University of Pécs

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Doctoral School for Literary Studies

Albert Noémi

CHARTING THE INTERSECTIONS OF MEMORY AND SPACE

Approaches to the Self in the British Fiction of the Noughties through Four Novels

PhD Dissertation

Supervisors:

Dr. habil. Kisantal Tamás

Dr. habil. Sári B. László

Pécs, 2020

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to my supervisors for their help during these years, and for their moral and professional support that I could always rely on. I thank my family for their unconditional love and support without which I would not have pursued this path. Finally, I thank my husband: my companion who is always there for me. I dedicate this work to my father, who facilitated my relationship with literature and started me on the path of humanities.

SUPPORTED BY THE ÚNKP-19-3 NEW NATIONAL EXCELLENCE PROGRAM OF THE MINISTRY FOR INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY.

Contents

Introduction

This dissertation topic was born out of a quite different set of questions I was trying to answer a few years ago. At the beginning of my work, I was invested in analysing the presence of history and historiography in contemporary British fiction. However, though from the very beginning I realised that I need to keep an open mind and identify alternative ways of writing history, through my investigations I came to another realisation: there is an ever-growing disillusionment in and mistrust towards history writing, identifiable in novels of the twenty-first century. It would be important to investigate the reasons for this perceived insecurity, but a different question started to preoccupy me: if history is unreliable, and we are already presented with an array of parallel histories that can coexist, how can the subject safely appropriate one of these versions? Or if one discards histories altogether, what is there to replace it? And thus I have arrived at memory. Contemporary novels invest themselves more and more into the different aspects of remembering, into the various memory processes. Naturally, this in itself would not be a new phenomenon, and one might even claim that every literary piece ever written is concerned with memory. How can one focus such a topic? Well, I am arguing in this dissertation that memory in the novels I am investigating (and in other contemporary literary works) is not just a natural component, but takes a central position and becomes a determining factor in identity formation, in approaching the self.

Even with this realisation one would face a substantial list of novels to consider for a dissertation. In order to both limit my enterprise and shed light on the complexity with which remembrance is handled in these fictions, I chose a companion that has also recently been moved into the limelight: space. Space had admittedly always been the neglected member besides time. The great investment in temporality reflected the nineteenth century's industrial revolution, which brought along space-time compression and, as Barney Warf and Santa Arias, writers of *The Spatial Turn* state, "this phenomenon was manifested through the lens of historicism, a despatialised consciousness in which geography figured weakly or not at all" (2). As the cited statement reveals, and as we all know, history has been the centre of our attention for a long time, dismissing memory as subjective, space as insignificant, while it was rising as objective science.

I believe that *the spatial turn* Warf and Arias define is connected to the growing mistrust in history. Hayden White in 1973 revolutionised thinking about history through his *Metahistory*. In this book White emphasised the constructed nature of history, through which he drew attention to the writer's subjectivity always involved in the writing, making the product itself subjective. Although seemingly the starting point for the re-evaluations of historiography, in reality, this book is the result of, to use Edward Soja's words, "a long-standing if often unperceived ontological and epistemological bias in all the human sciences" (12). And it was tightly connected to scholarly attempts to restore space into modern consciousness. The return of space was long and difficult, starting at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Warf, Arias 3). However, the real change came with Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, who claim that space is never empty or void, but it always embodies meaning.

The difference in approaches is graspable in the investigation of both memory and space. To start with the former, the four novels, namely Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2001), Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* (2007), Emma Donoghue's *Room* (2010), and David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) present various focuses on the interplay between remembrance and forgetting, traumatic remembering, past, present and future. The different spaces the characters of these four novels inhabit become quasi-protagonists to the novels, each one manifesting different aspects of the complexity of space and the subject's relation to it. The four distinct literary pieces present several versions of how space and the memory affect each other and, conversely, the subject.

McCarthy's novel sheds light on the maddening effect of life without memories, with a protagonist who suffers physical trauma (a nod back to the original meaning of the term) and, as a consequence, loses all his memories, and dedicates his entire life to chasing the lost, trying to find himself in the lost. The protagonist of *Remainder* uses London, his city as a playground to re-enact *ad infinitum* scenes he feels a particular connection to. The streets of the city, the different scenes become the stages of his personal puppet show through which he manipulates people and places alike. His approach to his surroundings allows for discussing the interconnection between the self and the city, how time and space interact, and exert their mutual influence.

The Opposite House functions as a quasi-opposite to *Remainder*, deploying a female protagonist, emphasising her visceral connection to her past, to her memory but, as the novel progresses, she is revealed to cling to a fabricated memory, and with its destruction, her sense of self is also shaken. The novel's focus is, however, much grander, because here the personal becomes a reflection of the collective. The parallel worlds of mortals and gods, the theme of migration, and the attendant sense of fluidity, in-betweenness all testify to issues that surpass the personal fate of a Black Cuban girl living in London. In her complex self personal and cultural memory sometimes intertwine, at other times clash, emanating a constant tension that culminates in Maja's own crisis. The novel's very title signifies its spatial focus, one that grows into a defining allegory, running through the entire literary work. The house becomes at once the trope for home and homelessness, fixity and instability, with protagonists being caught between these states. The *somewherehouse*, inhabited by otherworldly gods, in its every detail reflects upon the condition of the migrant, captured through a clash between past and present, memories and presence.

Donoghue's novel operates with a clearly defined dichotomy that runs through the entire literary work, contrasting the memories of an adult woman with their lack in a child. The conflict becomes poignant through Donoghue's choice to place mother and son into confinement, opposing the former's traumatic memories with the latter's carefree existence, even blissful ignorance. *Room*, similarly to *The Opposite House*, through its title already places space into a central position. After a combination of the physical world with the metaphysical one, manifested in the houses of Oyeyemi's universe, in Donoghue's novel confinement is conflated with vastness through the personal, through the opposing perspectives of mother and child upon the same object: the garden shed, their prison. Ma's sense of suffocation stands in stark contrast with Jack's vision in which Room is an infinite world with infinite possibilities, situated at the centre of a universe, with planets zooming around it. This conflict stems from and circles back to the differing psychological states, one resultant of years of abuse, the other one of successful shielding from the perpetrator.

Finally, Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* comprises the universal picture of remembrance, with six embedded stories that employ six different protagonists from across time and space. The various voices and personas unite as a living and ever-changing archive to preserve the past, to shape the future. Through this novel, the earlier dichotomy grows into a triad, where

remembrance, forgetting and the archive unite to create a new kind of world history, one starting from the self. Mitchell famously strives to create in his oeuvre an "überbook," a complex universe in which characters, spaces, memories, temporalities intersect and comprise a peculiar fictional multiverse. The complexity and web-like structure is the compositional centre of the novel, too, where six separate characters, inhabiting six different temporalities and spatialities, are all connected through several threads that pervade the entire novel. After encountering compressed spatialities that symbolise vastness, in this novel we witness the vastness of Earth itself, coupled with temporal zones that open up to welcome virtual versions too. This novel will serve as a synthesising conclusion to the different spatial vistas offered by the three preceding literary pieces, by conjoining the private with the public, the personal with the universal, place with time. The world created thus discards the laws of physics, and instead builds heavily on its world's fictionality to propose a new understanding of space and time.

The selection process, leading me to these four novels introduced above, was a rather complex one. My greatest aim is to present a varied image of novelistic fiction at the very beginning of the third millennium, with the purpose to investigate new tendencies and directions chartable in this day and age. Not only the novels come from this first decade, but I strove to choose from the not yet canonised novelists, the younger generation of writers. Furthermore, my choice fell on novels that present differences in their familiarity for the Hungarian readership, with two authors and novels that are widely known, contrasted by two less encountered artists and novels.

These novels exhibit a heightened interest in the combination of space and time, with express attention on remembrance and all its various manifestations. I propose to investigate what this heightened focus might reveal about the new generation of writers creating in the twenty-first century. I chose to limit my list to British authors, however, a cursory look at the four artists' background quickly reveals that this denomination is problematic, since, to use Zygmunt Bauman's famous term, we are living in "liquid modernity," a world that, through technology, surpasses the limits of historical time and operates at the speed of light. I believe this new world, starting sometime around the turn of the millennium, also captures the defining positioning of the self in a world thus changed. Geographical fixity is discarded for a more fluid existence, with people moving about, reconfiguring home and their role in the

world. In light of these changes, I use the term "British," relying on Philip Tew's insights into the matter, as denoting hybridity and multi-culture (*see The Contemporary British Novel*). This new definition of Britishness recognises and encompasses cultural hybridity and fluidity.

Two of the authors testify to this new approach to selfhood, to identification. Helen Oyeyemi and Emma Donoghue and their fictions would require a more complex term, capable of capturing their composite identities. Donoghue, for instance, was born in Dublin, Ireland, so strictly speaking she could not be considered a British writer. Furthermore, in her early years she spent one year in New York, then she moved to England, however, in her adult life she settled in Canada, where she is currently living. Even if she is not British, I believe that her art can and should be discussed as also British, besides being Irish-Canadian and, more importantly, transcultural. Others before me have allowed such a loosening of the definitions, for instance, Martyn Colebrook, one of the contributors to *The 2000s*, chooses to include the Irish Patrick McCabe, thus drawing attention to the shiftiness of boundaries and a required flexibility in categorisations. Oyeyemi's intricate geographical and cultural map is one of the best examples for the contemporary understanding of Britishness: she was born in Nigeria, then moved to London at the age of four, but later, in her adulthood, chose to live in Prague, where she is residing to date.

The very definition of Britishness is undergoing substantial changes. Ian Bradley, for instance, starts his book on the spiritual identity of Britishness by stating the following: "Britain is in danger of disappearing. I am not thinking here of the threat of long-term flooding and coastal erosion posed by global warming but rather of the demise of Britishness as a concept, an idea and an identity" (1). Current debates about Britishness focus on such issues as devolution, Britain's place in Europe, reconciling immigration and globalization, and the white working-class feeling like they no longer belong (*see* Aughey; Fenton; Hazell; McLean and McMillan). Philip Tew, among others, has drawn attention to the necessity of redefining Britishness starting from the literature of the 1970s, noticing "a shift in Britain's intellectual and geographic culture," which results in a society that is "intersubjective," which combines "changing, often transitional identities and subjectivities" (30). The keyword is "changing," a state of flux that cannot be discarded when defining British literature. A. Robert Lee, quoted by Tew, sees the nation "as less some canonical order than, post-empire for sure, an ever more arriving multi-culture" (1, quoted in Tew 34). Furthermore, the Commission on

the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (CMEB) suggests that Britishness must be re-imagined in a "multicultural way" and shorn of its exclusionary elements (36–38).

The dissertation commences with a short outline of the methodological background to the analyses, with the joint discussion of remembrance and spatiality in current scholarly thinking. My purpose is to clarify the terminology that is employed in the subsequent chapters and to outline the central issues the work investigates. The overview does not attempt any kind of historical, holistic account of the two disciplines, instead, it focuses on only those issues that the novels problematize, and which thus gain central focus in the analyses. Although trauma, various traumatic experiences figure in all four novels, I will discuss them separately in the course of the analyses, with no space allocated to them in the theoretical chapter, since it would divert attention and overburden the dissertation.

This chapter is followed by the four chapters dedicated to the analysis of the novels, organised around a few aspects. The first and third chapters centre around the private, the individual experience of characters found in peculiar situations, whereas the second and fourth novels expressly problematize the interplay between self and the world, the micro and the macro levels. Furthermore, there is a crescendo noticeable as well, both in the lengths of the literary pieces and the complexity of issues investigated by the chapters. However, the most important mechanism behind the order in which I discuss these novels lies in their scope in problematizing the interlocking issues of memory and spatiality. Starting from a main character who has no name, no memories, no identity, gradually engulfing London, we arrive at Mitchell's multiverse, in which numerous disparate spatialities and temporalities converge in the self, with the subject becoming the centre and the archive of the entire universe.

Memory and Spatiality in Contemporary British Fiction

As I propose to elaborate in the following pages, both space and memory have become central to contemporary thinking about the subject. Their joint consideration presents us with various alternatives to understanding the position of the self in the new millennium. It seems that several novels, written in the first decade of the twenty-first century, focus explicitly on the intertwining between memory and space, and their joint effect upon the self. Memory and spatiality connect the subject's past and present, flux and fixity, leading us to a greater understanding of the self in question. My exclusive focus on these novels coincides with Peter Boxall's standpoint, who dedicates an entire book to arguing for a need to approach literature after 2000 as a reflection on "a new kind of being in the third millennium," one that, according to him, "emerges in the wake of the decline of national sovereignty, and with the development of a new set of cultural and technological protocols for the organisation of space and time" (8). In agreement with Boxall's theory, this thesis recognises literature written after 2000 as reflecting a heightened interest in questions concerning both time and space. The self – the protagonist of the novel – is fraught between stability and instability, fixity and fluidity, past and present, emanating a pervasive sense of tension, of crisis even. The choice fell on such novels that present different facets of this state of crisis, highlighting the complexity of memory and space impacting the subject.

The interest in outlining the literature of the new millennium is prevalent, with several notable books dedicated to charting the current trends in novelistic fiction, to defining the emergent literary era. For instance, Dominic Head, in *The State of the Novel*, draws attention to the effect globalisation has on novel writing and scholarship alike. Consequently, he implies that the concepts of "Britain, British" need to be understood more loosely, and the scope widened to encompass the effects of globalisation. Kim Duff focuses on Britishness, analysing literary representations of contemporary British urban spaces affected by Margaret Thatcher's sociopolitical policies of privatisation during the 1980s and beyond. Pieter Vermeulen's *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel* works with a wide range of authors to test "the paradoxical productivity of the idea of the end of the novel in a significant sample of contemporary fiction and discovers that these fictions dramatize the end of the novel in order to reimagine the politics and ethics of form in the twenty-first century" (2).

The Legacies of Modernism takes an interesting approach, where numerous notable scholars investigate contemporary fiction as continuing in the tradition of, or in other ways linked to Modernism. This enterprise reinforces our need to see the connections between past and present, past and future, choosing as its focus the historicising of Anglophone fiction. *The Contemporary British Novel since 1980*, edited by James Acheson and Sarah C. E. Ross, covers a substantial period in time, working with twenty-two British novelists, who are organised around four major "-isms": realism, postcolonialism, feminism and postmodernism. Philip Tew and Rod Mengham's edited *British Fiction Today* takes an outlook into the pre- and post-millennial fiction, covering mostly the period between 1990 and 2006. Their four sections, each discussing four British authors, pinpoint major characteristics, issues or topics the two editors identified in contemporary writing, such as "Modern Lives, Contemporary Living," or "Histories."

The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction: 1980-2018, edited by Peter Boxall, is a very thorough work outlining almost four decades of British fiction, and showing several processes of change and influence the discussed authors exhibit. The treatise provides readers with an insight into how the fiction of the new millennium was and is shaped by novels and novelists and the world before them. For instance, Boxall states that such authors as David Mitchell, Ali Smith, Tom McCarthy "all work through the production of new forms with which to critique the neoliberal culture which emerged in 1980, and which has determined the terms in which the British novel has given expression to our present, the 'periodicity of this particular past-present-future'" (7). As he further deduces, "there is a close accord (…) between the development of a neoliberal globalisation, the rise and fall of a postmodern cultural dominant, and the history of the British novel in the period from 1980 to the present" (7).

David James's book is notable in presenting numerous contemporary British novels through the lens of spatiality. Furthermore, it is important to note that he dedicates a chapter in his book to charting the connections between memory and space, discussing several novels by Graham Swift, A.L. Kennedy and Trezza Azzopardi. His central claim is that "[m]emory has had an altogether significant role in shaping the imaginative geographies of contemporary British fiction" (96), and that "such fictions of remembrance […] reveal much about the way

striking memories arise spontaneously from everyday environments with disarming consequences" (97).

The contributors to *The 2000s*, an insightful collection of essays edited by Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble and Leigh Wilson, choose a narrower scope to have a greater understanding of the current paths discernible in the novels of that decade. Their greatest purpose is to diagnose novelistic literature at the beginning of the twenty-first century and thus attempt to outline the new directions and interests, together with their motivations. To mention a few central themes chosen by the authors, Laura Salisbury identifies a new genre, the "neuronovel," analysing novels that shift attention from the investigation of the mind to the scientific, clinical approaches to the brain. Nick Bentley maps the fiction of youth subcultures, showing how it provides greater insight into British culture and society. Daniel Weston takes a closer look at how contemporary novels blend realism with experimentation.

The 2000s proposes to investigate the problematisation of temporality. Starting from the term "contemporary," it investigates the new trends concerning the past, both proximate and distant. Furthermore, one of the chapters, written by Leigh Wilson, is dedicated to the historical novel, examining its relation to the past (modernism and postmodernism) and realism. She sheds light on the complex, maybe even problematic nature of this contemporary historical fiction, but concludes that this type of fiction serves as reconciliation between fiction and reality. In light of this collection of essays, my undertaking can be considered as an investigation of yet another path that contemporary literature has taken, one that can be added to the different trends slowly emerging in the fiction of the twenty-first century.

As the examples show, many scholars choose to bring together several decades of literature, thus showing the processes discernible in the fiction around the year 2000. My approach, however, is more concentrated, closer to what the contributors to *The 2000s* accomplished, in which they provide a detailed diagnosis of novelistic fiction written and published between 2000-2010. The book is part of *The Decades Series*, the individual volumes thus making possible a more focused attention on a wide range of literary pieces. Similarly to the series, the main principle of this current enterprise is not to isolate the novels of my choice from the history of British literature, but rather, by taking a microscope to only a select few of the novels, to reveal the more hidden processes and motivations behind the

fiction of the new millennium. Before I do that, however, I wish to briefly outline the methodology behind my subsequent chapters.

I. Memory and the Novels

Memory has always been a part of life. It is always present, it exerts its effect upon the present, upon choices, decisions the individual makes. It is an integral part of a person's existence. Why, then, should we pay so pronounced attention to it now? What has changed in memory? These are the questions that prompted me to start a research on Memory (I use capitalisation to signal the complexity of this term). Memory "has three meanings: the mental *capacity* to retrieve stored information and to perform learned mental operations, such as long division; the semantic, imagistic, or sensory *content* of recollections; and the *location* where these recollections are stored" (Young 4, emphasis in original). Theories of identity consider memory as a part of the self, a factor that plays a great role in identity formation, in the development of the self. Through memory the past becomes present, and thus it exercises its effect on both the present and the future, influencing the life of the individual.

One of the numerous categorisations of memory differentiates among its four main forms, which are the following: individual, social, collective, and public memory. My definition of them is based on Edward S. Casey's detailed analysis (20-26). The first type, individual memory focuses on the self, and thus highlights the uniqueness of remembering ascribed to individuals. One remembers in several different ways, recollects various things, and remembers either by way of being reminded, by recognising something, or by reminiscing. Social memory is the one shared by several individuals somehow related to each other (kinship, geographical proximity, common interest, etc.), and these pre-existing relationships are a prerequisite and often central elements of this type of memory. Collective memory unites people who, despite not knowing each other, are brought together by the memory of the same thing. And finally, public memory, as the opposite of any type of private memory, emphasises being out in the open, where one can encounter others, and where one is exposed.

In the following, I will start with this above categorisation. However, it is important to notice that Casey's system is one of the many that present similar typologies, with only slight

variations. For instance, Jan Assmann operates with two main categories, differentiating between personal and collective memory, and then he (relying on Aleida Assmann's "Memory, Individual and Collective") further breaks down collective memory into three categories: communicative, cultural and political. He defines these three major aspects as follows: "Communicative memory is a matter of socialization and communication (…); cultural memory is an externalization and objectivation of memory, which is individual and communicative (…); political memory finally shares its externalized, symbolical character with cultural memory, but is a top-down institution which depends on the political organization that institutes it" ("Globalization" 122). I believe this particular categorisation, and the existence of several versions, testifies to the flexibility of memory. Depending on the focus of the theoretician, the categories will slightly differ.

The complexity of memory is evident. Aleida Assmann, for instance, ascribes the continual surge in literature on the subject to the "wide variety of questions and interests – cultural, scientific, social, and informational – [that] are stimulated and consolidated at this particular point of intersection" (7). But we need to return to my original questions, the issues that started formulating in me a few years back. I started to notice that numerous contemporary novels focused more and more on several facets of memory, gradually making them central to the literary works. The four novels under scrutiny here led me to decipher three major tendencies in these works' relation to memory. The first one is connected to the problematisation of historiography, an increasing mistrust in history-writing, and turning to memory as a personal sort of historiography, one that is more trusted. The second observation is tightly connected to this, and it concerns the novels' different approaches to the issue of reliability in connection to remembrance. There is a common tendency in these works to actively investigate whether memories can be trusted, and, conversely, the effect of their enhanced presence in the subject's life. More of these novels operate with dichotomies, in the case of *Remainder* between the existence of memories and their loss (or complete absence), in *Room* between traumatic memories and blissful ignorance, or in *The Opposite House* between real and imagined/fabricated memories. The third common interest in these novels can be captured in their reaction to the 21st-century world, globalised and digitalised, influencing memory formation and self-definition in the subject.

