or postmodernism of the critical utopia, which reaches towards the *novum* only to encounter former visions, the novel's utopianism 'to the second power' implies that the new must emerge from the utopian tradition's 'uneven development'. More specifically, I have argued that *The Hothouse by the East River*, no less than Koolhaas's text, responds to the New York seventies context I began by discussing. Spark's reflexive utopianism, like Koolhaas's, centres on a city where utopian thought seems already to have flourished and become 'moribund' – 'a world totally fabricated by man', an overbuilt space thick with utopian precedents and dystopian analyses of the present. While both writers thus adopt an untimely approach to this charged discursive and material context, Spark's response is primarily one of condensation, which breaks through the 'congestion barrier' from the opposite direction than Koolhaas's more expansive spatial imaginary (whose 'new order of the colossal' establishes a frontier, 'a man-made Wild West'); what Spark's Manhattan sacrifices in realist materiality and tangibility it re-conceives as a spectral density, a shimmering coexistence of possible worlds within the text's abbreviated space, which might be seen as the negative image of the city's literal congestion (its uneven development 'to the second power').²⁷⁹ As in *The Abbess of Crewe* and *The Girls of Slender Means*, then, this spatial form is far from a straightforward allegorical condensation or miniaturization. While the setting of the apartment, like the Abbey of Crewe or May of Teck Club, acquires microcosmic associations – as in the 'problems' passage above, one of several parallels drawn between the surreal world of the 'hothouse' and the real-world urban context (a distinction blurred in references to 'Manhattan the mental clinic', 'New York, home of the vivisectioners of the mind', and so on) – its spatial and temporal incongruity with the wider city overdetermines any one-

²⁷⁹ Koolhaas, p.177

to-one correspondence with an urban macrocosm.²⁸⁰ Such an allegorical movement would again appear in terms of spatial distortion and transformation rather than a seamless correlation between part and whole, as in Auerbach's argument (discussed in the general introduction) that Spark's impure utopias assume 'abstract and asymmetrical forms' as they encounter the surrounding historical reality.

This allegorical structure, and its implied relation between the text and 'the world', comes into focus in the final scene of the novel. Recalling the image of the crumbling May of Teck Club with which I ended the previous chapter, the partial erasure of the apartment implies both its anti-utopian critique and possible transformation, as the spectral potentiality I have described again seems to survive the building's dematerialization:

[Elsa and Paul] stand outside the apartment block, looking at the scaffolding. The upper stories are already gone and the lower part is a shell...The morning breeze from the East River is already spreading the dust. Elsa stands in the morning light reading the billboard. It announces the new block of apartments to be built on the site of the old...She turns to the car, he following her, watching as she moves how she trails her faithful and lithe cloud of unknowing across the pavement.²⁸¹

As McHale argues, this moment goes beyond the demolition of the physical building to convey the termination of the characters' 'conditional existence' or 'death-world', and with it the novel itself. While Spark presents this erasure of the anachronous apartment as the laying to rest of a ghost ('Now we can have some peace,' says Elsa), the process appears as a partial one, a moment of renewal which remains haunted by a final reference to Elsa's 'faithful' shadow – as in the previous chapter, the new emerges 'on the site of the old', from its hollowed-out 'shell' and 'spreading...dust'. If the sense of historical succession in this culminating passage casts the preceding narrative in allegorical light, its movement would be towards history rather than that of history itself, whose course readers might imagine resumed with this collapse of the fictional world. Having been haunted throughout by 'spectres of reality', the diegetic world loses its integrity as history finally catches up with it, figured in the opening up of the claustrophobic 'hothouse' to the (now unproblematically natural) light and air, and 'the new block of apartments' which signals the city's restoration to historical time. Notably,

²⁸⁰ *The Hothouse by the East River*, pp.75, 11

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp.139-40

the passage quoted above is the first exterior view of the apartment (the preceding narrative having rarely moved beyond the interior and window-bay, whose relationship to the outside was always ambiguous), which places the deteriorating building in its proper spatial context, as one part of a now-living urban totality. Reflecting this return of the real, the novel's final images of Manhattan employ unusually naturalistic and quotidian detail: 'The garbage trucks are out and the early workers are passing them on the pavements...A demolition truck waits for the new day's shift to begin'.²⁸²

As in the traditional ghost story, then, the ending both releases the spectral characters from temporal concerns and frees the present from their lingering past, a narrative granted specifically urban resonance in the demolition of the anachronous 'hothouse' and the billboard's glimpse of futurity. This brief concluding image of present-day Manhattan, visible for the first time with almost realist transparency, thus emerges from its overlap with the old at its point of disappearance.²⁸³ This is the sense in which the novel, like Koolhaas's 'retroactive manifesto', can be read as an untimely approach to the then-present of seventies New York, an attempt to assume a (narrative) perspective from which it might be apprehended in historical terms. If the history of the built environment is one of its perpetual destruction (something Harvey's work has often emphasised), demolition being the reverse face of urban modernity's endless novelty, Spark imagines an untimely urban fragment preserved from this process, granted a kind of afterlife, only to rehearse its gradual deterioration and destruction as it comes into contact with the historical present. The meta-historical impulse expressed through this imaginative preservation can be distinguished from that of the traditional historical novel, a genre Lukács argues is capable of restoring our sense of the past, casting the present as the eventual outcome of the narrated historical events.²⁸⁴ If there is in *The Hothouse by the East River* an echo of this procedure, here the restored past is of course a parallel, alternative history of post-war Manhattan, whose mode of narration I have argued is antithetical to realist and historical fiction. It is as if the spatio-temporal unevenness on which the historicity of the historical novel depended has been

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ In an essay on urban nostalgia in contemporary writing about New York, Tamar Katz writes that 'we acquire a truly urban identity at the moment we react to change by remembering a vanished city...the city's constant novelty matters most for the way it generates a perpetually vanishing past' ('City Memory, City History: Urban Nostalgia, *The Colossus of New York*, and Late-Twentieth-Century Historical Fiction' in *Contemporary Literature* Volume 51, Number 4, (Winter, 2010), pp.809-810).

²⁸⁴ György Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin Press Limited, 1962), Hannah and Stanley Mitchell trans.

reinvented (in this ‘world totally fabricated by man’) as a spectral overlap, which both reflects and compensates for the unreality of the past to the present. That unreality is such that the return of the past – a fantasy which unites the historical novel and the ghost story – here coincides with a notion of its incommensurability with the present, conceived as its ultimate outcome in a different sense than in the historical novel: that is, as the site of its disappearance. In other words, the novel’s historical vocation is re-imagined as its ability to grasp the disappearance of the past in the present, which now appears as a necessary break, an opening to history as futurity, as in the freeing of the present from historical legacies in the traditional ghost story, but also the more utopian logic of Elsa’s shadow.

My argument then is that this meta-historical allegory, as much as it establishes the diegetic world in opposition to the real, is Spark’s response to the perceived ‘death’ of New York I discussed in the introduction – the gradual disappearance of the city’s collective and democratic past Harvey stresses, and equally its apparent fall *from* history (from modernity conceived as a teleological process) in the perpetual crises of the 1970s. I have stressed that the text’s allegorical condensation is not that of a historical novel like E.L. Doctorow’s *Ragtime* (1975), whose fictional exploration of New York’s early twentieth-century history might be similarly read against the city’s contemporary fate, but rather the imaginative juxtaposition of a spectral past and present – less a direct figuration of this historical turning point or its prehistory than a conceptual space where the possibility of historical change itself comes into focus. In other words, it seems to me not incidental that the novel was written at a pivotal moment in New York’s history, when the city’s future was in doubt – its ‘time...out of joint’, in the phrase from Hamlet which runs through Derrida’s *Spectres of Marx* – indeed on the verge of what Harvey sees as ‘a coup by the financial institutions against the democratically elected government of New York City’; and yet as the rhetoric of spectrality would suggest, the text registers the city’s present-day crisis in negative, while providing a form of utopian compensation for its perceived loss of history and futurity – condensation becomes not only a way of containing the real but of transforming its material density into ‘flickering’ potentiality. In this respect, the novel’s ghosts from the future are not quite ‘finance-capital spectralities’ (to return to Jameson’s phrase) – intimations of the dematerialization of built space through land speculation and the city’s incipient remodelling as a global financial hub – any more than the novel can be said to reflect or

prefigure the emergence of postmodern architecture (despite the parallels I have established with *Delirious New York*). It is rather in the semi-autonomy of its literary space that the text is able to both register and imaginatively negate these material shifts as themselves spectral possibilities emerging from this early seventies moment.

3. The Work of Tourism in *The Driver's Seat* (1970)

In this chapter I view the ostensibly apolitical and genderless figure of ‘the tourist’ as the grounds of *The Driver's Seat*'s intervention into a wider 1970s cultural and discursive context, in parallel (but not reducible) to theorizations of tourism provided by Dean MacCannell and Henri Lefebvre. If such contemporary spatial theory provides a means of thinking about Spark's novel and its relation to its historical moment, I also want to argue that *The Driver's Seat* sheds new light on the ‘early postmodern figure’ of the tourist as constructed within 1970s culture.²⁸⁵ The tourist acquires cultural significance and figurative potential in this period, on the one hand offering a tangible, at times utopian image of globalization, and on the other by allegorizing a simultaneous closure of space in the aftermath of the sixties. On one level, the protagonist's geographical mobility in this ‘story of the global village’ allegorizes and strives to totalize globalization itself, a term David Harvey claims was popularized during the 1970s when its present-day form (neoliberalism) was being constituted.²⁸⁶ But as with the shifting spatial scales and corporeal thematics discussed in the previous chapters, Lise's journey struggles to bear such allegorical weight, as its utopian movement towards global space reverses into the static locality and ‘finality’ of the novel's violent ending. Developing existing discussions of the text in terms of gender, space and representational power, I argue that in this period of the rise of second-wave feminism and the accompanying ‘feminization’ of labour, the tourist offers an ideological representation of ‘women's work’. While Lefebvre and MacCannell both suggest that what is represented in tourism is on one level the division between ‘work’ and ‘non-work’, Lise's activity appears as a touristic mimicry of labour – despite her unfettered movement, the protagonist's interpellation as a tourist and consumer confines her relentless activity to a feminized realm of surfaces, which excludes true production and ‘non-productive expense’ alike. My argument here draws from later analyses of the gendered nature of space and mobility, and in particular from Meaghan Morris's 1988 essay ‘At Henry Parkes motel’. While Morris, Lefebvre and MacCannell analyse the symbolic dimension of tourism from a theoretical distance, the novel's hermetic ‘spatial form’ attempts to encapsulate the signs and surfaces of the tourist world. Reading Spark

²⁸⁵ MacCannell, p.xvi

²⁸⁶ *Spaces of Hope*, p.12

in context allows us to think about how the spatialized and self-reflexive form of much postmodern fiction in the sixties and seventies was not only symptomatic of a loss of historicity or ‘inward turn’, but responded to the increasingly representational nature of social reality itself –something tourism’s commodification of space and place makes particularly visible. As Hal Foster puts it in a discussion of contemporary modes of postmodern reference such as photorealism, this shift produced art that was both ‘referential *and* simulacral’, contrary to postmodern theories of the obliteration of the former by the latter.²⁸⁷ In light of Foster’s arguments, I read the novel’s own mediated relation to its historical moment as neither one of critical distance nor sheer pastiche, but as a way of indicating the real in its smoothing over by the simulacral, like the tourist journey which both attests to and eradicates a frontier (as in MacCannell’s reading discussed below). By foregrounding the closure of the tourist world it contains within its airtight spatial form, *The Driver’s Seat* points less to an all-encompassing order of simulacra than to a symbolic order which reduces the subject’s activity to a depthless (but material) image. It is the ‘situatedness’ of this image, rather than the totalizing ambitions of her mobility, which makes the tourist an allegorical figure at this post-sixties moment.

Following a breakdown at work, Lise, the protagonist of *The Driver’s Seat*, travels from Northern Europe to an unnamed ‘foreign city’ in the South, probably Rome,²⁸⁸ where she engages in various shopping and tourist activities and claims to be looking for a boyfriend.²⁸⁹ But she eventually tracks down a man she knows to be a ‘sex maniac’, recently released from a stint in prison and six years’ treatment in a clinic, and drives him to ‘the grounds of an empty villa’; reluctantly following Lise’s own instructions and with the aid of the commodities she has purchased in the course of the trip, he ties her up, rapes and murders her.²⁹⁰ Elaine Showalter reads this narrative, which biographer Martin Stannard suggests was inspired by a contemporary news story of a German woman killed in Rome²⁹¹, in the context of representations of male violence in seventies women’s writing. Describing *The Driver’s Seat* as ‘an icy tour de force about

²⁸⁷ Foster, p.130

²⁸⁸ The evidence which indicates Rome is plausible but mostly extra-textual (given the deliberate lack of geographical specificity within the text itself), such as the fact that Spark wrote *The Driver’s Seat* while living there, basing the plot on a news report of a woman who died in the city (Stannard, p.133). The film version (1974, dir. Giuseppe Patroni Griffi) is set in the capital.

²⁸⁹ *The Driver’s Seat*, p.23

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.103, 25

²⁹¹ Stannard, pp.363-4

violence, sex, and power' which questions the nature of 'choice' and 'female control', her 1981 essay concludes:²⁹²

The feminist fantasies of the liberated will characteristic of the seventies – the will towards autonomy, the will to change our lives, to release sexual and political force in a confrontation with confining institutions – have come up against an external limit, as have the expansive fantasies of other revolutionary movements in education, politics, and civil rights.²⁹³

Along more metafictional, but similarly feminist lines, Martin McQuillan reads the whole novel as an 'institutionally patriarchal [police] report' which 'writes to type and blames the female victim'.²⁹⁴ In both readings, *The Driver's Seat*, though published at the beginning of a feminist decade, envisions a containment of 'the liberated will', which Showalter situates in light of a broader post-sixties closure of the political (a cultural narrative discussed in the general introduction). McQuillan also sees the intrusion of 'the student riots [of 1968], and all the cultural and ideological baggage they carry with them' in the protagonist's brief encounter with a political protest, whose police containment similarly evokes an atmosphere of repression and recuperation.²⁹⁵ In this light, the text might be read as an 'end of the sixties' novel, which gains a certain topicality when read in context, as its basis in a media report would suggest.

Peter Kemp points to another aspect of the novel's topicality, which relates its vision of a containment of individual agency (here represented by 'travel') to a form of spatial closure:

The Driver's Seat is contemporary, too, in being a story of the global village, of a world infected with a deadly, artificial sameness... The same goods are on sale at the northern airport from which Lise departs as at the city in the south where she arrives.... Travel, in this world, appears pointless but, ironically, has swelled to frightening proportions.²⁹⁶

Leaving aside his association of globalization and 'sameness' (I will be arguing that Lise's journey is defined by a logic of structured difference), Peter Kemp's reading directs attention to the role of setting and space in the novel, which I aim to elaborate in what follows:

Spark...carefully sets her plot against environmental anonymity, some of it occurring in transit – airport departure and arrival lounges, hotels, bars,

²⁹² Elaine Showalter, 'Rethinking the Seventies: Women Writers and Violence', *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (1981), pp.162, 164

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.170

²⁹⁴ McQuillan, p.3

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19

²⁹⁶ Peter Kemp, *Muriel Spark* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1975), p.125

department stores – most of it in what seems, but is never said, to be the Italy of mass vacation, tourist crowds, and halting, polyglot communication.²⁹⁷

Critic Jonathan Kemp has considered the stylistic dimension of the novel's spatiality:

Everything is described externally, as if it were being viewed through a camera lens...It is, in a very real sense, superficial, all surface, but self-consciously and stylistically so for reasons that will be offered.²⁹⁸

The Driver's Seat is characteristic of Spark's fiction in this period in that it employs what Joseph Frank calls 'spatial form', most strikingly in the frequent incursion of prolepsis, which works to spatialize the otherwise chronological narrative, as will be seen. In addition, the novel is brief at just over 100 pages, mostly written in the present tense and in a spare, visual style Jonathan Kemp aptly describes here. My reading however focuses less on the poststructuralist thematic of 'unspeakability' he emphasises than on the referential dimension of this heightened superficiality, which seems to me bound up with the actual spaces of consumption and tourism in which the narrative action takes place. Few critics (besides Peter Kemp above) have seen the latter as more than incidental setting, though even Lise's death occurs at the site of a tourist spectacle, such that the whole narrative appears on one level as a dark parody of a tourist journey. On the one hand, there is a realism to the novel's array of commodified surfaces, in the sense that anyone who wanted to find out what kind of food might have been served on a commercial flight around 1970 would find a detailed description in *The Driver's Seat*. At the same time, by approaching tourism and space from a more theoretical perspective, I want to argue that the realism of this empirical world is a false or simulacral one, as the novel's more metafictional dimension – the concern with representational power emphasised by McQuillan's reading in particular – works to expose.

In Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) and Dean MacCannell's *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (1976), tourism's material reality as an industry and form of leisure is accompanied by a set of representational or aesthetic practices. For both theorists, 'the tourist' consumes space in the form of signs, such that travel is rendered, if not 'pointless' (as Peter Kemp has it), then a journey through the 'universal

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p.122

²⁹⁸ Jonathan Kemp, "'Her Lips Are Slightly Parted': The Ineffability of Erotic Sociality in Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat*", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, volume 54, Number 3, (Fall, 2008), p.544

commodification of our object world'.²⁹⁹ MacCannell's study, which the author began 'in Paris in 1968', views 'tourism and revolution [as] the two poles of modern consciousness – a willingness to accept, even venerate, things as they are on the one hand, a desire to transform things on the other'.³⁰⁰ As a 'neutralizing', 'early postmodern figure', the tourist thus appears as an apt emblem of a post-sixties containment of 'the liberated will' – not only the encountering of an 'external limit' (as in male violence or police repression, though Lise certainly encounters both) but its recuperation within a space '*consumed...as a vast commodity*' (Lefebvre).³⁰¹ In a passage from *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre describes 'the current transformation of the perimeter of the Mediterranean into a leisure-oriented space for industrialized Europe', which might be seen as a concrete instance of the spatialization of capital (or the emergence of what Jameson calls postmodern space) in the 1970s:

as a 'non-work' space (set aside not just for vacations but also for convalescence, rest, retirement, and so on), this area has acquired a specific role in the social division of labour...At times this space even seems to transcend the constraints imposed by the neocapitalism which governs it...It has thus attained a certain qualitative distinctiveness as compared with the major industrial agglomerations, where a pure culture of the quantitative reigns supreme. If, by abandoning all our critical faculties, we were to accept this 'distinctiveness' at face value, we would get a mental picture of a space given over completely to unproductive expense, to a vast wastefulness, to an intense and gigantic potlatch of surplus objects, symbols and energies...The quasi-cultist focus of localities based on leisure would thus form a striking contrast to the productive focus of North European cities. The waste and expense, meanwhile, would appear as the end-point of a temporal sequence starting in the workplace, in production-based space, and leading to the consumption of space, sun and sea, and of spontaneous or induced eroticism.³⁰²

Lefebvre is arguing that the material shifts comprising spatialization are accompanied by a process of representation – a discourse of tourism and globalization, but equally a transformation of physical spaces into signs – which envisions the opening up of a utopian 'non-work' space at the outer limits of the productive system. His corrective in the next sentence implies that the expansion of international tourism during the 1970s in a sense heralds the opposite – the closure of the Mediterranean perimeter via 'a sort of

²⁹⁹ Lefebvre, pp. 58-9; Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Psychology Press, 1992), p.15.

