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**The reconnoiter inward: interiority and spatial aesthetics in
the novels of Don DeLillo and J. M. Coetzee**

Doctor of Philosophy

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University of Sussex

May 2017

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.

Signature:.....

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

KATHERINE DA CUNHA LEWIN

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The reconnoiter inward: 'The reconnoiter inward: interiority and spatial aesthetics in the novels of Don DeLillo and J.M. Coetzee.

The novel, as I will show, has an historic association with the interior. In its emergence through what Ian Watt refers to as 'realist particularity,' the novel allowed new access to the interior lives of human beings. As I discuss, this interiority is both real and imagined, a means of giving shape to life in modernity. This shaping, however, not only affects the depiction of interior spaces in fiction, but the space of fiction itself. In this, I suggest, we find a complex literary architecture that is foundational to the western canon.

I trace how this elastic interiority has been imagined in the work of Don DeLillo and J. M. Coetzee. My project reads the work of my chosen others together as a way of drawing attention to their shared investment in literary architecture. I will firstly outline the history of interiority in the novel from the house of fiction of Henry James and the interior architecture of Edith Wharton, to the modernist dismantling of novelistic geography in Franz Kafka. I focus on the work of Samuel Beckett whose radical reimagining of literary geography not only questioned the space of fiction but the ethics of looking for a fictional subject. In my second and third chapter, I outline the legacy literary architecture has had throughout DeLillo and Coetzee's oeuvre. In my conclusion, I read two novels—*Point Omega* and *Disgrace* respectively—as a way of mapping their challenge to the boundaries of contemporary global politics and its invasion into interior life.

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I dwell in Possibility –
 A fairer house than Prose –
 More numerous of windows –
 Superior – for doors - ¹

‘I see fields where others see chapters. And so I am forced to use another method to try and place and define events. A method which searches for co-ordinates extensively in space, rather than consequentially in time.’²

‘You talk about bringing the inside close to the outside. I’m talking about taking the whole big outside and dragging it in behind me.’³

¹ Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Thomas H. Johnson (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 657.

² John Berger, *G*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p. 167.

³ Don DeLillo, *End Zone* (London: Picador, 2004), p. 223. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and are abbreviated to EZ.

Introduction

‘I’m not outside, I’m inside, I’m in something, I’m shut up, the silence is outside, outside, inside, there is nothing but here, and the silence outside, nothing but this voice and the silence all round, no need of walls, yes, we must have walls, I need walls, good and thick...’⁴

In order to think about the ethics and politics of contemporary fiction, we must engage with the shifting terrain of the contemporary world. The writing of Don DeLillo and J.M. Coetzee may emerge from different contexts but there is a clear overlap in their intellectual interests and fictional strategies. I will elucidate the questions that both authors posit throughout their oeuvres in the course of this thesis, primarily through thinking about the complexities of their philosophies of space. Their work asks: how is space figured in fiction, and how does it operate? How does spatial thinking correspond to the politics of writing? Their work is also necessarily intertextual, not only because they incorporate the work of various writers into the texts themselves, but also through the generative conversations they have with canonical writers. Both are interested in where fiction has come from and where fiction is going.

In the quote above taken from Samuel Beckett’s *The Unnamable*, the slippage between inside and outside suggests the necessity of spatial knowledge, of being able to place oneself somewhere. The voice describes the desire for a wall, a demarcator between physical space that would make literal the inside and the outside. The additional clauses which turn from ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ suggest a frightening lack of clarity between those two physical positions; the only certainty is that there is ‘here’, wherever that may be. As I suggest throughout this thesis, Beckett’s writing provides a

⁴ Samuel Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy: Molly, Malone Dies, The Unnamable* (London: Picador, 1979), p. 378. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and will be abbreviated to M, MD, and TU respectively.

destabilising literary architecture through which DeLillo and Coetzee's work is brought to bear.

But in what ways do I conceive of the spatial and the architectural in fiction? I suggest, firstly, that we can locate a spatialising impulse in the very basis of storytelling. In a discussion between John Berger and Susan Sontag, Berger suggests that to tell a story is to imagine the safety and seclusion of being inside.⁵ He notes: 'If I think about telling a story, I think of a group of people huddled together, and around them a vast space, quite frightening.'⁶ He makes a distinction between the physical space in which a story is told, and the enclosed space of the story itself, in which we also find a kind of 'home.' Berger unites the physical place of storytelling and the metaphorical spaces of fiction together in a location of seclusion and containment, a space in which fiction finds its basis and through which it comes into being. This, I would argue, is a gesture towards an elastic interiority that I will continue to discuss throughout this thesis.

Not only is the location of the story closed off from the world through its very production, but it is contained within another vast space. The story within is ordered and fixed as a way of elucidating the internal location of story, whereas what is outside of the story is the unfixed swirling world. The larger space is, Berger suggests, 'quite frightening,' as if what is outside of the story is unknown and therefore untamed. This idea of being at once separate from the world in a physical location and simultaneously a part of the world through participation in the process of fiction is a very suggestive one; the individual cannot help but confront the world through the constraints of fiction, and moreover, *because* of the constraints of fiction. How is it

⁵ John Berger and Susan Sontag, 'To Tell A Story', YouTube video, 1:03:53, February 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoHCR8nshe8> 1983.

⁶ Ibid. 00:01:59.

that the *location* of the story figures in the very inception of a story? Is fiction bound up in an experience of containment, of some internal logic that runs parallel to another world, existing outside of it? The one creating the story is sheltered from the world; fiction contains the world, and the world is contained by fiction. But, Berger seems to ask, how is this frightening world figured in opposition to the safety of the interior?

This notion of containment and seclusion that Berger draws attention to finds its parallel in the unique form of the novel and its ability to represent the inner life of a human being. This relationship between inner life and the novel form has been primarily shaped by liberal humanist critiques, such as those by F. R. Leavis, in which we find the relationship between interiority and the depiction of humanity explicated. In *The Great Tradition*, George Eliot, Joseph Conrad, and Henry James are ‘significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life.’⁷ Of Henry James Leavis notes specifically, ‘He creates an ideal civilized sensibility; a humanity capable of communicating by the finest shades of inflection and implication: a nuance may engage a whole complex moral economy...’⁸ James creates a ‘civilized sensibility’ through attention to minute details that serve to reliably replicate the human in dialogue with a so-called ‘moral economy.’ The ‘finest shades of inflection and implication’ vividly render the complexity of individual, small gestures and moments (as I discuss below with regards to James and Wharton, the look is particularly charged) become vehicles to communicate an idiosyncratic ambiguity, the revelation of the hidden complexity that organises living. E. M. Forster finds that the real work of fiction lies in the creation of secrecy, noting: ‘[w]e believe that happiness and misery exist in the secret life, which each of us leads privately and

⁷ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), p. 10.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

to which (in his characters) the novelist has access. And by the secret life we mean the life for which there is no external evidence.’⁹ By distinguishing between a ‘secret’ and a surface life, Forster suggests that the writers have privileged access to that domain. This relationship to interiority then, also comes with a whole set of other associations; novelists can extract themselves from a totalizing perspective of the public world, and have the insight to reproduce the human psyche. The novelist can make the distinction between exteriority and interiority, by what takes place in public and what is actually private, for which, as Forster comments ‘there is no external evidence.’ Not only does this offer the reader intimate access to the subjective experience of an other, but it is also a *communicative* act of expression; that is, by the very virtue of being a novel, it is necessarily a revealing act of interiority, a demonstration of what one mind is like to another. A novel therefore contains a form of reality, a demonstration of life to itself. As D. H. Lawrence comments: ‘The novel is the one bright book of life. Books are not life. They are only tremulations on the ether. But the novel as a tremulation can make the whole man alive tremble.’¹⁰ This ‘tremulation’ is from uncertainty and from excitement: by allowing us access to hitherto unseen regions, it is a privileged way of knowing, facilitated by the very particular geography of novelistic space. In these associations, it is the art of the novelist that is inextricably linked to the private space: Forster here proposes the relationship that will underscore the perspective of my thesis: that the interior space that often becomes the subject of writing is intimately related to the place of fiction writing itself.

⁹ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 4th edn. (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 81.

¹⁰ D. H. Lawrence, ‘Why the Novel Matters,’ *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 193-198, (p. 195).

Though we may no longer agree that there is a morally instructive point to the depiction of life (in whatever form) in the novel, we still prize the novel as a means of privileged access to someone else's construction of the world. Through the intimacy of a novel, in the way we read, the way we think of novels, and in the spaces they can open out to us, novels simultaneously render the world proximate and alien. The internal life of a character in a book is appealing because we ourselves have an interiority that we recognise and understand as something within us. In recognizing and valuing interiority, we also come to prioritize it as the primary mode of engagement with a world we see as *outside* of our immediate experience. The primacy of interiority necessarily posits a world that is outside of us that we are able to synthesise with experience we envision as our own. In this way the novel is associated with some kind of secret, something hidden away, constructed as a way of conceptualizing the world around us. It dramatises an encounter between the self and the world through real or metaphorical spaces that interact and commingle. The seduction of thinking through the novel is how it allows us to engage with the world, whilst thinking we are not quite of or in the world; it allows us a space to think about how the world functions with us in it, but also outside of it.

In this thesis, I want to take the questions I have outlined above as starting points to explore the spatial imagination of two contemporary novelists, Don DeLillo and J. M. Coetzee. I argue that both authors write novels that engage with the heritage of a literary architecture founded through the strategies of the realist and modernist novel. I argue that their fiction destabilises our understanding of the way in which novels are constructed. By reconsidering a notion of interiority in an elastic and generative way, I show that DeLillo and Coetzee adapt and challenge a way of

thinking about space of and through the novel as a means of articulating the ethical and political possibility of the form.

Space and interiority in the novel

‘O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself a King of infinite space’¹¹

Though the representation of time may often dominate critical inquiry into the unique formulations of the form, in this thesis I contend that the question of space, and moreover, interiority, elucidates the singular aesthetic of the novel. Moreover, through this elucidation the contemporary relevance and ethical possibility of the novel are brought to bear. It is helpful to return to the history of the word ‘plot’ here; as the definition reminds us, it comes from a physical location: ‘a small piece of ground; a spot or small area on any surface; a ground plan of a building, plan of a field, etc.’ as well as the more recognisable definition as ‘the story or scheme; connected events running through a play, novel etc.; a secret scheme.’¹² Though a plot may only be one aspect of any novel—and what makes up a plot can be contested—here the creation of novelistic events is rooted in a physical framework; in other words, a novel has to happen in a space of some kind.

The projects of DeLillo and Coetzee are both profoundly literary. My thesis aims to place both writers within not only the history of the novel, but also within the notion of a literary architecture. I argue that the oeuvres of both authors cannot be discussed without the wider context of both a realist and modernist inheritance. Patrick

¹¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), II.II. 243-244.

¹² ‘Plot’ in *Chambers Dictionary*, 11th edn. (Edinburgh: Chambers Haarep, 2008), p. 1192.

Hayes's study, *J. M. Coetzee and the Novel: Writing and Politics after Beckett* also places Coetzee within the history of the form, noting:

Coetzee's historicist interest in the origins of the novel derives from his concern both to contest and develop the legacies that remain at stake—whether writers acknowledge them or otherwise—in the very structure of the literary form he inherits from European modernity.¹³

Following Hayes's argument, I also contend that Coetzee's careful engagement with and subsequent critique of the Western canon is central to the politics and ethics of his writing. For Coetzee, novels are bound up in the history that has made them, and through his careful analysis as a reader and critic, and his inventiveness as a writer, his work interrogates the productive constraints of the novel form. Though DeLillo's work does not engage with the canon in the same way as Coetzee, his early writing shows an interest in generic convention. In his early writing in particular, DeLillo investigates the workings of plot and character as a way of reconceiving of their relationship between the form and genre of the novel. John Johnston points out that the complexity of DeLillo's writing, particularly his '70s work, has posed a 'genre problem' that is often noted in responses from reviewers.¹⁴ DeLillo has made use of several conventions from a wide range of genres such as spy novels, thrillers and sports texts. He suggests 'DeLillo appropriates these subgenres of the novel not as forms to be subverted through irony or transformed into pastiche, but precisely because they are highly recognizable forms of representation that are already given as part of their content.'¹⁵ However, as I go on to suggest, DeLillo by no means directly replicates the exact codes of these genres, and instead suggests a kind of divorce of

¹³ Patrick Hayes, *J.M. Coetzee and the Novel: Writing and Politics after Beckett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 18.

¹⁴ John Johnston, 'Generic Difficulties in the Novels of Don DeLillo', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 30.4, (1989), pp. 261-275, (p. 262).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

character and content through the theme of retreat and the return to the interior room.

Johnston comments on DeLillo's noticeable hybridity, noting that:

By working in the margins of these easily recognizable subgenres; by extending, combining and crossing over into new areas of subject matter from that marginal position, DeLillo creates a new or at least a different sense of fictional space, on the edges and in the folds of these various mixings and crossings.¹⁶

In both writers, I explore how this new fictional space operates and what this means for the notion of the spatial in fiction more generally.

As will become apparent in this thesis, I suggest that the problem of space in the novel needs further critical engagement, in order to examine its effects on meaning as well as the ethical and political possibilities of novel writing. As I suggest, many of these ideas about space, or the ways in which the spatial is envisioned in the novel, are necessarily underscored by the desire to give shape to human experience. This is most obviously found in the way we conceive of our own minds, as Ellen Eve Frank notes:

Man [...] imagines his consciousness or experience to be bounded or located in particular space, within white walls, bodies, time, while what is outside his personal realm he imagines to be boundless as he thinks the universe is boundless, timeless as it is timeless.¹⁷

Though we may desire to think ourselves as whole, or as existing in this 'personal realm' as separate to these larger issues of space, this is to ignore how much we are made *through* the world. This desire for a monadic consciousness is tied to the way that expression in and of itself is understood, the idea that it moves from inside us in our minds, to outside us on the page. Writing then is bound up with a movement from inside to outside, a movement that, I suggest, is replayed in a myriad of ways within the novel form. As Fredric Jameson notes:

¹⁶ Johnston, p. 271.

¹⁷ Ellen Eve Frank, *Literary Architecture: Essays Towards a Tradition* (London: University of California Press, 1983), p. 6.

the very concept of expression presupposes indeed some separation within the subject, and along with that a whole metaphysics of inside and outside, of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that “emotion” is then projected out and externalized, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling.¹⁸

Jameson describes the necessity of movement within expression itself, as conceived as a way of externalising what seems hidden, be it internal thoughts and feelings, or indeed the more abstract revelation of the invisible or the unseen. George Eliot’s *The Mill on the Floss* describes a moment in which this happens: ‘No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it.’¹⁹ Maggie Tulliver cannot synthesise her internal desires with the expectations of the public realm, leading her to see her life simply as a response to what she thinks she is being asked to do, or as a retreat from real desires embedded deeply within herself.

Later Philip Wakem says to her:

It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite.²⁰

Maggie’s desire to adhere to the demands of the social world, a world that she figures as external to her, that she needs to become a *part of*, are in fact negations of herself as a person in the world. Wakem’s advice about the ‘safety’ of these so-called negations demonstrates the possibilities of participation that circles her, bound up in the interplay between inside and outside. By acknowledging the contingency of these two positions, that the desire to be a whole cannot be realised, we see that it is in these collisions that the drama of living (and the life that is depicted in art) takes place.

¹⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 2nd edn. (London: Verso, 2009), p. 11-12.

¹⁹ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 210.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 329.

Throughout this thesis, I want to explore the creative tension between physical space and imagined space as a means of suggesting the ability of the novel to trouble our conception of the way we live and move in space. The spaces I am particularly interested in are those ‘interior’ spaces, either conceived of as inside of us, or inside of a building or dwelling. This idea of interiority can be split into two parts: the exposition of the so-called inner life of a character, and the revealing of spaces that are otherwise unseen, that is, inside spaces. This means that, as described above, what we understand colloquially as a novel necessarily prioritises interiority in both senses as a mode of excavation of human truths.

As I have begun to tease out above, the movement between the inside and outside, both imaginatively and physically, finds its architecture in realism. Because of this dual exposition, of both thought and place, realism is often thought synonymous with what novels are for, what they represent and how they operate, a *realistic* portrayal of a life rendered in a fashion that appears to be similar to how people live. This has to a certain extent also been true for critics; Fredric Jameson notes that the existence of realism and the form of the novel are historically linked: ‘the history of the novel is inevitably the history of the realist novel.’²¹ Rosa Mucignat finds in realist fiction that:

‘space forms the framework that, together with time, structures the plot and determines who characters are and how they behave. A space made visible through description is thus a space that plays a role in the general economy of the diegetic-mimetic unity of the text.’²²

This new visibility comes from an attention to the specificities of space, be it home, garden, city, or country, as part and parcel of the world in which fiction takes place.

²¹ Fredric Jameson, *Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 3.

²² Rosa Mucignat, *Realism and Space in the Novel, 1795 – 1869* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2013), p. 5.

For Mark Seltzer, the transformation of modernity determined the subject of the fiction:

The subject of the realist novel...is the internal genesis and evolution of character in society. The realist novel, through techniques of narrative surveillance, organic continuity, and deterministic progress, secures the intelligibility and supervision of individuals in an evolutionary and genetic narration.²³

Here Seltzer sets out the interaction between character and their historical and social context, as well as the techniques that elucidate and fix this in place. The realist novel allows for the organizing of life through the interaction between figure and ground, that is, in the differentiation and synthesis of being in time and being in space. But, Seltzer's analysis here also takes into account the transformations of modernity, both in terms of technology and new ways of living in space.

Ian Watt's highly influential study, *The Rise of the Novel*, describes this new interest in the life of the individual and the rise of 'individualism' in the nineteenth century that sets apart the realist novel.²⁴ He explains:

[The realist novel] posits a whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to past modes of thought and action denoted by the word 'tradition' - a force that is always societal, not individual.²⁵

This new attention to day-to-day life, in opposition to the grander scope of epics and romances, is represented through the attention to the minutiae of existence. Watt identifies this specifically in the work of Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson where 'we feel that the writer's exclusive aim is to make the words bring his object home to us in all its concrete particularity.'²⁶ The particular becomes a proxy for reality. Peter Brooks outlines the central assertion of realist fiction: 'You cannot, the realist claims,

²³ Mark Seltzer, *Bodies and Machines* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 43.

²⁴ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 62.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 62.

²⁶ Watt, p. 30.

represent people without taking account of the things that people use and acquire in order to define themselves—their tools, their furniture, their accessories.’²⁷ This, we can recognise as what Roland Barthes called the ‘reality effect,’²⁸ information provided by the author that may seem trivial, but in actuality furnishes the text with a more ‘realistic’ background. As Coetzee suggests, specifically in the work of Defoe, this impacted on the way that the reading public understood the function of novels: ‘the nineteenth century realist novel flourished on the basis of a web of tacit contracts between writer and reader about how ‘the real’ might be represented.’²⁹ The author compounds their authority as the purveyor of the real through subject matter and narratological organisation, as well as the choice of form itself.

The emphasis upon both seeing and knowing has, for many critics, foundations in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, in which epistemological experiment was king. Watt notes the influence the dominant question of seventeenth century philosophy was ‘how the individual mind can know anything that is external to itself.’³⁰ This is of course referencing the influence of Rene Descartes, whose *cogito ergo sum* radically shaped Western philosophy. In dualism, the thinking subject acknowledges that its ability to think reveals its subjecthood, necessarily prioritising the mind over the body. The mind-body dichotomy emerges in a satirical form later in the section in which I discuss Samuel Beckett’s *Murphy*. As Watt notes, this distinction is one that is constitutive of the concerns of novelists at the time:

[A]lthough dualism dramatizes the opposition between different ways of looking at reality, it does not, in fact, lead to any complete rejection of the

²⁷ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (London: Yale University Press), p. 16.

²⁸ Roland Barthes, ‘Reality Effect’ in *The Rustle of Language* translated by Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 141-148.

²⁹ J.M. Coetzee, ‘Robinson Crusoe,’ *Stranger Shores: Essays 1986-1999* (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 22.

³⁰ Watt, p. 307.

reality either of the ego or of the external world. Similarly, although different novelists have given different degrees of importance to the internal and the external objects of consciousness, they have never completely rejected either; on the contrary, the basic terms of their inquiry have been dictated by the relation between the individual and his environment.³¹

Here we see that the relationship between figure and ground emerges from a particular mode of philosophical enquiry. Importantly Watt's emphasises that novelists have 'never completely rejected' the ego or the external world, locating their fiction in the encounters between them; the conflict between an inside and outside, and the ambiguousness of these locations, has always dominated the framework of literary thinking.

For Philip Weinstein, the realist fiction of the eighteenth century has its origins not in Descartes, but Locke, Newton and Kant. He comments:

The spatial and temporal coordinates of such a worldview are insistently tailored to the interests of the knowing subject. Space is traversed in ways that promote recognition, empowerment and education. Time is even more powerfully domesticated for progressive purposes. Experimental science, committed to the project of repeatable procedures that will reproduce the same results, provides a resonant model for countering time's dispersive power; it invokes time always in the interest of human mastery. Put more broadly, the Enlightenment narrative of coming to know—of moving past error into accuracy—fixes space and time as conditions permitting human empowerment.³²

In this articulation, the procedure of the realist plot is the slow movement towards some level of knowledge, a continual 'coming-to-know,' in which space and time become fixed co-ordinates through which individuals can place themselves. If space allows one to 'recognise' oneself then it is not a location of discovery, but an acknowledgement of what has always been there. In this way, an individual's capacity to know themselves is through spaces they have always occupied without knowing it.

³¹ Watt, p. 307.

³² Phillip Weinstein, *Unknowing* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 44.

Knowledge of the self is equated with the mastery of the abstract. Weinstein cites Levinas's idea of sovereignty here:

It is as though subjective life in the form of consciousness consisted in being itself, losing itself and finding itself again so as to *possess itself* [...] The detour [...] leads to coinciding with oneself, that is, to certainty, which remains the guide and the guarantee of the whole spiritual adventure of being. But this is why this adventure is no adventure. It is never dangerous; it is self-possession, sovereignty [emphasis in original].³³

If the subject recognises their own capacity for control, then knowledge of space is the recognition of *a priori* forms; space is there to be revealed, not discovered. The 'spiritual adventure of being' presupposes that it is a journey with an end point, and that the external world is there to be known by the subject who moves through it. Realist fiction encodes space and the problematics of being in space into the form of the novel; through this, I suggest we can understand other aspects of the novel like characterisation, plot and the operation of narrative.

This dramatization occurs throughout DeLillo and Coetzee's fiction in varying forms. In thinking through these multiple pressures, I want to illustrate the way that DeLillo and Coetzee refigure the spatial architecture of literature through the origins of this thesis's title, taken from *Falling Man*:

What she loved most were the two still lives on the north wall, by Giorgio Morandi, a painter her mother studied and written about. These were groupings of bottles, jugs, biscuit tins, that was all, but there was something else in the brushstrokes that held a mystery she could not name, or in the irregular edges of vases and jars, some reconnoiter inward, human and obscure, away from the very light and color of the paintings.³⁴

Morandi's painting, made up of a collection of household objects, allows Lianne to turn inwards towards herself, a retreat away from the object, but also a reconstitution of the object as part of herself. Lianne is able to access a reterritorialised space of

³³ Levinas quoted in Weinstein, *Unknowing*, p. 46.

³⁴ Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2011) p. 12. All references are hereafter taken from the edition and are abbreviated to FM.

inner ambiguity, which combines a personal aesthetic response with the external site of the painting. According to the Chambers Dictionary, the word ‘reconnoiter’ means ‘to examine with a view to military operations or other purpose; to remember’³⁵ but comes from the obsolete French *reconnoitre*, from Latin *recognoscere* ‘to recognise.’ It suggests both the surveying of a landscape to gain intelligence, but also the idea of knowing something *again*. Looking at these paintings provides Lianne an alternative, external location in which she can rediscover knowledge of herself; this reconfigures the realist strategy of knowing exterior space, instead mapping this knowledge onto the interior.

Though Lianne and her mother’s partner Martin may see the image of the twin towers after 9/11, Lianne’s mother Nina does not agree:

Finally her mother said, ‘Architecture, yes, maybe, but coming out of another time entirely, another century. Office towers, no. These shapes are not translatable to modern towers, twin towers. It’s work that rejects that kind of extension or projection. It takes you inward, down and in. That’s what I see there, half buried, something deeper than things or shapes of things (FM 111).

Lianne and Martin, in their new viewing of the Morandi drawings, see something that is external to the painting. Nina refutes this by disavowing the placement of the modern onto these paintings; rather than drawing you forward, they draw you back, and inwards, a way of questioning ‘being human, being mortal.’ It transcends the confines of the external locus of history, to places outside of time. In Leo Bersani’s words through this aesthetic experience, ‘[w]e are neither present in the world nor absent from it.’³⁶ Here, DeLillo suggests, the individual is placed at a threshold between the exterior through which one is produced, and an interior space that exists more obscurely. As I have discussed, the novel form has been historically conceived

³⁵ ‘Reconnoiter,’ *Chambers Dictionary*, p. 1303.

³⁶ Leo Bersani, ‘Psychoanalysis and the Aesthetic Subject,’ *Critical Inquiry*, 32.2 (2006), pp. 161-174, (p. 161).

as a structure through which meaning can be created; DeLillo and Coetzee look to other spaces that trouble the distinction between inside and outside, whether that be the space of literature, the space of the artwork, or the space of the other, as a form of literary architecture that rethinks the possibilities of the novel.

The spatial in DeLillo and Coetzee

In the course of this thesis, I explore the various manifestations of space in the oeuvres of DeLillo and Coetzee and argue that these various iterations of a topographical imagination assert a new way of understanding the relationship between the novel and interiority. In order to do this, I situate my thesis amongst the criticism indebted to spatial theory and novel history that has been undertaken in DeLillo and Coetzee studies.

Since the very early years of DeLillo's writing career, critics have been quick to pick up on DeLillo's interest in space both in terms of his interest in the novel as a form, as well as his interest in gaps or lacunas.³⁷ DeLillo's interest in spatial politics and spatial theory has been recognised by many different critics, who have placed his work in conjunction with a variety of theoretical frameworks, some of which I describe below.

³⁷ This idea of the gap or separation in DeLillo is often found in various critics' discussion of his use of language. There have been many studies focusing on DeLillo's use and interest in language. David Cowart's study, *The Physics of Language*, is essential to this discussion in its analysis of DeLilloan semiotics. James Berger's essay suggests DeLillo's work enacts the desire for a prelapsarian world in which word and thing are more closely unified see: 'Falling Towers and Postmodern Wild Children: Oliver Sacks, Don DeLillo, and Turns against Language,' *PMLA* 120.2 (2005), pp. 341-61.

One of the most immediate areas of interest in DeLillo studies is concerned with tracing his literary heritage.³⁸ In one of the first extended studies on Don DeLillo, Tom LeClair uses systems theory as established by prominent biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy in order to highlight the looping structure of his fiction.³⁹ LeClair's work determined the scope of criticism about DeLillo since then, as many other critics have explored the prevalence of systems, whether religious or political. Though strictly speaking these might not be overtly 'spatial' LeClair's thesis suggests the way in which DeLillo's fiction was organised, and therefore its subsequent impact on the governance of space in the novel. Subsequent studies followed LeClair's suggestion that DeLillo be situated in amongst postmodern writers such as William Gass and Thomas Pynchon: Marc Schuster⁴⁰ Jeffrey Ebbeson⁴¹, Randy Laist⁴², Mark C. Taylor⁴³ have all placed DeLillo firmly within a tradition of postmodernism. However, many critics, including Philip Nel (whose work I refer to later), Graley Herren⁴⁴ and

³⁸ The debate about whether or not DeLillo fulfils the terms of a modernist and postmodernist is beyond the remit of the study. Though my thesis reads DeLillo's work as absolutely indebted to the modernist writers I describe below, I do not seek to definitively label the entirety of his work. As Peter Boxall suggests 'The tendency to read him with or against the grain of postmodernism and of poststructuralism has skewed his critical reception, and occluded some of the most important and delicate ways in which his fiction offers to rethink culture from the post-war to the present day' (15).

³⁹ Tom LeClair's *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

⁴⁰ Marc Schuster, *Don DeLillo, Jean Baudrillard, and the Consumer Conundrum* (New York: Cambria Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Jeffrey Ebbeson, *Postmodernism and its Others: The Fiction of Ishmael Reed, Kathy Acker, and Don DeLillo* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁴² Randy Laist, *Technology and Postmodern Subjectivity in Don DeLillo's Novels* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010).

⁴³ Mark C. Taylor, *Rewiring the Real: In Conversation with William Gaddis, Richard Powers, Mark Danielewski, and Don DeLillo* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

⁴⁴ Graley Herren, 'Libranth: Nicholas Branch's Joycean Labyrinth in Don DeLillo's *Libra*' *Don DeLillo: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Katherine Da Cunha Lewin and Kiron Ward (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), forthcoming.

Catherine Gander⁴⁵ seek to read his work in relation to the work of James Joyce, John Dos Passos and Wallace Stevens as a means of asserting his inheritance of modernist forms, language concerns, and the scope and concerns of his literary imagination.⁴⁶

The national boundary and DeLillo's particular conception of not only America, but an American tradition has been a frequent source of study: Arnold Weinstein⁴⁷, Paul Civello⁴⁸, Stephanie Halldorson⁴⁹, Catherine Morley⁵⁰ have all written on DeLillo's relationship to American literary traditions. In more recent years, after the publication of *Cosmopolis*, the novel in which DeLillo most directly decries the new liquidity of virtual technologies and the effects of globalisation, critics have noted a new relationship between the local and the total. Katrina Harack's reads *White Noise* (1985) and *Falling Man* (2007) together and notes that both novels 'reveal DeLillo's increasing movement toward an embodied and situated sense of the local, as he creates an ethical counter-narrative to totalizing discourse.'⁵¹ Similarly, Michael Jones proposes DeLillo's particular form of what he terms 'ecological realism,' a mode of reading through which one can reimagine the scale of the earth in new local terms.⁵²

⁴⁵ Catherine Gander 'The Art of Being Out of Time': Don DeLillo's *Point Omega*, *Don DeLillo: Contemporary Critical Perspectives* ed. by Katherine Da Cunha Lewin, Katherine and Kiron Ward, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pages to be confirmed.

⁴⁶ I discuss this in greater detail in my DeLillo chapter.

⁴⁷ Arnold Weinstein, *Nobody's Home: Speech, Self, and Place in American Fiction From Hawthorne to DeLillo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

⁴⁸ Paul Civello, *American Literary Naturalism and its Twentieth-Century Transformations: Frank Norris, Ernest Hemingway, Don DeLillo* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

⁴⁹ Stephanie S. Halldorson, *The hero in contemporary American fiction: the works of Saul Bellow and Don DeLillo* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2007).

⁵⁰ Catherine Morley, *The Quest for Epic in Contemporary American Literature* (London: Routledge, 2008).

⁵¹ Katrina Harack, 'Embedded and Embodied Memories: Body, Space, and Time in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Falling Man*,' *Contemporary Literature*, 54.2 (2013), pp. 303-336, (p. 305).

⁵² Michael Jones, 'The other side of silence: realism, ecology and the whole life in Don DeLillo's late fiction,' *Textual Practice*, Online.

Elise Martucci's also proposes a new attention to specific issues of environment through a notion of amorphous 'environmental unconscious,'⁵³ whilst Tyler Kessel's book specifically casts DeLillo's work in terms of landscape and the Deleuzian Outside.⁵⁴

This sense of the local is also recalibrated in a further attention to the psychological and imaginative implications of globalisation and finds a theoretical counterpart in Fredric Jameson's influential work on cognitive mapping:⁵⁵ John N. Duvall has, for example, referred to DeLillo as 'one of the cartographers of contemporary cognition that Jameson calls for in his work.'⁵⁶ Marie-Christine Leps used Jameson's cognitive mapping in order to expose the workings of cybercapitalism and empire.⁵⁷ Similarly, Frida Beckman develops this reading to specifically think about the cartographic imagination, suggesting *Cosmopolis* fashions a Benjaminian allegory of political possibility.⁵⁸

In this overview of the variety of ways issues of space have been described throughout DeLillo's career, it is important to note that these studies often take the form of singular novel studies, or cover particular periods of writing. I rectify this gap by extending spatial analysis to the whole of his oeuvre.⁵⁹ This spatiality, I argue, is

⁵³ Elise Martucci, *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁵⁴ Tyler Kessel, *Reading Landscape in American Literature: The Outside in the Fiction of Don DeLillo* (New York: Cambria Press, 2011).

⁵⁵ I describe this theory in my next chapter.

⁵⁶ John N. Duvall, 'Introduction: From Valparaiso to Jerusalem: DeLillo and the Moment of Canonization', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3 (1999), pp. 559–68, (p. 562).

⁵⁷ See Marie-Christine Leps 'How to Map the Non-Place of Empire: DeLillo's *Cosmopolis*,' *Textual Practice*, 28.2 (2014), pp. 305-327.

⁵⁸ Frida Beckman, 'Cartographies of ambivalence: allegory and cognitive mapping in Don DeLillo's later novels', *Textual Practice* (2016) Online, pp. 1-21.

⁵⁹ The focus on particular periods in DeLillo's writing in these scholars work is arguably due to the distinct changes in size, style and subject matter across the decades. In my reading of his work in my chapter, I seek to be sensitive to the different periods

not filtered through postmodern problems of representation or a recuperation of the real, but through an interest in the architecture of literature itself, in which the possibilities of novelistic portrayal are deeply related to expansion, limitation and mapping of human experience. I seek ways of reading issues of space across DeLillo's oeuvre.

In Coetzee's fiction⁶⁰ the issue of space has been primarily discussed through issues of imperialism and colonialism. The political and contextual aspect of Coetzee's writing is crucial, and most critics who engage with his work note the importance of it in their own analysis. The spatial is figured, most literally, through national boundaries. Coetzee's writing has always been deeply entrenched in the politics and ethics of writing, made all the more urgent by the outrages of apartheid. Susan Van Zantep,⁶¹ David Attwell⁶² and Jonathan Crewe⁶³ have all written monographs on the subject of Coetzee and South Africa, but this essential context cannot be divorced from his work, and to which critics are careful to attend.

and the changes in some of his artistic priorities, but I also note that there are definitive concerns established since the beginning of his writing career in the 60s that endure until the present day.

⁶⁰ Coetzee's other works, *Boyhood* (1997), *Youth* (2002) and *Summertime* (2009), propose their own spatial implications, as well as generic complexities that I do not have space to tackle in this thesis. Coetzee once commented that "All autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography" (*Doubling the Point*, p. 391). Carol Clarkson's work establishes some interesting connection with my topic of interiority: in her analysis of Coetzee's autobiographic project, she suggests that Coetzee's work exposes the implicit problem of sectioning off spheres of engagement with the world: '...to speak of "the inner life" of a person, as if it were something hidden from view, accessible to me only and not to others, is to run the risk of assuming some self-contained and inviolable "essence" of a private subjectivity that has no public mode of expression.' (423). See: Clarkson, 'Inner Worlds', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 58.4 (2016), pp. 421-424.

⁶¹ Susan Van Zantep *A Story of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee's Fictions in Context*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1991).

⁶² David Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁶³ Jonathan Crewe, *In the Middle of Nowhere: J.M. Coetzee in South Africa* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2015).

There are several monographs that use particular spaces or particular spatial theories to consider the immediate spatial implications of Coetzee's writing: Teresa Dovey's first book length study of Coetzee analyses Coetzee's work in relation to Foucault's atopia. For Dovey, Coetzee's writing challenges master narratives through allegories that function as 'a temporary resting place for the repetitive dialectic movement of irony.'⁶⁴ Rita Barnard's subsequent work challenges Dovey's use of atopia and instead argues for critics to think of Coetzee's novels in terms of 'dream topography' – a phrase she has taken from Coetzee's own criticism of South African pastoral and one which I return to in my own work - that dominates writing from that country. Laura Wright reads his texts as performative, arguing that through his depiction of 'multiple subjectivities' that 'opens up a space for the audience to examine the constructed nature of Coetzee's fictions as texts that allow for interplay between character, audience, and author.'⁶⁵ In focusing on the particular space of the camp she links together that physical space with the political possibility of textual space – something I seek replicate during the course of this thesis. Similarly, other critics have explored the overlap between physical location and narrative and textual spaces, a crucial slippage that is central to my work in this thesis. Carol Clarkson's essay 'Responses of space and space of responses' uses the problems of etymology as a means of analysing Coetzee's use of language. In this she fuses linguistic constructs with the metaphor of material and building – through an association she finds with the writing of Robert Smithson - suggesting the interrelationship between language, space and structures of power. She notes 'Coetzee, through his fiction, reiterates the values

⁶⁴ Teresa Dovey, *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* (Johannesburg: A. Donker, 1988), p. 43.

⁶⁵ Laura Wright, *Writing 'Out of All the Camps:' J. M. Coetzee's Narratives of Displacement* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 11.

of creating a space for voices to be heard – even in the instant of exposing the underlying faultline of splits and ruptures.’⁶⁶

This spatial analysis is also referred to in terms of the other, and the ethics of the space of the other. Derek Attridge’s large corpus of work on Coetzee – which I will refer to during the course of this thesis - considers the ethical weight of literary writing in Coetzee’s South Africa; Attridge’s *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event* suggests that Coetzee problematizes reading practices through the Derridean event. Mike Marais has similarly considered this problem, invoking the work of a wide range of philosophers including Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida.⁶⁷

In both cases, this survey of criticism is by no means exhaustive: as well-known writers who have both won copious awards, there is a plethora of criticism that has been and continues to be produced on both. My summaries here however, are an important elucidation of the main areas of scholarship that has been undertaken thus far on these writers individually. In both cases, the authors have been described through physical spaces, such as national boundary or the city, and also more conceptual spaces, such as the space of the other, or indeed the space of the fiction itself. I seek to read a correspondence between these areas.

⁶⁶ Carrol Clarkson, ‘Responses to Space and Spaces of Response in J.M. Coetzee,’ in *J.M Coetzee’s Austerities*, edited by Graham Bradshaw and Michael Neill (Ashgate: Surrey, 2010), pp. 43-55, (p. 44).

⁶⁷ I refer to a range of essays by Marais in my third chapter on the work of Coetzee.

Thesis outline

John Berger's 'The changing view of the man in the portrait,' examines the conditions of the world that produce the painted portrait, noting:

[t]he measures, the scale-change of modern life, have changed the nature of individual identity. Confronted with another person today, we are aware, through this person, of forces operating in directions which were unimaginable before the turn of the century, and which have only become clear relatively recently.⁶⁸

This visibility of these various forces is partly due to the new topographical focus in critical theory, brought about by the spatial turn. But it is also, as Berger outlines here, through creating *imaginative* dialogues with these forces through the confines of art. Though Berger discusses painting in this extract, his description of 'measure' and 'scale-change' speak to the central concern of the project: how is it that contemporary literature responds to its particular moment?

This new engagement with space can emerge, as this thesis will argue, through the relationship between intimacy, visibility and the imagination, produced through the space of the artwork. Gaston Bachelard finds that 'outside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides.'⁶⁹ This is particularly evocative, as it not only takes into account the abilities of these spaces 'to be reversed', but also envisions a border between that is painful and difficult. In this intimacy we find a radical possibility, in which difficulty and creativity commingle to produce more spaces of inside and outside; this is a continual process which produces complex new ideas about what it means to be in space.

⁶⁸ John Berger, 'The changing view of the man in the portrait,' in *Moment of cubism and other essays* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), p. 45.

⁶⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (London: Penguin, 2014), pp. 217-8.

In the chapters that follow I will explore how the novel allows for exploration, disruption and fragmentation of spaces that can only take place within its parameters. In my first chapter, I trace the inheritance of spatial thinking in the work of DeLillo and Coetzee through the history of the novel, looking at the work of several writers who have had substantial influence on the development of the unique geography of fiction. My analysis covers the theories of Henry James and Edith Wharton, Virginia Woolf's critiques of realist strategies of character and emplacement, and Kafka's exploration of a new form of literary inside and outside. I then give an overview of the writing of Samuel Beckett, who I assert has had a significant impact in the relationship between space, power and intimacy. Beckett's work exposes the implicit ethical issue of novelistic space, creating rooms that cannot be grounded and characters who cannot be read through their environments. The notion of the stranger is particularly important to his work and I explore this figure across his oeuvre. I suggest that in Beckett's problematizing of fictional constructs, he directly responds to some of the issues I outline in realism. Finally, I will explore the legacy of these ideas in DeLillo and Coetzee, proposing a contemporary literary architecture that explores the creation of interior space, and the effects on the politics of fiction.

In my second chapter, I look at the work of DeLillo, moving from his first work *Americana* (1971) to *Zero K* (2016). I find a unifying image in his famous evocation of 'men in small rooms,' through which, I suggest, DeLillo's suggests the figure of the writer as a proxy for being in the world. I firstly consider this in three early novels, *End Zone* (1972), *Great Jones Street* (1973), and *Ratner's Star* (1976) looking at the way that physical retreat manifests as a new form of interiority that also speaks to the space of the novel itself. From my earlier work on Beckett I examine how DeLillo's work not only looks for a possible novelistic subject, but an *American*

subject, through the intersections between culture, history and character in *Americana* and *Libra* (1988). In my next section I analyse how imagination functions as an aspect of plot itself and consider the ethics of imagining an ‘other’ in his short story collection *The Angel Esmeralda* (2010). Finally, I explore the portrayal of the character and imaginative failure in his 2016 novel *Zero K*, and find a new kind of literary room in his depiction of land art.

In my third chapter, I analyse the work of Coetzee, also starting from his first novel. I consider the legacy of realism in his work, reading through his critiques in essays, interview and his novel *Elizabeth Costello* (2004). I begin with his first novel *Dusklands* (1974) and his third novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), analysing his exploration of the production of material history through ideas of expansive reading and encoded blankness. In my next section I look at *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), relating them to Coetzee’s wider discussion of the South African pastoral. In both texts he portrays complex subjectivities that reject the forms of novels in which they are contained, as well as their historico-political confines. I then look at *Age of Iron* (1990) and *Slow Man* (2005), thinking about how these novels envision new relationships between people in post-Apartheid South Africa and Australia respectively, responding to the Beckettian stranger I establish earlier. I conclude this chapter by considering Coetzee’s subversion of narrative authority and mastery, through a new way of unifying character and artwork.

In my conclusion I read two novels, DeLillo’s *Point Omega* (2010) and Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1998) to think about the way they suggest the unfastening of their own novelistic strategies. The two novels share a female character who is made equivalent to her environment—the desert and the farm, both contested and uniquely

political in each of their oeuvres—and through which she is read by the male protagonist. In demonstrating the inefficacy of these readings, both authors highlight the issues at stake in making character and place synonymous. I suggest that they propose an alternative to this by thinking through new forms of aesthetic experiences in the partial artwork, a way of being both inside and outside simultaneously that more adequately responds to the issues of reading character through space.

Architecture scholar Christine McCarthy conceptualizes interiority as necessarily elastic:

Interiority is that abstract quality that enables the recognition and definition of an interior. It is a theoretical and immaterial set of coincidences and variables from which “interior” is made possible. It is not an absolute condition that depends on a restrictive architectural definition. Interiority is instead mobile and promiscuous.⁷⁰

There is generative flexibility that also underpins my own research. McCarthy wants to distinguish between the abstract idea of interiority, and the more concrete version, the interior, which she thinks of as built space.⁷¹ However, in the course of this thesis, I want to explore ways in which certain built spaces may seem to suggest solidity but still follow McCarthy’s logic of interiority. As Charlotte Grant reminds us, ‘If we look at the etymology of the word “interior,” dating, according to the OED from 1490, it is clear that its earliest meanings relate to the mental, appearing as a synonym for “inward” in 1513.’⁷² The interior also refers then to the very process of becoming interior, of an inward movement. Throughout this thesis, I use a variety of spatial tropes as a means of arguing for a more expansive topographical imagination. My reading echoes the strategy of reading as discussed by Frank:

⁷⁰ Christine McCarthy, ‘Towards a Definition of Interiority,’ *Space and Culture*, 8.2 (2005), pp. 112-125, (p. 112).

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 116.

⁷² Charlotte Grant, ‘Reading the House of Fiction: From Object to Interior 1720–1920,’ *Home Cultures*, 2:3 (2005), pp. 233-249, p. 237.

The reading that I propose involves two steps: first, the noticing of internal architectural structures, those within the literary work...These internal structures may be, for instance, cathedrals which symbolize character, temples which organize memory, or dwelling-houses which are settings for action. The second task of this sort of reading would be a looking-up from the book to notice the same or similar structures outside, in the physical, external world...We may think of this second activity as the noticing of echoes or correspondences between internal and external structures; but "internal" structures are also structures of consciousness, conventions of perception, systems of belief, as well as the activities of thought and feeling. By "external," in addition to physical architecture and nature's architecture surrounding us, we must also understand all art-as-construct.⁷³

In this formula, Frank establishes 'correspondence between internal and external structures' through spatial descriptors in text and their relation to character, which are then modified by the operations of structure in the world outside of the text. Thinking through these multiple sets of internal and external frameworks forms a literary architecture that acknowledges not only the composition in text, but the composition of text. My methodology, in which I take into account both spatial theory and interiority, also echoes Kestner who argues:

The spatial method, the study of spatiality in the novel, is therefore inherently a critical approach which must integrate several disciplines, including literary theory, scientific thought, spatial artistic practices, and philosophic query. One must study the spatiality of the novel in the context of space as well as in the context of literature: since space is a property not only of literature but of science and art, a study of space in the novel is therefore integrative.⁷⁴

Like Barnard, who uses her study as a way to link together 'place represented *in* the text...[and] the place *of* the text' [emphasis in original],⁷⁵ and Clarkson who situates her argument between the 'topographic and the textual',⁷⁶ my thesis combines the imaginative practice of novelistic description with an interrogation into the procedures and limitations of the contemporary novel.

⁷³ Frank, p. 5-6.

⁷⁴ Joseph A. Kestner, *The Spatiality of the Novel* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1978)., p. 9.

⁷⁵ Barnard, p. 3.

⁷⁶ Clarkson, p. 44.

Chapter one:

Thinking through the novel: the house and the interior in realism and modernism

Thus far, I have demonstrated how the realist novel allows writers to expose the problems and complexities of space, founded through epistemology and a newfound attention to the intimate lives of the individual. In this section I will outline a central image in my thesis: the space of the house. I contend that both Coetzee and DeLillo deal with this image of the house in slightly different ways: in DeLillo it is the space of the room that is central to his literary architecture; Coetzee's work on the other hand, exposes the complexities of both the house and the farm. In both writers, the room and the house emerge in innovative and slippery ways, facilitated by the inheritance of Samuel Beckett, whose prose has had an immeasurable impact on the geography and imagination of the novel. However, this image firstly emerged, as I suggested above, in the legacies of realist fiction. By tracing the history of the house in fiction, I examine its foundational import in the structure of fiction in general, and its subsequent impact on DeLillo and Coetzee.

For Bachelard, 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.'⁷⁷ Bachelard's topoanalysis involves studying the sites of our intimate lives, and for him, this intimacy is found in the house through its relation to childhood, memories, thinking and sleeping.⁷⁸ He comments that '[a] house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.'⁷⁹ Not only does he find the house a site of interior intimacy but that this intimacy is secured, perpetuating the

⁷⁷ Bachelard, p. 27.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

notion that space can exist freely from external forces. Walter Benjamin also discusses the site of the house, specifically the effect of modernity on the bourgeois notion of home and work:

For the private individual, the place of dwelling is for the first time opposed to the place of work. The former comes to constitute the interior. Its complement is the office [...] The private individual, who in the office has to deal with realities, needs the domestic interior to sustain him in his illusions. This necessity is all the more pressing since he has no intention of grafting onto his business interests a clear perception of his social function. In the arrangement of his private surroundings, he suppresses both of these concerns. From this derive the phantasmagorias of the interior—which, for the private individual, represents the universe. In the interior, he brings together remote locales and memories of the past. His living room is a box in the theater of the world.⁸⁰

In the home, one is afforded a new perspective of the public world, one that is constituted through *being* in the home. This new space is ordered and controlled and, unlike the outside world, allows the individual to take ownership of a specifically contained space. The changing nature and locations of human activity means that the space in which one lives can be seen to exist outside the realities that govern it. The creation of a home perpetuates the idea that there are spaces that are uniquely absent from capital, and which are experientially distinct. Benjamin continues, '[t]he interior is not just the universe of the private individual, it is also his *étui*. Ever since the time of Louis Philippe, the bourgeois has shown a tendency to do this within the four walls of his apartment...The traces of its inhabitant are molded into the interior.'⁸¹ More specifically here, the creation of the interior in the mind of the bourgeois individual is through the organisation of commodities into a personal order that is seen as reflective of an individual psyche. For Benjamin, this is a necessary fantasy that rejects the idea

⁸⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century,' *The Arcades Project*, trans by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 19.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

that ideology pervades everywhere. The creation of an interior space is responsive to the structure of capitalism that emerged in the nineteenth century: 'The alienation process culminates in the emergence of the private home.'⁸² This 'phantasmagoria', as Benjamin terms it, is a coping mechanism, an imagined point of contact with a world that has been radically restructured. Rather than suggesting the interior space as a retreat from the world, for Benjamin the interior is in fact an extension of the exterior, only imagined as interior in the mental landscape of the individual.⁸³

This interior space, according to McCarthy, is also important in its presence in our mind as a familiar, known space. As she explains:

[f]amiliarity is reassuring. It constructs a set of rules and behaviors that make space accessible and able to be engaged with. Reassurance and safeness are sentiments associated with interiority because boundary conditions make promises of security.⁸⁴

In the limitations of space, McCarthy here establishes an opposition reminiscent of Berger's safe world of storytelling. For McCarthy, this is through human behaviour: by securing the interior, we are allowed further freedoms, or the promise of further freedoms through our seclusion from an immeasurable exteriority. The interior, then, conditions our expectation of space both in the past and for the future, determining the way we behave.