Memory Studies enumerates several factors involved in the investigation of memory in the humanities, I will exemplify the abundance with Joanne Garde-Hansen's adapted and expanded version of Pierre Nora's list of reasons for the significant rise of memory:

- access to and criticism of official versions of history through reference to unofficial versions;
- the recovery of repressed memories of communities, nations and individuals whose histories have been ignored, hidden or destroyed;
- the opening of existing and the creation of new archives for public and private scrutiny;
- the explosion in genealogical research and family narratives;
- the growth of museums and the heritage industry;
- the desire to commemorate, remember and memorialise in ways other than through public statues and monuments;
- an increasing emphasis upon trauma, grief, emotion, affect, cognition, confession, reconciliation, apology and therapy;
- the development of and investment in biotechnology and the increased visibility of the functions of the human brain. (13-14)

The novels of my choice give voice to several of these aforementioned issues, which will be analysed in the course of the chapters. For instance, Helen Oyeyemi's novel focuses on a community with a complex history of migration, slavery, cultural erasure and subordination, all of this through the parallel lives of a Cuban girl and a Yoruba deity. Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* and Emma Donoghue's *Room* present very different aspects of the issue of trauma, giving opportunity for a detailed analysis of those (both physical and mental). David Mitchell's novel centres on the phenomenon of the archive and, with its narrative straddling different temporalities and worlds, it raises new issues concerning the contemporary memorial culture.

In the following, I will briefly consider the theoretical background for the main aspects of memory studies, identifiable in the novels. Here I employ those theories and thinkers that are inevitable for a complex understanding of the issues raised by the fictional works. However, I wish to emphasise that the following outline does not in any way intend to provide a history of memory studies, a detailed account of the various theories and directions it took. Instead, I will only mention those thinkers and aspects of memory studies that provide great help in investigating the literary approaches to memory, with an exclusive focus on the four novels of my choice.

1. Memory and History

Memory and history have for a long time been considered opposites, two very different ways of relating to the past. Kendall R. Phillips defines history as "implying a singular and authentic account of the past," whereas memory would be "conceived in terms of multiple, diverse, mutable, and competing accounts of past events" (2). History was generally considered as fixed, and memory is conceptualised as fluid, dynamic, in constant flux, partly as a result of its interaction with the present and of its effect upon the future. Pierre Nora aptly summarises the most significant aspects of memory that emphasise its distance from history: "Memory is life, borne out of living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived" (8). This supposed fallibility, this weakness alluded to in Nora's definition is in fact the one that captures memory's current advantage against history.

What this implies is that, in Phillips' words, "societies are both constituted by their memories and, in their daily interactions, rituals, and exchanges, constitute these memories" (2), and thus memories live and change, they are in constant motion. On the other side of the spectrum is history, which started losing its commanding position among the social sciences in the second half of the twentieth century. The signs can be observed in several great theoreticians' work at the time, such as Edward Said's or Michel Foucault's (*see* Gibbons 4-5). But the work serving as the definitive proof of a crisis of historiography belongs to Hayden White, whose 1973 *Metahistory* erases the supposed fixity and objectivity of historical writing, instead revealing its constructed nature, and hence its subjectivity. His theory shatters beliefs in history being a grand narrative, proving it is never exclusive but consists of numerous versions. Alun Munslow, a historian following White, accurately claims that "[h]istory and the past cannot coincide" since the former "is a narrative about the latter" (7).

The aforementioned advantage of memory lies in the fact that it has always been deemed unreliable, whereas historians tried to maintain historiography's position as incontestable. The very concept of memory expresses provisionality, subjectivity, it is "concerned with representation and the present rather than fact and the past" (Radstone and Hodgkin 2). The emerging uncertainty, the loss of the authority of history prompts several

thinkers and the contemporary society at large to search for alternatives. Consequently, there is an increasing number of representatives who consider memory to convey the more accurate accounts of the past. As Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin remark, memory is more directly about the present than history is, and hence "it is to memory that one should turn in order to reveal 'what really happened'" (1-2). The focus falls on individuals, communities, different groups that remember and give voice to those memories.

What can bring history and memory closer together, and provide a sort of reconciliation between the two, is the concept and phenomenon of the collective memory, customarily tied to the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. Following in the footsteps of Émile Durkheim, Halbwachs postulated the concept of collective memory, and with this, he provided the appropriate alternative to history. He surpassed the subjectivity commonly attributed to memories and built a system of dualities in which the two extremes are private and public memory.

Halbwachs claims that memory cannot be conceived in isolation, as solely the attribute of a person, but it is always relational: it happens to the individual surrounded by family, by friends, or by larger communities (for instance, through religious or national ties). Although private and public/collective are opposites of each other, one cannot function without the other. As he states, "[o]ne may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories" (40). The process is circular, with one element always reliant on the other. "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (Halbwachs 43), which means that the society or the collective is a prerequisite for memories to exist. As Jan Assmann, writing about Halbwachs' theory, concludes, "[e]ven the most personal recollections only come about through communication and social interaction" (*Cultural Memory* 22).

Two of the four novels deal explicitly with the dichotomy of individual/collective memory, namely Oyeyemi's *Opposite House* and Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. In the former, Maja the novel's protagonist is caught between the two, and her story becomes a search for her true identity between the personal and the collective memories that define her life. The fact that she has a double, in the form of a Yoruba goddess migrating together with the slaves of the past, further enhances the duality that creates a constant tension inside her, manifesting in the

form of the *hysteric*. The latter novel, namely *Cloud Atlas*, builds on coexistence between the micro and macro levels of life, mutually forming and completing each other, where the self is both a clearly delineated individual entity and an integral part of a greater design. The subjects following each other in time, straddling numerous spatio-temporal points, together create a living collective memory, one that is changing and moving and travelling from self to self.

I believe that Halbwachs's theory is an important component and starting point for an analysis of memory in the novels, but many of his theoretical statements have been superseded and need to be complemented. In discussing the interplay between private and public, between individual and collective/social memory, I will very briefly invoke British social anthropologist Paul Connerton's theory of it. Collective memory becomes social memory in his theory, which he defines, additionally to Halbwachs' approach, as stating something essential about the present. As he claims, it is the commonality of certain memories that brings people together and that shapes the group in the present. "Thus we may say that our experiences of the present largely depend upon our knowledge of the past, and that our images of the past commonly serve to legitimate a present social order," remarks Connerton (*How Societies Remember* 3).

However, although this statement is straightforward, maybe even self-evident, he claims that it is incomplete, and a careful consideration of how images of the past are conveyed and sustained is required. And he believes that it is ritual performances that provide transmission and maintenance for memories. Furthermore, Halbwachs' theory seems to suggest that the lifespan of the collective memory is just as short as the life of the person/group members remembering it. What he does not discuss and, adversely, Connerton emphasises, is the consideration of communication in group dynamics. The latter scholar shifts focus and claims that "to study the social formation of memory is to study those acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible" (*How Societies Remember* 39). Consequently, he studies the different acts of transfer, from which he identifies commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices as the most important ones.

Aleida Assmann can provide us with a straightforward way to resolve the tension between memory and history. She takes a close look at Halbwachs' theory and concludes the following: "The neat polarization of history and memory seems to me just as unsatisfactory as the equation of the two," and instead she suggests "that history and memory should be grasped

as two complementary modes of cultural memory" (123). I believe this is the key to analysing memory in the novels of today, keeping in mind that it does not intend to exclude history from consciousness, but it rather proposes a coexistence that leads to a greater understanding of one's past.

The four novels, though very differently, exhibit signs of active engagement in remembrance. Most of the protagonists featured in these works are either in search of memories or they construct their own in an attempt to construct themselves together with the memories. For instance, the unnamed protagonist of McCarthy's novel is torn between authenticity and artificiality. As a consequence of physical traumas suffered in an accident, he loses two things: his control over his body, over his movements, and his memories of the event (and supposedly of other moments of his life, too). The entire novel is constructed as a compendium of ritual performances meant to revitalise both the lost memories and his own authenticity. The world of Oyeyemi's novel, though very differently, but is also organised around rituals, this time more explicitly connected to a community. One pervasive example is the practice of the Santería religion, a colourful mixture of Yoruba and Catholicism.

The interplay between memory and history presents a constant tension in the novels of my choice, however, one can gradually notice the gestures intended for a resolution between the two. Memory and history, as the literary pieces more and more pronouncedly reflect, show a coexistence whose acceptance leads to a redefinition of one's past. That very past will be a composite of the personal and the world, of the private and the public, of their memories inside various communities and the history of the world surrounding them. As the four chapters dedicated to the analysis will show, the novels' handling of the history-memory binary moves towards a reconception of the two, attained most explicitly in *Cloud Atlas*, the novel that unravels the infinitely intricate connections between self and world.

2. The Unreliability of Memory

It may seem paradoxical, but I recognise a widespread tendency in the novels of the noughties, one that combines a greater reliance on memory with a constant sense of insecurity, with its problematisation. Thus, although memory is indisputably one of the foci of these fictional works, one way in which it achieves central position is through its very questioning. The four

novels exhibit differing signs of their relation to remembrance, all of them pointing to a problematic relationship. For instance, *Remainder* operates with their loss or, as I will prove through the analysis, complete absence, revealing a maddened individual who gradually loses control. Unreliability in this case, similarly to Maja's persona in *The Opposite House*, refers to the protagonist's supposition of, or even firm belief in the reality of some memories, whereas the reader recognises that those are constructed by the protagonist himself, in an effort to (re)define himself.

Donoghue's novel contrasts adult with child, memories accumulated in life with a young existence devoid of any salient memories. In this scenario Jack, the protagonist is capable of leading a contented life, unaware of the dire circumstances of the prison he shares with his mother, whereas Ma's awareness of their situation and memories of her life preceding the kidnapping make her life almost unbearable. This novel employs clearly defined dualities to provide its readers with a greater understanding of the world mother and son inhabit. Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* has possibly the most complex relation to the issue of memory, since, on the one hand, the novel builds an entire universe where selves are connected and are capable of bridging time and space, thus creating an archive of lives and moments in the world. On the other hand, the six disparate chapters, organised in the form of reversed Matryoshka dolls, all seem to testify to the failure of history and, conversely, of memory, since the same atrocities are bound to be repeated. The archiving of Sonmi~451's confession, as an example of the complexity of approach to memory in the novel, will be placed under scrutiny in my subsequent analysis.

At this point I shall take a brief outlook on scholarship's handling the unreliability of memory, to see whether the four novels of my choice exhibit similar tendencies. What the two first novels focus on can be approached through the age-old question of whether memory belongs to the realm of the imagination or is distinct and more reliable than that. The history of memory shows us how the approach to it has been changing in time. For instance, Plato and Aristotle, despite professing different understandings of memory, both recognised its importance and ascribed it to a privileged position in knowledge acquisition. However, in the seventeenth century British empiricist philosophers shift from considering memory as a vehicle of knowledge to looking at it as a type or form of knowledge rooted in experience (*see* Warnock 15-27). This implies visuality, and so it becomes closely related to the imagination.

Numerous philosophers claim that if memory is comprised of images, of visual projections, then it is nothing more than an act of the imagination, with no pretence for accuracy and veracity. Paul Ricoeur, in his influential *Memory, History, Forgetting* also focuses on this issue of memory, when he claims that "[t]he constant danger of confusing remembering and imagining, resulting from memories becoming images in this way, affects the goal of faithfulness corresponding to the truth claim of memory" (7). However, as he remarks, we are still reliant on memory for recalling our past, and we need to accept that "the final referent of memory remains the past, whatever the pastness of the past may signify" (7).

Connected to this issue is the element of identity, which cannot be sidestepped when considering the problematic nature of memory. Every time one thinks of a definition of memory, the starting point is comprised of individual memory, its privacy, its particularity. Hence identity is a major factor in considering it. As Jan Assmann argues, the individual possesses an array of different identities, reliant on the environment they find themselves in; conversely, their memories are also of multiple forms and manifestations ("Globalization" 123). Memory and identity are closely intertwined through "frames that relate memory to specific horizons of time and identity on an individual, a generational, a political and a cultural level" (123). His new definition of memory entails that it is "knowledge with an identity-index," knowledge focusing on the self in time, on personal history as it gradually forms in different communities (123).

Ricoeur, for instance, investigates the different causes for the fragility of memory, one of them being its reliance on identity: the fragility of memory is partly the result of the frailty of identity itself which, according to Ricoeur, is primarily caused by its difficult relation to time. The second cause of fragility "lies in the confrontation with others," perceived as a threat (81); and the third cause is "the heritage of founding violence" ("violent acts legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right," 82). In light of these considerations, the most pronounced characteristic of memory becomes its flexibility, its mutability. Nevertheless, I believe that this has of late turned from a fault into one of memory's strengths.

It seems that the contemporary world needs flexibility more than anything: in an ever-changing, rapidly shifting world memory needs to keep up. As Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt remark, it is memory's transformative quality that makes it possible for it to "play a key role in processes of change and transition" (3). According to them, memory "transforms

knowledge in processes of continuous appropriation": "it can always be reopened and reconstructed in new acts of remembering" (3).[1] One of the proposed investigations in the analyses will be comprised of a careful attention to how the novels approach the issue of fragility, of unreliability, and whether they exhibit any signs of this fragility becoming one of memory's assets.

The other aspect involved in the supposed unreliability of memory can be comprised in the form of a dichotomy, once again: memory and forgetting. Forgetting is most explicitly problematized in McCarthy's novel, however, it also appears with different emphases in the other works. Forgetting has from time immemorial raised the issue of memory and its faithfulness to the past. It has always been conceived as the counterpart to memory and, what is more, as its greatest enemy. Forgetting further adds to the insecurity one feels when relying on memory for a faithful evocation of the past. If events can be forgotten, and if forgetting is not voluntary, not controlled, then anything and everything is in danger of disappearing into oblivion. It seems that now more than ever the society at large is afraid of forgetting. Connerton argues that "modernity has a particular problem with forgetting" (*How Modernity Forgets* 1), and dedicates an entire book to discussing the various reasons and aspects of modernity's relation to remembering and forgetting.[2]

There is definitely a heightened sense of anxiety in today's society, prompted by the fear of forgetting, and resulting in the commodification of memory: nostalgia has become a vehicle for the propagation of different consumer goods, the world is filled with memorial sites and rites that have been ordered for various purposes. All this, I believe, is tightly connected to the accelerated time, to constant changes that are becoming more and more difficult to follow, to a globalised world where traditional boundaries have been erased or rethought. This is the third issue I wish to elaborate on later, but one that has a significant effect on how memory and forgetting are approached today.

---

[1] Assmann and Shortt, in *Memory and Political Change*, propose three methodological premises to show how the fragility of memory is turned into its strength.

[2] Connerton presents his readers with a detailed list of thinkers who had the same realisation (2-4). Just to provide a few examples, he mentions Fredric Jameson, who has argued that "our entire contemporary social system has little by little begun to lose its capacity to retain its own past" (125, quoted in Connerton 2). Andreas Huyssen and Jacques Le Goff voice their thoughts that bring the society's infatuation with memory together with cultural forgetting: "the public at large (…) is obsessed by the fear of losing its memory in a kind of collective amnesia" (Le Goff 162, quoted in Connerton 2-3).

To show a process through which forgetting is gradually redefined, I once again turn to Ricoeur, who places forgetting into the very title of his seminal book. At the beginning of the chapter dedicated to the investigation of forgetting, he claims that it "remains the disturbing threat that lurks in the background of the phenomenology of memory and of the epistemology of history" (412). Thus forgetting is a danger, a counterpart to remembrance or, in his words, "the emblem of the vulnerability of [the historical] condition" (412). However, his careful investigation of forgetting gradually reveals a more complex understanding of the issue in question. For instance, Ricoeur differentiates between two readings of mnemonic phenomena: "The first tends toward the idea of a definitive forgetting," whereas the second "tends toward the idea of a reversible forgetting" (417).

The human subject is defined by a wrestling between these two different approaches to forgetting. These two aspects already open up forgetting towards new interpretations that gradually lead Ricoeur to questioning whether forgetting is indeed a dysfunction (as clinical investigation always contends). In some respect, it is definitely a dysfunction: a threat to our memories, and thus to our connection to the past ("one of the figures of the inevitable, the irremediable," 426). Nevertheless, it is still bound up with memory: Ricoeur goes even as far as claiming that "forgetting can be so closely tied to memory that it can be considered one of the conditions for it" (426). Memory and forgetting are inseparable, they together give rise to the social subject. The multiple ways how this is achieved I propose to delineate by turning to Paul Connerton once again.

Connerton's "Seven Types of Forgetting" provides us with a coherent understanding of the several aspects and effects forgetting can entail. He opens up forgetting towards positive, even beneficial effects; for instance, "prescriptive forgetting" and "forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity" show a side of forgetting as yet untouched, namely that it can be "a gain," as Connerton phrases it. As he describes, "prescriptive forgetting [is] believed to be in the interests of all parties to the previous dispute" (61). In the case of "forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity," emphasis falls on "the gain that accrues to those who know how to discard memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of one's current identity and ongoing purposes" (62).

Remembrance and forgetting operate together and they are inseparable. If I claimed that memory is constitutive of identity, now I will extend this to stating that forgetting,

together with memory, is also a defining issue. What, how, when and why is forgotten is just as representative as the memories retained, and they need to be investigated. This type of forgetting is not the clinical one, it is separated from cases of amnesia and rather opened towards sociological (and sometimes political) issues.

At this point, I will suspend the discussion of memory to turn to spatiality. I will return to memory in light of globalisation in a separate unit, in which I propose to reveal the multiple interconnections memory and spatiality show inside our globalised world, as revealed through the novels analysed in this work.

II. Spatiality and the Novels

Allow me to begin this section by quoting Michel Foucault's 1967 lecture "Of Other Spaces," with its poignant diagnosis of the present times: "the great obsession of the nineteenth century was, as we know, history… The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed" (22). And indeed, space seems to show a steady increase in its popularity in the humanities and social sciences. The very definition of globalism could be captured by the row of juxtapositions Foucault invokes here. However, I would like to extend this dualism to point out its effect on a wider area as well. What I wish to show in this enterprise is not the erasure of time, not its relegation to the background, but rather a more democratic coexistence between time and space. Furthermore, the novels under my scrutiny here draw attention to the need for (a) new perspective(s) on both space and time.

This new perspective is definitely complex and involves numerous ways through which our two central concepts intertwine. For this reason, I chose to focus on one manifestation of this interplay, in the form of memory and spatiality. After a brief presentation of the theoretical considerations of memory working in and with the novels of my choice, now I will turn to a short outline of spatiality, with a focus on its presence in the four literary works. The novels present very different emphases on how space as a concept appears in their worlds. In all four cases, spatiality in its different manifestations becomes a quasi-character participating in the events of the novels and, in some cases, even a central character, who is an active agent in the works.

In Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*, the nameless protagonist is desperately trying to regain his lost memories, his past, to understand himself and reach "authenticity." In order to accomplish this, he tries to gain total control over his surroundings: a tenement building he buys and transforms to his own needs, more and more people ("re-enactors") whom he hires to play given roles, and gradually ever-more expansive spaces of London, the stage of his re-enactments. Space itself becomes the symbol for his quest, and also the symbol of his emptiness: meant to fill the void but gradually making it greater. And finally, as my subsequent detailed analysis will purport to exhibit, the spaces he desperately tries to control in the end will emerge as controlling him, who is a slave to his madness, to his incessant search for authenticity.

In Oyeyemi's *Opposite House*, as the title already proposes, one of the main characters is the house itself: on the one hand, we have "the somewherehouse," that magical place that is inhabited by Yoruba gods, which is capable of connecting disparate worlds (human and divine, London and Lagos); on the other hand, there is another house raised to the level of character, the one Maja shares with her boyfriend, the house that communicates with Maja. The entire novel builds on the difference of and connection between distant places, with the human self being stranded somewhere in between.

In the case of Donoghue's *Room* the fortified garden shed imprisoning Ma and Jack is conceived through the juxtaposition between the two characters' relation to it and perception of it. For the five-year-old child, it is the entire world, even a good friend: warm, friendly, sheltering; whereas for his mother, it serves as the constant reminder of her kidnapping and regular visits from her rapist. Room is a rich entity that is bigger than life in the imagination of the boy, whereas for the mother it represents the site of trauma and struggle. My analysis of the novel builds on this duality that runs through the work, focusing on the different manifestations and implications it presents for the characters.

Finally, to end my brief hint at the central role of spatiality in the four novels, I turn to Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, a novel that, through its complex universe, in which six stories from six spatio-temporal planes interlace, creates a unity that gives birth to a redefinition of the subject. The places evoked in the stories initially may not seem central, but they gradually become part of the web of interconnected points. They come together to disclose the underlying patterns of the connection between the characters who belong to different

historical moments, spread out across the globe. The main motif running through the novel will prove to be plurality in unity and unity in plurality. All four novels present place and space as having a substantial influence on memory, on history, on the self's perception of time and themselves. The imaginative geographies of these works render space and time inseparable and capture the subject at the juncture of the two.

In the humanities and social sciences, the heightened interest in spatiality can be captured in the term and event of "The Spatial Turn," a concept coined as part of a line of turns: "postmodern turn," "linguistic turn," "mobilities turn," "GIS turn," etc., all meant to draw attention to the necessity of a shift in perspective. The spatial turn brings two perspectives into discussion: on the one hand, to quote German historian Karl Schlögel, it refers to "an increased attention to the spatial side of the historical world" (68). This view reinforces the already mentioned observation that the heightened interest in spatiality does not purport the erasure of temporality, rather it draws attention to the tight link between the two. On the other hand, mostly based on Henri Lefebvre's seminal work *The Production of Space,* this turn results in a heightened interest in the very production of space in the course of history. As Michael C. Frank formulates it, Lefebvre's work "aimed to liberate space from both its common status as a pre-existing given and its passive role as a mere backdrop for social action" (66).

The coinage of the term is mostly attributed to geographers, such as the leading geographer Edward Soja, who bases his theory on the two paradigmatic figures of spatiality: Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. Although the spatial turn started earlier, having a substantial tradition in French historiography, the general consensus points towards the previously mentioned lecture given by Michel Foucault as being a substantial claim for a turn towards the spatial paradigm. Drawing on Lefebvre and Foucault, Soja, in his *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, argues for a "flexible and balanced critical theory that re-entwines the making of history with the social production of space, with the construction and configuration of human geographies" (11).