³⁰⁰ MacCannell, pp.1-3

³⁰¹ Ibid., pp.xix, xvi; Lefebvre, p.349

³⁰² Lefebvre, pp.58-9

neo-colonization', a leap in the productive forces which now extend to 'the production of space itself' (distinct from an earlier 'production of things in space'):³⁰³

What a travesty such a picture would be, however, enshrining as it does both the illusion of transparency and the illusion of naturalness. The truth is that all this seemingly non-productive expense is planned with the greatest care: centralized, organized, hierarchized, symbolized and programmed to the nth degree, it serves the interests of the tour-operators, bankers and entrepreneurs of places such as London and Hamburg.³⁰⁴

The notion of a liberating mobility outside or at the limits of the 'total system' recalls the post-'68 turn to geographical metaphors within French theory which I discussed in the introduction. Indeed MacCannell's *The Tourist* envisions its titular character 'seeking fulfillment in his own alienation – nomadic, placeless, a kind of subjectivity without spirit, a "dead subject"'.³⁰⁵ But if the Deleuzian nomad posits a liminal or interstitial space which exceeds the total system, MacCannell's tourist is a somewhat tragic character who eradicates the very authenticity, difference or limit he seeks to uncover; while both figures attempt to outflank a presumed closure of space, the tourist is ultimately complicit in 'the internationalization of culture... a system of esthetic surfaces which are comprehensive and coercive'.³⁰⁶ Contrary to the nomad's deconstructive, anti-totalizing mobility, MacCannell sees the tourist as a totalizing figure, whose movement aligns with the theorist's own anthropological project: 'One might legitimately ask just how far modernization has progressed and follow it out to its furthest limits by following the tourists out to theirs'.³⁰⁷ If this 'collective striving for a transcendence of the modern totality... is doomed to eventual failure' – not least because the tourist perpetually extends the limits of 'modernization' – such a modernist ambition nonetheless differs from the nomad's postmodern resistance to modernity and totality.³⁰⁸ Caren Kaplan discusses the 'more historically specific, economically grounded' mobility of the tourist to shed light on discourses of modernist exile and postmodern displacement, both of which rely on their distance from tourism (Zygmunt Bauman similarly opposes the tourist and the 'vagabond').³⁰⁹ As an agent of the 'grounded' forms of mass-movement which Lefebvre sees engaged in an ongoing

³⁰³ Ibid., p.62

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p.58-9

³⁰⁵ MacCannell, p.xvi

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p.183

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p.13

³⁰⁹ Kaplan, p.57. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p.77

production and consumption of space, the tourist is a subject who embodies the global yet saturated ‘postmodern space’ which emerged during the 1960s particularly starkly (discussed in the introduction in terms of an eradication of ‘the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism’).³¹⁰ If the nomad represents an imaginative resolution to this saturation – an attempt to relocate utopia to an ‘outside’ or ‘elsewhere’, often in peripheral ‘spaces of alterity’ – such solutions encounter their impossibility in the tourist, whose escapist departure from the workplace has always-already produced its destination.

Indeed for both Lefebvre and MacCannell, tourism is defined by the opposing pole of production. MacCannell describes the transformation of work

into an object of tourist curiosity. In every corner of the modern world, *labor* and *production* are being presented to sightseers in guided tours of factories and in museums of science and industry...It is only by making a fetish of the work of others, by transforming it into an "amusement" ("do-it-yourself"), a spectacle (Grand Coulee), or an attraction (the guided tours of Ford Motor Company), that modern workers, on vacation, can apprehend work as a part of a meaningful totality.³¹¹

For MacCannell, the tourist wants to penetrate the ‘social surfaces’ of modernity and break into a more authentic back region of society where its normally-concealed workings are thought to reside. The structure of this argument recalls Marx’s intention to penetrate beyond exchange into a hidden abode of production, what Jameson calls ‘the promise of a deeper inside view’ of capital.³¹² MacCannell notes, however, that this trajectory is itself constructed by the tourist industry, which engineers ‘staged back region[s]’ for touristic consumption – in other words, surfaces which present themselves as depths.³¹³ If such a visual consumption of work inverts Lefebvre’s emphasis on its conspicuous absence in dedicated leisure spaces, both writers share the notion that tourism dramatizes and mystifies the spatial division of labour. Following Kaplan and other feminist critics who have explored the gendered nature of mobility and its rhetoric, I want to suggest that these readings also imply a sexual division of labour, which the tacitly male tourist seems able to ‘transcend’, as MacCannell puts it: ‘[T]he work display permits Industrial Man to reflect upon his own condition and to transcend

³¹⁰ ‘Periodizing the Sixties’, p.207

³¹¹ MacCannell, p.6

³¹² *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, p.15

³¹³ MacCannell, p.99

it'.³¹⁴ In 'At Henry Parkes motel', a *Cultural Studies* article which includes a discussion of MacCannell's book, Meaghan Morris reflects on 'the association of men with travel and women with home'.³¹⁵ Discussing George Van den Abbeele's 'Sightseers: the tourist as theorist' (an article which itself comments on *The Tourist* and argues for 'a theoretico-practical Nomadism'), Morris notes that whereas travel is often presented as a kind of labour – she refers to 'the work of tourism' – 'home' is...a space which is *blank*...figuratively constructed not only as a womb, but as unproductive – a womb prior to labour'.³¹⁶ She goes on to connect the figure of the nomad with a postmodern erasure of 'home' or 'domus' and 'a positive denial of situatedness in the social'.³¹⁷ As Kaplan's *Questions of Travel* shows, many feminist theorists have turned to 'the politics of location' as a way of countering not only traditional universalizing conceptions of space and place, but a postmodern tendency to elide the significance of 'situatedness' altogether – often in favour of a valorization of displacement which tends to conceal the social production of mobility and its spaces. These postmodern conceptualizations often rest on the kind of entrenched dichotomies analysed by the geographer Doreen Massey, such that 'masculine' time – as in Lefebvre's 'temporal sequence' of Mediterranean tourism – is imagined transcending 'feminine' space (associated with immanence according to Massey).³¹⁸ In light of Morris's comments, it seems notable that the associations of surplus, rest, consumption and sexuality which define Lefebvre's 'non-work space' fall on the 'not-A' side of Massey's 'dichotomous dualisms', and evoke 'the sphere of reproduction historically "reserved" for women' – the latter's productivity is thus effaced along with that of 'the tour-operators, bankers and entrepreneurs'.³¹⁹ These qualities also play on a similarly dichotomous conception of the Mediterranean as the negative image of the productive dominance of Northern Europe – on the former's cultural construction as 'weak, effeminate, southern, and exotic', and its economic construction as 'a site for the 'reproduction' of Northern labour power'.³²⁰ What Lefebvre calls the illusory 'transparency' and 'naturalness' of

³¹⁴ Ibid., p.58

³¹⁵ Meaghan Morris, 'At Henry Parkes motel', *Cultural Studies* (1988), Volume 2, Issue 1, p.2

³¹⁶ Ibid., p.12

³¹⁷ Ibid., p.16

³¹⁸ Doreen Massey, 'Politics and Space/Time', *New Left Review* I/196, (November-December 1992), pp.65-84

³¹⁹ Antonella Corsani, 'Beyond the Myth of Woman: The Becoming-Transfeminist of (Post-)Marxism', *SubStance* #112, Vol. 36, no.1 (2007), p.108

³²⁰ Beverly Allen, Mary J. Russo, *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p.3. Giovanni Arrighi, *Semiperipheral Development: The Politics of Southern Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1985), p.58

space here conveys an empty ground for the male tourist, whether a ‘stifling home’ (in Morris’s phrase) or seductively available destination.³²¹ In this sense, tourism exploits gender and geographical ‘differences’ together as means of signifying its difference from work, while in fact incorporating both into a greater production of space. Such differences also became sites of resistance in the contestation of the sexual and spatial division of labour during the 1960s and 70s, as in the Italian feminist demand of ‘wages for housework’ and the politicization of ‘Mediterranean idleness’ as a basis for the refusal of work.³²² Whether the traditional sphere of ‘non-work’ was to be expanded, escaped from, or acknowledged as productive in itself, the spatialized politics of seventies social movements presumed, like Lefebvre, that ‘[t]he division of labour affects the whole of space – not just the “space of work”, not just the factory floor’.³²³ As the passage from *The Production of Space* would suggest, the expanded spatiality of international tourism at once makes this fact particularly concrete, and mystifies it; the increasingly unstable Fordist separation of ‘work’ and ‘non-work’ here appears as apolitical and even utopian in its offer of a feminized realm of pleasure and self-realization.

Prior to the journey, Spark establishes Lise in her northern home and work space, a realm of closure and immanence where ‘a pure culture of the quantitative reigns supreme’ (as Lefebvre describes the industrialized North):

She walks along the broad street, scanning the windows for the dress she needs, the necessary dress. Her lips are slightly parted; she, whose lips are usually pressed together with the daily disapprovals of the accountants’ office where she has worked continually, except for the months of illness, since she was eighteen, that is to say, for sixteen years and some months. Her lips, when she does not speak or eat, are normally pressed together like the ruled line of a balance sheet, marked straight with her old-fashioned lipstick, a final and a judging mouth, a precision instrument, a detail-warden of a mouth; she has five girls under her and two men. Over her are two women and five men.³²⁴

The phrase ‘Her lips are slightly parted’ appears thirteen times in the novel according to Jonathan Kemp, for whom it signifies ‘the body’s erotic sociality; like Spark’s text, the

³²¹ Elsewhere in *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre briefly reflects on *chora*-like ‘feminine’ space ‘which, though not denied, is integrated, thrust down into the ‘abyss’ of the earth, as the place where seeds are sown and the dead are laid, as ‘world’ (p.245).

³²² For a discussion of the wages for housework movement in Italy, see Andrea Righi, *Biopolitics and Social Change in Italy: From Gramsci to Pasolini to Negri* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.55. On the refusal of work, see Franco Berardi, ‘Reassessing Italian Modernization: Social Autonomy in the Age of Exhaustion’, *diacritics*, Volume 39, Number 3, (Fall, 2009), p.31

³²³ Lefebvre, p.347

³²⁴ *The Driver’s Seat*, p.9

body is a mode of practice that will always resist any easy categorization'.³²⁵ In this example though the image precisely categorizes Lise's activity as 'non-work', and specifically consumption, forming a binary opposition with the 'lips...pressed together', which conversely evoke a puritan frugality, a productivity founded on the denial of waste and expense. '[S]ensing' the dress she will wear on holiday as she 'swerves' from store to store, the former image literalizes consumption as a kind of receptivity: 'her lips are slightly parted as if to receive a secret flavour'.³²⁶ And yet as the reciprocity of the images would suggest, this strangely intense activity, prefiguring that of her journey as a whole, already hints at a work ethic of consumption, an economy of 'needs' (later she 'sens[es] the dress that she must get').³²⁷ The passage above stresses that Lise has earned her leisure time, and brings the purchase of 'the necessary dress' into the quantification and self-regulation evoked in the metaphors of closed lips as 'a balance sheet' and 'warden'.

If Lise has been shaped according to the 'ruled line[s]' of the accountants' office, her fixing within a spatial and sexual division of labour ('she has five girls under her and two men...') extends beyond the workplace. Significantly, Lise's journey south is preceded by a painstaking description of her flat, which foregrounds the *domus* as a precondition for her mobility. Like the office, the space is one of closure and abnegation:

The room is meticulously neat. It is a one-room flat in an apartment house. Since it was put up the designer has won prizes for his interiors...The lines of the room are pure; space is used as a pattern in itself, circumscribed by the dextrous pinewood outlines that ensued from the designer's ingenuity and austere taste when he was young, unknown, studious and strict-principled.³²⁸

Like the austere domestic settings of *The Girls of Slender Means* and *The Hothouse by the East River*, the purity of this utopian (or dystopian) space seems to depend upon a diminution of the body. Evoking the spectral logic of those novels, Helene Meyers points out that pinewood is 'often used for coffins...in this cold, clean, impersonal space, Lise experiences death in life'.³²⁹ And yet Lise's near-disappearance into the

³²⁵ Jonathan Kemp, pp.549, 554

³²⁶ *The Driver's Seat*, p.10

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.10

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.13-4

³²⁹ Helene Meyers, *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), p.78

austere geometry and unified surfaces of the flat here coincides with a kind of hyper-functionality:

She has added very little to the room; very little is needed, for the furniture is all fixed, adaptable to various uses, and stackable. Stacked into a panel are six folding chairs, should the tenant decide to entertain six for dinner. The writing desk extends to a dining table, and when the desk is not in use it, too, disappears into the pinewood wall... The bed is by day a narrow seat with overhanging book-cases; by night, it swivels out to accommodate the sleeper... everything is contrived to fold away into the dignity of unvarnished pinewood. And in the bathroom as well, nothing need be seen, nothing be left lying about. The bed-supports, the door, the window frame, the hanging cupboard, the storage space, the shelves, the desk that extends, the tables that stack – they are made of such pinewood as one may never see again in a modest bachelor apartment. Lise keeps her flat as clean-lined and clear to return to after work as if it were uninhabited. The swaying tall pines among the litter of cones on the forest floor have been subdued into silence and into obedient bulks.³³⁰

Following the human mastery over nature glimpsed in the final sentence, this space has been produced as a constellation of use-values which place ‘the tenant’ at the centre of total domestic environment. Spark implies that this interior space, no less than the office, works to ‘produce’ Lise in turn, as she adapts her life to the austere lineaments of the flat and dissolves into a list of predetermined functions (‘the desk that extends, the tables that stack’).

The functionality of Lise’s flat points to the referential dimension of the novel’s setting and spatiality, through which, I am arguing, the text offers its own vision of the relationship between work and non-work. The economist Michel Aglietta describes ‘the creation of a *functional aesthetic* (‘design’), which acquired fundamental social importance’ during the period of Fordism; mass-production established ‘a functional link between use-values to create the need for their complementarity. In this way, consumption activity could be rendered uniform and fully subjected to the constraints of its items of equipment’.³³¹ In a study on the cultural politics of consumption, Martyn J. Lee similarly notes that under Fordism, ‘the prevailing industrial ethos which sought the foreclosure of economic contingency via a process of bureaucratic planning and calculation was effectively mapped onto the physical living spaces of the everyday

³³⁰ *The Driver’s Seat*, pp.13-5

³³¹ Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation: The US Experience* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), pp.160-1

environment'.³³² The functional aesthetic then registered the increasing penetration of 'non-work' spaces by the logic of productivity – and thus, as feminist critics pointed out, made particularly visible the artificial separation of the spheres of production and reproduction. In the 1970s there emerged a feminist critique of the declining Fordist-Keynesian regime, which argued that post-war welfare (in the words of Antonella Corsani)

trapped women in the "house," the domestic space which was, we must remember, becoming a space of high technology as a result of consumer products (from the washer and dryer to the dishwasher, etc.) and, far from being the mythical space of affect and loving care, was a space of enclosure and violence.³³³

Despite the seamless pinewood that so wholly 'circumscribe[s]' her, Lise is not exactly 'trapped' within this hyper-rationalized domestic space, to which in fact she never returns – contrary to the standard tourist circuit which begins and ends at 'home'. As she meticulously 'prepares for her departure the next day', her domestic work rather acquires a teleology which points beyond its walls. Recalling Lefebvre's observation that tourism's 'non-productive expense is planned with the greatest care', the scene hints that Lise's holiday activities will be subjected to the same rationalization and quantification which shapes her work and domestic life:

Lise breathes as if sleeping, deeply tired, but her eye-slits open from time to time. Her hand moves to her brown leather bag...and she raises herself, pulling the bag towards her. She leans on one elbow and empties the contents on the bed. She lifts them one by one, checking carefully, and puts them back...her air ticket, a power compact, a lipstick, a comb...There is a bunch of keys. She smiles at them and her lips are parted. There are six keys on the steel ring, two Yale door-keys, a key that might belong to a functional cupboard or drawer, a small silver-metal key of the type commonly belonging to zip-fastened luggage, and two tarnished car-keys. Lise takes the car-keys off the ring and lays them aside; the rest go back in her bag. Her passport, in its transparent plastic envelope, goes back in her bag. With straightened lips she prepares for her departure the next day.³³⁴

In this scene, Lise has just been sent home 'to pack and rest' after some kind of nervous breakdown at work; she returns to this space of reproduction '[s]till heaving with exhaustion'. Her preparations, compulsively resumed despite Lise being 'deeply tired' (she has already packed her bag but here 'empties the contents' and re-packs them), come into focus as an ambiguous kind of work – almost mechanical movements tailored

³³² Martyn J. Lee, *Consumer Culture Reborn: The Cultural Politics of Consumption* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.93

³³³ Corsani, p.122

³³⁴ *The Driver's Seat*, p.15

to this functionalist domestic space, which trace in advance the journey itself. Whereas the feminist critique of domestic entrapment Corsani refers to often focused on the non-teleological, ‘dead-end’ nature of unwaged housework (an instance of what Jane Elliott calls ‘static time’), tourism grants Lise’s domestic movements a definite purpose and destination.³³⁵ Contrary to the notion of travel as a transcendence of a blank and non-productive ‘home’, the narrative thus lingers long enough on this *domus* for readers to witness the beginnings of what Morris calls ‘the work of tourism’. The latter confines Lise not to an individual, static space but to an array of functional surfaces and objects which extend beyond the home, as will be seen.