If the creation of a psychic distinction between inside and outside is characteristic of modernity, then, for Fredric Jameson, postmodernism sees the total eradication of this border:

⁸² Benjamin, 'The Interior, The Trace,' *The Arcades Project*, p. 226.

⁸³ For more on the bourgeois interior space and its relationship to writing see: Diana Fuss, *The Sense of an Interior: Four Writers and the rooms that shaped them* (London: Routledge, 2004) and Julia Prewitt Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior* (London: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

⁸⁴ McCarthy, p. 117.

Postmodernism...went out to abolish something even more fundamental, namely, the distinction between the inside and outside (all the modernists ever said about that was that the one ought to express the other, which suggests that no one had yet begun to doubt whether you needed to have either of them at all in the first place).⁸⁵

The individual is no longer able to imagine distinctions between different kind of spaces, in the way that Benjamin describes, and instead is confronted with a life that is all ‘surface.’ As Jameson notes specifically of the use of glass in postmodernist architecture: ‘it is not even exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel’s outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it.’⁸⁶ But, though Jameson suggests this new depthlessness is indeed characteristic of late capitalism, he imagines that there may be some way of creating a political postmodernism. He envisions this primarily in his discussions of cities, specifically through his summary of Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of a City*, and his discussion of mental mapping. Jameson notes that:

[d]isalienation in the traditional city [...] involves, the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulate ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories.⁸⁷

Jameson outlines a creative reconstruction of place through new kinds of mobility afforded by the changing geography of contemporary city life, the kind of reconnoiter inward I will be discussing later in this thesis. This emergence of a possible political space within postmodernism is what he terms ‘cognitive mapping’. He describes

...a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system—will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representational dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do justice. This is not then, clearly, a call for a return to some older kind of machinery, some older and more transparent national space, or some more traditional and reassuring

⁸⁵ Jameson, p. 98.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

perspectival or mimetic enclave: the new political art (if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object—the world space of multinational capital—at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as spatial scale.⁸⁸

Jameson hopes for an internal relocation that can get to grips with the profoundly altered scale and organisation of the modern world. Specifically, this new ‘mode of representing’ is necessarily aiming to re-ground the individual in spaces that have been transformed through present historical conditions. His phrase, the ‘as yet unimaginable’, is helpful here, in its gesture towards new spaces that can be articulated through the *structures* of art. An example of this might be found in Jameson’s discussion of Frank Gehry’s house, a house that denies the viewer any one perspective from which to understand it. Through our disquieting experience of the Gehry building, in which we become aware of its process of creation as a designed sketch and a built object, and where we are unsure if we are inside or outside, Jameson suggests that space can indeed be political. For him, Gehry’s building is ‘the attempt to think a material thought.’⁸⁹

If Benjamin thinks of the projection of interior space as part of a reification under capitalism, and Jameson contests that an aesthetic of cognitive mapping can begin to re-place the individual, then my project here aims to synthesise these ideas by figuring the imaginative process of space *in fiction* that attempts to think through and go beyond the seeming constraints of fiction to find new forms of interiority.

⁸⁸ Jameson, p. 54.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

Realism's house of fiction

The issues about the house I have outlined above chime with the larger issues about the space of literature and the ideas of realism I established in my introduction. In this next section, I argue that the space of the house in realism becomes a kind of textual shorthand for a way of being and knowing space that not only makes legible the underlying issues of knowing and seeing, but also the role and possibility of character.

Kestner ascribes the new-found attention to spatial concerns in the novel to the criticism of Henry James, particularly his prefaces to his novels that were later collected as *The Art of the Novel*.⁹⁰ Henry James's preface to *The Portrait of the Lady* discusses his famous house of fiction:

The house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million—a number of possible windows not to be reckoned, rather; every one of which has been pierced, or is still pierceable, in its vast front, by the need of the individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will. These apertures, of dissimilar shape and size, hang so, all together, over the human scene that we might have expected of them a greater sameness of report than we find. They are but windows at the best, mere holes in a dead wall, disconnected, perched aloft; they are not hinged doors opening straight upon life. But they have this mark of their own that at each of them stands a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other. He and his neighbors are watching the same show, but one seeing more where the other sees less, one seeing black where the other sees white, one seeing big where the other sees small, one seeing coarse where the other sees fine. And so on, and so on; there is fortunately no saying on what, for the particular pair of eyes, the window may *not* open; 'fortunately' by reason, precisely, of this incalculability of range. The spreading field, the human scene, is the 'choice of subject'; the pierced aperture, either broad or balconied or slit-like and low-browed, is the 'literary form'; but they are, singly or together, as nothing without the posted presence of the watcher—without, in other words, the consciousness of the artist [emphasis in original].⁹¹

⁹⁰ Kestner, p. 27.

⁹¹ Henry James, 'Preface,' *The Portrait of Lady*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 8.

In this long explanation, James conceptualises fiction as occupying this position between the inside and the outside. These openings allow the writer to look *out* into the world through the house; the house distorts and changes the way the world is seen. Dorothy J. Hale notes the tension that James creates between the viewer and the viewed, between projection and reception suggesting the haziness between the sites of making and seeing.⁹² Like Benjamin, the interior becomes a site from which the world can be seen, both safely confining but also a platform or viewing point for everything that is not the room. Immediately then, James's house of fiction becomes a negotiation between the external and the internal through which the space of fiction is produced; as Charlotte Grant, comments: 'Fiction then does not merely depict houses and their interiors, it is, for James, itself a house.'⁹³ Here, we see a slippage that will characterize my thinking: that in the increasing importance of houses in people's lives, it developed increasing physic prominence.

James's house also refers back to its creator, the authority who has designed every aspect of this fictional dwelling. As Frank comments:

In the briefest shift from "field" to "scene" James has moved from the natural to the composed, from the unlimited (open ground) to the limited (territory); only composed can that "field" be suitable for fiction, can it be the "subject" of fiction.⁹⁴

The limitation and constraint of the 'scene' are the foundation of fiction; in order for fiction to be built the author must delimit the ground that is to be constructed. Frank continues: 'Reading becomes point-of-viewing, our placing of self that we might see. James asks that we regard language as *grounded* [emphasis in original].'⁹⁵ Like

⁹² Dorothy J. Hale, *Social Formalism: The Novel in Theory from James to Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 26-7.

⁹³ Grant, p. 235.

⁹⁴ Frank, p. 184.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

Coetzee's 'contract' between reader and writer, the construct not only emplaces the characters and author, but also the reader themselves.

Kestner notes the plethora of visual and painterly language in James's prefaces in general, outlining his use of 'pictorial, architectural, and sculptural metaphor,'⁹⁶ in *The Awkward Age* and *The Wings of a Dove*, as well as in James's reviews of novels by Balzac and Flaubert. This language is also present in this passage, suggesting that the house of fiction is a reflective construct. James's description is full of visual language, such as 'aperture,' 'field-glass,' 'observation,' 'watcher,' reminiscent of an experiment conducted through close observation. But this is no ordinary experiment, as this reflective structure reveals and distorts both the subjectivity that underscores interpretation and the authority through which this is filtered. The body of images that Bachelard envisions has been synthesized by James not only as a way of suggesting stability, but as a way of understanding human consciousness in the first place. The house shapes the way that the writer sees. Inscribed into James's artistic construction is reading as a penetrative literary looking.⁹⁷

Later in the preface, James goes on to use the terminology of building:

I now easily see, to inspire me with the right confidence for erecting on such a plot of ground the neat and careful and proportioned pile of bricks that arches over it and that was thus to form, constructionally speaking, *a literary monument*. ... On one thing I was determined; that, though I should clearly have to pile brick upon brick for the creation of an interest, I would leave no pretext for saying that anything is out of line, scale or perspective. I would build large—in fine embossed vaults and painted arches, as who should say, and yet never let it appear that the chequered pavement, the ground under the reader's feet, fails to stretch at every point to the base of the walls [emphasis mine].⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Kestner, p. 27-8.

⁹⁷ There is a clear relationship between observation and surveillance, particularly in the way that realist fiction often explores new institutions. Mark Seltzer has written extensively on this idea; see particularly *Henry James and the Art of Power* (London: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁹⁸ James, 'Preface,' p. 13.

This 'neat and careful and proportioned' building emerges from the demarcating of space, carving out a place within which events will occur, reminding us of McCarthy's discussion of our need for walls. To continue this building terminology, his monument is scaled to the size of the land and the scope of the building materials. This is a responsive construct that must take into account the *place* from which it is born. This is not, however, to suggest that in this language of building and proportion there lies a prescriptive formula, which he dismisses in his essay 'Art of Fiction' where one cannot 'imagine composition existing in a series of blocks.'⁹⁹ This house is a synthesis of figure and ground, a commingling of the particular and the constructed, bound together in a seamless creation. As Terry Eagleton points out, this seamlessness is essential, as realism is 'the form which seeks to merge itself so thoroughly with the world that its status as art is suppressed. It is as though its representations have become so transparent that we stare straight through them to reality itself.'¹⁰⁰ The sense of artifice then is subsumed in its apparently reality, its proximity to new spaces of intimate life that obscures the devices through which it comes into being.

Edith Wharton also uses a form of literary architecture first established through her interest in interior design.¹⁰¹ Wharton, who also trained as a decorator and published nonfiction books such as *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) and *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904), specifically envisioned her characters as fitting in with a central design principal that was reflective of their lives. Amy Kaplan draws

⁹⁹ Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction,' *Partial Portraits* (London: Macmillan and co., 1888), p. 391.

¹⁰⁰ Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 10.

¹⁰¹ There have been several studies of Edith Wharton's relationship with space, see Renee Somers, *Edith Wharton as Spatial Activist and Analyst* (Oxon: Taylor and Francis, 2005) and Annette Benert, *The Architectural Imagination of Edith Wharton: Gender, Class, and Power in the Progressive Era* (Madison & Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007).

attention to the language used in *The Decoration of Houses*, particularly Wharton and her co-author Ogden Codman's desire to unite the exterior structure of the house with its inside, in what they term 'interior architecture.'¹⁰² Kaplan explains:

This concept overturns the definition of woman's work from that of conspicuous consumption into the activity of construction. Rather than simply reject the conventional female realm of domesticity, Wharton appropriates the conventional male discourse of architecture and brings it into the interior space that had consigned women to decorating themselves as one among many ornaments. She thereby attempts to break down the dichotomy between the private space of the interior, which always requires an invitation to enter, and the external structure of the building, which confronts the public gaze. For Wharton, breaking down these dichotomies involves a double movement: architecture is internalized into domestic space and the private self is externalized onto objects through architectural form.¹⁰³

Wharton attempts to transform the space of fiction through the dissolution of distinctions between public and private. By extending her definition of architecture so that it becomes part of the inside as well as the outside, Wharton suggests that every aspect of life is constructed. As Weinstein notes, echoing Benjamin's claims:

narrative space in realism is reliably inventoried: not that everything is identified, but that everything pertinent to the subject's orientation is identified. The realist narrator silently performs this task of domesticating space in the moment of describing it, making it legible so that progress may occur.¹⁰⁴

The process of domesticating here is to make the interior space legible, so that it can be read as a part of a cohesive whole, in which space is there to be known. As Kaplan comments: "Interior architecture" turns domestic space inside out to project a borderline area at the intersection of the private home and the streets of the public marketplace, which is neither governed nor subsumed by either realm.'¹⁰⁵ The house and the street are both invaded and produced by capital; by dissolving the distinction

¹⁰² Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman Jnr. quoted in Amy Kaplan, 'Edith Wharton's Profession of Authorship,' *ELH*, 53.2 (1986), pp. 433-457 (p. 444).

¹⁰³ Kaplan, p. 444.

¹⁰⁴ Weinstein, p. 102.

¹⁰⁵ Kaplan, p. 446.

between the two, Wharton suggests that politics cannot be cut off from the part of world supposedly run and occupied exclusively by women.¹⁰⁶ Wharton's writing shows that home is a contested site that cannot be homogenised; moreover, as Benjamin's term 'threshold magic'¹⁰⁷ reminds us, moving between these spaces holds the possibility for transformative moments of contact between inside and outside. This borderline space will emerge in my subsequent discussions of Beckett, as well as DeLillo and Coetzee.

Wharton's 1904 book, *The House of Mirth*, like Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, focuses on the struggles of a young woman named to adequately respond to the demands of the oppressive society in which she lives. Throughout the novel, Lily is described in decorative and ornamental terms—reflected in the novel's original title, *A Moment's Ornament*¹⁰⁸—with her constraining life manifesting in her becoming-ornament, ossified by the gaze of others. In Lynne Tillman's discussion of this novel she describes the relationship between Lily and the spaces she moves through:

Architecture is, among other things, about bodies living within structures built for bodies by bodies. Lily is subject, even prey, to assaults within two kinds of structures—external or social and internal or psychological. The exterior holds, conditions and is manifested in the interior, interiority inhabited and penetrated by the social.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ There is clearly an issue at stake here about women and public space that is not the subject of this thesis. Wharton's work often uses the design of the city as a means of positing the idiosyncratic geography open to a woman in public. Both Lily Bart and Countess Olenska from *The Age of Innocence* confront the problems of public expectation with private longing. However, the inclusion of Wharton is essential in this thesis, as her writing establishes a form of literary architecture that is central to the novel and therefore my account of its history. There have been several studies of the relationship between female space and realist writing, most famously Susan Gubar and Sandra Gillbert, *The Mad Woman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1979) and Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and the Domestic Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin, 'The Interior, The Trace,' p. 214.

¹⁰⁸ Lynne Tillman, 'A mole in the house of the modern' in *What would Lynne Tillman do?* (New York: Red Lemonade, 2014), p. 327.

¹⁰⁹ Tillman, p. 336.

Though Lily loves the unity and style of a decorated room, as the novel goes on, the shrinking intimacy of these rooms smothers her. Tillman considers the impact of this pressure both in terms of Lily's interior life, and also through her body, demonstrating that both register the impact of the social. The drama of the confrontation between inside and outside for Lily is personified in the figure of Lawrence Selden and how his presence 'shed a new light on her surroundings,'¹¹⁰ expanding her sense of the possibilities of self, freed from constraining space. Wharton inscribes Selden as an additional viewing perspective who problematizes Lily's position between conflicting interior and exterior worlds, for both her and the reader.

This position between interior and exterior is also made manifest in Wharton's use of free indirect discourse. In *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer has no problem reading the faces of his family and knowing their thoughts, a way of suggesting the relationship between looking and knowing. After a passage of free indirect discourse, Wharton adds: 'All this Mrs. Archer felt and her son knew she felt.'¹¹¹ Later, Newland is given an astounding amount of information, again in a long passage of free indirect discourse, communicated through one simple look from his wife.¹¹² This knowledge, however, is borne from Newland's understanding of the structures that form his world, and the way that his family and wife fit into them. His love for Countess Olenska comes from his inability to adequately read her within these structures, and therefore know her. Like Selden, she disrupts Newland's sense of the society that he lives in, reflected through his inability to know her or predict what she does. Again, Wharton includes a character, who becomes in effect like the reader of

¹¹⁰ Edith Wharton, *House of Mirth* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 63.

¹¹¹ Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 33.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 219.

James's house of fiction, someone who can see and know the spatial configuration of the text. In this way, Wharton dramatises space as both the historical milieu that restricts the characters' lives through societal norms, as well inscribing a play of perspectives in which knowledge is either confirmed or denied. For Mark Seltzer 'Being inside and having an inside are the two sides of a single formation here. The subject of realism is formed from the outside in – filled, as it were, with the social...' ¹¹³ Placing and reading the body of another becomes a way of occupying a knowing position in the text. The spatial in Wharton then is intimately linked with the space of the self and other, replayed through reader and writer. This placing of bodies in particular spaces is a feature of both DeLillo and Coetzee: DeLillo is preoccupied by the very power of invention itself, creating characters who become obsessed with imagining and knowing others. For Coetzee, it is the ethical problem of knowing and placing historically subjugated people in the space of fiction, which is dominated by the Western canon. I return to these ideas in my following chapters.

In their construction of fictional space, both authors encode the penetrating gaze of the author that can expose hidden spaces that surface through an ordering structure.

Frank elucidates this structure:

The reader distils images into an understanding of mind; the artist issues forth from consciousness images, builds (out) from mind into literary art. We come to understand...the house of fiction... [as] a great democratizer of sorts, that to James the act of seeing (as distinct from the act of participating) constitutes creating, fiction-making, processes which are unavoidably interpretative and subjective and which James generously celebrates. ¹¹⁴

James's literary gaze over his house not only allows for many viewpoints in, but many ways for the fiction to move *outwards*, towards the reader. Though Frank sees this as a democratic mode of reading specifically through the emphasis that James places

¹¹³ Seltzer, p. 94.

¹¹⁴ Frank, p, 186.

upon the circulating of individual subjectivities, Wharton also uses interior architecture as a way of reconfiguring the confines of space. In the work of both writers, there is a play between public and private; the intimate space of the home and also the unknown space of the other are exposed through the construct of fiction.

The modernist house of fiction

Everyone carries a room about inside him. This fact can even be proved by the means of the sense of hearing. If someone walks fast and one pricks up one's ears and listens, say in the night, when everything round about is quiet, one hears, for instance, the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall.¹¹⁵

If in realism interior spaces have a distinct relationship to the interiority of characters, then this interrelationship is still present in modernism though in reimagined ways. Virginia Woolf's critical writing¹¹⁶ thinks through the relationship between character and house, specifically in her distinctions between different eras of writing. For Woolf, 'Edwardian' writers - specifically Arnold Bennett - over-use the metaphor of the house as a synecdoche for interiority:

House property was the common ground from which the Edwardians found it easy to proceed to intimacy. Indirect as it seems to us, the convention worked admirably, and thousands of Hilda Lessways were launched upon the world by this means. For that age and generation, the convention was a good one.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Franz Kafka, *Blue Octavo Notebook*, ed. by Max Brod, trans. by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1991), p. 1.

¹¹⁶ As above with my inclusion of Edith Wharton, I am also aware of the other issues at stake in Woolf's writing, particularly her consideration of women's access to educational space in *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin, 1973). However, this is by no means the only moment in which she discusses the possibility to represent space in the novel, and its relationship to character. As I suggest below, in her critical writing, she elucidates an important correspondence between character and environment that speaks suggestively to my previous section.

¹¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, 'Character in Fiction,' *Virginia Woolf: Selected Essays*, ed. by David Bradshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 37-54, (p. 48).

She continues later: ‘They have given us a house in the hope that we may be able to deduce the human beings who live there.’¹¹⁸ Though she does not dismiss this outright, noting that ‘the convention was a good one,’ this kind of literary building is to ignore the particularities that make life vivid:

He [Arnold Bennett] is trying to make us imagine for him; he is trying to hypnotize us into the belief that, because he has made a house, there must be a person living there. With all his powers of observation, which are marvellous, with all his sympathy and humanity, which are great, Mr Bennett has never once looked at Mrs Brown in her corner.¹¹⁹

This method is to prioritise the environment of the character over and above the creation of the character as an individual. Woolf writes of the need to consider this imagined character Mrs Brown in her ‘corner,’ that is, her as herself, away from exterior architecture that could be inserted into fiction as a way of conceiving of her internal world. In this way, characters assert their dominance over the spaces that are supposed to condition them.

Franz Kafka’s work also seeks to question the location of an individual in fiction through a reappraisal of fictional architecture. In the quote above Kafka responds to several of the issues I have discussed thus far in James and Wharton. Kafka posits an unknown interior space that is a room that lives inside us, ‘proved’ by the sound of a mirror that is loosening from the wall. This unfastening is a sudden realisation that our way of accessing interior space is through oblique means. If James is preoccupied with ‘neat’ building, and Wharton considers how to navigate the space of private and public through her description of ‘interior architecture,’ then Kafka drastically reduces the scope of this building, from a house into a single room. This simply described ‘room’ is not specified, and reveals itself through silence. Rather

¹¹⁸ Woolf, p. 49.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 47.

than the outward gesture towards the world, Kafka suggests that there are spaces within us that have yet to be occupied or understood.

Weinstein comments on Kafka's use of the room, noting of Kafka's K, that '[we are placed] in a familiar bedroom with the protagonist [...], but there is something wrong with that room, something that was never before wrong with it, something (we do not yet know) we are never going to find out.'¹²⁰ For Weinstein, Kafka's novels are based upon the epistemological frustrations of both the character and the reader; if the processes of coming-to-know space and knowing others underscore realism, then modernist novels are fuelled by a deferral of that knowledge.

This mode of knowing that Weinstein describes as 'unknowing' is demarcated here through Kafka's radical reappraisal of literary geography. If authority was at the forefront of both James and Wharton's work, then Kafka's oeuvre brought new attention to those on the margins, those enmeshed within the complexities of the bureaucratization of modern life, and those who have historically been denied voices within fiction. In 'The Burrow' for instance, the creature must negotiate the territories of the labyrinthine space of its own creation, existing as both creator and occupier. For this creature, they are twinned: 'I and the burrow belong so indissolubly together.'¹²¹ Space and self are radically reimagined as the body that inhabits this space and also actively fashions it. This seems to be a question of subjective agency: as Michael J. Shapiro notes, specifically relating this idea to the work of DeLillo: 'Kafka anticipated [postmodernism] by exploring the inner space of consciousness and demonstrating its ambiguities and uncanny relationships with spaces outside of

¹²⁰ Weinstein, p. 56.

¹²¹ Franz Kafka, 'The Burrow,' *The Great Wall of China and other short works*, ed. and trans. by Malcolm Pasley, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 200. All further references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to as TB.

consciousness.’¹²² We can place this in more general terms through how John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury conceive of agency in modernist fiction:

The characters belong less to a world being imitated than to a process, and they seem to participate in the act of their own creation. They are part of the technical plot; and as in many modern novels they seem to assert against their author the right to greater freedom, to profounder psychological depth, or to life that reaches freely backward and forward in time...¹²³

In this configuration, the constraints of fiction become looser, allowing for new modes of engagement between character and environment. This expansion of the fictional construct is extremely important in both DeLillo and Coetzee, and I shall return to this idea in subsequent chapters.

Like Fletcher and Bradbury’s assertion that characters ‘participate’ in new ways, the thoughts of this creature come to dominate the narrative, as it starts to dwell on the possibility of an intruder. Blanchot traces the thinking here from the perspective of the creature:

There you assure yourself of solid defenses against the world above, but leave yourself open to the insecurity of the underneath. You build after a day’s fashion, but below ground, and what rises sinks, what is erected is swallowed up. The more the burrow seems solidly closed to the outside, the greater the danger that you be closed in with the outside, delivered to the peril without any means of escape. And when every foreign threat seems shut out of this perfectly closed intimacy, then it is intimacy that becomes menacing foreignness.¹²⁴

Solidity contrasts with insecurity; danger lives with intimacy. The burrow’s spaces can be reversed at any moment: ‘the former place of danger has become a place of tranquillity’ (TB 212). Like Bachelard’s notion of the border between inside and

¹²² Michael, J. Shapiro, *Reading the Postmodern: Political Theory as Textual Practice* (Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), p. 124.

¹²³ John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury, ‘Introverted Novel,’ *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature: 1890-1930*, ed. by Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, 2nd edn. (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 397.

¹²⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 168.

outside, where one can turn into the other at any moment in a painful exchange, this contingency challenges the certainty with which we speak of any space, effectively dramatising the uncertainty with which we move through space.

Kafka's 'The Hunger Artist,' another short story I will be returning to throughout the course of this thesis, describes how a so-called Hunger Artist starves himself as his performance. The fundamental paradox of this artwork lies in the relationship between knowing and seeing:

No one was capable of spending every day and every night with the hunger-artist as an invigilator without a break, and therefore no one could know from direct evidence of his own senses whether the hunger-artist had starved himself without a break, without a lapse; only the hunger artist himself was in a position to know that, only he therefore could be the spectator completely satisfied by his own hunger.¹²⁵

Spectatorship is turned inward here, as the hunger artist's work exists on the boundaries between intimate knowing, and external being. In Adorno's essay on Kafka, he also thinks about this new relationship to the mechanics of plot, through the interplay between subjecthood and object: 'The crucial moment, however, towards which everything in Kafka is directed, is that in which men become aware that they are not themselves – that they themselves: are things.'¹²⁶ By moving closer to objects, Kafka produces a creative tension between being and seeing, in which the subject attempts to objectify itself; the character is the writing and writing is character. In this new intersection between these states, literary thinking gestures both towards the inside and outside simultaneously.

¹²⁵ Franz Kafka, 'The Hunger-Artist,' *Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, ed. and trans. by Michael Hofmann (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 254. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to HA.

¹²⁶ Theodor Adorno, 'Notes on Kafka,' *Prisms*, trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 255.

Here, I have established the ways that literary architecture was explored and altered by modernist writers. For Woolf, the house can no longer signify the individual in the same way, for to do so would be to ignore the idiosyncrasies and particularities of a human mind. Though Kafka's fiction is markedly different to Woolf's, the new attention to character is formulated through the conjoining of internal and external worlds. We can actively trace the continuation of these ideas in my chosen authors: through his attention to being and seeing, DeLillo explores the possibilities of modernist strategies as a way of conceiving of an American subject. Coetzee also encodes the strategies that Fletcher and Bradbury lay out, as a means of suggesting new modes of agency for characters that have been historically marginalised.

Samuel Beckett: 'The big world and the little world'

'Writing, as I know it, has no territory of its own.'¹²⁷

In thinking about the construct of the house of fiction, I have moved through the work of James, Wharton, Woolf and Kafka, exploring the architectural dimensions of their writing. In my next section, I explore Samuel Beckett's radical reappraisal and challenge to some of these fictional strategies.

Along with Kafka, Samuel Beckett is one of the most influential writers of the modernist novel.¹²⁸ For Fletcher and Bradbury, this lies in his 'feat of composing of novels which disintegrate into silence as they unfold.'¹²⁹ This double-movement characterises the strange circularity that demarcates Beckett's space, both in form and

¹²⁷ John Berger, 'The Storyteller,' *John Berger: Selected Essays*, ed. by Geoff Dyer (New York: Vintage, 2001). p. 366.

¹²⁸ I will not be addressing Beckett's theatrical work in this study because my interest is in the specific geography of his prose.

¹²⁹ Fletcher and Bradbury, p. 412.

content. Peter Boxall notes that Beckett's legacy wrestles 'with this contradiction between writing which continues to go on, and a writing which is unable to go on.'¹³⁰ Beckett's work is bidirectional, gesturing towards possibilities and limitations: in this movement, Beckett effectively dramatizes the human problem of being in space. In Gilles Deleuze's essay 'The Exhausted' he states that 'Beckett's protagonists play with the possible without realizing it.'¹³¹ Through his attention to the relationship between exhaustion of form and exhaustion of subject Deleuze distinguishes between exclusive and inclusive disjunctions. By including what Deleuze terms combinatorial series defined as 'the art or science of exhausting the possible, through inclusive disjunctions,'¹³² Beckett demonstrates how to 'press on, but toward nothing.'¹³³ This exceeds simple exhaustion of the subject, and instead suggests that language can express an exhausting of the form itself. This gesture outwards towards new ways of living cannot yet be conceived in this unformulated space, but through myriad movements Beckett's fiction circles back to its moment of constitution.

This moment of constitution is slippery and amorphous, and lies in the voices of characters that deny and reject form whilst also longing for it. The physical isolation of many of the characters, who find themselves alone, often in bare rooms, confused as to how they ended up there and unsure of how to leave, is paralleled in the mental isolation they endure and describe. The prose narratives dramatise an encounter between these characters and the process of fiction itself. Many of the characters in Beckett's novels, particularly those in the trilogy, never get over these

¹³⁰ Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 1.

¹³¹ Gilles Deleuze, 'The Exhausted,' trans. by Anthony Uhlmann, *SubStance*, 24.3 (1995), pp. 3-28, (p. 4).

¹³² Deleuze, p. 5.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

moments; the simultaneous presence and absence that is created from an existence within the boundaries of fiction never allows the reader to forget the origin of the text as a state of paradox. Jean-Michel Rabaté suggests that Beckett's writing '...blend[s] radical critique and experimental writing without a program, just to test the limits of textuality.'¹³⁴ This 'testing' is through his sustained examination of the limits of fiction, through the evocation of a jarring spatial aesthetic that seeks to disrupt the architecture of realism.

As I suggested earlier, realism established a new kind of grounded fiction in which real and imagined space comes together, through predominately interior architectural spaces, such as rooms and houses. From the beginning of Beckett's career, his writing explored a new peculiar geography of freedom and constraint, in which he critiques the aesthetic of fiction thus far, and the politics of writing at all: 'there is nothing to express, nothing which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express.'¹³⁵ Expression is a necessity born from struggle, from someone dedicated to undertake the profoundly difficult task of writing. For Chris Ackerley this reflects Beckett's '...attempt in fiction to determine the nature and location of that impossible imperative,'¹³⁶ suggesting a kind of fictional exploration or mapping. Steven Connor notes that Beckett's imagination is not 'a spontaneously indwelling and upwelling power' but instead 'a strenuous and exhausting labour that comes close to the ideas of staging, seeing through or putting

¹³⁴ Jean-Michel Rabaté, 'Bataille, Beckett, Blanchot: From the Impossible to the Unknowing,' *Journal of Beckett Studies*, 21.1 (2012), pp. 56-64, (p. 62).

¹³⁵ Beckett, 'Three Dialogues,' *Disjecta*, ed. by Ruby Cohn (London: Grove Press, 1984), p. 139.

¹³⁶ Chris Ackerley, 'The Uncertainty of Self: Samuel Beckett and the Location of Voice,' *Samuel Beckett Today: After Beckett*, ed. by Anthony Uhlmann, Sjef Houppermans, Bruno Clement (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 40.

into practice.’¹³⁷ For both critics, difficulty and labour underpin the work; unlike James’s breezy descriptions of building, Beckett actively highlights the exhaustion of creativity, not to celebrate the efforts of the author, but to demonstrate the necessity of artistic responses to the world that seems to resist it.

This demonstrates Beckett’s attention to the possibility of space, in which he asks if and how the contemporary subject can be placed *in* fiction through writing. In Barthes’s ‘The Death of the Author’ he notes that ‘[w]riting is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.’¹³⁸ Though I will not be conceptualising of this neutrality in the same way as Barthes does here—thinking as I am about the politics of space—Beckett also seems interested in the possibility of the literary space to slough off the restrictions of the subject. Moreover, throughout Beckett’s prose he not only does damage to the body of the protagonist, through the constant threat of surprising violence and the violence of non-identity, he also enacts a kind of pressurized violence to the space of fiction writing itself. Underscoring the creation of fiction is the knowledge that this creation constitutes itself; like Kafka, making and being are unified. For George Steiner, many modernist writers working in multiple languages are ‘extraterritorial’ or ‘unhoused.’¹³⁹ He explains that ‘it seems proper that those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism, which has so made many homeless, should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across language.’¹⁴⁰ Though Steiner conceives of this unhousedness specifically through

¹³⁷ Steven Connor, *Beckett, Modernism and the Material Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 7.

¹³⁸ Roland Barthes, ‘Death of the Author,’ *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 185.

¹³⁹ George Steiner, *Extraterritorial* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 3

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

language, the image is pertinent here, as it suggests the repercussions of spatiality in both literary origin and literary expression. I think in these terms throughout this section, as I explore Beckett's search for a literary home.

For Beckett, I argue, the politics of expression is also bound up in the ability to represent the other. Beckett's encounter with space is often figured through a process of spatial deferral found in a proximate other, who is always already inscribed in the text, but can never be directly confronted. If in realist fiction the environment of the character constitutes the character and determines their progress, Beckett considers a new form of reciprocity in which ahistorical spaces jostle against the experiential. I also suggest that this interest in space specifically speaks to Beckett's rejection of dominant historical narratives, found particularly in the discourse of imperialism and colonialism. The debate around Ireland's status as an ex-colony of England is beyond the scope of this study; however, Beckett's challenge to cultural hegemony, as well as the writer's relationship with their country of origin cannot help but inform my analysis which I layout below.¹⁴¹

Though there are clear links between Beckett and Kafka's writing, I do not seek to unify them under one literary project. In this section, I emphasise Beckett's exploration of distance and intimacy that lies in fictional devising. I specifically use this word 'devising' because it is not only a significant Beckettian word, frequently

¹⁴¹ I engage with some of the ideas laid out by Anna McMullan in my argument; however, there have been several studies which assess Beckett's relationship with Ireland, see: David Lloyd, 'Writing in the Shit: Beckett, Nationalism and the Colonial Subject,' *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-colonial Moment* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), pp. 41-58, Peter Boxall, 'The Existence I Ascribe: Memory, Invention and Autobiography in Beckett's Fiction', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 30 (2000), pp. 137-152, Sean Kennedy, ed., *Beckett and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), David Lloyd, *Irish Culture and Colonial Modernity 1800–2000: The Transformation of Oral Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

found in the later fiction, but because its Latin etymology, *divis*, from the Old French *deviser*, ‘dispose in portions,’ to *divide*,¹⁴² speaks to the very structure of Beckett’s work. This double-movement of construction attempts to think through points of contact between the self and the world, through a kind of permeable threshold; if, as Jameson notes, expression is that which travels through the boundary of inside and outside, then in Beckett, the reformulating of space in the contemporary world has a direct relationship with freedom and expression; the dissolution of lived space is to posit the possibility of new spaces that, for Beckett, could not yet be expressed.

Murphy

Beckett’s first published novel *Murphy* (1938) shows a writer already interested in the politics of form and its repercussions on space. Within the opening few pages of his first novel, Beckett seems to respond to some of the ideas I established above:

‘Murphy, All life is figure and ground.’
 ‘But a wandering to find home,’ said Murphy.’¹⁴³

Neary, Murphy’s tutor, speaks this line, one of his many aphorisms that pepper the novel; in this first one, we find a challenge to the strategies of realist fiction. If, ‘All life is figure and ground’ then Murphy’s rebuttal that we must wander to ‘find a home’ immediately eradicates these coordinates. Neary’s comment that we understand ‘life’ through the fixity of coordinates seems to strangely layout the tactic of fictional building. Murphy’s addition of ‘But’ adapts Neary’s statement, suggesting that this ‘figure and ground’ might be a way of moving, not of staying put. This disjuncture

¹⁴² ‘Devise,’ *Chambers Dictionary*, p. 422.

¹⁴³ Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*, (New York: Grove Press, 2010), p. 6. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and are abbreviated to Mu.

enacts a kind of simultaneous overlap and distance that characterises competing strategies of contemporary emplacement; answers that seem to contradict one another as a new kind of multiplicity, reflective of a new shifting terrain of being.

Coetzee's essay 'The Comedy of Point of View in Beckett's *Murphy*,' analyses the encoding of perspective in terms of its disruption of authority, reading a series of modifiers that alter point of view; the 'largely unambiguous tacit code'¹⁴⁴ of reading, established in realism, is undercut through the assemblage of characters who appear throughout the text and problematize what Frank earlier referred to as 'point-of-viewing.' The text complicates our understanding of a traditional omniscient narrator through its continual disruption or ambiguity of the derivation of particular pieces of information that make up the narrative. Coetzee notes Beckett's use of bland passives and modifiers as a way to suggest a play on 'the conventions of point of view.'¹⁴⁵ For Coetzee, the disruption of narrative authority comes specifically in the unfastening of speaker and speaker location, a technique he goes on to use in his own fiction.

Throughout *Murphy*, the flattened and unitary nature of the dialogue is contrasted with ideas of separation and division; what Coetzee names as the 'comic antigrammar of point of view'¹⁴⁶ then, I would describe as the possible unfixing of central tenets of information that threaten their own unfastening at any moment. *Murphy* consistently repositions many of the recognisable features of the text over and again, allowing the text to be both familiar and unfamiliar. In the exchanges of Neary and Murphy for example, we see a kind of unified tone in their play with mismatching aphorisms:

¹⁴⁴ Coetzee, 'The Comedy of Point of View in Beckett's *Murphy*,' *Doubling the Point*, p. 31.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

‘Love required,’ said Neary, ‘is a short circuit,’ a ball that gives rise to a sparkling rally.

‘The love that lifts up its eye,’ said Neary, ‘being in torment; that craves for the tip of her little finger, dipped in lacquer, to cool its tongue – is foreign to you, Murphy, I take it.’

‘Greek,’ said Murphy (Mu 7).

In multiple scenes such as this one, the exchanges of snatched sense ensure that dialogue in this text goes nowhere. Neary’s statement is modified by a phrase out of quotation; one of the modifiers that Coetzee asserts problematises the origin of voice. This is very characteristic of Beckett’s work: the increasing lack of distinction between self and other, firstly through flattened speech, then through the various pseudo-couples that populate both his prose and his plays, and then through the actual transformation of characters that occurs in *The Unnamable*.

In this blending of characters, the novel finds its counterpoint in the idiosyncrasies of Murphy’s challenge to philosophies of being. In the opening scene, Murphy has tied himself to a rocking chair, an image that becomes central to this novel. This rocking comes to signify a kind of stilling of the mind, a means of escape from the everyday through restriction. Murphy desires to rid himself of his bodily senses: ‘They detained him in the world to which they belonged, but not he, as he fondly hoped’ (M 6). But, though he desires this freedom, he also acknowledges that it can only come through his body, ‘it was not until his body was appeased that he could come alive in his mind’ (6), further confirmed through the narrative attention in listing those tied body parts. This situates us in a familiar Cartesian dichotomy of mind-body that determined the composition of the realist novel.

But, this dichotomy is certainly not a typical opposition, as Murphy is interested in thinking about how the self can be divided, or experience can be segmented, and prioritised, describing contrasting locations of experience as the ‘big world’ and the ‘little world.’ For Murphy, ‘what he called his mind functioned not as

an instrument but as a place' (Mu 101). This location suggests that Murphy's mind does not perceive the world but contains the world, hence his concern with the establishing of zones in which different levels of experience are stored. In chapter 6 the narrative voice outlines Murphy's mind 'not [...] as it really was [...] but solely with what it felt and pictured itself to be' (Mu 63). As I have described in my introduction, the mind internalises a particular spatial organisation as a way of conceiving of its relation to its surroundings, so that space is at once real and imagined. Moreover, like Kafka's room, also discussed above, it is an expansive interiority 'a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without' (Mu 63). For Naoyo Mori, this passages demonstrates 'Beckett's debt to monadology'¹⁴⁷ in which he plays with the chaotic virtual-actual as a way of thinking through the complexities of 'communication between himself and others...his mind and his body.'¹⁴⁸ John Wall concurs with Mori's use of monadism, noting that here 'the mind is a monad, an abstract topology of mental faculties that contains within itself a microcosm of the external world based on the mechanism, or...the metaphor of reflection.'¹⁴⁹ This relationship between the individual and world is a perverse figure/ground relationship, in which the exterior can be replicated in the interior, the 'big world' existing in the 'little world.' In Mori's discussion this form of solipsism may be a way of conceiving of freedom but it is also a way to create interiority as a kind of coping mechanism for modernism.¹⁵⁰

Rather than emulating the orthodox arguments of mind-body dualism, it seems instead that Murphy appears to explore levels of participation in the world, or as a way

¹⁴⁷ Naoyo Mori, 'Beckett's Windows and the Windowless Self,' *After Beckett*, p. 365.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 364.

¹⁴⁹ John Wall, A Study of the Imagination in Samuel Beckett's "Watt," *New Literary History*, 33.3 (2002), pp. 533-558, (p. 538).

¹⁵⁰ Mori, p. 366.

of positing possible distinctions in the experiential. The zones he describes are depicted as light, seemingly subverting the 'light' of knowledge. For Ackerely, these three zones are 'arguably a blueprint for the trilogy, with its tripartite movement from Moran's outer light to the Unnamable's dark centre.'¹⁵¹ This division of experience is equated with levels of participation. In this way, Murphy's relationship to the space of the Magdalen Mental Merceyseat, the sanatorium, demonstrates his prioritisation of the inner world above the exterior. In his role as a warden, he is to aid in the recovery of patients by communicating the logic of society as exterior. But for Murphy, this seems to be ill fated in its simplest definition:

The nature of outer reality remained obscure [...] The definition of outer reality, or of reality short and simple, varied according to the sensibility of the definer. But all seemed agreed that contact with it, even the layman's muzzy contact, was a rare privilege (Mu 101).

In its obscurity, the etymology of which is literally dark, the outer world is echoed in the play of dark and light. The need to communicate the incommunicable underscores Murphy's chief task – in his own demeanour he must somehow exemplify the characteristics of a functioning society. His increased isolation is counterbalanced by the need to refute the legitimacy of this kind of existence.

The function of treatment was to bridge the gulf, translate the sufferer from his own pernicious little private dungheap to the glorious world of discrete particles, where it would be his inestimable prerogative once again to wonder, love, hate, desire, rejoice and howl in a reasonable balanced manner and comfort himself with the society of others in the same predicament (Mu 101).

Here 'treatment' is a way to identify points between the 'little private dungheap' and the 'world,' reconnection between these states as conceived of by the medical staff. This threshold is permeable, through which the patient is translated from inside to outside. This is reminiscent of Jameson's description of the journey of expression, also

¹⁵¹ Ackerley, p. 40-1.

from inside to outside. Sanity is found in uniformity, in a strange median or equilibrium between others and oneself, found through assimilation into normality. In Murphy's decision to disappear and seclude himself, he rejects this translation from the outer world of health to the inner world of sickness.

In fact, for Murphy these padded cells are 'indoor bowers of bliss' (Mu 103). He thinks that 'within the narrow limits of domestic architecture he had never been able to imagine a more creditable representation of what he kept on calling, indefatigably, the little world' (Mu 103) that he would ideally occupy. This description of his ideal room is, I would suggest, a kind of satirising of James's earlier assertions that characters are built in response to their environments. Of course, later on in Beckett's fiction, the ambiguity of self is directly related to the unclear confines of the spaces they live in: here, as a character articulates their ideal space, it is not so much that the character is constituted by the spaces in which they live, but in some projection of an interior world. Moreover, it is the desire for a space that is reflective of a confined mind; it is not the mind that forms through the world, but the world that follows through the mind; Murphy's systems become a way of seeking validation in *a priori* structures that already exist, a kind of an internal confirmation.

The trilogy

'Live and invent. I have tried. I must have tried. Invent. It is not the word. Neither is live. No matter. I have tried' (MD 179).

If *Murphy* posits how an individual can rethink their relationship to the world through radical strategies of constraint, then the novels *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (1951), and *The Unnamable* (1953) think about how constraint can transform expression. Each novel is invested in thinking through textual production as both a creative act and a mechanical process, nearly always happening in rooms: *Molloy's*

early line, 'I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now' (M 9) is answered by *The Unnamable's* minimizing of the room to alleys and jars. But, if we have begun to think about the relationship between rooms and houses as gestures towards coherence, Beckett's rooms express the paradoxes of seeking coherence, and even of supposing that a desire for ownership of an intimate and personal space can be fulfilled.

The final lines of *Molloy* proclaim the beginning of a writing process: 'I went back in to the house and wrote, It is midnight. The rain is beating on the windows. It was not midnight. It was not raining' (M 162). *Malone Dies* seems to bring this process to an abrupt stop through Malone's declaration of his imminent death so that the literal 'end' is present at the beginning. This is an acceleration towards the end, in which the future oriented movement of the plot is brought right to the immediate moment. Is this, as Daniel Katz notes, Beckett's 'refusal of the temporality of a present moment in which a subject could seize itself?'¹⁵² This disruption by the novel's interest in death-as-end is a way for the text to explore its own limits; or, indeed to refigure the idea of a limit in a text at all. As Mike Marais notes in his discussion of Coetzee's *Age of Iron* and Beckett's *Murphy*:

Since death is the end of the subject, it is not an action that may be accomplished in a realm of agential possibility. To choose to die is to attempt to control one's loss of control. It is to place oneself in the paradoxical position of the suicide who, in killing herself, seeks to reduce death to an object that may be grasped and thereby controlled by a subject.¹⁵³

Therefore, *Malone Dies* starts by proposing a counterpoint to Molloy's creative paradox by simultaneously positing the control of the subject and the slippage into the

¹⁵² Daniel Katz, *Saying I No More: Subjectivity and Consciousness in the Prose of Samuel Beckett* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p. 79.

¹⁵³ Mike Marais, 'The incurious seeker: Waiting, and the search for the stranger in the fiction of Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee,' *MediaTropes*, 4.2 (2014), pp. 6-30, (p. 21).

space of death. Writing does not, as Lawrence imagined it, show life to life, but shows death to life, as a death-in-life.

The text becomes an exercise in creative waiting, as Malone attempts to simultaneously facilitate and counter death through storytelling:

While waiting I shall tell myself stories, if I can. They will not be the same kind of stories as hitherto, that is all. They will neither be beautiful nor ugly, they will be calm, there will be no ugliness or beauty or fever in them in any more, they will be almost lifeless, like the teller (MD 165).

Throughout the novel, the fictions that Malone writes develop and transport the reader between different narratives suggesting the tension between the geography of fiction and production of identity. In this way, the novel establishes its primary concern with narrative, narrative framework, and the usage of frameworks by an unstable narrative voice. Unlike James or Wharton, who posit their fictional constructions as replications or responses to identity, and a way of outlining narrative authority, here the narrative cannot be written properly because the narrative voice cannot conceptualise of a frame through which to create. The production of fiction becomes part of Malone's strategy to manufacture time: 'What am I doing now, I wonder, losing time or gaining it?' (MD 182) Whilst losing time as he moves toward death, he gains time through the accumulation of fictions he creates. Fiction, or more specifically fiction writing, is not a past time but a gain-time, a barrier of words to stave off death.

But, if fiction writing can delay the future, then it also repeats the immediate moment through the literal repetition of pen-to-paper. There is deliberate confusion around Malone's tools of writing and his act of writing: 'I cannot find my exercise-book. But I still have the pencil in my hand. I shall have to wait for day to break. God knows what I am going to do until then' (MD 191). There is no disruption in the writing for us as reader, but there is disruption here for Malone as author. Later he

says: ‘What a misfortune, the pencil must have slipped from my fingers, for I have only just succeeded in recovering it after forty-eight hours [...] of intermittent efforts’ (MD 222). Here, the lack of writing has also stood in for a kind of writing, in its creation of time; the extension of time, a period of forty-eight hours, is transformed into the experience of space on the page. Beckett’s extension of time becomes a way of looking at the actual marks on the page and considering their temporal moment; there is no way to measure the *time* of writing, only the moment of recording. The temporality of the process of writing is in the foreground, as well as the material conditions of the literal process of writing. The appearance and reappearance of the pencil is therefore crucial to Malone’s capacity to keep on writing, and work against the ‘anguish of empty time.’¹⁵⁴ Blanchot further comments that ‘the pencil [...] enlarges [...] even more by making his space the infinite space of words and telling.’¹⁵⁵ Between the words on the page, Beckett can hint to other spaces existing just outside of them, partially present in the time of writing. Unlike, George Eliot’s ‘drop of ink at the end of my pen’¹⁵⁶ which, she assures her reader, will render the moment she is describing in the here and now, Malone’s pencil is not tied to a responsibility for the reader; in fact, this writing implement may impede the writing process altogether.

These objects, moreover, also remind of us Benjamin’s assertion that interior space is demarcated through commodities, or the arrangement of commodities; Malone here subverts his desire to arrange these objects which seem to disappear and reappear at random. Though Malone wishes to firstly write his stories and then

¹⁵⁴ Maurice Blanchot, ‘Where Now? Who Now?’ *On Beckett: Essays and Criticism*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski, 2nd edn (London: Anthem Press, 2014), p. 112.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹⁵⁶ George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 5.

prepare an inventory, from the very beginning he realises that he cannot properly remember what objects he has (MD 180-1). Though the disappearance of his pencil and notebook should have an effect on his ability to write, it is only in theory. The ‘company of these little objects’ (MD 227), whether they are there or not, comes to stand in as Malone’s attachment to material reality, in which objects become the only thing that represents reality; in *The Unnamable*, the attempt for the voice to objectify itself becomes this certificate of presence.

This presence is also echoed in the immediacy of the narrative itself, written in the present tense, and a continuous monologue in stream of consciousness. However, this form posits that there can be an originary voice from which this consciousness can speak. In H. Porter Abbott’s analysis of one sequence from *Malone Dies*, he notes that Beckett moves through a series of literary tropes in quick succession, from a ‘visitation of divine truth’ to the ‘confessional’ only to dismiss them a page later.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps this is a kind of shedding and accumulating, in order to find a new mode of expression, like a hermit crab looking for a new shell: ‘The forms are many in which the unchanging seeks relief from its formlessness’ (MD 181). But there is no promise of a final form underpinning this search. In fact, it appears that this is seeking a home for a homeless kind of fiction. Ackerley concurs, confirmed in his naming of Malone as ‘the unaccommodated voice,’¹⁵⁸ a voice that in its very mode of being cannot be placed. If the novel cannot hold the narrative voice then the novel’s engagement with the body finds a counterbalance here:

And so there I am, who always thought I would shrivel and shrivel, more and more, until in the end I could almost be buried in a casket, swelling. No matter, what matters is in spite of my stories I continue to fit in this room, let us call it

¹⁵⁷ H. Porter Abbott, ‘Narrative,’ *Palgrave Advances in Beckett Studies*, ed. by Lois Oppenheim (Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire, 2004), p. 18-19.