The humanities and social sciences now engage extensively with the different manifestations of this spatial turn and everything this new perspective entails. As Santa Arias states: "Geographical knowledge can no longer be considered a container of life and nature;

this absolutist perspective of space has been replaced by a relational one, where space depends on and it is intertwined with historical events, responds to political paradigm shifts, economic changes, and the cultural transformation of societies" (124). Different scholars present differing approaches to the spatial turn, to the very definition of spatiality. For instance, as Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman remark, for some it "refers to seeing the transformation of economies, emerging digital cultures, and ecological movements as global processes that prompt us to rethink the role of locality, space, and spatiality in understanding culture and history" (2).

Spatiality is a defining agent of our existence, of our understanding of ourselves in the world. Heightened attention given to spatiality results in "the identification of what seems like a constantly expanding universe of spaces and territories, each of which provides different kinds of inhabitation – from the bordering provided by the womb, through all the things in the home that are just out of reach, through the corporeal traces of buildings and landscapes that provide a kind of half-remembered poetics (…)" (Thrift 139). The four novels of my choice allow me to investigate the questions fiction asks when recognising the central role of spatiality and its diversity. Maja in Oyeyemi's novel experiences her womanhood through pregnancy, one that is accompanied by her "hysteric," an alter-ego that erases the boundary between sanity and insanity, between herself and her baby, between humans and gods. Donoghue's novel continues in the vein of this intimacy by placing mother and son inside a garden shed, a womb of sorts that is both a haven and a prison. The character of McCarthy's *Remainder* is trying to regain a sense of self through the city he inhabits and makes his own. And Mitchell's novel is the very definition of infinity, of the erasure (or at least the reconceptualization) of boundaries.

Consequently, it is already visible from these few details that space is a central issue for all four novels, and their approaches to it unveil its complexity. So we need to ask the following question: what is space? How can we define it? Numerous definitions and approaches exist, but possibly one of the most evocative ones was uttered by French scholar Bertrand Westphal: "A priori, space is a concept that encompasses the universe; it is oriented toward the infinitely large or reduced to the infinitely small, which is itself infinitely and infinitesimally vast" (4). This definition encompasses the infinite possibilities space offers,

ranging from the microscopic to the universal, being all-pervasive and of countless shapes and manifestations.

Nevertheless, Westphal's definition is rather poetic, so to counteract it I turn to geographer Doreen B. Massey, who proposes three interconnected ways of approaching space: Massey recognises in her first proposition that space cannot exist in isolation, but only through interactions. Secondly, it is always defined by multiplicity, by plurality, since interrelation itself requires plurality, and thus one cannot exist without the other. And finally, as she claims, space is "always under construction" (9), meaning that "it is always in the process of being made" (9). Space is never finished, never done, but in constant motion, changing, Massey inviting us to imagine it "as a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (9).

At the beginning of this methodological approach to space, after these attempts at a definition, I am invoking Nigel Thrift's system of four principles, through which one can have a greater understanding of the different issues at play in the discussion of space. The first principle is that everything is spatially distributed (as he claims, "even the head of a pin has been seen to have its own geography," 140), the second one states that there is no such thing as a boundary, since all spaces are porous. The third principle claims that every space is in constant motion, and the fourth is that space has many forms, shapes, manifestations: "points, planes, parabolas; blots, blurs and blackouts" (Thrift 141).

I believe that the analysis of these novels, with express attention to spatiality in the works, needs to approach space through these four principles, looking at changes, movements, and powers the different spaces exhibit. Before I can move on, I still feel the need to address one more issue, namely the difference between space and place. This dichotomy is age-old, with numerous theoretical approaches differentiating between the two concepts. Usually, space is considered to be more general, whereas place is the more particular one of the two ("personalized space, occupied space," as John Rennie Short puts it, 15). Place entails being "situated in a definite location," whereas space "is a background, a container" (Short 15). For a rather comprehensive understanding of the dichotomy of space and place, one can visit Eric Prieto's list of a few theses on place (*see* Prieto 12-13). Here, for instance, he summarises how Yi-Fu Tuan defines place as "space enriched with human experience and understanding" (Tuan 179, qtd. in Prieto 12), or how it can be "a social construct, like space and time"

(Harvey, *Justice* 293, qtd. in Prieto 12), or "a particular constellation of social relations" (Massey 154, qtd. in Prieto 12).

A closer look only at this short list Prieto provides sheds light on the elusive nature of the concept, showing how different the approaches to it have been. Prieto concludes that the concept of place is "inherently multidimensional [b]ecause it cannot be understood without some sense of its various dimensions, be they spatial, material, psychological, social, political, or metaphysical" (13). The definitions are usually further complicated based on the background of the scholar: geographers, phenomenologists, philosophers, literary theoreticians all approach place/space from different angles, enriching their meaning.

Westphal, amongst many theoreticians, provides a similar definition to Short's above, defining space as abstract and place as concrete: "the first would encompass conceptual *space* and the second factual *place*," he states (5, emphasis in original). And just to show how different approaches can get, let me mention philosopher Michel de Certeau's definition, which inverts this general approach. According to him, "[a] place is … an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability," whereas "space is composed of intersections of mobile elements," and thus it is "practiced place" (de Certeau 117).

All these various approaches to place/space can give a sense of total confusion, however, they really open up the two concepts to a fluidity that needs to be acknowledged. Westphal, for instance, adds an important observation to his above-quoted definition when he states that they "are not mutually exclusive, if only because the line between space and place is always shifting" (5). Place becomes space, space turns into place, and they together exhibit a constant interplay that has to be recognised. This shiftiness is what I am prioritising in the subsequent analyses, showing the very processes through which one turns into another in the focus of the human experience.

1. Experienced Space

The four novels present different instances of how the subject conceives of space, creates it, inhabits it. My focus here will be mostly on space, investigated based on the realisation that space is always produced. This, through the course of the dissertation, will be extended into a bidirectional movement, where space is produced by the subject, and the subject is produced

by the space. The starting point of this investigation coincides with Henri Lefebvre's triad of perceived, conceived, or lived space (or, in other words: spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representation), which provides a key to understanding (social) space and its mechanisms. The centre of the triad becomes the body, as everything – perception, conception, living – stems from it, and is understood through it.

Starting from the first element of the triad, the body plays a central role. The questions that capture this aspect of space are "what?' and "how?": what is perceived by the body, and how does it translate the information, how does it get into contact with the perceived space? One could state that "it is spatial practice that produces social spaces to the extent that it postulates and at the same time presupposes them" (Cabo Aseguinolaza). And, as Lefebvre claims, "social practice presupposes the use of the body: the use of the hands, members and sensory organs, and the gestures of work as of activity unrelated to work. This is the realm of the *perceived*" (40, emphasis in original).

The second concept is the conceived space, focusing on the representations of space. This implies an understanding of space, including organisation and planning of the spaces. This is the dominant one in societies, as Lefebvre claims: the "space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers" (38). The approach to the body is different in the realm of the conceived space, here emphasis falls on the scientific knowledge of the body: "from knowledge of anatomy, of physiology, of sickness and its cure, and of the body's relations with nature and with its surroundings or 'milieu'" (40). The third category suggests greater complexity, as this is the lived or suffered space that the imagination attempts to appropriate and modify. In contrast to perceived space, which is rather material, lived space is defined by abstractness. This is the realm of symbols, memories, imaginations, and dreams. In Lefebvre's words, this is "space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users', but also of some artists" (39). This is the moment when affection is reversed, and the subject's psyche basically reorganises the space they inhabit, reflecting their own state of mind.

This is Lefebvre's conceptual triad very briefly summed up. What the three elements create is a constant connection and transition, imagined as a two-directional cyclicality (for an accurate model of the triad, with an added focus on literary historiography and topography, *see* Zähringer 86). What is in the centre of Zähringer's model of the triad is the human body,

with such keywords attached as perception, experience, and performance; and the city body, defined by size, density, heterogeneity/homogeneity (86). The novels figuring in my work show how truly central these two bodies are. In the following, I intend to take them separately and show how they will be approached in the course of the chapters.

2. Embodied Space

The body is the focal point through which Lefebvre's social space is born, created and recreated. This "body", using Setha Low's definition, refers to "its biological, emotional, cognitive and social characteristics" (95), thus exhibiting complexity and depth. Through its surface layer self and the world are connected and they mutually affect each other. The two take part in a constant definition and redefinition reliant upon each other. From a phenomenological perspective, the body is the focal point that brings together perception and experiences. The central claim of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* is that human reality is not body or soul, taken separately, but a unification of them in the "incarnate subject" (passim.): "The body is our general medium for having a world," as he claims (169). Merleau-Ponty recognises that one's own body is both physical and experiential, combining consciousness and intentionality. He comments that "far from my body's being for me no more than a fragment of space, there would be no space at all for me if I had no body" (102).

I borrow the definition of "embodiment" from anthropologist Thomas J. Csordás, who claims that it is an "indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and mode of presence and engagement in the world" (12). The novels centre on the body and its experiences, and the different characters inhabiting the various universes of the fictional works exhibit a "presence and engagement in the world" through the *sensorium*, which captures "bodily sensibilities and dispositions" (Hirschkind 633), and "the multiple senses and sensory modes of apprehending the world" (Low 95). The sense impressions operate at the level of the body which, from a phenomenological perspective, as Setha Low formulates it, "is the ground of perceptual processes that end in objectification" (99), central to the philosophy of, among others, Merleau-Ponty, who identifies the body as "both physical and experiential, combining consciousness and intentionality" (Low 99).

For a more thorough view of the relationship between embodiment and space, I call Arijit Sen's and Lisa Silverman's elucidation to help, who claim that "to embody something is to express, personify, and give concrete and perceptible form to a concept that may exist only as an abstraction," which occurs "when we read place as a material product of human imagination and experience" (4). They draw our attention to the fact that place can never be considered a "neutral site," since "our current experiences, as well as memories of past events frame how we understand and reproduce it" (4). Consequently, no objective or distant handling of place is possible. Nevertheless, questions may arise, since Sen and Silverman are talking about place, whereas this dissertation claims that spaces suffer the same fate. This may be possible, since, although space is conceptualized as an abstract entity, this very abstractness – contrary to the concreteness of place – has already embedded in its definition the assumption that the human mind conceives it.

In the subsequent analyses, I will focus on space utilizing the vocabulary borrowed from Lefebvre, who in his treatment of the relationship between body and consciousness shows the influence of Merleau-Ponty. The novels exhibit great interest in the (social) space Lefebvre approaches through the aforementioned conceptual triad. To briefly exemplify through one of the works of my choice, one could consider the rather peculiar setting of Donoghue's *Room*, which relies heavily on the dichotomy of differently experiencing the garden shed by mother and son. The perceived space manifests itself very differently, depending on the eyes through which it is seen. Furthermore, the first-person narration, utilizing a child's voice and persona, makes possible the presentation of the space in its every minute detail, with the innocent, curious and, above all, accepting approach Jack has towards all the nooks and crannies of Room.

This latter aspect is already connected to Lefebvre's concept of lived space, which alters the experience of space through imagination, memories, etc. Through the five-year-old boy Room appears as a big, exciting place filled with joy and friends, in which every otherwise ordinary object gains special importance, is personified and loved by the boy. Consequently, there will be a discernible clash between the objective reality of the garden shed and its representation through Jack's narrative, which transforms it into a complex universe. However, it is not accidental that I reversed Lefebvre's order. Actually, it seems that what we would interpret as lived space, in Jack's limited world, through his perspective would

really be the conceived space. The alterations that happen to his surroundings in/through his mind are not conscious, and one preoccupation the novel has is showing how the child's understanding and sense of his environment changes as he grows, most importantly after he experiences the Outside. Added to this rather peculiar definition of conceived space, Ma's experiences and views of the shed further complicate the picture. She represents the more objective, realist approach to the space they inhabit, which can be exemplified with a central instance in which mother and son touch the chain-link fence under the floor, and their sense impressions reveal the reality of Room.

I believe that the central focus on space in all four novels should be approached with Lefebvre's triad in mind, and this will allow me a greater understanding of the role space plays in contemporary novelistic fiction, and of its significance for the subject. Let us not forget one other relevant aspect of the approach to space. In Sen and Silverman's words, "'to embody' also suggests the act of becoming part of a body" (4), thus embodiment is an "act of incorporation" (4), one that works in both directions. What this means is that we create and define space through our sensorium, through our mind and body, and conversely, the space we find ourselves in exerts its effect over us. To demonstrate how this is thematised by the fictional pieces, I turn to Oyeyemi's *Opposite House*, whose protagonist(s) is (are) caught between two worlds. The place of the origin and the current home gradually give rise to separate personalities inside Maja, the main character, and so the different places become embodied by her, in her self and her hysteric or alter ego.

Furthermore, the spaces and their effects upon her are further complicated by the houses figuring in this fictional world: the somewherehouse, which functions as a magical crossroad, uniting London and Lagos, manifesting the fissure between the two worlds; a house that is capable of changing and shifting, reacting to its inhabitants and reflecting on their psyches; and there is a seemingly simpler house Maja shares with her boyfriend Aaron, and yet this house also exhibits signs of life, of quasi-supernatural powers: it is hostile to Maja who can never accept it as her own, as her home, and the constantly dripping water that drives her mad reflects on her state of mind, reacts to her feelings. The novel's preoccupation with the house as a central character reminds one of Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, whose central tenet is: "On whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being" (xxxvi). The house provides

insight into the characters' intimate lives, modulating their inner struggles, and reflecting on their personalities.

The novels in this work testify to the realisation that "we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities," in Edward Soja's words (*Thirdspace* 1). Consequently, the novels interrogate space and its relation to the subject from different angles, showing the complexity and the changeability of this relation. "The space occupied by the body, and the perception and experience of that space, contracts and expands in relationship to a person's emotions and state of mind, sense of self, social relations, and cultural predispositions," claims Setha Low (10), and I believe this is a crucial realization for the analysis of the novels. The presentation and representation of space in literature is the combination of several factors, such as subjectivity, memories, imagination, social environment, culture, etc.

3. Non-places

The novels investigated in the following chapters raise a few issues that need to be addressed very briefly here, too. I separated spatiality from memory only to unite them in my discussion of the globalised world. And I believe that the following issue and theory contributes substantially to our greater understanding of the concept and the processes of globalisation.

As it will be seen in the analyses, many instances of the four novels bring to mind Marc Augé's theory of *non-places*, one that basically introduces the vocabulary for a new spatial category, one that is situated between space and place. He defines non-places as "the spaces of circulation, communication and consumption, where solitudes coexist without creating any social bond or even a social emotion" ("Paris" 178). According to Augé, people in the current world are more and more surrounded by such non-places as airports, stations, shopping centres, hotels, motorways, theme parks, and cyberspace. What defines these prototypical examples is their emptiness, lack of humanity. People are just passers-by who spend a short, meaningless time in these non-places, mostly out of necessity.

Non-places are emptied out in the sense that they "cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (*Non-places* 77-78). Augé's entire book on non-places argues that these spaces that are not themselves anthropological places proliferate in and, what

is more, are the product of *supermodernity*. The keywords are transit and temporariness, an ever-more pervading state in our current world: "a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral" (78).

It is important to emphasise, just as Augé does, that non-place "never exists in pure form": "relations are restored and resumed in it (…). Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, the second never totally completed; they are like palimpsests on which the scrambled game of identity and relations is ceaselessly rewritten" (78-79). This sort of always-possible transition and change from one into the next, the very impurity of non-place reflects on the state of *supermodernity*, to use Augé's term, the state of globalisation that is majorly defined by flows and metamorphoses. As the novels in the following also seem to testify, "non-places are the real measure of our time" (79), they are always in the forefront, leading us closer to understanding how space and time work on the subject in the current world.

III. The Novels and the Global Era

"'Globalization' is on everybody's lips," thusly begins Zygmunt Bauman his treatise: "a fad word fast turning into a shibboleth, a magic incantation, a pass-key meant to unlock the gates to all present and future mysteries" (*Globalization* 1). Globalisation has become the keyword of the twenty-first century, "a pass-key" that provides a viable explanation for everything happening in this accelerated world where our perception of both time and space has changed radically. It extends over the entire world, everyone is globalised, but this does not mean that everyone is affected in the same way. Globalisation can be most easily understood as a dialectical process: it affects and redefines the global-local dialectic, here and there, space and time alike. It works through expansion and compression happening at once.

Globalisation is connection itself; it is a process that links people, things, places, events, everything. To use Short's definition, "globalization is the increasing tendency for the world to be a single network of flows of money, ideas, people and things" (10). Everyone and everything is affected, even if the effect is not so pronounced. Local and global are mutually influenced, and the entire world is right there in everyone's living room, in the person's quotidian existence. Identity changes in this new environment: it "can become more fluid –

less a fixed static node and more an assemblage of flows" (Short 175). To some, this new state is liberating and welcoming, giving a possibility for growth and the expansion of the identity, but to others, this fluidity gives instability and even distress, with the subject yearning for fixity, for some sort of rootedness. This is one major consideration to focus on when investigating the effects of globalisation in the literary works.

The fluidity Short talks about is a central concept for understanding the workings of globalisation. Bauman claims that the social roots of globalisation lie in the liquidation of modernity's formerly solid form, such as nation-states, geographical boundaries, industrial societies, etc. Both space and time undergo thus a complex restructuring. "The shrinking of space abolishes the flow of time," remarks Bauman (88). People inhabit a constant present fuelled by ever-newer impulses and the fast pace of their lives. Our perception of both temporal and spatial distances has been radically reshaped. We might understand globalisation as exhibiting a homogenising tendency, but all signs point towards complexity and even chaos instead of simplification and unification.

Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* presents the greatest involvement in these questions raised by the Global Age. It thematises several aspects involved in understanding the current world, such as cloning, modern slavery, environmental catastrophe, digital archiving, a world that is at once expansive and limited or folding upon itself. Both space and time are malleable and in constant motion, boundaries are either reconceived or erased altogether, and the self becomes part of a complex mechanism. I believe the novel presents an artistic rendering of globalisation, of an accelerated world that is at once open and closed up.

Even if the other novels do not focus on globalisation and digitisation as overtly as *Cloud Atlas* does, signs of a preoccupation with the issues entailed in the globalised world are still recognisable. To use John Rennie Short's words, "globalization is making places both different and the same. It is bringing peoples closer apart and places further together" (9), and the novels capture this paradoxical duality in different ways. For instance, Donoghue's Room is deliberately conceived of as an autonomous entity, resembling an island, singular and disconnected from its environment. The young boy born and raised in the confinement of this garden shed imagines it to be floating in outer space, surrounded by planets that zoom by them. Furthermore, even the particularities of the actual shed as a spatially located entity are erased. No cultural traits are hinting at a specific place on Earth. The garden shed could be

located almost anywhere. What these decisions reveal is the duality inherent in our globalised world, namely that of isolation and connection. And because of its lack of cultural signs, it hints at uniformity and the ensuing interchangeability, aspects that can be identified in the objects and entities of the global world.

Oyeyemi's *Opposite House* takes a different approach to mapping a world that is both connected and isolated at the same time. Choosing a house as the centre of its universe, the novel connects not only different places (such as London and Lagos), but also different spheres. Humans and gods coexist and share the hardships of their lives, they struggle in similar ways with migration and finding a home for themselves. Nevertheless, despite the linkages that enmesh the world of the novel, its main characters still find themselves isolated and insecure. The freedom of movement, the migration result in the further destabilisation of their subjects, and a closing in that leads to social alienation. The dual nature of the globalised world is inherent to this novel, too, in which the reader can experience the personal effects of both the extension and the shrinking of the world at the same time.

McCarthy's novel presents the world as the ultimate commodity, where everything is for sale. The nameless protagonist gains quasi-omnipotence as a result of a substantial sum he receives as settlement for the accident he suffered. The reception of £8.5 million prompts the eccentric man to buy ever-more properties that are meant to provide the stage for re-enactments he orchestrates to soothe him. Alongside the different places of London, the man goes as far as buying human lives as well, robbing them of their personalities, refashioning them to his own selfish needs. He controls their bodies, their movements, even their thoughts. One man gradually engulfs almost an entire metropolis, over which he rules with the help of his newly received fortune.

The four novels choose very different aspects of the globalised world of the twenty-first century, and they together provide a detailed consideration of the complexity of this world we are currently living in. The questions they ask, the problems they posit shed light on the elusive, multifaceted nature of globalisation, which pervades all areas of life, and exerts its influence on everything and everyone. In the following, I will consider how memory and spatiality are redefined and understood through globalisation, respectively.

1. Memory and the Global World

The last couple of decades have brought the need for a different approach to time: to past, present and future. The traditional understanding of such concepts as history and memory has been radically altered, and what can be noticed is a heightened flexibility and mutability characterising them. French historian François Hartog ascribes this to a change in the "regime of historicity," claiming that in the past the dominant regime of historicity was future-oriented, whereas now a phenomenon he calls "presentism" has taken over (111-62). Hartog describes the presentist regime as follows: "Since it has neither a past nor a future, this present daily fabricates the past and future it requires, while privileging the immediate" (113).

What this entails is a palpable change in both past and future, since they are subject to the changes the present dictates. And its relation to time, to history is rather problematic: firstly, the "media age" we inhabit compels the present to obey an "economy in which events are constantly produced and consumed," however, the present, according to Hartog, "seeks to view itself as already history, already past," which results in a turning back on itself, with a wish to anticipate itself (114). Consequently, temporality in general needs a new approach that abandons the linear conception of time, enabling instead free movement in time, with several manifestations of the past upon the present, for instance.