Significantly, though, this functionality emerges at the level of style. As will be clear from the passages quoted above (which I have considerably shortened), the description of the flat, of Lise’s actions and possessions, is itself somewhat laborious; the branching list of keys and the itemization of ‘adaptable’ furniture in particular seem to aspire to a comprehensive survey of the interior, which unfolds within a perpetual present (the tense used throughout, with the exception of the proleptic passages discussed below). In such passages, form and content seem in close accord, as Spark’s blank, minimal prose comprises its own functional aesthetic, in a style one critic has described as ‘machine-made’.³³⁶ Throughout the text, objects resist symbolic or psychological meaning; the novel’s detailed but pointedly neutral style betrays Spark’s enthusiasm for Alain Robbe-Grillet, discussed by Michael Gardiner and others.³³⁷ But the Fordist connections I draw above point to a more worldly referent for this style (to which ‘uniform’ and even ‘bureaucratic’ apply just as well as they do the functionalist aesthetic), and indeed it is *The Driver’s Seat*’s immersion in a commercial, mass-produced, or in the case of Lise’s flat, highly ‘designed’ object-world – very much the terrain of mass-tourism – which precludes symbolism within the text itself, whether or not Spark shared Robbe-Grillet’s aesthetic and philosophical objections to metaphor.³³⁸ Far from transcending spatial ‘immanence’, Lise’s journey and the narrative as a whole amount to little more than her

³³⁵ See Jane Elliott, *Popular Feminist Fiction as American Allegory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

³³⁶ Angus Wilson, ‘Journey to Jerusalem,’ *Observer* (17 October, 1965), p.28 cited in Bryan Cheyette, *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014) p.273

³³⁷ Michael Gardiner, *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp.27-8

³³⁸ As laid out in his *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), Richard Howard trans.

movement between domestic spaces (from the flat to her hotel room in the ‘foreign city’) and generic sites of consumption (a shopping mall, a café, several tourist locations), in which she purchases or rejects various commodities (themselves, like the stain-resistant dress and food processor she considers, often of the functionalist aesthetic), before itemizing and rearranging them with the same compulsive motions she first performs in her flat. I suggest that an attention to the materiality and facticity of objects of the kind associated with Robbe-Grillet’s work here responds to this particular subject-matter – that in its apparent neutrality and objectivity, *The Driver’s Seat* tries to attend to such quotidian, commercial, and ‘non-literary’ spaces, to find a style adequate to the empirical surfaces of *this* object-world. Consequently, there is a sense in which the attempt to represent the ‘blank’ of the *domus* (to return to Morris’s terms) – a vocation apparent in much feminist cultural production from the decade – in *The Driver’s Seat* only reproduces a pre-existing, ‘machine-made’ blankness.³³⁹ As Lise is visualized within domestic space, she is effectively neutralized as a subject, her productivity reduced to a corollary of her ‘designed’ environment – to a kind of style.

Lise’s impersonal flat, then, is part of a whole object world so technologically enclosed as to exclude ‘affect and loving care’ altogether (as Corsani describes the myth of the house). Far from humanizing the protagonist and explicitly critiquing this enclosure, Spark’s functionalist prose works to accentuate this loss of affect. And yet such a loss is itself an affect of a kind, and I want to suggest that it is through the conspicuous neutrality of the writing that a sense of the ‘violence and enclosure’ of the diegetic world emerges most disquietingly, not only on the level of content but in the way the text (like the novels discussed in the previous chapters) lays bare its own narrative closure. That *The Driver’s Seat*’s minimalist style has little room for affect is clearest in Spark’s refusal to provide any information about Lise’s interior life, such as a psychological motivation for her actions – again, a technique employed by Robbe-Grillet is here bound up with the seamless surfaces or depthlessness of the spaces she passes through, as with the purported superficiality of tourism and consumption. Throughout the novel, the protagonist herself is thus rendered as a kind of narrative blank, even as her external movements are described with pedantic, seemingly

³³⁹ See, for example, the films *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975, Chantal Akerman dir.) and *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977, Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen dir.), both of which visualize and linger on domestic work, as does much feminist performance art from the sixties and seventies.

exhaustive detail; very much a ‘flat’ rather than ‘round’ character (to evoke E.M. Forster’s distinction), Lise is hardly more than a trajectory or ‘line of flight’ which serves to organize the action.³⁴⁰ I have already mentioned her facial expressions, which tempt the reader as possible clues to the protagonist’s mental state or deeper character, like a close-up in a film or a physical description in a realist novel; I argued that they correspond rather to a regulation of expenditure and consumption, whose binary logic, from ‘pressed together’ to ‘slightly parted’, suggests the smallest possible deviation from emotional neutrality. When the narrator follows another lengthy description of Lise’s movements with the questions ‘Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?’, Spark foregrounds the seamless closure of the narration by pointing to what lies beyond it.³⁴¹ Readers are made aware of the narrative’s relentless exteriority – that the protagonist is being apprehended from without – which elides Lise as a subject even as it delimits and fixes her in space. As much as depthlessness and loss of affect are familiar postmodern themes, what I have described as the novel’s attention to particular postmodern spaces conveys no generalized ‘death of the subject’. Beyond the metaphorical superficiality evoked in the word ‘touristic’, MacCannell describes tourism as ‘a system of esthetic surfaces which are comprehensive and coercive’, while Lefebvre emphasises the false ‘naturalness’ and ‘transparency’ of tourist spaces. Whereas both theorists attempt to expose tourism’s ideological deep structure, it is by refusing depth altogether, by rendering Lise as little more than a wrinkle in the fabric of the tourist world, that Spark directs attention to its ‘comprehensive and coercive’ closure.³⁴² If the text visualizes ‘the work of tourism’, that work is shown to depend upon Lise’s consignment to visibility alone – to a feminized realm conceived as superficial, literally without depth. Discussing ‘[t]he conception of woman as consumer’, Susan Stewart suggests that the discourse of ‘the feminine’ is constituted ‘as surface’, which masks ‘a purely material relation, that relation which places women within the cycle of exchange and simultaneously makes their labor invisible’.³⁴³ Extending beyond an entrapment in the home, Lise’s representation as a tourist confines her not to a space but to a surface, a realm of sheer appearances conveyed through the depthlessness of Spark’s prose.

³⁴⁰ E.M. Forster outlines this distinction in his *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Edward Arnold, 1927)

³⁴¹ *The Driver’s Seat*, p.50

³⁴² In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), A. M. Sheridan Smith trans., Michel Foucault refers to ‘man’ as merely a ‘wrinkle in our knowledge’ (p.xxv).

³⁴³ Stewart, p.168

Lise's hotel room when she arrives in 'the foreign city', though not quite the austere dystopia of the flat, is functional and segmented 'in the interests of hotel economy', and her resumed preparations for 'departure' acquire the same instrumental, almost mechanical quality.³⁴⁴ Paid domestic work is referenced when Lise calls a hotel maid and shouts at her in several different languages about the shortcomings of her room; the protagonist's own actions, however, point to a different kind of labour:

She takes out a dress, hangs it in the cupboard, takes it off the hanger again, folds it neatly and puts it back...she takes out a pink cotton dress, hangs it in the cupboard, then after hesitating for a few seconds she takes it off the hanger again, folds it carefully and lays it back in her case. It may be that she is indeed contemplating an immediate departure from the hotel...Lise is lifting the corners of her carefully packed things, as if in absent-minded accompaniment to some thought, who knows what? Then, with some access of decision, she takes off her dress-gown and slippers and starts putting on again the same clothes that she wore on her journey. When she is dressed she folds the dressing-gown, puts the slippers back in their plastic bag, and replaces them in her suitcase. She also puts back everything that she has taken out of her sponge-bag, and packs this away.³⁴⁵

Peter Kemp notes a 'marked emphasis on wrapping and protection...Clothes, food, implements, documents: continually, almost obsessively, attention is drawn to the way that these are covered up by plastic or by paper'.³⁴⁶ Here the fetishistic display and folding away of the dresses – whose reversible motions recall the 'meticulously neat' flat in which 'everything is contrived to fold away into the dignity of unvarnished pinewood' – dramatizes in miniature the reduction of Lise's agency and productivity to an interplay of objective surfaces, through which she shapes both her journey and the narrative itself. Again domestic space is a site of work, but a work of style, which as with the image of opened and closed lips, conveys a regulation and measuring of personal consumption, conveyed through laborious, exterior description. What is being planned and calculated here is effectively the narrative action to come, as the commodities, though refusing symbolic or psychological associations, acquire a telos in their realisation of the impending plot. '[I]n Lise's careful selection of her death-dress', as Showalter puts it, 'her patient pursuit of her assassin, Spark has given us the devastated postulates of feminine wisdom: that a woman creates her identity by choosing her clothes, that she creates her history by choosing her man'.³⁴⁷ This process

³⁴⁴ *The Driver's Seat*, p.45

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.47-8

³⁴⁶ Peter Kemp, p.123

³⁴⁷ Showalter, p.164

of selection begins in the first scene of the novel, in the protagonist's discrimination between functional surfaces which effectively initiates her movement. The first words of the novel are those of a 'salesgirl' describing the '[s]pecially treated...new stainless fabric' of a dress, which she tells Lise will prevent 'the marks that you pick up on your journey'.³⁴⁸ When the protagonist rejects this first dress, 'throwing it on the floor in the utmost irritation', Spark stresses the exclusions which permit Lise's self-definition; the narrator notes that the item 'has not been a successful line...three others, identical but for sizes, hang in the back storeroom awaiting the drastic reduction of next week's sale, [having] been too vivid for most customers' taste'.³⁴⁹ As with the unpacking and folding away in the hotel scene, agency expresses itself through a series of mechanical choices, the selection or rejection of a predetermined 'line' which in turn determines Lise's physical trajectory. She 'steps speedily out of' the first dress, 'getting quickly, with absolute purpose, into her own blouse and skirt', before '[going] to the door almost at a run'.³⁵⁰

She walks along the broad street, scanning the windows for the dress she needs, the necessary dress...She swerves in her course at the door of a department store and enters. Resort Department: she has seen the dress.³⁵¹

In this way, the first part of the protagonist's journey comprises a movement from the rejected, stainless dress, 'patterned with green and purple squares on a white background, with blue spots within the green squares, cyclamen spots within the purple', to a 'lemon-yellow top with a skirt patterned in bright V's of orange, mauve and blue', made of 'a washable cotton' – a displacement between commodified surfaces which seem to structure Lise's mobility.³⁵²

At a department store in the foreign city, the protagonist buys an orange scarf and

a striped man's necktie, dark blue and yellow. Then, glimpsing through the crowd a rack from which dangles a larger assortment of men's ties, each neatly enfolded in transparent plastic, she changes her mind about the coloured tie she has bought. The girl at the counter...accompanies Lise over to the rack to see if an exchange can be effected. Lise selects two ties, one plain black knitted cotton, the other green. Then, changing her mind once more, she says... 'Alright, give me two black ties, they're always useful'.³⁵³

³⁴⁸ *The Driver's Seat*, p.8

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.7

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp.9-10

³⁵² *Ibid.*, pp.7-10

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp.66-7

Again Spark devotes great attention here to colours and materials, by which Lise discriminates between an ‘assortment’ of choices. Her journey as a whole is shaped by these successive moments of consumption; the protagonist tells a couple at check-in that she travels light because ‘you can get everything you want at the other end’.³⁵⁴ This ‘consumption of space’, in Lefebvre’s phrase, is manifest in another scene set at the airport:

On her way to Gate 14 Lise stops to glance at a gift-stall...she lifts up a paper-knife shaped like a scimitar, of brass-coloured metal with insert coloured stones. She removes it from its curved sheath and tests the blade and the point with deep interest...‘Too much. I can get it cheaper at the other end,’ Lise says, putting it down.³⁵⁵

In a department store in the foreign city, Lise indeed finds another paper-knife which she notes is ‘almost the same but not quite’: ‘The paper-knife is made of brassy metal, curved like a scimitar. The sheath is embossed but not, like the one Lise had considered earlier in the day, jewelled’.³⁵⁶ Mobility, the experience of geographical difference which is tourism, here unfolds across minor differences between commodities. Narrative activity, too, is reduced to little more than a process of differentiation. Spark’s lingering on these quotidian purchases stresses that such consumer selections are also moments of narrative differentiation, reflected in Lise’s ‘deep interest’ in the paper-knives, the second of which becomes the murder weapon, and her comment that the ties, later to bind her ankles, will be ‘useful’. And yet as Showalter’s comment suggests, they do not alter Lise’s fate – the use-values of the objects are not altered by these purely decorative differences – so much as refine its style.

As the examples above indicate, colour is the most prominent means of differentiation in the novel. Starting with the dress, the narrative so frequently draws attention to colour as to evoke a possible unity of colour-coded objects, as in the Bauhaus ambition Miller sees prefiguring the functionalist aesthetic:

the *Bauhaus* is seen as the symbol of a drive to make all human creations serve the principles of style. In this new world, all architecture, furniture, clothing and behaviour are intended to relate to each other in a visibly coherent fashion. This works to break down all frames into a universal order of good design. The matching colour scheme is extended to all commodities.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p.20

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p.24

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p.67

³⁵⁷ Ibid., p.45

While never quite realising such utopian visions, post-1945 Fordism, following the famous mandatory blackness of the early Model Ts, relied on colour to differentiate its fundamentally standardized and mass-produced commodities (as noted above, Fordism tried to render consumption ‘uniform and fully subjected to the constraints of its items of equipment’).³⁵⁸ Colour thus becomes a ‘coded difference’ within a ‘system of objects’, to evoke the critiques of the consumer society Jean Baudrillard wrote from the late sixties – a sign by which subjects enter into not only consumption but a system of representation: ‘The sign object is neither given nor exchanged: it is appropriated, withheld and manipulated by individual subjects as a sign; that is, a coded difference. Here lies the object of consumption’.³⁵⁹ On the one hand, by selecting invariably colourful clothing and accessories, Lise simply achieves representation as a tourist – identifies herself with the technicoloured tourist world of ‘the south’ and appropriates its difference from her northern home. In the exchange with the first salesgirl, Lise justifies her ‘lurid’ choice of dress by saying that ‘The colours go together perfectly. People here in the North are ignorant of colours’.³⁶⁰ Observing her clothes, different onlookers immediately assume she is going on holiday, to the beach, to ‘the South’, to the carnival, and even to the circus.³⁶¹ Such associations evoke what Lefebvre calls the ‘striking contrast’ or ‘qualitative distinctiveness’ of feminized spaces apparently dedicated to ‘the consumption of space, sun and sea, and of spontaneous or induced eroticism’. The crowds at the airport

look at [Lise] as she walks past, noting without comment the lurid colours of her coat... They look, as she passes, as they look also at those girls whose skirts are especially short, or those men whose tight-fitting shirts are patterned with flowers or are transparent.³⁶²

The women at Lise’s destination, ‘too, are dressed brightly for a southern summer’. In this way, her carefully-selected clothing integrates her into a system of differences and symbolizes her accommodation to what the narrator calls the ‘holiday environment’, just as she earlier merges with the impersonal space of the flat. At a bookstall at the

³⁵⁸ Hal Foster in *Return of the Real* writes: ‘in serial production a degree of difference between commodity-signs becomes necessary...in our political economy of commodity-signs it is difference that we consume’ (p.66).

³⁵⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 1981), Charles Levin trans., pp.65. See also *The System of Objects* (1968) and *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (1970).

³⁶⁰ *The Driver’s Seat*, p.12

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.48, 23, 69, 17

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p.21

airport, Lise encounters a woman looking for paperbacks to match the ‘pastel tints’ of her spare bedrooms. Lise by contrast

picks out one with bright green lettering on a white background with the author’s name printed to look like blue lightning streaks. In the middle of the cover are depicted a brown boy and girl wearing only garlands of sunflowers. Lise pays for it, while the white-haired woman says, ‘Those colours are too bright for me. I don’t see anything’.³⁶³

Lise literally displays this ‘exotic’ paperback against the surface of her clothing, as if combining signs of ‘vacation’: ‘Lise is holding the book up against her coat, giggling merrily, and looking up to the woman as if to see if her purchase is admired’.³⁶⁴ A similar moment occurs at a café in the foreign city, when Mrs Fiedke (an elderly woman who temporarily accompanies the protagonist) tells Lise that her ‘rainbow ice...matches with [her] outfit’.³⁶⁵

Lise laughs at this, longer than Mrs Fiedke had evidently expected. ‘Beautiful colours,’ Mrs Fiedke offers, as one might offer a cough-sweet. Lise sits before the brightly streaked ice-cream with her spoon in her hand and laughs on. Mrs Fiedke looks frightened, and more frightened as the voices of the bar stop to watch the laughing one; Mrs Fiedke shrinks into her old age, her face dry and wrinkled, her eyes gone into a far retreat...The man behind the bar, having started coming over to their table to investigate a potential disorder, stops and turns back, muttering something. A few young men round the bar start up a mimic laugh-laugh-laugh but are stopped by the barman.³⁶⁶

If the motif of colour coordination evokes a harmonious integration with her ‘holiday environment’ (‘These colours are a natural blend for me’, she tells the northern salesgirl. ‘Absolutely natural’), here Lise appears grotesque, herself a kind of ‘mimic’.³⁶⁷ Beyond conspicuous consumption and leisure, Lise seems increasingly to overact or overidentify with her touristic performance. In her repeated display of the paperback book, for example, her desire to ‘blend’ or ‘match’ becomes ostentatious in its insistence. She brandishes the object as a crude prop, a redundant sign:

She holds her paperback well in evidence, her hand-bag and the new zipper-bag slung over her left arm just above the wrist, and her hands holding up the book in front of her chest like an identification notice carried by a displaced person.³⁶⁸

On several occasions, Lise ‘seems to display it deliberately’, as when she ‘props up her paperback book against her bag, as it were so that its bright cover is addressed to whom

³⁶³ Ibid., p.22

³⁶⁴ Ibid., p.22

³⁶⁵ Ibid., p.56

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p.56

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p.12

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p.61

it may concern' and 'stands for a moment in the aisle, raising the arm on which the hand-bag is slung from the wrist, so that the paperback, now held between finger and thumb, is visible'.³⁶⁹ As the physical awkwardness of these gestures might suggest, the paperback refers tautologically to Lise herself and her matching clothing, as if to underscore its 'lurid' effect; as when Lise looks at Mrs Friedke 'to see if her purchase is admired', the possible addressee would be less the recipient of a communication than a means of 'identification'. If the figure of the tourist always implies a position of cultural and geographical difference, Lise further estranges herself through the 'coded difference' of the commodity, whose representational dimension here appears in terms of narration. The theatrical play with colours exaggerates and at times travesties the logic of fashion and Fordist 'complementarity', which registers her movement through space as a kind of visual impression. The narrator notes 'the unanimous perception of her bright-coloured clothes' at the airport due to 'the particular mixture of her colours', while the women in the foreign city later 'stare' at Lise: 'It is possibly the combination of colours – the red in her coat and the purple in her dress – rather than the colours themselves which draws attention to her'.³⁷⁰ Indeed Spark repeatedly stresses the conspicuousness of her 'conflicting appearance' and 'the garish effect of Lise on normal perceptions'.³⁷¹ This effect is precisely a superficial, touristic one, a surface impression:

She brushes past a few people at the vestibule who look at her with the same casual curiosity with which others throughout the day have looked at her. They are mainly tourists; one exceptional sight among so many others does not deflect their attention for very long.³⁷²

In her sheer exteriority and ostentation, Lise appears as a tourist 'sight' as much as a tourist; for Carlo, a garage owner who attempts to rape her, she is an 'unforeseen, exotic...yet clearly available treasure'.³⁷³

Literalizing the representational function of the commodity, the protagonist thus employs consumer objects not only to identify herself as a tourist, but to signify her journey and its 'difference' – to establish what the narrator calls her 'extra shockingness' amongst the 'July thousands'.³⁷⁴ In this sense, as in Baudrillard's theories

³⁶⁹ Ibid., pp.54, 39

³⁷⁰ Ibid., pp.21, 50

³⁷¹ Ibid., pp.78, 51

³⁷² Ibid., p.89

³⁷³ Ibid., p.79

³⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.20, 50

of the consumer society, Lise consumes objects primarily as signs rather than use-values. Here though the process seems to use up or expend the objects in mediating the narrative, echoing the disposability of the commodity. As I have mentioned, Lise collects and displays, but also puts away and discards commodities in the course of the plot. The paperback, for example, she gives away to a hotel porter just before her death, just as she disperses her other possessions, including her keys, passport, and handbag, during the journey. Though they never realize their use-values, these signs refer to Lise all the more overtly through her acts of dispossession. If the protagonist is a 'sight', these objects are akin to what MacCannell calls tourist 'markers', which denote tourist attractions.³⁷⁵ Lise's display of the paperback in various locations and before several future witnesses, her theatrical demonstration of its 'complementarity', retrospectively appears as a means of underlining its visual connection to her own image and allowing it to be re-established later on. In this way, as the narrator puts it, 'she lays the trail, presently to be followed by Interpol and elaborated upon with due art by the journalists of Europe for the few days it takes for her identity to be established'.³⁷⁶ Declaring 'I don't need it any more' as she relinquishes possession, when the book is retrieved by Interpol it will nonetheless have realized its function as a physical marker of her journey – the brightly-coloured paperback will have 'registered the fact of her presence'.³⁷⁷ In the case of Lise's clothing, the consuming or expenditure of signs evokes the commodity's 'planned obsolescence', as its physical surfaces appear in light of friction and attrition. When a student protest interrupts Lise's quotidian shopping activities, the moment is presented as a jarring collision of trajectories: 'Suddenly round the corner comes a stampede. Lise and Mrs Friedke are swept apart and jostled in all directions by a large crowd'.³⁷⁸ The protest forms a blockage in these tourist flows: 'A band of grey-clad policemen come running towards them... The traffic on the circular intersection has stopped'. Notably, consumption too is interrupted: 'A shutter on a shop-front near Lise comes down with a hasty clatter, then the other shops start closing for the day'.³⁷⁹ And yet Lise's own course is not halted so much as diverted, as she 'swerves with her crowd into a garage', where she briefly takes refuge in a car; when she emerges 'to see what damage has been done to her clothes', the commodity seems to bear the trace of the

³⁷⁵ MacCannell, p.110

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p.51

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p.20

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p.74

³⁷⁹ Ibid., p.74

incident.³⁸⁰ Contrary to the first dress which the salesgirl tells Lise will prevent ‘the marks that you pick up on your journey’, her coat is ‘stained with a long black oily mark’ which cleaning efforts turn ‘into a messy blur’.³⁸¹ In the final pages of the novel, the narrator notes ‘the blurred stain on her coat, the rumpled aspect that she has acquired in the course of the evening’ (a car Lise steals, ‘a cream Fiat’, also becomes ‘a bit dirty, I’ve been travelling’).³⁸² The motif of colour coordination, then – the use of the ‘coded difference’ of the commodity, in this case Lise’s ‘particular combination of colours’, to leave a visual impression of the journey – culminates in this ‘messy blur’, the despoiling of the object’s surfaces.

In her ‘rumpled aspect’, Lise finally re-converges with the murderer, a man she had briefly ‘chosen to adhere to’ at the airport.³⁸³ Notably, commodities again mediate between the two characters in producing the ending. In that earlier glancing encounter, the man is said to be ‘frightened of [Lise’s] psychedelic clothes. Terrified’ and suffers ‘a kind of paralysis in his act of fetching out some papers from his brief-case’ (like most people she encounters, he ‘stares’ at the protagonist).³⁸⁴ When she finds him again in a hotel lobby, her presence immediately provokes his ‘trembling’, despite being initially indirect, a characteristically surface contact here relegated to a subordinate clause: ‘Excuse me,’ Lise says to the porter, brushing against the dark-suited man as she comes up to the desk besides him’.³⁸⁵ As she drives to meet him in a stolen car, she briefly considers the items she has purchased in the course of the journey:

Her zipper-bag is on the floor of the car. While waiting for the lights to change she lifts it on to the seat, unzips it and looks with a kind of satisfaction at the wrapped-up objects of different shape (*sic*), as it might be they represent a good day’s work.³⁸⁶

I have argued that Lise’s ‘good day’s work’ is simply consumption, albeit with a certain intensity and implied work ethic. Despite its logic of display, I would distinguish this activity from ‘conspicuous consumption’, and from the conspicuous possession Baudrillard sees in consumer culture during this period. Describing the ‘baroque and theatrical covering of domestic property’ (‘table cloth[s]...drapes...carpets, slipcovers,

³⁸⁰ Ibid., pp.74-5

³⁸¹ Ibid., pp.76-7

³⁸² Ibid., pp.85, 89

³⁸³ Ibid., p.25

³⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.31, 27

³⁸⁵ Ibid., p.101

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p.82

coasters, wainscoting, lampshades...Everything is protected and surrounded'), he refers to an 'overworking of signs of possession':

the obsession of the cottage owner and small capitalist is not merely to possess, but to underline what he possesses two or three times. There...the unconscious speaks in the redundancy of signs, in their connotations and their overworking (*surcharge*).³⁸⁷

As with the covering and uncovering of surfaces throughout the novel, however, 'the wrapped-up objects' in the passage above are soon unwrapped, itemized for the last time, and bestowed on Lise's murderer as he sits in the passenger's seat. Following her exacting instructions, the stranger uses the carefully-selected paper-knife as the murder weapon, while the 'silk scarf' and 'man's necktie' find perverted use-values in tying the protagonist's wrists and ankles. The novel's violent ending thus appears as the end-point of Lise's consumption, a moment of *dispossession*, expenditure and waste – 'They will come and sweep it up in the morning', as she says just before her death, and indeed she will be discovered near some bins by 'tomorrow's garbage men', her body 'surrounded' and 'underline[d]' (if not protected) by the commodities.³⁸⁸ Jonathan Kemp stresses 'the symbolic meaning of Lise's murder', which he reads as 'a limit-experience that defines linguistic expression'.³⁸⁹ He quotes Bataille's claim that there is 'something profoundly excremental...about the act of murder'; Lise's 'death drive' in this sense ends in abjection and the 'production of waste'.³⁹⁰ In his 'Bataillean reading of Spark', Jeremy Idle similarly argues that the ending of *The Driver's Seat* 'blurs sex and death in a Bataillean manner'.³⁹¹ Considered as a Bataillean 'limit-experience', the protagonist's end would seem to signal her transgression of the economic dimension of tourism, like an extreme realization of the fantasy of 'wastefulness' Lefebvre describes (a vision which seems to have been inspired by Bataille, who is briefly mentioned in *The Production of Space*).³⁹² To return to Lefebvre's terms, the 'waste and expense' of Lise's death would appear as 'the end-point of a temporal sequence starting in the workplace' and ending in a 'potlatch of surplus objects, symbols and energies'. More in line with his corrective account of tourism, however, I have characterised Lise as operating well within the realm of consumption and (capitalist) exchange, contrary to the gift economy of the potlatch; I read the waste and expense of the ending not in terms

³⁸⁷ *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p.42

³⁸⁸ *The Driver's Seat*, pp.106, 97

³⁸⁹ Jonathan Kemp, pp.545, 550

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 550, 553

³⁹¹ Jeremy Idle, 'Muriel Spark's Uselessness', in McQuillan ed., p.151

³⁹² Lefebvre, p.19

of Bataillean transgression but as the disposability and obsolescence of the commodity at its limits. If the discarded and ‘overworked’ objects fail to realise their intended use-values – a concept which in Marx, Baudrillard argues, functions as ‘a concrete destination and purpose, an intrinsic finality of goods and products’ – they continue to function as signs: they reach their destination, their final combination and complementarity, in realising the image of Lise’s death.³⁹³ As with the despoiling and dispersal of objects throughout the narrative, in consuming (expending) the commodities as signs, the protagonist travesties the middle-class desire ‘to show how *well* one possesses’ (Baudrillard again).³⁹⁴ Recalling Stewart’s notion of ‘woman as consumer’, Lise instead shows how well she consumes, not simply through conspicuous consumption, but in fully inhabiting the ‘coded difference’ and life-cycle of the commodity as she signifies her final day in the foreign city.

Lise’s death then blurs consumption and narration – she completes her ‘trail’ of clues and commodities, which will now ‘be followed by Interpol and elaborated upon with due art by the journalists of Europe for the few days it takes for her identity to be established’.³⁹⁵ Such narratorial comments cast the protagonist as a tacitly metafictional figure who constructs her narrative from within. At the same time, the notion that her trail will be ‘elaborated upon’ after her death points to the limits of her narrative control, as in what I have characterised as the pseudo-agential nature of her movement; the free mobility of tourism seems simultaneously static and fixed. For the remainder of this chapter I want to discuss *The Driver’s Seat*’s most notable formal device, which brings this tension into focus – the repeated incursion of prolepsis into an otherwise chronological narrative, a technique at its most jarring at the beginning of the third chapter:

She will be found tomorrow morning dead from multiple stab-wounds, her wrists bound with a silk scarf and her ankles bound with a man’s necktie, in the grounds of an empty villa, in a park of the foreign city to which she is travelling on the flight now boarding at Gate 14.³⁹⁶

The next sentence (‘Crossing the tarmac to the plane...’) resumes where the previous chapter ended, with a relatively innocuous description of Lise boarding her flight. Such proleptic passages recur at intervals throughout the narrative, interrupting Lise’s

³⁹³ *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p.131

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.42

³⁹⁵ *The Driver’s Seat*, p.51

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.25

quotidian shopping and holiday activities with fragments of witness statements from characters she encounters, and brief narratorial comments like the above, or the following tense-shifting sentence (which emerges from a conventionally novelistic description of the protagonist): ‘Her nose is short and wider than it will look in the likeness constructed partly by the method of identikit, partly by actual photography, soon to be published in the newspapers of four languages’.³⁹⁷ Critics have tended to view the device as a temporal one, which Spark uses to engage religious notions of predeterminism or raise metafictional questions about narrative order.³⁹⁸ While neither of these readings is inaccurate, I want to argue that the device throws into definition space as much as time (the two being difficult to separate) – both the spatiality of the novel form and the teleological construction of the journey. In *The Prison-house of Language*, Jameson argues that the novel is ‘a diachronic phenomenon’, unlike the lyric and short story, which

must be in their very essence short... They are both, in a sense, ways of surmounting time, of translating a formless temporal succession into a simultaneity which we can grasp and possess; and if from this point of view the novel is unjustifiable, it is on account of the endless prospect of genuine time unfolding that it promises.³⁹⁹

He points to an exception, however, in the novel’s ending, ‘the point at which *duree* and diachrony break off, and which can therefore momentarily be seized in synchronic terms’.⁴⁰⁰ While Jameson’s definition of the novel as fundamentally temporal or diachronic might easily be contested (as for instance in Joseph Frank’s attention to the ‘spatial form’ of the modernist novel), his comments direct attention to the distinctiveness, and even the perversity from a novelistic point of view, of *The Driver’s Seat*’s proleptic technique. Dispersing the ending through the main body of the narrative, Spark repeatedly (but momentarily) breaks off ‘*duree* and diachrony’, or the illusion of ‘genuine time unfolding’, with proleptic flashes of the kind of spatial simultaneity Jameson sees in the short story – an effect which is indeed heightened by the novel’s brevity at just over 100 pages. Even more so than the detailed descriptions of spaces like Lise’s flat, then, prolepsis works to spatialize the narrative. And yet on returning to the narrative present, such spaces (initially described in a dilating present tense) appear in a newly temporal light, insofar as their existence within a teleological

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p.10

³⁹⁸ See, for example, Patricia Waugh’s *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1984), p.56.

³⁹⁹ *The Prison-house of Language*, p.74

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p.75

plot has been forcefully underscored; following the revelation at the beginning of the third chapter, for example, Lise's movement across the tarmac and interactions with fellow passengers inevitably seem charged with narrative significance (will the businessman she 'adhere[s] to' be her murderer?). Prolepsis then 'break[s] off diachrony', but prematurely and temporarily, such that time is not 'surmount[ed]' so much as directed, channelled towards a destination which appears germinal within Lise's present. Indeed if space and time are opposed in Jameson's comments, as in Lukács's classic opposition of (static, spatial) description and (dynamic, temporal) narration, they here converge in the journey.

I want to suggest that MacCannell's concept of the tourist journey as a penetration of the kind of omnipresent surfaces I have been describing towards a hidden 'back region' of society provides a useful way of thinking about the spatiality of Lise's movement. I also want to argue, however, that Spark's use of prolepsis works to complicate the distinction between front and back, surface and depth. The proleptic passage quoted in the paragraph above, for example, envisions Lise moving from the front region of the airport to a glimpsed 'elsewhere' whose violence seems to lie behind the everyday scene. The protagonist meticulously selects and surveys the site of her death, which is both a tourist spectacle – a 'famous Pavilion' – and an apparent back region. Despite the construction of tourism as 'non-work', I have suggested that Lise seems to be working at something, what we might consider a movement beyond tourist surfaces. The protagonist 'surveys the ground earnestly' when she visits the Pavilion shortly before her death: 'I want to look round the back. I've got to see how things are round here, it's important'.⁴⁰¹ Her tour of the site thus takes on a topographic or exploratory aspect, and there is a sense in which her death will bring this back region to light. Outside tourist hours ('[t]he wandering groups are null and void, the cars have gone away'), space itself comes into focus at the Pavilion:

a graceful three-storey building with a quaint gilded frieze above the first level of the façade...The ground floor of the Pavilion is largely glass-fronted. She goes up to it and peers in. There are bare café tables and chairs piled high in the classic fashion of restaurants closed for the night. There is...an empty glass sandwich-bar. There is nothing else except an expanse of floor, which in the darkness can only be half-seen, patterned in black-and-white chequered pavements. Lise cranes and twists to see the ceiling which obscurely seems to be

⁴⁰¹ *The Driver's Seat*, pp. 96-7

painted with some classical scene; the hind-leg of a horse and one side of a cupid are all that is visible.⁴⁰²

‘[G]ilded frieze’, ‘façade’ and ‘glass-fronted’ all refer to the front of this tourist spectacle, which Lise’s gaze attempts to penetrate; though she sees almost ‘nothing’ inside the Pavilion, her glimpse ‘behind’ the comprehensive tourist surfaces and coverings figures the promise of the journey as a whole. Behind the Pavilion itself is an ‘old villa...they say in the brochure that it’s to be restored and turned into a museum’.⁴⁰³ As the proleptic passages repeatedly indicate, the grounds of the villa is the site where Lise’s activity will finally come to rest, the outer limit of her narrative as she experiences it: ‘She traverses the side of the building and turns round to the back where five large dust-bins stand waiting for tomorrow’s garbage-men, who will also find Lise, not far off, stabbed to death’.⁴⁰⁴

If the Bataille reading mentioned above suggests that the protagonist accesses a kind of depth in these last moments – that Lise’s perception of ‘how final is finality’ indicates an existential ‘limit-experience’ – I have argued that the ending is rather a moment of narrative closure, which only seals off the preceding play of signs and surfaces; in Jameson’s terms, it confirms the ‘finality’ of this limit of the text, ‘which can therefore momentarily be seized in synchronic terms’.⁴⁰⁵ As the imminent restoration of the villa might suggest, the completion of the protagonist’s journey, like the self-defeating trajectory of MacCannell’s tourist, ‘stages’ this pseudo-back region as a spectacle, as Lise becomes a ‘sight’ more ‘exceptional’ than the Pavilion itself. The closure of the surface or front realm Lise inhabits is confirmed by a glimpse of a narrative back region which she notably fails to penetrate – a space ‘behind’ the Pavilion and tourist world as whole, where the story of her death is pieced together and made public. The penultimate instance of prolepsis occurs as Lise is walking ‘round and round’ the Pavilion:

They will come and go in the little office, already beset by inquietude and fear, even before her identity is traced back to where she came from...Round and round again will go the interrogators, moving slowly forwards, always bearing the same questions like the whorling shell of a snail.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰² Ibid., pp.95-6

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p.94

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p.97

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., p.107

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p.105

This ‘little office’ is an institutional, but also narrative back region from which emerge the fragments of police interviews dispersed throughout the text. The proleptic spatialization of the voyage and unhinging of its teleology thus finds a diegetic motivation in the investigative procedure, by which Lise’s ‘identity is traced back to where she came from’, before being ‘elaborated upon with due art by the journalists of Europe’.⁴⁰⁷ Unlike the finality of the death drive or limit-experience, the representational and metafictional dimension of the ending implies a reverse, but also constitutive movement – the (re)production of Lise’s journey as a police report, media spectacle (her picture will be ‘published in the newspapers of four languages’), and ultimately as the narrative itself.⁴⁰⁸ This self-begetting structure presumes a narrative circularity evoked several times in the final chapters through synechdochic imagery, like ‘the whorling shell of a snail’ in the passage above. The self-begetting narrative is precisely a kind of ‘whorling’ pattern with no definitive point of origin, whose front and back refer to different parts of the same surface (as with a Möbius strip) – if Lise, acting as an agent of her own story, prompts the investigation which takes place in ‘the little office’, this narrative back region equally seems to generate the text which contains her journey.