¹⁵⁸ Ackerley, p. 44.

a room, that's all that matters, and I need not worry, I'll fit in as long as needs be. And if I ever succeed in breathing my last it will not be in the street, or in a hospital, but here, in the midst of my possessions, beside this window that sometimes looks as if it were painted on the wall, like Tiepolo's ceiling at Wurzburg (MD 216).

The expansion and contraction of the body is a way to imagine the aging process; but it is also to imagine the 'filling' of the body as if it was a vase to be filled with fictions. This is reminiscent of George Eliot's summary of character: 'In these frail vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affection.'¹⁵⁹ For Eliot, the character becomes a literal space that the reader firstly brings to life and then gradually 'fills' through the reading process. Author and reader are unified in the act of giving life. Here, this process is reversed, as time creates a corpse that swells after death. Malone can defer the decay of his body through the very process of creating fictions. Life is prolonged for the *author* in the moment of writing but characters are not given eternal life after the book is closed.

In this expansion and contraction of the body, Beckett also explores how the space of fiction might include bodies of people who are called 'other.' At one point Malone comments:

My concern is not with me, but with another, far beneath me and whom I envy, of whose crass adventures I can now tell at last, I don't know how. Of myself I could never tell, any more than live or tell of others. How could I have, who never tried? To show myself now, on the point of vanishing, at the same time as the stranger, and by the same grace, that would be no ordinary last straw. Then live, long enough to feel, behind my closed eyes, other eyes close. What an end (MD 179-80).

The inscribed gaze of James's house of fiction and Wharton's look of knowledge finds its opposite here. The other is buried below, in possible spaces underground; within himself there are traces of others. Strangers circulate the trilogy as forces that seem to

¹⁵⁹ George Eliot quoted in Henry James, 'Preface,' p. 10.

be neither malevolent nor benevolent but simply spaces of otherness, ones that the narrators of these novels cannot adequately fathom.

In *Malone Dies*, identity was posited through the production of fiction; in *The Unnamable*, the position of self has completely disintegrated, so that any relationship between self and other, or self and world, can no longer be described in the same terms, and a vocabulary can only be a gesture. Daniel Katz notes that not only does 'the unnamable' suggest that it does not have a name *and* cannot be named, but that it is 'not a name at all, but the marker of a space which refuses nominational effects.'¹⁶⁰ The voice of the novel is a step away from self, a non-place speaking, or attempting to speak. In fiction, the name becomes a proxy for life, simply a way of identifying character in the space of fiction. Here, the very marker of character identity is denied but, through this non-name, we paradoxically begin to understand the voice as that thing that cannot be named. In this way, Beckett relates the problem of representing the subject free from the historical conditions that produce them, as well as the very status of that subject in the first place: 'Bah, any old pronoun will do, provided one sees through it. Matter of habit. To be adjusted later' (TU 315). As the novel goes on this 'later' appears to be outside the text.

What does this mean for the partial emergence of spaces that reoccur, only to be dismissed? Does Beckett attempt to figure the text as a place for the subject to live, even momentarily? The voice seems to oscillate between desire and dislike for this possible space:

If only I could put myself in a room, that would be the end of the wordy-gurdy, even doorless, even windowless, nothing but the four surfaces, the six surfaces, if I could shut myself up, it would be a mind, it could be black dark, I could be motionless and fixed, I'd find a way to explore it, I'd listen to the echo, I'd get to know it, I'd get to remember it, I'd be home, I'd say what it's like, in my

¹⁶⁰ Katz, p. 79.

home, instead of any old thing, this place, if I could describe this place, portray it, I've tried, I feel no place, no place round me, there's no end to me, I don't know what it is, it isn't flesh, it doesn't end (TU 367).

These lines completely transform even the most basic co-ordinates. The house of fiction has been transformed to 'nothing but the four surfaces', barely resembling a house at all. The play on 'hurdy-gurdy,' the string instrument that produces sound through a hand-crank, suggests the manual production of the monologue so far, reminding the reader that these words have to come from somewhere, asking us to envision an end point. If 'here is my only elsewhere' (TU 370) then the attempt to elucidate any space of fiction will always be underscored by the possibility of endless others, a continual displacement in which the relation between here and there is always deferred. The voice later says, almost like a chant or an incantation:

make a place, a little world, it will be round, this time, it's not certain, low of ceiling, thick of wall, why low, why thick, I don't know, it isn't certain, it remains to be seen, all remains to be seen, a little world, try to find out what it's like, try and guess, put someone in it, seek someone in it, and what's he's like, and how he manages, it won't be I, no matter, perhaps it will, perhaps it will be my world (TU 373).

In the repetition of trying to 'put someone in' or 'seek someone in' this little world the desire for emplacement becomes a frantic scramble for a suitable subject.

In the search for the place of the subject, or, in depicting the constraint of space, Beckett questions how it is that fiction can accommodate the subject. This is furthered by the interplay between occupying space and spaces of others: 'I'll make a place, it won't be mine, it doesn't matter...I'll make it mine, I'll put myself in it, I'll put someone in it, I'll find someone in it' (TU 368). Again, the voice seeks to find a suitable resident for this fictional space that might be itself or someone else. This, I would suggest, is a way of refiguring the idea of 'knowing' in the text, through waiting for a stranger. By encoding the 'stranger' into his fiction, Beckett, unlike the proponents of realism, does not suggest that spaces exist to be known, or indeed

recognised. In placing the eternal stranger in the text, Beckett asks how fiction can represent and read the space of others. Marais also notes this idea of finding a stranger in Beckett's work, commenting 'If the stranger is to be found, the search must proceed without object or subject. In order to receive the stranger, the subject must relinquish the position from which she searches.'¹⁶¹ Marais notes that Beckett transforms the position of the fiction through this preoccupation with the stranger. This speaks to Berger's claim that, '[w]riting, as I know it, has no territory of its own.'¹⁶² By inscribing the idea of the stranger, not only does Beckett suggest spaces that cannot or refuse to be known, both inside and outside of the narrative, he also questions the ethics of attempting to incorporate bodies that reject co-option into existing systems. There is undoubtedly a critique here about the way in which space becomes objectified, whether or not we talk about owning space of a room or the space of land. By conjoining these concepts, Beckett rescinds any possibility of ownership, in which ownership may become of other people, or when others are made synonymous with the spaces they inhabit.

For Edward Said, literary space has always manifested itself in a superiority found in an ability to own and invade; after all Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is 'about a European who creates a fiefdom for himself on a distant, non-European island.'¹⁶³ As noted above, Beckett's writing certainly speaks to postcolonial critiques, and the rejection of national narratives. Anna McMullan suggests: 'Beckett's oeuvre can be seen as a sustained critique or parody of that sovereign consciousness which seeks to

¹⁶¹ Marais, p. 7.

¹⁶² Berger, 'The Storyteller,' p. 366.

¹⁶³ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. xiii.

see, know and record its objects.’¹⁶⁴ In this language ‘seeing,’ ‘knowing,’ and ‘recording’ we recognise the central tenets described earlier in my discussion of realism. McMullan sees Beckett’s choices as in line with a wider modernist project:

Beckett chose, like his mentor, James Joyce, an iconoclastic, international, and hybrid aesthetic, even when invoking Ireland. Beckett vehemently refused the parameters of Irish cultural nationalism as he encountered it in the first decades of the Irish Free State.¹⁶⁵

For many critics, Beckett’s analysis of the politics of expression and his disintegration of the ‘I’ speak directly to the concerns of postcolonial criticism.¹⁶⁶ In Mark Quigley’s analysis of the colonial subject in *The Unnamable*, he argues that

Basil’s subsequent slide into ‘Mahood’ suggests the diffusion of colonial authority and the obfuscation of power during the hegemonic phase of imperialism. Here, in addition to providing a means for conveying a ‘softer’ and more omnipresent authority, Mahood enables a further projection of power through his mingling of voice and consciousness with the speaker.¹⁶⁷

In *Murphy*, Beckett began to explore how the eradication of difference in dialogue transforms the location of writing. In *The Unnamable*, Beckett explores the impact of a fictional landscape that does not provide the grounding from which to establish character, attenuated by a central voice in which the ‘I’ that speaks denies its own subject position. Throughout this text, the voice calls for a space of which it can take ownership: ‘I wanted myself, in my own land, for a brief space, I didn’t want to die a stranger in the midst of strangers, a stranger in my own midst, surrounded by invaders’ (TU 365). Like Kafka’s invader in ‘The Burrow’ this bland term ‘invader’ becomes any ‘foreign’ threat to the space this creature has made. But, this immediately asks,

¹⁶⁴ Anna McMullan, ‘Irish/Postcolonial Beckett,’ *Palgrave Advances in Samuel Beckett studies*, p. 95.

¹⁶⁵ McMullan, p. 90.

¹⁶⁶ See Patrick Bixby, *Samuel Beckett and the Postcolonial Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Eric Prieto, *Literature, Geography and the Postmodern Poetics of Place* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹⁶⁷ Mark Quigley, ‘Unnaming the Subject: Samuel Beckett and Colonial Alterity,’ *Samuel Beckett Today / Aujourd’hui*, 15 (2005), pp. 87-100, (p. 93-4).

what constitutes a stranger if the space has not been produced through particularities? How can the space be conceived of, if it only exists as a placeholder, a space that is only vaguely outlined, rather than solidly made? In Luce Irigaray's comparative reading of *Waiting for Godot* and Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, she discusses the depiction of waiting for an 'other':

They wait for an outside, a beyond, as for a something or someone who could bring that which they are unable to realise by themselves: the salvation or the destruction and damnation of their own world, of themselves. The waiting in fact corresponds to the underside of the integration of the other in our country, our home.¹⁶⁸

For Irigaray, like Marais, in waiting, both authors gesture towards unfathomable spaces that promise salvation whilst also anticipating a time when the other is allowed a place in society. However, I argue that Beckett suggests that occupying space necessarily leads to the use of othering language in which distinctions between self and other are reified. By refusing to occupy space, Beckett rejects the assimilating discourse of us and them.

Deleuze considers Beckett's creation of multiple characters who seem to exist as part of one literary universe to be part of his notion—discussed above—of the combinatorial series; 'the Others are *possible worlds*, to which voices confer a reality that is always variable, following the force that the voices have, and revocable, following the silences that they make [emphasis in original].'¹⁶⁹ If characters can transform, then at any moment, the voice in the text can also become other. In this way, the experience of reading is overwhelmed by the possibility of a sudden transformation. But this also questions the prioritising of one voice, any voice, over

¹⁶⁸ Luce Irigaray, 'The Path Toward the Other,' *Beckett after Beckett*, ed. by S. E. Gontarski and Anthony Uhlmann (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), pp. 39-51, (p. 43-4).

¹⁶⁹ Deleuze, p. 7.

another; if at any minute one can become another, then the distinctions that we make between ourselves and others are shown to be completely arbitrary. For Deleuze, 'it is always an Other who speaks, since words have not expected/waited for me and there is no language other than the foreign; it is always an Other, the "owner" of objects that he possesses by speaking.'¹⁷⁰

The voice in *The Unnamable* attempts to be itself and describe itself, looking in at itself whilst also occupying the space into which it is looking, becoming an exploration into objectification of self. If as Abbott comments that '...the larger referential object is to thwart the in-filling imagination,'¹⁷¹ then this interplay between emptiness and fullness is undercut by the text's complete rejection of novelistic coordinates whilst the subject within the fiction busies itself with trying to provide details it cannot.

Still: After *The Unnamable*

For Abbott, *The Unnamable* and the later *Texts for Nothing* (1950-52) 'are unprecedented events in the history of narrative, moments in which the architecture itself is pulled inside out, and what "happens" (if the term can be used) takes place in a narrative void.'¹⁷² In this voiding of fictional space, Beckett posits a radical new way for fiction to engage with itself as both an internal and external action. Stan Gontarski describes how the 'post-*How It Is* period [are] stories that [...] focus on a single, often static image.'¹⁷³ This still image is however, slight, impartial and difficult to view, emerging in prose that appears to circulate around it, whilst never quite representing it.

¹⁷⁰ Deleuze, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Abbott, p. 25.

¹⁷² Abbott, p. 20.

¹⁷³ Stan Gontarski, 'Introduction,' *Complete Short Prose 1929-1989*, ed. by Stan Gontarski (New York: Grove Press, 1995), p. xv.

In the two stories I discuss below, the realist look I described earlier has been transformed.

‘Company’, published in 1980, attempts to create itself as a story whilst navigating itself through a dark and unimaginable location. The first lines, ‘A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine’¹⁷⁴ set up the interplay between voice and darkness that continues throughout, a voice that should give light to that dark place. A voice describes a man who lies prostrate on the ground on his back and who becomes the ‘you’ the actions of the story are directed at. This voice, of unknown origin, speaks to this ‘one’ and yet figuring the location and shape of the text is difficult. The origin and central positioning of the text is obscure:

In another dark or in the same another devising it all for company. This at first sight seems clear. But as the eye dwells it grows obscure. Indeed the longer the eye dwells the obscurer it grows. Till the eye closes and freed from the pore the mind inquires, What does this mean? What finally does this mean that at first sight seemed clear? Till it the mind too closes as it were. As the window might close of a dark empty room. The single window giving on outer dark. Then nothing more. No. Unhappily no. Pangs of faint light and stirrings still. Unformulable gropings of the mind. Unstillable (C 14).

The longer the eye looks, the less definition the image has, in a kind of reversed process of clarification. This vision of the eye is based in an alternative seeing, in which obscurity is *revealed* by further looking; to see is to understand that you cannot see anything at all. As noted earlier, to devise is to *divide* so that within this concept of invention there is always an underlying process of separation. Beckett explicates this complex relationship:

Deviser of the voice and of its hearer and of himself. Deviser of himself for company. Leave it at that. He speaks of himself as of another. He says of himself, He speaks of himself as of another. Himself he devises too for company (C 16).

¹⁷⁴ Samuel Beckett, ‘Company,’ *Company etc.*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), p. 3. All references are hereafter taken from the edition and are abbreviated to C.

This is a self-reflexive process in which creation is to suggest a space of a subject, whilst also to defer that possible space. In conjuring this other, he seeks to at once displace and refract his self as his very mode of being. Devising therefore is not only to evacuate a central point of origin from the text, but also a way of incorporating self-alienation into the very process of writing. The shifting tenses of the story reinforce this as this male character alters between second and third person. The voice comments upon this: 'Use of the second person marks the voice. That of the third that cankerous other. Could he speak to and of whom the voice speaks there would be a first. But he cannot. He shall not. You cannot. You shall not' (C 3-4). There are three different consciousnesses involved in the construction of this text: a palimpsest of figures who give this text its odd kind of separation, whilst simultaneously a kind of unified choral voice. In these multiple tenses, Beckett simultaneously suggests unity and division, a way of chopping up language into space. I return to the effects of nominal pronouns in both my chosen author chapters.

The narrative of 'Company' is an attempt for narrative to unburden itself, a way of shedding the most basic terms of a story. It is the moment before story, the moment during, and the moment after, in which it considers how a story can document its own origins. In that static emergence of a 'deviser' that exists within and without the text, it speaks explicitly to the possibilities of inside and outside as a way of reconceiving of fictional space.

'Ill Seen Ill Said' is often seen as a counterpart to 'Company', given their similarity in length, at around sixty-odd paragraphs, and in their shared focus on an isolated individual encroached upon by darkness. The title refers to both the physical difficulty in outlining the figure of the old woman, who is our makeshift protagonist, and the architectural obscurity of the narrative itself. The figure moves in and out of

vision, appearing and disappearing from a small hut, around which move several white stones, gradually encroaching upon her space. This is a space devoid of historical signifiers, and yet, through the movement of the stones, the location of the hut, and the theme of obscurity, this story offers a way of thinking about vulnerability and intimacy through a unique denuding of space.

In the hut setting, Beckett invokes a strong set of associations, as described by Bachelard as part of his topoanalysis:

The hut immediately becomes centralized solitude, for in the land of legend, there exists no adjoining hut. And although geographers may bring back photographs of hut villages from their travels in distant lands, our legendary past transcends everything that has been seen, even everything that we have experienced personally. The image leads us on towards extreme solitude. The hermit is *alone* before God. His hut, therefore, is just the opposite of the monastery. And there radiates about this centralized solitude a universe of meditation and prayer, a universe outside the universe...as destitution increases it gives us access to absolute refuge.¹⁷⁵

For Bachelard, there is an historical relationship between huts and solitude, in which the hut-dweller can have a further intimacy with God. The hut is then a religious refuge and a space of extreme loneliness. In this hut setting, the reader is afforded a careful intimacy with the subject of the narrative, who as Masaki Kondo notes, is like ‘A motionless figure painted on a canvas [that] seems to be minutely moving.’¹⁷⁶ The narrative tracks these careful movements through the dwelling that is more specific than the novels of the trilogy, and yet continues Beckett’s investigation into the possibilities of fictional space. The marginal space of the hut echoes the marginality of this woman, who remains solitary, and yet, like Beckett’s other fiction, also surrounded by the possibility of others.

This manifests in the discussion of the stranger once more:

¹⁷⁵ Bachelard, p. 52.

¹⁷⁶ Masaki Kondo, ‘Ill Seen Ill Said and Agitur, Beckett after Beckett’, *After Beckett*, p. 78.

To the imaginary stranger the dwelling appears deserted. Under constant watch it betrays no sign of life...Motionless against the door he listens long. No sound. Knocks. No answer. Watches all night in vain for the least glimmer. Returns at last to his own and avows, No one. She shows herself only to her own. But she has no own. Yes yes she has one. And who has her.¹⁷⁷

The 'imaginary stranger' functions as an other against which we can isolate the old woman, and yet this other is a shapeless amorphous being, an additional perspective that circles the text. Like the earlier fictions, implicit within the fictional construct are alternative figures that may or may not appear. But, unlike the earlier fictions, these figures are not named, and are no longer even imaginable:

A figure come what may. Twelve...She raises her eyes and sees one. Turns away and sees another. So on. Always afar. Still or receding. She never once saw one come toward her. Or she forgets...Are they always the same? Do they see her? Enough (ISIS 47).

The separated location of narrative is furthered to house several different external presences apart from the central narrative voice, that at once reiterates the depictions spoken by this voice, and subject them to additional scrutiny. A kind of camaraderie is found in this community of reader and character; in waiting for the plethora of other gazes, the narrative functions as a kind of stilled house of fiction.

Encoding space: Beckett's architecture of displacement

'The creation of the world did not take place once and for all time, but takes place every day.'¹⁷⁸

Beckett's fiction enacts a continual process of displacement through the process of making and dismantling fictional space. Unlike the strategies of realist fiction I described above, in which the subject can orient itself in spaces they come to

¹⁷⁷ Beckett, 'Ill Seen Ill Said,' *Company etc.*, p. 49. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to ISIS.

¹⁷⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues* (London: John Calder, 1965), p. 19.

know, Beckett explores the possibility we can never truly know the spaces we exist in.

In *Watt*, his explanation speaks to this duality:

my personal system was so distended at the period of which I speak that the distinction between what was inside it and what was outside it was not at all easy to draw. Everything that happened happened inside it, and at the same time everything that happened happened outside of it.¹⁷⁹

He provides literary thinking with a distinct way of considering the obliteration of imagined topographies that have hitherto conditioned life.

In the transformation of these parameters, Beckett also envisions a new ethics of interspatiality that considers the ability of narrative to adequately render spaces for others to exist in. By exploring the production of character, from *Murphy*'s flat dialogue, to the trilogy's multiple cast, to the later fictions' space of an 'other' or 'others,' Beckett uses the idea of knowing a character in fiction to counter the representation of others as others. Moreover, by troubling the idea of an authoritative narrative voice, Beckett does not assert that a house of fiction can be made, in which a safe interior location can be imagined. By instead placing his characters in spaces that they cannot know, and refuse to know, he questions the need for fiction to be made in these terms, gesturing towards new ways of envisioning literary architecture. In this way Beckett's writing attempts to sketch out momentary points of contact between the self and the world through jostling textures within the space of fiction itself. To be writing, to be in the moment of writing, is for Beckett a kind of slippage between spaces, which in itself is a point of contact.

Connor suggests that Beckett provides

resources for thinking about a specifically material or finite kind of imagination, an imagination that performs the traditional duty of taking us beyond the merely given or present at hand but does so in ways that seem

¹⁷⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (London: Faber, 2009), p. 41-2.

designed to keep us on terms with its materiality, even as that materiality is itself something still to be imagined.¹⁸⁰

By thinking through the idea of objects and of stories, Beckett attempts to inscribe a moment of material reality into spaces that cannot be represented in any material means. To express something in literature is no longer conceived from the inside into the outside, but as a constant renegotiation between those spaces; expression is not the transformation of the inside into the outside but a butting together of multiple frames.

DeLillo and Coetzee's Beckettian architecture.

‘unspeakable home’¹⁸¹

In my above section, I explored Beckett's creation of a particular form of literary geography that exposed the implicit ethical dilemma in writing as a form of spatial ownership. I contend, in my following chapters, that both of my chosen writers have engaged with Beckett and used their readings to consider their own novelistic spaces.

DeLillo's relationship with Beckett has received some critical attention. Peter Boxall's monograph *Don DeLillo: The Possibility of Fiction* (2008) has most thoroughly explored DeLillo's indebtedness to Beckett whilst Gary Adelman's study of DeLillo along with Cormac McCarthy and Robert Stone sought to show a more general modernist inheritance, focusing particularly on Kafka and Beckett.¹⁸² In recent years, there also seems to be a general consensus among reviewers that

¹⁸⁰ Connor, p. 8.

¹⁸¹ Beckett, ‘neither,’ *Complete Short Prose*, p. 258.

¹⁸² Gary Adelman, *Sorrow's Rigging: The Novels of Cormac McCarthy, Don DeLillo, and Robert Stone* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012).

DeLillo's works are becoming increasingly Beckettian in both subject matter and size.¹⁸³

DeLillo himself has commented on the influence of Beckett, responding to Gary Adelman that:

Beckett is a master of language. He is all language. Out of the words come the people instead of the other way around. He is the last writer whose work extends into the world so that (as with Kafka before him) we can see or hear something and identify it as an expression of Beckett beyond the book or stage.¹⁸⁴

DeLillo characterises Beckett's influence in terms of his idiosyncrasy: there is something so unique about his writing that it has left an indelible mark upon the space of fiction. In imagining his work as 'extending into the world,' it appears that DeLillo envisions Beckett's writing as a kind of prosthesis, a way of seeing through his work that has actively transformed contemporary writing.

Coetzee's relationship with Beckett is better established as he has written and spoken about Beckett throughout his career. Coetzee's doctoral thesis was entitled 'The English Fiction of Samuel Beckett: An Essay in Stylistic Analysis' and was submitted in 1969; Coetzee has since written several more essays on Beckett's work.

¹⁸³ This has been the case since DeLillo's post-*Underworld* work. Tim Adams, for example, writing on *The Body Artist* noted: 'If *Underworld* required the reader to think of Joyce, *The Body Artist* brings to mind, in the wariness of its prose, Beckett', 'The library in the body,' *The Guardian*, 11th <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/feb/11/fiction.dondelillo>. In reviews for *Zero K*, this reference became almost a commonplace, occurring in reviews by David Sexton ('Zero K' by Don DeLillo – review,' *The Evening Standard*, 19th May 2016, <https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/books/zero-k-by-don-delillo-review-a3252556.html>, accessed March 18th 201.) and Jason Cowley ('Zero K' by Don DeLillo, *The Financial Times*, 13th May 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/6649f490-16b3-11e6-b197-a4af20d5575e>, accessed March 18th 2018) as well as many others.

¹⁸⁴ Letter to Gary Adelman, 'Beckett's Readers: A Commentary and Symposium,' *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 54.1 (2004), pp. 54-70, (p. 55)

Most critics of Coetzee cannot help but engage with the work of Beckett:¹⁸⁵ Derek Attridge notes that Coetzee's early work on Beckett engaged with his 'handling of language, specifically the English language' as well as 'the ability to portray indigence, physical distress, boredom, the pursuit of the unattainable goals, and many other features of imperfect lives...'¹⁸⁶ Attridge notes that 'Beckett [...] showed that prose too, could do very well without a determinate location' offering a 'means of escape from his own too-present background,'¹⁸⁷ suggesting, along with an influence of language, Beckett's appeal for Coetzee was in his refiguring of fictional space. Coetzee himself has commented on his relationship to Beckett:

Beckett has meant a great deal to me in my own writing—that must be obvious. He is a clear influence on my prose. Most writers absorb influence through their skin. With me there has been a more conscious process of absorption [...] The essays I wrote on Beckett's style aren't only academic exercises [...] They are also attempts to get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett's that I wanted to make my own.¹⁸⁸

In his sustained close readings, and his linguistic and computational models of engagement, Coetzee's scholarly work demonstrates his interest in a Beckettian formula. He describes Beckett's work as 'miniature mechanisms for switching themselves off...Like a switch, they have no content only shape,'¹⁸⁹ and sees them

¹⁸⁵ There are various studies that read their work together, see Paul. A. Cantor, 'Happy Days in the Veld: Beckett and Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*,' *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 93.1 (1994), pp. 83-110, Daniel Watt, *Fragmentary futures: Blanchot, Beckett, Coetzee* (Ashby-de-la-Zouch: InkerMen, 2007), Yoshiki Taijiri, 'Beckett's legacy in the work of J.M. Coetzee' in *Borderless Beckett Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui* 19, / Beckett sans frontières: Tokyo 2006, ed. by Minako Okamura (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), pp. 361-370, Paul Stewart, 'Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee: Narrative Power and the Postcolonial', *Cross/cultures: readings in the post/colonial literatures in English*, 181 (2015), pp. 145-164, Arthur Rose, *Literary cynics: Borges, Beckett, Coetzee* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

¹⁸⁶ Derek Attridge, 'Sex, Comedy and Influence: Coetzee's Beckett,' *J.M. Coetzee in Context and Theory*, p. 74.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁸⁸ Coetzee, in interview in *Doubling the Point*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁹ J.M. Coetzee, 'Beckett and the Temptations of Style,' in *Doubling the Point*, p. 49.

taking place in a 'prison of empty style.'¹⁹⁰ In both of these descriptions, Beckett is another kind of prosthesis, providing the necessary elucidation of the problems of being in space. I will be suggesting that his inheritance lies in his incorporation of multiple points of disintegration, as well as an investment in the necessity of fiction to 'go on' in the face of invasive power and the changing global landscape.

If in novels, '[f]ictional character is made salient by a narrative ground',¹⁹¹ how can a novel use its relationship between character and ground to represent the myriad of transformations of the 20th and 21st centuries? John Frow expands on this idea: 'It is the genre of the novel, which more than any other genre, facilitates the detachment of the represented self from the events in which it is embedded and thus allows that represented self to be made the point of the stories told about it.'¹⁹² This 'detachment' that Frow discusses here is felt throughout the writing of both these authors, in their depiction of a kind of formal shedding I suggest they have inherited from Beckett. In both their exploration of the limitations of form, as well as plot and character, DeLillo and Coetzee explore how fiction can critique its own architecture.

¹⁹⁰ Coetzee, 'Beckett and the Temptations of Style,' p. 49.

¹⁹¹ John Frow, *Character and Person* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 24.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Chapter two

Don DeLillo: The room is inside

In 1982, writer and scholar Tom LeClair interviewed Don DeLillo. This interview is now considered essential in DeLillo studies due to DeLillo's willingness to speak about his writing and his methods. In particular, he elucidates a fundamental method in his work: 'I try to examine psychological states by looking at people in rooms, objects in rooms. It's a way of saying we know something important about a character by the way he sees himself in relation to objects.'¹⁹³ This is by no means DeLillo's only reference to rooms in interviews, references that have occurred from the very early stages of his writing career until the most recent. In a 2016 interview for the *New York Times*, DeLillo explains:

When I'm conceiving a scene, do I see it in three dimensions? It's not so easy to answer what appears to be a simple question. I see it -- I see characters, I see people, I see streets, cars -- and they seem to exist in this special level of mental reality. I could not distinguish the features of a character's face when I have an idea concerning this character, when I see him or her in a room, and in most cases the room itself is fairly generic...¹⁹⁴

The room supplies the proportions and scale against which character is built. This is to assert the importance of both an artistic vision and its existence in 3-D. This language echoes his phrasing in an earlier interview for the *Paris Review* in which he describes his use of three dimensions that specifically comes from Kafka and Beckett: 'There was a time when the inner world of the novelist—Kafka's private vision and maybe Beckett's—eventually folded into the three-dimensional world we're all living in.

¹⁹³ Don DeLillo in LeClair, p. 14.

¹⁹⁴ Don DeLillo quoted in Carolyn Kellogg, 'A rare interview with Don DeLillo, one of the titans of American fiction,' *The LA Times*, <http://www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-et-jc-don-delillo-q-a-20160426-story.html>, accessed March 18th 2018.

These men wrote a kind of world narrative.¹⁹⁵ To be in the three-dimensional world, in this configuration, means that expression needs to emerge from the ‘inner world’ of the novelist. Peter Boxall remarks upon the idiosyncrasies that mark Beckett’s dwellings over and above other canonical modernists:

Where Joyce and Proust produce great edifices in which the Hegelian spirit of the artist is forged and enshrined, Beckett can produce only the most fragile shelters in which the artist might cower, shelters which themselves are constantly collapsing, returning the artist to the midst of the world which s/he is endeavouring to see, or to think, from the outside.¹⁹⁶

To be in the world, through Beckett, is to live in the paradox of this bidirectional movement. This movement, discussed above, is characterised by simultaneous gestures inwards and outwards that question the confines of literary space.

The ‘fragile shelters’ Boxall identifies in Beckett finds its echo in DeLillo’s use of rooms. We can trace this interest in the room across his fiction; In *End Zone*, the star football player, Taft Robinson, sits alone in a starkly decorated grey room, reading about the ovens in Nazi Germany; in *Great Jones Street*, Bucky Wunderlick is mostly confined to one small room, attempting to retreat from celebrity; in *Mao II*, his writer character Bill Gray spends most of his time in his room, a reclusive author working in mountains of paper. But it is not only the physical room, but also a conceptual one; In *Americana*, David Bell, imagines his mind ‘as a dark room with many doors’ (A 36) echoing some of the rooms of Kafka or Beckett, where it functions as a stand-in for the mind, the most intimate of internal spaces. For Bell, who can adapt and change the light flow into the room, like Murphy’s zones, it is a fantasy of protection and participation simultaneously, in which the mind can both

¹⁹⁵ Don DeLillo quoted in Adam Begley, ‘The Art of Fiction No. 135,’ *The Paris Review*, <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1887/don-delillo-the-art-of-fiction-no-135-don-delillo>, accessed March 18th 2018.

¹⁹⁶ Peter Boxall, *Don DeLillo: The possibility of fiction* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 36-7.

welcome and shut out the exterior. In *White Noise*, Willie Mink gives a suggestive description of both the psychological descriptions of the room, but also its subsequent implications for the coding of human behaviour:

The point of a room is that they're inside. No one should go into a room unless he understands this. People behave one way in rooms, another way in streets, parks and airports. To enter a room is to agree a certain kind of behaviour that takes place in rooms...There is an unwritten agreement between the person who enters a room and the person whose room has been entered, as opposed to open air theatres, outdoor pools.¹⁹⁷ The purpose of the room derives from the special nature of a room. The room is inside.¹⁹⁸

The room, in its very condition as a room, must be inside; in being inside it also leads to particular behaviours and expectations. Though the house may have determined the scope of fiction in realist novels, DeLillo's room appears more invasive, conditioning human movement through its 'special nature.'

This 'special nature' seems to come from DeLillo's ambivalent relationship to the room in modernism and the figure of the modernist artist. Philip Nel's discussion of DeLillo's modernist inheritance describes the character of Gray as an echo of DeLillo himself;¹⁹⁹ DeLillo seems to almost agree noting that he'd like to 'change [his] name to Bill Gray and disappear'.²⁰⁰ Nel conceives of this as a demonstration of DeLillo's interest in the artist as hero²⁰¹ and Barrett concurs noting '[l]ocked away in his refuge, Bill Gray is the emblem of the modern artist.'²⁰² The room seems to suggest an idealised place of creativity, where art can take place, and where the creator

¹⁹⁷ Tyler Kessel writes about the room in relation to the promise of hospitality, reading through Derrida's idea of conditional and absolute hospitality (102-3) In this thesis, I do not use this critical framework.

¹⁹⁸ Don DeLillo, *White Noise* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 306. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to WN.

¹⁹⁹ Philip Nel, 'DeLillo and Modernism,' *Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, ed. by John N. Duvall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 13-26, (p. 24).

²⁰⁰ Don DeLillo quoted in Vince Passaro, *Conversations with Don DeLillo* ed. by Thomas DiPietro (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2005), p. 79.

²⁰¹ Nel, p. 23.

²⁰² Barrett, p. 791.

and creation exist simultaneously. However, as I show in my discussions below, DeLillo does not idealise either the retreat to the room – Gray has not been able to write his novel, for example – or the world outside of it. As Gray emerges from his room, in which he has been holed up writing for several years, into a dangerous world of violence and terrorism, the power of the room becomes more apparent: ‘A person sits in a room and thinks a thought and it bleeds out into the world. Every thought is permitted. And there’s no longer a moral or spatial distinction between thinking and acting.’²⁰³ This ‘bleed[ing] out into the world’ demonstrates the shared connectivity between what goes on in small rooms and these larger channels of history. Though Gray may have desired to stay in his room and write, he was eventually forced out into the world.

Jeremy Green elaborates on this tendency of a variety of DeLillo characters to retreat to the particular space of the room. He comments:

The retreat to the small room might be seen as an act of resistance on behalf of a certain idea of the self. In withdrawing, DeLillo's characters often seek to gain control over their immediate environment, thereby compensating for the alarming lack of control they feel in relation to the world at large. Withdrawal to the small room, then, may be impelled by the desire to regain some vestige of free, spontaneous selfhood, but the lessons that DeLillo's characters learn in their retreats tend most often to involve threats to the idea of individual agency. Stepping out of the commodified world of media images and mass-identifications proves ultimately to confirm its predominance.²⁰⁴

Within Green’s wider argument about DeLillo’s use of recorded violence, he also sees these retreats as integral to DeLillo’s portrayal and interrogation of the self. If the serial killer represents a new kind of hypervisibility, that suggests an intimacy that works in tandem with technology and that transcends the distance between individuals off and on screen, then he sees the reversal of this to lie in the different kinds of

²⁰³ Don DeLillo, *Mao II* (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 132.

²⁰⁴ Jeremy Green, ‘Disaster Footage: Spectacle of violence in DeLillo’s fiction,’ *Modern Fiction Studies*, 45.3 (1999), pp. 571-599 (p. 576).

physical and mental retreats of Robinson, Wunderlick, Owen Brademas, Bill Gray and the multitudes of rooms in *Libra*. Through Jameson's discussion of Sartre's idea of seriality, Green explains that there is a prevalence of these small rooms in DeLillo's fictions because they 'appear to offer a seclusion from which the other might temporarily be removed, a space given over to a kind of circumscribed individualism, one that is not hollowed out by reference to a public...' ²⁰⁵ Characters in DeLillo exist in this other space as a way of searching for alternative locations of meaning: 'The world of the small room, of the private self, is the world of anonymity, of not being recognized by others.' ²⁰⁶ But, as Green argues, turning inward, from a public to a private space, does not necessarily eradicate the responsibility to be in the world. DeLillo's characters trade in a form of fantasy, and though retreating from the public sphere may seem to alleviate the problems of selfhood, the room has 'the effect of making one into nobody in particular, the anonymous double of an identity always possessed by one who is structurally other.' ²⁰⁷ There is, therefore a troubling limitation to the room, knowledge that it only provides a fantasy refuge. Where Beckett's characters may undertake an increasingly anxious search for a subject to put into a space they cannot own, DeLillo turns this on its head: by situating narrative in the room, the space of fiction dramatises the interplay between a refuge and an escape. The room cannot provide safety, a theatre from which one can view the world, but nor does it totally eradicate the world in which it exists: it instead straddles the two spaces, leaving both DeLillo and his characters to negotiate the divide.

²⁰⁵ Green, p. 577.

²⁰⁶ Eugene Goodheart, 'Cinematic Real,' *Introducing Don DeLillo*, ed. by Frank Lentricchia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 117-30, (p. 128).

²⁰⁷ Green, p. 580.

In my previous chapter, I considered the way in which Kafka conceptualized of an interior room as a way of considering a secret subjectivity, and Beckett's conception of the room as a way of responding to the house of fiction. In this chapter, I will show how DeLillo sees the room as an internal site of creation, but also as a necessary limit to be overcome. Like Bachelard's painful limit, DeLillo consistently evokes the room as a limiting space for the space of writing and as a metaphor for character and consciousness. As I argue in this chapter, DeLillo responds to a Beckettian limit through which the co-ordinates of the space of fiction are constantly renegotiated.

This chapter analyses the ways that DeLillo's work conceives of different ways an individual can retreat inward, reassessing the definition of inner space. This image of the man in the small room is a central image, but moreover, it is the tussle between the room and the world, imagined as an inside and outside respectively, that shows DeLillo grappling with the inheritance of a realist literary architecture and a modernist ethics of the other. I will be close reading several of his works, examining his interest in the architecture of fiction itself as a way of conceiving of the room as a necessary aspect of the world. Later, I demonstrate how in DeLillo's later fiction, the room finds its answer in the creation of an artwork that is both inside and outside simultaneously. By exposing the troubling barrier between the creation and viewing of an artwork, DeLillo suggests an alternative interior space fully enthralled to the world.

Plots building inward: *End Zone*, *Great Jones Street* and *Ratner's Star*

I think [my protagonists] see freedom and possibility as being too remote from what they perceive existence to mean. They feel instinctively there's a certain struggle, a solitude they have to confront. The landscape is silent, whether it's a desert, a small room, a hole in the ground.²⁰⁸

DeLillo's interest in the space of the room is often contrasted with his interest in genre and its role in cultural critique. In his first few novels, DeLillo ranges through different popular genres, such as science fiction and sports writing, and topics such as football and rock music, juxtaposing them with larger meditations on media, technology and death. Novels such as *Great Jones Street*, *Running Dog* (1978), and *The Names* (1982) read almost like detective or spy novels, in their complex plots and cast of characters. Works like *Libra* (1988) and *Underworld* (1997) have often been called conspiracy novels, or historical thrillers, in their incorporation of figures like J. Edgar Hoover, Lee Harvey Oswald and Lenny Bruce. Robert Towers, in noting the prevalence of some of these themes, famously calling him the 'chief shaman of the paranoid school of American fiction.'²⁰⁹ However, though DeLillo may reference to these subgenres, his texts are by no means exact replicas of any of them. As mentioned earlier, both DeLillo and Coetzee are interested in the heritage and malleability of the novel form, found in both its political reach and its formal

²⁰⁸ DeLillo quoted in LeClair interview, p. 8.

²⁰⁹ Robert Towers, 'From a Grassy Knoll,' *New York Review of Books*, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1988/08/18/from-the-grassy-knoll/>, accessed May 12th 2007. There have been many studies that have explored DeLillo's work in the context of detective fiction, conspiracy or paranoia, see Skip Willman, 'Traversing the Fantasies of the JFK Assassination: Conspiracy and Contingency in Don DeLillo's "Libra,"' *Contemporary Literature*, 39.3 (1998), pp. 405-433, Patrick O'Donnell, *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary U.S. Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), Peter Knight, 'Everything is Connected: *Underworld's* Secret History of Paranoia,' *Critical Essays on Don DeLillo*, ed. by Hugh Ruppersburg, & Tim Engles (New York: G. K. Hall, 2000), pp. 282-301.

composition. Implicit within DeLillo's use of form is the insistence on fictional structures that refer back to themselves, demanding attention on its own terms. José Liste Noya makes an important comment about the structure of *Libra* that I argue underscores much of DeLillo's fiction. He comments,

The foregrounding of plot structure in [*Libra*] – we already know what has happened; these events, in fact, constitute part of our identity as citizens of the contemporary Western world – is meant to reflect on the very uses of plot, within and without fiction, a reflection recurrent in a novelist who relies on paranoid atmospheres, and the conventional generic structures (espionage thriller, detective story, quest romance) that they tend to call forth as constraining devices.²¹⁰

The uses of genre forms, paranoia, and connectivity are, for Noya, demonstrative of DeLillo's concern with the limitations of these very devices. Noya argues that in fact this is a metafictional nod to his reader, a reader who will be familiar with these genres in the first place and their existence both as purveyors and limiters of meaning. The conventions of these kinds of narrative shape and distort meaning within the confines of that genre. In these explorations of plot, DeLillo proposes a way of formulating writing through multiple frameworks, a way of conceiving of form as a spatial configuration in and of itself.

This is furthered by the tension DeLillo creates between the individual and the culture in which they live. Many critics have discussed the role of culture in DeLillo's work. Mark Osteen notes that DeLillo is interested in 'the tension between American individualism and the pull of public life'²¹¹ that leads characters to often 'seek solace in purgative rituals.'²¹² He elaborates

²¹⁰ José Liste Noya, 'Naming the Secret: Don DeLillo's "Libra,"' *Contemporary Literature*, 45.2 (2004) pp. 239-275, (p. 251).

²¹¹ Mark Osteen, *American Magic and Dread: Don DeLillo's Dialogue with Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 2.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

DeLillo's work undertakes a dialogue with American cultural institutions and their discourses that dramatizes the dialectical relationship between, as well as the myriad shapes, meanings, and consequences of, American magic and dread. In DeLillo's work, the bombardment of consciousness by cinematic and consumer images; the fetishization of secrecy, violence and celebrity; the fragmentation of the grand narratives of history, heroism and high culture all combine to induce a paralyzing dread.²¹³

Osteen, noticing a dialectic relationship between the individual and 'American cultural institutions' outlines the need to find other kinds of spaces that alleviate the 'bombardment of consciousness' that he characterizes as fundamentally emerging through the visual. Joseph Dewey's 2006 *Beyond Grief and Nothing* also notes the need for a sacred space, splitting DeLillo's work into narratives of retreat, narratives of failed engagement, narratives of recovery, narratives of redemption, and parables of resurrection. Dewey describes how DeLillo moves past 'spiritual thinness by the suffocating impress of pop culture and consumerism' and 'the redemptive grace of tragedy' to 'affirmation of something beyond dust and lust, beyond grief and nothing.'²¹⁴ In doing so Dewey believes, that DeLillo restores our ability to experience 'enticing ambiguities' in 'an accessible world denied value.'²¹⁵

Though I agree with the oppositions present in both Osteen and Dewey, my work is interested in how this recuperation of meaning is explored spatially in both form and content. This is not so much in the opposition between culture and the individual, but the ways in which the limitations or boundaries are blurred, in which the spaces through which characters move are formulated by a new way of envisioning inside and outside. In his essay, 'The Power of History', DeLillo lays out how he characterises the relationship between the author and the world:

²¹³ Osteen, p. 1.

²¹⁴ Joseph Dewey, *Beyond grief and nothing: a reading of Don DeLillo* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), p. 12-13.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

Against the force of history, so powerful, visible and real, the novelist poses the idiosyncratic self. Here it is, sly, mazed, mercurial, scared half-crazy. It is also free and undivided, the only thing that can match the enormous dimensions of social reality.²¹⁶

This 'idiosyncratic self,' regardless of the form it takes, is a counterpoint to history. DeLillo uses the novel form therefore as a way to outline methods of existing within 'enormous dimensions', carving out a slim path in amongst the seeming expansiveness of post-war America, through a fashioning of a new kind of subjective power. DeLillo doubles this sense of space in not only the physical size of America, but also the psychological heft that goes along with being an American. He states:

Fiction will always examine the small anonymous corners of human experience. But there is also the magnetic force of public events and the people behind them. There is something in the novel itself, its size and psychological reach, its openness to strong social themes that suggests a matching of odd-couple appetites -- the solitary writer and the public figure at the teeming center of events. The writer wants to see inside the human works, down to dreams and routine rambling thoughts, in order to locate the neural strands that link him to men and women who shape history.²¹⁷

This shaping of fiction suggests the necessity to pose spatial configurations in opposition to history, a space over which, as DeLillo's suggests, we do not have any control. DeLillo counters the 'magnetic force of public events' with his desire for writing to 'examine the small anonymous corners of human experience.' Clearly reminiscent of Woolf's image of Mrs Brown 'in her corner,' DeLillo sees the novel as a way of interrogating the way that an individual is made, and the pressures of varying external forces. Through this, his fiction oscillates between the small and the large, the interior of a human life and the world as an exterior construct.

In DeLillo's depiction of the corporation, we find an example of the issue of scale that he notes above:

²¹⁶ DeLillo, 'The Power of History,' n. pag.

²¹⁷ Ibid, n. pag.

The corporation is supposed to take us outside ourselves. We design these organized bodies to respond to the market, face foursquare into the world. But things tend to drift dimly inward. Gossip, rumour, promotions, personalities, it's only natural, isn't it – all the human lapses that take up space in the company soul. But the world persists, the world heals in a way. You feel the contact points around you, the caress of linking grids that give you a sense of order and command.²¹⁸

As Osteen notes of consumerism, the corporation 'offers communion without real community.'²¹⁹ DeLillo noticeably uses lots of spatial metaphor here, conceiving of the corporation as a way of organising contemporary existence, 'the caress of linking grids' that is noticeably exterior, taking us 'outside ourselves.' Rather than the realist particularity Watt notes in Defoe and Richardson,²²⁰ there is some collective unifying experience in the very singularity of the individuals that make up the corporation, a movement, I argue, that is both inside and outside simultaneously. In DeLillo's phrase 'contact points' we find an echo of those points of contact in Beckett's work, his 'company of little objects' or the fleeting glimpse of another perspective circulating the fiction. In this example, we find the troubling of spaces that I argue continues throughout DeLillo's oeuvre.

DeLillo's second novel *End Zone* is underscored by several different kinds of retreat, focussed by the space of the 'end zone' that appears throughout and from which the book takes its title. It refers firstly to the location in American football where the ball must end up to score a touchdown, and as Dewey notes it is 'the sole uncontested zone within the field of football, a sort of sanctuary within a sanctuary.'²²¹ Simultaneously, it is also the very place that this college resides in: 'We were in the middle of nowhere,' explains Gary Harkness, 'that terrain so flat and bare, suggestive

²¹⁸ Don DeLillo, *Underworld* (London: Picador, 2011), p. 89. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to U.

²¹⁹ Osteen, p. 2.

²²⁰ Watt, p. 60.

²²¹ Dewey, p. 27.

of the end of recorded time, a splendid sense of remoteness firing my soul' (EZ 29). The desert, a setting frequently referenced within the rest of the oeuvre, and something I will return to throughout this thesis, provides the exemplary setting in which Harkness can strip things away to the barest minimum. Harkness comes to characterize the setting as a kind of exile: 'Exile in a real place, a place of few bodies and many stones, is just an extension (a packaging) of the other exile, the state of being separated from whatever is left of the center of one's own history' (EZ 29). This 'exile in a real place' is a literal rendering of the displacement Harkness feels has already occurred within himself, suggesting a kinship between Harkness's experience of the world and the setting he now finds himself in.

However, this expansion and opening of space is also contrasted to the historical associations between the desert and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. As Matilde Nardelli notes:

At the height of the Cold War, and with the rise of modern environmental movements, the desert came to operate as an exemplary setting – be this an actual place on the map or a conceptual projection – through which the end was imagined or rehearsed.²²²

Though in its blankness, it appears ahistorical, like Adorno notes of Beckett, DeLillo demonstrates that even a space that may seem outside of experiential time, cannot absent itself from history. Though Harkness desires his physical location to echo his own absence from history, DeLillo ensures that he is still enmeshed in a landscape that specifically references contemporaneous issues.

The separation he diagnoses within himself stems from his inability to function in other colleges. His move from different universities due to misdemeanours,

²²² Matilde Nardelli, 'No End to the End: the Desert as Eschatology in Late Modernity,' *Tate Papers*, 22 (2014), <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/22/no-end-to-the-end-the-desert-as-eschatology-in-late-modernity>, accessed May 1st 2017.

accidental violence or bad behaviour results in extended periods of isolation. DeLillo explores relationship between character and space by literally placing Harkness in the 'end zone', some place of finality. In Adorno's reading of Beckett's *Endgame* he suggests that it takes place in 'a zone of indifference between inner and outer, neutral between.'²²³ DeLillo also seems to conceive of the desert in this way as a means of situating his characters in a territory of transformation. Dewey comments that Harkness is '...determined to make sense of the grief in the world by withdrawing from it.'²²⁴ I agree with this reading, and suggest that in this novel, DeLillo demonstrates the constant and unavoidable propulsion back into the world that counters any possibility of retreat.

DeLillo uses the image of the disaster as a way to suggest this movement. Harkness is interested in the disaster as a way to confront the world, and a way to abstain from it. Whilst at the University of Miami, he takes a course entitled 'modes of disaster technology.' He reads a book that leads to an addiction:

I liked reading about the deaths of tens of millions of people. I liked dwelling on the destruction of great cities. Five to twenty million dead. Fifty to a hundred million dead. Ninety percent population loss. Seattle wiped out by mistake. Moscow demolished. Airbursts over every SAC base in Europe. I liked to think of huge buildings toppling, of firestorms, of bridges collapsing, survivors roaming the charred countryside. Carbon-14 and strontium-90. Escalation ladder and subcrisis situation. Titan, Spartan, Poseidon.... I read several chapters twice. Pleasure in the contemplation of millions dying and dead. I became fascinated by words and phrases like thermal hurricane, overkill, circular error probability, post-attack environment, stark deterrence, dose-rate contours, kill-ratio, spasm war. Pleasure in these words. They were extremely effective, I thought, whispering shyly of cycles of destruction so great that the language of past world wars became laughable, the wars themselves somewhat naïve. A thrill almost sensual accompanied the reading of this book (EZ 20-21).