Hartog's theory of presentism provides a good starting point for evaluating memory in a globalised world, such as the one we currently live in. What this presentism entails is a radical questioning of memory in general: the new regime is defined by immediacy, by a successive, fast appearance of ever-newer experiences, events that the subject witnesses or participates in, and then instantaneously moves on from. There are two possibilities I can see for memory in this world largely guided by consumerism, where experiences have become the most coveted consumer goods. Either memory becomes seemingly obsolete, with the constant present taking over, or it is needed more than ever before. Andreas Huyssen, for instance, sees the current preoccupation with memory as a way to "find mooring" in an age of uncertainty (100).

Jan Assmann defines globalisation as "a process of general dissemination (of merchandise, technologies, news, political influence, religious ideas) across political and cultural boundaries and of the ensuing integration of various, previously isolated zones into

one system of interconnections and interdependencies, where all nations, empires, tribes and states cohere in some way or other through political, economic or cultural relations" ("Globalization" 121). Nevertheless, I also need to take into consideration the four models of globalisation that theories generally distinguish. According to the first model, globalisation is a one-way process of cultural imperialism, the second approaches it through flows and networks, the third one emphasises the role of audiences in cultural production, and the last one relies on the competition between state and superstate (*see* Reading 244). These four approaches to globalisation naturally infer four distinct memory processes: the first one states that particular memories dominate, the second one suggests that there are multiple memories with multiple flows, according to the third one memories are created by individuals, whereas the last one places power into the hands of public memory institutions (*see* Reading 244). These distinct approaches to global memory emphasise its complexity, since there are numerous factors involved when we think of memory in the global arena.

Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad claim that the field of memory has changed significantly in recent years. According to them, "[u]nder the impact of globalizing processes, both the spaces of memory and the composition of memory communities have been redefined" (1). They even go as far as to argue that memory and the global cannot be separated, and a global frame of reference is needed for the study of memory processes (2). This means that whenever memory is analysed, it happens in light of globalisation. Assmann and Conrad further argue through three levels of interpretation how globalisation has become an integral part of the study of memory. "Firstly, the past decade has witnessed the emergence of a global public sphere that has turned memory into an issue of global accountability" (7). Memories are out in the open and they need to be handled in front of the entire world. "Secondly, memory claims themselves are increasingly globalized" (8). The greatest example for this is the Holocaust, turned "into a universal legacy of mankind" (8). "Thirdly, even in cases in which memory is not invested with universal claims, contemporary debates about the past are nevertheless informed by the global context in which they unfold" (9). This last point basically means that even if remembrance does not unfold in the global arena, globalisation still has an impact on it.

I agree with Assmann and Conrad and believe that in the twenty-first century one cannot speak about memory without taking into account the impact of the globalised world.

And there are certain concepts that are tightly connected to the phenomenon of globalisation, such as connectedness, speed, news, etc. The means through which globalisation succeeds is technology, the concept that links all the enumerated keywords. To stay with Assmann and Conrad for one more observation, they rightly claim that "the most obvious and basic paths along which memories move, crossing boundaries and extending to a global level, are the satellites of telecommunication, the channels of mass media, and the Internet" (3). Memories are born and transmitted in the milieu of a digital world, and consequently memory, both the process and the object, changes significantly: it is in constant motion, can reach to the end of the world, but is ephemeral and fleeting.

The digital(ised) memories need reconceptualization, since, as Reading states, they "traverse, reconfigure, and extend established memory binaries such as the organic and inorganic, the personal and the shared, the digital and the analog, the individual and the media organization, the local and the global" (241). What this means is that basically all previous dichotomies need a new approach, since digital memory is defined by fluidity, by mutability. In the globalised world people are on the move, but through the digital technologies data, memories are also in constant movement. Technologies facilitate the rapid movement of memories, which also involves definite ephemerality, however, at the same time, new technologies enable the storage of and access to infinite data (a substantial issue I will subsequently revisit).

Theories abound in novel approaches to this digital memory phenomenon, visible in the different terms one might encounter, such as Alison Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory," Andrew Hoskins' "new memory," or Christian Pentzold's "global memory." Furthermore, terms revealing the focus of their theorists are, for instance, "connectionist memory" (Sutton), "liquid memory" (Assmann), "transcultural" and "travelling" (Erll), "digital" (Garde-Hansen), "globital" (Reading), "multidirectional" (Rothberg), or "transmedial" (Harvey). And, as Garde-Hansen claims, it was José van Dijck who has provided the first comprehensive paradigm of "mediated memory" (28).

All these different terms testify to the pervasive effect the Global Era has on our recollection, and to the need for considerable change in theoretical directions. Media "are the main sources for recording, constructing, archiving and disseminating public and private histories in the early twenty-first century" (Garde-Hansen 1). Media are not only the vessels

through which data are transmitted, their role is much more complex. The different technologies are the ones through which we have access to our past, we make sense of it, and we define ourselves through the past accessed thus.

One substantial issue of great importance in my analysis of *Cloud Atlas* is the concept of the archive. To exemplify the general relation to the archive, I am shortly invoking Jacques Derrida's theory, who connects the phenomenon of the archive to loss: according to him, it takes place exactly when history is erased. To use Mary Anne Doane's words, "what is archivable loses its presence, becomes immediately the past. Hence, what is archivable is not so much a material object as an experience—an experience of the present" (82). Consequently, for Derrida the archive "marks a space of anxiety, precisely, an anxiety about the possibility of loss: the archive exists only as an anticipation (…) of the loss of history; as such, it works proleptically to preserve what will inevitably be lost" (Boulter 4). I detect here a slight paradoxicality, for, based on this approach, the archive is meant to preserve something that will be irretrievably lost, thus dooming it to failure. The archive is elusive and highly problematic, since it "defines itself by interrogating the claims of history on the subject," and basically by questioning itself (Boulter 8).

In order to show the changes in the perception regarding the archive, one can consider, with Pinchevski's help, the three senses associated with it: firstly, "the archive has become common, popular practice, [which] serves to pluralize its *nomos*, the law of the archive and the authority of the archive." Secondly, "contemporary technology allows for storage and retrieval on the most rudimentary, bit-pixel level," which significantly democratises the archivable material. Thirdly, and most importantly, "no longer circumscribed and exclusionary, the digital multimedia archive is an on-line network archive – an inter-archive – which is, by default, accessible and shareable" (255). In the chapter at hand, I wish to revisit the discussion of the archive, focusing on its aspects that are not discussed here.

Consequently, archiving has become a constant process, an active involvement that is democratised, open, inclusive rather than exclusive. Aleida Assmann has a similar statement about the archive, since she claims: "The archive is not just a place in which documents from the past are preserved; it is also a place where the past is constructed and produced" (13). Archiving and the collective memory work together in shaping and reshaping social life and identity. It "can now be viewed as a form of social intervention, a participatory social practice,

which turns the archive as a whole into a collective project" (256). However, one cannot forget about Derrida's issue of loss. As I claimed at the end of the previous section, there is a dual movement noticeable in memory today: its overabundance and its absence, the two paradoxically coexisting. Consequently, the problem of loss, sometimes of absence cannot be excluded from considerations rooted in the Digital Age either. I believe, together with Derrida, that we need to acknowledge an inherent anxiety in today's society: to quote Garde-Hansen et al, "[k]eeping track, recording, retrieving, stockpiling, archiving, backing-up and saving are deferring one of our greatest fears of this century: information loss" ("Introduction" 5). So, in all considerations, the duality of the archive needs to be kept in mind.

2. Spatiality and the Global World

Globalisation is a process whose effects we started to feel a few decades back. Among the numerous theoretical examples I could turn to the aforementioned Marc Augé, whose concept of *supermodernity* stems from three figures of excess: "overabundance of events, spatial overabundance and the individualization of references" (*Non-places* 109). As he claims, supermodernity finds its full expression in the previously outlined non-places, as the "shrinking of the planet," together with the diverse excesses, is mediatised, concretised, or experienced in them. Thus, the phenomenon of the non-place becomes a more and more accentuated and prevalent state in the globalised world where any space is prone to turn into it.

Spatially speaking, the most prevalent diagnosis concerning the globalising processes focuses on the shrinking of the globe. As Augé remarks, rather paradoxically "the excess of space is correlative with the shrinking of the planet: with the distancing from ourselves embodied in the feats of our astronauts and the endless circling of our satellites" (31). As the world is expanding, our own private worlds, or environment, and ourselves undergo a constant process of shrinking. Additionally, one needs to consider the changes in the transmission of data, and in the movement of individuals. The keyword is acceleration. In the case of data, nowadays everything has become instantaneous. One can see and talk to one's family from thousands of miles. Bank transfers are instantaneous. And you can do everything from the

comfort of your home. It seems like the world comes to us, and is served to us on a platter through the Internet.

Concerning individual movement, it has become the prerequisite of 21st-century existence. Mobility, the phenomenon John Urry and Anthony Elliott investigate, among others, is the process through which we engulf ever-greater spaces which, in their turn, engulf us. We are living in a world of connections, as nodal points in an infinite network. What John Urry proposes is the next step after the spatial turn: *the mobilities turn*, which provides an investigation of the sociology of space, focusing on spatial relations and mobile spatialisations. He distinguishes from among five different modes of mobilities, which reveal the connection between social life and spatial practices: the *corporeal* travel of people, the physical travel of *objects*, imaginative travel with the help of visuals, of social media, *virtual* travel using digital media, and *communicative* travel through messages (*see* Urry and Elliott 15-16).

Globalism is defined by dialectical processes. Expansion and shrinking happen at the same time, infinitely big and infinitely small coexist, some experience closeness, others utmost distance. As John Rennie Short remarks, "[t]here is a spatial dialectic to globalization[:] some places have moved closer together in relative space," such as national economies, among others, whereas "some places, subject to a process of financial exclusion, have moved further apart in relative space" (9). This dialectic testifies to the "uneven development and spatial differentiation" of the world, which is more and more interconnected, but this network system does not bring along equality or universality.

Zygmunt Bauman's own theory of globalisation shares similar concerns to the ones briefly presented above, concerns that can be captured in the term *glocalisation* he borrowed from Roland Robertson. The phenomenon behind the concept points towards the simultaneity of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation but, beyond this, it "implies a worldwide restratification of society based on freedom of movement (or lack thereof)" (Hubbard, and Kitchin 52). The term emphasises the dialectics of the global world, in which "[s]ome of us become fully and truly 'global'; some are fixed in their 'locality' – a predicament neither pleasurable nor endurable in the world in which the 'globals' set the tone and compose the rules of the life-game" (Bauman 2).

Another concern that is pervasive in Bauman's book addresses the supposed "end of geography." As he claims, "[t]he distances do not matter any more, while the idea of a geophysical border is increasingly difficult to sustain in the 'real world'" (12). In this accelerated world, in which transport posits no obstacles, or often is not needed at all, thanks to the Internet and the instantaneous flow of information, the previously accepted divisions, boundaries lose their legitimacy. Sten Pultz Moslund, contributor to *Geocritical Explorations*, seems to agree with this diagnosis when he talks about "increased detachment from space and physical existence," since, according to him, our spatial relationships have turned into "digital" ones (29). Today, claims Moslund, the emphasis falls on "information transfer," which makes our spatial positioning, the places surrounding us, superfluous information.

Contrary to this more and more current view that this would be the age of "the end of geography," some scholars claim the contrary, like Barney Warf and Santa Arias, who state that "[f]ar from annihilating the importance of space, globalization has increased it" (5). Their view is based on the observation that the globalised world requires a new type of approach to geography, to spatiality in general, since "geography acquired a renewed significance in the analysis of international flows of information, culture, capital, and people" (5). Further in the collection of essays, Barney Warf delves deeper into the redefinition of place and space in light of globalism. In the networked world, which brings together countless places, they cease to matter as isolated entities and, as he states, they "are not locales as much as they are processes in which different types of activities are embedded and different forms of interconnection are established" (71). This view re-enforces two basic assumptions about places in the current world, both of them emphasised in the novels of my choice. Firstly, it sheds light on the interconnections between places, how one affects the other, since, as Warf goes on, "[a]s they become increasingly connected, the repercussions of actions in one area inevitably spiral out to shape other places" (72). Secondly, this definition of places supposes a certain kind of agency one can attribute to them: places (and let me extend this to spaces, since I claim that there is a constant possibility for a transition from one to the other) are not mere receptacles, settings for the events of one's life, but active agents that exert a palpable effect on that, and can be captured in interaction with the self.

These opposing views can coexist in the age of the globalised world, what is more, I believe that the 21st century is largely about the possibility of these sorts of coexistence. I

intend to investigate how the individual novels and their treatments of spatiality reflect on or even identify with one or the other stance summarised above. The four literary works will present me with several different questions arising in connection with spatiality and the subject, giving me the possibility of charting the central issues in scholarship and in life as well.

After a brief outlook on memory studies and space studies separately, I chose to dedicate one subchapter to the two together, investigated through and in relation to globalisation. I have taken memory, spatiality and globalisation together in such a way, because it is my firm conviction that all the events, all the past moments were building towards our current globalised world. And this is reflected in the scholarship of the 20th century, which provides us with a greater understanding of our present moment. I needed to separate memory and spatiality for coherence reasons, however, I wish to emphasise throughout this work how the two are inseparable. The two present a constant interconnection, with one affecting and changing the other, and they together operate on the subject.

Once again, I wish to emphasise the fact that this chapter does not propose to chart the very rich scholarship of memory studies and space studies respectively. Instead, it only focuses on those theories and concepts that make the understanding of the novels and their problematisation of memory and space more accessible. Consequently, I needed to leave out major thinkers who, nevertheless, will gain space in subsequent works, where new literary pieces show the necessity for newer considerations.

What this brief investigation of some aspects of globalisation made clear is that "[g]lobalization is an annoyingly ambiguous term, (…) and refers to a variety of processes that play out in different ways, from global cities to international trade to the internationalization of culture and consumption" (Warf and Arias 5). Our temporal and spatial perceptions have changed radically, and what is even more pronounced, they are in constant change, too. While analysing the books in this undertaking, this ambiguity and shiftiness will gain central focus.

Numerous scholars have discussed the effects globalisation has on identity and the subjectivity, with migration and the media, among others, causing a substantial shift in identity formation (*see* Mike Featherstone's *Global Culture*; Roland Robertson's

Globalization; Gubrium and Holstein's *Institutional Selves*). This scholarship underlines a major issue that is recognisable in the literary works chosen for investigation, namely the fact that instead of a unified and fixed identity, in the global world one needs to approach it as consisting of multiple selves that shift, change, sometimes even oppose each other. My main task is to decode these various selves, and to investigate how they are spatially and temporally situated. Investigating the self through memory and spatiality sheds light on the agency of the latter two, on their energies and powers to affect the individual and his/her very becoming. I believe that these four novels can already signal a new and accentuated tendency in contemporary literature, namely approaching the self through its relation to space and time. That is what I propose to investigate in the following chapters.

Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*: Memories and Re-Enactments

Remainder is the ambitious first novel of the young English writer Tom McCarthy. However, the discrepancy between the year of its writing (2001) and that of its publishing (2005), by the French Metronome Press, shows that its reception has not been as straightforward as one would imagine after reading the reviews following its publication. When finally available to larger audiences, the novel received widespread acclaim, and won the 2007 Believer Book Award. Since then, the writer has published three subsequent novels, namely *Men in Space* (2007), *C* (2010), and *Satin Island* (2015), thus showing a steady, continuous output followed by mostly positive criticism. It seems that McCarthy revisits similar themes in every novel, choosing different settings that focus on Europe, presenting 21st-century Kafkaesque protagonists in chaotic spaces. Duncan White, a reviewer of McCarthy's novels, remarks: "Reading Tom McCarthy's fiction induces a certain kind of mania. It demands to be unpacked and decoded, charted and mapped. (…) Reading a McCarthy novel is like being in a McCarthy novel: everything is part of a fizzing network, the scope of which can never be fully apprehended." All his novels employ repetitions enforcing this realisation that the reader enters a complex network whose threads are difficult to discern. *Remainder*'s central organising mechanism is exactly this repetition that needs to be carefully examined, however, emphasis will be placed not on the reading experience (as for White), but on its main character, a person lost in a labyrinth of repetitions.

Before getting into the thick of the text, a short summary of the novel's key moments is due. *Remainder* commences after an accident suffered by our unnamed narrator-character. Neither he nor the reader will find out what exactly caused the trauma, however, the information seems totally superfluous. Instead, the exclusive focus falls on this man's changed state that leads him to start a maddening search for authenticity. His receiving 8.5 million pounds for his silence facilitates his ever-growing projects of re-enactment: first, he buys a tenement building that is meant to bring to life a supposedly genuine memory, and then exponential growth is captured: he goes on to re-enact a tire-shop scene at an abandoned airport hangar, then he starts encompassing the streets of his city, playing over and over again different scenes from turf wars, with his final project being a bank heist.

The novel shows a peculiar insight into the traumatised mind and its workings. It is a paradigmatic work that captures some major changed in novel writing, and it will present the current enterprise with a special approach to the joint appearance of memory and space in the novels of the Noughties. Let me refer back to the previously mentioned collection of essays outlining current trends in British Fiction, *The 2000s*. There, Laura Salisbury analyses McCarthy's novel with the help of a new term coined by Marco Roth: "neuronovel." To use Salisbury's words, several contemporary novels labelled thusly "explore the cultural (and, in psychology proper, a disciplinary) shift away from environmental and relational theories of personality back to the study of brains themselves, as the source of who we are" (84).

Remainder is a novel that wishes to present the traumatised self, but chooses an approach that differs from traditional literary accounts of trauma. As Salisbury states, this novel "uses the subject of a traumatic head wound to explore a world denuded of a subjectivity freighted with the emotional continuities and perceptions of contained transcendence that somehow anchor it to a sensation of reality" (85). My analysis of the work coincides with Salisbury's statement in the investigation of the protagonist's clear detachment from reality and his subsequent attempts to reconnect. Meanwhile, he is presented not through feelings and emotions, but, as Patricia Waugh shows, with the help of a phenomenological narrative mode through which brain damage and its consequences are observed.

My investigation of the novel's handling of trauma relies on a joint consideration of the issues of remembrance and forgetting as experienced by the narrator-protagonist. Furthermore, I claim that the man exhibits signs of fixity, even of being stuck, and the different (but also limited) spaces he moves in gain heightened importance for him. The spaces of his infinite re-enactments at first seem to be the symbolic spaces of remembrance and forgetting, manifesting the workings of his mind, however, it will gradually unfold that the created spaces of the novel, populated by the aforementioned re-enactments, continuously prevent and frustrate the attainment of both remembrance and forgetting. The two central issues are approached here through definitions borrowed from Paul Ricoeur, who, for instance, claims that "[w]ith remembering, the emphasis is placed on the return to awakened consciousness of an event recognized as having occurred before the moment when consciousness declares having experienced, perceived, learned it" (58). As I mentioned it in the methodological chapter, Ricoeur, alongside numerous other theoreticians, considered

forgetting to be the counterpart to remembering, a danger to it, however, the two are inseparable. Together with Harald Weinrich we can conceive of forgetting as the inevitable pair to remembering, thus becoming one side of the duality of *ars memoriae* and *ars oblivionis* (*see* Weinrich).

I. Spaces of Memory, Spaces of Forgetting

Although the novel's outset presupposes loss, in the form of a state of (quasi-)amnesia caused by an accident, this loss will ultimately prove to be an absence. Literary approaches to trauma strictly differentiate loss and absence, since loss enables the narrativisation, and thus the processing of the traumatic event, whereas absence testifies to the inability to capture the root of the trauma and, consequently, any possibility for a narrative. Nevertheless, in Tom McCarthy's novel initial loss gradually turns into absence, to hiatuses that also characterize the spaces the narrator-character desperately wants to fill. In the following I will undertake a careful examination of the shift captured on several levels of the text, leading to a different perspective on memories and their absences, and on the complex issue of trauma.

The novel opens with an unnamed narrator claiming that he has no memories. "It's not that I'm being shy. It's just that—well, for one, I don't even remember the event. It's a blank: a white slate, a black hole," he states (5). The narrative's onset presents a narrator-character relating the events of his life after undergoing a traumatic event. As a result, the protagonist exhibits signs of a complete change in his approach to his self, to his life, to his every movement. However, the accident itself (the agent of his trauma) disappears in utter oblivion: "About the accident itself I can say very little. Almost nothing. It involved something falling from the sky. Technology. Parts, bits. That's it, really: all I can divulge. Not much, I know" (5). No clear picture, no story about the event itself is ever comprised. The words hang in the air, without ever connecting throughout our protagonist's account: "Technology. Parts, bits."

The narrator opens his story *in medias res*, not divulging any details about his accident, strongly claiming that he has no memories at all of the event. The narration employed is retrospective, which provides the character with information the reader does not possess yet. For instance, though the reader does not know yet about the favourable settlement he will receive, the one that forces silence upon him, the opening paragraph shows hints of an

unreliable narrator. His unreliability is revealed through the vocabulary he employs, such as the word "divulge," which means something different from the previously implied "remember," or "recollect." This unreliability is a substantial trait of his narration, and it will gradually unfold into scepticism purposefully provoked.

On the one hand, it seems that the novel's central claim, highly emphasised throughout the work, chimes in with one of the most contested arguments of trauma studies, namely that "trauma is ontologically at odds with representation" (Agostinho 2), consequently the main character does not even attempt to revisit it, to narrativise it. However, it works with a double perspective, and I believe that the second one is highly ironic, meant to reflect on the futility of any attempt at understanding the traumatised mind. Instead, it shifts focus onto the brain, something that is more palpable and straightforward.

The novel's approach to trauma significantly deviates from the general focus of trauma fiction. As Gabriele Griffin claims, "[t]he tendency in much writing on trauma is to focus on the notion of the traumatic event as a quasi-singular or, in the case of abuse, often as a repeated but the same kind of experience," and what McCarthy's *Remainder* does is to resolve this duality by employing, instead, a "tripartite structure […] of the experience of the initial violent traumatic event, i.e. the accident, its consequences for the victim in whom particular prior tendencies become augmented, and the implications of the resolution of these consequences for the victim and the others involved in the resolution" (76-77).