The novel’s final, proleptic image provides another synechdoche for this recursive structure. Again the office fleetingly appears (now as it were at the ‘front’ of the narrative) as the murderer flees the scene:

He runs to the car, taking his chance and knowing that he will at last be taken, and seeing already as he drives away from the Pavilion and away, the sad little office where the police clank in and out and the type-writer ticks out his unnerving statement...He sees already the gleaming buttons of the policemen’s uniforms, hears the cold and the confiding, the hot and the barking voices, sees already the holsters and epaulets and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear.⁴⁰⁹

McQuillan argues that from the vantage point of this ending, ‘the whole of the novel, with its cool as marble depthlessness and its refusal to engage with the emotions or motivations of its characters, can be reread as an unnerving police report’.⁴¹⁰ As in Spark’s first metafiction *The Comforters* (1954), in which a typing sound repeatedly intrudes into the diegesis, the type-writer here can be imagined producing the text itself,

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p.51

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p.18

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p.107

⁴¹⁰ McQuillan, p.3

while the murderer's flight enacts this narrative circularity with a trajectory which is the mirror image of Lise's (as I mentioned in the general introduction, *The Abbess of Crewe* similarly presents itself as a circular and self-generating text). Her arrival, that is, initiates his departure, which like her own seems to have prefigured its destination in the form of the back region of the office which will produce his statement and Lise's story alike. McQuillan's argument suggests that we might read this moment in terms of the textual or discursive power of the police, whose partial, metonymic appearance from 'behind' the main narrative posits an objective correlative for the coldly omniscient quality of the prose, and of prolepsis in particular. Spark was writing *The Driver's Seat* in Rome during the onset of the political violence of the *anni di piombo* ('years of lead'), which coincided with an increase in state powers and police repression – 'emergency legislation' (much of which remained in force afterwards) created a state of 'hypervigilance'.⁴¹¹ As I mentioned in the general introduction, Kristin Ross has described an incursion of various 'police figures' into French theory after 1968 (whose events fed into the state reaction and 'return to order' in this period), including Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1975). There Foucault elaborates a diffuse notion of social control, describing how surveillance instils 'a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the *automatic* functioning of power' (my italics).⁴¹² Power then becomes pre-emptive or proleptic: 'the constant pressure acts even before the offenses, mistakes or crimes have been committed'. Just as Lise seems bound to realize her death, her murderer in the passage above seems to have internalized the operation of a diffuse and disembodied power. The image is the climax of the novel's proleptic technique, no longer punctuating the present-tense narration, but merging with it through free indirect discourse. The movement from the active 'taking his chance' to the passive 'being taken', from present participle (indicating an ongoing action) to future tense (indicating the inevitability of the outcome), enacts the way the murderer's escape attempt is immediately – or 'already', to use the word repeated three times in this final paragraph – contained by the police. The descriptive details of the constricting space of the police station, of the 'trappings' which seem to close in around him, imparts a mental presence to the police even while they are in fact absent.

⁴¹¹ Ruth Glynn, *Women, Terrorism, and Trauma in Italian Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 23

⁴¹² *Discipline and Punish*, p.201

Drawing analogies between Foucauldian surveillance and the novel form, D.A. Miller in *The Novel and the Police* refers to ‘panoptical narration’: ‘Balzac’s omniscient narration assumes a fully panoptic view of the world it places under surveillance’.⁴¹³ Significantly though, Miller describes the activity of both the police and the novelist in terms of ‘a penetration of social surfaces’.⁴¹⁴ Discussing Miller’s book and subsequent critical parallels between disciplinary power and realist omniscience, Dorrit Cohn notes that in such readings the novel appears as ‘a genre that...exists largely in order to wield absolute cognitive control over the lives of the characters it incarcerates and whose psyches it maliciously invades and inspects’.⁴¹⁵ Conversely, Spark’s proleptic form subjects omniscience to metafictional scrutiny, as in her reluctance to ‘invade’ the protagonist’s inner life; any fictional version of Foucauldian control would thus have to operate at the level of ‘social surfaces’. Whereas Miller (reiterating Foucault’s emphasis on the invisibility of the guard in the panopticon) argues that ‘the policing power...is either invisible or visible only under cover of other, nobler or simply blander intentionalities (to educate, to cure, to produce, to defend)’, what’s notable in *The Driver’s Seat*’s final image is the unexpected appearance of the police themselves, their power symbolized by the threatening but also protective surfaces of their uniforms.⁴¹⁶ MacCannell suggests that rather than hiding itself, power

“pretends to be hiding something” that, if exposed, would justify control of culture, as in “this might be a gun in my pocket”. Thus, the maintenance of the generative principle of culture under a male sign...requires the covering of the male “member”...and a corresponding public exposure of women as proof that they, unlike men, have “nothing to hide”.⁴¹⁷

In this light, the police holsters evoke a symbolic covering of the phallus by the uniform, which conveys a false ‘genderlessness of power’. The novel’s final image points to a power which appears from ‘behind’ but in fact operates at the level of style, as a control of surfaces which forms the mirror image of Lise’s ‘stained’ and ‘rumpled aspect’ a few pages earlier. In its superficiality and impersonality, the back region of the office mirrors the front region Lise inhabits, and yet the same surfaces which ‘protect’ the police are the means of her ‘exposure’ – signs which convey the violence or ‘fear and pity’ of her death. As Maureen Bell notes, ‘fear and pity’ are the emotions which

⁴¹³ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1988), p.25

⁴¹⁴ Miller, p.23

⁴¹⁵ Dorrit Cohn, *The Distinction of Fiction* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2000), p.166

⁴¹⁶ Miller, p.17

⁴¹⁷ MacCannell, p.xii

define tragedy for Aristotle.⁴¹⁸ The seeming exchangeability of these words as they conclude the novel ('fear and pity, pity and fear'), like the balanced contraries 'the cold and the confiding'/'the hot and the barking', suggests a negation of any potential catharsis in this final, orderly image of the police – a smoothing over of a traumatic real by the simulacral, as Foster puts it in relation to photorealism. Here the 'coercive and comprehensive' nature of the novel's surfaces is at its most explicit, as Lise is simultaneously exposed and neutralized as a subject – shown to have no hidden or tragic depths, 'nothing to hide'. *The Driver's Seat* thus envisions 'permanent visibility' as less a matter of surveillance or incarceration – 'the sad little office' is only a mental image at this point, just as Lise moves freely between spaces – than as a form of representational control, figured in the immaculate police uniforms and the reproductive machinery of the identikit and type-writer, which maintains the protagonist within a surface or front realm. Contrary to McQuillan's argument that the whole text is an 'institutionally patriarchal [police] report', *The Driver's Seat* implies an internal differentiation of narrative, in which Lise's very agency – her 'good day's work' – inscribes her within this feminized realm of surfaces.

Insofar as Lise's manipulation of signs and surfaces is offset by such glimpses of a narrative back region – notably, she never accesses the 'little office', which exists on a higher (extradiegetic) level of the text – prolepsis implies a division of labour at the level of representation, which I want to suggest extends beyond the textual power of the police (as McQuillan sees it). To invert Miller's phrase, the latter's threatening visibility itself covers the 'blander intentionalities' of a symbolic order which, according to Stewart's notion of the feminine as surface, 'places women within the cycle of exchange and simultaneously makes their labor invisible'. The Fordist interpellation of women as consumers here appears as a touristic social identity whose superficiality signals its difference or extraneousness in relation to production, on which it nonetheless depends (Giorgio Agamben describes the tourist as a 'planetary figure of...irreducible extraneousness with regard to the world').⁴¹⁹ In light of Lefebvre's suggestion that

⁴¹⁸ Maureen Bell, *Re-constructing the Book: Literary Texts in Transmission* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2001), p.160

⁴¹⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2011), p.140. For Baudrillard, "consumption" has become a kind of labor, "an active manipulation of signs," a sort of *bricolage* in which the individual desperately attempts to organize his (*sic*) privatized existence and invest it with meaning'. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, p.5

tourism embodies, but also represents, the separation of work and ‘non-work’ under Fordism, Lise’s performance of the role of tourist implies ‘a discourse miming the discourse of male productivity’ (to quote Stewart again).⁴²⁰ The tourist’s flight from the workplace and manipulation of readymade products and signs (which as I discussed, often refer to the factory on a purely aesthetic level) provides a miniature model or spatial imaginary of this separation, which was reshaped by the crisis of Fordism during the seventies and what Lefebvre describes as the extension of productive activity beyond the factory floor. While I started by suggesting that the apparently universal and apolitical image of tourism might be considered in gendered terms, it is precisely the ‘feminized’ dimensions of the tourist’s activity – most relevantly here, the consumption of traditional ‘non-work’ spaces, and not only the ‘things in space’ produced in the Fordist factory – which become emblematic of this broader shift (often considered in terms of the ‘feminization’ of capitalism).⁴²¹ On the one hand, tourism employment has been characterised as ‘women’s work’, being usually low-paid service activity (much of it falling under hospitality and affective labour).⁴²² But MacCannell argues that whereas the (tourist) worker is ‘restricted to a single position among millions in the division of labour’, the tourist ‘may attempt to grasp the division of labour as a phenomenon *sui generis* and become a moral witness of its masterpieces of virtue and viciousness’.⁴²³ Indeed it is when Lise departs the hierarchy of the accountants’ office that her ambiguous position on the threshold of work and ‘non-work’ comes into focus. On the other hand, neither protagonist nor reader is granted the critical distance of the ‘moral witness’; if Spark is able to point to the ‘viciousness’ of this double yet secondary identity, its negation of the embodied subject (as in the final ‘expenditure’ of both goods and Lise’s energies) and the erasure of labour Stewart points to, it is through the simulacral image of the tourist. The novel, like Lise herself, thus engages in a kind of mimicry but also a pointed overemphasis; without offering an alternative vantage point, Spark foregrounds the closure of this false realism, whose elision of Lise’s subjectivity and body – which is ‘exposed’ as a signifying surface, a pure image – might be seen as

⁴²⁰ Stewart, p.168.

⁴²¹ Initially valued within post-war Fordism principally as an expanded consumer market, from the sixties and seventies, Doreen Massey notes in a British context, women increasingly ‘provided a cheap, flexible, untrained...pool of labour’ (*Space, Place and Gender*, p.203). The ‘feminization’ of work in general in the neoliberal period is often viewed as an extension of these qualities (the ‘flexibility’ and precarity traditionally associated with ‘women’s work’) to the workforce as a whole.

⁴²² For a book length study, see M. Thea Sinclair ed., *Gender, Work and Tourism* (London: Routledge, 2005)

⁴²³ MacCannell, p.7

the antithesis of the contemporary *écriture féminine*, and the broader turn to what Showalter describes as ‘a complete--if "unladylike"--language of the body’ in women’s writing of the time.⁴²⁴

⁴²⁴ Showalter, p.157

4. Berto's Privatopia: *The Takeover* (1976) as a Neoliberal Novel

In this chapter I offer a close-reading of the Villa Tullio, a fictional 'Palladian villa in the Veneto' which concentrates narrative and utopian energies in *The Takeover* (1976).⁴²⁵ Spark's 'parable of the pagan seventies' focuses on several such 'privatopias' – physical and conceptual spaces through which, I will argue, the novel engages with both the history of realism and the (early) history of neoliberalism.⁴²⁶ My reading of the text, one of Spark's less-discussed works, intersects with recent criticism concerning the 'neoliberal novel', while also drawing from earlier theories of realism.⁴²⁷ On the one hand, Jameson's influential discussion of Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975) suggests that the cultural significance and effectiveness of realism had ebbed by the 1970s, as the decade's postmodern culture reduced the historical novel to historicist pastiche.⁴²⁸ And yet the emergence of the neoliberal novel in this period, considered here as a 'late' realism, points to its resilience and evident usefulness as a form which could incorporate postmodern assumptions while allowing a symbolic mastery of the historical novelty ushered in by the 1970s. Through my discussion of *The Takeover*, I aim to show that the category of the neoliberal novel can thus complicate any chronological sequence from realism to modernism and postmodernism insofar as it embodies what Franco Moretti calls the 'solidity' of realism. This 'solidity' refers not only to the realist novel's untimely survival following the challenges to its dominance from the late nineteenth-century, but equally to its ability to become timely again at later historical moments – in this case from the mid-1970s and the onset of neoliberalism.⁴²⁹ Indeed the novel's 'solidity', as Moretti notes, is also a kind of 'flexibility'. Literary critics have long argued that realism's success as a form relies on that of a broader 'bourgeois' worldview, discussed in what follows in terms of the novel's investment in 'privatopia', which literalizes realism's solidity in the concrete (yet utopian) spaces of bourgeois private property. I read the reverberation of this spatial imaginary in *The Takeover* as an attempt to exploit the traditional novel's former

⁴²⁵ Muriel Spark, *The Takeover* (London: Macmillan, 1976), p.151

⁴²⁶ I define "privatopia" below. For a concise definition of neoliberalism, see David Harvey's *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. "A parable of the pagan seventies" was the subtitle of the first edition of *The Takeover*.

⁴²⁷ Martin McQuillan in *Theorising Muriel Spark: Gender, Race, Deconstruction* provides one of the few close readings of the novel (pp.16-18).

⁴²⁸ *Postmodernism*, pp.20-25

⁴²⁹ *Atlas of the European Novel*, pp.191-3

‘symbolic hegemony’ in the context of the proto-neoliberal culture of the 1970s.⁴³⁰ In this way, Spark’s neoliberal novel implies a postmodernism which, rather than extending or completing the modernist critique, simultaneously produces a renovated realism. While *The Takeover*’s content expresses ‘the beginning of something new in the world’ (as the narrator heralds the pivotal year of 1973), I argue that its politics are inseparable from Spark’s reliance on realism as a ‘moderating form’ (to use another of Moretti’s descriptions of the traditional novel) capable of domesticating the era’s cultural and historical novelty.⁴³¹

In a recent article entitled ‘The Plutocratic Imagination’, critic Jeffrey J. Williams argues that

Since around 1990, a new wave of American fiction has emerged that focuses on the dominance of finance [and] the political power of the super-rich... This new wave marks a turn in the political novel: the fiction of the 1970s and 1980s tended to expose conspiracies under the surface of formal government, whereas this new wave tends to see government as subsidiary, with the main societal choices occurring within the economic sphere. The novels animate the turn to neoliberalism, and thus we might aptly categorize them as ‘the neoliberal novel’.⁴³²

As a 1970s ‘political novel’ which ‘animate[s]’ the decade’s upheavals through the economic fortunes of a group of wealthy, property-owning characters, *The Takeover* suggests that it is reasonable to date the emergence of some form of ‘neoliberal novel’ to the mid-1970s, coinciding with that of neoliberalism itself (Margaret Drabble’s *The Ice Age* (1977) would be another, comparable example in a British context). But beyond complicating Williams’s periodization, my discussion of Spark’s book aims to direct attention to the *forms* of fiction viable under neoliberalism, starting from his remark that ‘a resigned realism’ seems to be the neoliberal novel’s dominant mode. Despite a suggestive comment about Jonathan Franzen’s *Freedom* (2010) – ‘It is not that Franzen advocates neoliberalism... but, adhering to the conventions of literary realism, he cannot imagine any other possibility’ – ‘The Plutocratic Imagination’ is characteristic of recent discussions of the relationship between neoliberalism and the novel in that its focus is primarily thematic, concerned with isolating what is distinctively contemporary in the

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p.193

⁴³¹ *The Takeover*, p.127. The notion of ‘[the] novel as perhaps not exactly a conservative, but certainly a moderating, form’ comes from Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to Garcia Marquez* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p.195

⁴³² Jeffrey J. Williams, ‘The Plutocratic Imagination’, *Dissent* (Volume 60, Issue 1, Winter 2013), p.92

ideas and concerns of this purportedly new category of fiction.⁴³³ A ‘new wave’ of realist writing in which ‘we see the world through the eyes of millionaires’ demands an attention to the politics of form, and the necessarily historical question of its relationship to the ‘bourgeois’ novel generally thought to have lost its emblematic status and cultural hegemony by the end of the nineteenth-century.⁴³⁴ Returning to this germinal or proto- neoliberal novel, then, calls for a reconsideration of these older ‘conventions of literary realism’, and specifically what their continuing application (and yet reconfiguration) in postmodern and neoliberal culture – here as the very means by which the historical novelty of the 1970s is grasped – might tell us about the relationship between aesthetic and political forms, beyond a simple narrative of mutual conservatism. I thus turn to Marxist interpretations of the realist novel from Lukács and Jameson (both of whom see the form’s apotheosis in Balzac), along with Alistair M. Duckworth’s study of the politics of ‘the estate’ in Jane Austen’s fiction, in order to establish the persistence of this bourgeois tradition within the contemporaneity of Spark’s neoliberal novel. I begin though with a short discussion of the concept of the privatopia and its significance under neoliberalism, before suggesting that the traditional novel produces its own concept of private and domestic space as a locus of identification and desire, which might be said to naturalize its political-territorial meaning. I go on to argue that in refiguring the Balzacian ‘object of desire’ in the global, mediatic context of the 1970s, *The Takeover* presents the decade in which our own political present was born in terms of a rebirth of ‘symbolic hegemony’.

Discussing the fate of utopia under neoliberalism, Harvey comments:

If there is any broad swathe of insurgent politics at work in the interstices of urbanization in the advanced capitalist countries...it is a mobilization in defense of private property rights...[A] turn inwards to protect already existing personalized ‘privatopias’.⁴³⁵

A much-noted feature of postmodern urbanism has been the proliferation since the 1960s of privatized, high-security ‘gated communities’, first mainly in the U.S. and then globally.⁴³⁶ Harvey’s comment implies that we might see the privatopia (like the figure

⁴³³ See, for example, Jane Elliott’s ‘Suffering Agency: Imagining Neoliberal Personhood in North America and Britain’, *Social Text* Volume 31, Number 2, 115 (2013), pp.83-101.

⁴³⁴ On “the crisis of bourgeois realism” in the course of the nineteenth-century, see György Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (London: Merlin Press Limited, 1962), Hannah and Stanley Mitchell trans.