These horrifying scenarios proliferate before our eyes, like something out of a fever dream. Harkness tortures himself with multiplying scenes of death, whilst relishing

²²³ Adorno, 'Trying to Understand Endgame,' p. 127.

²²⁴ Dewey, p. 26.

the sounds of the words themselves. Their sound, their size, renders the ‘past world wars...laughable’ and ‘naïve,’ as if their very possibility as thoughts is enough to reimagine the possibility of the world itself. In Jeremy Green’s reading of DeLillo’s depiction of the televised images of violence, such as the Texas Highway Killer or Oswald’s murder by Jack Ruby in *Libra*, he comments that through television ‘the display of violated bodies gives an imaginary body to the noncorporeal crowd of television watchers and newspaper readers, while at the same time vouchsafing the reassurance that the suffering physical body is elsewhere.’²²⁵ There are not many references made to television in this novel, though the central part of the text rendered in football jargon and nonsense, is still very visual. However, what is interesting in Harkness’s imagined nuclear disaster is it is simultaneously real and imagined, producing real feelings in him. The language of the disaster creates such strong impression on Harkness that they render an internal image that function akin to this televisual image. The implications are historical, and large, and Harkness, though purveyor of these images, remains curiously absent from his own fantasy, as Freud said, ‘It is indeed impossible to imagine our own death; and whenever we try to do so we can perceive that we are in fact still present as spectators.’²²⁶ Green attributes this distinction between spectacle and spectator to the relation to fantasy:

In the first place, the channel between isolated private experience and collective being is one laid down in fantasy; to this extent, the imagination of shared experience, collective agency, and desire remains relatively remote and inaccessible, always situated at a remove. Disaster footage presents the image of a passive, victimized (collective) subject.²²⁷

²²⁵ Green, p. 576.

²²⁶ Sigmund Freud, ‘Our Attitude Towards Death,’ in *The Standard Edition of the Psychological Works Volume XIV: On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey and Anna Freud, pp. 284-300, (p. 289).

²²⁷ Green, p. 574.

Harkness can navigate a collective experience through his imagined world where this occurs, but it functions as a dual movement both towards and away from the world; towards it because he engages in some way with the concept of his own death and the possibility of a nuclear disaster, but also away from it because his death does not come into this vision. The ‘almost’ sensual thrill of these images is not fully pleasurable, and exposure to this deathly world of possibility, though of his own making, encourages a different level of retreat, another layer of separation from the world.

His love of rituals and a penchant for asceticism sees him try to purge himself of his desire for the catastrophe:

To complete the day truly I had to remember to think of Milwaukee in flames. I was doing a different area every day. This practice filled me with self-disgust and was meant, eventually, to liberate me from the joy of imagining millions dead. In time, I assumed, my disgust would become so great that I would be released from all sense of global holocaust. But it wasn’t working...I seemed to be subjecting my emotions to an unintentioned cycle in which pleasure nourished itself on the black bones of revulsion and dread...For Milwaukee I had planned firestorms. But now I could not imagine Milwaukee in flames. I had never been to Milwaukee (EZ 41).

The disaster is once more pushed away from him, in his choice to imagine a place he has never been to. Harkness is caught at these paradoxical moments of attempting to create the unimaginable, while held back from doing so by his revulsion for it – returning to the restriction and abundance we of food. His choice of Milwaukee, rather than any of the places he had been in colleges at, is clearly significant as he gives himself an impossible task. Once more, he demonstrates his intention to push the disaster away from him, whilst anticipating its probability.

This retreat is a temporal one, a way of attempting to re-think the time of now and then. James Berger describes the ‘time loop’ that exists in fictions of the apocalypse, that ‘[t]he narrative logic of apocalyptic writing insists that the post-

apocalyptic precede the apocalypse,²²⁸ that the aftermath of the end must prefigure the event of the end. Steven Connor notes of Beckett's work that '...the finitude of the here and now does not belong to it: it is a yet-to-come, proleptically belated, here and now.'²²⁹ In both of these forms, there is a deferral of the experience of the end. For Harkness, the end has repeated in his mind as an imagined vision, a psychic wounding that has yet to occur in reality; in imagining this 'end' moment, however, he is protected from it.

Through this construction of the world, and the accumulated images of the disaster, Harkness attempts to keep moving deliberately inward. The world of jargon that he builds around him becomes unsustainable, as he overburdens himself with the possibility of these scenarios. His response is to retreat again, in another way, through submitting himself to other kinds of restrictions. As characters around him adhere to asceticism--the bare room of Taft Robinson at the end of the novel for example--Harkness refrains from eating meat as a way to restore balance. Throughout the novel, there are many references made to eating and diets,²³⁰ through Harkness's roommate Bloomberg, and through his girlfriend Myna. Both characters discuss their ambivalent relationships to their weight. This question of weight and food restriction returns in DeLillo's later story 'The Starveling,' in a similar form, where obesity and diet are shown as forms of one another, an embodiment of limit. In *End Zone*, the imagined

²²⁸ James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 7.

²²⁹ Connor, p. 194.

²³⁰ The theme of eating will re-emerge throughout my thesis, particularly with reference to Kafka. In *White Noise*, DeLillo explores American consumer culture, relating television, images, food and brand names as a way of critiquing the production and consumption. See Karen Weekes, 'Consuming and Dying: Meaning and the Marketplace in Don DeLillo's *White Noise*,' *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 18.4 (2007), pp. 285-302 and Rocco Marinaccio 'Slow Food/White Noise: Food and Eating in DeLillo's Postmodern America,' *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 26.1 (2015), pp. 62-84.

accumulation of hideous images through nuclear warfare, or the wide expanse of desert can be countered or balanced by fasting:

Day after day my eyes scanned in all directions a stunned earth, unchangingly dull, a land silenced by its own beginnings in the roaring heat, born dead, flat stones burying the memory. I felt threatened by the silence. In my room at home, during my retreats from destructive episodes of one kind or another, I had never even noticed the quiet. Perhaps silence is dispersed by familiar things; their antiquity is heard. All I had feared then was that my mother, bringing my lunch upstairs, would forget to comment on the weather. (These reports were indispensable to my progress.) But now, in the vast burning west, the silences were menacing. I decided not to eat meat for a few weeks (EZ 30).

The overwhelming presence of silence in his family home can be countered by the weather, a semi-correct vision of the future, delivered to him as nourishment, the same as the sandwich brought by his mother; at Logos College, in the middle of the desert, it takes some work to counter the 'land silenced by its own beginnings' an unending time-loop that looms large in his mind. His decision to not eat meat, perhaps also related to his rather bloodthirsty visions of destruction, also sees another form of limit, of reduction, that he can place upon himself. He can use the relatively arbitrary rules of a diet to enclose himself in something, some kind of existence that cannot merge into the desert. The desert cannot threaten him in its boundlessness, because he himself can be given shape through his decisions.

His roommate Bloomberg impresses him because he has implemented another kind of restriction in opposition:

Bloomberg weighed three hundred pounds. This itself was historical. I revered his weight. It was an affirmation of humanity's reckless potential; it went beyond legend and returned through mist to the lovely folly of history. To weigh three hundred pounds. What devout vulgarity. It seemed a worthwhile goal for prospective saints and flagellants. The new asceticism. All the visionary possibilities of the fast. To feed on the plants and animals on earth. To expand and wallow. I cherished his size, the formlessness of it, the sheer vulgar pleasure, his sense of being overwritten prose. Somehow it was the opposite of death (EZ 46-47).

Harkness suggests a reverse asceticism: a sainthood gained in eating, in being too 'of the world,' too fleshly. Bloomberg is historical because his vastness 'went beyond legend,' making him undeniably *here*, rooted in the world as a physical presence that cannot be denied. If Beckett's 'here' is found in a simple word, then DeLillo's 'here' is in the body. Bloomberg explains that he has dieted before:

I thought I would become more efficient if I ate less. I thought the discipline of dieting would be good for me. It would make me quicker in body and therefore quicker in mind...It would give me a sense of physical definition and therefore of spiritual awareness. This was all wrong...[i]t was all part of the Jewish thing, you see. I thought the self-control of dieting would lead to the self-control needed to unjew myself. But it didn't work out that way. As I lost weight, as I continued to struggle against food and its temptations, I began to lose the idea of myself...I was losing the most important part of my being. Obesity. What I had considered self-control was really self-indulgence...I realize now that these things aren't important, that they're nothing compared with my individual reality...I was losing more and more of myself. I was losing more of the old body and more of the newly acquired mind...I would soon be left with one thing (EZ 71).

This process of reduction to gain a sense of 'physical definition' which turns into a 'spiritual awareness' is interesting as it works on the assumption that discipline and self-control of the body can be transferred to the mind. The mind/body dualism that Bloomberg assumes makes him up as a conscious being is undermined by his diet, because, by eating less, he loses the sense of himself; this sense of himself, as an 'I', is absolutely embodied, as a physical presence in the world. The 'one thing' left would be his Jewishness, the thing about himself he cannot change. His form and appearance can alter, but his Jewishness remains a defining historico-cultural fact. He finds this fact frustrating: 'I am a twentieth-century individual. I am working myself up to a point where I can exist beyond guilt, beyond blood, beyond the ridiculous past' (EZ 72). To be an individual now, he suggests, is to be beyond history. Similarly, in the later *White Noise*, Jack Gladney also experiences the pressure of the body situated within history, ironically necessitated from his proximity to Hitler.

The chancellor warned against what he called my tendency to make feeble presentation of self. He strongly suggested I gain weight. He wanted me to “grow out” into Hitler. He himself was tall, paunchy, ruddy, jowly, big-footed and dull. A formidable combination. I had the advantage of substantial height, big hands, big feet, but badly needed bulk, or so he believed—an air of unhealthy excess, of padding and exaggeration, hulking massiveness. If I could become more ugly, he seemed to be suggesting, it would help my career enormously (WN 16-17).

As the professor of Hitler studies, Jack needs to ‘grow out[ward]’ as a way to replicate the historical mass of Hitler himself.. The desire to study Hitler and understand Nazism is also underscored by a different kind of physical knowledge; knowledge found in bulk and size that can gesture towards historical space and time. Understanding Hitler gives Jack some purpose: ‘So Hitler gave me something to grow into and develop toward, tentative, as I have sometimes been in the effort’ (17 WN). Jack’s development of a character, the professor who studies Hitler, suggests a double creation of both himself and history. Finding this through the body only serves to shift the boundary between these two things; in both novels, these characters attempt to reconfigure how the individuals can physically shrink or enlarge themselves in the face of a history that seems so much larger than themselves.

In Myna’s loss of weight ‘she appears willing to engage the world, if only superficially,’²³¹ a seeming acceptance that she cannot forego the burden of beauty, whatever that really means. If this is Myna’s acceptance of what it means for a young woman to be in the world, then Harkness’s fast at the end of his novel is his final clumsy attempt to once more rescind from view. At the beginning of the novel he is diagnosed as ‘dying of something slow and incurable’ (EZ 19): by the end of the novel he either succumbs to this diagnosis, or he resists all food in one fell swoop. But starvation and diet are not sustainable ways of retreating, as Auster comments of Knut

²³¹ Joseph Dewey, ‘DeLillo’s Apocalyptic Satires,’ *Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*, p. 58.

Hamsun's *Hunger*: 'The idea of ending is resisted in the interests of maintaining the constant possibility of the end. Because his fasting neither posits a goal nor offers a promise of redemption, its contradiction must remain unresolved.'²³² The body is a conflicted location, and as Harkness tries to think about the world without the body, he is returned to the body. Bloomberg asserts that 'History is guilt' (E 43), but Harkness amends this so that history becomes the 'placement of bodies.' The body is threatened by the world, and as Harkness tries to subvert the boundaries of the bodily as a way to redefine the parameters of the mind, he is always thrown back to a mode of asceticism that cannot deny the world. Like *Murphy*, in this play of retreat and inclusion, these modes of retreat become sustaining fantasies.

Peter Boxall comments that Taft Robinson's room at the end of the novel echoes the descriptions of Beckett's rooms: 'The empty grey compartment in which Taft sits silently meditating is cast as a late Beckettian space – calling to mind the rotunda's of *Imagination Dead Imagine* and *Ping*.'²³³ Taft tells Gary that his decision to decorate his room sparsely comes from the fact that he is 'after small things' (EZ 222). In this minimalism, the collection of objects he has meticulously arranged, Taft finds a way of measuring space. Like Beckett's 'company of little objects,' Taft finds a way to cope with a scary world. But, like Gary Harkness, in paring down to almost nothing, DeLillo suggests an ambiguous relief that seems unsustainable.

If Logos College is a place that allows Harkness to consider the predetermined limit of the world, and attempt to refute it, in *Great Jones Street*, Bucky Wunderlick plays with the notion of a saturated culture he wants to avoid through his retreat from celebrity. Through the form of the novel, in which an accelerated plot suddenly stops,

²³² Paul Auster, *Art of Hunger* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 13.

²³³ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 41.

DeLillo creates a literary construct that falls short, leaving a strange gap within the space of fiction itself.

DeLillo's rock-star protagonist Wunderlick tries to leave his band, and his celebrity behind, in order to 'learn beyond certain personal limits, in endland, far from the tropics of fame.'²³⁴ This decision to move away from rock stardom to something quieter comes to be intolerable to the public that have grown used to Bucky's presence. His new location away from the society that he has come to abhor possesses a kind of power that he did not foresee; the power of isolation, and from that, the power of privacy. A reporter from ABC news, one of many ragtag individuals who shows up at Wunderlick's door in search of a scoop after the break-up of his band, tells him,

Your power is growing, Bucky. The more time you spend in isolation, the more demands are made on the various media to communicate some relevant words and pictures [...] People want words and pictures. They want images. Your power grows. The less you say, the more you are (GJS 124).

His decision to leave his band, and move into one room, a seeming relinquishing of his power of celebrity, in actuality renders him more powerful. His move away from the spotlight only increases the urgency for his return to it. DeLillo comments on this:

The fame-making apparatus confers celebrity on an individual in a conflagration so intense that he or she can't possibly survive. The quick and pitiless end of such a person's career is inherent in the first gathering glimmers of fame. This is how time is collapsed. And this is how the larger cultural drama of white-hot consumption and instant waste is performed in individualized terms...²³⁵

In celebrity culture DeLillo finds an exterior 'apparatus' through which individuals come to be famous, which then perpetuates that very construct. His disappearance from popular culture creates a space that vibrates with power, with either the possibility of his reappearance, or the finality of a definitive absence. Privacy is not

²³⁴ Don DeLillo, *Great Jones Street* (Picador: London, 2011), p. 5. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to GJS.

²³⁵ DeLillo, 'Power of History,' n.pag

found in one specific location, like his room, but is instead thought of as alternative to a visible presence.

What Bucky does then, is to combine the struggle for a public identity and what was previously supposed as a personal given freedom, and demonstrates the crossover between the public and private space. This movement from one position to another is replaced by his central position in a complex drug exchange that he does not understand, until a high-ranking member of the oft-mentioned Happy Valley Farm Commune named Buhack reveals both the founding concepts of the organization and the part Wunderlick is credited as playing. He says:

There's no land left. You can't go out West to find privacy. You need to build inward. That's the only direction left to build. We're building inward. We're hoping to wholesale dope to make the money to build inward. This isn't an easy concept to explain, understand or defend. But we believe you're the last person we have to defend ourselves to. We're your group-image, Bucky. You've come inside to stay. You've always been one step ahead of the times and this is the biggest step of all. Demythologizing yourself. Keeping covered. Putting up walls. Stripping off fantasy and legend. Reducing yourself to minimums. Your privacy and isolation are what give us strength to be ourselves. We were willing victims of your sound. Now we're acolytes of your silence (GJS 185).

Bucky's retreat into his small apartment, a movement of love and refuge, comes to symbolize a greater political meaning. His existence indoors, inside the walls of a cramped New York dwelling, is a process of a reduction, a deliberate counterbalance to his life as celebrity rock star. In his retreat from the world he has now found tiresome is a secrecy the Happy Valley Commune seeks to duplicate through the production and sale of an unnamed and unspecified 'product'; the product that comes to dominate the narrative. Wunderlick himself is also seeking another 'product,' some lost tapes of music. These two 'products,' music and drugs, circulate the fiction, contained in bland packaging. In the duplication of the product, as well as the plethora of visitors to Bucky's room, we find a kind of saturation of text. In this saturation,

there is the possibility of its being voided at any minute. This is reminiscent of Beckett's *Watt* in which the abundance of details in the text creates a superabundance of meaning that ultimately leads to decreased comprehension. Bucky's attempt to 'perform an action that is devoid of significance'²³⁶ is surrounded by other characters that refuse to allow him to continue doing so, attempting to force him back into a world that he has rejected.

At the climax of the GJS, Bucky comes into contact with someone who may or may not be the leader of the Happy Valley Commune, the person who may be the central cog in this incredibly complex scheme. However, rather than providing some kind of answer (not that Bucky seems that interested in being provided with one), the whole plot comes undone:

"Are you Dr. Pepper?" I said. "you're not, are you?"
 "I'm Chess and these are my plants. Pepper is at least four inches taller than I am. You know that. Voice aside. Color of eyes aside. The man is four inches taller than I am. Pepper's feats in the realm of disguise are well known and well documented but the man can't hide four inches of muscle, bone and tissue. I'm Fred Chess, ordinary American. I used to be a theatrical producer. I went into photo offset work after that. Nothing seemed to be panning out. Look, if I were Pepper, it would mean I knew all along what kind of drug was in the package. Any long-standing intimate connections between Pepper and Happy Valley would mean that I, as Pepper, had knowledge of the drug from the very beginning. You'd have to revise everything that's happened. It would mean that I managed not only Bohack but also Hanes and Watney. If I'm Pepper, it means everything's been a lie up to now. I managed the whole thing, it means. I guided the product from hand to hand. It was my circle, point by point, the product originating at Happy Valley and ending there. It would mean that you've been the victim of the paranoid man's ultimate fear. Everything that takes place is taking place solely to mislead you. Your reality is managed by others. Logic is inside out. Events are delusions. If I were Pepper, it would mean I knew the nature of the product, I had it delivered to you, I planned and followed its course, I fabricated a Toronto meeting between Hanes and Watney, I assigned the informer to Azarian, I planted Hanes in the subway, I had Watney leave the bubble gum cards, I had Bohack bring you over here – the straight line intersecting the circle. It would mean I managed Opel.'
 'But there's the difference in height" I said (GJS 239-240).

²³⁶ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 38.

This chilling paragraph momentarily loosens and undercuts the connections that both the reader and Bucky have made thus far. The culmination of events that had suggested coincidence, are suddenly exposed as possibly the deliberate plan to fulfil ‘the paranoid man’s ultimate fear.’ Chess stands outside of the narrative for a second and recounts details of the narrative back to the protagonist, outlying the particular moments that had some significance or more precisely, are now being given particular significance, by the very act of naming them as significant. As Peter Brooks notes, this is a point in the classical narrative, where ‘the moment of significant revelation, embraces and comprehends the past as a panorama leading to realization in the ultimate moment.’²³⁷ DeLillo exploits the moment of climactic revelation, by suggesting not only its lack of importance to the narrative, but also its lack of interest to the protagonist. This uncertain revelation is undercut comically by Bucky once more, demonstrating his studied disinterest. The reader’s desire for conclusion in the plot is demonstrated as unimportant and ineffectual: nothing changes and what was already happening continues. The plot, in this way, has already reached its conclusion without the revelation of the central force of the plot, or the reasons behind it. Bucky’s punishment was complete from the moment that he was handed the package, from the moment he was introduced as a character.

The final chapter then, functions as a sort of static epilogue to a plot that collapsed under the imperative for conclusion found in the delivery of senseless punishment. The drug plot has ended but the novel continues; there are pages that still need to be filled. DeLillo has saved his most beautiful language, for these final pages, as if filling the empty space of this chapter with lyrical words. The drug administered to Bucky

²³⁷ Peter Brooks, *Reading for the plot: design and intention in narrative* (London: Harvard University Press 1992), p. 52.

which was supposed to render him speechless, a seemingly catastrophic removal of language, only lasts a few weeks: his punishment, and the conclusion to narrative, is only partial. It is as if Bucky's speechlessness affords him greater powers of observation, as he wanders through the streets of Manhattan, joined once more by the unknown girl who delivered the original product to him, giving the novel a neat circularity. In an interview for the *Paris Review*, Adam Begley asks DeLillo about this structure. He comments,

When I was working on the book there were beggars and derelicts in parts of the city they'd never entered before. A sense of failed souls and forgotten lives on a new scale. And the place began to feel a little like a community in the Middle Ages. Disease on the streets, insane people talking to themselves, the drug culture spreading among the young. We're talking about the very early 1970s, and I remember thinking of New York as a European city in the fourteenth century. Maybe this is why I was looking for a ruined sort of grandeur in the language at the end of the book.²³⁸

'Ruined', 'failed', 'forgotten,' Bucky becomes one of these people, doomed to walk the streets of Manhattan. In these pages, disaster is everywhere for these characters as they predict doom, death and God. These private catastrophes, identifying ominous links and conspiracy are now familiar to Bucky, forcibly entered into this world where the disaster reigns as conspiracy, and where the reader sees and knows its probability. And yet, this new silence brings no pain to Bucky, is even productive for him:

After Essex Street I spent weeks of deep peace...having no words for the things around me affected even my movements across the room. I walked more slowly, as though in fear of objects, all things with names unknown to me. Some of the careless passion people feel for unteachable children (his neighbour downstairs) began to communicate itself from one part of my mind to another. I was unreasonably happy, subsisting in blessed circumstance, thinking of myself as a kind of living chant. I made interesting and original sounds. I looked out the window and moaned (quietly) at the lumbering trucks below and at the painters and sculptors now occupying windows across the way, placid faces suspended over Great Jones Street (GJS 249).

²³⁸ DeLillo quoted in 'Art of Fiction No.35,' n. pag.

This partial end affords him a tranquil space to return to the single repeated moment found in the ‘living chant:’ a moment of unadulterated babble, without past or future, a continuous present. The calamitous plot finalized in the penultimate chapter leaves both Bucky and us with an additional space, a chapter that shows the return – the literal return of language, and the individual back to society: ‘Soon all was normal, a return prior modes...Several weeks of immense serenity. Then ended. But I see no reason to announce the news. Let viscid history suck me down a bit’ (GJS 250). History can be rendered into a physical substance, into which we can be dissolved. Like Harkness’s idea of the historical body, here we have a historical material. If the plot can be abruptly cut off, then for DeLillo, history too can be made malleable, produced physically. Where Gary Harkness anticipates a nuclear future that he is curiously absent from, it is the reader who anticipates the future here, from which Bucky also refrains. In this way, the novel itself becomes a form of room, a place no longer safe from the invasions of complex plot: DeLillo suggests a kind of formal mish-mash which concludes only partially.

In these two novels, DeLillo has used the single room as a site to return to, and a place from which characters must escape. In *Ratner’s Star* (1976), ostensibly a work of science fiction, he uses the metaphor of burrowing as a way of conceiving of multiple forms of knowledge and responsive ways of living in unknown spaces. The plot follows an attempt by a group of scientists and mathematicians who are attempting to understand a code purported to come from outside the galaxy. The narrative ultimately returns to earth, by asking questions about human life and identity, and through the abundance of burrowing, tunnelling, and earthly images. ‘Little Billy Twillig,’ the adolescent genius, is our guide through this world; his assignment to decode a set of numbers which will translate an alien message. However, as the novel

reveals, the numbers refer to the time of an eclipse, something visible, striking, and very real, emitted from an ancient civilization previously unknown to modern society. If these earlier novels have explored the interaction between the individual and world, here DeLillo thinks through more abstract through systems of knowledge in both science and mathematics. In collapsing categories DeLillo demonstrates the shaky distinctions between the concrete and the abstract. Through an episodic form that sees Billy encounter several strange characters that traverse numerous subjects in the history of mathematics, and also the history of the strange and the occult, different forms of knowledge jostle against each other for priority.

In *Billy*, DeLillo explores the juxtaposition between systems that elucidate knowledge and systems which obfuscate it. Billy's Nobel Prize winning work, work that 'was understood by only three or four people,'²³⁹ is in the creation of a stellated twilligon, a star shape. For Billy, this realm of pure mathematics is natural, almost intuitive: 'Mathematics made sense' (RS 13). Billy disagrees with those who tell him that mathematics is a kind of mystery: 'I don't think we can talk about it being a mystery. There's no mystery. When you talk about difficulty, that's one thing, the difficulty of simple arithmetic. But mystery, forget about, because that's another subject' (RS 23). This refrain repeats later 'There may be a lot of crazy things in the world that scare you and me but mathematics is the one thing where there's nothing to be afraid of or stupid about or think it's a big mystery' (RS 67). For Billy, theoretical mathematics is the only thing that is *not* terrifying. Moments of fear are counterbalanced by the realisations: 'there is at least one prime between a given number and its double' (RS 5). Mathematics '[o]ffer[s] beauty, austerity, permanence,

²³⁹ Don DeLillo, *Ratner's Star* (London: Vintage, 1991), p. 4. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and are abbreviated to RS.

universality, and precision, mathematics makes sense of a chaotic, menacing world.²⁴⁰

The realm of pure mathematics may be an attempt to order an irrational world, but it demonstrates itself as alien to lived experience. The mystery of mathematics and the purity of his work are contrasted with Billy's burgeoning sexuality and of images of the body. If in *End Zone* the emphasis has been food, in this novel it is shit. The language of mathematics that comes so simply to the young boy is contrasted by euphemism and the inexactitude of childish babbling: regardless of how advanced Billy's brain may be, his is still fascinated with bodily functions, with 'tee-tee or big business' (RS 24). He muses:

There was something about waste material that defied systematic naming. It was as though the many infantile names for faecal matter and urine were concessions to the fact that the real names (whichever these were) possessed a secret power that inhabited all but the most ceremonial utterance (RS 38).

The body is a location of secrets in the way that the world is not. This concept of 'ceremonial utterance' is frequently found in references throughout the text to the symbolic, or the unknown. Billy himself uses some kind of ceremonial utterance when standing in the mirror brushing his teeth uttering the word 'tetraktys' (RS 44) as password to his mouth. The symbol tetraktys, a Pythagorean concept, reflects the mysterious and unifying power of maths in nature, suggesting a harmony between Billy's body and the mysterious. Pythagoras becomes an external site in which Billy can collapse the distinction between the apparent naturalness of mathematics and the otherness of the body. As Cowart explains 'is there really any difference, asks DeLillo, between the rationalism of mathematics and hard science, on the one hand, and on the other, the various forms of systematic irrationalism with which humanity

²⁴⁰ Osteen, p. 64.

has always sought to negotiate the unseen?’²⁴¹ DeLillo himself has commented on the role of Pythagoras in this book:

There is also a kind of guiding spirit. This is Pythagoras. The mathematician-mystic. The whole book is informed by this link or opposition, however you see it, and the characters keep bouncing between science and superstition.²⁴²

This opposition, is however, proved not to be an opposition at all. Like Beckett’s dissolution of the foundational boundary between self and other, DeLillo here explores whether other foundational ideas can also be radically reimagined.

In this way, the oscillation between the natural and the body can also be reflected in the prevalence of burrowing and holes in the text. This concern with the subterranean is not only figured through literal undergrounds and Endor’s hole, but also through the documenting of the history of mathematics, in a way that both elucidates it and maintains its complexity. DeLillo references mathematical concepts and historical anecdotes, creating an underlying chain of underground mathematical references in the text itself. As Endor comments (fittingly, from his hole):

The whole history of mathematics is subterranean, taking place beneath history itself, misunderstood, ignored, ridiculed, unread, a shadow-world scarcely perceived even by the learned. Of adventure, greatness, insanity and suicide, it is nevertheless a history of nothing happening. *Of nothing happening* (195 RS).

Mathematics is both visible and invisible: visible in its presence in the world as something that happens, something studied, and something that helps reveal the world to itself, but it is also invisible as shown by the novel’s play on the obscure details of different mathematicians and their lives, as well as the inclusion of abstract and obscure mathematical concepts. The contrast between mathematical discovery and its effects on the wider world is a kind of nothing; does Endor posit that mathematics can be transformed into a kind of *something*? Or that in its very abstract form, in Billy’s

²⁴¹ Cowart, p. 146.

²⁴² DeLillo quoted in LeClair, p. 11.

case, the realm of pure mathematics which Cowart comments is more like a beautiful artwork in its ‘aesthetic purity,’²⁴³ is a kind of Beckettian zero? In this way, the image of the burrow creates the distinction between knowing and seeing, a way of burrowing into and out of knowledge systems that are figured as external locations. Moreover, as DeLillo comments of both this novel and *End Zone*, both ‘are pieces of jargon. They engage in wars of jargon with each other. There is a mechanical element, a kind of fragmented self-consciousness.’²⁴⁴ Jargon becomes another kind of language itself, so that the text is saturated with voices that are and are not speaking to each other. Like Beckett, DeLillo decentres the novel, not because the form cannot accommodate a central voice, but because the form cannot accommodate the plethora of voices.

This idea of burrowing is also present more conceptually, and is intimately related with the inward movement I have been discussing elsewhere in this chapter. Osteen argues, ‘Billy resembles DeLillo’s other self-contained protagonists (Bucky Wunderlick, Nick Shay) whose “convergence inward” is both a symptom and cause of their alienation.’²⁴⁵ He notes the deliberate turn away from the world that demonstrates the very impossibility of doing so. By conceiving of interiority as existing separately to the world, they perpetuate the distance between themselves and it. For Dewey he sees the protagonists of *End Zone* and *Ratner’s Star* as existing between oppositional states:

Each man-child is offered a dramatic choice: accept the difficult vulnerability implied by the apocalyptic temper or indulge naïve strategies of retreat that foretell maturity unavailable to the fullest measure of living (documented by DeLillo’s later adults).²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Cowart, p. 152.

²⁴⁴ DeLillo quoted in LeClair, p. 5.

²⁴⁵ Osteen, p. 71-2.

²⁴⁶ Dewey, ‘DeLillo’s Apocalyptic Satires,’ p. 54.

I disagree with Dewey's emphasis on maturity here as DeLillo suggests that regardless of age, his protagonists will always seek escape from the dominating discourses in which they are contained. Billy does not resist the world, but resists the coming into the world as an adult, through the systems of the body.

The novel also thinks about these movements inward through a mystical whirling. The first is in chapter 6—fittingly named the 'Convergence inward,'—during the lecture given by the transformed Gerald Pence who now goes by the aboriginal name Mutuka. Mutuka explains that his lecture will communicate the 'nonobjective truth' (RS 102) that he has learnt through his adoption of an Aboriginal understanding of the creation and meaning of the world. In this scene Mutuka describes dreamtime in which 'there is no separation between man and land (RS 104).' Mutuka explains the use of tektite in aboriginal sorcery, suggesting how the rock demonstrates the relationship between 'the primitive and the extraterrestrial [...]' It is almost certain that the white-haired aborigine's magic object, his tektite, his mapanpa, is what enabled him to travel to the radio star in the timeless time of the dreamtime' (RS 104). This is a way to access the radio star through making a 'journey' through the dreamtime where 'Time and space will be replaced by the nameless dimension of the whirl' (RS 106). Like DeLillo's collapse of categories of pure and real, here the primitive and the extraterrestrial are unified in a stone. In this mystic ritual, the cosmic order is broken down, so that the individual can physically join with the vast expanse of space. Osteen notes that 'The aborigine's journey...also prefigures the novel's climatic discovery that the message is really an echo or boomerang'.²⁴⁷ And of course, in true DeLillo fashion, the boomerang looks like Billy's stellated twilligon, the shape

²⁴⁷ Osteen, p. 72.

that is at once physical and abstract, real and pure, thrown by a human hand, or imagined by a human mind.

Later in the novel, there is another kind of whirl performed by a woman with her mouth sewn shut: 'Her body, performing nothing more than this slow rotation, appeared to assert the prestige of emptiness; it might take the shape of whatever swerved in its direction' (RS 427). Like Kafka's burrow and Beckett's unnameable, the subject attempts to transform itself into its own creation. In this enacting of emptiness, she experiences a new way of being in time: 'This woman's jurisdiction, the ascending of her vacant gaze, was turned completely inward. Her territorial range was nil. She was unravelled before them an imbecile beauty, senseless and deserted, the negative element of her life.' (RS 428) Through this mystical swirling, DeLillo posits a being fully subsumed by the desire for a way of becoming interior. This spinning is a process of emptying that is filled up by one name: 'Pythagoras.' The physical process finds its answer in the abstraction of name, in the unifying of mathematics and mysticism. This whirl, like *Great Jones Street*, works as a kind of climatic anti-climax for the plot, in which the two systems of the novel, mathematics and mysticism, converge in a denuded body.

In Cowart's discussion of *Ratner's Star*, he notes that, 'fiction has always sustained a ludic relationship with reality.'²⁴⁸ these three novels do indeed play with and subvert ways of being in the world as a way of envisioning the wider significance of competing discourses. As Boxall notes,

if *End Zone* turns around the failure of football to organise its elements into a shape with wider cultural, aesthetic and theological resonances, then *Great Jones Street* dramatises the failure of the music industry to articulate any form of resistance to mainstream capitalist culture.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ Cowart, p. 152.

²⁴⁹ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 36.

In these multiple retreats, I suggest DeLillo is looking for a way out of the fiction itself, a way of exploring spaces that emerge when characters are no longer enthralled to their environment. As Johnston comments, DeLillo's early novels contain 'events that seem to menace and disrupt the language-body relationships from some undefinable "outside."' ²⁵⁰ Curtis A. Yehnert adapts this:

Portraying a mutually constitutive relationship between his characters and their environment allows DeLillo to craft a new kind of subjectivity. For he undercuts traditional modernist selfhood through characters who strive not to forge their souls in agnostic struggle, but to deceive, forget, flee themselves, who seek not to discover but to eliminate their inwardness to live on the surface. ²⁵¹

However, whilst Yehnert sees them moving towards a 'surface,' I suggest he creates something more ambiguous, and also more searching. In my conceptions of plots that build inward, I have explored the way in which DeLillo portrays the struggle between the self and the world of the novel. In his myriad concepts of retreats, he fashions internal spaces that are created explicitly through an interaction with external architecture that falls short and collapses. In DeLillo's later fiction, however, he explores other kinds of literary architecture which might provide alternatives for interiority as seen in realism or modernism.

²⁵⁰ Johnston, p. 265.

²⁵¹ Curtis A. Yehnert, "Like Some Endless Sky Waking Inside": Subjectivity in Don DeLillo,' *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 42.4, (2001), pp. 357-366, (p. 360).

Being an American: *Americana* and *Libra*

‘The “private life” is nothing but that zone of space, of time, where I am not an image, an object. It is my *political* right to be a subject which I must protect’²⁵²

In the above section, I noted the way that EZ, GJS and RS formulated interior spaces filtered through the room and ambivalent responses to the room. In this next section, I want to continue to think ownership of a particular space, but in these two novels, it is the space of the self. Through the important concepts of being and seeing, which I described in my chapter about realism, DeLillo dramatises the way an individual can be in space by exploring differing modes of interiority. He furthermore situates this exploration within larger debates about public and private spaces and how they function in the American imagination. As Barthes describes above, a ‘private life’ is associated with a possible zone or physical location, but in DeLillo’s figuring of the room, he suggests that it is never truly private. In this section, I describe below how DeLillo returns to the room, to consider an historical figure whose true life can never be known.

Errol Morris’s 2013 film, *The Unknown Known*, considers Donald Rumsfeld’s infamous phrase used in response to a question about the link between terrorist organizations and Saddam Hussein’s regime. Morris’s film attempts to unpick the thinking of Rumsfeld through an extended interview and through the hundreds of thousands of memos he sent during his time in the White House and the Pentagon. Rumsfeld however maintains a specific kind of thinking, considering events as possibilities to be worked out and imagined. This is demonstrated by the amount of memos that he sends. One memo from July 23 2001 is particularly revealing:

²⁵² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Cape, 1982), p. 15.

“Subject: Pearl Harbour Post-Mortem.”

In some future hearing I am going to say that I do not want to be sitting before this panel in a modern day version of a Pearl Harbour post-mortem. Who didn't do what, when, where, and why? None of us would want to have to be back here going through that agony.²⁵³

Rumsfeld's musings become fact only a few weeks later. In reference to this memo, Rumsfeld tells Morris, “It would be wrong, to think that someone who wrote it—namely me—was prescient. I wasn't. I simply had read enough history that I worried.”²⁵⁴ That ‘enough history’ could have lead anyone to specifically envision the events of 9/11 and the following years, demonstrates Rumsfeld's approach to the problem of America's future. In Morris's film he later comments that the US Government's inability to predict both Pearl Harbour and 9/11 was a ‘failure of the imagination.’²⁵⁵ His thinking finds its pinnacle in the now infamous quote from a press briefing—that started its life not off the cuff, but pre-written in a memo—that is attempting to give some kind of an answer, whilst also evading the directness of one journalist's questions. Rumsfeld posited what is in actuality an interesting formulation about the possibility to delimit parameters of thought:

There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There are things we don't know we don't know.²⁵⁶

Though this is clearly some form of shaky epistemology, overly wordy to try and cloud Rumsfeld's ambivalent role in US Government, this repetition of clauses and reformulations as negations sound undoubtedly DeLilloan, suggesting something

²⁵³ Donald Rumsfeld memo quoted in Mark Danner ‘Donald Rumsfeld Revealed’ in *The New York Review of Books*, <http://www.markdanner.com/articles/donald-rumsfeld-revealed>, accessed May 23rd 2017.

²⁵⁴ Rumsfeld memo in Danner. n. pag.

²⁵⁵ Donald Rumsfeld, *The Unknown Known*, directed by Errol Morris (Dogwoof: London, 2013), DVD.

²⁵⁶ Donald Rumsfeld, ‘Donald Rumsfeld Unknown Unknowns,’ YouTube video, 0:00:35, August 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GiPe1OiKQuk>, 2002.

interesting about not only the possibility of knowledge, but of the responsibility one has to the unimaginable. In this way, the world is defined by what we can know, and what we cannot know and the struggle to simultaneously categorise both, whilst reconciling the relationship between the two.

This political possibility of this taxonomy of thought is the subject of 1988's *Libra*. DeLillo's description of the kinds of knowing and unknowing that take place in US Government are striking similar to what I began to outline above; descriptions of varying levels of committees and groups give way to this line 'The White House was to be the summit of unknowing' (L 22). Knowledge is to be carried up if and when it's needed to the President: 'It was as if an unsullied leader redeemed some ancient truth which the others were forced to admire only in the abstract, owing to their mission in the convoluted world' (L 22). If the White House functions as the locus of unknowing, then how does this interact with the systems of 'intelligence' that circle around it? Can we add to Rumsfeld's list of failures the assassination of JFK?

Jonathan Brent comments that '[q]uestions of knowledge are at the center of Lee Harvey Oswald's world;²⁵⁷ in fact, the whole novel posits a variety of 'answers' to questions that have surrounded the events of November 22nd 1963. Timothy Melley argues that

official investigation into Kennedy's death produced a crisis of knowledge...epitomizing the condition of knowledge and history in postmodernity because it turns on an unbridgeable gap between historical events and historical narrative.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ Jonathan Brent, 'The unimaginable space of Danilo Kis and Don DeLillo,' *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 14.1 (1994), pp. 180-88.

²⁵⁸ Timothy Melley quoted in Shannon Herbert, 'Playing the Historical Record DeLillo's "Libra" and the Kennedy Archive,' *Twentieth Century Literature*, 56.3 (2010), pp. 287-317, (p. 290).

DeLillo's novel, I want to suggest is not interested in providing an alternative narrative, but as DeLillo mentions in his Author's note, 'a way of thinking about the assassination without being constrained by half-facts or overwhelmed by possibilities' (L 458). Like Coetzee's discussion of the novel as either supplement or rival to history, here DeLillo chooses the latter, specifically forefronting the process of creation and invention, its possibility and its failure in the light of an event that transformed America. Rather than responding to the range of conspiracy theories around that day in Dallas, DeLillo uses the framework of his novel to demarcate the possibilities of subjectivity in post-war America. Mark Seltzer's work describes the production of an American subject as one that can be replicated. Seltzer describes what he terms as the 'statistical person,'²⁵⁹ using the FBI's outline of the serial killer 'checklist' to suggest the individual most likely to commit a series of violent crimes. But these checklists, rather than helping to just define the nature of the crime, come to define the identity of the killer, down to the frequency of his bedwetting as a child. The implication, Seltzer establishes is that

[t]he killer's experience of his own identity is directly absorbed in an identification with the personality type called "the serial killer": absorbed into the case-likeness of his own case. On one level, this points to the manner in which the serial killer *internalizes* the public...and expert...definitions of his kind of person.²⁶⁰

The internalization of the definition means that not only must the serial killer repeat killings, but the serial killer must also repeat personality, in order to fit the bill of serial killer. In this definition of the 'statistical person' Seltzer establishes a helpful way of thinking through the complexities of DeLillo's characters who look for a criteria they themselves can replicate.

²⁵⁹ Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: life and death in America's wound culture* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 4.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 107.

This, I suggest, is a strong theme that re-emerges throughout DeLillo's writing. As Joseph Dewey notes, this notion of a pre-supposed character, with a pre-determined limit is present in the main character in DeLillo's first novel:

David Bell, network wunderkind, functions as less as a character...more as a premise. He is that staple of post-war American fiction, the empty form shaped by a gray-flannel suit, the Corporate Every-WASP...Bell is not specific – he is generic; he is not somebody – he looks like somebody, a convincing simulation of an authentic person.²⁶¹

This demarcation between 'being somebody' and 'looking like somebody' suggests the replication of a certain kind of existence and interaction with the world around them that produces the same person, what DeLillo later calls a 'furtive sameness' (U 785). But this appearance of personhood is externalized – though David may seem generic, this genericism hides an 'empty form.' David himself seems to agree: 'The only problem I had was that my whole life was a lesson in the effect of echoes, that I was living in the third person. This would have been hard to explain.'²⁶² David, rather than being a character, becomes the shape of a character, or, indeed like Beckett's unnameable, the space where a character should be.

Bell's blandness is furthered through his attempt (and ultimate failure) in trying to externalize his subjectivity on film. David's film, a kind of shapeless desire at the outset, becomes increasingly personal, through a ventriloquism of himself and those close to him. He explains 'It's sort of first-person thing but without me in it in any physical sense, except fleetingly, not exactly in the Hitchcock manner but a brief personal appearance nonetheless, my mirror image at any rate' (A 263). The novel, plotting this disappointment and the 'failure of the filmic',²⁶³ exposes the necessity to

²⁶¹ Dewey, *Beyond Grief and Nothing*, p. 18.

²⁶² Don DeLillo, *Americana* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 58. All references are hereafter taken from the edition and abbreviated to A.

²⁶³ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 34.

return in some form. David retrospectively terms his journey as ‘the great seeking leap into the depths of America,’ (A 341) that is, a journey back to the beginning, through which he acknowledges that he cannot escape from his these defining categories that produce him, empty as they are. Later, in *Underworld*, as Randy Laist comments, Nick Shay ‘ropes off a personal space for himself by affecting a mobster persona out of clichéd phrases from gangster movies,’²⁶⁴ becoming ‘one in a long line of DeLillo’s narrators who come off as third-person characters even when they speak in their own voices.’²⁶⁵ Nick, like David, ranges through the American landscape, attempting to find some connecting tissue between himself and the world he lives in, but only finding spaces that fall short.

These issues of first and third person are bound up in the notion of the space from one which speaks. As in my discussion of Beckett, DeLillo’s young male protagonists sense a disturbance in their lives that trouble their sense of themselves. This issue comes to the fore in *Libra*: in taking the subject of Lee Harvey Oswald, DeLillo exaggerates the difference between a person’s sense of themselves and a cultural idea; by tracing the way in which Oswald ‘becomes historical’²⁶⁶ as Boxall terms it.

Like David Bell, Oswald also has a quality that suggests his typicality but unlike Bell, it is not that he seems too typical, but that he appears almost universal:

Oswald’s eyes are gray, they are blue, they are brown. He is five feet nine, five feet ten, five feet eleven. He is right-handed, he is left-handed. He drives a car, he does not. He is a crack shot and a dud...Oswald even looks like different people from one photograph to the next. He is solid, frail, thin-lipped, broad-featured, extroverted, shy and bank-clerkish, all, with the columned neck of a fullback. He looks like everybody. In two photos taken in the military he

²⁶⁴ Laist, p. 131.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 132

²⁶⁶ Boxall, ‘Becoming historical: *Libra*’ in *Don DeLillo: The possibility of fiction*, pp. 131-153.

is a grim killer and a baby-face hero. In another photo he sits in profile with a group of fellow Marines on a rattan mat under palm trees. Four or five men face the camera. They all look like Oswald. Branch thinks they look more like Oswald than the figure in profile, officially identified as him (L 300).

As Nicholas Branch, the investigator, pores over photographs of Oswald, he realises that his subject 'looks like everybody' and describes him through a series of categories: the bank-clerk, grim killer, baby-face hero, all of whom are replicatable through their very American typicality. But not only does Oswald appear like these types, he does not even look like himself; there are other characters who do a more convincing job of 'seeming' like him than he does. The problem with Oswald, then, is not that he cannot convincingly replicate typicality, but that he can so convincingly replicate typicality that he looks like everyone. Throughout the novel, Oswald is shadowy, blurry, indistinct, collated from the piles of papers he exists within. As Jonathan Brent demonstrates, he appears to be the sum of many different parts:

Oswald's head on a different body; Oswald's name on someone else's act. Oswald is the dupe of history. He is no longer (perhaps never was) somebody in himself. He can play things "either way," and his existence will be actualized only in relation to what an anonymous "they" can prove or not. He is, in the end, the reflex of others' expectations, ambitions, needs.²⁶⁷

These familiar traces suggest his own reappearance in myriad ways, in and out of the schemes of Everett and Parmenter, within his self-created identities, and in the text itself. DeLillo has written a book about Oswald, so even when Oswald does not feature in a scene, his figure looms large over the whole of the text. In this way, the text's central point is a kind of disappearing nothingness, a man who exists everywhere and nowhere.

Though Oswald might be alienated from society, he is presented as a keen reader and writer throughout. Boxall has discussed the heavily intertextuality of this

²⁶⁷ Brent, n. page.

text,²⁶⁸ but here I want to focus on two intertexts, *Time* magazine and Walt Whitman. The first weekly magazine in the US, *Time* magazine became famous for its one-person front cover, a sign of that person's relevance to contemporary society. Oswald fantasises about this cover:

He had a thirty-nine-week subscription to *Time*. He imagined the backyard photograph in *Time*: The Castro partisan with his guns and subversive journals. He imagined the cover of *Time*, a picture seen across the socialist world. The man who shot the fascist general. A friend of the revolution (L 281).

His fantasies of fame rely on his visibility on the front of the well-known magazine, using it as a proxy for belonging and validation, as a way of assimilating into American culture. Though his picture would be a way for his politics to literally occupy the pages of an American magazine, the 'picture seen across the socialist world' would also be available in the marketplace of America, another commodity to be bought and sold. In fact, the famous 'backyard' photograph does appear on the front of a magazine, but it is *Life* and not *Time*. Oswald does appear on the front cover of *Time*, on the 2nd October 1964 edition, but it is not the backyard photo that they use, but an illustration: a cruel irony. But the central disjuncture of this fantasy is his desire for notoriety within mainstream American culture, a culture that would reject him for the very reason for which he become famous.

This idea of belonging is also found in Oswald's reading of Walt Whitman. Though mentioned only briefly after his suicide attempt—'He reads Walt Whitman in hospital ruins' (L 94)—Whitman functions as another kind of proxy; this time, rather than standing in for American culture, he instead symbolises the desire for an inclusive utopian democracy. Jason Stacy, in his study of Whitman's relationship to the many, notes that 'there are two Walt Whitmans [...] Whitman molds to his

²⁶⁸ Boxall, *Don DeLillo*, p. 141.

situation and metamorphoses into what we want of him. On the Fourth of July, he is our drum-beating patriot. In our moments of quiet doubt, he whispers to our desires.²⁶⁹ Whitman is a stand-in then, for both American patriotism and the desire for belonging, somehow managing to enact both the process of *becoming* American, and *being* American simultaneously. The famous 'Leaves of Grass' has long been a rallying cry for the all-encompassing democracy that America supposedly champions:

I am of old and young, of the foolish as much as the wise;
Regardless of others, ever regardful of others,
Maternal as well as paternal, a child as well as a man,
Stuff'd with the stuff that is coarse, and stuff'd with the stuff that is fine;
One of the Great Nation, the nation of many nations, the smallest the same, and the largest the same.²⁷⁰

American identity is formed through polyphony, in which the self is expanded through a new interspatial ethics of being. From the very first page of the *Libra*, Oswald echoes this desire to renegotiate the borderline between self and other: 'Happiness is not based on oneself, it does not consist of a small home, of taking and getting. Happiness is taking part in the struggle, where this is no borderline between one's personal world, and the world in general.'²⁷¹ Here, DeLillo establishes Oswald's primary concern in the rest of the text: to consider how it is possible for the preoccupation of the individual to diffuse into the concerns of the mass. The communism that shapes his thinking from an early age relates to his need for absorption into a higher purpose. In asserting that 'happiness' comes from 'taking part in the struggle' Oswald suggests a continuous process that he was always outside of, not being fully accepted in Russia, only on ever on the side-lines as a peripheral

²⁶⁹ Jason Stacy, *Walt Whitman's Multitudes* (Peter Lang: New York, 2008), p. 1.