The narrative revolves around the absence of a crucial memory and the narrator's maniacal attempts to regain it. In the character's life a fissure occurs: the accident is ungraspable, and it will never be remembered. A gap is formed thus in his story ("It's a blank: a white slate, a black hole," 5). However, this incapacity to remember is not exclusive to this particular event, but overwrites his entire past, even his still existing memories of his past life. Although they do not seem to get completely lost in oblivion, their hierarchy changes considerably and, what is even more important, they make both our narrator and the readers question their reality since, as he remarks, "[m]inds are versatile and wily things. Real chancers" (5). Consequently, "[w]ho's to say that these are genuine memories? (5). Much of the novel's game revolves around this central question and the ensuing uncertainty and unreliability.

In my discussion of memory in literature, its unreliability surfaces as an issue that the novels engage in discussing. McCarthy's *Remainder* revolves around the question of whether the protagonist's memories were ever there, to begin with, or they are fabricated as a possible effect of his accident. As Aleida Assmann remarks, "the (in)stability of memory is inseparable from its (un)reliability" (253), which, according to her, raises the problem of "false memories," something that has become a widely discussed concern since the rise in our so-called "memorial culture." In Assmann's words, the unreliability of memories "is due not only to deficiencies in the faculty itself but also, and at least as much, to the active forces that work to distort it" (253). Memories are actively tied to the present, and it is the present that exerts great pressure on the process of remembering: "Current affects, motives, and intentions are the guides to remembering and forgetting" (253). I believe that this theoretical stance helps in deciphering the reasons behind the novel's protagonist fabricating memories. His present is defined by the accident, and as a consequence, he is under the influence of a traumatic experience that prompts him into rewriting not only his present and future but, working retroactively, his entire existence.

Remainder's narrator is a traumatised man who provides an account of his life after the event. As Alexander C. McFarlane, representative of Trauma Studies claims, "[c]entral characteristics of traumatic stress are the experiences of helplessness, powerlessness, and the threat to one's life and sense of control" (33). The unnamed man wakes on his hospital bed, as different substances are pumped into his body through several tubes. And this is an inert body, slowly coming back from a coma, a body that needs months of excruciating work to relearn basic movements. However, the novel does not only capture the corporeal in the process of rehabilitation: body and mind (and, conversely, brain and mind) comprise a central dichotomy in *Remainder*. Their meticulous disassociation by the protagonist has the adverse effect of defamiliarisation on the whole reading experience. From the very outset, a constant disharmony is noticeable in the persona of the unnamed man, captured for instance in the struggles to understand all the mechanisms behind his every movement: a paradoxical process ("Everything, each movement: I had to learn them all. I had to understand how they work first, break them down into each constituent part, then execute them," 20). In McFarlane's words, "[t]rauma attacks the individual's sense of self and the predictability of the world" (34), in this case through the fissure that constantly grows between body and mind.

The approach the novel takes in representing the traumatised self may be a reaction to the expansion and, as a result, attenuation of the concept and meaning of trauma. As Dominick La Capra remarks, "the style of a prevalent approach to historiography, in its quest for objectified facts, ready readability, entertaining anecdotes, free-flowing narrative, and classical balance, threatens to take the trauma out of trauma" (377). As a reaction to this tendency, he goes on, "trauma sometimes assumes the form of utterly unspeakable experience, blank unreadability, the unsymbolizable Lacanian 'real,' or even the sublime object of endless melancholia and impossible mourning" (378). Tom McCarthy's novel purports to capture this experience of the ineffable: trauma as experienced on a visceral level.

This work inverts the focus of trauma fiction by erasing the memory of the event and concentrating on its lack or, rather, on the effects, not the source. Literary scholar Pieter Vermeulen, writing about *Remainder*'s approach to trauma, claims that it "is an attempt to debunk the customary pieties of trauma fiction" (24). Thus, although "the parties, institutions, organizations – let's call them the *bodies* – responsible for what happened to me prohibit me from discussing … the nature and/or details of the incident" (5), the narrator claims that this is unnecessary, since he cannot recount the event, which becomes a void never filled. The book "borrows the 'grammar' of post-trauma, which thrives on 'repetition and reenactment' (Orwell 1), while it remains conspicuously indifferent to the ethical dimensions of artistic engagements with the extreme violence and the psychological suffering that characterize trauma" (Vermeulen 24).

Two contradictory approaches may be identified in the discussion of trauma. The first approach, exemplified by Cathy Caruth's psychoanalytic theory, lies on the claim that "it is not the experience itself that produces a traumatic effect, but rather the remembrance of it" (Caruth 17). However, how can one approach trauma if there is no memory of it? Greenberg and van der Kolk, for instance, remark that "[p]athologies of memory are characteristic features of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These range from amnesia for a part, or all, of the traumatic events to frank dissociation, in which large realms of experience or aspects of one's identity are disowned" (191). In the case of *Remainder*'s protagonist remembering the traumatic event is impossible, total amnesia sets in. Nevertheless, with this mental state, with every attempt at exclusion, the trauma does not disappear. And the escalating repetitions of other moments, other events will testify to this.

Vermeulen's observation leads me to the linkage that connects the two central topics (remembrance and trauma), which requires detailed analysis for its constructive (but also deconstructive) force presented in the novel. Throughout the work, I investigate *Remainder*'s involvement with the aforementioned paradigmatic problems through the repetition–escalation–exhaustion triad, borrowed from Fred Botting[3]. The three constituent parts are employed here through definitions provided by Gilles Deleuze.

For instance, Deleuze proposes a definition of repetition through which he connects it with memory or, more accurately, with the lack thereof. He claims: "When the consciousness of knowledge or the working through of memory is missing, the knowledge in itself is only the repetition of its object: it is *played*, that is to say, repeated, enacted instead of being known" (16). Consequently, memory and repetition stand in stark contrast, the latter thus pointing to a hiatus, emphasizing the absence of something (namely of the former) that it desperately tries to recover. So there is an inescapability here inherent in repetition itself: "the less one remembers, the less one is conscious of remembering one's past, the more one repeats it – remember and work through the memory in order not to repeat it" (Deleuze 16). This continuous distancing from the purpose defines *Remainder*'s narrator-protagonist who compulsively repeats bits and pieces allegedly coming from memories, but thus gets further and further away from attaining remembrance. This obsession with repetition appears in the form of strong escalation that will be presented through the analysis of the quick and continuous escalations of different re-enactments in the world of *Remainder*.

However, exhaustion requires a more thorough examination precisely through its absence. The novel presents constant repetitions (re-enactments) that swirl in upward spirals, but exhaustion, which could bring closure (either utter failure or success), is unattained. In "The Exhausted," Deleuze differentiates among four ways of exhausting the possible: "forming exhaustive series of things; drying up the flow of voices; extenuating the potentialities of space; dissipating the power of the image" (161). From the perspective of the novel two of these ways gain importance, namely forming exhaustive series and extenuating the potentialities of space. In the following, I propose to analyse the numerous attempts of the character-narrator to attain them, and the constant failure of each attempt. Deleuze starts this

[3] Botting employs the triad in the discussion of the chapter entitled "The Dream" from Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*. (*See* Botting, Fred. "From Excess to the New World Order." *British Fiction of the 1990s*. ed. Nick Bentley. Routledge, 2005.21–41.)

essay by differentiating exhaustion from tiredness, claiming that the former is much more than the latter. He defines exhaustion in the following way: "one combines the set of variables of a situation, on the condition that one renounce any order of preference, any organization in relation to a goal, any signification" (153). As I intend to show, for the novel's protagonist it is impossible to renounce all his attempts at logicality, at systematising his and his environment's every move. All his undertakings distance him more and more from his initial purpose, and so the desired exhaustion always eludes him.

Gradually labyrinthine spaces take shape from which escape is impossible. The unnamed narrator is a 21st-century Kafkaesque character who, like Gregor Samsa, one day wakes up completely changed, struggling to cope with his new state. He, through losing his memories, loses himself, and this results in progress towards something that could be termed as madness. The narrative techniques employed by this narrator, and his actions as a character, in turn, alter the entire world around him, pervading it with a sense of insanity. Joseph K. in Orson Welles' *The Trial* says the following: "That's the conspiracy. To persuade us all that the whole world is crazy. Formless, meaningless, absurd… Does that sentence the entire universe to lunacy?" McCarthy's 30-year-old man does not explicitly pose this question throughout his search for authenticity, for his memories and, through them, for his identity. Nevertheless, this becomes one of the novel's central questions, reflecting on his personal conception of himself and of the world around him: its physical and abstracted spaces and inhabitants.

1. A Crack: The Absence of Memories

The novel's inception presents the struggles of a man waking from a coma after an accident, who consequently needs to adapt to his changed physical and mental capabilities. He experiences losses on both levels, since he needs to relearn every movement, to rewire his brain in order to understand those moves and ultimately attain a state in which they come naturally to him. His brain, however, needs rewiring in terms of remembering, too, since the trauma he suffered brought on forgetting or, more accurately, the (almost) complete loss of defining memories. Consequently, he sets on an active search to find something irretrievably lost, or something that possibly was never his.

Following the accident, the sole driving force in the character's rather powerful apathy, or even anhedonia, becomes his attainment of a feeling of genuineness, which gradually turns him into a monomaniac. Relatively quickly he gets close to the longed-for state, when, during rush hour, he instinctively raises his palms, as if he were begging. This moment, brought on by his remembering himself just before the accident, causes a tingling sensation throughout his body, and he feels "serene and intense" (McCarthy 40). This (quasi-)feeling, experienced just for a moment, will drive him into a mad chase to attain it, to reach authenticity and retain it.

While at a party, the character notices a crack in the host's bathroom wall, triggering all kinds of memories, and leading to his determination to recreate them and populate them with re-enactors that will – as their name suggests – re-enact the same actions, scenes over and over again. This is the moment when our protagonist becomes the enactor (a term borrowed from Zadie Smith[4]). His remembrance is quite peculiar: his are not memories of events, of scenes from his life, but of impressions about mundane stills:

> Out of the window there'd been roofs with cats on them. Red roofs, black cats. It had been high up, much higher than I was now ... People had been packed into the building: neighbours beneath me and around me and on the floor above. The smell of liver cooking in a pan had been wafting to me from the floor below—the sound too, the spit and sizzle. (58)

The determining, but very much mundane, details of his *déjà vu*, that will need to be enacted repeatedly, all trigger his senses, however, these memories float without any connection among them or with the enactor, who claims that he "remembered it all, but I couldn't remember where I'd been in this place, this flat, this bathroom. Or when" (59). Placing the memories is impossible for him, but even redundant (Zadie Smith goes as far as to claim that through this epiphany "[i]t all comes back to him, though it was never there in the first place"), since what really matters is that "in these spaces, all my movements had been fluent and unforced" (60), and this is what he wants to recreate, to re-experience.

The novel's very first paragraph foreshadows the issue of another absence (besides that of memories), namely that of feelings. Whereas the unnamed man is in constant search for a genuine feeling, for the feeling of being real, authentic, the novel captures the failure to achieve this. Instead, what we encounter are only sense impressions, same as the ones captured in his efforts to recount the accident: "I have vague images, half-impressions: of

[4] *See* Smith, Zadie. "Two Directions for the Novel." *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*. Penguin, 2009.

being, or having been – or, more precisely, being about to be – hit; blue light; railings; lights of other colours; being held above some kind of tray or bed" (5). While at first it seems that the novel immerses itself in searching for the root of this loss and, at the same time, searching for genuineness, these undertakings are doomed to failure and forgotten about, their place being taken by repetition and escalation.

2. Spaces

The enactor's memories are composed solely of sense impressions, no placing is possible for them. What he envisions, what he claims to remember is always the space, but not the place: nothing particular, no real events. Scholars have always carefully distinguished these two concepts, claiming that space is more abstract: "boundless, empty, three-dimensional abstraction within which existed a set of interrelated events or objects" (Sen and Silverman 2). As Arijit Sen and Lisa Silverman summarise, other scholars "stressed the socially constructed nature of space, thus drawing attention to the material qualities that delimit its bounds" (2). In contrast to this, place denotes physical location.

From the perspective of the novel, it seems that the conception of space as abstract gains significant stress. For instance, I agree with Salisbury who remarks that the crack, the starting-point of his mad enterprise, "produces an echo of his head wound" (108) and, as such, it haunts him throughout the entire novel. The protagonist attempts to re-create those very spaces (be they wherever they may) that enable his movements to become "fluent and unforced," and him to identify with his movements, thus becoming natural. However, a challenging duality surfaces in his (quasi-)realisation of his elaborate projects to rebuild his memories through re-enactments. The sites he chooses gradually get detached from their surroundings: his first re-enactment involves a large tenement building which he populates with people employed to play set roles, all their movements and words carefully chosen by the enactor himself. The building is heavily altered until it becomes an entity that exists for itself or, rather, for the enactor himself. And the protagonist is capable of spending day after day in the same place, completely unheeding of the outside world. Firstly, this place itself gradually becomes highly abstracted, thus turning into a space; secondly, the escalation that his projects show is gradually engulfing most of the city, and thus every isolated site presents an ever-

growing complex of interrelations. This constant flux the place and space participate in remind one of theorists, starting with Henri Lefebvre, who challenge the place-space duality and propose the close interrelatedness of the two concepts.

For the novel's protagonist, space represents the security, the control he longs to possess: "Later, as I sat inside the tube, I felt the need, like I'd done every time I'd taken the tube up to Angel, to picture the terrain the hurtling car was covering. Not the tunnels and the platforms, but the space, the overground space, London" (15). When he is deprived of the space around him, he feels threatened and sick, like, after the accident, when he is taken to the hospital in an ambulance car that does not allow him to see what is happening and, as he states, "my failure to get a grip on the space we were traversing had made me nauseous. I'd even thrown up in the ambulance" (16). Consequently, he needs to experience the space around him, to possess it in order to control himself. This urge may be tightly connected to his experience of the accident, caused by something falling from the sky. From hence arises the compulsion to avoid the reoccurrence of such a traumatic event, which he wishes to accomplish through observing and dominating everything and everyone around him.

In the analysis of the spaces created and populated throughout the novel, they should be approached as a social construction, which, as Setha Low remarks, "refers to the transformation of space through language, social interaction, memory, representation, behavior and use into scenes and actions that convey meaning" (7). Through this definition surfaces one side of a dialogic relation that will further be outlined. This side emphasises the constructed nature of the space, completely reliant on human agency and interaction. The processes and influences shaping the creation of the different, but gradually interlinked spaces inside the novel may be identified through these very keywords Setha Low enumerates. Memory, or the belief that our protagonist possesses real memories, is the root cause of the enactor's entire undertaking. And these same shards of memory highly influence the whole development of the space, captured most emphatically, in greatest detail, in the description of the process of the transformation the tenement building undergoes (think of the blanks in the tiles, on the walls, the concierge's mask, etc.).

Representation would be an element of the list that bears exciting, quite complex meaning and role in the novel. Firstly, the projects themselves, the spaces created and the infinite re-creations are meant to be the perfect rendering, the perfect representation of his

glimpses of a perceived past. Later on, however, a representation of a representation is commissioned: the model of his building. This is another *mise-en-abyme* scene, similar but preceding the previously outlined one. However, the relationship between the "original" and its "model", between signifier and signified is reversed, when the enactor decides to act out different scenes of his tenants' lives, and, in parallel, he orders them to do the same. Of course, an interesting, but rather diverting treatise offers itself about the Baudrillardian aspects and inferences of this issue. As Griffin puts it, the re-enactments "are simulacra representing different sign-orders, ranging from being microscopically faithful reproductions of a space the protagonist has encountered to having seemingly no material origin" (76).

Finally, I will mention in greater detail the role of language in the creation of spaces, of paramount status for the enactor. He maniacally follows the generally accepted view that the knowledge of somebody's name entails possession of that person. Through language we get to know our environment, the entire world, and through language we can possess it. Thus, the unnamed man (maybe not accidentally so) needs staff on constant alert, capable of checking the meaning of any word he is not familiar with, or he needs assurance about. In accordance with his temporary loss of motor functions and memories, he also needs to relearn a substantial vocabulary. The words need to be perfect, and he always relates to them rather subjectively, making constant excursions when he encounters an exciting one (for instance: "… plus any surplus these might have accrued (a good word that, "accrued")," 5; or: "The Settlement. That word: Settlement. Set-l-ment. … during the months I spent in hospital, this word planted itself in me and grew. Settlement. It wormed its way into my coma," 5). So much so, that the fate of his entire enterprise seems to sometimes rely solely on the right choice of words: "'Performers isn't the right word,' I said. 'Staff. Participants. Re-enactors.'" (81).

However, as I mentioned before, we must imagine the creative process of space in the form of a duality. As Henri Lefebvre remarks, "space is never empty: it always embodies a meaning" (154), and he conceives of this space as a social product "that masks the contradictions of its own production" (Low 17). Besides the sociologist Lefebvre the geographer Edward Soja should be briefly mentioned, who coins the term "Thirdspace": a highly problematic term, which seems to encompass everything and, through this, nothing:

> subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind

> and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (57)

However, this Thirdspace, with its all-encompassing nature, with its elusiveness, undefinability, captures the vein in which the space is created in *Remainder*. The small, individual places gradually get abstracted into spaces, interconnected, devouring everything inside them and surrounding them, and gradually the power relations shift: the spaces and the projects organised in and through them take over the enactor, who cannot escape their rhythm, their compelling presence. Early signs of these power relations can be captured in his search for the perfect building.

Henri Lefebvre, one of the most widely quoted theoreticians focusing on the production of space, which he does through the body, also focuses extensively on rhythms and their effect on the subject. His theory on rhythmanalysis is insightful in understanding the protagonist of McCarthy's novel and his relation to the repetitive movements he desperately seeks. "Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body," claims Lefebvre (8). The body and the outside world with its own rhythms coexist: "Rational, numerical, quantitative and qualitative rhythms superimpose themselves on the multiple natural rhythms of the body (respiration, the heart, hunger and thirst, etc.), though not without changing them" (9). The relation the novel's protagonist exhibits towards his own self is greatly flawed, consequently, his conception of rational rhythms and, conversely, their effect on him, exhibit diversions from the norm.

The whole process of finding his building, for instance, is imagined like a game of hide-and-seek that one might play with children, or like they were hunters looking for the prey. Thus, although the enactor decides to take matters into his own hands, he still keeps the searchers whose "burrowing would get inside the city's block and loosen it, start chiselling away at surplus matter: it would scare my building out, like beaters scaring pheasants out of bushes for a Lord to shoot—six beaters advancing in formation, beating to the same rhythms, their movements duplicating one another" (86). The ritualistic conception of the movements, their rhythm, the entire experience induces a trance-like state in the enactor who conceives of the building as a living, changing organism. So power relations are reversed, and thus the meaning-making is also reversed: while at first the enactor gives new meanings to existing places, thus turning them into spaces, ultimately he starts to be defined by these same spaces.

Winston Churchill, in his "Speech on Rebuilding the House of Commons," made the following declaration: "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us" (Churchill 7:6869-71, qtd. in Sen and Silverman 1). Although here Churchill is talking about a figurative shaping, this sentence may easily be applied to the characters inhabiting the world of *Remainder*, with the enactor in the limelight, in whose case the buildings, the streets, the city, all spaces actively change, and quite aggressively affect him.

3. Mean Streets

The precise transformation of the apartment building is followed by the infinite repetition of a single scene: the quasi-reconstruction of an isolated moment captured in the spaces of the building. The novel's protagonist ascertains that for the authentic experience he cannot hire professional actors to play the distinct roles: only laymen can capture the essence of his project. The paradox behind his undertaking is more and more palpable: he purports to achieve the real, the existing experience, but through its complete orchestration. He devises a meticulous plan for the entire mechanism of the events and movements, he writes scripts for the building's "inhabitants," and even choreographs his own movements in this peculiar directing. And Naz, his faithful and excited facilitator, makes everything possible.

From this perspective, the meaning of his insistence on words could be further extended, since in this meticulous organisation words possess a significance beyond the quotidian. The protagonist exhibits signs of an aggressive insistence upon the right word for everything, and a fascination for the exploration of numerous words. Nazrul, his facilitator, also functions as a walking dictionary, meant to research any and every word the enactor is interested in. All this manic need for knowledge, for control ultimately ties in with the source of his trauma.

In the accident the part of his brain controlling motor functions had been damaged, consequently, following the accident he experiences something that Tom Morton calls "authenticity deficit," that, interestingly enough, is not limited to his own person, but extended to his surroundings, to his entire world. To use Don DeLillo's words, "the grain of the most routine movement" is completely transformed in the aftermath of the event. Frederik Tygstrup interprets this transfiguration as "a monumental and at times almost anaesthetising

defamiliarisation of everything known and intuitively taken for granted" (206). Although Tygstrup here reflects on DeLillo's *Falling Man*, McCarthy's protagonist exhibits the signs of a similar defamiliarising process.

From the first moment of regaining consciousness, the man starts doubting the genuineness of his every motion. His narrative is comprised of alternative scenarios to the events happening to him, to the choices he makes. One evocative example captures the discrepancy between how he and his friend Greg actually celebrate something, and how they really should if they wanted to be *authentic*. Greg's choice of holding his celebratory hug until he puts down the beers is contrasted to our protagonist's following conviction:

> It felt strange – the whole exchange. I felt we hadn't done it *right.* It would have seemed more genuine if he'd thrown the drinks up in the air and we'd danced a jig together while the golden drops rained slowly down on us, or if we'd been young aristocrats from another era, unimaginably wealthy lords and viscounts, and he'd just said quietly *Good show, old chap* before we moved on to discuss grouse shooting or some scandal at the opera. But this was neither-nor. And beer got on my elbow when I leant it on the table. (McCarthy 29)

This is a clear instance of the defamiliarising process underlying his entire narrative. Ordinary moments, simple movements become alien and even theatrical, whereas alternatives that are easily deemed the same way by us readers are accepted to be true and genuine. And the discrepancy, together with the exaggerations, is in constant expansion. This realisation and the ensuing continuous frustration are the triggers that set in motion the fast escalation of more and more complex re-enactments, all with the seeming purpose to regain authenticity.