⁴³⁵ *Spaces of Hope*, pp. 238-9

⁴³⁶ James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman and Michael O’Malley eds., *The Cultural Turn in U.S. History: Past, Present, and Future* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p.234

of the tourist discussed in the previous chapter) as a negative image of the politicization of urban space by sixties and seventies social movements, the collective ‘mobilization’ of property-owners now serving a wealthy retreat from the city proper. This tendency, part of post-war suburbanization in general, has coincided with the rise of homeowner associations, the subject of Evan McKenzie’s full length study on ‘residential private government’, called *Privatopia*. McKenzie traces the origins of privatopia back to the nineteenth-century, and the emergence, again initially in the U.S., of ‘privately owned and operated luxury subdivisions for the rich...exclusive neighbourhoods designed to be separate and shielded from their surroundings’, while in Britain he points to the publication of Ebenezer Howard’s *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1898) as an anticipation of later privatopias.⁴³⁷ In 2007, Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk catalogued what they called the ‘dreamworlds of neoliberalism’, the construction of luxury, highly-exclusive spaces worldwide which for Davis amounts to ‘nothing less than a utopian frenzy’:

modern wealth and luxury consumption are more enwalled and socially enclaved than at any time since the 1890s...The spatial logic of neoliberalism...revives the most extreme colonial patterns of residential segregation and zoned consumption...Everywhere, the rich and near rich are retreating into sumptuary compounds, leisure cities, and gated replicas of imaginary California suburbs.⁴³⁸

As Davis’s ‘[e]verywhere’ might suggest, the contemporary privatopia, more so than its precedents, is bound up with the dynamics of globalization, whose opposing pole within ‘[t]he spatial logic of neoliberalism’ can be seen as privatization. Zygmunt Bauman’s *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (1998) similarly views neoliberalism in terms of a revival of older modes of spatial domination, as in his description of a ‘new version of ‘absentee landlordship’’ enjoyed by ‘global elites’:

Thanks to the new ‘bodylessness’ of power in its mainly financial form, the power-holders become truly exterritorial even if, bodily, they happen to stay ‘in place’. Their power is, fully and truly not ‘out of this world’ – not of the physical world in which they build their heavily guarded homes and offices, themselves exterritorial, free from intrusion of unwelcome neighbours, cut out from whatever may be called a *local* community, inaccessible to whoever is, unlike them, confined to it.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁷ Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p.9

⁴³⁸ Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk eds., *Evil Paradieses: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism* (New York and London: the New Press, 2008), pp.xiii-xiv

⁴³⁹ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 3, 20

For Bauman, then, the privatopia is at once territorial ('heavily guarded'), its spatial monopoly alluding to older conceptions of landed property, and 'exterritorial' in its autonomy from the local environment and integration with the global reach of financial power.

I will suggest that *The Takeover*'s privatopias similarly presume an exterritorial space consolidated during the upheavals of the early 1970s; and yet they draw as much from the spatial imaginary of nineteenth-century realism as from this contemporary history. Before I say more about the text itself, then, I want to briefly discuss what might be called the realist privatopia, a space of consensus and community in the traditional novel. Alistair M. Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate* (1971), one of the first studies of the "'conservative' (in the Burkean sense of the word) tendencies in Austen's fiction', views the chronotope of 'the estate' in just these (utopian) terms:⁴⁴⁰

For Jane Austen, in *Mansfield Park*, the estate as an ordered physical structure is a metonym for other inherited structures – society as a whole, a code of morality, a body of manners, a system of language... In the possession of a public language and of common modes of behavior, in the very disposition of buildings and landscape, such a community manifests an organization that has evolved over a long period of time. Though it is a human organization, it is complete, inherited intact, and it has about it an air of consecration.⁴⁴¹

Many historicist and particularly feminist studies of the realist novel have shown how its attention to the private, domestic and architectural space of the house is central to the form's historical significance and purported realism.⁴⁴² While my argument will intersect with these concerns, in using the word 'privatopia' I aim to connect the postmodern and neoliberal 'spatial logic' discussed above with the realist novel's investment in what Roland Barthes calls 'the publicity of the private' – the tendency for 'the house' to appear not only as a lived, material space but as the site of utopian community, of a certain public.⁴⁴³ What I find suggestive in Duckworth's comment is his definition of the estate as a concrete reality – a space, a 'disposition of buildings and landscape' – which is at the same time 'a human organization' reproduced in a historical

⁴⁴⁰ Colin Winborn, *The Literary Economy of Jane Austen and George Crabbe* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2004), p.9

⁴⁴¹ Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp.xxix- 2

⁴⁴² Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) is an early, influential contribution to the field.

⁴⁴³ Cited in Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994), p.8

evolution, these meanings converging to form what he calls Austen's 'grounds of being'. I will argue that a concept of privatopia 'grounds' *The Takeover*'s realism not in the sense of providing some essential, ontological foundation, nor as mere setting, but as the 'common world' at once presupposed and constructed by the text's 'general consciousness' (to use J. Hillis Miller's phrase for realism's collective, bourgeois subject-position).⁴⁴⁴ In *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space and Narrative*, Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth argues that this consciousness 'brought into existence by the living together of a group', as Miller sees it, in turn 'objectifies a common world', a space (and a time) of consensus.⁴⁴⁵ Like the neoliberal or 'actually existing' privatopias (which construct their own, exclusive communities), the traditional novel's myopically 'private' worldview in this sense presumes a specific public, even expressing a contradictory desire for social consensus.

As a starting point for my discussion of *The Takeover*, then, I quote Jameson's analysis of fictional desire in Balzac's *La Vieille Fille*, which provides an archetypal realist privatopia:

The Cormon town-house...[is] the prize on which the narrative struggle or agon of *La Vieille Fille* turns. It is therefore quintessentially an object of desire...the Balzacian dwelling invites the awakening of a longing for possession, of the mild and warming fantasy of landed property as the tangible figure of Utopian wish-fulfillment. A peace released from the competitive dynamism of Paris and of metropolitan business struggles, yet still imaginable in some existent backwater of concrete social history; a well-nigh Benjaminian preservation of the storehouse of the past...this mesmerizing image is the 'still point' around which the disorder and urgency of a properly novelistic time will turn.⁴⁴⁶

The Takeover's principal setting is a small town to the southeast of Rome called Nemi, where '[i]n mid-1974', as Stannard notes, Spark bought 'a studio apartment overlooking the lake'.⁴⁴⁷ Stannard's biography describes her 'touring Italy' and 'examin[ing] villas' with artist and sculptor Penelope Jardine; it also seems notable, in light of the overlap of textual and architectural space discussed in what follows, that Spark was to write several articles on Italian architecture for *Architectural Digest* in the 1980s.⁴⁴⁸ While a

⁴⁴⁴ J Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy* (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p.67

⁴⁴⁵ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth, *Realism and Consensus in the English Novel: Time, Space, Narrative* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. x, 76

⁴⁴⁶ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp.156-7

⁴⁴⁷ Martin Stannard, *Muriel Spark: The Biography* (London: Hachette UK, 2009), p.405

⁴⁴⁸ Stannard, pp.405, 459, 581

dispute over land and property at Nemi – ostensibly owned by Maggie, a wealthy American or member of Bauman's global elite, but 'spiritually' claimed by Englishman Hubert – provides the novel's main narrative struggle, here I want to focus on the Villa Tullio, a 'Palladian villa in the Veneto' belonging to Maggie's husband and 'Italian nobleman' Berto, and very much an 'object of desire':⁴⁴⁹

Berto's Palladian villa was a famous one. It had been photographed from the beginning of photography and, before that, etched, sketched, painted, minutely described inside and out, poetically laboured upon, visited by scholars and drooled over by the world's architects. The Villa Tullio was indeed a beauty; the Villas Foscari, Emo, Sarego, D'Este, Barbaro, Capra, with their elegant and economical delights still in comparison with the smaller Villa Tullio, seemed to some tastes to be more in the nature of architectural projects and propositions. The Villa Tullio was somehow magically complete and at rest. It was a farmhouse built for the agricultural industry of the original Tullios, for the charm of its position beside a reclaimed waterway and the civilized comfort of Berto's prosperous ancestors. Now, the plans of this house, every angle, every detail of its structure, being known throughout the world, photographs of the interior and exterior, and the original plan of the lay-out from every side having been published for centuries in studious manuals and picture books, it was hardly worth the while or the price for a gang of expert thieves to send their men to case the lay-out.⁴⁵⁰

With the exception of 'Tullio' itself, these names refer to real Palladian villas in the Veneto, that is country residences designed by the renowned sixteenth-century Venetian architect Andrea Palladio.⁴⁵¹ Like the estate in Austen or the town-house in Balzac, the Palladian villa provides the physical and conceptual space for a novelistic elaboration of privatopia. Indeed as with the microcosms or miniatures discussed in the previous chapters, the 'smaller' the structure the greater its imaginative enlargement. The fictionality of the Villa Tullio allows Spark to posit a building so 'magically complete' as to make the iconic real-world villas look like 'architectural projects and propositions', in a suggestion of a utopian perfection rather than mere reflection of the real. In other words, the novel imaginatively realises an ideal of the Palladian Villa, whose image of 'High Renaissance calm and harmony' facilitates a Balzacian 'awakening' of readerly desire.⁴⁵² More than an architectural quality, the Villa Tullio's sense of being 'magically complete and at rest' points to its metonymic relation (like that of Austen's estate) to the social space inhabited by 'Berto's prosperous ancestors'; it is as if the historical aura of the Palladian villa manifests the timelessness of landed

⁴⁴⁹ *The Takeover*, pp.151, 10

⁴⁵⁰ *The Takeover*, pp.155-6

⁴⁵¹ David Watkin, *A History of Western Architecture* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2005), p.243

⁴⁵² Watkin, p.243

property. And yet this fantasy is perhaps closer to the surface, more visible, than in Balzac's town-house, and I want to show that Spark's 'neoliberal novel' does not simply reproduce the spatial imaginary of the realist privatopia in equally timeless fashion. Though the privileged qualities of the Balzacian dwelling – 'peace', 'backwater', 'storehouse of the past' – persist in the Palladian villa's rural setting and air of permanence (notably Berto has 'changed nothing of the structure'), they here exist in tension with a set of seemingly-opposed associations, which stress the villa's fame as a global 'object of desire'.⁴⁵³ The passage suggests that the historical aura of the privatopia, far from disappearing over time, is now literally a 'mesmerizing image', its persistence ensured by this 'appearance'. But in the process, the meaning of the villa's history seems to have shifted, being now principally the history of its publication and representation in various mediums ('It had been photographed from the beginning of photography and, before that, etched, sketched, painted...'), while its landed origins occupy only a sentence – the fourth in the passage above, after which 'Now...' immediately returns us to the textual history. The list of mediums notably precedes the description of the building itself, as if the latter were the result of this artistic labour; the villa is a 'mesmerizing image' before the narrative produces its own image of its physical or habitable space. The purely aesthetic ('charm'), rather than productive or 'agricultural' relationship between the villa and the land hints that the timelessness of landed property might here be less a matter of the continuity of the 'human organization' of the estate, or of the social space of Palladio's era, than of a decontextualized image reproduced over time. The original referent of the building's timeless air thus coexists with a sense that the villa now resides in an abstract space of representation, whose stilling or spatialization of time achieves permanence through more ephemeral means.

Indeed the interior of the Villa Tullio, revealed immediately after this introduction, is as much an object of visual pleasure as a Balzacian 'Utopia of the household' of the kind Jameson describes, 'in whose courtyards, hallways, and garden paths the immemorial routines of daily life, of husbandry and domestic economy, are traced in advance'.⁴⁵⁴ As we move inside the building, the oppositions introduced in the preceding passage,

⁴⁵³ *The Takeover*, p.156

⁴⁵⁴ *The Political Unconscious*, pp.156-7

which structure Berto's villa as both 'famous' and a 'backwater', public and private, global and local, are dramatized and resolved in distinctively spatial terms. Berto watches from above as the 'expert thieves' cross the threshold of his property, leading to a formal entrance ritual (I quote from the scene at some length to stress its spaciousness):

It was ten minutes past twelve when two smart-looking men drove up to the marvellous front door in a white touring car. On to the upper balcony came Berto from the library where he had been glooming behind the French windows. Out he came into the shadows cast by the sweetness and light of that harmonious pediment... Berto was proud of his Palladian jewel, and his heart bent towards the two arrivals with such a desire that they should be educated tourists wanting to see the house that he invested them at first sight with various nice qualities. They mounted the fine steps, a tall, white-haired man and an equally tall youth, presentably dressed in fresh shirts and pale trousers; they approached the house with the right visitors' modesty and lost themselves under the balcony where Berto hovered and awaited their ring of the door-bell. After a few seconds, during which Berto imagined them to be admiring the portico, that harmonious little temple, and the well-calculated panorama therefrom, the bell rang... 'A few moments,' Berto said, giving... the visitors time, no doubt, to admire the care that had gone into the maintenance of the villa inside and out, starting with the hall and its superb outlook... Berto descended in his own time and... took in the well-silvered hair and the interesting light blue and white fine stripes of his trousers, the jacket of which he held over his arm. The younger man, who wore well-tailored fawn trousers of some uncrushable and impeccable material, was holding a shiny slim catalogue of an artistic nature... 'Come along,' said Berto. 'With pleasure, come along.' The younger man left his catalogue on the hall table, while Guillaume came forward to take the older man's jacket from his arm.⁴⁵⁵

This relatively minor moment in narrative terms is the occasion for a prolonged ritual of admittance, as the novel savours, if to some degree ironizes, Berto's 'Utopia of the household'. In the elevated diction of his emergence onto the 'harmonious pediment', the narrator lavishes her own poetic labour on the villa, as in the redundant repetition – it is as if he emerges twice, the second time with a lyrical flourish – which knowingly contributes to the history of representational excess just described. Equally mediated and second-hand is Berto's own desire, which takes the form of an imaginative investment in that of the visitors. Again we have the sense of being at one remove from the physical space of the villa, as description of the building is filtered through the visitors' perceptions, or rather what Berto imagines them to be perceiving (for the reader of course this is a double remove); privatopia is experienced from the inside, from the perspective of the owner, but at the same time vicariously, through a

⁴⁵⁵ *The Takeover*, pp.157-9

displacement onto these strangers. Berto's visualization of his property combines a form of surveillance – in coordination with his butler Guillaume, who communicates his evaluation of the visitors through 'a kind of reciprocal telepathy' – with this vicarious appreciation of its 'harmonious' architecture, in a synthesis of territorial and aestheticizing modes of vision. There is a sense that the visitors' admiring gazes 'complete' Berto's fantasy of possession, in line with the notion that the villa's value is now inseparable from its representation and public scrutiny. Just as readers first know the building through the history of its representation, Berto seems only to fully inhabit and possess his property through the mediation of the visitors, as if the intrusion of 'the public' – Guillaume refers to them simply as 'people' or '*gente*' – activates the space (before his emergence onto the upper balcony, Berto had been 'glooming behind the French windows'). This imagined, second-hand experience of his villa, like his communication with Guillaume, is almost telepathic, an elision of mental and physical space which appears to grant Berto omniscience. Significantly, the villa's architecture plays a part in this totalizing perspective – Berto's graceful movement onto the balcony displays 'the sweetness and light of that harmonious pediment', while also granting him a vantage point from which to survey the visitors, stressing his reciprocity with the lived space of the house. The scene's visual logic is somewhat filmic and 'panoram[ic]' itself, and conveys a strong sense of spatial simultaneity within the 'harmonious' totality of the villa. Defined, fluid movements filtered through Berto's omniscient perspective articulate the contours of this utopian space – the visitors 'mount...the fine steps...and los[e] themselves under the balcony'; Guillaume 'climb[s] the beautiful sweeping staircase', while Berto oversees these actions from his literal and imaginative vantage point. What is 'traced in advance' in these motions is not so much 'the immemorial routines of daily life' privileged in Balzac ('whose courtyards, hallways, and garden paths' figure space in terms of 'dwelling') as the total visualization and knowledge of the villa evoked in the introductory passage, which might be said to express a broader desire for totality. Berto of course believes the thieves are 'educated tourists' or 'art historians', in other words the means by which his property is 'known throughout the world' down to its 'every detail' and ultimately reproduced as a visual commodity; their anonymous arrival and (Berto thinks) studious attention gestures towards the global as a structuring absence imaginable only as an extraneous movement through the local and interior dimensions of the villa. While the performance of omniscience and spatio-temporal mastery in this scene is redolent of traditional realism, Berto's privatopia

becomes ‘magically complete’ only with the arrival of the visitors, who serve to counterpoint his interior view with a ‘significance ‘out there’’ – specifically, I suggest, with the extraneous knowledge of the market they bear in the form of a ‘shiny slim catalogue of an artistic nature’ (namely that of ‘Neuilles-Pfortzheimer, a Swiss auction house famous among collectors of paintings and fine arts’), symbol of their ‘expert’ valuation and visual consumption of the Villa Tullio.⁴⁵⁶ As much as the miniature seems momentarily able to contain the gigantic – even, as in *The Driver’s Seat*, the largest scale of human activity, as an allegory of the global – its spatial closure again comes into focus as provisional and mediated.

The visitors, themselves bearers of a text, thus figure what I would characterise as the textual (re)production and consumption of Berto’s villa. In *Privacy and Publicity:*

Modern Architecture as Mass Media, Beatriz Colomina describes

a transformation of the site of architectural production – no longer exclusively located on the construction site, but more and more displaced into the rather immaterial sites of architectural publication, exhibitions, journals. Paradoxically, those are supposedly much more ephemeral media than the building and yet in many ways are much more permanent: they secure a place for architecture in history.⁴⁵⁷

In comparison to the original architectural and agricultural production of the Palladian villas, the Villa Tullio represents a shift towards textual production through the kinds of media Colomina describes, whose ‘permanence’ takes the form of reified images of the past. The touristic presentation of the villa evokes less the material persistence of landed property than its history preserved or ‘produced’ for visual consumption – a process to which ‘The Palladian Villas of the Veneto’, designated a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1994, have indeed been subject.⁴⁵⁸ What in Balzac appeared as ‘a storehouse of the past’ has in Spark been commodified as such, which seems to result in privatopia at one remove, conveyed through a self-consciously mediated or meta- realism. While the existing villas are increasingly conceived as international tourist sites, the Palladian ‘style’ has travelled in turn; architectural historian David Watkin writes of Palladio that ‘there is probably no architect whose work has been so widely imitated in so many

⁴⁵⁶ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Random House, 1994), p.111; *The Takeover*, p.162

⁴⁵⁷ Colomina, pp.14-5

⁴⁵⁸ ‘City of Vicenza and the Palladian Villas of the Veneto’, *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*, UNESCO, n.d. Web. 7. Apr. 2014.

countries for so long a period'.⁴⁵⁹ Significantly though, *The Takeover* presents the very second-hand nature of contemporary privatopia, embodied in the global and textual reproducibility of the Palladian villa, in utopian light. On the one hand, the possibility of a 'universal' desire – of the kind of anonymous 'longing for possession' which (in Jameson's reading of Balzac's town-house) becomes 'allegorical of desire in general and of Desire as such' – is ironized as the product of Berto's restricted point of view, as in the dramatic irony of his mistaking 'expert thieves' (identified immediately to the reader) for 'educated tourists'. The mediated, knowing quality of the narration indeed compromises the earnest soliciting of readerly desire which characterises Balzac's omniscient technique. If his description of the Cormon town-house 'solicits the reader not merely to reconstruct [the] building and grounds in some inner eye, but to reinvent it as Idea and as heart's desire', here the process of visualization and imaginative investment is pre-empted and as it were privatized through internal focalization, to which the reader is placed at an ironic (but not necessarily critical) distance.⁴⁶⁰ This shift conveys less a critique or parody (the scene is surely closer to pastiche) than a concept of privatopia as 'preconsumed', its universality as an 'object of desire' now being akin to the commodity's; desire itself thus comes to seem predetermined.⁴⁶¹ Along with Berto's anticipation of the visitors' desire, there is a sense that the narrator can only reaffirm the desirability of this global commodity, however redundantly – and yet it is in the process of adding another representation to the chain of textual reproductions of the villa that a secondary utopian impulse seems to emerge, a desire for architecture as a form of mass media (to evoke the title of Colomina's book) as much as a household or dwelling. This desire, conceived as already textual, appears on a diegetic level as a form of identification and projection reminiscent of the imaginative investment of reading itself. From his 'hover[ing]' vantage point, Berto appears to 'read' the Villa Tullio through the strangers, who themselves contribute to its collective production and consumption. If their arrival registers the radical exteriority of the global, in this case the unrepresentable supra-individuality of the market, the villa nonetheless constitutes a momentary 'still point' within that space – a globally-produced but locally-legible 'text' which mediates between Berto's inside view and the seemingly 'exterritorial' (if not universal in the sense of Balzac's town-house) desire in

⁴⁵⁹ Watkin, p.243

⁴⁶⁰ *The Political Unconscious*, p.147

⁴⁶¹ *Postmodernism*, p.150

which he imaginatively participates. In this respect, the villa's very reification raises the possibility that totalizing knowledge of this 'magically complete' space might speculatively stand in for the larger global space from which it is now inseparable. To the extent that the extradiegetic narrator and actual reader enter into this chain, the scene enacts *The Takeover*'s broader imaginative investment in the privatopia as an emblematic space through which the new global realities of the 1970s might be registered. Like the estate in Austen whose 'improvements' Duckworth sees as expressions of social change, Berto's Palladian villa internalizes the period's 'sea-change' (as the narrator calls it in a pivotal passage discussed below) in its stark combination of 'timeless' landed origins and reification as a kind of media artefact. This new textuality suggests that the privatopia's metonymic or totalizing potential – its realism – now depends on its reproduction and dissemination as a form of media, pointing to the novel's own postmodern and mediated mode of reference, as will be seen.