²⁷⁰ Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself,' *Leaves of Grass*, ed. by Malcolm Cowley (New York: Penguin, 1976), 16.326-330.

²⁷¹ Lee Harvey Oswald quoted in *Libra*, epigraph, n. pag.

supporter in Cuba, and always separated from America. This made all the more poignant in the contrast between the continuous present of the epigraph and the narrative itself, already in the past. DeLillo's incorporation of Whitman then chimes with the inherent failure of Oswald's project to merge with the world. If, as Whitman states, 'All goes onward and outward—nothing collapses'²⁷² what does this expansion mean for the lone American individual? Ben Lerner outlines what he sees as the failure of Whitman's poetry:

Walt Whitman is himself a *place* for the genuine, an open space or textual commons where American readers of the future can forge and renew their sense of possibility and interconnectedness...But the Whitmanic programme has never been realised in history, and I don't think it can be: Whitman comes to stand for the contradictions of a democratic personhood that cannot become actual without becoming exclusive [...] Whitman's dreamed union has never arrived, but his vision determines the nostalgist's call for a poetry that could supposedly reconcile the individual and the social and so transform millions of individuals into an authentic people.²⁷³

This Whitmanic expansiveness finds its answer in Oswald, who becomes, for America, a kind of textual commons, a place rather than a subject. But rather than existing as a utopian space of possibility in which the individual has a freedom to construct their unique American identity, he becomes a space onto which identity is laid, the subject of years of speculation.

It is only at the end of the novel, and at the end of Oswald's life that his name begins to make sense: 'His life had a single clear subject now, called Lee Harvey Oswald' (L 435). This double meaning of subject, as in subject of study and actual subjectivity, is still at a remove to Oswald the man. Oswald's ownership of his own historical moment demonstrates his submission into history as a historical person, not an acknowledgment of identity. This is furthered at the end of the novel by a moment

²⁷² Whitman, 'Song of Myself,' *Leaves of Grass*, 6.120.

²⁷³ Ben Lerner, *Hatred of Poetry* (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2016), p. 67-8.

from Marguerite Oswald's testimony to the Warren Commission. Earlier in the text she says that she 'took back [her] name. Maguerite Claverie Oswald. (L 11); this is as a way to suggest her re-possession of her self, yet another three part name. At the end of the novel, Marguerite claims another name, but this time it is the name of her son:

Lee Harvey Oswald. Saying it like a secret they'd keep forever [...] Lee Harvey Oswald. No matter what happened, how hard they schemed against her, this was the one thing they could not take away – the true and lasting power of his name. It belonged to her now, and to history (L 456).

But this name that she is taking back is one that she never recognized as belonging to him in the first place; what she is taking back is the now externalized idea of her son that does indeed belong to history. This name only belongs to the Oswald after the shooting, and even then for just a few short days. In 'taking back' this name, she has possession of something that was never his to begin with, Oswald as a man in history.

However, DeLillo complicates this further by the addition of another imagining presence. Win Everett is of central importance to *Libra* because he is to produce the puppet that will carry out the botched assassination, inventing a character and a history that would reflect a growing dissatisfaction with the President. Everett, in his semi-retirement, living in comfortable suburban Texas and working as a teacher at a woman's college, must lay out a full enough paper trail to convincingly suggest a growing discontentment within the populous that finds its voice in a lone gunman. Nicholas Branch, the writer piecing together all of the thousands and thousands of pages of information and writing in the 80s, is often characterized as the DeLillo surrogate in this novel, but I will be suggesting here and elsewhere that DeLillo is not interested in author surrogates, so much as writers in the process of writing.

Everett's careful consideration of his own creative output makes him sound like a man who has decided to use his free time to write a novel:

He would put someone together, build an identity, a skein of persuasion and habit, ever so subtle. He wanted a man with believable quirks. He would create a shadowed room, the gunman's room, which investigators would eventually find, exposing each fact to relentless scrutiny, following each friend, relative, casual acquaintance into his own roomful of shadows. We lead more interesting lives than we think. We are characters in plots, without the compression and numinous sheen. Our lives, examined carefully in all their affinities and links, abound with suggestive meaning, with themes and involute turnings we have not allowed ourselves to see completely. He would show the secret symmetries in non-descript life (L 78).

Everett, in concocting this plan, is the writer of this narrative characterised by very ordinariness. Behind this phantom life, there must be a history that appears lived, full, and ordinary so that the gunman appears as non-noteworthy as possible. Everett realizes his need to fabricate what seems unbelievable, suggesting that this will allow everything to seem more believable: 'You have to leave them with coincidence, lingering mystery. This is what makes it real.' (L 147), he says, and later 'Croak coincidence so bizarre they have to believe it. Create a loneliness that beats with violent desire. This kind of man. Self-watcher' (L 147).

Everett doesn't count on the fact that Oswald exists already and that what he thought of as character emerges as increasingly real, leaving Everett to realize: 'It was no longer possible to hide from the fact that Lee Oswald existed independent of the plot' (L 178). When T. J. Mackey and Everett break into Oswald's small room above the detective agency Everett realizes the 'shadowed room' he sought to create as the imagined dwelling of his faceless shooter exists is an actuality, 'Small, dark, shabby, a desperate place, the gunman's perfect hutch' (L 180). This 'shadowed room' that same shadowed room he attempted to imagine earlier, is brought to life in eerie reality. This perfection, this neatness, fills him with dread: 'It produced a sensation of the eeriest panic, gave him a glimpse of the fiction he'd been devising, a fiction living prematurely in the world' (L 179). Rather than acknowledging Oswald's independence, it is as if his creation lives unfinished. His separation from the real life

of Oswald serves his purpose to be able to adequately imagine and fictionalise his character, but then seeing the materiality and evidence of this life, his work becomes unbearable. This itself is also a moment of disruption to DeLillo's text as text – when creator realizes the uncanny nature of seeing their creation live.

This is all made all the more poignant when considering the difference between Oswald as a man and Oswald as a character. DeLillo engages with the reality of Oswald as a man who existed, tracing his life from early childhood until his death. Borrowing quotes from his Historic Diary, DeLillo shows Oswald's struggle to fully submit to the history that will come to define him. These parallel plots, one fictional, and one supposedly based in reality are intertwined in the apparent doubling of the central creative force. And the text seems to suggest this at several points, Oswald noting, 'It was like a shadow of his own life keeps falling across his path' (L 133) and 'It is the shadow of his prior life that keeps appearing' (L 229). The appearance and reappearance of his former life, his past self, or a possible self demonstrates not only his lack of textual identity but also his status as character. His part in a palimpsest of fictions seems to be brought to the fore, as he at once belongs to and is separate from what occurs around him. Most striking is his absence from the document that is supposed to explain him: the Warren Commission report. This report is filled with voices that can attempt to represent his life, but will always remain conspicuously unable to vocalize just what it was that lead Oswald to this act.

Moreover, it the place where Everett creates his 'shadowed rooms', and his character that will shape and change the American future. But it is also in this room that he 'hone[d] his sense of the past' (L 179). Everett's shadowed room is a location out of time where he can contemplate time, even refining his life's own narrative. In contrast, Oswald's life is repeatedly depicted in small rooms. From his infancy with

his mother, to his incarceration as the JFK shooter, he exists room to room. When holed up in the brig in Astugi, Oswald starts to see his own imprisonment in its wider context:

He tried to feel history in the cell. This was the history out of George Orwell, the territory of no-choice. He could see how he'd been headed here since the day he was born. The brig was invented just for him. It was just another name for the stunted rooms where he'd spent his life (L 101).

Later, when talking to the spy Powers, Oswald is once more struck by the power of small rooms: 'Men in small rooms, in isolation. A cell is the basic state. They put you in a room and lock the door. So simple it is a form of genius. This is the final size of all the forces around you. Eight by fifteen (L 196).' These neat moments of clarity afford Oswald a moment of blissful stasis; his return to small rooms, and his ability to identify their position both within and without their wider contexts seems to alleviate something within him. In both of the above quotes, he is in some way coerced or forced into these small spaces, but in both it is in this stripping down to the 'basic state' that he makes realizations. In Everett's room he is suggesting and shaping, in Oswald's many rooms he is shaped, but ultimately simplified into a man subject to forces outside of his control. Again, Everett and Oswald are unified; creator and created. Oswald the patsy forced to consider his position in the future, Everett shaping the future, but seeking to understand his past.

This unification of creator and created is important not just in *Libra* but also in many of DeLillo's other novels. As Liste Noya comments: 'The proliferation of rooms and, particularly, men in small rooms intent on making sense of history and their place in throughout DeLillo's fiction would seem to establish some sort of alignment here that extends out to the reader's experience.'²⁷⁴ The creator and created,

²⁷⁴ Noya, p. 240.

in tandem with another, retreating away from the world, but one to escape from its pervasiveness and the other to recreate it elsewhere.

In DeLillo's later novel, *Zero K*, the protagonist Jeffrey expresses his desire for his ex-partner to see him ahistorically: 'I wanted her to see me in an isolated setting, outside the forces that made me.'²⁷⁵ In *Libra*, Oswald may exist in the text as a partial figure never fully present, but he exists in history as an historical signifier indefinitely. Cowart comments that 'DeLillo sees the fundamental irony of the outsider's eventual success in violently broaching history, placing himself inside at last.'²⁷⁶ DeLillo suggests the vacant space that lies at the centre of his novel enacting not only the dual absence and presence of Oswald himself, and the inescapable vacuum that was torn into the heart of America on that day in Dallas, but the work of plot itself.

Imagining an other: *The Angel Esmeralda*

'If he blinked an eye, she would disappear.'²⁷⁷

'Apart, we are together'²⁷⁸

In *Libra*, Oswald becomes a pressure point within the text, in which plot and character continually clash; in DeLillo's later fiction, the possibility for proximate knowledge remains at the forefront of his narratives, and the process of imagining, or inventing other characters is of central importance to many of the individuals in his narratives. DeLillo's characters are consistently attempting to unpick the unknowable

²⁷⁵ Don DeLillo, *Zero K*, (London: Picador, 2016), p. 271. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and are abbreviated to ZK.

²⁷⁶ Cowart, p. 103.

²⁷⁷ Don DeLillo, 'The Starveling,' *The Angel Esmeralda* (London: Picador, 2011). All references are hereafter taken from this edition and will be abbreviated to TS.

²⁷⁸ Stéphane Mallarmé trans. by Jacques Rancière, quoted in Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), p. 51.

secret that exists in close proximity but is characterized by its unknowability. The interaction between the internal and the external world finds its central point of complication in the individual's imagination. Characters attempt to create and excavate other lives that are sometimes counterparts to their own, but often function as additional external spaces. There are often confrontations between the imaginer and the imagined, whether as a real event or as another imagined consequence, undertaking complex and convoluted intellectual labour that suggests their own desire for a fleshed-out subjectivity, or for the *process* of fleshing out subjectivity; they desire to know and understand what subjectivity may mean through the attempt to embody another subjectivity that necessarily exists as separate to them. As I described earlier, Beckett's characters engage in a search for an other, which becomes inextricably bound up in the search for space. Through this confrontation with the ethics of creation, Beckett suggests that space in the novel is profoundly bound up in the politics of representation in demarcating and ultimately placing another in the space of fiction.

John Barth, in discussing Borges's story 'Tlön, Uqbar, Ortis Tertius' notes that the:

First Encyclopaedia of Tlön [...] describes a coherent alternative to this world complete in every respect from its algebra to its fire, Borges tells us, and of such imaginative power that, once conceived, it begins to obtrude itself into and eventually supplant our prior reality.²⁷⁹

In a similar way, DeLillo creates narrative from these imaginative processes that displace an internal exploration of a self, projecting it onto a space of another. DeLillo displaces the act of creating characters, the bedrock of realist fiction, by incorporating

²⁷⁹ John Barth 'The Literature of Exhaustion' from *The Friday Book: Essays and Other Non-Fiction* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 62-76, (p. 70).

them into the very narrative of creating. Characters affect one another through the possibilities and limitations of imagination. In his later work *The Body Artist*, for example, the strange ghostly man Mr Tuttle profoundly affects the protagonist Lauren Hartke through his unique subjectivity:

he'd placed her in a set of counter-surroundings, of simultaneous insides and outsides. The house, the sea-planet outside it, and how the word *alone* referred to her and to the house and how the word *sea* reinforced the idea of solitude but suggested a vigorous release as well, a means of escape from the book-walled limits of the self.²⁸⁰

Through Mr Tuttle, Lauren is brought to a strange juncture, in which freedom and constraint are conjoined. Like Beckett's characters, Mr Tuttle seems to deny a moment of 'now' in which she can grasp him as a person in time, causing her to rethink her being in space. DeLillo's characters often see answers to their status as an emplaced character in fiction through the creation of additional parallel fictions. Knowledge is always in dialogue with the unknowable: what they desire to know remains curiously absent from them, as they suggest and discard possibilities for others around them. In these simultaneously internal and external dramas, we can find a parallel in Kafka's 'abortive building attempts' (TB 185) of his creature in the burrow.

DeLillo's short story collection *The Angel Esmeralda*, published in 2011, contains many stories that contain the possibility for imagined spaces where other characters exist. Henry Veggian's suggests that DeLillo studies must reassess the importance of DeLillo's short fiction, rather than characterising the work as a precursor or a partial rendering of the themes in his novels.²⁸¹ And indeed, this collection contains an interesting thread that speaks directly to the concerns of this thesis: the inevitability of imagination and the interest in the lives of others. This

²⁸⁰ Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist* (London: Picador, 2001), p. 48.

²⁸¹ Veggian, p. 117.

process of imagining often starts with a snatched glance that appears unimportant but builds until it is the central impetus of the text, proliferating more possibilities that are conjured and discarded one after another. ‘Midnight in Dostoyevsky’²⁸² is entirely about the attempt to unravel the mystery of an unknowable person, as is ‘The Starveling’ but with different implications. ‘Creation’, ‘The Runner’ and ‘Baader Meinhof’ seek to understand a variety of situations by suggesting different possibilities through attempts to affix identities, events and preoccupations to characters through other characters. This section seeks to analyse the contribution of the short stories to the simultaneous inward and outward movement that DeLillo’s fiction enacts in other forms in the rest of his oeuvre.

‘Midnight in Dostoyevsky,’ the title taken from Frank O’Hara’s ‘Meditations in an Emergency,’ tracks the conversations of two young men, attending a college ‘at the edge of a small town way upstate’ (MiD 119), who become fascinated with two older men, their logic professor and an old man they see wondering the sparsely populated streets. The narrative is structured by their conversations and arguments, each interaction they have furthering the imagined narrative of this man, intercut with their seminars with Professor Ilgauskas, a philosopher of logic. In its repetitive move from conversation to the classroom, the narrative is curiously static, working against the progression of the imagined life held in the two young men’s minds.

The narrator introduces the two of them as ‘we’ from the first line: ‘We were two somber boys hunched in our coats, grim winter settling in’ (MiD 119) immediately unifying them through their physicality and shared perspective. They are only characterized as different when they encounter another person: something that is

²⁸² Don DeLillo, ‘Midnight in Dostoevsky,’ *The Angel Esmeralda* (London: Picador, 2011). All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to MiD.

established earlier as being a rare occurrence in this remote place. They see a man wearing a coat about which they promptly start to argue: 'It was our routine; we were ever ready to find a matter to contest' (MiD 119). This is the first point of difference between them, demonstrating the beginning of the pattern of finding difference as a way to solidify their unity. Throughout the story, trees, Inuits, and coats all become fair game in these exchanges, as it is not the definition that becomes important but the point of difference: 'Even in matters of pure physical reality, we depended on a friction between our basic faculties of sensation, his and mine, and we understood now that the rest of the afternoon would be spent in the marking of differences' (MiD 121). Joined together in the pronoun 'we' they are simultaneously pulled together and pulled apart by their shared seeking of their differences, and the accumulation of facts and possible definitions.

These conversations and searches for difference are then contrasted with the voice of the singular Professor Ilgauskas, whose lessons are represented in short mysterious sentences taken from out of context: 'The atomic fact,' 'and 'F and not-F' (MiD 123), these sentences hang suspended in the narrative and literally on the page, on an indented sentence away from the rest of the paragraphs. His intelligence and complexity are a source of fascination to his students:

He seemed a man in a trance state. But he wasn't simply absent from his remarks, another drained voice echoing down the tunnel of teaching years. We'd decided, some of us that he was suffering from a neurological condition. He was not bored but simply unbound, speaking freely and erratically out of a kind of stricken insight. It was a question of neurochemistry. We'd decided that the condition was not understood well enough to have been given a name. And if it did not have a name, we said, paraphrasing a proposition in logic, then it could not be treated (MiD 122-3).

In their inability to understand, the students – at least some of them – find an explanation in an unnamed condition. This unknowable illness manifests itself in his separateness, and in the quality of his isolated, obscure sentences. The narrator uses

‘we’ again to unify this group of individuals as distinct from the space of their professor. They differentiate themselves further from him through their (again shared) suggestion of his view of them:

He didn’t want to know who we were. We were passersby to him, smeary faces, we were roadkill. It was an aspect of his neurological condition, we thought, to regard others as displaceable, and this seemed interesting, seemed part of the course, displaceability, one of the truth functions that he referred to now and then (MiD 130).

Their indefiniteness is directly related to their increased confidence in their definition of him: they are a blurry whole in another collective ‘we’. There appears to be a tacit agreement that ‘The questions he asked were unanswerable, at least by us, and he was not expecting answers, in any case.’ The exchange in this classroom is the about the exchange of knowledge, but not of intellectual knowledge, but between the collective and individual subjectivity – he is imagined in sharper focus as a man not to be understood. In fact, their non-understanding starts to take on a different quality:

We didn’t want to like him, only to believe in him. We tendered our deepest trust to the stark nature of his methodology. Of course, there was no methodology. There was only Ilgauskas. He challenged our reason for being, what we thought, how we lived, the truth or falsity of what we believed to be true or false (MiD 131-2).

He becomes representative of their collective belief, a quasi-God transcending the basic category of knowing. The students instead reify his existence, turning his unknowability into a more concrete position, characterized by that very unknowability.

Ilguaskas introduces the young men to a new kind of thought and understanding of the world: that of not understanding it. The conclusion to these abstract lessons appears to find the resolution in the old man in the hooded coat that appears at the beginning. From the possible differences in his coat, arises the possibility for a whole life, a life that was always theirs to understand: ‘This was why the man had been born, to end up in this town wearing that coat’ (MiD 119). As

Virginia Woolf discusses in 'Character in Fiction': 'Here is a character imposing itself upon another person.'²⁸³ He has a quality that suggests its need to be unravelled: unlike their professor who becomes clearer to them as they believe in his unknowability and his unnameable disease, this man seems to ask to be made *more* distinct.

Their knowledge of Ilgauskas coupled with the revelation from another student that he 'reads Dostoevsky day and night' (MiD 138) leads the narrators to decide that these two men must be related to one another. This detail of the Russian author proves to be the 'crystalline link: the old man to Ilgauskas to Dostoevsky to Russia. I thought about it all the time. Todd said it would become my life's work. I would spend my life in a thought bubble, purifying the link' (MiD 141). But this purity and clarity only works as a thought because it can *only* work in thought. When Todd asks Robbie just how important Russian is to this narrative he is creating, Robbie responds, "That's not the point. The point is that it all fits together. It's a formulation, it's artful, it's structured" (MiD 138). DeLillo's familiar 'this is the point,' a phrase that reoccurs throughout his oeuvre, is reversed here: the possibility of its coherence is the most important aspect of the imagining. Through this other man, Robbie begins to construct his very own house of fiction.

The story ends in an argument that sees the two boys suggesting radically different conclusions to this imaginary discovery. For Robbie, the momentary proximity of walking by him in the street is enough to confirm his ideas: 'He looked misplaced, isolated, someone who could easily be the man we were in the process of imagining' (MiD 142-3). But for Todd, this moment indicates the need for other moments with him:

²⁸³ Woolf, p. 42.

“We’ll ask a few questions, that’s all. Quiet, low key. Find out a few things.”
 “It’s never been a matter of literal answers” (MiD 143).

In this exchange lies the important distinction between these characters and the quality of their imagining: for both the details need to be ironed out, and argued over, but its existence as possibility is enough for Robbie. Todd needs the clarification from the man himself. The men tussle over the possibility of a conversation with the old man, and the narrative ends with their separation as Todd watches Robbie run off. Their friendship, though based in differences and antagonisms, was still unified in this joint enterprise. This final break marks their separation from one another: ‘I couldn’t make sense of it. I felt completely detached...I wondered what it was that had caused this thing to happen’ (MiD 145). The narrative suggests two issues at stake in imagining another, as represented by each character: either knowledge only has meaning when confirmed in reality, or one must acknowledge the multitudinous possibilities that exist regardless of an externalized reality. John Frow comments of this story that:

The act of imagining depends not on invention *ex nihilo* but a filling out the details of the type. The narrator and Todd are novelists, imitating a reality made up of nothing but types, stereotypes, the exemplary figures of their cultural stories.²⁸⁴

Though the imaged characters may indeed appear to be ‘types’ I want to argue that it is the *process* of ‘filling out’ that DeLillo emphasises. The narrative ends in a definitive split between truth and fiction. In ending the narrative in this argument, DeLillo emphasises that this is not about confirming truth, but exploring possibilities. DeLillo does not attempt to prioritise different kinds of knowledge, but instead suggest different kinds of knowledge can exist simultaneously.

²⁸⁴ Frow, p. 125.

The most recent story in the collection, 'The Starveling,' in DeLillo's words, 'is about an incomplete man and his acquiescence to a static life.'²⁸⁵ His seeming incompleteness manifests itself in repetitive visits to the movie theatre, a lonely vocation he has fallen into without quite understanding why. One day he sees another solitary figure, also attending movies alone, and starts to imagine her life, until he corners her in a bathroom, delivers a long rambling monologue, and returns home. Though it bears a strong resemblance to MiD due to its emphasis on the imagined life of an other, the primary character is even more indistinct here, and so the process of imagining is also revealing of the status of the subject. As opposed to MiD which searches for some kind of collective imagination, considering the distinction between the self and the collective, here the two most prominent characters, Leo and Flory his 'windblown' (TS 194) ex-wife and sometime roommate, live as outsiders from society and apart from each other.

Leo has lived alone in a room for a prolonged period of time, repeating the same actions and living curiously separate from his life, and even from his name:

His name was Leo Zhelezniak. It took half a lifetime before he began to fit into the name. Did he think there was a resonance in the name, or a foreignness, a history, that he could never earn...Maybe he would feel this separation no what matter what name he carried (TS 186).

In a familiar DeLilloan configuration that I described earlier in relation to Oswald in *Libra*, the name carries a particular secret significance that comes with a possible history. Here, the unusual Russian surname bears the weight of a whole cultural, social and historical milieu that feels oppressively present. Like Bloomberg in EZ, Leo understands belonging in terms of scale. This partial belonging to his background expresses his denial of a defining subject position; his separation from his name is

²⁸⁵ Don DeLillo quoted in 'Don DeLillo: Interview,' Yuka Igarashi, *Granta* <http://granta.com/interview-don-delillo/>, accessed May 22nd 2017.

representative of his inability to submit himself to any kind of larger social construct, and establishes a pattern in the text of his inability to see himself in any definitive social position.

Leo here begins to demonstrate some capacity for imagining alterity, but only in regards to himself:

he imagined himself being foreign, walking stooped and unshaven along the sides of buildings, although he didn't know why this seemed foreign. He could see himself in another life, some nameless city in Belarus or Romania... These visions would fade in seconds but in a curious way, a serious way, they had the density of a lifetime compressed (TS 193).

His internalised foreignness and absence from his name finds its logical extension in a fantasy of otherness in an unnameable place. The question becomes, however, when he imagines himself 'being foreign' in a 'nameless city,' would he still have his Russian-sounding name? Or would he be named 'Joe Smith,' something suitably American in Russian-bordering, Russian-speaking Belarus? But contained within this vision is more otherness; there is no recipe here for a happier life but instead an additional alternative, another shade of foreignness. He is still 'walking stooped,' suggesting perhaps that even in his fantasy, his imagination is limited to circuitous tramping around. His vision also has a static quality, a flashing isolated moment that communicates much in a short time.

But what is it that has caused this seemingly chosen suspension? Flory tries to give possible explanations:

He was an ascetic, she said. This was one theory. She found something saintly and crazed in his undertaking, an element of self-denial, an element of penance. Sit in the dark, revere the images. Were his parents Catholic? Did his grandparents go to mass every day, before first light, in some village in the Carpathian Mountains, repeating the words of a priest with a long white beard and golden cloak? Where were the Carpathian Mountains? She spoke late at night, usually in bed, bodies in rest, and he liked listening to these ideas. They were impeccable fictions, with no attempt on her part to get his rendering of what might be case (TS 187).

Questions abound in this possible scenario, as Flory suggests a religious significance in his choice of life. DeLillo himself has commented that ‘I’m not sure I have a clear explanation for the asceticism of my characters in general’²⁸⁶ but it seems that it arises from a notional paring down, an emptying out of life to its barest frame. She also recognizes his otherness not only from others, but from his life itself: ‘Flory thought he did not have to imagine an alternative life as a foreigner. He was actually leading an alternative life. In real life, she said, he is a schoolteacher in one of the outer boroughs’ (TS 194). Flory’s guessing games at the beginning of the text foreshadow the prevalence that they will have in the remainder of the text, as well as the relationship between sameness and difference that will come to categorise the imagining process. Flory, a part-time traffic announcer and actress, is reminiscent of Lauren Harte in *The Body Artist*, often meditating for hours in rigid poses that paradoxically seem to obscure her from view: ‘she seemed nearly swallowed by her surroundings, on the verge of melting out of sight, dematerializing’ (TS 195). This dematerialising is characterized by repetition and return, whether it is Flory’s poses or Leo’s position at the last step on the stair before he heads inside his apartment.

Within this static time, Leo seems to have no sense of why he behaves in the way he does. He does not respond to Flory’s suggestions, and in the course of the narrative asserts that he is going to the movies to be at the movies, to be ‘bare-faced, bare-souled [...] in the isolated dark’ (TS 206). In this space he can be naked, but his nakedness is masked in the shadows, and is necessarily isolated from others around him. In many ways, Leo fulfils Richard Smithson’s discussion of the filmgoer:

²⁸⁶ Don DeLillo quoted in Mark Binelli, ‘Intensity of plot,’ *Guernica magazine*, https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/intensity_of_a_plot/, accessed May 22nd 2017.

The ultimate film-goer would be a captive of sloth. Sitting constantly in a movie house, among the flickering shadows, his perception would take on a kind of sluggishness. He would be the hermit dwelling among the elsewhere, forging the salvation of reality...He would not be able to distinguish between good or bad films, all would be swallowed up into an endless blur. He would not be watching films, but rather experiencing blurs of many shades [...] This dozing consciousness would bring about a tepid abstraction. It would increase the gravity of perception. Like tortoise crawling over a desert, his eyes would crawl across the screen. All films would be brought into equilibrium—a vast mud filed of images forever motionless.²⁸⁷

Smithson unifies a sluggish experience of time with a ‘salvation of reality’ dredged up through the ‘flickering shadows.’ Leo has a half-life, in which he moves amongst images truer than his own life.

It is only later and through following this woman, ultimately projecting his own life onto her, that he begins to piece together some of the reasoning behind the decisions he is making, an emerging acknowledgement that his cinema-going may be pathological, suggestive of a repressed desire that needs release: ‘Did he know why he was doing this, any of it, from the instant he decided to take the wrong train, her train? There was nothing to know. It was minute-to-minute, see what’s next’ (TS 196). Here, Martin Amis comments, DeLillo ‘avowedly abjures all cause and effect...and enters the void of the motiveless.’²⁸⁸ The organizing principle of the action becomes these minute movements forward, the minutes themselves leading him to make these decisions. He exists out of time, but his decisions only exist within it and because of it.

This temporal trajectory, to *do* only in time, but to *be* outside of it finds its conclusion in this other moviegoer. In her, he finds some obscure purpose, in his identification of her purposeless and in her indistinctness, but that can only be realised

²⁸⁷ Richard Smithson, ‘A Cinematic Atopia,’ *Collected Writings* (London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 142.

²⁸⁸ Martin Amis, ‘Laureate of Terror: Don DeLillo’s prophetic soul,’ *The New Yorker*, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/11/21/laureate-of-terror>, accessed May 19th 2017.

in his feelings of her inevitability that she appeared specifically for him. Like the men in *MiD*, a brief glimpse piques his interest; she seems different from these other nomads, moving from cinema to cinema. But unlike the characters in *MiD*, this is the only time Leo has found something worth his attention. He is ‘searching for something he could not identify. Then he saw her across the street. She was born to be unseen, he thought except by him’ (TS 204). She is an inevitability for him, just as the character was for Robbie and Todd, but instead of being a locus of creativity and possibility, she is a sight to be ‘unseen’, except to him, another one of these unseen, and by extension, an unseer.

The narrative shifts as Leo snatches at ideas and, for the first time, the narrative includes sustained interpretative thought. Through this new form of thought, Leo begins to use her as an indirect way of accessing himself:

He thought a number of things. He thought she was a person who lived within herself, remote, elusive, whatever else. Her gaze was down and away, into nothing. He scanned the ad panels above the windows, reading the Spanish copy over and over. She had no friends, one friend. This is how he chose to define her, for now, in the early stages (TS 196).

He begins to amass a selection of thoughts that emerge piecemeal, an interpretation that is strikingly similar to the reader’s perception of his own character. Living within ‘herself, remote, elusive, whatever else’ he uses words that echo his own self-displacement. Her gaze ‘into nothing’ is also reminiscent of the lack of driving force in his life so far. The sentence, ‘she had no friends’ and then the modifier, ‘one friend’ shows the immediacy of thought, as if Leo is drawing himself into her life. The emergence of his desire for some unnamed conclusion lies in the phrases ‘for now’ and ‘early stages.’ Both suggest this is a preliminary diagnosis, one that will be added to at a later date; but how this verification might take place remains unsettlingly vague.

These guessing games continue as he sits behind her in the movie theatre:

He was practically breathing on her and this proximity helped him work his way into things that hadn't been clear up to now. She was a woman alone. This had to be the case. She lives alone, in one room, as he did. Those were years that still gathered force in his memory, and the choice he would make, the fact of this life, scratched-out, gouged-out, first became a vision in that room' She looks down at warped floorboards. There is no bathtub, only a shower with tinny sides that rattle if you lean on them. She forgets to bathe, forgets to eat. She lies in bed, eyes open, and replays scenes from the day's films, shot by shot. She has the capacity to do this. It is natural, it is innate. She doesn't care about the actors, only the characters (TS 198).

Like MiD, proximity provides another kind of knowledge. But, Leo has seemingly decided from the outset that she *is* like him, distancing both her and himself from 'the other, the floating group of four or five people who made the circuit every day, each keeping to his or her rigid schedule' (TS 188). They exist in a world of exactly two, physically polar opposites but unified through their shared purposeless:

Okay, he understands this. She steps away from her own shadow. She is a scant being trying to find a place to be. But there was something she had to understand. This is everyday life, this is the job day to day. Your head is folded into a newspaper or plugged into a telephone so you can measure movie times against estimated travel times. You make the slate, keep the hours, remain true to the plan. This was what we do, he thought (TS 199).

He has already identified himself with her through the change in pronoun from 'she' to 'you' even before he concludes using 'we.' DeLillo again demonstrates the power of the 'we' pronoun in conjunction with the imagining process by suggesting the relationship between a kind of collective, group mentality, and assimilating an individual either within or without it. The 'we' is an inclusion into something, but the imaging processes that are occurring are necessarily elsewhere, absent. This play with pronouns also returns at the end of the story as Leo's 'drift[s] toward a state of neutral observation' (TS 207) that sees him describe the events taking place in third person plural. Leo's perspective shifts from me, to we, to they.

But his use of language also starts to shift in tone, as his comments about her become increasingly medical:

She is also erratic, possibly self-destructive [...] It occurred to him that what he was doing made complete sense, to define her as someone who has taken this life, their life, to its predetermined limit. She has no recourse to sensible measures. She is pure, he is not. Does she forget her name? Is it possible for her to imagine the slightest semblance of well-being? (TS 202)

His mental descriptions of her make 'complete sense' to him, suggesting that these internal conversations are mere extensions of his movie-going. In his definition of her then, lies an insidious suggestion that they have both submitted themselves to a kind of death-in-life, that there is nowhere else for them to go. The identification of this parameter also foreshadows the confrontation that comes at the end: a confrontation that must necessarily take place in order to relieve whatever he is repressing.

In labelling her 'pure' and he as not, he begins to make larger assumptions about the morality of the life they both lead. Is this life reflective of an internal sickness? Adorno's discussion of sickness and its relation to health is helpful in unpicking Leo's use of diagnostic language. Adorno describes sickness as existing in a binary with health, reminiscent of Murphy's translation of ill patients from the sick inside, to the healthy outside. Those who are most healthy live lives most obviously adhering to societal norms, and are those who have fully submitted themselves to capitalism.²⁸⁹ Both Leo and 'The Starveling' are sick through their deviating from norms, in their extreme physical dimensions, small and large respectively, and in their isolated lives. It is in her youth and beauty, that he recognizes difference through sameness; he recognizes his own sickness through a distanced identification, and moreover, gains a purpose within his own sickness in studying another's. And yet, it seems important to him that 'Maybe there was no technical term or medical name for what she did or what she was. She just wandered on past, free of all that' (TS 203). As the sufferer or another one of DeLillo's unnamed diseases, she lives outside of

²⁸⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 58-9.

binary, ultimately reinforcing the image of her life as elsewhere, one that refuses to engage with any of the parameters that would give her a diagnosis in the first place.

This is also suggested through physical differences. Her thin body compared to his ‘big, slow’ (TS 185) one could also suggest this purity: she denies herself ‘all those fistful of saturated fat’ (TS 185) that he cannot help but consume. The name he gives her, ‘The Starveling,’ is both literal and figurative. In his decision to diagnose her as ‘an anorectic but not quite’ he implies another kind of voyeurism. As Maud Ellmann discusses:

Even though the anorectic body seems to represent a radical negation of the other, it still depends upon the other as spectator in order to be *read* as representative of anything at all. Thus its emaciation, which seems to indicate a violent rebuff, also bespeaks a strange adventure in seduction.²⁹⁰

In his diagnosis of her as a partial or possible anorectic, he not only becomes this spectator, but the only spectator – in giving her this partial diagnosis, he becomes the sole spectator for a disease only he has named. In a reversal of Kafka’s ‘Hunger Artist’, in which the artist is the one who truly understands and views his own art, Leo is the only one who ‘sees’ the body of this woman. She functions both as an extension of his repression, and also a symbol of food he cannot deny himself. Her small body becomes the site of a complex transference, where she is both an antidote and a poison to his curious malady.

The final confrontation in a bathroom sees his ultimate detachment from his own image as a man existing in this place at this very moment: ‘He tried to imagine what he looked like to her, a man of some size, some years, but what did he look like to anyone? He had no idea’ (TS 207). His shift ‘toward a state of neutral observation’ (TS 207) where ‘[h]e didn’t know what would happen next’ (TS 207). In this position,

²⁹⁰ Maud Ellmann, *The Hunger Artists* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 17.

he no longer has to worry about fitting into his surname, his motivations, or even what he looks like. He can instead wait for the events to take place:

There were gaps in the silence, a feeling of stop and go. She was looking past him. She had the face and eyes of someone distant in time, a woman, in a painting, curtains hanging in loose folds. He wanted one of them to say something (TS 207).

At this moment, she is a character in a movie that Leo watches, a character whose eyes do not quite meet the eye line of the audience member. In this way, his whole life becomes a movie, and he can finally apply the feeling of safety he outlined earlier, in real life. Leo reverses Daniel Dayan's assertion that a viewer's relationship with the camera comes to be characterised by a partial possession²⁹¹ of the space between characters and objects, and therefore 'feels dispossessed of what he is prevented from seeing'²⁹², by finding the limiting of the frame of the screen *empowering*. The story, which has formulated itself on top of an increasing threat of sexual violence, undercuts itself by instead performing a moment of pure cinema in which he both narrates and watches the film.

'The Starveling' then is a story that allows a damaged character a small opportunity to understand his own position through imagining the live of another based on the ostensible sameness of life but physical difference of body. The size of the other body, and its perceived purity next to Leo's huge body allows him to engage in a psychic transference and a momentary alleviation of his own alienation through the creation of a third neutral space where he can exist as a neutral observer rather than participant. The imagining process here then enables the protagonist to momentarily alleviate himself from his own position, reinforcing the partiality that

²⁹¹ Daniel Dayan, 'The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema,' *Film Quarterly*, 28.1 (1974), pp. 22-31, (p. 29).

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

comes with these acts of creativity. DeLillo posits the space of the other as a conduit for being, an inexact transitional object through which we can find some place in the world.

Space becoming art: *Zero K*

‘No but now, now, simply stay still, standing before a window, one hand on the wall, the other clutching your shirt, and see the sky, a long gaze, but no, gasps and spasms, a childhood sea, other skies, another body.’²⁹³

In *Zero K*, DeLillo’s 2016 novel, DeLillo seems to transform his interest in imagination to its relationship with memory, in a new deep attention to the fleeting sensations and emotions that make up childhood. This is not an idealised childhood, or a Proustian transportation back in time, but instead a recovery in the form of a piecemeal personal archaeology, dredged up through half-remembered words, rhythms and rituals. Peeling the label off of an apple, rubbing the edge of a wallet in a pocket to check that it is still there, closing one’s eyes in a dark room, DeLillo imbues these moments with a stilled wonder, as if they can mean both everything and nothing in their mundanity: ‘I inhale the little drizzly details of the past and know who I am’ (ZK 109). Though ostensibly about the possibilities of science, focusing as it does on a cryonics facility in Kyrgyzstan,²⁹⁴ it is a novel about seeing and knowing space.

As in *MiD* and *TS*, the protagonist Jeffrey is a keen observer of others, attempting to understand himself and the world through the observation and imagining

²⁹³ Beckett ‘Fizzles 6,’ *Complete Short Prose*, p. 239.

²⁹⁴ In a talk at the Barbican with Alex Clark, DeLillo noted that this work is firmly in the realm of speculative science. Unlike many of his other novels—most obviously *Ratner’s Star* for which he did a tremendous amount of research in a field of mathematics—DeLillo did not want to furnish *Zero K* with accurate science, and in fact, the ambiguous possibility of the science he does suggest speaks more suggestively to his central themes. I will not be focusing on the idea of cryonics and death in this section because his discussions of space speak absolutely to my earlier concerns.

of other people; this imagining and understanding often comes from naming: 'She would not be real until I gave her a name' (ZK 72). Jeffrey's obsession with naming seems to stem from his dissatisfaction with his own name 'The name Lockhart was all wrong for me. Too tight, too clenched. The solid and decisive Lockhart, the firm closure of Lockhart. The name excluded me. All I could do was peer into it from outside.' (ZK 83) Like Leo Zhelzeniak, there is a disconnect between himself and the name, as if the name is literally demarcating a space he should fit into. The name becomes short-hand for the space that should be occupied by the subject. In seeking to know and understand others around him, Jeffrey seeks to redraw the boundaries of intimate knowledge, and indeed self-knowledge.

As the above descriptions of the relationship between imagination and character began to suggest, the problems of knowing or understanding others is often at the fore of DeLillo's work. In this novel, DeLillo's protagonist is again highly invested in this as a strategy; it is however, constituted as a failed imaginative process, an inability to locate another individual in the world: if in the two stories mentioned above from *The Angel Esmeralda*, this process of imagining was used as a way of shore up the boundary of self and other, in this novel, DeLillo takes us beyond this point. Throughout the novel the phrase 'tried to imagine' (ZK 26, 47, 63, 125, 148, 190, 224, 272) is repeated several times, as Jeffrey seems unable to think of other lives; when he gives money to homeless people, he notes: 'I see this all the time and always pause to give them something and what I feel is that I don't know how to imagine the lives behind the momentary contact, the dollar contact' (ZK 222). Through the denuding of the bodies through the cryonics procedures that both his step-mother and father undertake Jeffrey seems to engage in a similar process, in which he realises the lack of particularity of other lives through simple gestures or moments:

‘Sometimes history is single lives in momentary touch’ (ZK 237). This momentary ‘touch’ it seems, is not I suggest physical proximity, as shown in the exchange of a dollar, but a kind of ‘convergence’, a movement towards one another, founded through different means.

This exploration of the relationships between individuals is also echoed in the relationship between Jeffrey and the spaces he moves through. In his observations he notes ‘[t]his is what I did in any new environment. I tried to inject meaning, make the place coherent or at least locate myself within the place, to confirm my uneasy presence’ (ZK 10). This search for belonging and coherence finds an echo in the architecture of the cryogenic facility, named, fittingly, Convergence (reminiscent of the chapter title from *Ratner’s Star* which I discussed earlier). Jeffrey defines it thus: ‘Two distinct forces approaching a point of intersection. The merger, breath to breath, of end and beginning’ (ZK 255). Elaine Showalter identifies a unity in theme and form in that, ‘the convergence is also about the parts of the novel coming together.’²⁹⁵ In the novel’s careful organisation in three parts, ‘The Time of Chelyabinsk’ named after the meteor that hit that area in 2013, ‘Artis Martineau’ and ‘In the Time of Kostantinovka’ named after the Ukrainian uprising in 2014, it enacts this convergence, in which environmental and political effects are literally felt in and on the bodies of humans. The novel attempts to bring together these disparate themes as a means of conceiving of a new fictional space.

This is also found in the building the novel contains, which, as one of the guides notes, is reflective of its purpose:

²⁹⁵ Elaine Showalter, ‘The Frozen Ones,’ *Prospect Magazine*, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/the-frozen-ones>, accessed May 13th 2017.

Your situation, those few of you on the verge of the journey toward rebirth. You are completely outside the narrative of what we refer to as history. There are no horizons here. We are pledged to inwardness, a deep probing focus on who and where we are (ZK 237).

As the barriers between Jeffrey and others seem to be insurmountable, DeLillo collapses the distinction between the building and the concept of art itself. DeLillo has always been interested in the gallery space and in the ways that individuals look at art and can be looked at while looking at art.²⁹⁶ In the creation of this building, DeLillo creates a new kind of land art that is expansive and unlimited, where the artwork exists in its very possibility of existence, its becoming-art:

Artis says we ought to regard it as a work-in-progress, an earthwork, a form of earth art, land art. Built up out of the land and sunk back down into it as well. Restricted access. Defined by stillness, both human and environmental. A little tomblike as well. The earth is the guiding principle...Return to the earth, emerge from the earth (ZK 10).

Like *Ratner's Star*, this structure is built to project outwards whilst also suggesting a movement downward back to earth. Unlike the earlier structure, which played with the idea of subterranean burrowing, the 'restricted access' of this 'earthwork' is a kind of tomb. DeLillo's has transformed the rhizomatic exploration of tunnels into a building that foreshadow its own collapse, a building that feels decidedly more final.

It is both a functional space, and a space to be looked at, filled with a series of corridors containing doors that lead nowhere and suddenly appearing artworks. Walking along the corridors, Jeffrey experiences a new kind of being in space that is directly related to looking at art.

I was led to a room in which all four walls were covered with a continuous painted image of the room itself. There were only three pieces of furniture, two chairs and a low table, all depicted from several angles. I remained standing, turning my head and then my body to scan the mural. The fact of four plane surfaces being a likeness of themselves as well as background for

²⁹⁶ I discuss this later in my conclusion, but see Graley Herren, 'Don DeLillo's Art Stalkers,' *Modern Fiction Studies*, 61.1 (2015), pp. 138-67 for more extended analysis.

three objects of spatial extent struck me as a subject worthy of some deep method of inquiry, phenomenology maybe, but I wasn't equal to the challenge (ZK 252).

Jeffrey considers that this chance encounter with art 'met the standards of unlikelihood, or daring dumb luck, that can mark the most compelling art' (23-4). This contingent artwork exists in its moment before creation, refiguring a new space between individual and object, suggested only in its possibilities.

This is not DeLillo's first exploration into land art. In his play *Love-Lies-Bleeding*, this return to the earth converges with this notion of the artwork as a structure that exists literally underground and as a space inside the human mind. Alex and his ex-wife Toinette, sit discussing a project that Alex has been attempting to undertake for quite some time, the excavating of a space inside of a mountain:

Alex

A chamber, a cubical room. Fashioned out of solid rock. Precise dimensions. A large empty room. Six congruent square surfaces. Painted. Ocher and amber. Old colors. Burnt brick. Lamp-black. All six surfaces every square inch.

Toinette

Painted.

Alex

Painted.

Toinette

And the paintings. What do I see exactly?

Alex

You understand this will never happen. It'll never get that far. I don't want to describe the paintings anyway. Wouldn't be able to²⁹⁷

The two fashion this space through their shared imagining, but Alex is quick to deny this project as an actual possibility. In a play about aging and dying, this scene stands out as hopefully continuous, allowing for a space where the two characters can be

²⁹⁷ Don DeLillo, *Love-Lies-Bleeding* (London: Picador, 2005), p. 59.

momentarily unified through the emptied room. This is a man that was, in his son's words 'a large presence, out there somewhere, with hair and teeth. He was a force in people's lives' (LLB 25). He both 'drew people in' and 'consumed and absorbed them,' suggesting the permeability between himself and others, a boundary that can be traversed by the very 'largeness' of an individual. Alex abandons his easel to start creating 'land art': Toinette explains: 'It's all one thing. The art, the artist, the landscape, the sky' (LLB 62). Rather than staying inside, this expansive individual attempts to unify himself, the world, and the artwork in one grand gesture of process; a deterritorialisation that acknowledges a return and an absence simultaneously. In this interpenetrative formulation, one does not constitute the other, but instead converges in a moment of radical possibility, held inwards, burrowed away, subterranean.

Rosi Braidotti, in her discussion of nomadism, considers the work of artists who have created installations in or about public spaces. She discusses Martha Rosler's 'In the Place of the Public' (1983-1990) in which Rosler takes a series of photographs of a variety of places that DeLillo has always shown an interest in, such as airports and motels.²⁹⁸ Braidotti sees the convergence of art and these curious non-places as creating a paradox, turning a public space into a place that can be read, that is also under the jurisdiction of rules:

In Rosler's vision, public spaces are sites that mark rites of passage and are subjected to culture-specific imperatives such as schedules, rhythms of production, allowed or forbidden directions, loading and unloading, areas of transition, and spaces of transactions. Space is an abstraction ruled by the logic of the market economy and, as such, it is "permeated with social relations." The great merit of Rosler's art is to have captured both aspects of these areas of transit: their instrumental value as well as their peculiarly seductive anonymity.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ These spaces Marc Augé terms non-places; see Augé, *Non-Places: An Introduction to Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1992).

²⁹⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (Columbia Press: New York, 1994), p. 19.

Art in the public space can therefore unify the processes of reading with a particular kind of snatched anonymity. For Rosi Braidotti, the work of Martha Rosler, the billboards of Barbara Kruger and the projections of Jenny Holzer transform the public space:

In their hands, areas of transit and passage become contemporary equivalents of the desert, not only because of the enormous, alienating solitude that characterizes them but also because they are heavily marked by signs and boards indicating a multitude of possible directions, to which the artist adds her own, unexpected and disruptive one.³⁰⁰

Their artworks reconfigure the possibility of the public space, suggesting the possibility for meaning and its very lack simultaneously. This paradox is useful when thinking about DeLillo's unmade artwork within the mountain.³⁰¹ This painting and excavation still functions as a kind of land art, a public kind of art that is also private and secluded. Clearly reminiscent of Palaeolithic cave paintings, these indescribable, uncreated artworks would exist in a space transformed by their presence, and yet would remain unviewed.

In *Zero K*, this interest in land art can be seen in several scenes, mostly through a relation to stone. At one point, Jeffrey and his father are led to a room in which the whole thing appears to be made of marble.

I tried to imagine the experience even as I saw it. What made the experience so elusive? A large room, a couple of men standing and looking. A woman at the entrance, dead still. An art gallery, I thought, with nothing in it. The gallery is the art, the space itself, the walls, the floor. On an enormous marble tomb, a mass gravesite emptied of bodies or waiting for bodies. No ornamental cornice or frieze, just flat walls of shiny marble (ZK 148).

³⁰⁰ Braidotti, p. 20.

³⁰¹ Though there isn't space for me to enter into a debate about what comes under the definition of public art, I am using it as a catch-all term, meaning artworks that are removed from the traditional gallery setting. Moreover, the usage of 'public art' suggests that it needs to be viewed in this way, as public; land art also demands a similar viewing, viewed in the context of its surrounding and as actively in conversation with its setting.

The marble gallery becomes the artwork itself, space and artwork unified. The artwork is the space that waits for death, suggesting the bodies that are not there. In another scene, Jeffrey visits a gallery with Emma and her son Stak to see what he terms ‘an interior rock sculpture’ (ZK 214). This bare space only contains a rock, an object that Stak notes will outlive them all. Like ‘Ill Seen Ill Said’ in which ‘[e]verywhere stone is gaining,’ (ISIS 57), stones encroach upon the territory of this novel, as if, in the in-between stages of death and life, rocks can posit an alternative mode of being. As Jeffrey notes, echoing Heidegger: ‘*Rocks are, but they do not exist*’ (ZK 218). If Kafka, according to Adorno, ‘collapses aesthetic distance,’³⁰² then the use of rocks as artwork collapse and extend aesthetic distance, placing the individuals who views them somewhere in between. These singular artworks engender singular experiences of art. When Jeffrey thinks back to the room he stayed in the Convergence, it is rather reminiscent of Beckett’s post trilogy work that Gontarski noted had become so still:

Sometimes I think of the room, the scant roomscape, wall, floor, door, bed, a monosyllabic image, all but abstract, and I try to see myself sitting in the chair and that’s all there is, highly detailed, this thing and that thing and the man in the chair, waiting for his escort to knock on the door (ZK 271).