Watching the movie *Mean Streets* at a cinema leads him into formulating his so-called "authenticity deficit," defined against an actor from the movie. This seems highly ironic, since he, the real person (naturally in the fictitious world he inhabits) feels that the actor Robert De Niro, while playing his role in the movie, is genuine and natural, whereas the enactor is "artificial," "plastic" (23): "I mean that he's relaxed, malleable. He flows into his movements, even the most basic ones. Opening fridge doors, lighting cigarettes. … He doesn't have to think about them because he and they are one. Perfect. Real. My movements are all fake. Second-hand" (23). Nevertheless, the choice of the movie and of De Niro cannot be random (mostly because randomness is his enemy, he does not tolerate it).

The artificiality he seemingly identifies after the accident as his greatest issue gradually grows to encompass his entire life, including his prior self, everybody around him, and finally the entire world. He reaches the conclusion that "[r]ecovering from the accident,

learning to move and walk, understanding before I could act—all this just made me become even more what I'd always been anyway, added another layer of distance between me and things I did" (23). And he fails to identify individuals that might be considered authentic: even the children are "fake," "second-hand," since they only mime what they see around them. Through this realisation a return to the duality of loss and absence is required: what initially was identified as a loss (his authenticity), with the watching of this film turns into the discovery that he never possessed it, or only did for a fleeting instant.

Repetition and escalation were part of the history of *Mean Streets*, since the original draft, bearing the title *Season of the Witch*, had been rewritten several times, and had undergone major changes. However, the backstory and its plot prove secondary for our protagonist who obsessively focuses on a single character and, interestingly, on a scene that bears no significance for other viewers, critics and interpreters. He highlights the small, insignificant movements that, nevertheless, make acting real. De Niro is one of the most famous representatives of method acting, which "strives to represent realistic human behaviour" (La Rocca 211). However, I would venture further and say that here De Niro achieves more than just "realistic" human behaviour. As Andrew J. Rausch notes, "[a]s filming progressed, De Niro, consumed with the idea of fully realizing his character, became more and more isolated from the rest of the cast and crew" (9); furthermore, several scenes presented real feelings that did not begin and end on the set[5]. Consequently, the traditional Aristotelian position that art imitates life, later inverted by philosophy, is further complicated in a novel that blurs the boundaries between life and art, between authenticity and artificiality.

This movie in particular and moving images in general represent the crux of this narrative: firstly, because the enactor is constantly attempting to (artificially) create that environment in which he would feel natural; secondly, because his memories and senses themselves operate in a similar manner to movies: "My memory had come back to me in moving images, as I mentioned earlier—like a film run in instalments, a soap opera, one five-year episode each week or so" (21). These two issues work together in the enactor's projects, resulting in a complete blurring of any boundary between his life and the movies he relates to: he remembers the images of the block, they come to him in instalments, and when re-creating the space and populating it, the entire process and space function as a film set: parts of the

[5] *See* different accounts of the production of *Mean Streets* in Rausch 2010, pp. 1–26.

building are left empty (on sets only those spaces are meticulously detailed that are used, while the rest of the space is empty), tiles missing from parcels he cannot remember, the concierge's face is covered with an expressionless mask, since he cannot recount her appearance and, of course, the repetition: just like rehearsals, film shootings meant to achieve perfection. Although there are obvious differences between sets and his creation of spaces, these are mainly connected to the reasons behind one and the other.

When devising, directing and enacting the different scenes (there is a constant escalation: the re-enactments of different activities inside the building, such as frying liver, playing the piano, repairing a motorcycle, etc.; then the re-enactment of his visit to a tire shop; followed by the killings of a turf war; and ultimately a bank heist) our protagonist occupies the position of an omnipotent entity, handling all re-enactors (people and animals alike) like marionettes. He carefully stages every instant, every movement in order to be in full control. As it was already mentioned, at the first stage of his projects he commissions the model of his building, and gives clear orders to the re-enactors while playing with the model figurines in his living room (145-47). Furthermore, he is completely unconcerned by the cats continuously falling from the neighbouring building's roof: "We can't expect everything to work perfectly straight away. It's a learning process" (140), says the character, despite his facilitator's question: "Doesn't it upset you?" (140), which would refer to the fact that huge numbers of animals are being killed. Nevertheless, anything less than perfect is total failure: "'The sunlight's not doing it right,' I said. … 'I mean,' I said, 'that it's running over the floor too quickly.'" (203). A delusional character, no doubt, who needs to dominate everything and everyone:

> And just how perfect does his recreated environment need to be? Partial success is abject failure. The point for him is to capture the connection, not merely an acceptable re-enactment. And once captured, it must be repeated. Realness is a state, not an isolated action. To experience it, our narrator must return to it again and again. It is only in the constant repetition of a remembered action that he finds the connection that he seeks. (Saikali)

All these attempts at control are meant to counterbalance the experience of the trauma suffered by him, which robbed him of his security, of his command on the events. What he desperately tries to overcome, but what haunts him over and over again, are ultimately the central characteristics of traumatic stress, namely "the experiences of helplessness, and the threat to one's life and sense of control" (McFarlane 33), since, as McFarlane claims, "trauma attacks the individual's sense of self and the predictability of the world" (33).

Possibly the most peculiar moment of his need for total authority surfaces when he decides to slow everything down. This request conforms to his physical state after the accident: he himself has to slow down every motion and meticulously analyse it before executing it, so understanding and mastery precede implementation. “Things I don’t understand make me feel dizzy. I’ve learnt to do things slowly since the accident, understanding every move, each part of what I’m doing. I didn’t choose to do things like this: it’s the only way I can do them,” confesses the enactor at the beginning of his story (7). The perfection of his project is thus tested through slowing it down. The probably most far-fetched instant is his giving orders to the concierge, the already motionless, faceless character of his show, telling her: “Now, you are already static. I mean, you just stand there in the lobby doing nothing. Which is good. But now I want you to do nothing even slower.” (199). He goes as far as ordering his re-enactors what to think and how to think it (“What I mean is that you should think more slowly. Not just think more slowly, but relate to everything around you slower,” 200).

It seems that our protagonist himself devises and orchestrates the play, he deliberately immerses himself and part of his city into its labyrinthine spaces and choreographies. Nevertheless, these choreographies gradually take over everything and everyone: the constant repetition of different scenes inside the building are followed and extended by newer and newer moments and events. And these show an emphatic *crescendo*: as I already mentioned, these aforementioned scenes are followed by those experienced in a tire shop, and then those of a murder happening on the streets. With this latter one, a substantial excursion can be identified, the events and their re-enactments become irrational and uncontrollable: these are the first scenes that our enactor has not participated in (be it actual or imagined participation). A chain reaction can be witnessed, starting from the shootout, since the enactor and his team find themselves in the thick of a gang war, whose every attack should be staged, and progressively the re-enactment of the re-enactment is also put in force, which creates an infinite *mise-en-abyme*. The question arises, then: who is really orchestrating and influencing these scenes in these spaces?

II. Trauma and Repetition

1. Surplus Matter

According to Allan Young we need to differentiate between bodily memory and mental memory when discussing trauma (97). We need to approach the two distinct memory types separately, alongside the following definitions provided by Young: "Mental memories include intrusive memories and re-experiences of the trauma, symptomatic efforts to avoid circumstances that might trigger memories, and emotional numbing. Bodily memories are signalled through explosive violence, hyper-vigilance and irritability" (Young 97, qtd. by Morrissey 189). The emphasis seems to gradually shift towards the closer investigation of bodily memories, through which, contrary to other trauma fictions usually analysing and attempting to capture the traumatised psyche, this novel thwarts all attempts of this sort.

The novel "works by accumulation and repetition, closing in on its subject in ever-decreasing revolutions, like a trauma victim circling the blank horror of the traumatic event. It plays a long, meticulous game," remarks Zadie Smith about *Remainder*. Repetition is key. Due to his new condition, namely the necessity to re-acquire, re-learn all movements, understand them, and then execute them, his entire life is about repetition. As Smith asserts,

> He's only good at completing cycles and series, reenacting actions. For example, he gets a certain tingling pleasure (this is literal; he gets it in his body) from having his reward card stamped in a certain "themed Seattle coffee bar," on the corner of Frith Street and Old Compton. Ten stamps, ten cappuccinos, a new card, start the series again.

Due to his insistence on cycles, among other factors, his initial goal is unattainable. He attempts to obtain a state similar to actors who, after performing continuously, after identifying with their characters (De Niro is a good example for this and for our protagonist, no doubt), reach a state in which their movements, their performance become genuine. The enactor needs to reach this genuineness first through motions: he repeats the same movements until they are wired into him, resulting in his muscles remembering the actions. Despite the logicality of this undertaking, it is doomed to failure. And this failure rests on the clash between his purpose and means to achieve it: as László B. Sári remarked during an informal discussion about the novel, "re-enactment is impossible when you long for control." Furthermore, he claimed, "real re-enactment of trauma is always traumatic itself, and provides no control, especially if you don't know what to re-enact." Consequently, the entire undertaking proves rather ironic, since the character-narrator constantly tries to operate with two irreconcilable states.

The enactor's every move, every act and decision works in patterns. For instance, let us revisit his search for the perfect building. As it was previously stated, although he organises a search party, the enactor realises soon enough that he is the only one who can find the block. However, the search team is not retracted: "Why hadn't I called the search off, then? you might ask. Because I liked the process, liked the sense of pattern" (86). The rhythm, the organised movement, the pattern itself soothes him. But the paradoxical nature of this plan is clear for him as well: he is meticulously devising numerous methods for "scar[ing his] building out," while knowing that only irrationality would result in success. However, the act's irrationality cannot be accomplished while being pre-meditated: "By early afternoon I'd realized that none of them would work in any case, for the good reason that implementing any one of them methodically would cancel its irrational value" (91).

Surplus matter, mentioned above, is of paramount importance to the protagonist. Its identification with the novel's title is straightforward, and several instances focus on the enactor's dual attitude to it. He first remembers this term at the beginning of his narration, recounting his art teacher saying: "'Your task isn't to create the sculpture, … it's to strip all the other stuff away, get rid of it. The surplus matter" (82). And this surplus matter constantly frustrates him. "The protagonist describes his reassembly of self as stripping away surplus matter, thus viewing the material rather than the psychic as the obstacle to his desired state of un-differentiation" (Griffin 78). Furthermore, after the accident *the bodies* offered him a settlement of eight and a half million for his silence. Thinking about this sum, he feels irritated, because "[t]he eight was perfect, neat: a curved figure infinitely turning back into itself. But then the half. Why had they added the half? It seemed to me so messy, this half: a leftover fragment, a shard of detritus" (9). For him this half million, this surplus matter is similar to the splinter in his knee that had stayed loose, and "floated around … surplus to requirements" (9), causing him unease and discomfort. I agree with Griffin who claims that "[s]uch circumscription of being is, however, ultimately auto-destructive since its implicit immunization from the other, secured through the other's exclusion by the absolute focus on self, produces entropy" (78).

Remainders, surpluses are everywhere; and he is both irritated and fascinated by them. These are the details that he tries to eliminate from his patterns, like making windscreen washer liquid evaporate, matter become un-matter. As Liesl Schillinger remarks,

> McCarthy's antihero narrator feels threatened by the "messy, irksome" physical world. ... Yet because he doubts the solidity of his own existence as a human being, he surrounds himself with enough remainders to provide a reassuringly packed context — not only the detritus of everyday life but made-to-order roofs and walls, staircases strewn with cigarette butts, and phony tenants, all magicked into stage sets where he can fit in, like a doll in a toy house.

While he is highly irritated by a stain on his sleeve ("I have, right to this day, a photographically clear memory of standing on the concourse looking at my stained sleeve, at the grease – this messy, irksome matter that had no respect for millions, didn't know its place. My undoing: matter," 17), he reaches the conclusion that "[e]verything must leave some kind of mark" (178), and he wishes to discover it, to capture it. Thus, after deciding to finally leave his building, he goes to a tire shop to fix his flat tire. When the aforementioned liquid seemingly disappears from the reservoir, he claims, "It felt wonderful. Don't ask me why: it just did. It was as though I'd just witnessed a miracle: matter – these two litres of liquid – becoming un-matter – not surplus matter, mess or clutter, but pure, bodiless blueness." Nevertheless, he knows that the surplus matter, the mark is paramount, and looking at the boy whose "overalls and face were covered in smears […] so that the miracle could happen," he elevates him into a "Christian martyr being flagellated, crucified, scrawled over with stigmata" (153). Whereas this elevated feeling dissolves when the liquid eventually gushes out into the cabin, onto him, he decides to endlessly re-enact the tire-shop scene, and eventually starts making blueprints of the stains the massive amount of liquid leaves, decorating his own walls with them. The duality of fascination and irritation gradually becomes a trademark of this character's relation to everything: two opposing feelings, irreconcilable, always fighting.

2. "History Repeating"

> After the accident I forgot everything. It was as though my memories were pigeons and the accident a big noise that had scared them off. They fluttered back eventually -- but when they did, their hierarchy had changed, and some that had had crappy places before ended up with better ones; I remembered them more clearly; they seemed more important. (82)

The trauma of the accident causes a fissure in the enactor, leaving behind a blank space, impossible to fill. And this hiatus changes the hierarchy of every memory coming back to him from his previous life: the memories, coming back "in instalments," have changed importance for him, and it seems, based mostly on his re-enactments, that the mundane events, previously deemed trivial, start to acquire paramount significance. The shift in itself could not be

attributed to the workings of a traumatised psyche, since all "minds are versatile and wily things" (5, this time bearing extra meaning), and authors often capture this change in hierarchy.[6] However, the importance and effect of these memories for our narrator-character exceed the threshold of a psyche deemed "normal," precisely because of his fascination with and repugnance for those details, for the "surplus matter" or remainder.

There is another important aspect of his remembrance: the realisation that all his memories are of sense impressions, never of actual events: hence the necessity to repeat everything ad infinitum. The patterns he himself designs and makes others execute, his total control of his environment represent the only possibility of his recreating the impressions that he longs after. We can conceive of his self as limited to the plane of the "sensorium." This is a holistic understanding of the body which focuses on the constant interaction between self and other, inside and outside. However, although the body – pertaining to humans, to objects, etc. – in *Remainder* operates as a link, and creates a continuous interdependence, the stage when these sense impressions would become feelings is absent. The enactor's entire experience of his world remains at the level of sensorium, of a "tingling sensation" that he pursues, that he experiences in certain situations he identifies as genuine.

The sensory context of each project, of each re-enactment is central to the character. His fragments of memories are solely composed of them, and consequently they will be the leading force of all the undertakings. The most expressed case is, again, the first one, since that is the most detailed and elaborated game: our enactor pursues this authenticity through experiencing the same sensory impulses that come back to him: the sound of piano music ("real, live music, … I remembered how it had sounded, its rhythms," 58), the smell of liver ("There'd been liver cooking on the floor below—the smell, the spit and sizzle," 58), the sight of cats, the sound of a motorcycle being repaired, etc. It is not, thus, surprising that all these impressions have to be perfect. When a minor detail is amiss, a maddening obsession may be identified in his self: although the re-enactors, the entire team constantly buy liver, they fry them all the time, even an extractor fan is installed to conduct the smell towards his apartment, this smell still seems to be wrong: he claims that the smell is "kind of strange," "sort of like cordite," and he (the only one) will keep smelling cordite throughout the long days of frying.

[6] *See* Salman Rushdie, for instance, who in "Imaginary Homelands" writes: "The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were remains; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities," *Imaginary Homelands*. 1991. 12.

In his obsessions games and their rules soothe him, the organised nature of sets gives him a sense of security: "I'd sit and think of sets—six games in tennis or however many matching cups and plates, the scenery in theatres, patterns" (6). His fascination with these is also connected to the idea of exhaustion: as Deleuze remarks, "[t]he combinatorial is the art or science of exhausting the possible through inclusive disjunctions," and he further states that "what matters is the order in which he does what he has to do, and in what combination he does two things at the same time" (154). There is an inherent duality, however, in sets, in games. Although their rules provide a sense of control, what happens during a particular set does not depend on the outside viewer. Deleuze provides the example of a dice throw to demonstrate the role of chance: "Nothing is exempt from the game: consequences are not subtracted from chance by connecting them with a hypothetical necessity which would tie them to a determinate fragment" (283). Thus, again, what seemingly soothes this disturbed agent also brings him further frustration. Consequently, the duality of his experiences concerning surplus matter invades his enjoyment of choreographies, too. The exhaustion of the possible is never attained exactly because of all those further possibilities he cannot control, cannot foretell.

There is a great compulsion to understand everything, to go back to the inception of every movement. For instance, when thinking about the turf wars and guns being fired, he remarks: "Each time a gun is fired the whole history of engineering comes into play. … Guns aren't just history's props and agents: they're history itself, spinning alternate futures in their chamber, hurling the present from their barrel, casting aside the empty shells of the past" (171). History and its materialisation in guns fascinates him, and it cannot be a consequence that the plasterer Kevin hums the song "History Repeating" by the Propellerheads for several hours, while struggling to reproduce the crack in the bathroom, doing wrong what he usually does right (116). One cannot help but think of Marx's elaboration of Hegel: history repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce. But what happens when history repeats itself over and over and over again? When the same scene is played continuously, without ever stopping? What happens is repetition with continuous escalation, but exhaustion being always eluded.

3. Human(ity)?

In an interview, McCarthy provides a spot-on characterisation of his enactor, claiming:

> He kind of has to have OCD but not entirely. He's stuck with impuissance. I think everyone in all of the books I've written is stuck with impuissance and their challenge it that they're trying to work out, like a laboratory rat in a maze. They're trying to work out the labyrinth like Theseus or Oedipus working out the patterns they're in. Or in the case of *Remainder*, he's not even working it out. He's just triggering and retriggering it. (Bollen)

Two observations are of great importance: firstly, that he repeatedly triggers the same thing, thus aspiring for control; secondly, that despite all his struggles, he is a passive endurer to all the re-enactments. Rehearsals are his way of cutting out all possibility of failure, but this is never achieved. Even before starting the re-enactments, he is in a constant state of panic, and in order to combat that, he rehearses all possible scenarios in his head: "Sometimes I'd run the failure scenario and then the good one, to cancel the bad one out. At other times I'd be running the good one and the bad one would cut in and make me break out in a panicky sweat" (119). His compulsion to organise everything is meant to eliminate all possibility of failure, but eventually this becomes the one leading to it.

The novel's last chapters relate the ultimate escalation of his re-enactments, namely the staging of THE bank heist, utilising the choreography of all bank heists. This also encompasses several stages, such as the construction of a building designed after a bank, where re-enactors would play all the roles, and finally its transfer to a real bank with real employees, oblivious of his staging. Nevertheless, the undertaking results in utter failure exactly due to his careful orchestration: during the previous re-enactments (in the replica bank), one of the robber re-enactors trips in a tear in the carpet, and after this occurrence the enactor orders the man to trip over it every time they re-enact the scene (the gesture creates a rhythm that entrances the enactor). However, at the actual bank there is no (artificially designed) tear, and thus the robber re-enactor (accustomed to the repetitive movements of tripping) loses his balance, which results in his gun going off, and ultimately in blood bath.

Although the enactor seems to rule this world, he gradually proves to be a puppet, just like his re-enactors themselves. In this manner he bears interesting similarities with Franz Kafka's characters, who are stuck in a labyrinth, incapable of getting out, entirely impotent. The change in our enactor happens after he wakes up from coma, just like the actual physical change occurring with Gregor Samsa from "Metamorphosis." Of course, the world he inhabits

is different: his newly acquired wealth makes him almost omnipotent, and so he can gradually expand his vision to encompass half the city – both its spaces and inhabitants –; and the movies he watches highly influence his aforementioned vision and the choreographies. However, these ever-expanding spaces and re-enactments comprise the labyrinth he loses himself in, progressively becoming more and more insane.

The "antihero" (Schillinger) gradually becomes a monster for his re-enactors, a man who is capable of ordering the infinite repetition of one particular scene, exhausting all people participating in it, and then, after a while completely forgetting about them. Nevertheless, the re-enactment has to continue. Money provides him with the greatest power imaginable: he buys human beings to cater to all his needs, and bribes the police to allow him to take possession of an entire street of London for an indeterminate amount of time. Whenever he encounters some obstacles, he is both enraged and surprised, since in his own secluded world everything needs to revolve around his projects. The transformation is complete. To him human beings cease to be humans, they lose all humanity: they become mindless objects blindly following instructions.

Pieter Vermeulen draws attention to the difference between emotion and affect, of great importance in analysing *Remainder*: "While emotions have a semantic and cognitive dimension, affects are intractable intensities that escape narrative sequencing and conceptual capture" (30). Another significant observation on this duality is formulated by Frederik Tygstrup, who says that "emotions are something you have, whereas affects is something you are in. Put differently: subjects have emotions, but affects produce subjectivity" (196-97). The enactor lacks any emotion whatsoever, he can only be approached through the concept of affect: "Affects cannot be codified as expressions of an individual's interiority" (Vermeulen 30). Subjectivity vanishes, but what is even more: humanity does too, and with this McCarthy emphasises one of the most paradigmatic issues of a traumatised self. Going back to my premise, I claim that whereas literature usually attempts to psychologise the self, to construct a subjective narrative around the traumatic events, this novel purposefully fails to do so. However, the unnamed narrator of McCarthy's novel, the character who, interestingly enough, holds the narrative thread in his hands, loses all subjectivity, all humanity. As Vermeulen remarks, the novel presents a connection between trauma and literature that depends "on the unleashing of non-subjective affects that confront the reader with an evacuated subjectivity

that, precisely because it does not offer a position to identify with, cannot leave the reader unaffected" (29).