As Colomina's book indicates, viewing architecture as a form of mass-media implies a notion of what Barthes calls 'the publicity of the private', an opposition I now want to suggest is similarly dissolved in Spark's depiction of the Villa Tullio. The privacy of privatopia is clearly at stake in the entrance scene, to the extent that the villa's textualization seems to herald its deterritorialization – the partial receding of Berto's proprietorship and the 'publication' of this once-exclusive space.⁴⁶² 'The age of photography', Barthes writes, 'corresponds...to the creation of a new social value, which is the publicity of the private: the private is consumed as such, publically'.⁴⁶³ Barthes gives the familiar example of 'the incessant aggression of the press against the privacy of the stars', but he might equally have mentioned heritage tourism and the opening of stately homes to the public, more relevant examples in this context. On the one hand, in being made (minimally) public Berto's villa is 'put to work', its interior surfaces exposed to the gaze of tourism and visual consumption in a manner that implies, as with stately homes, the need to economically sustain landed property (often

⁴⁶² The concept of deterritorialization is often associated with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. See *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R Lane trans.

⁴⁶³ Cited in Colomina, p.8

considered a parasitical store of value) following its historical decline.⁴⁶⁴ And yet this process can be read in terms of a more ideological kind of work, as offering a simulacrum of ‘the publicity of the private’. I suggest that Berto’s readerly remove – his omnipresence yet apparent decentring as proprietor – works to reconcile the villa’s private and public meanings while positing a ‘general consciousness’ which, like the bourgeois novel itself, in fact constructs its own ‘public’. Perhaps the most obvious public meaning of the traditional Palladian villa is its symbolization of class power, and ‘Berto’s Paladian jewel’ is on one level a monument to ‘the original Tullios...Berto’s prosperous ancestors’. But through an aestheticization of property and possession, the villa’s role in the present-day articulation of that power is envisioned as fundamentally benevolent, compatible with the building’s more utopian dimension. In this light, I suggest, Berto’s naïve admittance of the thieves appears as a reflection of his utopianism – his (class-bound) view of private space as non-conflictual. When Maggie hears that her husband has admitted the strangers, she complains that ‘Berto will get us all killed one day...They could be armed. We could all be tied up and shot through the head while they loot the place...You read about them every day in the papers’.⁴⁶⁵ Her servant Lauro responds: ‘Your husband is too much of a gentleman’.⁴⁶⁶ If Maggie’s global mobility allows her to circumvent the embattled terrain of Nemi in the novel’s main plotline, Berto’s old-fashioned ‘gentlemanliness’ concerning his villa facilitates a symbolic incorporation of potential conflict. Notably, it does not occur to Berto that the ‘longing for possession’ provoked by the Villa Tullio might cross over into the looting Maggie fears. His ‘gentlemanly’ attitude to his property entails a particular style or manner of possessing (again with certain class associations of wealthy philanthropy and hospitality), which he demonstrates in ‘courteously’ admitting ‘gente’ or members of the public, whom he ‘invest[s] with various nice qualities’ and assumes to be the ‘educated’, ideal readers of the building’s architecture. Berto’s omnipresence in this way mitigates surveillance’s more overt exercise of territorial power with a form of identification, a mutual, learned appreciation for the Villa Tullio shared between gentlemen.⁴⁶⁷ His ‘hover[ing]’ perspective produces the visual seamlessness I have described, which envisions the conflictual element embodied by the thieves

⁴⁶⁴ Jacques Gouverneur, *Contemporary Capitalism and Marxist Economics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983), p.137

⁴⁶⁵ *The Takeover*, p.159-60

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.160

⁴⁶⁷ Indeed the gendered nature of the public/private division implicit in Spark’s earlier communities of women is here shielded (as in *The Driver’s Seat*) by an apparent ‘genderlessness of power’.

incorporated into the ‘harmonious’ totality of the villa, as if to efface the contested threshold of private space by rendering it as a smooth surface. Significantly, the scene culminates in this aestheticizing gaze and fluid spatiality encompassing the physical appearance and gestures of the strangers themselves, with their ‘well-silvered hair’ and ‘fawn trousers of some uncrushable and impeccable material’; the final image of Guillaume ‘c[oming] forward to take the older man’s jacket from his arm’ crystallizes their involvement in privatopia under the sign of Berto’s hospitality. As with stately homes, this scene from *The Takeover* thus depicts a ritual inclusion of an element of the public within a space whose privateness is disavowed in being made visible – deceptively available for consumption and at the same time consigned to the historical past. Here though that visibility also takes the form of textuality, in the way the villa’s literal publication at once inscribes and effaces the signs of its ownership and authorship; the ‘displacement’ of the villa, as text, beyond its (private) point of origin, is envisioned as its deterritorialization. Berto’s property now seems to reside partly in the semi-public space or ‘immaterial sites’ of architectural production presided over not by Berto himself but by a kind of exterritorial elite – the artists, tourists, scholars and architects whose impersonal admiration frames our knowledge of the villa. But of course the strangers are actually ‘expert thieves’, and the irony of the purely appreciative gaze Berto attributes to them – in fact his own script or ‘general consciousness’, despite his apparent retreat to a more readerly position – underlines that this privatopia is founded on an enabling fiction, a false assumption of a unified reading public. In this respect, the entrance scene might be better described in terms of interpellation than deterritorialization: as Berto’s contradictory attempt to summon his own ‘public’ on the grounds of his (private) desire.⁴⁶⁸

Like the ‘sumptuary compounds, leisure cities, and gated replicas of imaginary California suburbs’ mentioned in the introduction, the Villa Tullio appears as a total space safely removed from the contested social space of the city proper (alluded to in Maggie’s anxious comment), which allows Berto to envision the social on his own, privatized terms. Privatopia in this sense constitutes not atomized individuality, but its own pseudo-public space; it presumes some form of desire-based politics of community, however exclusionary. Underpinning the tacit metafictionality of Berto’s

⁴⁶⁸ The concept of interpellation derives from Louis Althusser’s *Marxist Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), Ben Brewster and Grahame Lock trans.

entrance ritual is the novel's traditional investment in an idea of 'the publicity of the private', its claim to offer up the domestic and the personal for public consumption, while privatizing them in another sense, as the property of a readership interpellated in terms of bourgeois privacy and individuality. As I mentioned in the introduction, critics have shown that techniques like omniscient narration presuppose their own public or 'common world', and for the remainder of this reading I want to argue that the space and set of assumptions which I have been calling 'privatopia' serves to 'ground' *The Takeover*'s realism in this broader sense. Spark's omniscient narrator, like Berto, can be said to imagine the social and the public on private terms, despite gesturing towards a new deterritorialization and 'publicity of the private' within global or postmodern culture. Once again, the 'immaterial sites' of textual and mediatic production are the vehicles of this promised publicity, notably in the narrator's assumption of a form of journalistic authority, part of an explicitly second-hand relationship to the real which extends beyond the description of Berto's villa. Indeed what I have characterised as *The Takeover*'s mediated or meta-realism might equally be described as journalistic, to the extent that the novel can be read as a fictionalization of the crisis narratives which dominated media discourse for much of the 1970s (and in which literary fiction was 'deeply implicated' according to one study of the decade's cultural production).⁴⁶⁹ Stannard describes Spark's 'obsessive reading' of newspapers during this period; much of her seventies fiction, he suggests, 'derived from press reports'.⁴⁷⁰ *The Takeover*'s fictional narrative is punctuated with references to contemporary events – often motivated by a character reading about a particular news story – which serve to (sometimes literally) date the diegetic action, integrating historical and narrative time. These allusions are rarely directly relevant to the plot, but reflect the contingency of news coverage; Hubert reads stories ranging from the Watergate scandal to the deaths of Noël Coward, Julian Huxley and P.G. Wodehouse, such that the novel becomes on one level a broad chronicle of the first half of the seventies.⁴⁷¹ This loose meta-narrative casts the period as a vaguely-defined turning point, crystallized in a phrase directly quoted several times, and further reiterated by characters: "The passing of an era..., the newspapers had commented".⁴⁷² The interpersonal narrative can thus be imagined intersecting with or exemplifying this broader socio-cultural shift. But as the clichéd

⁴⁶⁹ Moore-Gilbert, p.152

⁴⁷⁰ Stannard, pp.363-4

⁴⁷¹ *The Takeover*, pp.72, 12, 154

⁴⁷² Ibid., p.154

nature of the phrase suggests, the glancing, periodic references to events like Watergate convey not so much the period's historical change as its rendering as news, a brief illumination of the ever-present background and identifiable texture of the 'era'.

One such intersection between the diegetic world and the global economic crisis of the early seventies – what McQuillan calls a 'singular textual moment' halfway through *The Takeover* – brings into focus the novel's relationship to journalism, forms which can be said to mediate between private and public space.⁴⁷³ Through a close-reading of this passage, I want to show that despite the second-hand quality I have described, the text does not simply reflect some external, journalistic referent, but works to render the wider public meaning of the seventies in its own, distinctively novelistic terms (to which the concept of privatopia will again prove central). In a scene halfway through the novel, McQuillan notes, 'The narrative suddenly breaks from a close-up representation of the sexual and material excesses of an insular, bourgeois, Western community, panning out to consider the global setting':⁴⁷⁴

At dinner they spoke of Hubert, and of Nemi to where they were all planning shortly to return. It was not in their minds at the time that this last quarter of the year they had entered, that of 1973, was in fact the beginning of something new in their world; a change in the meaning of property and money. They all understood these were changing in value, and they talked from time to time of recession and inflation, of losses on the stock-market, failures in business, bargains in real-estate; they habitually bandied the phrases of the newspaper economists and unquestioningly used the newspaper writers' figures of speech. They talked of hedges against inflation, as if mathematics could contain actual air and some row of hawthorn could stop an army of numbers from marching over it...But it did not occur to one of those spirited and in various ways intelligent people round Berto's table that a complete mutation of our means of nourishment had already come into being where the concept of money and property were concerned...such a sea-change in the nature of reality as could not have been envisaged by Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud. Such a mutation that what were assets were to be liabilities and no armed guards could be found and fed sufficient to guard those armed guards who failed to protect the properties they guarded, whether hoarded in banks or built on confined territories...Innocent of all this future they sat round the table and, since all were attached to Nemi, talked of Hubert. Maggie had him very much on her mind and the wormwood of her attention focused on him as the battle in the Middle East hiccuped to a pause in the warm late October of 1973.⁴⁷⁵

McQuillan suggests that this scene provides a 'counternarrative' to the diegesis:

⁴⁷³ McQuillan, p.17

⁴⁷⁴ McQuillan, p.17

⁴⁷⁵ *The Takeover*, pp.127-8

After this singular textual moment not only does the alert reader begin to question the absurdity of the bourgeois characters' lives but also the absurdity of the very categories of character and anecdote as they are associated with the bourgeois novel...Rather than being a novel about secular Europe's thirst for spirituality, it reads as a critique of the bankruptcy of Late Capitalism and fictions of exchange value...Spark, in 1976, is in fact recognizing the importance of 1973 to the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'. 1973 is the date which both Jameson and Harvey give as constitutive of certain postmodern discourses in art and society.⁴⁷⁶

Notably, the deconstructive function McQuillan assigns to this passage seems only to displace the novel's realism onto a 'textual' or extradiegetic level, as in the direct historical reference implied by Spark's 'critique' of capitalism and recognition of 'the importance of 1973'; if this 'singular textual moment' assumes 'an untimely relation to the forms of intelligibility' provided by contemporary fiction and journalism, it is simultaneously timely, even topical.⁴⁷⁷ Drawing from Lukács's analysis of how realist form is unevenly contoured by the very history it fictionalizes, I want to complicate the notion that the untimeliness McQuillan sees in Spark's neoliberal novel signifies 'a relation of otherness' to the traditional novel.⁴⁷⁸ McQuillan implies that this moment exceeds not only the formal conventions of the bourgeois novel ('the very categories of character and anecdote') but its class consciousness, which for Lukács limits its ability to convey a totalizing 'critique of...Capitalism'.⁴⁷⁹ And yet this passage hinges on the superiority and spatiotemporal mastery of the omniscient narrator, a key component of bourgeois realism. What distinguishes the text's 'panning out to consider the global setting' from the space-time mastery present in Balzac's fiction, for example, is less a matter of subject-position than of increased scale and immediacy, facilitated by the dated allusions to an extratextual and geopolitical real. Despite the narrator's disavowal of 'the newspaper writers'' rhetoric (which might be said to allow its incorporation), the unexpected reference to the Middle East conflict in the final sentence itself evokes journalism in its objectivity and the instantaneity of its associative shift; exceeding what any individual subject can have witnessed, the synchronicity of the Arab-Israeli war with this 'insular...Western community' is thinkable only due to the existence of a global media network. Like the allusion to (say) the death of Noël Coward, what

⁴⁷⁶ McQuillan, pp.17-8

⁴⁷⁷ McQuillan, p.18

⁴⁷⁸ McQuillan argues that Spark's novels are "'premature' in their experimentation with novelistic form...she is decidedly in a relation of otherness to the tradition of English literature" (p.11).

⁴⁷⁹ György Lukács, 'Narrate or Describe', *Writer and Critic: And Other Essays* (Lincoln: iUniverse, 2005), trans. and Ed. Arthur Kahn., pp. 110-148

Barthes would call the ‘reality effect’ of the Middle East detail derives from its apparent contingency, its positing of a ‘referential plenitude’ of reported events which the narrator might at any time cross-reference with the diegesis.⁴⁸⁰ This cross-referencing stresses the narrator’s localizing force, her ability to ‘pin down’ the characters and connect these disparate spaces, while her own location, or what Kaplan calls a speaker’s ‘enunciatory situation’, remains obscure.⁴⁸¹ The narrator’s access to a larger mediatic realm in this sense facilitates a performance of exterritoriality, of her independence from the constricted private world inhabited by the characters.