In trying to create a ‘monosyllabic image,’ DeLillo suggests the possibility for a memory to become a hermeti, as if a memory can become singular and exactly contain the simultaneity of thoughts and feelings brought about in a moment. This is reminiscent of the scene discussed above from *Falling Man* in which Lianne finds herself look at a Morandi still life: ‘The two dark objects, the white bottle, the huddled boxes. Lianne turned away from the painting and saw the room itself as a still life, briefly’ (FM 111). The painting becomes the room, or the room lives in the painting. Through her looking at the painting, her external life is merged with that space of the

³⁰² Adorno, ‘Notes on Kafka,’ p. 246.

artwork, but only momentarily, fleetingly. This a moment in which she is both inside and outside simultaneously. In my discussion of his earlier work, DeLillo posits a way for plot and character to work against each other, as a way of suggesting a way of being within and without the world simultaneously. In his later work, through these reconfigurations of the aesthetic experience, DeLillo reconsiders the historical interiority of the novel form, suggesting the possibility of the aesthetic encounter as an additional space of fiction, in which the boundaries of inside and outside can be radically redrawn.

Conclusion: Other rooms

In this chapter, I have explored DeLillo's refashioning of contemporary space through various strategies that disrupt the legacy of the house of fiction. In thinking through this legacy, some critics, as I noted above, have discussed this in terms of the mysterious. Critic John A. McClure's has written substantially on mystery in DeLillo, specifically defining this in terms of travel and exile. If modernists think that the world needs an antidote to the pervasiveness of capital, DeLillo looks inside the culture to see if anything can be saved. What McClure terms as the 'new Elsewhere' does not have to be located in the same geographical places in which Graham Greene, E. M. Forster and Malcolm Lowry placed them; that is, in the new, unknown or unmapped territories of Africa, Asia or Latin America. These places, he contends, were

represented as places where the conditions of romance, still obtained, where one could enjoy adventures unavailable to a world of law and order, achieve goals out of reach in a class-bound society, experience emotional and sensual intensities prohibited in a world of carefully regulated responses, and enjoy

experiences of the sacred, the demonic, and the sublime unavailable in a utilitarian, scientific and secular world.³⁰³

For McClure, DeLillo's 'postmodern romances' relocate this modernist desire for elsewhere, by attempting to find it within the heart of by America itself. Here, McClure argues

capitalism has penetrated everywhere, but its globalization has not resulted in global rationalization...It seems instead to have sponsored a profound reversal: the emergence of zones and forces like those that imperial expansion has erased: jungle-like techno-tangles; dangerous, unknown "tribes"; secret cults with their own codes and ceremonies, vast conspiracies.³⁰⁴

I would however, reframe this, thinking instead about how DeLillo looks for this unknown space in new forms of interiority. Like Benjamin's interior, his characters search for ways to cope with the invasions of modernity through envisioning new troubling interiorities. Though oftentimes his novels conclude with individuals flung out of the safety of their rooms, in the very process of moving from the inside and the outside, some new territory has been accessed. This is facilitated through the interactions between multiple frameworks that make up the novel, an extension of the literary architecture I have been discussing throughout. Like the work of Beckett, his literary architecture is complex and shifting, encompassing not only a survey of literary terrain but the possibilities of imagination itself. Though he explicitly called for the writers to produce the 'counter-narrative' after 9/11, in which author's role is 'to give memory, tenderness and meaning to all that howling space,'³⁰⁵ left by the empty space of twin towers, his writing has always explored a subterranean version of America, that runs in parallel with the expanse of the historical. Throughout his work,

³⁰³ John A. McClure, 'Postmodern Romance,' *Introducing Don DeLillo*, p. 100.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 102.

³⁰⁵ Don DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future,' *The Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo>, accessed May 14th 2017.

the refrain 'this was the point' becomes an exact moment in time in which everything coheres momentarily. In carving out these exact moments in contrast with amorphous shape of history, DeLillo explores multiple textures of experience, in which a subterranean mode of being lies just under the surface. In my analysis, it is in the partial artwork that acts as a mediating space between inside and outside that we find an 'emergent zone' that has yet to be territorialised, containing within it multitudinous possibilities for momentary experiences of interiority. DeLillo's challenge to the globalisation and the invasion of capital into everyday life finds its answer in the artwork that straddles the border between public and private, and moreover, in the aesthetic response that it triggers which is neither inside nor outside.

Chapter three

J. M. Coetzee: Text and topography

‘Where am I when I write?’³⁰⁶

In a letter to his contemporary and friend Paul Auster, Coetzee remarks upon the use of detail in his fiction, what I have earlier called ‘realist particularity.’ Coetzee seems to feel no need to replicate this method in his own work, suggesting: ‘The room in which my fictional action takes place is a pretty bare place, an empty cube.’³⁰⁷ This empty cube, clearly echoing the ‘generic room’ of DeLillo, and by extension, the language I used to describe the modernist geography of Kafka and Beckett, is fashioned out of a kind of bare language. An example of this bare room can be found in *Dusklands*, when Eugene Dawn has been confined to an insane asylum: ‘It has all come down to this (I ease myself in and tell over the clear, functional words: my bed, my window, my door, my walls, my room. These words I love [...] I live in them and they in me’).³⁰⁸ Rather than the detail found in the descriptive work of James, Wharton or Eliot, the proportioned building or ‘vivid detail,’ Coetzee emphasises the sparseness in the language itself. He professes this as an overarching preference in his writing: ‘spare prose and a spare, thrifty world.’³⁰⁹

This sparseness, as I will be arguing, can be found in his destabilising of the spatial landscape in which his fiction takes place, both in the literal geographic sense, and also in the space of fiction. In an interview, writer Tony Murphet asks Coetzee if

³⁰⁶ J.M. Coetzee, ‘Interview’ with David Atwell, *Doubling the Point*, p. 30.

³⁰⁷ J.M. Coetzee in a letter to Paul Auster from November 11, 2010 in *Here and Now: Letters 2008 - 2011* (London: Faber, 2013), p. 193

³⁰⁸ J.M. Coetzee, *Dusklands* (London: Vintage, 1982), p. 43. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and will be abbreviated to Du.

³⁰⁹ J.M. Coetzee, ‘Interview,’ p. 20.

he can comment about his use of specific geographic details in his 1983 novel *Life and Times of Michael K*. Coetzee responds to his question:

The geography is, I fear, less trustworthy than you imagine – not because I deliberately set about altering the reality of Sea Point or Prince Albert but because I don't have much interest in, or can't seriously engage myself with, the kind of realism that takes pride in copying the "real" world.³¹⁰

Though one might want to read Sea Point and other places to which Coetzee refers in the novel as real places on a real map, Coetzee flatly denies that reading, distancing himself from any kind of fiction that seeks to replicate detail in this manner. Jan Wilm argues why this may be:

Many of Coetzee's worlds exhibit a tenuous relationship with specific locales, because they are pluralized worlds, constructed from various disparate aspects of real worlds, like an assemblage of world-versions, an eclectic bricolage of disjunct world-elements, and because they do not *describe* worlds in a mimetically realist way, but rather *suggest* them.³¹¹

In the discussions that follow, I suggest that this plurality also extends to Coetzee's use of and relationship with the heritage of both realist and modernist fiction. This 'tenuous relationship' that Wilm describes can be read as a form of critical suspicion: Coetzee's work, made as Wilm comment through 'an eclectic bricolage of disjunct world-elements', seeks to trouble any sense of geography within fiction, and its impact on a fully rendered and detailed world. As with my discussion of Samuel Beckett earlier, Coetzee's decidedly shifting writing is made in its unmaking, in its gestures towards its own limitations. Indeed, in the 'Realism' lecture from *Elizabeth Costello* (2004), Coetzee explores this problem of realism as an accumulation of facts, or the replication of detail, through his imaginary writer Elizabeth Costello: 'The blue costume, the greasy hair, are details, signs of moderate realism. Supply the particulars,

³¹⁰ J.M. Coetzee in Tony Morphet, 'An interview with J.M. Coetzee,' *Social Dynamics* 10.1(1984), pp. 62-65, (p. 62).

³¹¹ Jan Wilm, *The Slow Philosophy of J.M. Coetzee* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 209.

allow the significations to emerge of themselves. A procedure pioneered by Daniel Defoe.³¹² Within the narrative of this novel thus far, the narrative voice has jumped from one scene to another, dismissing some scenes as unimportant or unnecessary, undercutting the claims made in this quote. The ‘particulars’ then are shown to be a strategy, a writerly method like any other. Costello herself seems to have some suspicions about methods of reassuring the reader of a text’s reality: in a talk she gives at Altona College, entitled ‘What is Realism?’ her immediate point of reference is a surprising choice: Kafka’s ‘A Report to an Academy.’ In this enigmatic speech, Costello expresses the unknown quantity found in the speaking ape itself, in our inability to ‘really’ understand his motivations, his heritage, or indeed Kafka’s perspective when writing it. Costello contrasts the reading required of a realist text, with the experimentations of modernist fiction.³¹³ In this, Coetzee demonstrates the asymmetry between strategies of reading and subsequent expectations for writing. When Costello notes to her son that ‘The word-mirror is broken, irreparably, it seems’ (EC 19) and that ‘the words on the page will no longer stand up and be counted, each proclaiming “I mean what I mean”’ there is a kind of shifting going on: like Beckett’s search for strangers, Coetzee’s writer-character seems to search for a new kind of reality. Recalling Kafka’s earlier description of the modernist room, in which one hears ‘the rattling of a mirror not quite firmly fastened to the wall,’ the mimetic dream of reflective language can no longer hold, for either writer or character. After the work of previous centuries of writers, Coetzee demonstrates that a contemporary writer

³¹² J.M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 4. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to EC.

³¹³ For more on realism in this novel see: Gareth Cornwell, ‘J. M. Coetzee, Elizabeth Costello, and the Inevitability of “Realism”’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 52.3 (2011), pp. 348-361.

cannot simply mimic what has come before, but must explore literary legacy as a means of providing new ways of thinking in our present moment.

However, this is not to suggest that Coetzee prioritises any form as a means of adequately replicating, representing or indeed accessing authentic human truths.

Patrick Hayes comments that:

What Coetzee is suggesting—time and again—is that while the conventions of the realist novel may indeed rely upon, and inculcate, an insupportable logocentrism and thus a deeply falsifying sense of objectivity and human recognition, parodic ‘autodestruction’ is an equally inauthentic alternative. Not only does it risk becoming an equally ‘stylized’ variety of aesthetic retreat, it automatically voids any attempt to engage with the problems posed by embodied life.³¹⁴

I follow’s Hayes’s point in my following discussions, but with a different emphasis: though I agree that Coetzee continually seeks to question the makeup of his literary heritage, he does not do it by critiquing both, but by actively placing them in creative opposition with one another. Though it is in Coetzee’s later fiction we see these more immediately metafictional devices – particularly in *Elizabeth Costello*, *Slow Man* (2006) and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) – this conflict and awareness of form has been present since the very first novel Coetzee produced. The space of fiction is, for Coetzee, a contested site, that must always interrogate its own procedures and question the terrain on and through which it comes to being. Coetzee’s texts take several different forms often in the same novel, and transcend different genres, including but not limited to the epistolary novel, the bildungsroman, the monologue, pseudo-historical record, as well as others.

Coetzee consistently demonstrates the novel is, in its origins and its usages, a practical and political tool, and these origins cannot be erased: the canon is not apolitical and a writer cannot disengage from the tradition of the canon. As Toni

³¹⁴ Hayes, p. 43.

Morrison comments: 'Canon building is Empire building. Canon defense is national defense.'³¹⁵ Derek Attridge uses the term 'canonic intertextuality'³¹⁶ to describe the particular way Coetzee engages with other texts. He comments, 'The perpetuation of any canon is dependant in part on the references made to its earliest members by its later members (or would-be members); and in this respect Coetzee's novels could be said to presuppose and to reproduce the canonic status of their predecessors while claiming to join them.'³¹⁷ However, Attridge notes that, as always with Coetzee, it is more complicated than it first appears:

The unproblematic notion of a canon is complicit with a mode of literature—and of criticism—which dehistoricizes and dematerializes the acts of writing and reading while promoting a myth of transcendent human truths and values. By the same token, however, a mode of fiction which exposed the ideological basis of canonization, which drew attention to its own relation to the existing canon, which thematized the role of race, class, and gender in the processes of cultural acceptance and exclusion, and which, while speaking from a marginal location, addressed the question of marginality—such a mode of fiction would have to be seen as participating in the struggle to achieve a voice for those who have been silenced, even if it did so by literary means that have been traditionally been celebrated as characterizing canonic art.³¹⁸

Coetzee's usage of accepted canonical texts is not to replay old philosophical battles, instead, his usage of (a predominantly European) canon, directly confronts the history of reading, and its political erasures. By redrawing the boundaries of the canon and considering its political repercussions in a non-Western context, Coetzee examines the relevance and limitations of that very canon; moreover, by placing his texts in relation to these so-called canonical texts, he highlights the need for contemporary writing to create dialogues with the past. As Rama Kundu points out, this dialogue relies on

³¹⁵ Toni Morrison, 'Unspeakable things Unspoken,' *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 28. 1 (1989), pp. 1-34, (p. 8).

³¹⁶ Derek Attridge, *J.M. Coetzee and the ethics of reading: literature in the event* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 69.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 71-2.

knowledge of the canon, suggesting that we as readers are ‘reading alongside.’³¹⁹ Rather than simply responding to these texts, Coetzee’s engagement is an active reading *through* which is itself a way of problematising and critiquing the novel form.

This expansive canon is a counterpoint to the presentation of a bare and spare life. Several novels contain protagonists, who in ways reminiscent of Beckett, seek to escape or denude their life. And, like DeLillo, form and character are often working in opposition to one another; in *Dusklands*, the report that Eugene Dawn gives radically disintegrates; Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* gives a monologue in which she is obsessed with dialogue; Paul Rayment in *Slow Man*, arguably some kind of bildungsroman, is joined halfway through by Elizabeth Costello who asserts that she is writing that very story. In this way, characters are pressure points, consistently disrupting, altering and challenging the forms of text that contain them. Like Beckett and DeLillo, Coetzee’s characters seek to find new forms of expression in which they can live.

My argument in this chapter will follow the ideas laid out by David Attwell in his essay ‘Coetzee’s Estrangements.’ He contends that the ‘forms of estrangement to which we need to attend [in Coetzee’s work] are multiple rather than limited purely to the aesthetics of defamiliarization.’³²⁰ This multiplicity will be key to my argument here as I stress the complex interweaving of different structuring ideas that underpin Coetzee’s novels. Attwell summarises the multiple forms that this estrangement takes:

Nearly all of Coetzee’s fiction deals in one way or another with subjects who reluctantly find themselves forced to engage with a particular historical situation.

³¹⁹ Rama Kundu, *Intertexts: A Study of Dialogue Between Texts* (New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2008) p. 15.

³²⁰ David Attwell, ‘Coetzee’s estrangements,’ *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 41.2/3 (2008), pp. 229-243, (p. 230).

There should be no mystery about where this emphasis comes from. In part, it is certainly the product of the mid-twentieth-century high modernism of Coetzee's models, apart from Dostoevsky; it is, in some measure, the Beckettian subject, confronting the Situation in all its absurd but ineluctable facticity. To this artistic legacy, however, one must add the sense of having South Africanness in various forms (as a legal structure of citizenship, an historical identity, and the cultural edifice of being a South African writer) forced upon him by an accident of birth. A consistent premise of Coetzee's writing is that you do not choose your history; it chooses you. The given historical situation is a confinement: one exercises restricted options and longs to be able to exercise others.³²¹

Atwell places Coetzee's writing at the intersections of various cultural and historical contexts to which I will be referring throughout this chapter. By thinking about the multiple entry points into Coetzee's fiction, I do not seek to read him as a definitive modernist, but consider the way in which his writing is embedded in the legacies and strategies of this literature.

As with my earlier discussion of realist knowing, Coetzee questions the way in which the body can be made known through reading it. The idea of imagining or reading an other, so prevalent in my previous chapter, has a more urgent politics than we found in DeLillo as Coetzee questions the ethics of being able to 'know' another through a form of reading that sees bodies as other kinds of geographic spaces. Unlike DeLillo, whose discussion the idea of the body is specifically in relation to selfhood and identity through absorption of culture, in Coetzee, the body remains as a location in which history has an undeniable presence. John J. Su comments that in Coetzee '...the autonomy of imagining is limited by the materiality of the body, which can be disciplined, tortured and destroyed by a repressive state.'³²² Coetzee problematizes the ease to which character and the material body function in an interspatial literary architecture.

³²¹ Attwell, 'Coetzee's estrangements,' p. 232.

³²² John Su, *Imagination and the Contemporary Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 44.

As I suggested earlier, my approach to both DeLillo and Coetzee's fiction is through an interest in the spaces presented in fiction and the space of fiction itself. As noted already, several critics of Coetzee already conceive of his work in these terms. Sue Kossew's discussion of borders, specifically in *Dusklands*, links the 'productive instability of the imagined borders of text and reader' as being in 'dialogue with the discourses of certainty that set up material and imperial borders.'³²³ Coetzee's attention to the literal borders of the nation that is South Africa is echoed in the borders of fiction; by looking for those in-between spaces, he demonstrates how essential this writerly uncertainty is to any discussion of contemporary literature and contemporary modes of ethical being.

Through close reading several novels, I show how Coetzee constructs an oeuvre in which both form and content unspool. I begin by analysing the two early novels, *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* in relationship to the landscape and historical document. I then consider the relationship between form and space in *In the Heart of the Country* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, exploring how Coetzee depicts the farmhouse and land itself. In my final section, I look at *Age of Iron* and *Slow Man*, and contrast his formal experimentations with his reconceived relationships of care, thinking about new kinds of intimacy in the late 20th and 21st century. In each section, I analyse Coetzee's use and exploration of form, whether this is monologue in *In the Heart of the Country*, or epistolary in *Age of Iron*. Through my analysis, I show how Coetzee's work challenges the notion of form and suggests a new kind of interspatial architecture, in which form, the other and the depiction of space itself coalesce into a new way of problematizing the ethical possibilities of the novel.

³²³ Sue Kossew, 'Border Crossings: Self and Text,' *J.M. Coetzee in Context and Theory*, ed. by Elleke Bohemer, Robert Eaglestone and Katy Iddiols (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 62.

History, land and blankness: *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*

The landscape in Coetzee's fiction is one that is both fertile with possibility and resistant to explanation. In his critiques of South African literature, he establishes the paradox that lies at the heart of the African pastoral, a pastoral he contends cannot exist. Coetzee describes this conflicted notion:

One dream topography that the South African pastoral projects is...of a network of boundaries crisscrossing the surface of the land, marking off thousands of farms, each a separate kingdom ruled over by a benign patriarch with, beneath him, a pyramid of contented and industrious children, grandchildren, and serfs. But there is a rival dream topography as well: of South Africa as a vast, empty, silent space, older than man, older than the dinosaurs whose bones lie bedded in its rocks, and destined to be vast, empty, and unchanged long after man has passed from its face. Under such a conception of Africa—"Africa, oldest of the continents"—the task of the human imagination is to conceive not a social order capable of domesticating the landscape, but any kind of relation at all that consciousness can have with it.³²⁴

The 'dream topography' of the South African landscape faces a pull in different directions, one that is characterized by both the domestic and the wild. In the imagined domestic setting, a patriarchal familial structure is established and replicated through the generations. Land is conquered, owned and managed. In the imagined wild setting, the land of South Africa is as an unknowable mystery with a strange ahistorical temporality. In his Jerusalem Prize Speech, Coetzee is also critical of a particular kind of South African sentimentality about love of land. He notes '...their talk, their excessive talk, about how they love South Africa has consistently been directed towards *the land*, that is, toward what is least likely to respond to love: mountains and deserts, birds and animals and flowers.'³²⁵ Attwell is careful to note that this 'love' is something that Coetzee critiques not only in others, but also in

³²⁴ Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 6-7.

³²⁵ Coetzee, 'Jerusalem Prize Speech,' p. 97.

himself.³²⁶ In these critiques, the land is figured noticeably separate to the people who live there, an imagined location that cannot exist.

Coetzee explores how the landscape bears the burden of these conflicting ideas in two of his early novels, *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. His protagonists both assert readings of and project their fears onto the landscape, enacting both their search for a place within it and their rejection from it. In these novels, the search for placement is found in the material, through administration and the production of material records. This interest in the materiality of history is contrasted to the places these documents are supposed to describe; these novels contrast what is presented through documents and what is experienced in the body, demonstrating that the documenting of violence cannot adequately relay the experiences of those subject to it. However, Coetzee's use of the document also relates to my earlier arguments about realism, modernism and forms of textual knowing. David Lodge suggests that realist texts presents 'experience in a manner which approximates closely to representations of similar experience in nonliterary texts of the same culture,'³²⁷ situating it in its historical milieu. This is a form of textual knowing, in which the fictional reproduces where history is made, or gives form to the amorphous shape of a historical being. Novels in this sense are an additional form of historical document, another form of epistemology. As Walter Benjamin comments '[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.'³²⁸ The documents contained in these two novels produced by the protagonists replicate the discourse and language

³²⁶ David Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee Life and Writing: Face to Face with Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 72.

³²⁷ David Lodge, *Modes of Modern Writing Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1977), p. 25.

³²⁸ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 256.

of the invasion narrative, one that perpetuates its own mythology of progress. Coetzee contrasts the material document as a mode of knowing, with bodies that are made 'unknowable.'

For a writer whose work is so synonymous with the history and politics of South Africa, it is interesting to note that the first half of *Dusklands* is dedicated to the horrors of the Vietnam War. His initial foray into literature already demonstrates his desire to explore a political consciousness that makes connections between different imperialist and expansionist regimes. Made up of two parts, 'The Vietnam Project' and 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee', the novel is written from the perspective of two men, each writing in an ostensibly journalistic style, documenting two different time periods. In the first part, Eugene Dawn is charged with writing a report on the possible instruments of psychological warfare used to win the war in Vietnam. As the section continues, Dawn's mind gradually disintegrates, leading him to stab his young son. The second part, 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' contains an historical account of an exploration into the Northern Cape by a relative of Coetzee's from the 18th century, in which he describes extreme violence against the tribe's people he encounters. The narrative is supplemented by a translator's preface (the only part that J. M. Coetzee asserts as his own), as well as an afterword, and an appendix containing Jacobus's subsequent deposition. Each part has a single epigraph, the first by Herman Kahn, the military strategist and founder of conservative think-tank the Hudson Institute. The epigraph is as follows:

Obviously it is difficult not to sympathize with those European and American audiences who, when shown films of fighter-bomber pilots visibly exhilarated by successful napalm bombing runs on Viet-Cong targets, react with horror and disgust. Yet, it is unreasonable to expect the U.S. Government to obtain pilots who are so appalled by the damage they may be doing that they cannot carry out their missions or become excessively depressed or guilt ridden (Du n. pag)

The second epigraph is taken from Flaubert's *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, the incomplete work in which a proto-Beckettian pseudo-couple look to exhaust the possibilities of knowledge. It reads: 'What is important is the philosophy of history' (Du n. pag). Attwell points out, 'Very soon...Flaubert's characters discard even this formula for other opinions. In *Dusklands* the formula emphasizes the fickleness of data and directs attention to the struggle *over* history.'³²⁹ These two epigraphs, though different in emphasis, suggest the visibility of suffering in the concept of history, an idea that endures throughout Coetzee's work. The first, in which Kahn uses cool reasoning to weigh up two sides of an argument about the active enjoyment of violence, appears to legitimize the necessary enjoyment of suffering in order to perpetrate it. The second, spoken by Bouvard (and missing the exclamation mark present in some translations) is misleadingly general. Only a few pages earlier, the two characters are reading through various books of contemporary French history, in which they try to use a 'mnemotechnic' to try and learn facts, but quickly abandon hope of being able to. Though 'Ancient history is obscure through want of documents' contemporary history is 'changing every day.'³³⁰ In Flaubert's satirical work, the philosophy of history seems to be that it 'will never be fixed.'³³¹

In including two epigraphs that discuss the malleability of history, Coetzee assertively proposes the need to interrogate the procedures through which we understand it. Though the two sections deal with different time periods and different countries, they are unified (not only under the umbrella of the novel itself) through the attention paid to production of the history: the first section through modern media

³²⁹ David Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*, p. 45.

³³⁰ Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, trans by Mark Polizzotti (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2012), p. 106.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

propaganda, and the second through historical record. The novel is formulated through a mix of first-person present or first-person past, reports, prefaces, an appendix, an afterword and notes. This use of multiple styles contained in the novelistic space is a recurrent theme in Coetzee's work, as he explores various different fiction and non-fiction forms of writing. In Anne Haeming's discussion of this text, she suggests

Coetzee's technique of writing against a backdrop of seemingly verifiable authenticity...establishes textual spaces which explore the relationship between experienced 'reality' and documented experience. Through these textual spaces, Coetzee draws attention to the *edges of texts* and, consequently, the *edges of fact and fiction*.³³²

Haeming helpfully suggests that by using various conflicting styles Coetzee is actively seeking to explore the production of the past. The accumulation of these records jostles with the movement of the narration; the production of historical record also forms the content of the novel. This notion of 'textual edges' is one that I will be continuing to think about throughout the course of this chapter, paying attention to Coetzee's interest in textual production in form and as an organizational scheme. Through these butting styles and tones, writing that we as readers recognize as the very foundation of our understanding of history, we begin to recognize as the novel goes on that this is not where history is produced. Later, in *Foe* (1986), Coetzee unspools the production of a travel text through his engagement with Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. In that novel and this one, exploration and colonization are decidedly textual. In these two texts, Coetzee stretches the extent to which the colonizer 'explains' their rationale, through the contrast between existential musings and scenes of horrendous violence. He suggests thoughtful introspection, self-interrogation and self-awareness can co-exist with violence.

³³² Anne Haeming, 'Authenticity: Diaries, Chronicles, Records as Index-Simulations,' *J. M Coetzee in Context and Theory*, p. 174.

Jacobus perceives the land he moves through as existing to be understood by him, echoing the rationality of epistemological philosophy, in which to see is to know. This is counteracted however, by his perception of the land's rejection of him, conceptualised through the language of penetration. Jacobus identifies himself absolutely with this role of explorer:

I am an explorer. My essence is to open what is closed, to bring to light what is dark. If the Hottentots comprise an immense world of delight, it is an impenetrable world, impenetrable to men like me, who must either skirt it, which is to evade our mission, or clear it out of the way (Du 106).

Creation and destruction are made synonymous here; in order for Jacobus Coetzee to 'open' the land, and by this he means open it to white settlers, he must be able to access it. In her discussion of photography and its relation to Coetzee, Ayala Amir notes of this novel: 'It is in the wild then, where one loses a sense of boundaries, where the eye devours everything one sees, leaving no space for anything but the self. Nothing eludes the gaze of the explorer, who therefore comes to question the existence of the world around him.'³³³ The eye of the colonizer is penetrative, seeking to make the landscape into a coherent object to be known. Here, we can think of Coetzee's discussion of the history of the South African landscape. He notes firstly that, '[t]he word *landscape*, which we use today to designate both a specific terrain and the general character of that terrain, enters English in the sixteenth century as a term from the art of painting: landscapes were pictures of stretches of countryside.'³³⁴ Implicit therefore within this notion of landscape is composition inside a frame. He continues, 'the word landscape is both topographical and aesthetic in its reference, the word picturesque refers to nature and art at the same time, that is to physical landscape

³³³ Ayala Amir, "'What Used to Lie Outside the Frame': Boundaries of Photography, Subjectivity and Fiction in Three Novels by J.M. Coetzee,' *Journal of Literary Studies*, 29:4 (2013), pp. 58-79, (p. 61).

³³⁴ Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 37.

conceived of pictorially.’³³⁵ There is an interpenetrative process at work here, as the landscape emerges as both an aesthetic category and a literal concept. In this way landscape is simultaneously mapped and composed, real and imagined. Like James’s scaled building, here the landscape must be delimited in order to function as an aesthetic category; the unknowable landscape therefore is a landscape that is explicitly rejecting its own formulation. This paradox underscores this novel, as well as much of Coetzee’s writing on landscape.

In one scene, Jacobus lays out the failure of his travels through the land purely through his own visual experience:

In the blindest alley of the labyrinths of myself I had hidden myself away, abandoning mile after mile of defences. The Hottentot assault had been disappointing. It had fallen on my shame, a judicious point of attack; but it had been baffled from the beginning, in a body which partook too of the labyrinth, by the continuity of my exterior with the interior surface of my digestive tract. The male body has no inner space. The Hottentots knew nothing of penetration. For penetration you need blue eyes.

With what new eyes of knowledge, I wondered, would I see myself when I saw myself, now that I had been violated by the cackling heathen. Would I know myself better? Around my forearms and neck were rings of demarcation between the rough red-brown skin of myself the invader of the wilderness and the slayer of elephants and myself the Hottentots’ patient victim. I hugged my white shoulders. I stroked my white buttocks, I longed for a mirror. Perhaps I would find a pool, a small limpid pool with a dark bed, in which I might stand and, framed by the recomposing clouds, see myself as others had seen me, making out at last too the lump my fingers had told me so much about, the scar of the violence I had done myself.

I continued with my exploration of the Hottentots, trying to find a place for them in my history.

Their failure to enter more deeply into me had disappointed me. They had violated my privacy, all my privacies, from the privacy of my property to the privacy of my body (Du 967).

This exploration is both visual and bodily, moving as it does through different body parts. He desires a mirror in which to recognize himself as visibly white, but to also see himself ‘as others had seen [him].’ In this way, his body becomes a surface onto

³³⁵ Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 40.

which he can visualise being both self and other. There are several images of burrows and entrances here, as a way of conceiving of inward spaces of self. In trying to find a place in history, Jacobus also suggests that history can be entered. These inward spaces also have historical import, as they allow him to simultaneously excavate ‘labyrinths’ but also conceive of a relationship of self and other so that the interior and the historical combine. In their ‘failure to enter’ him, and his subsequent ‘violation of privacy’ Coetzee suggests that in failure to understand the Hottentots, or in their failure to assimilate to his private structuring of the historical and his interior world, his way of conceiving of the relationship of self and other has been destroyed. Moreover, he metaphorically castrates them in claiming that they ‘knew nothing of penetration’ as if they are unable to both physical and mentally enter him historically or psychically. Penetration is racialised and formulated as a *white* way of knowing, so that to be non-white means to be passive, necessarily waiting to be absorbed, or penetrated, by history.

Judith Butler discusses this relationship between permeable boundaries and interior space in her discussion of gender performativity and topography. She states:

The boundary between the inner and outer is confronted by those excremental passages in which the inner effectively becomes outer, and this excreting function becomes, as it were, the model by which other forms of identity-differentiation are accomplished. In effect, this is the mode by which Others become shit. For inner and outer worlds to remain utterly distinct, the entire surface of the body would have to achieve impermeability. This sealing of its surfaces would constitute the seamless boundary of the subject; but this enclosure would invariably be exploded by precisely the excremental filth that it fears.³³⁶

The passage between inner and outer, which Jacobus calls the ‘continuity of my exterior with the interior surface of my digestive tract’ making others ‘shit,’ rendering

³³⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge 2011), p. 170.

them waste products in a system that they cannot become a part of. For Jacobus, it seems that he can only envision a relationship with another through the body, not as a way of suggesting an embodied ethical relationship, but because, perversely, he has absented himself in the ‘blindest alley of the labyrinths of myself.’ In his burrowing deeply into himself, he does not open out spaces towards the other, but rejects them through eyes that can only see internally.

In his internal landscape, he also encounters more failure: ‘The only sound was the cold whistling of images through my brain. All were inadequate...I was undergoing nothing less than a failure of imagination before the void. I was sick at heart’ (Du 101-2). This language of the void, particularly reminiscent of Beckett, speaks to a kind of existential unravelling here: the land refuses to be colonised but it is because of the ‘I’ and the ‘eye’ of the colonizer. Amir explains the relationship between the ‘I’ and the eye of the camera:

In *Dusklands*, the process whereby one contracts into a “tiny I” and becomes a non-self seems to be the opposite of the infinite inflation of the self that Jacobus experienced at the beginning of his journey: a boundless expansion of the I, where the other can be recognised only through its extension versus an I that regresses infinitely in response to the other’s expansion. But in fact, these two opposite reactions – of expansion and constriction – share a similar conception of the self as an elastic surface capable of an infinite stretching (outward or inward), and the elasticity is synonymous with impenetrability: the self does not contain any sort of otherness.³³⁷

This discussion of expansion and regression - which we can recognize from the previous chapter and which will extend throughout this one – is couched in purely individualistic terms and in ways that objectify the other. This notion of expansion has been imagined both physically and psychically in DeLillo, mapped onto large bodies or through interactions with paintings. This elasticity colonises through seeing and landscapes become sites of repetition. This language is reminiscent of the previous

³³⁷ Amir, p. 62.

chapter's discussion of Lee Harvey Oswald and Walt Whitman. In Ben Lerner's discussion 'Whitman democratizes pronouns in order to attempt to make room for any reader in his 'I' and 'you', so that a celebration of the former is also a celebration of the latter.'³³⁸ But here, the category of 'we' is never envisaged; any notion of expansion is formulated purely in the imagined expansion of only that 'I', which continually fails. All that's left are 'whistling...images.'

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee explores the mind of the Magistrate, whose sense of the land he occupies starts to break down as he is confronted by the grim realities of occupation and legislation of colonised land. In his relationship with the so-called 'barbarian girl' an unnamed woman who has been left disabled after torture, the Magistrate attempts to read her body as a way of confronting the horrors that he has helped to oversee. Coetzee lays out the relationship between reading and the land and reading and the body. He also explores the idea of heritage through material documentation, administration and paperwork, and ruins found in the landscape. Through continuing the themes established in *Dusklands*, the novel suggests an encoded blankness or blindness that contrasts with accumulation of historical documents, suggesting gaps and incompleteness as a way of spatialising experiences that cannot be written.

The idea of blankness is presented primarily through the young woman who fascinates the Magistrate through what he repeatedly terms her 'incompleteness.' This is reminiscent of the DeLillo story 'The Starveling' in which Leo uses the body of a vulnerable woman as a way to see himself more clearly, couched in diagnostic language and of the binary of well and sick. The Magistrate becomes involved with a young disabled woman he sees in the town square, a woman who does not speak and

³³⁸ Lerner, p. 65.

who never consents to the subsequent actions that place. He starts to care for the girl, but in actuality, a rather more sinister act is taking place, one in which he body becomes an object to be understood through reading. In Peter Brooks's work, he describes this process of being made into a literary body thus:

It is as if identity, and its recognition, depended on the body having been marked with a special sign, which looks suspiciously like a linguistic signifier. The sign imprints the body, making it part of the signifying process. Signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body, in that the inscription of the sign depends on and produces a story. The signing of the body is an allegory of the body become a subject for literary narrative—a body entered into writing.³³⁹

The girl's body is 'entered into writing' through the Magistrate's attention to her injuries. Her body is literally read as an object, and becomes an object in fiction; but crucially she is only a partial object, as I will come to in a moment, and also an object that refuses to be known.

Unlike the later state between sleeping and dreaming in *Life and Times of Michael K*, the ritualistic massage he performs on the girl and its effects on the Magistrate suggests the one-sidedness of this exchange. Here, Coetzee begins to explore the theme of reciprocity through a discussion of her eyes, and her blindness: 'I look into the eye. Am I to believe that gazing back at me she sees nothing – my feet perhaps, parts of the room, a hazy circle of light, but at the centre, where I am only a blur, a blank?'³⁴⁰ The Magistrate cannot imagine an eye that is unseeing; moreover, in this imagined viewpoint—one he cannot accurately diagnose—he is displaced from the centre of her vision. He is unsettled by the idea that he may be the one to exist as 'a blur or a blank.'

³³⁹ Peter Brooks, *Body Work: objects of desire in modern narrative* (London: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 3.

³⁴⁰ J.M. Coetzee, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), p. 33. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to WB.

Like *Dusklands*, the power of knowledge is also envisioned through the power of penetration. But the Magistrate refuses to acknowledge that his interest in the young woman may be sexual, and so the idea of penetration moves from a physical to psychic one. This is found in her as an incomplete or partial space:

‘She is incomplete!’ I say to myself. Though the thought begins to float away at once, I cling to it. I have a vision of her closed eyes and closed face filming over with skin. Blank, like a fist beneath a wig, the face grows out of the throat and out of the blanks body beneath it, without aperture, without entry’ (WB 45).

Amir’s earlier comments about a kind of elastic impenetrability of the self, found in pronouns, is made literal here in a growing of a layer of skin. But this incompleteness is only in his vision, another layer of fiction he writes over her body. The hermetic surface of her body, rather than suggesting Butler’s ‘seamless boundary of the subject,’ instead makes her a partial object that does not allow for the psychic penetration of his gaze. Like Jacobus’s resistance to the landscape through his own vision, here the Magistrate exaggerates the girl’s refusal to be read as a way of circumventing his own inability to engage with her.

This incompleteness is also present in the form of writing itself. As Judith Ryan comments,

Present-tense narration that is supposed to occur simultaneously with the narrated event blocks retrospection. To deprive the first-person narrator of genuine retrospection is to curtail the traditional hope for narrative: that it can somehow find out the truth or show the way to redemption.³⁴¹

This is a novel of anti-redemption, in which there is no consolation of form. For the girl too, this sense of incompleteness manifests itself in her inability to tell the Magistrate of her experience with him; as the housekeeper later explains, the Magistrate made her very unhappy: ‘You don’t understand...There is a whole side to

³⁴¹ Judith Ryan, *The Novel After Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 145.

the story you don't know, that she could not have told you because she did not know it herself" (WB 166-7). In the final pages of the novel, the magistrate sits down to write, suggesting to himself, 'It seems right that, as a gesture to the people who inhabited the ruins in the desert, we too ought to set down a record of a settlement to be left to posterity buried under the walls of our town: and to write such a history no one would seem to be better fitted than our last magistrate' (WB 168). These sentences, written as 'we' rather than 'I' suggest a statement that comes from a unified perspective. But in the next few sentences, the Magistrate moves back to 'I', as he begins to realise that he cannot write what he set out to, instead writing platitudes about the 'charm of life' and calling the town 'paradise on earth' (WB 169). The Magistrate is struck by the sudden horror that perhaps the slips he has been trying to decipher throughout the novel have been equally mundane: 'It would be disappointing to know that the poplar slips I have spent so much time on contain a message as devious, as equivocal, as reprehensible as this' (WB 169). This so-called 'plea' for the right of this settlement to exist, cannot be recorded. The next six paragraphs start with the phrase 'I think' suggesting the Magistrate's preference for internal speculation over written thought. He acknowledges his limitations to represent the experience of this settlement: 'Of all the people of this town I am the one least fitted to write a memorial. Better the blacksmith with his cries of rage and woe' (WB 169). He promises to go and place the slips that have so preoccupied him back into the desert, preserving them first with linseed oil and wrapping them up; in this way, the magistrate can take care of them, in much the same way he attempted to take care of the barbarian girl, but like her, he cannot understand them. By acknowledging that he cannot replicate the slips, or indeed write an adequate record of the place in which he has lived and overseen, he concedes that what has happened there may not be able to be recorded through traditional means.

This moment of writing becomes another form of blankness, the blankness that was found in the girl and on the slips. Elizabeth McFarlane's assertion that the blank page is a motif found throughout much of Coetzee's work³⁴² can be extended I think, to the work that reads as in some way 'blank' even if the act of writing has taken place. The novel starts and ends with these moments of blankness; just as the novel opens with the Magistrate looking into the unseeing glasses of Colonel Joll, so the novel ends with his inability to look at the scene in front of him: 'This is not the scene I dreamed of' (WB 170), a few sentences earlier noting: 'There has been something staring me in the face and still I do not see it.' Coetzee book ends the novel with these scenes of unseeing, suggesting the circularity of this narrative; though the Magistrate may have transformed his views on occupation, he still cannot change the way he sees the world.

Maria López comments that 'Coetzee begins his literary career with a ferocious attack on the way in which the southern African land has been articulated and appropriated by European thought as embodied by European explorers.'³⁴³ In these two early novels, Coetzee establishes his interest in the textual production of experience and how a novel can encode its own blankness. In both, the imagined possibilities of both land and other bodies are written in language that relates to some form of interior but become possessive and penetrative. Coetzee extends Beckett's ethical concern about containing strangers or others in fiction, by showing the language of knowing to actively eradicate the possibilities of communication with others.

³⁴² Elizabeth McFarlane, *Reading Coetzee (Consciousness, Literature and the Arts)* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), p. 34.

³⁴³ María López, 'J.M. Coetzee and Patrick White: Explorers, Settlers, Guests,' *Strong Opinions*, ed. by Chris Danta, Sue Kossew and Julian Murphet (Continuum: London, 2011), p. 37.

The farm and gardening: *In the Heart of the Country* and *Life and Times of Michael K*

‘I should have lived in the city...I would have room to expand.’³⁴⁴

‘Lacking all external enemies and resistances, confined within an oppressive narrowness and regularity, man at last has no choice but to turn himself into an adventure’ (IHC 159).

In the Heart of the Country explicates the relationship between landscape and silence. It is about the process of writing a life that has no shape, and resists any shape that it can be given by language. The narrator, a woman named Magda, lives on an isolated farm somewhere in the Karoo, that vast but indefinable semi-desert, located in South Africa. Magda is the daughter of a white farmer, living a solitary life where she is ignored by her father and found odd by her servants. As the novel progresses, Magda’s narration of her own life consistently undermines itself; events that seem to have taken place do not, whilst other events repeat in strikingly vivid detail. The novel not only functions as a post-structuralist lament on the limits of language, but as a metafictional experiment into the failure of form: Magda, as both the oppressor and the oppressed, cannot find herself at home in either the language she speaks or the place in which she lives. Whilst Magda characterizes herself as marginalized, invisible and unseen by wider society, Coetzee suggests that this experience of alienation is central to both the experience of the farm, and the experience of the white South African in general. Homi Bhabha comments that ‘the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intimate invasions;’³⁴⁵ in this novel, Coetzee explores how the domestic interacts with and is shaped by history. As Mrs Curren

³⁴⁴ J.M. Coetzee, *In the Heart of the Country*, 3rd edn. (Vintage: London, 2014), p. 83. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and are abbreviated to IHC.

³⁴⁵ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 3.

notes in later novel *Age of Iron*: 'Power is power, after all. It invades. That is its nature. It invades one's life.'³⁴⁶

The text is written in Magda's voice, a strange, timeless monologue that appears structured through its organization in numbered paragraphs of varying lengths.³⁴⁷ In these paragraphs, the reader is presented with several contradictory stories, in which fantasy and reality are blurred. As the novel continues, we gain no better idea of what has happened, and the reader is left with the sense that the entire novel has taken place in a vacuum, a place of no consequence. The detail to which Magda's internal voice is depicted then, the way that she recounts various strands of narrative that could be her life, ensure that the novel arrives to the reader already in a process of demolition. In reading the novel, the reader partakes in continual dismantling of the novelistic construction, and therefore in the impeding of its progression. The numbered paragraphs serve to underscore the ambiguous plot with the sure and deliberate forward march of numbers, giving the novel a contrapuntal rhythm, echoing the play between the solid and fixed, with the ambiguous and unclear.

From the opening paragraph, when Magda sets the scene of the arrival of her father's new wife, she establishes herself as a watcher or seer, as she recounts details such as 'a dog-cart drawn by a horse with an ostrich-plume waving on its forehead'

³⁴⁶ J.M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron* (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 117. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and are abbreviated to AI.

³⁴⁷ Hermann Wittenberg has noted that 'In the Heart of the Country is Coetzee's most cinematic novel' (9) Though the film was not written as a screenplay per se, 'the novel, even more so than the screenplay, functioned cinematically in the sense that its assemblage of narrative material approximated the nonlinear, anti-realist editing of a modernist film' (9). Wittenberg has edited collected two screenplay versions of Coetzee novels, *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* in *J.M. Coetzee: Two Screenplays* (University of Cape Town Press: Cape Town, 2014). He has also published work on these adaptations in 'Godard in the Karoo: J.M. Coetzee's Screenplay Adaptation of In the Heart of the Country', *African Journals Online* 41.2 (2014), Online.

and 'black swallowtail coat' (IHC 1), immediately situating the novel within a world of physical realism. However, the next sentence immediately disrupts the opening few lines:

More detail I cannot give unless I begin to embroider, for I was not watching. I was in my room, in the emerald semi-dark of the shuttered late afternoon, reading a book, or more likely, supine with a damp towel over my eyes fighting a migraine. I am the one who stays in her room reading or writing or fighting migraines (IHC 1).

Those specific details introduced in the first sentences are undercut by this pronouncement. As the novel continues, the reader begins to recognize the process in which Magda recounts violent events that appear not to have happened. The violent murder of her father and his new wife is dismissed by the sentences: 'For he does not die so easily after all...The old days are not gone after all. He has not brought home a new wife, I am still his daughter' (IHC 20). The narrative shifts slightly, and the reader is brought back to a location they are unsure of: Magda's laments suddenly lose their power. Attridge comments 'having read paragraphs 1–35 in the good faith of the novelistic consumer, only to find them a fantasy, we can never quite achieve the same confidence in the scenes presented to us thereafter.'³⁴⁸ In his reading, the reality of one scene over another is supported within the text by the way one particular 'route' is continued in the narrative. In this way, narrative is not a linear construct with a beginning and end, but a tangle in which the reader must follow the thread.

However, what seems to be most important about these moments of disruption is not the question of reality or fantasy, but of the subject's relationship to time and space. The events of novel appear to lack any anchoring in a fixed time or a fixed place. The difficulty in distinguishing between fantasy and reality can be seen to be an echo of the difficulty in pinning down an exact setting; though Dominic Head has

³⁴⁸ Attridge, p. 23.

suggested that some details (he discusses bicycles, trains, airplanes and taxes as being the most telling details)³⁴⁹ place us firmly in the twentieth century, Coetzee appears to make the time period deliberately abstract. The landscape itself is described in the general terms of a farm, characterized mostly by the words ‘nowhere’ and ‘empty’, for example ‘Where the house stands in the desert there is a turbulence, a vortex, a black hole that I live in but abhor’ (IHC 48). The progression of time is also strange, as there is little to demarcate its passage: ‘My theme is the endless drift of the currents of sleep and waking, not the storms of human conflict’ (IHC 48). Magda defines the time of the desert thus:

In the shadowy hallway the clock ticks away day and night. I am the one who keeps it wound and who weekly, from sun and almanac, corrects it. Time on the farm is the time of the wide world, neither a jot nor a tittle more or less. Resolutely I beat down the blind, subjective time of the heart, with its spurts of excitement and drags of tedium: my pulse will throb with the stead one-second beat of civilization. One day some as yet unborn scholar will recognize in the clock the machine that has tamed the wilds. But will he ever know the desolation of the hour of the siesta chiming in cool green high-ceilinged houses where the daughters of the colonies lie counting with their eyes shut? The land is full of melancholy spinsters like me, lost to history... (IHC 3-4)

Though the house has servants, it is Magda’s responsibility to wind the clock and adjust the time to the date. She asserts that time on the farm is indeed the same as time experienced elsewhere, in the ‘wide world’; in adjusting the clock to the time she knows it to be elsewhere, she fixes the farm in place. In doing this, she attempts to resist both the ‘desolation of the hour of the siesta’ and the ‘subjective time of the heart.’ Julian Barnes has also attempted to figure an experience of subjective time, through a watch worn on the inside of the wrist, so that time faces inwards and not outwards: ‘It made time feel more personal, even a secret thing.’³⁵⁰ These bodily rhythms must be brought in line to the experience of the rest of the world. In this way,

³⁴⁹ Head, p. 50.

³⁵⁰ Julian Barnes, *The Sense of the Ending* (Jonathan Cape: London, 2011), p. 6.

Magda can begin to imagine that she is indeed a part of the totalizing structure of time, a structure that completely transforms the experiential. But, in the last sentences, she undoes this: both individual and general, Magda's solitary life in her room cannot be brought into a structure because it cannot capture something of the particularities of her life on the farm. This sense of being outside of history and outside of time emerges several times throughout the novel: 'Born into a vacuum in time, I have no understanding of changing forms' (IHC 87).

Through this unfastening of time and space, the subject cannot respond to a world that they do not understand. Magda's monologue is one of gaps and silence: the form and language in which she is trying to speak appears to resist her attempts to speak it in the same way the land seems to reject her habitation. This expressionistic rendering of rejection from both form and land, harks back to the figure/ground of realism, in which the character of the individual is considered within their setting as a way of suggesting the unification between the inside and outside. As Philip Weinstein explains: 'realism situates its protagonist in a compelling here and now. Composed so as to be knowable though not yet known, the subject is cleanly figured against a ground of familiar space and time, pregnant with a future.'³⁵¹ In this novel, Coetzee seems to directly reference this novelistic organisation by the unfixing the relationship between time and space, and by further dwelling on a strange kind of domestication, in which Magda is both defined by her space and imprisoned by it.