According to Setha Low, affects are "described as presubjective, prepersonal visceral intensities that influence our thinking and feelings" (Low 151), however, these visceral intensities are "transpersonal," through which a body is affected and affects (Anderson 735). The phenomenon of affect is tightly connected to the sensorium discussed in the previous subchapter, and thus, by inference, to the body and its connection to spaces. Since sense impressions do not turn into consciousness and feelings, they will become affects that, according to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Daniel Lord Smail, as formulated by Low, are "innate and hardwired, triggered by the brain-body and functioning outside of consciousness without cognitive intervention" (Low 152). All definitions of affect rely on the careful separation of affect and emotion, "emphasising the transcorporal, inhuman and contagious aspects of affect and its capacity to affect and to be affected as resolving the conceptual limitations of emotion as an individual and personal experience of feeling" (Low 152).

The inhumanity of the enactor's affects pervades all his choices and undertakings, visible in the acceleration his projects. Gradually he manipulates the entire city, similarly to the concierge whose motionlessness, and even her thoughts are predetermined. For him, these people stop being people, they become mere tools in his efforts to reach his goal. Money is not an obstacle: in a blink of an eye he is willing to double the already substantial fee he is paying to the re-enactors. His mania reaches such proportions that he is trying to bribe the police for the total control of entire streets, and he is revolted when an obstacle surfaces. The metamorphosis is complete: consequently, he manages to change his environment as well. Similarly to the buildings and spaces highly altered by his projects, the people are also changed. They have lost their humanity not only in the enactor's eyes, but in their own, in the entire world's eyes, too: they have become robots that execute every command. They form a faceless mass, from which nobody is capable of rising.

The affects controlling this character have the narrative purpose of defamiliarisation, which is meant to highlight trauma in a manner contrary to customary narratives. The novel's approach to the issue seems to be in accord with Jeffrey C. Alexander's reflections and observations concerning the fashionableness of the term of trauma, which circumscribes our everyday lives. As he remarks,

> In the last century, first in Western societies and then, soon after, throughout the rest of the world, people spoke continually about being traumatized by an experience, by an event, by an act of violence or harassment, or even, simply, by an abrupt and unexpected, and sometimes not even particularly malevolent, experience of social transformation and change. (7)

However, in this great expansive movement of the trauma, its identification and treatment is more and more difficult. Consequently, in these attempts one needs to gain reflexivity, "to move from the sense of something commonly experienced to the sense of strangeness that allows us to think socially" (Alexander 7), and this is the very trick *Remainder* employs. The trauma itself: an accident involving something falling from the sky, is common, familiar to every reader. The distancing, the defamiliarisation is attained through the focus on a character deluded, maddened in consequence to this very mundane event. And his gradual shift into inhumanity makes it possible for the narrative to present the strangeness of trauma Alexander talks about, which, according to him, "is something constructed by society" (7).

There is only one character, besides the enactor, in the world of *Remainder* who, through our protagonist's fascination with him and appraisal of his faculties, rises to the fore. He is Nazrul Ram Vyas (or Naz), the facilitator whose job, as his denomination suggests, extends into the facilitation of anything and everything. His sole purpose is success. The nature of the goal, the means are secondary. The enactor's connection with Naz results from the fascinating similarities the two characters exhibit. The project and its continuous exponential growth, the growing complexity and interconnectedness of the details, of the bodies suck him into this labyrinthine world. His obsession is information, similarly handled to the enactor's obsession with authenticity, since he is also fascinated by logicality and systematisation. The enactor himself notices Naz's transformation and formulates it in the following way:

> I realized as I hung up that Naz was changing. He'd always been dedicated to my projects, ever since that first day that I'd met him in the Blueprint Café—but back then his dedication had been purely professional. Now, though, his in-built genius for logistics was mixed with something else: a kind of measured zeal, a quiet passion. He defended my work with a fierceness that was muted but unshakable. (208)

Although in the beginning, after getting hold of his new wealth, the enactor is convinced that he has total control over the spaces he acquires, there are small hints that gradually start dominating his narrative, turning attention towards the possibility that this control was completely illusory from the very beginning. With his turning into a tyrant who does not treat his re-enactors as people but reduces them to an animal-like state, he himself is gradually

reduced together with them. From the first encounter we read the account of a broken man. Throughout the narration he struggles to reconstruct himself, to restore his body and mind to the state before his accident. However, this is doomed to failure, because his change, his metamorphosis is permanent. Thus he becomes an "irredeemable vermin in search of nonexistent redemption" (Geier 15).

In his incessant search for an authentic existence he is getting ever-farther from its attainment. In his mania he is convinced that his surroundings are all fake, all the people around him are playing roles, and thus he decides to be the one supplanting them with these roles. During one of his mad coffee-drinking escapades he starts observing the homeless who assimilate into the landscape of the filthy city. This moment in his experiences is significant for two reasons. Firstly, the homeless can be considered as positively Kafkaesque characters: excluded, living on the fringes of society, on its lowest levels, leading an almost animal-like existence. Secondly, their back-and-forth movements as noticed by our protagonist organise into a choreography that excites him and prompts him to recognise their genuineness. It seems thus that the millionaire can identify best with these homeless people. The novel itself also functions as further enhancement of this experience, since from the first pages an affiliation of this kind was noticeable (think of him starting to beg on the streets and feeling "serene and intense").

The unnamed narrator-character wills total control, and he seemingly attains it, since he gradually orchestrates almost an entire city in his re-enactments. Not only his obsession with games and sets attests to his maniacal need for domination, but also his compulsion to find logic, patterns, rules for every move. However, exactly these obsessions represent his doom, his inability to escape from them. The clash gradually becomes more pronounced: he seems to be omnipotent, he believes his newly acquired wealth gives him control over the entire city, but that very city engulfs him. As Laura Colombino remarks, in this novel "London provides not a residual interest but a strong psychic-phenomenological grounding […] where the awareness of the physical reality of buildings and landscape conditions shape the concept of the subject traversing the city" (4). The re-enactments do indeed cover major areas of the metropolis, however, it is not the enactor who controls them, but vice versa. The repetitions, their rhythm entrance him and thus imprison him. He is enthralled by his own fixations which he ultimately cannot control, and they gradually surmount him. Consequently,

these compulsions, through the continuous re-enactments, start comprising more and more complex labyrinths from which he cannot escape. They devour his entire environment, constantly escalating, driving him into madness. He cannot control his need to drink nine coffees in order to fill the reward card, which then results in his getting a new one. He cannot help but wait until the dust and litter on the floor of his building are perfectly reproduced. He becomes nothing more than his re-enactors whom he considers sub-human.

The parallel between Franz Kafka's writings and *Remainder* could be revealing for the investigation of this monster creature gradually taking shape in McCarthy's novel. For instance, Ted Geier, the author of *Kafka's Nonhuman Form*, focuses on the lifeless life forms, existences and roles as they appear in Kafka's art, where these existences can easily be repeated and replaced, programmed and killed (7). In the eyes of McCarthy's protagonist almost everybody is just as replaceable and disposable. His mad behaviour definitely leads him to this attitude towards human beings: they become mere objects, props in his show. But who or what does he himself become? From the first moment of his narration the reader encounters a broken, shattered man. Throughout his constantly expanding projects his sole goal is to regain the state prior to the accident, a state that he deems authentic, genuine; however, this will never be attained. The change is irreversible. Ultimately his own existence proves to coincide with that of his re-enactors, reduced into an animal-like state.

4. Infinity

Although the enactor is totally invested in mundane, unimportant scenes that he himself designs, there are two interconnected threads that organise his narration into a futile search for meaning, into a continuous battle for authenticity, one doomed to failure. These interlinked threads are the tingling sensation (mentioned above) and his fascination with the symbol of infinity, one facilitating the other. From the very beginning of his story, the narrator expresses his veneration of infinity and perfection: the citation, quoted in a previous section, presents the sum of his settlement and his reaction to it, claiming that "[t]he eight was perfect, neat: a curved figure infinitely turning back into itself" (9), which soothes him, and he considers that this alone would have been enough, without the added half, which is just some "detritus." The number eight, or its symbol turned horizontally, signifying the infinite, becomes a leitmotif

capable of raising a tingling sensation in him, which in turn leads to the infinite number of re-enactments. He feels content when he moves in an eight-shape, and this movement triggers his realisation that he needs to recreate something that might have never existed in the first place; later on, while re-enacting his visit to the tire shop, the car follows the same shape, and as the scene plays over and over again, the car's tires leave the symbol of infinity on the concrete.

The entire world of the novel gradually turns into a labyrinth from where the protagonist cannot escape. The labyrinth is comprised of the very re-enactments that ultimately pervade almost the entire city: both its spaces and its inhabitants. There is no possible end to the ever-growing number of re-enactments, since the man is constantly searching for that sensation of serenity that he claims to have felt on peculiar occasions. These re-enactments, through their monotonous nature, are hypnotic, and have an effect similar to opioids on the enactor. Bessel van der Kolk, a Dutch psychiatrist, in his book entitled *The Body Keeps the Score*, investigates the causes, manifestations and solutions for numerous traumatic cases. Although this novel resists all psychologisation of trauma, one of van der Kolk's diagnoses captures the enactor's state: "Reenactments are frozen in time, unchanging, and they are always lonely, humiliating, and alienating experiences" (180). The character does not take into consideration the changes of time (remember his irritation with the sun failing to shine for the right amount of time), he needs the perfectly orchestrated movements to repeat endlessly, such as his back-and-forth game with the old lady, frying livers in his building:

> Once more she stooped to set her bag down, holding her left hand to her lower back as she did this; once more she looked up at me and pronounced her phrase:
> "Harder and harder to lift up."
> I answered her as before. Again I felt the sense of gliding, of light density. The moment I was in seemed to expand and become a pool—a still, clear pool that swallowed everything up in its calm contentedness. Again the feeling dwindled as I left the zone around her door. As soon as I'd reached the third step of the next flight I turned round, as before, and said:
> "Again." (131–32)

However, if we return to van der Kolk's definition, one issue may seem amiss: the humiliating nature of his re-enactments. Seemingly, this particularity does not apply to the enactor, to the wealthy entrepreneur who does not feel humiliation after or while re-enacting his fantasies, but the opposite: euphoria, which also presents acceleration, resulting in trance-like states, or waking comas. The physician's diagnosis in the novel is the following: "He's manifesting the autonomic symptoms of trauma: masked facies, decreased eye blink, cogwheel rigidity, postural flexion, mydriasis … response to trauma is often mediated by endogenous opioids. …

The stronger the trauma, the stronger the dose, and hence the stronger the compulsion to trigger new releases" (196). Consequently, our protagonist needs ever-stronger doses, ultimately becoming one of the puppets of his own show. His extreme need for control will become his own failure.

Nevertheless, the dangers of humiliation, their constant presence in the enactor's life can easily be identified throughout his narration. It seems that he consciously and purposefully pursues the states of the impotent victim, from the very beginning of his maddening pursuit for genuineness, when he instinctively starts begging on the streets. Furthermore, with the occasion of the different re-enactments of the scenes captured from turf wars, he decides to participate in the show (a highly surprising moment, since he did not actively participate in the actual events, and thus his involvement is unusual). The role he chooses is that of the victim who, according to the police reports smuggled out for the sake of his enterprise, tries to flee from his attackers, jumps on his bike, but trips, falls and is shot to death.

At this point the question arises (also asked by the narrator himself): "Why was I so obsessed with the death of this man I'd never met?" (177). He needs to know the smallest details of the entire event, in order to fully grasp the victim's state, his experience of falling, of dying. And the narrator's rendering of them provides the answer to the question above: in the character of this man converge all the previously discussed fascinations and frustrations ultimately comprising the duality of matter/un-matter, or loss and absence ("Matter again: the world became a fridge door, a broken lighter, two litres of blue goop," 174). Furthermore, the affects that define the man are also identified in this stranger:

> He'd been hit by something, hurt, laid prostrate and lost consciousness; so had I. We'd both slipped into a place of total blackness, silence, nothing, without memory and without anticipation, a place unreached by stimuli of any kind. He'd stayed on there, gone the whole hog, while I'd been sucked back, via vague sports stadiums, to L-shaped wards and talks of Settlement – but for a short while we'd both stood at the same spot: stood there, lay there, floated there, whatever. Persisted. (177)

Ultimately, his fascination with the man lies not only in their shared fate, both being thrust into oblivion, into blank space, but also in his realisation that this stranger achieved that which completely eluded the enactor: death. Thus he becomes "the symbol of perfection," since "he'd done what I wanted to do: merged with the space around him, sunk and flowed into it until there was no distance between it and him – and merged, too, with his actions, merged to

the extent of having no more consciousness of them. He'd stopped being separate, removed, imperfect" (177).

Conclusion

The last re-enactment McCarthy's narrator-protagonist orchestrates is rightly the ultimate escalation of all previous undertakings: he first devises the re-enactment of all bank heists in history, in a remote location, with paid staff, but then decides to change the location to an actual bank, with actual employees. Besides the Baudrillardian considerations of this and previous re-enactments, what can be witnessed is the ultimate delusion and madness of the (supposedly) omnipotent enactor. And this is not yet the endgame, but only its beginning. He carefully devises a plan of escape after the robbery is executed, consisting of all the re-enactors from all re-enactments being put on planes, which will blow up mid-air. However, the heist fails, so only a select few reach their plane. He is content: he will blow it up all the same, thus becoming and turning the others into remainders. The reader, however, together with the enactor, is robbed of any resolution, of the illusion of ending: the narration stops with the plane flying in an eight-shape in the sky.

But is this possible? Reality and fiction (be it a movie or his dreams or anything else) have been intermixed long ago in the enactor, and there are countless signs implying that something is wrong. From the very beginning, he is the only one who constantly smells and tastes cordite (gunpowder). Furthermore, the third chapter of the novel, relating his encounter with homeless people while searching for authenticity, reveals further details about his unreliability: he claims to have invited a homeless man to dinner, but then suddenly his narrative loses consistence (he cannot decide whether there was a waiter or a waitress, so he shifts pronouns), and then the homeless man and the restaurant both disappear, like a movie set being reorganised: "'I want to know…' I started, but the waiter leant across me as he took the tablecloth away. She took the table away too. There wasn't any table. The truth is, I've been making all this up – the stuff about the homeless person" (54). Patrick Ness, in his critique written for *The Guardian*, asks the following thought-provoking question: "Is this purgatory? Did he in fact die in the traumatic event?"

Whether actual or figurative, the narrative leaves the issue open, however, some kind of death is perceptible in the enactor. The trauma brought along a complete metamorphosis through which the absences came to the fore: his absence of memories, of feelings. And these very memories and feelings are what give life to the self. The enactor is a trauma victim who, through his enactments, presents the shocking view of a wounded psyche. The trauma he suffers reminds one of Jeffrey C. Alexander's emphasis on the prevalence of events, happenings considered traumatic by the society, on the fashionableness of this term and experience. Consequently, Tom McCarthy employs an approach to the traumatic self that not only detaches itself from the customary trauma fiction, but even questions that fiction's efforts of narrativising the traumatic experience. *Remainder*, through its constant and carefully staged defamilarisation, resists all attempts at creating a narrative, a story around the traumatic event and around the traumatised individual. Instead, what this work captures is the state in which memories, the past itself is replaced by constant, maddening repetitions, in which feelings and emotions are supplanted by sense impressions and affects that only function at the surface level of the self, with no depth whatsoever.

The authenticity he so desperately tries to recover was never there to begin with. Every loss ultimately proves to be complete absence with no hope for attainment. What the reader witnesses in the 30-year old nameless, self-less enactor is complete anhedonia, since every project, every re-enactment bears in itself the problematic nature of that "re-": what if all these re-enactments are repetitions of events that have never happened? It would mean that his pursuit for authenticity was ultimately a pursuit for something inexistent. And even though we cannot know for sure whether he really lived in this tenement building, surrounded by the sounds and smells of liver frying, piano music, a motorbike, etc., we know that he will never attain genuineness.

All the (few) occasions when he feels that he got close to the desired state, he is the victim, not the omnipotent enactor whose role he plays (or tries to) during the escalation of the re-enactments. And his victimhood, his helplessness is most apparent when identifying with the victim of a turf war, who was chased and shot on the streets of London. In contrast to himself, the enactor claims that this man is "perfection" incarnate, since he managed to die, to dissolve, and thus, through him, matter became un-matter. However, the enactor fails to realise this greatest wish of all, and he is stuck as remainder, as surplus matter.

The shift in power relations is captured through his problematic relationship with the spaces he frantically struggles to affect, but that ultimately affect him so powerfully that he becomes helpless. The shards of memory, the impressions that flood him take over the control, and ultimately he himself becomes that "trauma victim circling the blank horror of the event" Zadie Smith likened to the novel itself. The spaces he devises comprise a never-ending loop, a labyrinth made up of remainders he tries to escape. The final picture of his plane flying in an eight-shape in the sky testifies to the infinity, to the inescapability of his state, of him being the victim.

I believe that this character presents new views on the traumatised individual, providing a peek into the workings of his mind exactly through the avoidance of any hint of him being traumatised. The novel problematizes the absence of memories: what the protagonist faces is not forgetting but something more catastrophic: a void. In the centre of the novel stands an exhaustive search for a state prior to the accident, one that is doomed to failure because of the void. Meanwhile, no attempts are made at making sense of the traumatic event itself. The chasm of the accident opens up into other chasms concerning the protagonist's past, his life preceding the event. As Zadie Smith, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, remarks: "It all comes back to him, though it was never there in the first place." And thus, although the accident is barely ever mentioned in the novel, in the end it becomes the true protagonist of the work, shaping the entire life of the unnamed man.

All the memories serving as starting-points for the man's magnanimous projects lose their genuineness in the process. The man loses his plausibility and thus everything he builds will ultimately be nothing more than fantasy and yearning. The hierarchy of all events turns upside down, and finally everything that initially was deemed essential becomes no more than mere remainder. Thus the novel shifts the focus of trauma literature: it erases all traces, all memories of the event and emphasises the void created thus. This is the bared-down traumatised individual captured in the greatest details imaginable as he undergoes an irreversible transformation.

Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*: Humans, Gods, and Collective Memories

After discussing a novel that focuses on a male character craving control, striving to recover lost (or possibly inexistent) memories, I now turn my attention to Helen Oyeyemi's 2007 novel, titled *The Opposite House*. In contrast to McCarthy's masculine protagonist, and male-centred presentation of experiences, Oyeyemi's second novel (one that is in many ways representative of her literary output to date) approaches such issues as remembrance, instability, rootlessness, connection and disconnection through the female perspective. The novel's main character is Maja, a young British daughter of Cuban immigrants, who, while expecting her first child, strives to come to terms with her identity, with her hybridity. In parallel to her story, interspersing Maja's struggles with highly poetic segments, is the fantastic story of a Yoruba Goddess, Yemaya Saramagua, through whom the novel reworks the transatlantic journey of Nigerian slaves and their faith.

The Opposite House is a complex novel that blends Africa and Europe: distant places, differing cultures, various religions. Maja and Yemaya, the two protagonists are different versions of the same persona: they come to represent not just the complexity inherent in identity, but also the difficulties in recognising and embracing a hybrid identity, one that spans continents and cultures. This and other novels by Nigerian author Helen Oyeyemi provide an artistic reflection on her own personal experiences as a second-generation Nigerian living in the United Kingdom. Her own life and journey already encompass the intricate connections between space and memory, their effect upon each other. Oyeyemi's is a truly fluid identity, one that is charged by different countries, various cultural experiences: born in Nigeria in 1984, she grew up in England, but since has inhabited several European cities, such as Budapest, Berlin, Barcelona, Paris, and is currently living in Prague.

In her novels, Oyeyemi usually focuses on children who had a similar journey to her own, namely those of African parents trying to find a home in a foreign country, having to "negotiate their hybrid identities that result from both British and Nigerian cultural influences," to use Maximilian Feldner's words (147). *The Icarus Girl* (2005), Oyeyemi's debut novel encompasses the most pronounced foci of her literary output by choosing a child protagonist of mixed parentage, who finds herself at a crossroads, unable to decide where she

belongs, who she really is. Since Jessamy's mother is Nigerian, when the girl is just eight years old they visit her grandparents, where she is confronted by a double identity. In a representative passage, when her grandfather calls her by her Yoruba name, Wuraola, she experiences an identity crisis: "Wuraola sounded like another person. Not her at all" (*Icarus* 20). The crisis is further deepened by the appearance of a mysterious play pal, whom Jessamy will call by the name TillyTilly, a *doppelgänger*, possibly her lost twin (Fern, who died during childbirth). With the image of this "imaginary friend," or rather vengeful twin, Oyeyemi opens the rich array of African myths, blending Western fairy tales and Yoruba beliefs.

My choice, however, fell on the author's second novel, since its protagonist is an adult who consciously battles remembrance and forgetting, and needs to face her memories constructed to depict an imaginary Cuba. *The Opposite House* continues in the vein of *The Icarus Girl*, intertwining the Western (realist) world with myths that come to life, myths that project a supernatural world. The boundaries (both fictional and geographical) are blurred, cultures blend into each other, and the reader experiences an intricate fictional world that is created through a "narrative labyrinth" (Cooper, "Middle" 110; Feldner 148).