But as in the entrance scene, the private and the territorial ‘return’ in another sense. Lukács associates the separation of omniscient subject from observed object with the reified, bourgeois consciousness implicit in both journalism and the novel, ‘forms of intelligibility’ which Spark’s narrator works to synthesise rather than suspend, as if to shore up the text’s postmodern realism via the public authority of media discourse;⁴⁸² this stylistic synthesis locates *The Takeover* within the contemporary history of the realist novel alongside movements like New Journalism (or the ‘non-fiction novel’), which similarly responded to a perceived waning of fiction’s cultural authority and an expansion of mass-media internationally (particularly noticeable from the 1960s with heavily mediatized political events like Vietnam).⁴⁸³ Here the object of this scientific attention is Maggie and Berto’s Ischia villa, another privatopia which the narrator’s ‘panning out’ does not transcend so much as bring into metonymic relation with ‘the global setting’. Again there is a suggestion that total knowledge of the villa – indicated by a protracted ‘freeze-frame’ and classically realist evocation of narrative closure as inescapable fate – might equate to knowledge of the larger space, at least from the impossible, exterritorial vantage point assumed by the narrator, who (like the visitors in the earlier scene) serves to ‘complete’ this static image of privacy and locality by restoring its absent global dimension. The ‘still point’ of privatopia is literalized in several references to ‘Berto’s table’, the axis around which the passage rotates and thus the symbolic centre not only of this bourgeois ‘common world’ but of the vaster global

⁴⁸⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), Richard Howard trans., p. 148

⁴⁸¹ Kaplan, p.159

⁴⁸² György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1971), Rodney Livingstone trans., p.100

⁴⁸³ Phyllis Frus, *The Politics and Poetics of Journalistic Narrative: The Timely and the Timeless* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.1-12

space; the associative shift of the final sentence stresses that this ‘pause’ in the diegesis, halfway through the novel, perfectly aligns with the ebbing of the conflict in the Middle East, and thereby with the broader historical interregnum of 1973. If this moment heralds the emergence of postmodernism (as McQuillan suggests), the narrator presents it as a transformation, not of ‘the cultural logic of late capitalism’, but of bourgeois private space, identifiable from realism’s ‘consensual’ perspective with ‘a sea-change in the nature of reality’; it is the disappearance of the older guarantees of land and property (as in the impotence of the ‘armed guards’), and the worldview they serve to orient, which the characters are unable to grasp from their local isolation. That the novel offers a very particular perspective on the period is apparent from the imagery depicting an ineluctable collapse of spatial barriers – a momentous abstraction of space by ‘an army of numbers’ – as historical change is imagined relative to (as something that *happens* to) privatopia. Significantly, these portentous images of change, like ‘the newspaper writers’ figures of speech’, remain metaphorical, never achieving representation outside the narrator’s isolated utterance; they press at the threshold of a narrative present which remains fundamentally static and empty, defined only negatively (what is significant is ‘not in their minds’ nor part of the characters’ trivial conversation, nor ‘envisaged by Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud’, and so on). From the narrator’s point of view, the ‘innocen[ce]’ of the characters at Berto’s table seems almost prelapsarian; their present appears as a past utopia threatened by the impending displacement – by the ‘world of vanishing substance and lost directions’ many postmodern critics saw emerging in the early seventies, here synonymous with the end of privatopia.⁴⁸⁴ McQuillan notes that ‘October 1973 [was] the date of the fourth Arab-Israeli war, the OPEC oil embargo and the geo-politics of the energy crisis’.⁴⁸⁵ Expressing a journalistic conception of ‘the publicity of the private’ through distinctively fictional means, *The Takeover*’s ‘singular textual moment’ situates privatopia at the centre of this historical turning point, which the novel prolongs and mediates in the form of a reified image, a timely yet frozen present. Staying with Lukács, his ‘Narrate or Describe’ criticizes novelists like Zola who attempt to grasp history in this form – as a succession of ‘still lives’, often descriptions of a static object world, which entail ‘a prolongation of the state of pure immediacy’.⁴⁸⁶ Here the frozen, fully-knowable present of the bourgeois dinner party

⁴⁸⁴ Kaplan, p.156

⁴⁸⁵ McQuillan, p.17

⁴⁸⁶ ‘Narrate or Describe’, pp.110, 148

provides a stable foundation for the historical (but also journalistic) novelty of 1973, with its more abstract and unrepresentable space-time; the novel mediates history with its own form of immediacy. In light of Lukács's arguments, the untimeliness (and indeed spatial disjuncture) of the narrator's intrusion can be read as a formal contradiction which registers a restricted historical vantage point: not only the epistemological limits of Spark's own perception of such recent events, but the rigid separation of subject and object *The Takeover* retains from traditional realism and which results, on the one hand, in a sense of historical change as 'a catastrophe, a sudden, unexpected turn of events that comes from outside and eliminates all mediations', and on the other – what is its correlative rather than 'singular' exception – as an object of distanced contemplation and imaginative mastery.⁴⁸⁷ As I have argued, that 'outside' is here a global, mediatic realm which becomes immediately knowable within the privileged figurative space of privatopia. In this respect, *The Takeover*'s political imaginary emerges not only from what Lukács views as the *a priori* limits and possibilities of nineteenth-century realism, but from Spark's attempt to bring them into a timely relation with 1970s postmodernism and the early history of neoliberalism.

As a corollary of Barthes' remark, the 'publicity' of both the novel and the newspaper equally depends upon a conception of personal space, on the compatibility of public discourse with the terms and physical sites of bourgeois privacy – a connection underscored when a guest at one of Berto's villas tries to order 'a Communist or slightly left-wing newspaper', which causes the owner to feel that 'his roof had been insulted and his hearth befouled'; only 'the established paper of the right...[was] permitted within his walls'.⁴⁸⁸ This detail points to the fragility of Berto's notion of privatopia as non-conflictual, its dependence on a fully homogenous 'public'. Like the scenes I have been discussing, it is suggestive of the way realism's 'consensus', to return to Ermarth's phrase, entails a symbolic negotiation of the limits of its 'common world', beyond what the newspaper is capable of. The omniscient 'counternarrative' seeks to expand those limits in order that the novel might speak to the wider cultural meaning of the early 1970s ('A parable of the pagan seventies', runs the subtitle of the first edition), just as Berto posits a global and exterritorial public for his Palladian villa; and yet I have suggested that the text remains tied to the traditional 'grounds' of realism's authority –

⁴⁸⁷ *History and Class Consciousness*, p.154

⁴⁸⁸ *The Takeover*, p.115

that it must speak *from* the perspective of the private. I have argued that Spark's vision of the period's historical novelty cannot be separated from the determinative weight of this formal inheritance, such that *The Takeover*'s most telling feature might be less its topicality than its revelation of 'the terrible *solidity* of successful forms', as Moretti puts it – in this case, the realist novel's ability (similarly exemplified by the contemporary New Journalism) to remain timely, to retain its authority even after the cresting of modernism and emergence of postmodernism during the cultural transformations of the 60s and early 70s. In this sense, the text does not simply 'animate the turn to neoliberalism' but enters into a parallel, formal evolution. Confronting the period's 'sea-change' by turning to the 'solidity' of the realist tradition, *The Takeover* suggests that the neoliberal novel might be viewed less as a new addition to a linear progression of styles than a 'moderating' form, part of a post-sixties delimitation of (late) modernist innovation and renewal of 'symbolic hegemony' which began as a response to the upheavals of the 1970s.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁹ *Modern Epic*, p.195

Conclusion

In his defining anthology *The New Journalism* (1973), American author Tom Wolfe outlines a 'status structure' which had dominated twentieth-century literature:

It was somewhat like a class structure on the eighteenth-century model in that there was a chance for you to compete but only with people of your own class. The literary upper class were the novelists... They had exclusive entry to the soul of man, the profound emotions, the eternal mysteries, and so forth... The middle class were the 'men of letters', the literary essayists, the more authoritative critics; the occasional biographer, historian or cosmically inclined scientist... The lower class were the journalists, and they were so low down in the structure that they were barely noticed at all. They were regarded chiefly as day laborers who dug up slags of raw information for writers of higher 'sensibility' to make use of. As for people who wrote for popular ('slick') magazines and Sunday supplements... They were the lumpenproles.⁴⁹⁰

Wolfe goes on to describe New Journalism performing 'all of these roles at the same time' and thus 'ignoring literary class lines that have been almost a century in the making'.⁴⁹¹ Beyond the hyperbole and self-promotion often associated with the new form, this account of the then-rising trend of literary journalism – cast as an oppositional or even revolutionary seizing of the means of literary production by cultural 'laborers' (to extend Wolfe's metaphor) – provides one framing of the perceived waning of the novel's traditional authority relative to the increasing concentrations of media power and influence which confronted writers (in the U.S. and elsewhere) from the sixties and seventies.⁴⁹² Wolfe's own 'The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening', published in *New York* magazine three years after the passage above, seemed indeed to transcend its 'lumpenprole' origins to become, along with historian Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (1979), one of the most influential contemporary narratives of the American seventies, both being versions of the 'cultural closure' thesis I outlined in the general introduction.⁴⁹³ Notably, historian Peter N. Carroll responded by associating Wolfe and Lasch with 'the power of mass media', against which he positioned his own early history of the decade *It Seemed Like Nothing Happened: The Tragedy and Promise of America in the 1970s* (1982):

Lasch's original article on the narcissistic society appeared in the *N.Y. Review of Books* in September 1976, just three weeks after Tom Wolfe coined the term

⁴⁹⁰ Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism* (London: Picador, 1996), p.39

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.40

⁴⁹² See Frus, pp.1-12

⁴⁹³ Tom Wolfe, 'The "Me" Decade and the Third Great Awakening', *New York*, August 23, 1976

‘Me Decade’ in a widely read article in *New York* magazine. In that same month, the idea appeared in a *Newsweek* cover story and in a syndicated column by Ellen Goodman. In this way, the major media...set the ground rules for all subsequent considerations of the seventies.⁴⁹⁴

One ambiguity of the New Journalism, as with the traditional media’s role in political scandals like Watergate, was that the success of its investigative ‘exposure’ often revealed the reach of its own power, which could seem at odds with its oppositional stance. Already in the early eighties, Carroll saw behind the critical façade of media coverage since the Nixon era a concerted ‘attempt to separate the seventies from their historical context’ (his book’s title reacted against the journalistic claim – ‘nothing happened’ – that greeted the decade’s end).⁴⁹⁵ Against ‘a politics of amnesia’ which severed the seventies from the progressive struggles and gains of the sixties, Carroll stressed that their ‘outcome [was] less tidy and less certain’ than such narrative closure would allow.⁴⁹⁶

I want to conclude with a short reading of Spark’s *Not to Disturb* (1971) in light of how it complicates Wolfe’s literary class structure, and thus reframes the evolving relationship between the novel and journalism – a relationship which, as my reading of *The Takeover*’s journalistic realism would suggest, has broader implications for the modes of postmodern reference and topicality Spark’s work in this period is able to employ. With its Watergate-era concern with media scandals and reproductive technology, *Not to Disturb* bears comparison to *The Abbess of Crewe*; though less explicitly topical than the later satire – the fabulist displacement of this subject-matter from any real-world context more comprehensive – *Not to Disturb* brings into focus a set of formal conditions which variously shape the novels I have been discussing. Set entirely in a chateau in Geneva, *Not to Disturb* centres on the Baron Klopstock’s murder of the Baroness and the young secretary with whom she had been having an affair, before the Baron commits suicide in despair.⁴⁹⁷ But this narrative centre is also an empty one, contained within the Klopstocks’ library which remains locked from the inside for the duration of the significant action, whose details thus remain vague beyond this stereotypical love triangle and ‘crime of passion’ – the trio, scarcely defined as

⁴⁹⁴ Peter Carroll, ‘It Seemed Like Nothing Happened’, *The Antioch Review*, Vol. 41, No.1 (Winter, 1983), pp.5-19

⁴⁹⁵ Carroll, p.5

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.6, 19

⁴⁹⁷ Muriel Spark, *Not to Disturb* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976)

characters, merely provide the basic ingredients for a ‘scandal’.⁴⁹⁸ Spark instead focuses on the perspective of the servants who, led by the butler Lister, preside over events from the outside, before selling their stories to the press. Typically for Spark’s metafiction, the servants thus assume the role of author surrogates within the text, both witnessing the action as it unfolds and knowing the outcome in proleptic fashion; in the opening scene, Lister has already signed contracts granting exclusive rights on the impending narrative to the magazines ‘*Stern* and *Paris-Match*’.⁴⁹⁹ In a more playful take on the fatality of narrative closure which animates *The Driver’s Seat*, the ‘late Baron’ is in this sense both expected at the house and already dead:

‘The Baron is no more.’

‘I can hear his voice. What d’you mean?’

‘Let us not strain after vulgar chronology,’ says Lister.⁵⁰⁰

As in *The Driver’s Seat*, the prefiguring of the ending spatializes the narrative, whose impossible simultaneity is manifested in the grounds of the isolated chateau. The house and its surrounds materialize the narrative as a closed space, its boundaries – and those of the events unfolding (yet already ‘accomplished’) in the hermetically-sealed library – maintained by the servants: ‘“The Baron said not to disturb,” says Lister, ‘as if to say, nobody leaves the room till we’ve had clarification, let the tension mount as it may. And that’s final’’.⁵⁰¹ More explicitly, Lister at one point declares that two minor characters seeking entrance to the house are ‘extras’ who ‘don’t come into the story’ – they lurk in the grounds (presented as a kind of narrative anteroom) before Spark finally kills them off in a subordinate clause: ‘Meanwhile the lightning, which strikes the clump of elms so that the two friends huddled there are killed instantly without pain, zig-zags across the lawns’.⁵⁰²

But as I have argued throughout this thesis, such pointed regulation of spatial and narrative closure directs attention to what exists outside Spark’s sequestered communities. As Lister instructs the porter: ‘The gates don’t open till eight, then everyone, absolutely everyone, can come and go as they please’.⁵⁰³ This ‘everyone’, the

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., p.38

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p.6

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., pp.6, 40

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p.29

⁵⁰² Ibid., pp.31, 86; as Kemp notes, ‘the syntax insists on the irrelevance of these interlopers’ (*Muriel Spark*, p. 134).

⁵⁰³ *Not to Disturb*, p.70

outside which confirms the chateau's integrity, refers principally to journalists (along with the police), whose entrance marks both the end of the plot taking place in the library, which seems to depend on their initial exclusion, and the start of its retelling and dissemination. Prior to their arrival at the house, the four journalists given the exclusive rights to the story are depicted 'waiting up all night for the call, playing poker meanwhile, with the ash-trays piled high' in a 'discreet and well-appointed flat in Geneva which [Lister] prudently maintains'.⁵⁰⁴ Lister's omniscient, unmistakably fictional control over events thus seems to encompass the news media – foreseeing the end of the narrative, he instructs the servants to 'interview the journalists who will already have arrived' on cue.⁵⁰⁵ In this way, the reporters are positioned as instruments in the production of the fictional plot, alongside the camera, tape-recorder and gramophone, technologies the novel incorporates and submits to its distinctively narrative and textual order (as when a press-cutting from the *Daily American* is read out and tape-recorded to form part of the fabricated story sold to reporters).⁵⁰⁶ In light of Wolfe's essay, *Not to Disturb*'s vision of servants profiting from the downfall of their masters reads less as a comment on social class than 'literary class', and indeed Spark literalizes the metaphor: 'Bear in mind,' says Lister, 'that when dealing with the rich, the journalists are mainly interested in backstairs chatter. The popular glossy magazines have replaced the servants' hall in modern society. Our position of privilege is unparalleled in history'.⁵⁰⁷ Echoing Wolfe's 'status structure', Lister calls journalists 'riff-raff', reasserting his own literary 'privilege' as an author figure capable of manipulating the media.⁵⁰⁸ Yet this manipulation places him not as a member of a discrete 'literary upper-class' (despite his florid speech and frequent quotation from the canon of English literature), but rather as one of the 'busy workers' engaged in the business of narration, which together with journalism trades in 'facts accomplished' (as one of the servants puts it).⁵⁰⁹ Literary revolution is thus imagined less in terms of journalists acquiring properly novelistic technique and prestige (as in Wolfe's arguments) than as the extension of a mode of fictional mastery into the media's traditional realm.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p.87

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p.64

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 50-51

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p.83

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., p.91

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., pp.71, 5

But rather than a New Journalist-style synthesis achieved from the opposite direction, Lister's actions imply an initial separation of these realms. In stark contrast to the 'noise' of the journalists' arrival, who 'thrust forward' their microphones 'like hot-dogs being offered to hungry pilgrims', in the undisturbed library, '[t]he books are silent'.⁵¹⁰ Indeed the significant events of the novel seem to unfold in silence, the gunshots unheard against the noise of the rest of the house – a silence Spark reproduces textually by withholding any representation of the interior of the library until the action is over. Read in terms of 'literary class lines', the library appears as a semi-autonomous literary space, which gains meaning in relation to what it excludes – the transformation of the events into an 'inside story...an exclusive' ironically echoes this spatial closure, which the servants diligently maintain.⁵¹¹ Despite the narrative's journalistic fate, Lister is not a reporter figure, extracting 'raw information' from the library (he too remains outside), nor a novelist with 'exclusive entry to the soul of man'; rather, his literary 'privilege' and mastery lies in his coordination of these distinct realms, his preservation of the dramatic kernel which sanctions the concluding media frenzy. As well as being frequently based on news reports, Spark's seventies novels often end by re-converging with a wider mediatic context, as with the publication of the Abbess's 'edited transcripts' in *The Abbess of Crewe*, or the appearance of Lise's image 'in the newspapers of four languages' following the events of *The Driver's Seat* – these being moments which both close the narrative and point to an ongoing rewriting, a process of fabrication imagined extending far beyond the novel itself. *Not to Disturb* in this sense allegorizes a characteristic desire, more ambivalent than the synthesis embraced by a New Journalist like Wolfe, to stake out a space for fiction relative to journalism, from which the novel must now both draw and separate itself.

Put another way, Spark's vision of a kind of fictional production undertaken between the 'backstairs chatter' of the servants' hall and the glossy magazines presumes the extension of a generalized textuality beyond any aesthetic sphere or 'literary upper-class'. In this respect, *Not to Disturb* suggests that the spatialization and concern with closure I have been discussing comes back to the problem of the novel's autonomy in the decade of culture's full 'integrat[ion] into commodity production generally', in

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., pp.91, 44

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p.42

Jameson's influential definition of postmodernism.⁵¹² Spark's 1970 address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, published as 'The Desegregation of Art', described the arts

in process of abstracting themselves from the confines of separate faculties, already tending to become part and parcel of society, where they belong... It is easy to say that poetry and the novel are on the decline compared with the great masterpieces of the past. But it seems to me that the art of speech itself has improved, standards of journalism and reportage have improved... [Literature] is not a special department set aside for the entertainment and delight of the sophisticated minority.⁵¹³

In particular, Spark rejected the 'literature of sentiment and emotion', of what she called 'depicted suffering', as no longer effective in its artificial separation from life.⁵¹⁴

Published the following year, the more ambivalent *Not to Disturb* explores the very process of 'desegregation' on the level of content; I have suggested that the novel retains within itself a space which effectively seals off the infidelity, murder and suicide by which the text might have participated in literature's 'cult of pathos', only to envision its integration with society, with 'the popular glossy magazines' and ultimately the commodity ('Play it cool and sell to the highest bidder', advises Lister, having signed his contracts with *Stern* and *Paris-Match*).⁵¹⁵ But I want to suggest that this plot goes beyond a satirical affirmation of Spark's argument in 'The Desegregation of Art'. The enclosed silence of the library, on a diegetic but also textual level in the novel's refusal to depict the 'suffering' within (which might be said to constitute the scenario's traditional literary and journalistic value), speaks to the reduction of Spark's spatial form, evoking the promise of minimalism as a kind of temporary muting of media noise – its constitution of a formally mastered, as it were soundproof space which also betrays the tenuousness of its autonomy, caught between irrelevant 'segregation' and total integration. Such tensions in these novels' implied relationship to their journalistic 'outside' – the burgeoning mediatic realm which Wolfe saw as novelists' newly

⁵¹² *Postmodernism*, p.4

⁵¹³ *The Golden Fleece*, p.27

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.28

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.30; *Not to Disturb*, p. 6. From the early 1960s, several of Spark's novels were first published in the *New Yorker* (as was Truman Capote's inaugural New Journalist work *In Cold Blood* (1966), although Wolfe publically berated the magazine), contravening any 'segregation' between fiction and magazine journalism. In line with my arguments throughout, their brevity can be seen as an adaption and response to this media environment, comparable to the way the work of nineteenth-century novelists like Dickens was formally marked by its serialization. For a discussion of Spark's relationship to the *New Yorker*, see Lisa Harrison, "'The Magazine That Is Considered the Best in the World': Muriel Spark and the *New Yorker*", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 54, Number 3 (Fall 2008), pp.595-616.

privileged terrain – point to the way the spatiality of postmodern culture in this period could embody not merely a passive ‘integrat[ion] into commodity production generally’, but the scope and limits of its own imagined position within a no longer ‘segregated’ cultural sphere.

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