In this way Magda is displaced in several different senses: first, in her inability to find a position in the home itself, secondly through her severed relationship to a space and time, and a linear progression of space and time, thirdly to herself, and fourthly to the novel as a frame through which we as the reader understand the

³⁵¹ Weinstein, p. 56.

narrative. Magda cannot progress from one place to another, from abandonment to belonging, but instead moves through these series of displacements, a re-grounding in which she cannot find any ground. This impermanence has no resolution because it has no central origin that can be resolved. Coetzee here documents a voice that seeks a home it cannot have.

But, the invention of events and the collapsing of reality and fiction is a mode of becoming for Magda:

I want my story to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, not the yawning middle without end...I must not fall asleep in the middle of my life. Out of the blankness that surrounds me I must pluck the incident after incident after incident whose little explosions keep me going (IHC 53).

The attempt to organize a linear trajectory is similar to her attempt to keep time with the rest of the world by winding the clock: she attempts to place a structure upon something that appears structureless. She does this, she says, as mode of self-determination: 'I make it all up in order that it shall make me up. I cannot stop now' (IHC 90). By deconstructing her narrative, herself and the form of the novel, Magda resists her story being retold. She cannot become a part of a traditional farm narrative because she cannot replicate what has come before her; she is not as Weinstein commented, 'pregnant with a future' but cursed with a perpetual present.

This idea of pregnancy, or the possibility of pregnancy contained within the body of a woman, is a particularly loaded concept in this novel; Coetzee uses the word 'barren' to describe both Magda's body and the land she lives on throughout. In this way, there is some resemblance between the land and Magda herself, joining them together in their image of some immanent desolation or resistance to change. For Michael K, as I discuss later, the dry ground becomes a site for a transient kind of gardening, containing the possibility to grow vegetables and therefore allowing Michael a new way of experiencing a connection with the world, even if only

momentarily. Here, however, Magda's inability to have children does not come from her tested knowledge (it doesn't appear that she has had sex until she is raped by Hendrik) but in her supposition that there is something intrinsically wrong with her so she cannot procreate.

This seems to come from her notion and understanding of some South African pastoral trope that she cannot fulfil. At one point, she asks 'Which is the more implausible, the story of my life as lived by me or the story of the good daughter humming the psalms as she bastes the Sunday roast in a Dutch kitchen in the dead centre of the stone desert?' (IHC 160) Magda's assertion that she is barren allows her to circumnavigate the notion that she can fulfil a particular role on the farm. She is imprisoned by a trope that she understands but cannot replicate. The space that she lives in figures this imprisonment. Magda describes:

In a house shaped by destiny like an H I have lived all my life, in a theatre of stone and sun, fenced in with miles of wire, spinning my trail from room to room, looming over the servants...in the mornings vied in icy asceticism to be the earlier afoot, to lay the fire in the cold grate. Life on the farm (IHC 3).

Rather than the idylls of the imagined pastoral life of colonisers, Magda instead suggests a life that is somehow false; her use of 'a theatre of stone and sun' suggests the performance that underscores her life, her need to replicate the dream topography Coetzee describes. Barnard notes that this dream topography is characteristic of the *plaasroman*,³⁵² the nostalgic farm novel that Coetzee critiques in *White Writing*. In the shape of the house, Coetzee extends this critique in this novel once more, as he thinks about the effects this literature has on the actual experience of the place. As Barnard continues, 'pastoral activities of plowing, digging, building, fence-making—even the construction of those Cape Dutch houses in the classic shape of the letter H...are all to

³⁵² Rita Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond: South African writers and the politics of place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 28.

be regarded as acts of inscription.³⁵³ In this inscription, Magda seeks to read the land in a way that it refuses.

This enforced asceticism is also replicated in Magda's depiction of her bedroom, the space in which we as the reader come to associate with her; it is the room she retreats to in order to rest or to sleep, but she is also confined in this room, stuck as she is in the middle of nowhere with nothing to do. In the scene discussed from the very beginning of the novel, Magda says that 'I was not watching. I was in my room...' Here she establishes that the primary scene of the imagination: being alone in a room. As discussed in my previous chapter, DeLillo's man alone in the room is in some way retreating from the world in order to remake it imaginatively, only to be thrust back into the world. However, in this novel, Magda has none of the choice so available to the male narrators in the work of DeLillo. This room, though functioning as an important space for her self-analysis, also confines and separates her from the world. She enacts the course that history has taken for her: 'In the cloister of my room I am the mad hag I am destined to be' (IHC 9). Simultaneously, she wants to resist this characterization:

I live, I suffer, I am here. With cunning and treachery, if necessary, I fight against becoming one of the forgotten ones of history. I am a spinster with a locked diary but I am more than that. I am an uneasy consciousness but I am more than that too (IHC 4).

Her repeated sentence structure, in which she is both a 'spinster', 'uneasy consciousness' but also 'more than that,' demonstrates that she both understands her own constraints and seeks to surpass them. Magda also acknowledges that it may not just be the room that constrains her, as she asks if she is perhaps not prisoner 'not of the lonely farmhouse and the stone desert but of my stony monologue' (IHC 14).

³⁵³ Barnard, p. 28.

This construction of a so-called ‘stony monologue’ (one that is literally built in the last chapter) plays on the notion of boredom, work, and building, all charged concepts in South African literature, particularly in the farm novel. As the novel continues, Magda is ‘...gaping with boredom because nothing ever happens on the farm’ (IHC 9). The deconstruction of her narrative becomes her work:

Clenched beneath a pillow in a dim room, focused on the kernel of pain, I am lost in the being of my being. This is what I was meant to be: a poetess of interiority, an explorer of the inwardness of stones, the emotions of ants, the consciousness of the thinking parts of the brain. It seems to be the only career, if we except death, for which life in the desert has fitted me (IHC 43).

Coetzee himself characterizes this interiority as being one of so-called ‘problematics of landscape writing’³⁵⁴ found within South African literature. Like Jacobus or the Magistrate, this interiority manifests in the prioritising of the individual impressions and emotions over relationships with others. Like *Dusklands*, the novel’s monologue is reminiscent of the work of Beckett, in which the voice seeks to create and dismantle a fictional space in which to live. But throughout, Magda is trying to reach out and speak to others; her use of the monologue is out of necessity, not through choice. Her repeated attempts to get her servants to interact with her become her main occupation. Maria López argues that ‘Though she would like to turn this monologue into a dialogue by achieving communion/communication with the surrounding land and surrounding people – namely her servants, Hendrik and Klein-Anna – Magda fails in both attempts.’³⁵⁵ This failure, however, is only a failure in as much as Magda’s attempt to reach out to other characters in the novel are rejected by them, because she cannot communicate with them on their own terms. This monologue is not written because Magda seeks to give her own voice space, but because she cannot find anyone

³⁵⁴ Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 174.

³⁵⁵ López, p. 42.

who can and will respond to her; she is contained by a monologue that resists its existence as a monologue. Throughout the novel then, Magda searches for an adequate interlocutor, attempting to fashion her own replica of conversation. As an author, Magda searches for the characters that will become a part of her fiction. Derek Attridge notes of the relationships between Magda and her servants that ‘Hendrik and Anna remain problematic presences, never wholly grasped by the machinery of the text, never securely “in their place.” Magda [...] cannot be said to achieve knowledge of them.’³⁵⁶ There is no frame through which they can respond. We can see this as Coetzee’s response to South African pastoral fiction in which ‘...the black man becomes a shadowy presence flitting across the stage now and then...’³⁵⁷ In her attempts to reach out to them, the historical absence of black people in the pastoral novel is made present through that absence.

This notion of conversation and exchange returns later, when Magda makes structures of stone as a way of communicating with voices she hears, sentences that sound snatched from philosophy. She recognizes them to be in Spanish and tries to respond with an approximation of Spanish: ‘forming the stones into letters twelve feet high I began to spell out messages to my saviours: CINDRLA ES MI; and the next day; VENE AL TERRA; and QUIERO UN AUTR; and again: SON ISOLADO’ (IHC 164-5). Spanish is in itself important as it both simultaneously a European, and for all intents and purposes a ‘white’ language, whilst at the same time also being a historical language of the coloniser. In this way, Spanish works as an equivalent to English, and like English, Magda also seeks to reshape the words in some way. She comments:

I know no Spanish whatsoever. However, it is characteristic of the Spanish that is spoken to me out of the flying machines that I find it immediately

³⁵⁶ Attridge, p. 29.

³⁵⁷ Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 5.

comprehensible. I have no way of explaining this circumstance save to suggest that while in their externals the words may present themselves as Spanish, they belong in fact not to a local Spanish but to a Spanish of pure meanings such as might be dreamed of by philosophers, and that which is communicated to me via the Spanish language, by mechanisms I cannot detect, so deeply embedded in me do they lie, is therefore pure meaning...The words are Spanish but they are tied to universal meanings (IHC 156-7).

These ‘voices’ Magda hears speaking in Spanish, are in fact a tissue of intertextual references to various philosophers, including Calvin, Nietzsche, Hegel and Rousseau. These words are indeed some kind of translation spoken, as she imagines, by machines over a desert. They serve as counterpoint to her identity as the ‘poetess of interiority;’ these fragments of language compel her to respond through building. Magda ‘translates’ these phrases from one language she does not know, to one language she feels separated from, and then in turn to the stone structures she makes. They are also a continuation of some internal feeling, as she notes this is ‘a Spanish which I had to invent from first principles, by introspecting, as I went along’ (IHC 163).

We can relate Magda’s desire to build from the earth to debates around the buildings of memorials in Africa. David Bunn’s essay, ‘Whited sepulchres: On the reluctance of monuments’, discusses the history of monument building in apartheid South Africa, noting the preponderance of rough-hewn stone in order to commemorate mostly white settlers. He specifically focuses on the work of Herbert Baker, a British architect who worked in India and Africa. He notes that:

stone, for Baker, enables a metonymic association between settler identity and natural landscape; it suggests that a new national presence is being built out of the local, and the stone itself is evidence of the necessarily rough care with which that identity is forced to fashion new traditions.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁸ David Bunn, ‘Whited sepulchres: On the reluctance of monuments,’ *Blank--: architecture, apartheid and after*, ed. by Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavić (New York: Distributed Art Publishers, 1998), n. pag.

By using stones that are indigenous to the landscape in a way that people cannot be, Baker forged a relationship between dwelling and belonging. In Baker's designs of churches and houses, we see this desire played out:

Both house and church therefore appear to be intrinsically related to the landscape; it is as though an expression of settled European identity is coaxed out of the of the rock, with rough tutelage, or through a return to pre-industrial craft processes. It is as though, in some reversal of temporal sequence, the marks of settlement had somehow always been present in the native rock.³⁵⁹

In this reversal, stones are envisioned as both a signature of nature and a stand-in for human endeavour. For Coetzee, as noted earlier, this inwardness is a problem in writing:

What response to do rocks and stones make to the poet who urges them to utter their true names? As we might expect, it is silence. Indeed, so self-evidently foredoomed is the quest that we may ask why it persists so long. The answer is perhaps that the failure of the listening imagination to intuit the true language of Africa, the continued apprehension of silence (by the poet) or blankness (by the painter), stands for, or stands in the place of, another failure, by no means inevitable: a failure to imagine a peopled landscape, an ability to conceive a society in South Africa in which there is a place for the self. In this respect the art of empty landscape is the pessimistic obverse of a wishful pastoral art by the labour of hands makes the landscape speak, and people it with an ideal community³⁶⁰

Magda, who calls herself 'a poetess of interiority, an explorer of the inwardness of stones,' attempts to make the stones speak. Like the memorials of Baker, Magda whitewashes these stones, literally by painting them white, and figuratively, by making them speak for her white experience. The creation of these monuments then, in a language fashioned inexactly, is a reduplication of her stony monologue. In this way, Coetzee includes a number of transposing movements that leads Magda to some location of being through an imaginative externalization, the exteriorization of her psychic drama of internal displacement. Coetzee himself seems to have translated

³⁵⁹ David Bunn, n. pag.

³⁶⁰ Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 9.

Beckett's 'obscure graffiti' (ISIS 68) in 'Ill Seen Ill Said' to become a way of recording of experience. The land becomes a space onto which she projects her own self-image of the void: the novel is not one of a failed landscape, but of an imagination constrained through inheritance. Magda does indeed appear to lay bare the central paradoxes of her existence as both oppressed and oppressor, this process of deconstruction demonstrates a wider import about the process of storytelling in a landscape that appears to resist narrativisation. This process of deconstruction stages the metaphor of displacement that I have begun to sketch out: Magda cannot speak to or speak from any central position, because the images that fill her mind of an idealised farm found in the concept of the African pastoral. In the final pages of the novel, Coetzee formulates some kind of expansive being, through an eccentric intertextuality that emerges through these enigmatic structures.

Coetzee continues this interest in new forms of self-expression in *Life and Times of Michael K* but this time through the burrow and the garden. Jamaica Kincaid relays the history of the garden to its beginning in England; the idealised English garden in which nature has been contained is an echo of the project of imperialist expansion. Her essays contain her memories of the different gardens she has known in her life in Antigua, the UK and the US, as well as communicating her knowledge of botanical history; she notes that '...the world cannot be left out of the garden.'³⁶¹ For Kincaid, the history of garden demonstrates both the urge to control and aestheticise nature, coupled with the confidence that there is sufficient empty land that allows these gardens to be built; the history of the garden is inextricable with the history of the expansionist explorer. Kincaid explains:

³⁶¹ Jamaica Kincaid, *My garden(book)* (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 59.

Accounts of botanical gardens begin with men who have sworn to forsake the company of women and have attached themselves to other things, the pursuit of only thinking, contemplating the world as it ought to be and, as a relief from this or complementary to this, the capture, isolation, and imprisoning of plants.³⁶²

The gardens in *Life and Times of Michael K* also emerge from this same history, but rather than becoming a way for the protagonist Michael K to control nature, they are spaces in which he can sever ties with his lifetime of labour and abuse, as fleeting as this may be. The novel in turn explores the possibility of a textual space at a crossroads; a form of a novel that cannot engage with the character it presents.

All of Michael K's life, both as a black man³⁶³ and as someone identified as learning impaired, he has been taught that his sole contribution to the world lies in his ability as a labourer:

Because of his disfigurement and because his mind was not quick, Michael was taken out of school after a short trial and committed to the protection of Huis Norenus in Faure, where at the expense of the state he spent the rest of his childhood in the company of other variously afflicted and unfortunate children learning the elements of reading, writing, counting, sweeping, scrubbing, bedmaking, dishwashing, basketweaving, woodwork and digging.³⁶⁴

³⁶² Kincaid, p. 112.

³⁶³ Coetzee never describes Michael K as black, but it is suggested through his treatment by other characters. There is one moment in part 1 in which Michael is given a charge sheet that reads 'Michael Visagie--CM--40--NFA--Unemployed' (K 96) which critics such as Poyner (2006), Wright (2013) Wilm (2016), have all suggested can be read as 'Coloured Male, aged 40 with No Fixed Address.' I do not seek to deviate from this reading here. As with *Disgrace*, a text I discuss in the conclusion, Coetzee's deliberate evasion of naming characters as black or white, can be read in several ways, either through allegory of power and othering in general, or as a way of shifting assumption and prejudice to the reader. However, as is generally the critical consensus when reading this text, I also read him as black in my analysis. For more on the problem of reading race in Coetzee see: Barbara J. Eckstein, 'Race is not an issue: J. M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K*' in *The Language of Fiction in a World of Pain: Reading Politics as Paradox* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), pp. 93-106 and David Attwell, 'Race In *Disgrace*,' *Interventions*, 4.3 (2002), pp. 331-341.

³⁶⁴ J.M. Coetzee, *Life and Times of Michael K* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 4. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and abbreviated to K.

Here sweeping and scrubbing are made equivalent to reading and writing. Throughout the novel, he understands his existence through undertaking work: he cleans the apartment of his mother's employers long after they have abandoned it (K 19) and at the hospital where his mother is dying, he asks for work: 'I don't want money,' he said, 'just something to do' (K 40). For K, undertaking labour is the way he understands the meaning of his body. K's performance of labour is his way of being in time.

Over the course of the novel, K travels across the unnamed country, firstly with his mother, and then after her death, alone, in order to return to her family farm. During this journey, there are moments in which K is alleviated from this definition as labourer, through a new kind of relationship to the land. Here we see Coetzee's continued interest in exploring the peculiarities of the land in South African history, but rather than looking at the coloniser, he focuses on an individual who has been subjugated through institutional racism. Coetzee's essay, 'Idleness in South Africa' outlines the relationship between work, idleness and the Hottentot or Nama tribe in ethnographic writings since the discovery of the cape. In this essay, Coetzee explains that travel writers visiting the cape after 1654, started to describe the indigenous people in terms of 'idleness, indolence, sloth, laziness, torpor.'³⁶⁵ Historically black people in South Africa have been made other through these characterisations, formed through the inherited Protestant work ethic that shaped culture since the enlightenment and made its way over to Africa with the first settlers.

Moreover, the relationship between work, the land itself and its indigenous occupants is further explicated through gardening or farming: the colonial project was underscored by the idea that tribes were not willing to work the land, leaving it to colonialists to introduce models of agriculture. Coetzee notes:

³⁶⁵ Coetzee, 'Idleness in South Africa,' *White Writing*, p. 18.

The consensus is that the Hottentot way of life, characterised by low-level subsistence maintained by minimal resort to wage-labour (“laziness”), wandering in search of greener pastures (“vagrancy”), and a sometimes casual attitude toward private property (“thieving”), will have to be re-formed by *discipline* (a key word of the age) if the Hottentot is to have any stake (“pull his weight”) in the Colony.³⁶⁶

In mapping the land, controlling the activities and standardising work practices, the European settlers, in their mind, put the land to the use that it actively demanded. By squandering the possibilities of this landscape, the native people demonstrated their unfitness to live there. Through the re-categorisation of activity that Coetzee outlines above, the mode of being in space was transformed dramatically.

When K enters the desert landscape, his sense of how to be in space is disrupted because he is unable to perform labour. K is struck by a new thought, as he makes his way through a barren, silent, landscape:

I could live here forever, he thought, or till I die. Nothing would happen, every day would be the same as the day before, there would be nothing to say. The anxiety that belonged to the time on the road began to leave him. Sometimes, as he walked, he did not know whether to he was awake or asleep. He could understand that people should have retreated here and fenced themselves in with miles and miles of silence; he could understand that they should have wanted to bequeath the privilege of so much silence to their grandchildren in perpetuity (though by what right he was not sure); he wondered whether there were not forgotten corners and angles and corridors between the fences, land belonged to no one yet. Perhaps if one flew high enough, he thought, one would be able to see (K 63-4).

Time has no distinct quality, only that it is here where no one makes any demands from him or expects him to undertake labour. This new experience of time is specifically rooted in the landscape, and mediated by lines of mapping. In seeking ‘forgotten corners and angles and corridors’ K considers other ways of understanding the land, escape from the lines of fences. The inheritance of silence seems to refer both to the farmers who have lived there, and those who have not been represented in

³⁶⁶ Coetzee, *White Writing*, p. 26.

this form of mapping. Like Magda's attempt at making stone speak, here K realises that land cannot bear witness.

As with DeLillo, Coetzee also uses images of the burrow as means of representing knowledge, whilst also aligning it to the new form of agency found in Kafka's creatures burrow. Marais contrasts K's unwillingness to colonise the land, with Jacobus's descriptions of the 'boundless' (Du 80) wilderness in *Dusklands*.³⁶⁷ K is not interested in the farmhouse, but instead chooses to live in a burrow, what he calls his 'home in the earth' (K 142): 'I want to live here, he thought: I want to live here forever, where my mother and my grandmother lived. It is as simple as that' (135). Coetzee considers the interrelation between character and land: like DeLillo, he forms a new kind of affiliation between character and space, that is not to suggest one can fully explicate the other, but that new ways of living and being in it can emerge. As Marais comments: 'Henceforth, [K] sees not a 'farm', that is, a property, but an undefined space. Indeed, following his forfeiture of subject-centred consciousness, he develops the ability to see the land in its original wilderness condition, that is, divested of its "being-something", its ratiocinative overlay.'³⁶⁸ K's burrow is a way of finding an alternative space for himself, a subterranean home that also provides him with an internal architecture through which he can be afforded some form of agency.

In the novel's relentless movement, in which K is consistently moved forwards and onwards, when he is not confronted by the demands of others he is not conscious in the same way. He is afforded a new kind of time, in which he does not have to fill it with activity:

³⁶⁷ Mike Marais 'One of those islands without an owner': The aesthetic of Space in *Robinson Crusoe and Life and Time of Michael K*, *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*, 8.1 (1996), 19-32, (p. 25).

³⁶⁸ Ibid. p. 25.

When he awoke in the morning he faced only the single huge block of the day, one day at a time. He thought of himself as a termite boring its way through a rock. There seemed nothing to do but live. He sat so still that it would not have startled him if birds had flown down and perched on his shoulders (K 91).

Time is not measured out in the notion of directed abstract labour, so cannot be broken down into the constituent parts that characterize a working day. Rather than a moving body that is active, he is a 'still body' that is passive.³⁶⁹ His activity cannot be redefined through the racist language Coetzee explains above, but instead surpasses those categories, existing between different states, an interstitial mode of engagement with the world.

In his later novel *Slow Man*, which I will be discussing later, the protagonist Paul Rayment says, 'If your time is not worth much in itself, at least you can put it to a good use.'³⁷⁰ Rayment's obsession with discovering a mode of filling his time as a recently disabled man finds a counterpoint in this earlier novel, in which the notion of 'time-well spent', or time 'spent' at all is disrupted. K momentarily experiences what life would be like if he did not have to sell or undertake labour. No longer obligated to work to fill up the time, he becomes increasingly dedicated to his secret gardening. This dedication begins as he buries his mother's ashes where, in an unusual moment of self-reflection K says: 'This was the beginning of his life as a cultivator' (K 81). He continues:

His deepest pleasure came at sunset when he turned open the cock at the dam wall and watched the stream of water run down its channels to soak the earth, turning it from a fawn to deep brown. It is because I am a gardener, he thought, because that is my nature. He sharpened the blade of his spade on a stone, the better to savour the instant when it clove to the earth. The impulse to plant had been awoken in him now, in a matter of weeks, he found his waking life bound

³⁶⁹ This notion of passivity is interesting, but unfortunately not one I have time to adequately explore here. For more on radical passivity see Thomas Carl Wall, *Radical Passivity: Levinas, Blanchot, and Agamben* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999).

³⁷⁰ J.M. Coetzee, *Slow Man* (London: Vintage, 2006), p. 177. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and referred to as SM.

tightly to the patch of earth he had begun to cultivate and the seeds he had planted there (K 81).

This is one of the few moments of delight that Coetzee affords his otherwise affectless character. His 'waking life' is now reimagined through the patch of earth. But clearly this garden and the act of gardening are characterised by a completely different relationship to space: K does not need to establish a space for himself as an owner of land; on the contrary, he uses the land as he finds it. The garden is also a moving place: this is by no means the fixed space of a controlled English garden as Kincaid notes above, but instead one that goes with him, where he goes. For Michael K it seems that the territory of the refugee is an in-between place, a space he can move through that demands nothing from him. The external categories that render him a refugee (black, disabled, working class) no longer have the power to suppress him in the location of the desert.

In Nadine Gordimer's review of the book she criticized Coetzee for what she characterised as Coetzee's removal of K from history. She says,

Coetzee's heroes are those who ignore history, not make it...No one in this novel has any sense of taking part in determining that course; no one is shown to believe he knows what that course should be. The sense is of the ultimate malaise: of destruction. Not even the oppressor really believes in what he is doing, anymore, let alone the revolutionary.³⁷¹

What Gordimer seems to misread here is Coetzee's exploration of being in space, in which semi-consciousness and gardening are ways of enacting an in-between state that cannot be subsumed into the dominant historical narrative. By transforming K from a working gardener to an itinerant gardener, Coetzee's novel is not as Gordimer says,

³⁷¹ Nadine Gordimer, 'The Idea of Gardening', in *New York Review of Books*, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1984/02/02/the-idea-of-gardening/>, accessed May 20th 2017.

apolitical, a way of hiding from history in ‘the idea of gardening,’³⁷² but a response to the history of racist taxonomies of behaviour.

This new way of being is also found in his changing relationship to food and to eating. As the novel continues, K gradually eats less and less food, until he is emaciated and thin and unable to hold down water. Kyoko Yoshida comments that ‘K suffers a type of aphasia that estranges symbol from substance, metaphors from objects, language from things, words in mouth from foods in mouth.’³⁷³ Like some of DeLillo’s characters, starvation for K seems to be a bodily way of expressing a separation from the world. There is a similar relationship in Gonalo M. Tavares’s novel, *Klaus Klump: A Man*, whose main character is also deprived of speech through starvation:

Klaus’s gums were very red. There was blood on Klaus’s lower gum. Vitamins are important for the sentences you speak. Klaus now spoke with faulty grammar, he spoke confusedly. He lacked vitamins in his gums and his sentences had lost their former precision. He no longer discoursed promptly and aptly. His sentences were approximations, attempts. Language deprived of vitamins is incompatible with reality.³⁷⁴

Klaus’s worsening physical health reduces his ability to speak, reminding us that though language may seem to be an innate ability, it too is a bodily process that requires nurturing. K, whose cleft palate has physically impeded his speech from the very beginning of his life, is actively prohibited the use of words through his thinning body. Food and speaking become interrelated as poverty denies people voices; in the literal act of starving one is relegated to the margins from which one cannot speak. In choosing to deny himself food, K inverts the systems that have historically denied him the means through which to eat.

³⁷² Gordimer, n. pag.

³⁷³ Kyoko Yoshida, ‘Eating (Dis)Order,’ *J. M Coetzee in Context and Theory*, p. 142.

³⁷⁴ Gonalo M. Tavares, *Klaus Klump: A Man*, trans. by Rhett McNeil (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2014), p. 23.

In Kafka's 'The Hunger Artist', the body becomes a site of defiance made into art, a rejection of bodily function and a prioritising of creativity. In each of these texts these writers explore food as a metonym for participation in the world; in their eschewing of food, these characters consider the permeable boundaries between a bodily purity and worldly excess. In an essay in which they compare the characters of Herman Melville's 'Bartleby, The Scrivener' and Michael K, Gert Buelens and Dominiek Hoens note that both characters have a clear lack of self: 'they are at once something and nothing, a fact that precisely enables them to appear as highly singular.'³⁷⁵ Both of them however, are made 'something and nothing' through their denial of language. In their resistance to expression and their refusal to engage in dialogue, both Bartleby and K become expressive through this very inexpressiveness.

In David Attwell's study into the early drafts of this text, he notes that both Knut Hamsun's *Hunger* and Kafka's 'The Hunger Artist' appear in Coetzee's notes,³⁷⁶ as well as Melville's 'Bartleby'.³⁷⁷ Moreover, Hermann Wittenberg has analysed the influence of film and photography on the composition of this text, noting Coetzee's search for a "renovation of form."³⁷⁸ This 'renovation' seems to emerge from an interest in incorporating multiple forms within the text: in his notes from the time of writing, Coetzee outlines the intersection of other novel forms in which K is mired: 'K struggles to exist between the Scylla of Representativeness (the Historical Novel) and the Charybdis of Individuality (the Modern Novel). In the background also

³⁷⁵ Gert Buelens and Dominiek Hoens. "Above and beneath Classification:" Bartleby, Life and Times of Michael K, and Syntagmatic Participation,' *Diacritics*, 37. 2/3 (2007), pp. 157-170, (p. 158).

³⁷⁶ Attwell, J.M. *Coetzee Life and Writing: Face to Face with Time*, p. 135.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

³⁷⁸ J.M. Coetzee diary entry, quoted in Hermann Wittenberg, 'Film and Photography in J.M. Coetzee's Life & Times of Michael K,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 58.4 (2016), pp. 473-492, (p. 474).

lurk the lone heroes of the American Romance (Natty Bumppo, Huck Finn).³⁷⁹ In this intersection between novel form and character archetype Michael K's story struggles to find its proper place. Coetzee explores how one individual character bears the burden of so many forms of writing, and in K's responsive silence, suggests that he cannot.

This tension between K and the form of the novel itself is one that is worth unpacking fully. The novel is divided into three parts: the first part outlines a series of events in Michael's life, almost as reportage. It is written in the third person and makes some limited use of free indirect discourse. The second part is from the perspective of the doctor in an internment camp, a doctor who considers Michael K to be so other, that '[he was] not sure he is wholly of our world' (K 178-9). The third part returns to third person, as Michael K returns to his hometown. The title of the novel is highly ironic, suggesting it will explore a significant life of an individual through history. To give the novel this title is to consider the visibility and invisibility of the lives of poor people of colour, in both fiction and real life. Coetzee redraws the boundaries of what is *significant* by making a person with little real power in the society around them the central focus. The bildungsroman structure is impeded by limited representation of K's internal thought process; without these moments of elucidation, the reader sees no difference in him. Indeed, the novel progresses by the nature of his journey, a journey that is delayed by his mother's death, his health, and by his placement in camps, but K does not change, and is seemingly unable to change. In plotting K's life in this way, Coetzee asks: what would it mean for K to respond to

³⁷⁹ Coetzee quoted in David Atwell, *J.M. Coetzee Life and Writing: Face to Face with Time*, p. 145.

the demands of this form? Moreover, what are the politics of a journey narrative and bildungsroman in the first place?

However, this is not to suggest that K is self-conscious of himself as character. In fact, this idea of consciousness is troubled by Coetzee, as he demonstrates the inability to which K can adequately self-reflect. We see small examples of what should be internal questioning, but where K fails to fulfil the narratological demand of a bildungsroman. This firstly happens after the death of K's mother: 'He tore a black strip from the lining of his mother's coat and pinned it around his arm. But he did not miss her, he found, except insofar as he had missed her all his life' (K 46). In the act of deciding to mourn his mother, K replicates the mourning band, a traditional way of signifying to oneself and to others the loss of a loved one. The band reveals his desire to mourn, but in this small revelation K realizes that he cannot mourn what was never there. Later, in meeting a family who let him stay with them for a night and feed him, he is confronted with a thought he does not know how to answer: 'He might help people, he might not help them, he did not know beforehand, anything was possible. He did not seem to have a belief, or did not seem to have a belief regarding help. Perhaps I am the stony ground' (K 65). In being met with kindness from this family, K asks himself if he can reciprocate, and in doing so, realizes that he does not recognize the possibility with any certainty. The movement from third to first person in the last sentence is a small moment of illumination, still couched in the tentative phrase 'perhaps' and using a metaphor of silence. These moments of internal reflection do not go back to K, but outwards to us, as the reader. How is it that K can adequately respond to the demands of others, when he has never been cared for? What does it mean to care for someone else when your relationships with others are and have been characterised by a lack of care?

In fact, the experience of burden and frustration is passed from the reader to another character. In part two, when Michael K is placed in a military hospital, Coetzee introduces a character who is in some way changed, but through their interactions with K. The narrative changes to first person and we are presented with Michael through the eyes of a doctor. The doctor is confounded by Michael, describing him as a lizard (181, 190), a stone or pebble (185, 191), a duckling or a kitten (195), a baby (198), a corpse (198), and a stick insect (204). These disparate images demonstrate the doctor's inability to actively see and understand Michael K on his own terms, resorting instead to inexact metaphors. As he spends more time with Michael—or as he names him Michaels, 'as a shorthand for the lack of purchase the medical officer's interpretations have over the protagonist'³⁸⁰ as Richard Adelman has pointed out—he becomes obsessed with the idea of knowing his story, and of K's seeming inability to recount the story. The transformative effects of the bildungsroman form, in which a character is met with an event that insists upon a response, is enacted upon this character and not on Michael. In fact, the doctor notes that 'Michaels...makes no progress' (K 184).

But though he might not make medical progress by moving towards recognizable 'health,' in the third part of the novel Michael comes to some kind of conclusion about his life, found in a return to the room he shared with his mother. As he wanders round Sea Point, ill and thin, he returns to the room they shared and begins to think about storytelling: 'It struck him too that his story was paltry, not worth the telling, full of the same old gaps that he would never learn how to bridge. Or else he simply did not know how to tell a story, how to keep interest alive' (K 240). What is

³⁸⁰ Richard Adelman, 'Ventriloquism and idleness in J. M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*,' *Textual Practice*, 30.4 (2016), pp. 599-619, (p. 617).

interesting here is K's concept of a story, in which 'paltry', 'same old gaps' and 'interest' form the basis for a story 'not worth the telling.' Unlike DeLillo's room which is the primary scene of writing, returning to the room only reveals how little K is able to recount. Maud Ellmann argues that in the work of both Kafka and Yeats, starvation and the production of art are linked: 'The image of the starving artist in their work seems to stand for the crisis of high art in bourgeois culture that is, for the exclusion of artists from the life of commerce and their proud refusal to be "fed" by capital.'³⁸¹ Paul Auster makes the link between Kafka's starving artist and artistry itself, linking it more closely with an actual embodied experience of art; art that is created through the body, or art that becomes inseparable from the body: 'In the end, the art of hunger can be described as an existential art. It is a way of looking death in the face, and by death I mean death as we live it today; without God, without hope of salvation. Death as the abrupt and absurd end of life.'³⁸² The Hunger Artist undertakes a new kind of art in which only he knows if he fulfils the terms which characterize him as that artist: this new experience of art that is found through an activity of the body, undertaken invisibly. Though K is not an explicit artist in this same way, he shares this notion of art as a secret undertaking that emerges through gaps. As opposed to the romantic image of the artist, we have K the gardener and the harvester, and where K's artistry lies in the secret performance of a way of being out of time.

³⁸¹ Ellmann, p. 70.

³⁸² Auster, p. 20.

Reading the space of the other: *Age of Iron* and *Slow Man*

‘It is thus important that we can cross the threshold that is open in our world in both directions: going out to meet with the other, and returning inside to meet ourselves. To return home, back to ourselves is necessary. Taking shelter is essential for those who have left their own house, who have ventured in spaces still unknown, who have exposed themselves to the other: the foreigner or the stranger in relation with themselves.’³⁸³

In *Age of Iron* and *Slow Man*, Coetzee continues his interest in intimate relationships, though in these novels the settings are much more established in a specific time and place, South Africa in 1986-9 and Australia circa 2004-5 respectively, set predominantly in the home. However, though these specifics dates and places are mentioned, as Coetzee notes earlier, his use of explicit times and places are not to suggest an exact replication of the real, but instead give us particular historical contexts with which to think about issues always at stake in his work. Coetzee thinks through themes of proximity, invasion and care in relation to the space of the home, at the intersections between the public and private. Though Coetzee has explored these notions through the (somewhat makeshift) domestic lives of Michael and Magda, here, the majority of these novels are spent in houses; houses in which the domestic order is rearranged through illness. As with DeLillo in my previous chapter, Coetzee reconsiders the forms of literary architecture that underpin the book in terms of a proximate other. By thinking about the space of the home in relation to an other, Coetzee expands how it is that the historic interiority of the novel can be reimagined as a new interspatial ethics.

In *Age of Iron* Coetzee suggests that the space of the house needs to be interrogated as a location in which a person must live and confront others. Like

³⁸³ Irigaray, p. 46.

Magda's home in IHC, Coetzee explores how the domestic space is just as political as the farm. The novel opens thus:

There is an alley down the side of the garage, you may remember it, you and your friends would sometimes play there. Now it is a dead place, waste, without use, where windblown leaves pile up and rot. Yesterday, at the end of this alley, I came upon a house of carton boxes and plastic sheeting and a man curled up inside, a man I recognized from the streets: tall, thin, with a weathered skin and long, carious fangs, wearing a baggy grey suit and a hat with a sagging brim (AI 3).

This space, both inside and outside of the house, used to be used by the addressee when she or he was a child. This 'dead place', without use, becomes reoccupied, by what the narrator immediately refers to as a 'house.' This transition from 'dead place' to 'house' shows a movement of transformation and reterritorialisation that underlies the book. Mrs Curren, the protagonist, begins to understand that she cannot dismiss lives that take place in particular spaces that she cannot recognise as a 'home'.

Through this occupation of this alley, the novel meditates on the meaning of the neighbour, an issue at the heart of Coetzee's later novel *Disgrace*, through the character Petrus. The protagonist David Lurie is suspicious of this man, who lives in close proximity to his daughter Lucy and works with her on her smallholding. After he and Lucy are attacked, Petrus is absent for a few days. David is suspicious and wants to confront him, but knows that the relationship between himself and Petrus has now changed:

In the old days one could have had it out with Petrus. In the old days one could have had it out to the extent of losing one's temper and sending him packing and hiring someone in his place. But though Petrus is paid a wage, Petrus is no longer, strictly speaking, hired help. It is hard to say what Petrus is, strictly speaking. The word that seems to serve best, however, is *neighbour*. Petrus is a neighbour who at present happens to sell his labour, because that is what suits him. He sells his labour under contract, unwritten contract, and that contract makes no provision for dismissal on grounds of suspicion. It is a new

world they live in, he and Lucy and Petrus. Petrus knows it, and he knows it, and Petrus knows that he knows it.³⁸⁴

For David, human relationships during apartheid made sense in some grim way because interpersonal relationships were fixed into position through language. In post-apartheid South Africa, Lurie searches for ways of speaking that avoid referring to racist hierarchies, and specifically the language of master and slave. The etymology of neighbour is from the Old English literally meaning ‘neardweller’³⁸⁵ and this word takes on supreme importance for Lurie, as he begins to understand the impact that end of apartheid means living with others, specifically a new proximity outside of the defining positions of racist law and language.

For Mrs Curren, in *Age of Iron*, this idea of neighbour is manifested in the close proximity of another’s body, the idea of a guest, the idea of charity, and of familial relationships transformed. When Mr Vercueil turns up in her garden one day, he is a homeless drunk that she has little interest in; by the end of the novel he shares her bed and cares for her in her dying days. This transformation depicts Mrs Curren’s gradual realisation that to live in South Africa at this time means to radically alter not only her idea of morality, but also re-envision the idea of mutual care that is outside of her previous frame of reference. Her monologue—written in the form of a letter—moves between the deconstruction of her understanding of the world she lives in, and a restating of it. As many critics note, Coetzee often uses his novels as a way to stage a process of an individual transformation but these transformations are by no means a simple move from point A to B: they involve the complex negotiation of several intersecting positions, in which the protagonist much continually confront the

³⁸⁴ J.M. Coetzee, (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 116-7. All references are taken from this edition and hereafter abbreviated to D.

³⁸⁵ ‘Neighbour’ in *Chambers Dictionary*, p. 1030.

limitations of their understanding and the possibilities of their imagination. In this novel, Coetzee's narrator, an elderly woman dying of cancer, becomes a conduit for an exploration that is both racial and generational. Magda in IHC may be wondering what her life *could* be, imagining spaces in which she can 'expand' but Mrs Curren, whose ill health renders her more and more constrained to her house, is looking back at what her life has been. In the space of the house she is confronted by her ethical responsibility to acknowledge her proximity, both literally and historically, to the atrocities of apartheid. By placing this narrative within the mind of a frail and ill woman, Coetzee demonstrates the crucial need for every member of society to include themselves in a confrontation with the past, present, and indeed future, regardless of whether or not they have a stake in it. By considering Mrs Curren's body as a site of vulnerability, I extend the reading of Derek Attridge, who has identified a 'conversion'³⁸⁶ or 'transformation' experience at work in Coetzee's fiction, in which his characters encounter a vulnerable body, suggesting that there is a need for individuals to recognise the differing kinds of vulnerability that exist, a solidarity that is essential to the rebuilding of human relationships.

The novel's form, a long letter, written in the immediate present, evokes the historical form of the epistolary novel. Written to a daughter who now lives in America and appears to have severed all ties to South Africa in what we assume to be a political stand against the continuing regime of apartheid, the letter is an attempt to breach a divide of space and of time. In its very inception it is aiming to literally

³⁸⁶ Derek Attridge, "'A Yes without a No': Philosophical Reason and the Ethics of Conversion in Coetzee's Fiction' in *Beyond the Ancient Quarrel: Literature, Philosophy, and J.M. Coetzee*, ed. by Patrick Hayes and Jan Wilm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 91-106.

travel across a great divide, to another location that is both physically and culturally distant. The novel is also an experiment in the time of communication, a future-oriented document written in the present, a delayed missive, in which a response is suggested in the form, but never forthcoming in the novel itself. This letter then signifies a lack of response from the interlocutor.

In fact, as the letter goes on, it seems to ask who the correct interlocutor could actually be; though it is addressed to her daughter, it appears that by the end of the novel the true addressee may instead be Vercueil or indeed the writer herself. The letter begins as a way for Mrs Curren to communicate with her absent child. This is contrasted to her lack of love for the others who surround her, posing the question, what use is this maternal love if it is merely being sent out into the world without being returned? In the form of the novel, the relationship is in fact, one-sided, and Mrs Curren acknowledges this: ‘To whom writing this then? The answer: to you but not to you; to me; to you in me’ (AI 6). The daughter is simultaneously present and absent in the text, and may never receive the words on the page. The daughter serves as a vacant space, an exterior location to which Mrs Curren can send her thoughts – a way of writing outside of herself but *for* herself. Coetzee suggests that this movement outward must necessarily return to the self. In fact, the daughter, who is barely characterised, is a stand-in, prosthesis for Mrs Curren’s radical reassessment of her life. Coetzee appears to extend Beckett’s search for others within the text by using a form that in its very nature must reach outside of the text.

In her examination of herself, Mrs Curren also engages with other characters, most specifically Vercueil; as she notes at the beginning of the novel, ‘When I write about him I write about myself’ (AI 9). In this way, though the letter is directed to an absent loved one, an act of love that should travel across borders, it quickly becomes

clear that the letter is an exploration of the territory of home, a form of reconnoiter inward that I have been exploring in DeLillo. Mrs Curren moves from her daughter, to Vercueil, to herself, dismantling the distinctions between each of them; she uses the notion of distance, both real in the case of her daughter, and socialized in the case of Vercueil, to return to her individual understanding of the boundary between self and other in human relationships.

The letter is, in true Coetzee style, decidedly mongrel; it straddles the form of epistolary and of deathbed confessional, fulfilling neither quite exactly. In this way, the novel is both inward and outward looking: As Coetzee notes in his discussion of *Notes from the Underground*, the confession becomes ‘pseudo-public but “really” a private document,’³⁸⁷ noting that in that novel, the main character says, ‘I shall never have readers.’ The ‘I’ of this text is one that has been formulated explicitly through writing, directed towards an unspecific location in a future time, underscored by the idea that it is a message that must be delivered.³⁸⁸ But she also seems to realize that the letter signifies more than that: ‘This letter is not a baring of my heart. It is a baring of something, but not of my heart’ (AI 15). This laying bare of ‘something’ appears to be a gradual undoing of Mrs Curren’s notion of love: the physical descriptions of the embrace of the child are replaced by a different kind of love, a new economy of care that is unrecognizable and outside of the familial structure.

³⁸⁷ Coetzee, ‘Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky,’ *Doubling the Point*, p. 281.

³⁸⁸ Vercueil is discussed throughout the course of the book as both an angel and messenger, the etymology of ‘angel’ from the ecclesiastical Greek ‘messenger.’ The Dostoevsky story that Mrs Curren reads, ‘What Men Live By,’ is a retelling of the proverb from Hebrews 13:2: ‘Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.’ Many critics have discussed hospitality in the relation to the other in Coetzee’s work, see Michael Marais, *Secretary of the Invisible: The Idea of Hospitality in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee* (New York: Rodopi, 2009) and María J. López, *Acts of Visitation: The Narrative of J.M. Coetzee* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011).

But, as Dominic Head notes, the novel ‘seems to have been constructed in such a way as to confront the problem of double thought and the tainted confession.’³⁸⁹

Coetzee notes that:

Confession is one element in a sequence of transgression, confession, penitence and absolution. Absolution means the end of the episode, the closing of the chapter, liberation from the oppression of the memory. Absolution in this sense is therefore the indispensable goal of all confession, sacramental or secular.³⁹⁰

By placing this confession within the form of the letter, Coetzee problematizes the notion that confessing contains its own absolution, by suggesting that the letter may never reach its intended audience. There can be no conclusion to confession; instead this letter is a placeholder for an absolution that will never arrive. This deferral is contrasted with Mrs Curren’s preoccupation with the notion of direct speech: though the novel opens with a direct address to a ‘you’, it is filled with conversations and dialogues that cannot be reciprocated. Rather than a Beckettian search for a space for its own voice, Coetzee here enacts a protracted search for the ethical interlocutor, or indeed, a space in which this can take place.

The familial and the maternal is also focused through Mrs Curren’s cancer. In *IHC*, Coetzee related the idea of feminine labour with barrenness, specifically in terms of its relation to land. This subverted the association of possibility and (re)production with women’s bodies, and the tendency to supplant these metaphors on the land of Africa. Magda guessed that she was barren, though she had no proof, by making herself an equivalent to the land she lived in. In this novel, Mrs Curren’s cancer is a form of child-bearing, as Jayne Poyner notes: ‘Cancer...therefore signals not only Mrs

³⁸⁹ Head, p. 66.

³⁹⁰ Coetzee, ‘Confession,’ p. 194.

Curren's imminent death but also the impossible birth of an afflicted nation.'³⁹¹ Mrs Curren, pregnant with the 'accumulation of shame' (AI 145) does not and cannot give birth to it. But, like Magda in IHC, Coetzee does not let the metaphor of cancer and pregnancy for shame sit easily; instead, he appears to use this metaphor as a way to consider the efficacy of liberal internalized self-punishment. When she asks: 'Must one die in full knowledge, fully oneself? Must one give birth to one's death without anaesthetic?' (AI 141), Mrs Curren suggests that to know oneself fully means to acknowledge the scope of self-knowledge, some excavation of the dark internal recesses that make up the individual. Implicit within one's life is one death, a painful realization that cannot be dulled through medication. But through the letter, Mrs Curren also accepts the limits of this self-knowledge, or, disavows the notion of self-knowledge altogether. An acknowledgement of a profound internalized shame is not 'self-knowledge' and is not an equivalent to the atrocities of apartheid. Indeed, by reading Mrs Curren's cancer as a responsive and symbolic suffering, it occludes the real pain of her disease. In attempting to read a vulnerable female body as a site for national trauma we fall into a trap of making Mrs Curren's cancer absolutely analogous to her guilt, rendering her body invisible. As Susan Sontag discusses, cancer is often depicted as a willed disease and that some people deserve it. In using metaphor of cancer 'It amounts to saying...that the event or situation is unqualifiedly and unredemably wicked,'³⁹² that situations are cancerous because they are beyond help. To read her cancer in this way is to obfuscate her vulnerabilities, that she is an elderly woman who is ill and alone.

³⁹¹ Jayne Poyner, *J.M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship* (Ohio University Press: London, 2006), p. 112.

³⁹² Susan Sontag, *Illness as metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 82-83.

However, Coetzee complicates her isolation through her seeming rejection of her grandsons in America. At the end of the novel, Mrs Curren thinks of them and does not appear to feel any emotion for them:

Do I wish death upon my grandchildren? Are you, at this very instant, flinging the page away from you in disgust? Mad old woman! are you crying out? They are not my grandchildren. They are too distant to be children of mine of whatever sort. I do not leave behind a numerous family. A daughter. A consort and his dog (AI 195).

Katherine Stanton argues that these lines demonstrate Mrs Curren's 'desire to disown these two boys' and that through 'disassembly' she has managed to reimagine her family unit,³⁹³ but I suggest that this paragraph is more ambiguous than that. The last two phrases 'A daughter. A consort and his dog' are not necessarily confirmed as part of the previous thought, so they hang as fragments; in this fragmentation Mrs Curren proposes a new kind of proximity, but not through claiming them as part of a neatly 'reimagined' unit. Indeed, though Mr Vercueil is simultaneously a messenger, an angel and 'shadow husband'—and ambiguously, her killer—we cannot see this relationship in terms of a family unit at all. Instead, through their multiple and varying interactions, Coetzee suggests a complex form of human relationships in which the vulnerable and the ill can be given a kind of radical agency to co-exist outside hierarchal power structures that 'invade' every exchange. This co-existence dismantles the family unit, in a new kind of neighbourly relationship, proximity over blood. By including a character who gradually recognizes the inefficacy of liberal guilt, we see the limits of reading the body as a site for national trauma, and in particular making the body of a woman the symbolic site of both motherhood and care. Again, to return to Sontag, 'modern [illness] metaphors suggest a profound

³⁹³ Katherine Stanton, *Cosmopolitan Fictions: ethics, politics and global change in the works of Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Ondaatje, Jamaica Kincaid and J.M. Coetzee* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 70.

disequilibrium between individual and society, with a society conceived as the individual's adversary.³⁹⁴ By placing Mrs Curren at the intersection between the individual and society, asking her to bear the weight of national trauma on her vulnerable body, the notion of cancer as 'standing in' for or working as a national disease internalized by the specific individual collapses as a mode of reading. Coetzee questions the narrative of public grief inscribed onto private bodies through this metaphor. By placing this tension within the space of the house, Coetzee questions the very stability of the space of house in fiction.

Katherine Stanton continues this discussion about the tendency of national narratives to be placed on the bodies of women in her analysis of *Disgrace*, in which she wonders how the economies of redistribution will take into account women into this newly imagined South Africa.³⁹⁵ What this 'restitution' might mean is circulated in this novel through the notion of care that I have been exploring: 'Care: the true root of charity. I look for him to care, and he does not. Because he is beyond caring. Beyond caring and beyond care' (AI 22). This idea of care outside of a system of charity is important; Mrs Curren thinks about how human relationships can exist outside of a particular surface level of exchange asking "'What is the point of charity when it does not go from heart to heart'" (AI 22). In this novel, love cannot be represented through a maternal confession or through the family home, so it is replaced by a new kind of indirect care: 'I love him because I do not love him' (AI 131). Returning to his Jerusalem Prize Speech, Coetzee notes that: 'At the heart of the unfreedom of the hereditary masters of South Africa is a failure to love. To be blunt:

³⁹⁴ Sontag, p. 74.

³⁹⁵ Stanton, p. 73.

their love is not enough today and has not been since they arrived on the continent.³⁹⁶ As with earlier descriptions of land and landscape, Coetzee again describes how the abstraction of 'love' is allowed to stand in for more material forms of solidarity. Familial, sexual and maternal love are replaced by a new kind of loveless neighbourly kinship; one that is forged through a solidarity found in vulnerability.

In *Slow Man*, another close relationship of care is reconfigured, also in the setting of the home. In considering the role of the migrant in a newly globalized world, Coetzee complicates the idea of direct exchange between individuals. Both Pieter Viermuelen³⁹⁷ and David Attwell note that Coetzee considers authorship and the failures of the novel to address contemporary global crises, with Attwell commenting 'The overriding subject of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), *Slow Man* (2005) and *Diary [of a bad year]* (2007) is really the practice of authorship itself, a question always in the background of earlier work, but [...] now become the fabric and substance.'³⁹⁸ Like much of Coetzee's earlier fiction, this novel explores how to represent human relationships that respond to contemporaneous issues, in this case, migration and identity. Moreover, in this text, Coetzee's nascent interest in photography comes to the fore,³⁹⁹ as a means of exploring belonging and the boundaries of inside and

³⁹⁶ Coetzee, 'Jerusalem Prize Speech,' p. 97.

³⁹⁷ Pieter Viermuelen, 'Abandoned Creatures: Creaturely Life and the Novel Form in J.M. Coetzee's *Slow Man*,' *Studies in the Novel*, 45.4 (2013), pp. 655-674.

³⁹⁸ David Atwell, 'Mastering Authority: J.M. Coetzee's *Diary of a Bad Year*,' *Social Dynamics: A journal of African studies*, 36.1 (2010), pp. 214-221, (p. 217).

³⁹⁹ This is not Coetzee's only mention of photography in his work: In part one of *Dusklands*, for example, Dawn owns photographs of the atrocities taking place in Vietnam (Du 8, 13-16) and Michael K is fascinated by a newspaper image of the 'Khamieskroon killer' (K 22). There has been some work that looks into the relationship between Coetzee's work and photography, which I mention below, as well as the influence of photography and cinematography on his writing process. As mentioned above, Hermann Wittenberg used his archival research at the Harry Ransom Centre to explore the influence of montage on the composition of *Life and*

outside, echoing DeLillo's interest in the space of the partial artwork. The earlier points I made about realism and the real also emerge in these discussions, as Coetzee uses the photograph as a stand-in for another kind of reality that cannot hold.

In a novel in which we see different characters demanding action from one another, relatively little happens. As Pieter Viermuelen comments: 'Coetzee's late fiction produces novels from which almost all novelistic elements have been subtracted. These books abandon their characters in a zone where the routines of desire and other novelistic ploys can no longer guide them.'⁴⁰⁰ Like Beckett's late fiction, which as Gontarski notes, often focuses on a single image, or DeLillo's late fiction, in which bodies are often literally suspended or slowed down, Coetzee's *slow man* is both literally slowed down by his disability, and also suspended by an unwillingness to respond to the contemporary world. Unlike some of the other Coetzee narratives, in which there has been some journey, either internally or externally, for much of the novel the protagonist is preoccupied by his desire to prove himself a candidate for a woman's love. When Elizabeth Costello enters the narrative and asserts herself as the author of his life, her presence problematizes not only Rayment's sense of self but also the question of agency.

In the opening pages, Paul Rayment is the victim of an accident that leads to the loss of his leg. Donald Powers describes this accident as a catalyst for a series of displacements: 'By bringing the professional carer Marijana Jokić into his circumscribed life, Rayment's bicycle accident brings into view a different order of

Times of Michael K as well as the influence of his screenplay adaptation of *In the Heart of the Country*.

⁴⁰⁰ Viermuelen, p. 658.

displacement – emigration.’⁴⁰¹ The accident and Marijana, pain and possible love, are the interlinked framing devices that underscore the text. But, as Powers also notes, the accident is established as a literary event: ‘The surfacing in his thoughts of the sequence of letters “Q-W-E-R-T-Y” (3) frames this physical event as a creative act of writing in which he is the partly self-conscious subject.’⁴⁰² Because the novel opens with the accident, Rayment enters the novel through its representation: his body is written into the space of fiction. But the forming of letters, the material building blocks that make up words, also demonstrates Rayment’s interest in forging a distinction between real and fake, something that becomes an obsession for him. Moreover, this also foreshadows the arrival of Elizabeth Costello, and alerts us to the tension between character and writer that re-emerges throughout.

Rayment begins to experience a profound disconnect between himself and his now disabled body, the literal severing of his leg also enacting a mental one: ‘The man he used to be is just a memory, and a memory fading fast. He still has a sense of being a soul with an undiminished soul-life; as for the rest of him, it is just a sack of blood and bones that he is forced to carry around’ (SM 32). The loss of part of his body alerts him to his embodied existence as a body in the first place. It is this new experience that draws Boxall to conclude ‘in *Slow Man* the fall to illness, death, and inertness, is held against a slow suspension that is produced by the artwork itself.’⁴⁰³ This dual slowness emerges in this curious lack of events that fill the narrative, in which the narrative considers the relationship between progression and action.

⁴⁰¹ Donald Powers, ‘Emigration and photography in J.M. Coetzee’s *Slow Man*,’ *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49.4 (2013), pp. 458-469, (p. 459).

⁴⁰² Ibid, p. 459.

⁴⁰³ Boxall, *Since Beckett*, p. 191.

The loss of his leg functions as prosthesis for his experience of time. As he lies in hospital, he feels time as an active force upon his body: ‘Even as he lies here he can feel time at work on him like a wasting disease, like the quicklime they pour on corpses. Time is gnawing away at him, devouring one by one the cells that make him up. His cells are going out like lights’ (SM 11-12). Time exists not in the abstract, as something that sweeps over us, but as a material that moves into him, reducing him down, cell by cell. This sense of reduction is clearly to do with the loss of his leg—as Boxall comments ‘It is this accident, and even more this amputation, that makes a temporal disjunction in the novel, a cut in time as much as a cut in flesh’⁴⁰⁴—but it is also through a sudden attention to aging, or the body that undergoes aging. We also see this in *Disgrace* after David Lurie’s attack: ‘For the first time he has a taste of what it will be like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hopes, without desires, indifferent to the future’ (D 107). Both men find themselves propelled through time, where they are categorically ‘old’ – a jump cut, in which a violent event accelerates their attention from outwards towards to the world, back to themselves and their bodies. The loss of the leg severs Rayment from his youth.

This then manifests itself in Rayment’s preoccupation with ‘the real thing.’ The word ‘real’ or phrase ‘real thing’ emerges constantly throughout the novel, and Rayment becomes obsessed with how he himself can embody this idea of the real. This is manifested in two ways: in his existence as a real person, and the loss of his leg as a real event. Very early on, this idea of ‘real’ is mediated through the body:

This – this strange bed, this bare room, this smell both antiseptic and faintly ruinous – this is clearly no dream, it is the real thing, as real as things get. Yet the whole of today, if it is all the same day, if time still means anything, has the feel of a dream. Certainly this *thing*, which now for the first time he inspects

⁴⁰⁴ Boxall, *Since Beckett*, p. 190.

under the sheet, this monstrous object swathed in white and attached to his hip, comes straight out of the land of dreams (SM 9).

Rayment experiences unreality in viewing his leg, now a 'monstrous object swathed in white.' The accident, which is 'as real as things get' is dreamlike in that it hasn't registered as an event with consequences. Though this is a perhaps unsurprising description of a traumatic event, one in which the effects on the body can be seen but not yet felt, the delay in cognition also suggests a hierarchy of the real. Reality occurs once the event has made its mark psychically, not just physically. He continues later, as his wound starts to hurt him:

Pain is nothing, he tells himself, just a warning signal from the body to the brain. Pain is no more the real thing than an X-ray photograph is the real thing. But of course he is wrong. Pain is the real thing, it does not have to press hard to persuade him of that... (SM 12).

Here, he establishes an opposition between the reality of internal and external experiences. 'Pain' as synaptic movement through the body, a specific bodily process, is contrasted to the experience of pain as a mental idea. But, Rayment's division here is unsustainable, as he realizes that 'of course he is wrong' – pain is also an event in and of itself, even if it cannot be established in the same terms as his placement in the hospital room. This need for Rayment to strip himself back to 'real things' seems to be such a problem because, as established earlier, the novel literally writes his body into the text through the accident. The real is a problem because what constitutes the real is at stake.

If Rayment's concern with reality is to do with the difference between external experience and internal thoughts, the motif of photography treads this line between material object and 'certificate of presence.'⁴⁰⁵ As Peter Brooks has noted in his study of the visual language of realism: 'It is not coincidental that photography comes into

⁴⁰⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 85.

being along with realism, with the lens imitating the retina to reproduce the world.⁴⁰⁶ In his inclusion of photography in this text, Coetzee seems to be playfully harking back to the supposed 'transparency' of realist fiction. Rayment's collection of photographs by Antoine Fauchery, the French immigrant to Australia in the 1850s, depicts the mining communities and landscapes of Victoria, Melbourne. This collection becomes the focaliser for Rayment's ideas of what constitutes real. Through these images, Rayment builds upon his definition of real and fake through his interest in material production. He elaborates thus: 'He tends to trust pictures more than he trusts words. Not because pictures cannot lie but because, once they leave the darkroom, they are fixed, immutable. Whereas stories [...] seem to change shape all the time' (SM 64). He explains to Drago that he was interested in photographs because of his sensual experience of their *now-ness*: 'he would sometimes experience a little shiver of ecstasy, as though he were present at the day of creation' (SM 64). But when the process changed, specifically from black and white photography to colour, he 'transferred his energies to saving the past' (SM 65). These new photographs seem to him in some way '...doctored, untrue' (SM 65).

The important distinction to be made in Rayment's concept of photography is through his characterization of himself: '...I was never – how shall I put it? – an artist of the camera. I was always more of a technician' (SM 175). Roland Barthes unifies the experience of time with the mechanics of production 'cameras, in short, were clocks for seeing, and perhaps in me someone very old still hears in the photographic mechanism the living sound of the wood.'⁴⁰⁷ In Barthes description, the photographer's organ is finger, not the eye. Powers comments that Rayment 'collects

⁴⁰⁶ Brooks, *Realist Vision*, p. 3.

⁴⁰⁷ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 15.

[the photographs] because he believes them to represent a more rooted and tactile mode of recording the world in images than modern electronic modes.⁴⁰⁸ Making an image through the body is present and tangible, and is therefore *real*, unlike the virtual, which cannot and does not have the physical presence that Rayment here prioritises.

His interest in collecting photography also comes from its power to unite people together in shared history, and specifically as a way to solidify his own position in Australia. The photographs have both a public and private role. Rayment, who came to Australia from France as a young man, wonders about the relationship between immigrants and their past, asking ‘Don’t immigrants have a history of their own? Do you cease to have a history when you move from one point on the globe to another?’ (SM 49) Marijana seems less concerned with an immigrant history than with claiming an Australian one. She thinks it is ‘good you [sic] save history’ (SM 48) to attest to Australia’s past. In order to combat the idea that people move to Australia only for money (though ironically she later asks how much money the photographs are worth) Marijana is keen for these photographs to prove that Australia is not a desert in which ‘everybody is new’ (SM 49). Of course, the photographs, taken by a Frenchman and including images specifically of migrants who came to Victoria for the gold rush, establish the history of Australia as one of migrants, who did indeed come for the money. Marijana’s anxiety about an Australian identity in which she can be a part is a fantasy that eradicates difference under the umbrella identity ‘Australian.’ But, part of her seductive quality for Paul is her difference, her otherness. He is disappointed, for example, when he goes to her house and sees ‘No dolls in folk costume, no sunsets over the Adriatic, nothing to put one in mind of the old country’ (SM 242), but instead a fairly bland apartment decorated in a modern way. “‘So real!’

⁴⁰⁸ Powers, p. 461.

says Elizabeth” (SM 242): but like the photographs that Rayment describes as ‘real’ this is also real in the sense that it is a *real* attempt at assimilation; a composition of what contemporary Australian life *looks* like. Implicit within this real is some kind of fakery. Marijana is Australian through uniformity, what DeLillo might term ‘furtive sameness.’

This then poses a question about Marijana’s sense of what make a legitimate migrant; though she later dismisses Rayment’s desire for originality—in her dismissal of his concern for the literal ‘originals’ of Fauchery’s photographs— she seems to be interested in authenticity in her definition of citizenship. To move for money, as Marijana notes is shameful, there has to be some reason, some historic affinity that leads one to one’s new home. This finds its explication in Drago’s forgery, in which he places himself in the frame of the past, but also unifies himself with those pictures of migrants.

This notion of authenticity is also continued in Rayment’s desired destination for his collection, the State Library of Adelaide. In this way, his private collection becomes ‘public property’ and ‘[p]art of our historical record’ (SM 177). Through this, his position in Australia is solidified: the donation will bear his name, perhaps as a wing at the library. He muses about the power of these photographs:

...just possibly this image before them, this distribution of particles of silver that records the way sunlight fell, one day in 1855, on the faces of two long-dead Irishwomen, an image in whose making he, the little boy from Lourdes, had no part in and which Drago, son of Dubrovnik, has had no part in either, may like a mystical charm – *I was here, I live, I suffered* – have the power to draw them together (SM 177).

The frame literally excludes them through its specificity in a history that is not theirs in the most immediate sense. They would however become included into the frame metaphorically if the collection is given to national historical archive, a shorthand for a collective historical identity. However, the historical archive here is a performance

of truth; it exists in externally verifiable location in which what is contained within it is automatically understood to be part of national history. But there is a tension between what the picture *is* and what it *shows*. In Coetzee's review of a book of South African photography, he comments on the stillness embedded into the pose of the photograph, as well as the still image of the photo itself:

In the case of human subjects the standard instruction was therefore, 'Keep still for the camera!' In the interval between this command and the click of the shutter, the subject had nothing to but compose himself, becoming self-for-camera whose trace, formed by the lens, given substance by chemical processes, would re-emerge into the world as a photograph.⁴⁰⁹

These images—and Fauchery's images are also representative of this kind of composed photography—are definitely not 'snapshots' but careful compositions created with the precise aim of recording the past. The composition is a reflection of life, but it is not 'real' in the sense that contains an additional layer of artifice. Does the 'self-for-camera' say '*I was here, I lived, I suffered*'? Or, does it instead say, 'I was here having my photograph taken'?

Indeed, in *Age of Iron*, when Mrs Curren looks at a photograph of herself as a child, and thinks about the literal edges of the image, she becomes aware of what the photograph erases: 'Who, outside the picture, leaning on their rakes, leaning on their spades, waiting to get back to work, lean also against the edge of the rectangle, bending it, bursting it in?' (AI 111). She considers how this erasure took place not just in the contents of the photo but also in the development:

The fixing did not hold or the developing went further than one would ever have dreamed – who can know how it happened? – but they have become negative again, a new kind of negative in which we begin to see what used to lie outside the frame, occulted (AI 102-3).

⁴⁰⁹ Coetzee, 'Photographs of South Africa,' *Stranger Shores*, p. 344-5.

As Amir comments, Mrs Curren's 'new negative' contains multiple possibilities: 'The openness of the world to transformation, a ghostly presence of the outside inside, a sense of threat, a hidden layer that reveals the image's past, yet contains the future as a disturbing uncertainty.'⁴¹⁰ It has not been 'fixed' but keeps 'developing' to reveal what was supposedly hidden. Amir notes that in this idea of a 'new negative' Coetzee engages with various thinkers who have attempted to rethink 'the closure of the frame.'⁴¹¹ She argues, summarizing Eyal Peretz:

[t]his wide Open, Peretz elucidates, is futurity as such – not an unreachable essence beyond, but an active uncertainty within; the presence of the outside in the inside is the presence of blindness and ignorance with regard to the future inherent in our temporal existence. It is the presence of the world as subjected to transformation.⁴¹²

In *Age of Iron*, the photograph contains hidden knowledge that will be revealed through time, the 'outside' of history will invade the borders. By suggesting that, once the photograph has been placed in the archive, it will become a document through which both he and Drago can understand and articulate their experience, Rayment postulates the photograph as a form of knowledge. What both novels share however, is the realisation that a single photograph always gestures to what is outside of the frame; in its existence as a material object, or rather, something that contains subjects made *into* material objects, it always implies that objects that could again be subjects.

Rayment is horrified when Drago steals one of the photographs and replaces it with a copy. His horror is then aggravated by Drago's use of technology he does not understand to doctor one of his photographs so that it includes members of the Jokić family. As Amir comments here Coetzee illustrates how '[i]n this photo of the digital age, past and future, the events of taking the photograph *and* of viewing it coexist

⁴¹⁰ Amir, p. 67.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p. 65.

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 67.

simultaneously and at the same level.⁴¹³ Through the literal doctoring of an image Drago writes himself into the past, making his family into a record of Australian history that proves, as Rayment said earlier, '*I was here.*' Drago unifies his viewing of the photograph with his participation in the frame by literally placing his family within an object he understands to be historical, responding literally to Rayment's pronouncement that these images are a conduit for their entrance into Australia. But for Rayment there are boundaries that are sacred: 'A photograph is not the thing itself. Nor is a painting. But that does not make either or them a copy. Each becomes a new thing, a new real, new in the world, a new original' (SM 245). We can think here of DeLillo's *Point Omega*, a novel I will be returning to in my conclusion in which the narrator in the 'Anonymity' chapters that book-end the novel watches multiple showings of Douglas Gordon's installation '24 Hour Psycho.' This unnamed narrator becomes fascinated by the idea that through this replaying and slowing down of Hitchcock's film some essential truth is revealed: 'The original movie was fiction, this was real.'⁴¹⁴ In what is new, Rayment finds some truth, but a truth produced through the manipulation of an aesthetic object. In this configuration, it is the status of the image as a material object that is most important; its aesthetic qualities are secondary.

As I have been discussing above, the presence of an embedded absence is a theme that traverses Coetzee's work. Rayment appears to be 'A man not wholly a man, then: a half-man, an after-man, like an after-image; the ghost of a man looking back in regret on time not well used' (SM 33-4). The shrinking world he lives in is made up of in such a way that '...he cannot make the parts cohere' (SM 108). This is compounded by the appearance of Elizabeth Costello. Costello, a character whom

⁴¹³ Ibid. p. 69-70.

⁴¹⁴ Don DeLillo, *Point Omega* (London: Picador, 2010), p. 17. All references are hereafter taken from this edition and will be abbreviated to PO.

Coetzee audiences are familiar with through the earlier book from 2004, journeys from that book to this one as the same character. Rayment, a man so preoccupied with what is real and what is fake, become increasingly distressed by the thought that he himself may be the product of her imagination. And of course, he is a product of another imagination: Coetzee's. Through the first accident in which he appears to feel himself 'written in' to the text, he struggles with the disjuncture between the world as he perceives it in the dichotomy of real and fake, and relying on other constructs through which to support himself, whether systems of care or systems of fiction. In the bicycle made for him by the Jokić family, we find a literal construct that he also refuses: 'A recumbent. He has never ridden one before, but he dislikes recumbents instinctively, as he dislikes prostheses, as he dislikes all fakes' (SM 255). This recumbent, a metal contraption, is made with the express purpose to allow him to move around, outside of his new constricted universe. But for Rayment, it does not bridge a divide between him and the world, but serves as an extra-bodily reminder of his lack. In this way, Rayment searches for coherence in the world he builds for himself. This 'fakery', this shade of fiction, he rejects because it does not reflect his inner 'instinctive' feelings and cannot translate his internal experience.

The more unsure he seems of his immediate reality, the more childhood memories he seems to be able to recall, as if his memories can serve as a preventive barrier or a sort of proof. For him memories, though partial, and though simultaneously in and out of time, are evidence of existence. They do not have the luxury however of being ratified through documents, theirs is an internal presence that finds its evidence in lived experience. Powers is helpful here:

To remember, to re-member: disjointing the word in this way makes clearer the link between Rayment's desire to imprint his name in the Australian state record by way of the Fauchery bequest and his efforts to regain a measure of agency and independence as a maimed body in the world and author of his life.

In both instances he seeks to assert himself as a subject with the will to decide the terms of his existence in the face of a narrative (the history of a nation, Costello's story) apparently beyond his power to write.⁴¹⁵

Rayment, though both his body and experience have been incorporated into fiction, can claim some kind of agency through his ambivalent relationship with the boundaries of the fiction he is placed in. The photographs, as Powers sees them, stand in not only for belonging, but also for heritage and memory. For Coetzee, photography enacts this tension between the individual and their history through the frame that simultaneously excludes and includes the viewer.

Through the loss of part of his leg, his previous lifestyle could no longer be maintained, so Rayment looks to how he could replace this loss with the gaining of a ready-made family. However, as the novel progresses, he learns that one structure of living cannot be replaced by another, that no way of living is no more 'real' than any other. Marais comments, 'In foregrounding its exile from its origin and thereby acknowledging its inability to present love, *Slow Man* exposes the ethical nature of the writer's aesthetic responsibility.'⁴¹⁶ But more than that, Coetzee uses the idea of being 'written into' fiction, through the accident, Rayment's displacement from his own body and the use and discussions of photography as a way of considering where it is an individual in a new globalised world might 'live' in fiction. By considering the implication of digital versus manual photography, Coetzee plays not only on the historical relationship between photography and realism but complicates any form of intermedial and interspatial conversation. Fletcher and Bradbury's summary of the modernist novel considers this: 'It is a forging, but also a faking; it partakes of orders

⁴¹⁵ Powers, p. 466.

⁴¹⁶ Michael Marais, 'Coming into Being: *Slow Man* and the Aesthetics of Hospitality,' *Contemporary Literature*, 50. 2 (2009), pp. 273-298, (p. 286).

discerned in reality, but discovers its own orders which are the orders of art.’⁴¹⁷ The novel is organised through artificial constructs in which is also inscribed a desire for the real, that ‘tactile mode of recording the world.’

Conclusion: ‘Empty cube’

In his Jerusalem Prize Speech, Coetzee discusses the burden placed fiction in its process of revealing or hiding truth: ‘In South Africa there is now too much truth for the art to hold, truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination.’⁴¹⁸ As in his discussion of realism, Coetzee demonstrates that writing cannot simply replicate dominate narratives, forms, or indeed attempt to create the same expectations in readers. In his use of forms of literature that allow for confessions, self-interrogations, deconstructions, he reveals their insufficiency to adequately respond to the history of oppression in South Africa of women, black people and the disabled, as well as the specific horrors of apartheid. I have shown that through his creation of a complex and interweaving literary architecture, he demonstrates that these strategies fall short, and suggests instead that there are moments of illumination in the confrontation between frameworks. Like DeLillo, Coetzee investigates how the space of fiction can interrogate itself through continual movements of inside and outside.

As I have discussed throughout the above sections, Coetzee’s explorations into the spatial and political configuration of the novel are remarkable in their breadth and innovation. I explored the myriad ways in which we can read space in his work,

⁴¹⁷ Fletcher and Bradbury, p. 411.

⁴¹⁸ Coetzee, ‘Jerusalem Prize Speech,’ p. 99.

through houses, rooms, and the other, but also through intimate relationships in general. By drawing on a rich heritage of both realist and modernist writing, his writing seeks to employ and disrupt strategies of fiction through which human relations have been hitherto represented. In his constant renegotiation of the underlying terms through which his fiction has been brought to bear, Coetzee's work seems to be conceptualizing of a new space through his reinscription of modernist aesthetics onto the historical topography of South Africa.

However, as Hayes notes, Coetzee does not suggest there can be one way to respond to a contemporary moment through fiction. Instead, through his experimentation with form and character, he replicates a kind of Beckettian shedding, in which the search for form necessarily means engaging with what has come before. In his idiosyncratic literary architecture, what he referred to as his 'empty cube' to Auster, Coetzee searches for a new set of ethical coordinates through which his fiction can exist.

Conclusion:

Disgrace and Point Omega

As I have discussed throughout my thesis, DeLillo and Coetzee experiment with literary architecture through a kind of formal escapism to show how the novel can excavate new kinds of interiority that expose the reaches of the novel form. In this conclusion, I seek to read two later works of fiction by DeLillo and Coetzee, *Point Omega* (2010) and *Disgrace* (1998) in tandem, in order to fully explore their shared strategies. Both novels have garnered an immense amount of critical attention due to their immediate political contexts; Coetzee's novel, published only a couple of years after the end of apartheid proved to be immensely controversial⁴¹⁹; DeLillo, also no stranger to political controversy – critiqued by some for daring to imagine the life of Lee Harvey Oswald in *Libra*⁴²⁰ - had been seen to respond to the 9/11 in 2007's *Falling Man*, only to return more obliquely to the repercussions of that event in *Point Omega*.

Both *Disgrace* and *Point Omega* explore complexities of family life, the navigation of personal responsibility to national politics and the possibility of response through art. In the conclusions of both of my chapters, I suggested that the authors look towards other forms of art as a means of finding new forms of literary architecture, that their search for novelistic possibility encouraged an interspatial

⁴¹⁹ Attwell describes 'Most of the controversy arises from the fact that the African National Congress referred to the novel in its submission to the Human Rights Commission's Inquiry into Racism in the Media on 5 April 2000' (332).

⁴²⁰ In a review for the Washington Post, George F. Will called DeLillo's 1988 novel an 'act of literary vandalism and bad citizenship.' George F. Will, 'Shallow Look at the Mind of an Assassin' *Washington Post*, 22nd September 1988, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1988/09/22/shallow-look-at-the-mind-of-an-assassin/f8a4c3c6-8355-43c3-8a04-03d6588688e6/?utm_term=.6ecee095056d, accessed March 26th 2018.

ethics founded through engagement with other art forms. The messiness of the ‘reconnoiter inward’ exposes the inherent complexity of the spatiality of literary expression. In these texts, I will be suggesting, we find the coalescence of many of the varieties of space I noted above: the literal landscape, the body, the other, and the artwork. In comparing these two novels, I argue that both authors explore the relationship between contemporary politics and a spatial aesthetic that is found in both content and novel form itself. In seeking to read spaces of otherness as fully legible, where they can be incorporated into the space of the novel, both writers create various and conflicting spatial frameworks that challenge the boundaries of representation.

In *Point Omega*, DeLillo once again returns to the desert, the Sonoran desert in California. The desert setting, a space that has emerged several times throughout this thesis, allows DeLillo to problematize statehood and western invasion through not only what the space represents, but also how the characters respond to it. The retreat to the desert is reminiscent of Gary Harkness’s self-imposed exile in the Texan desert, a way for him to understand himself in a blank and bare setting. But, more pressingly, the novel documents several transgressions of space, stemming from the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq by the US and UK after 9/11. DeLillo uses the setting of the desert to demonstrate the inherent paradox between a global capitalism that seeks to disintegrate borders, and the policies of right and centrist governments that reinforce them. My analysis here focuses on the effects this transgression has on the sense of self post-invasion, through the transposition of this narrative onto the body of a single woman.

In the desert setting, DeLillo seeks to balance the relationship between the desert as a mode of recalibration for the self, and as a site that represents national narrative. David Cowart comments that ‘[t]o some degree, the author makes of desert

asceticism a spiritualised analog [sic] to pastoral (also predicated on the dream or vision of getting away from the complexity and temptations of the civilised world).⁴²¹ As Martin Eve describes however, the desert is at once a site associated with the emerging technology of nuclear warfare ‘bring[ing] the issue of the Cold War back into the spotlight,’⁴²² as well as obliquely referencing the Iraqi desert. Like Harkness’s desert, written 40 years earlier, DeLillo presents the desert as both the enactment of an imagined and achievable asceticism, but also a locale with a myriad of historical associations. The desert is a setting most clearly linked to the history of America’s foreign policy.

Though Elster describes the desert house as facilitating a return to basic human functions, to ‘eat, sleep and sweat’ (PO 22) allowing him to do away with what he refers to as ‘News and Traffic. Sports and Weather’ (PO 23), his language demonstrates his euphemistic tendencies, his use of nominally straightforward phrasing as a stand in for far more unsettling acts, something he perfected in his role as ‘defense intellectual’ (PO 35). In this role, Elster’s job was all talk: in his essay entitled ‘Renditions’ all he does, essentially, is talk in euphemism, outlining the varying meanings of that now infamous word. Here he can exchange talking for being, creating a stark divide between the two; ‘talk’ for Elster is ‘the risk assessments and policy papers, the interagency groups’ (PO 23), ‘being’ means to sit in the heat reading poetry by Ezra Pound, Louis Zukofsky or Rainer Rilke. In these stark distinctions, it is easy to forget what underscores the euphemism: the invasion of two countries.

⁴²¹ David Cowart, ‘The Lady Vanishes: Don DeLillo’s *Point Omega*,’ *Contemporary Literature*, 53.1 (2012), pp. 31-50, (p. 44).

⁴²² Martin Paul Eve, ‘Too Many Goddamn Echoes: Historicizing the Iraq War in Don DeLillo’s *Point Omega*,’ *Journal of American Studies*, 49 (2015), 575-592, (p. 582).

If the desert is a space that is associated with silence, it is also a silence that allows the return to the body, a body in space and time. I have discussed the interplay between the expansive and the contained in relation to the desert earlier, but in this novel, it reappears in Elster's own terms; as Finley relays, 'Extinction was a current theme of his. The landscape inspired themes. Spaciousness and claustrophobia. This would become a theme' (PO 25). The curious balance between space and restriction demonstrates the turn I have been describing in DeLillo's fiction throughout. The use of the desert as a central metaphor is problematized by its very qualities a space of seeming unknown size; it is open, large, and inhospitable. It is also bare in a way that allows these meanings to be placed upon it. Simultaneously, as Nardelli and Eve demonstrate, the space of the American desert is anything but ahistorical. The desert is a setting that straddles the possibility of signifying too much and signifying too little, a myriad of readings could underlie its supposed blankness.

This materialises through the coalescing of character and setting in the form of Elster's daughter, Jessie. When she first arrives to the desert house, she becomes a blank space for each man to project upon; for Elster, she is the object of intense fatherly love, one that is bound up in his need for her approval; for Finley, she is impartial, an absent-present, which leads to his desire to know her physically and sexually. In both readings, Jessie disappears under the burden of representations placed upon her; her significance is in her otherness, of her existence in relation to others. She is both unremarkable and unusual:

She had ordinary features, brown eyes, brown hair that she kept brushing back over her ear. There was something self-determined in her look, a blandness that seemed willed. It was a choice she'd made, to look like this, or so I told myself. Hers was another life, nowhere near mine, and it offered a release from constant self-tunnelling of my time here and also a kind of balance to her father's grip on my immediate future (PO 53).

This 'willed blandness' is not a new thing in DeLillo's writing, as seen in my above discussions of Oswald and the young woman in the 'The Starveling.' Finley acknowledges however that though he imagines she has cultivated this appearance, it is he who ultimately decides this for her, a choice which becomes more and more disquieting when Jessie disappears, and even more so by the book-ended sections of anonymity, in which Norman Bates is 'scary bland' (PO 146). In her case, blankness, appears to be both gendered and imperialist; her absolute otherness 'another life, nowhere near mind' becomes a counterbalance to his own 'self-tunnelling.' This language here is reminiscent of Jacobus's in *Dusklands*, in which the gaze upon the body of another is described in penetrative and labyrinthine terms simultaneously. Rather than the kind of burrowing we find in Kafka, in which creation and self are twinned, Finley dreams of releasing himself from the perils of self-actualisation in the occupation of another.

Elster suggests that Jessie is 'attentive to some interior presence' and that she 'said she heard words from inside them' (PO 50). The surface of her body can be conspicuously plain because this 'surface' is not where she lives her life; as I have been discussing thus far, in her ability to live in words, she seems to exemplify DeLillo's search for another kind of being. For Finley, the play between ordinariness and stillness means that she evades his understanding:

She was sylphlike, her element was air. She gave the impression that nothing about this place was different from any other, this south and west, latitude and longitude. She moved through places in a soft glide, feeling the same things everywhere, this is what there was, the space within (PO 62).

Her seeming indifference to this landscape suggests to Finley that she has some quality that means she exists elsewhere, untouched by the largeness or timelessness of the desert. This 'space within' then, is a place that is untouched by the outside the world or not shaped by the outside world. She does not need to escape the desert to

understand another time, or to escape from the world in the way her father does; indeed, she has some other way of being in the world that is not determined by an 'outside'. Jessie dissolves the boundary between body and place, 'feeling the same things everywhere.' Unlike her father, she does not adjust herself to the location, and in fact has no need to. She is an idealized monad, an hermetic object or a stone in the desert.

Jessie's interiority appears to be very different to the characters of earlier novels: in *End Zone* and *Great Jones Street*, these characters come to terms with their need to be in the world, despite their attempts to pull their lives inward into spaces of somewhat safe interiority. In *Ratner's Star*, DeLillo explores the distinction between mathematics and religion as subjects that deal with the internal and the external, only for those categories to collapse, unified in the novel's 'guiding spirit' Pythagoras. In this novel, Jessie's interiority is read primarily as a space for others, as Elster concentrates his immense love on her: 'She was her father's dream thing...I'm not sure he understood the fact that she was not him' (PO 71). For Elster she is seemingly fantastical, a 'dream thing' and so intimate as to be an extension of himself. The father's reading of the daughter only through himself, and particularly through a projection as an object will also re-emerge in my discussion below of David and Lucy in *Disgrace*.

DeLillo seems to be deeply concerned with the ethics of not only this other mode of being, but the responses these men have to it and to her; in both situations, there emerges a deep need to possess. Finley's need to understand what this 'space within' may mean, leads him to ponder whether or not he will make a sexual advance toward Jessie. She unnerves him: 'I found it disturbing to watch her, knowing that she didn't feel watched. Where was she? She wasn't lost in thought, wasn't gauging the

course of the next hour or minute. She was missing, fixed tightly within' (PO 76). His looking starts to take on a predatory air; the voyeurism of the prologue, the anonymous man's affinity to Norman Bates, as well as the reader's intertextual knowledge of *Psycho* itself, means that Finley's observation of Jessie, and his attention to her, appears to be somewhat questionable:

The bathroom door was open, midday, and Jessie was in there, barefoot, wearing a t-shirt and briefs, head over the basin, washing her face. I paused at the door. I wasn't sure whether I wanted her to see me there. I didn't imagine walking in and in and standing behind her and leaning into her...but it was there in some tenuous stroke of the moment, the idea of it, and when I moved away from the door I made no special effort to leave quietly (PO 70).

Voyeurism and violence are here explicitly linked. In the prologue, DeLillo gives much attention to the infamous bathroom scene of Hitchcock's *Psycho*. It is very deliberate then, that the bathroom that Finley and Jessie share is given such attention here. I do not suggest that Finley is necessarily responsible for her disappearance, but that the transgression and threat of an invasion is made abundantly clear before Jessie vanishes. In this scene, Finley appears to desire both to be acknowledged by Jessie but remain invisible to her. The conspicuous 'didn't' added before his description of a sexual fantasy does not alleviate the discomfort of the scene. In his watching of Jessie, Finley occupies a liminal space before a metaphorical line has been crossed, a space that he is endeavouring to demarcate by his attempt to erase his own sexual fantasies as they occur. In his inability to understand her, he desires to occupy an interior space he cannot access, a life 'nowhere near mine.'

If, like in 'The Starveling' film allows us to be 'bare-souled' then Finley's imagined film, a shot of a man 'up against a wall' (PO 57) is an extension of this sparseness. For Finley, this film becomes a way of being: 'I think about it, dream about it, I open my eyes and see it, I close my eyes it's there' (PO 34). In *The Names*, film is also presented in this way: 'Film is more than the twentieth-century art. It's

another part of the twentieth-century mind. It's the world seen from inside' (TN 200). Director Michelangelo Antonioni—a huge early influence on DeLillo—also conceives of his work as 'interior neorealism,' calling 1970's *Zabriskie Point* an 'interior film.'⁴²³ Both in Antonioni and in DeLillo it appears that film replicates a unique form of interiority. In the film existing only as an imagined piece of art, it cannot reproduce the same binary of creator/spectator, director/audience. Instead, it has a much shakier foundation that circumvents those positions to gesture towards another, ambiguous, response.

Disgrace, Coetzee's 1998 award-winning text, considers the intersections between imagination, intertextuality and reading. It explores the tension between the personal and political and between the individual and national body, and much like my discussions of his other works, considers the interactions between several constituting positions. Coetzee questions the efficacy of his vehicles of meaning by simultaneously presenting a possible national narrative that is then undermined. The text concludes through the partial composition of an opera, suggesting that the artwork is a kind of prosthesis for a post-apartheid subjectivity.

In the opening pages, it seems that *Disgrace* is a campus novel which follows the life of a disillusioned university Professor named David Lurie as he teaches classes for which it appears he has very little enthusiasm. Through the transplanting of the aesthetics and sympathies of a Romantic imagination to the newly structured university system of post-apartheid South Africa, Coetzee explores the contemporary position of the Western canon. In one of Lurie's classes, he discusses passages from

⁴²³ Michelangelo Antonioni, *The Architecture of Vision: Writings and Interviews on Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 305.

Wordsworth in a classroom full of students who appear nonplussed. In this scene, Lurie attempts to talk about particular landscapes as if they were interchangeable, Table Mountain for the Lake District. Lucy Graham notes in her discussion of *Disgrace* that the novel's use of Romanticism and sublimity is as a critique and 'warning that veiling the other in sublimity may obscure abuse and may permit one to behave unethically toward another body.'⁴²⁴ She draws attention to the scene in which Coetzee uses the word 'usurp' and its various iterations to think about Wordsworth's Mont Blanc, suggesting Lurie's problematic relationship to the spaces of others. By 'misreading' the Romantics in this context, Coetzee establishes this as a trope through which he explores the limitations of reading and assumptions in reading spaces and bodies.

This misreading is perpetuated in his relationships with the two young women in the novel: Melanie, a young student of his he sexually assaults, and his estranged daughter Lucy. Lurie is a keen consumer of bodies, established not only in his descriptions of his libido, but also his use of prostitutes.⁴²⁵ In his relationship with Melanie, his unsettling pronouncements on her beauty suggest the very problems Graham outlines earlier: 'She does not own herself. Beauty does not own itself (D 16).' She is absented from herself, becoming another in a line of beautiful young woman he has previously had affairs with, who are there for his enjoyment.

⁴²⁴ Lucy Graham, *State of Peril: Race and Rape in South African Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 155.

⁴²⁵ In Katherine Stanton's *Cosmopolitan Fictions*, she discusses Coetzee's representation of prostitution (particularly of so-called 'exotics' [D 8]) as a way for Coetzee to explore a critical cosmopolitanism that must be transnational in its ethical position. She notes that '*Disgrace* observes South Africa's entrance into the global economy with a critical eye [...] *Disgrace* suggests to us that redistribution is endangered by furthering the cause of global capitalism' (p. 77).

In a similar way to *Point Omega*, Lurie's daughter Lucy is described in terms of her affinity to the land, in this case a smallholding in the Eastern Cape. As discussed earlier, the farm for Coetzee is a difficult space, and many of the novels I have discussed above can be read as anti-pastoral⁴²⁶ novels, writing against the traditional form of the *plaasroman*. Though Lucy denies this is a farm at all, 'This is not a farm, it's just a piece of land where I grow things' (D 200), her smallholding still contains an undeniable attachment to the place of the farm in the South African imagination. And, as in earlier Coetzee characters, Lucy's relationship to the landscape, is, in Lurie's mind, direct: she becomes an equivalent to the land on which she lives. She, like Jessie, is also mysterious to her father, but not because of Jessie's imagined 'interior presence' but because of her historical otherness: 'Curious that he and her mother, city folk intellectuals, should have produced this throwback, this sturdy young settler. But perhaps it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share' (D 61). In casting Lucy as a throwback, he sees her as representative of old thinking, or at least standing in for old thinking, though as I will describe in a moment, it is he who demonstrates an unshakeable attachment to the past. Their relationship becomes increasingly tense as Lurie struggles to know how to be a father to this young woman. Lucy counters by rejecting not only his claims of her relationship to the land and indeed the characterisation of her sexuality, but by how she understands her historical moment. She summarises this in her dismissal of the readings he places upon her: 'You keep misreading me' (D 112). Unlike Jessie, who becomes a silent space onto which others project their desires, Lucy resists Lurie's

⁴²⁶ For more on this novel as an anti-pastoral see: Susan Smit-Marais, and Marita Wenzel, 'Subverting the pastoral: the transcendence of space and place in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*', *Literator*, 27.7 (2006), pp. 23-38.

interpretations of her. In archetypal Coetzeean self-reflexive address she tells her father:

You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until half way through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor (D 198).⁴²⁷

In this metafictional comment, Lucy also invokes the theme of reading, asking her father to consider the ethical construction of the story of his own life. Though, of course, the description she provides does indeed follow what we have read thus far in *Disgrace*, Lucy alerts both the reader and her father that his version is not the only narrative that exists, and not the only story that can be told. Whilst Jim Finley and Richard Elster may hold varying ideas about Jessie without her ability to respond and reject them, here Lucy asserts a new kind of relationship to her heritage, both through family and through history. Though we may have become obliquely in cahoots with Lurie through Coetzee's use of free indirect discourse, Lucy reminds us that there are other narratives encircling the central one. Lucy breaks out and announces her intentions to extract herself from that particular system of exchange with her father; she contests her role as a secondary character that can be read, or that can be made to stand in for anything. She asserts that she can live on land, and later, raise her child, without having to succumb to language she refutes. Though Lurie may not understand or agree with her decisions, he has to respect her in making them, without condemning her to his idea of right and wrong. In this way, he learns that she cannot be read, because his systems of reading her do not adequately reach her.

⁴²⁷ In Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*, she also critiques this distinction made between major and minor. At one point she critiques 'The "serious" contemporary heterosexual male novel' where 'the hero/anti-hero explicitly *is* the author, [and] everybody else is reduced to "characters."' Chris Kraus, *I Love Dick* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2016), p. 56.

Like characters in Coetzee's earlier fiction – such as Rayment – Lurie prides himself on his 'fixed mind' (D 2, 7, 16, 38). This inflexibility is contrasted to the form of the novel; as in *Age of Iron* or *Slow Man*, Coetzee here depicts older characters that are transformed by new ethical confrontations in their contemporary moment. As in my earlier discussion, in which I discussed how Coetzee uses character as a means of questioning formal constraints of the novel, the possibilities of the transformation are implied through its form as a problematic bildungsroman. As with many of his earlier texts, Coetzee undermines the idea of a linear transformation or ethical awakening that can have a start and end point, or indeed take place within fiction at all. Marais notes that 'Towards the end of the novel, then, there appear to be clear indications that Lurie has completed the task assigned him by his author.'⁴²⁸ This is through various scenes in which Lurie seems to forge connections with his daughter, with Melanie and her family, and through a relationship with Bev Shaw – a woman he had previously maligned for being unattractive. But as Boehmer examines,

There are, however, at least two problematic aspects to this secular and ultimately male-led atonement as represented in the novel. The first is that Lurie is – by definition for Coetzee – not conscious of his salvation; he does not mastermind it. Despite the fact that he has gained release from the self-love that certainly is fundamental to the drama of confession, are we then convinced by this 'third-term' atonement, by this abjective identification with the animal other? [...] Who or what authorizes such atonement? It is one of those questions without an answer which runs throughout Coetzee's work.⁴²⁹

Though Lurie may be in a radically different position at the end of the novel there are limitations to seeing this as a transformation. When Lurie says that he 'think[s] of himself as obscure and growing obscurer. A figure from the margins of history' (D

⁴²⁸ Mike Marais, 'J.M. Coetzee's "Disgrace" and the Task of the Imagination,' *Journal of Modern Literature*, 29.2 (2006), pp. 75-93, (p. 77).

⁴²⁹ Elleke Boehmer, 'Not Saying Sorry, Not Speaking Pain: Gender Implications in Disgrace,' *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 4.3 (2002), pp. 342-351, (p. 348).

167), this seems to speak more to Lurie's inability to see his own place in the post-apartheid South Africa as opposed to his concern for his own ethical status. In questioning the ethics of using the formulations of certain subgenres to achieve a certain kind of atonement, Coetzee exposes the assumptions implicit in certain kinds of fiction; assumptions that no longer hold.

Instead, it is in the emergence of a partial and bathetic artwork that Coetzee places some hope: 'So this is art, he thinks, and this is how it does its work! How strange! How fascinating!' (D 105). Earlier on in this thesis I described various iterations of incomplete artworks, Magda's partial sculptures, Michael K's possible story. Here Coetzee resumes this theme in the last few pages of his novel. Early on in the text, Lurie's opera is merely a pet project but still a luxuriant epic; by the end of the text, Lurie is consumed by it, though it has now transformed into lyrics sung over a few notes of the banjo. What started as 'a chamber-play about love and death, with a passionate young woman and a once passionate but now less than passionate older man' (D 180) now becomes a semi-comic wail of love. In the same way he appears to be mystified by his own apparent sentimentality about the deaths of rescue dogs ('He does not understand what is happening to him' [D 143]), he unthinkingly chooses Byron's Italian wife Teresa - whom Bryon had abandoned - to become the voice of his opera. Rather than a young Teresa, he now imagines 'Teresa [as] a dumpy little widow installed in the Villa Gamba with her aged father, running the household, holding the purse-strings tight' (D 181). Looking more like a 'peasant than an aristocrat' (reminding the reader of his earlier descriptions of his daughter) she no longer plays the role of young seductress, but melancholy middle-aged woman. By 'giving voice' (D 183-4) to Teresa, and privileging her voice over Byron's, Lurie seems to demonstrate his awoken interest in how others can be represented. Moreover,

he also seems to actively respond to Lucy's wilful silence: by imagining the words spoken by Teresa, Lurie fills the gap left by Lucy with words he gives to Teresa. He at one point notes, 'He can find words for Byron, but the Teresa that history has bequeathed him – young, greedy, wilful, petulant – does not match up to the music he has dreamed of, music whose harmonies, lushly autumnal yet edged with irony, he hears shadowed in his inner ear' (D 182). This opera is a Beckettian space, from which a voice calls that cannot be placed, and that cannot be answered. Lurie is displaced from his own creation through his own emergent understanding of the shaky ground on which his artwork stands. In its sparseness it demonstrates that the lavish metaphors of beauty and romance through which Lurie previously understood women in general can no longer be sustained. Lurie realizes that what he has internalized must be dismantled and replaced by a new mutable mode of engagement; the possibilities of an expansive imagination that find a voice in other forms of art.

The novels share, I think, a great deal, and benefit from a comparative reading. Both novels gesture towards a contemporary ethics of interspatiality manifested through exterior locations and both appear to have a central ambivalence to the various framing devices they present. Not only do they explore the displacement of older white men from landscapes they have historically dominated, but they also suggest that contemporary fiction must find forms to enact this displacement outside orthodox representation. In *Disgrace*, Coetzee uses and engages with language of forgiveness, steeped in, as many critics have noted, the language of the Truth and Reconciliation commission prevalent at that time.⁴³⁰ DeLillo's novel also emerges from its specific

⁴³⁰ There have been several studies that have analysed the relationship between this text and the Truth and Reconciliation committee, including Sue Kossew 'The Politics of Shame and Redemption in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*,' *Research in African Literatures*, 34. 2 (2003), pp. 155-162, Jayne Poyner, 'Truth and Reconciliation in J.M.

political and historical context, the Iraq war, and in its meditation on military jargon it echoes and critiques the prevalence of contemporaneous euphemism. In Elster's discussion of the ancient time of the desert, and the 'omega point' that titles the novel, the intense transformation of being, for Elster at least, comes from the disappearance of his daughter: 'All the man's grand themes funnelled down to local grief, one body, out there somewhere, or not' (PO 124) Similarly, though Lucy may wish to denude the farm of its politics, the land on which she lives still bears traces of the inherited inequality. Lucy has to start again: 'To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing.' (D 205). These movements to specific points of nothingness appear to echo a Beckettian 'here.'

The imagined unreadability of another body, its refusal to be made literary, takes the two male characters to the limit of their sense of themselves. Through the dismantling of their reading strategies, the men of the text turn inwards; Richard Elster experiences collapse, a spiritual diminishment, in which he is no longer able to produce words; Jim Finley explores the liminal space between participant and seer through film; David Lurie conceives of a space of art that allows for engagement with others. In both, the artwork remains impartial. In fact, the borderline between the subject and the artwork disintegrates, as the partial artwork allows them to access another kind of experience that did not seem possible at the beginning of the novel. By incorporating these partial artworks within the confines of the novel, both authors seek to formulate new interiorities that emerge through this interspatial literary architecture. Through Jim Finley's idea for a film, and David Lurie's sparsely

Coetzee's *Disgrace*, 'Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa', 5.2 (2008) pp. 67-77, and Julie McGonegal *Imagining Justice: The Politics of Postcolonial Forgiveness and Reconciliation* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).

composed opera, the function and creation of the artwork comes to bear new weight in the economy of contemporary fiction.

Across this thesis, I have argued that a spatial aesthetics is crucial to understanding the novel. From the house of fiction in realism, to the denuded rooms and burrows of modernism, to the shifting interiors of DeLillo and Coetzee, a literary architecture provides a means of considering the reaches of contemporary fiction.

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