The novel's Maja is in several ways a manifestation of Oyeyemi's own experiences being a migrant, possessing a hybrid identity and trying to come to terms with this complexity. In an interview conducted by Michel Martin she defines Maja's state through her own personal feelings, claiming: "I feel as if my experiences being removed from Nigerian and thus not particularly Nigerian, like I don't really consider myself Nigerian." The novel's protagonist is "twice removed" (from West Africa, and then from Cuba; Martin), and thus she can experience an even deeper sense of placelessness, a greater insecurity. The novel tackles the issues of migration, transculturalism, hybridity on a personal plane, filtering everything through Maja's character and her often conflicting feelings. She is striving to define herself, to capture her identity, an aspiration prompted by the approaching arrival of her child. But one can intuit the conclusion to her search from the above quoted interview, in which Oyeyemi shifts focus from search to acceptance. She states: "maybe I'm just not anything in particular and that's okay" (Martin), which, as she parallels her feelings to those voiced in her novel, leads the protagonist into trying to come to terms with this realisation.

Despite the personal tone of the narrative presenting Maja, one gradually realises that her story, and the entire novel voices the story of the *Migrant*: of different individuals who

cope with change differently, but nevertheless share some aspects that make them into a collective. While Maja represents the self in its most intimate state, with the narrative diving into the depths of her character, her counterpart, namely Yemaya, is meant to balance this out by invoking the story of the slaves and their gods, thousands of people forced to abandon their home and search for meaning in a foreign place. Furthermore, the array of migrant stories is further enriched by the novel presenting different people from Maja's environment, all having different experiences connected to their culture, their identity, and to their new homes. These stories together present a complex image of the various hardships, of the states, of the feelings the *Migrant* can face.

The journey Maja takes is defined by the interplay between her remembrance and the places she inhabits. The novel's title could be considered to capture the duality of worlds, the opposition between Africa and England, or Cuba and England, and the significance of the house that is caught in-between. The image of the opposite house encompasses both states of anticipation and fulfilment: it represents the contrasting perspectives of Maja and her parents. To the parents the opposite house was England and its promise of peace, of freedom, however, for Maja, the woman who spent most of her life in England, Cuba, the point of origin, will present her with a promise, this time of an anchored identity. According to reviewer Darryl Lorenzo Wellington, the lives are "split between the multicultural West and 'the opposite house' – dreams, longings and sensibilities rooted elsewhere." So the house thus conceived is an ever-shifting entity, one that represents contrastive wishes, different states, and various identities.

There is an inherent duality to the entity of the opposite house. It is always conceived of as the other, as the longed-for. The dichotomy at its core is a structural and thematic pillar in *The Opposite House*. It stands for the "postcolonial condition of immigrating into another country's ways and the liminal spaces of a house" (Wisker 151). It gives birth to the split subject, to a doubling that pervades the entire fictional world. The opposite house is personified to represent the novel's two protagonists, Maja and Yemaya (or Yemaja, a spelling that makes the link between the two names even more obvious), and the spaces they occupy.

Through the two characters we arrive at the links between the opposite house and the somewherehouse that is Yemaya's home. With its two L-shaped doors, one opening into

Lagos, the other one into London, this house becomes the ultimate liminal space, similar to Augé's non-places: a place of constant transit, of flow, of change. And this house mirrors its inhabitant, namely Yemaya Saramagua, the Yoruba goddess who accompanies the slaves on their journey, with the promise of a better life. Her narrative is infused with a highly poetic, supra-realist feel, which resonates with the numerous lines borrowed from Emily Dickinson's poetry. The title of Oyeyemi's novel is not an exception either, and thus the interpretations are further enriched by the ones associated with the poem. Dickinson's poem, "There's been a Death, in the Opposite House," shifts the initial promising, positive connotation of the novel's title into a quasi-philosophical treatise on what is irretrievably lost through the transition. Ultimately it is this duality of promise and loss that governs the work and may define its central characters.

This chapter proposes to investigate the interrelationship between memory and space through the two central characters of the novel, first by focusing on the narrative style and on its language. Later, I propose to investigate the blending of Western and Yoruba traditions and myths and the Santería religion, and then I will gradually move towards more pronounced aspects of spatiality and identity mutually affecting each other, by analysing the "somewherehouse," paralleling it with Maja's own home, and projecting it to Maja, the woman, the expectant mother, the character who has her own hysteric. Through her and Yemaya Saramagua the chapter proposes to present new aspects of such issues as hybridity, placelessness, cultural memory and forgetting.

I. Between Two Worlds

From the first sentence Oyeyemi's second novel leads its reader into a mysterious world, projected through a poetic language that blends reality and fantasy, the world of mortals with that of gods. "Sometimes a child with wise eyes is born" (Oyeyemi 1): an exposition that counteracts the allusions the novel's title provides. The narration starts with birth, and focuses on two distinct but connected characters immersed in the events of birth and death. The eerie sensations the first sentences emanate continue throughout *The Opposite House*, by the continuous mixing of two worlds, of different styles, languages and cultures. As Manjiri Indurkar formulates it, Oyeyemi's "narratives are layered with various moments that seem to

be in flux, they give away a sense of comatose and that of movement all at the same time, blurring the boundaries of the two" (10). Oyeyemi proposes to chart this very complexity, to capture all the intricacies of the self, of the world through her novel's language. To do so, she separates the novel into two sections that often almost imperceptibly slide into one another inside the distinct chapters. These sections are Maja's and Yemaya's stories that never meet, nevertheless, they run in a close parallel, and their "simultaneous intersections are tantalisingly elusive and suggestive" (Cooper, "Middle" 111).

Oyeyemi creates a "narrative labyrinth" in which she places side by side the mortal and the godly, the real and the magical, the prosaic and the poetic. Although the two characters do not meet, their worlds intersect when humans and gods are closely aligned. Oyeyemi's narrative projects this fluidity and freedom, with words mirroring states, mindsets, with lines reminiscent more of poetry than of prose writing. The two stories are meant to reflect her belief that "there are two kinds of real" (Brace), and the reader definitely experiences worlds that are realer than the real. As Oyeyemi claims, "each story is the story of the house opposite it" (Brace), a statement that sheds light on the relationship between the two female protagonists. Their houses, their selves signify states of transit, fluidity instead of fixedness, interchangeability instead of separateness.

1. Narrative between Dickinson and Hitchcock

In Brenda Cooper's words, what the novel presents can be defined as the "organised chaos of the patchwork quilt or Emily Dickinson's poetry" ("Middle" 110). In the amalgam of different realities, in the style that makes possible the fluid use of words, Dickinson's poetry indeed sits comfortably. Her poems from the nineteenth century resonate with Maja's and Yemaya's worlds and, conversely, they reflect on the young female author's own twenty-first-century world. I agree with Cooper who claims that "[t]he melange of traveling gods, slavery and an American poet, among other mingling myths and mutations, is Oyeyemi's vision of the nature of the circuitous mental journey across the waters" ("Middle" 109).

Oyeyemi borrows most of her chapter titles from Dickinson's poems, thus creating an all-pervasive echo of Dickinson's style and poetry in general. The excerpts set the tone and, furthermore, the general state of the novel's protagonists. Similarly to Cooper who emphasises

the first chapter title, I believe that "telling it slant" reflects on the philosophy of Oyeyemi's novel. The "truth" Dickinson names in her poem will come to signify the interrelationship between the two characters and, as Cooper enumerates, "the intersections between reality and myth, allegory and magic, slaves and gods, Habana, London, and Lagos" ("Middle" 117).

The title of Oyeyemi's novel, however, connected to another Dickinson-poem, will cast a shadow of mourning upon the characters of this fictional world. Oyeyemi borrows her title from Dickinson's "There's been a Death, in the Opposite House," which also appears as the epigraph to the novel, a poem that counteracts death with life, stillness with movement. Lines of the poem read "I know it, by the numb look/ Such Houses have" (185), showing how the houses reflect on the inhabitants, they emanate the energies from within them. The theme of death pervades the pages of the novel, interpreted by Buckley and Ilott as "the death of certain cultural practices and the process of forgetting that accompanies doubly displaced peoples and traditions" (13). This sense of death is further enforced by more palpable events taking place in the novel, such as the slow death of the Kayodes, transcendental creatures that do not recognise the need to eat, and the rather poetic death of Amy, who becomes endowed with the power of "crossing heaviness with lightness" (193).

The poetic or, more generally, literary background for the novel is further extended by a cinematic masterpiece, namely Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 *Vertigo*. The artistic connection between Dickinson's poetry and the movie, though maybe not obvious at first glance, will gradually reveal itself. *Vertigo* is widely considered to be one of Hitchcock's greatest works, one that, according to Philip J. Skerry, is his own *Hamlet* (104). The movie is a complex piece of art, giving birth to an abundance of criticism and scholarship, focusing on the richness of its symbolic web, on the characters and acting, on the shifts in perspectives it employs, among numerous others. As critic Peter Matthews notes, at the core of *Vertigo* there is a "delirious excess that paradoxically borders on abstraction and renders the film a true nonpareil in Hitchcock's career" (55), which "delirious excess" testifies to the poeticality of the film (Skerry 106).

Maja, the protagonist of *The Opposite House*, together with her best friend, Amy Eleni, is so infatuated with Hitchcock's film that its viewing becomes a regularly enacted ritual. Seemingly each viewing enriches the array of interpretations and, alongside them, the two girls' relation to the film and to themselves. Their approach mirrors the aforementioned

inexhaustible scholarly attention *Vertigo* has been receiving. Ironically, although in recent decades the film has shown a steady increase in popularity, it started off as a cinematic failure. This work shows some established Hitchcockian patterns and methods, nevertheless, it is considered to be a deviation from his oeuvre.

The two girls' infatuation with *Vertigo* in Oyeyemi's novel seems odd at first. The first half of the film is pronouncedly governed by the perspective of its male protagonist, Scottie Ferguson, it is his gaze through which one views Madeleine. The strangeness of this interest Maja and Amy Eleni present towards *Vertigo* is even more accentuated because of Scottie's overbearing transformation of Judy Barton into Madeleine Elster, coupled with her obvious reluctance and unease. But this film represents many experiences for the fictional characters of Oyeyemi's novel. Madeleine becomes a symbol, standing for womanhood on the one hand, and trauma on the other. Maja interprets her for us in the following way:

> You know that Madeleine is in big trouble because she's a vast wound in a landscape where wounds aren't allowed to stay open – people have to shut up and heal up. She's in trouble because the film works to a plan that makes trauma speak itself out, speak itself to excess until it dies; this film at the peak of its slyness, when people sweat and lick their lips excessively and pound their chests and grab their hair and twist their heads from side to side, performing this unspeakable torment. (Oyeyemi 34)

Madeleine is the embodiment of painful memory, of the past intruding into the present and robbing the character of their present. Scottie believes that she is haunted, even possessed by the spirit of a woman who had been taken advantage of, robbed of her own child and cast aside. Carlotta Valdes, this spirit from the past enters the present through her *doppelgänger*, Madeleine Elster, who wants to commit suicide similarly to her ancestor. Through Carlotta the artwork turns into a "meditation on time and its illusory conquest," in Richard Allen's words (578). Madeleine becomes the embodiment of both Carlotta and Judy; the three fates are interlinked, and they all are "objects of love reincarnated, remade, over and over" (Duncan 132).

Madeleine is doubly abstracted and manufactured: first by Judy and Gavin Elster, who together create the image of a disturbed woman whose fate is doomed; secondly, Judy is again transformed, this time by Scottie, into the Madeleine he believes he knows. And this woman is never real; not only because of her manufactured nature, but because she exists through Scottie, through his gaze. And he never sees the flesh-and-blood human being: he falls in love with a romantic mirage. Madeleine herself is never present, instead she is always an

unattainable, lost past: her entire persona, her mostly wordless, expressionless detachment gives her an eerie quality. For instance, as Susan White remarks, her trancelike state among the sequoias "speaks of the invasion of the present by the past, of Madeleine as an immutable object of desire" (189).

After Madeleine's (both real and symbolic) death, Judy could gain existence as herself, but Scottie's supposed memory of his lost love forbids the present from manifesting itself, and thus Judy from existing. Nevertheless, although the male perspective seems to rule the film, and to rule the women, the issue is more complex. With the apparition of Judy the woman recovers her reality, and abandons her abstract nature. Through this shift in portrayal and approach I believe, together with Nicholas Haeffner, that Hitchcock's film reveals "an oscillation between identification with and objectification of women" (80). The numerous doubles and dichotomies the film operates with are appealing to the two girls of Oyeyemi's novel.

Maja and Amy Eleni can identify with the two states symbolised by Madeleine and Judy, played by the same person. The great difference in sameness, in one person is what the protagonist of *The Opposite House* and her best friend defiantly embrace. They call it their "personal hysteric" (29, 31, 223), a denomination that in itself signifies the duality of man and woman, object and subject. The hysteric has become a rather derogatory term used in psychoanalysis to label female behaviour not understood by men. But Oyeyemi's characters take charge of this concept and they redefine it, turning it into a symbolic gesture of women reclaiming their selves and the gazes projected at them.

Furthermore, *Vertigo* becomes the symbol of memories contrasting the present, the past intruding upon the present and altering it. But memories in the film, just as memories in the novel (as we shall see in the subsequent analysis) are unreliable. Memory in the film is even more problematic, since it links characters to an inexistent, imagined past: Madeleine's otherworldly connection to her great-grandmother is a story meant to ensnare Scottie, and his memories of his lover, after her suicide, are of a different woman playing a role, staging Madeleine as a role. Amy Eleni makes the parallel between these experiences and Maja's memories explicit when she claims: "Listen, Maja, I think you're pulling a *Vertigo* on me with this distraught chat about oh, something missing in your Cuba memory and how you feel so trapped by your dad not letting you go" (Oyeyemi 229). Through this association Amy Eleni

destabilises Maja's Cuba memory, but she also draws attention to the hidden agency that is there in Hitchcock's female characters as much as in Maja herself. These are women *choosing* to play a role: Judy choosing to let Scottie change her into Madeleine, Maja choosing to surrender to her father's prohibition.

Vertigo is the symbol of Maja's own complex, compound subjectivity, with the woman both as herself and as seen by the male gaze. She is accompanied by her personal hysteric, and haunted by a memory, by a country that may prove to be an illusion. Her experience and her persona in *The Opposite House* are mirrored by the spiral of vertigo, which "suggests the impossibility of attaining a final truth about woman – and hence about man" (Modleski 180). The film's mesmerising title sequence with the spiral recreates the feelings a person suffering from acrophobia may feel when faced with the abyss. This spiral becomes a motif in the movie, reappearing in the staircase of the bell tower, in the rings of the trunk of the Sequoia trees, but also on Madeleine Elster's hair. The spiral haunts Scottie in his dreams, thus making it explicit that it represents "internal, psychological structures that are malfunctioning" (Belton 6). The designer of the title sequence, Saul Bass states: "I wanted to achieve that very particular state of unsettledness associated with *Vertigo* and also a mood of mystery" (Auiler 55). This particular feeling of unsettledness, or a specific unease is what pervades Maja's world in Oyeyemi's *Opposite House*.

Her life, her self as a young woman, living together with her boyfriend Aaron, expecting a baby, trying to find herself between London and Cuba is accentuated through her alter ego, through the persona of the Yoruba goddess. Yemaya Saramagua is an amalgam of Yoruba and Christian beliefs, and of humanity. But her presence is always elusive, always mysterious, just like the spirals in *Vertigo*. She is the very embodiment of femininity, of fluidity, weightless but with a powerful presence. The highly poetic nature of Aya's story in the novel not just opposes Maja's more literal existence, but it also enriches it, mirrors it in a parallel world. In one instance her movement is captured as follows: "Aya steps through her London door and crosses concrete slopes that balance drowsy houses on their shoulders" (161). Aya brings her surroundings to life, and the conventionally lifeless vista of the city is naturalised and also personified. She harmonises with her environment, and brings magic into the dire nature.

The patterns working on the level of the narrative are intricate, difficult to decipher, but the frame structure, operating with the same paragraph at the beginning and end of the novel, gives the story infinite cyclicality. *The Opposite House* utilises dualities, based on Yoruba culture it works through constant twinning, bringing together two contrastive aspects, but at the same time facets of the same self, of life, of the world. The novel begins and (almost) ends with the same sentences: "Sometimes a child with wise eyes is born. And some people will call that child an old soul. And that is surely enough to make God laugh" (Oyeyemi 1, 251). This child brings together birth and death and then again rebirth. She will come to represent loss and remainder, life and death, new beginnings, and the cyclicality of life itself. And this child is Yemaya Saramagua.

2. Yemaya Saramagua and Santería

Yemaya Saramagua is the child with wise eyes, one of the gods of the Yoruba religion. Santería is "a complex of religious cults in the Afro-Cuban population, combining Yoruba African and Spanish Catholic traditions, especially concerning the saints (*santos*) who are identified with the spirits (*orisha*) of the Yoruba pantheon" (Bowker 856). Santería is defined by this visible duality between worlds, between identities and religions. Slaves brought it to Cuba, where it was further developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The narrator of *The Opposite House*, however, tells a slightly different story. The Orisha become more than symbols or detached deities, they suffer together with the humans:

> The Yoruba gods discovered their Cuba in the dark, hidden in bigger emergencies and cries of warning as patrol ships tried to intercept the cargo. The gods were hidden in the fear of being drowned. They were hidden in the unseen smack, smack, smack of the next man's head on the ship's boards as he tried to damage his brain and decrease his market value. The gods were not afraid, but they wept. (Oyeyemi 23-24)

These images make the journey, the fates more present than ever, wounds and pains are palpable in this poetic language. The journey of the Orisha reframes the hardships suffered by the slaves, and it reflects on the fate of black people in Cuba as they embraced this mixed religion: "On arrival, Orishas became beloved in secret. Slaves had to be Catholic and obedient or they'd be killed, or worse" (24). Santería became the symbol of these people's resistance and perseverance, their only tie to their past, to their lost home. Chabella, Maja's mother touches upon the religion's great significance when she states, "I suppose El Jefe was

right to be nervous that something was going on with Santería. Something is going on. Those West Africans brought another country in with them, a whole other country in their heads" (107), proving that even though physically they were robbed of their home, their memories and beliefs could not be taken away from them.

Even though Santería continues to be an integral part of many people's lives, it presents complex issues in Maja's family. As Maja remarks, "Mami is a Santero. She constantly tells me that I don't know what that means" (23). Although the religion is imbued with spiritual and moral complexity for Chabella who, together with her husband, underwent a new self-exile by choosing to move to London ("There is so much of me that hasn't survived with all this moving around. Paris. And Hamburg –," 42), the young protagonist does not share the same devotion, because she was a small child when the migration happened:

> I was seven years old when we came here. I've come to think that there's an age beyond which it is impossible to lift a child from the pervading marinade of an original country, pat them down with a paper napkin and then deep-fry them in another country, another language like hot oil scalding the first language away. I arrived here just before that age. (12)

It seems that she moved early enough in order to have a straightforward identity formed in London, lacking in the complexity of a migrant who may experience insecurity, in-betweenness. However, the novel works in such a way as to contradict this assumption, presenting a personal, subjective portrait of Maja as she strives to find herself while expecting her son. Consequently, the chapter will later revisit this citation, pinning it against Maja's story of search. The discrepancy inside the family does not stop here. Maja's Papi not only resists Santería, but his words are full of scepticism and sarcasm: "Santería is a garbled religion. So it draws on Catholicism, and it draws on Yoruba religion. It's like throwing a rosary in the air and saying it's magic because it fell from a slave's hand. Suffering isn't transformative," he states (76).

Even though these characters' relation to the religion is intricate and even problematic, the novel works through paralleling the life story of this family with that of a peculiar one: Yemaya Saramagua who comes to live in the somewherehouse, which she inhabits with the Kayodes, with other Orisha, and with Proserpine. So a quick presentation of the Orisha is due. In the centre of this religion is the main god, Olodumare, surrounded by a host of gods and goddesses, all fulfilling specific roles in the pantheon. These deities are called Orisha, and various religious rituals of worship centre upon them (Clark 2). The Orisha are complex

figures, supposedly possessing magical powers, and their worship often mirrors this. These deities are "imbued with the ability to subtly affect the visible and invisible world, to use 'magic' to change lives and fortunes, and to control natural phenomena" (Clark 43). Nevertheless, as Mary Ann Clark writes in her book dedicated to Santería, "unlike the Greek gods, the Orisha are not remote deities living high on a mountain peak, rather they are living beings present in the everyday life of their followers" (34). Since, as Clark remarks, most of the mythology relates the times when the Orisha lived upon the earth (34), it is not surprising to find them once again, in Oyeyemi's fictional world, joining the slaves on the ships to Cuba, and inhabiting the Earth alongside mortal beings.

Yemaya Saramagua, as the goddess that occupies centre stage alongside Maja in Oyeyemi's fictional world, is a symbol of both universal femininity and a particular woman, Maja herself. She is the epitome of femininity, already visible from her role among the Orisha. As Clark formulates it, in the Americas Yemaya has become "the patron of the ocean, the source and goal of all rivers" (59). Furthermore, she is the great mother of all Orisha, nurturing and fierce, "subdued, peaceful, and soft," representing that "which nurtures physical, psychological, and spiritual growth" (Clark 59). She overflows with *ache*, the very manifestation of duality, of complexity:

> Aya overflows with *ache*, or power. When the accent is taken off it, *ache* describes, in English, bone-deep pain. But otherwise *ache* is blood . . . fleeing and returning . . . red momentum. *Ache* is, *ache* is is is, kin to fear – a frayed pause near the end of a thread where the cloth matters too much to fail. The kind of need that takes you across water on nothing but bare feet. *Ache* is energy, damage, it is constant, in Aya's mind all the time. She was born that way – powerful, half mad, but quiet about it. (3, emphasis in original)

This concept captures Yemaya Saramagua's reality, the power governing her life. But it cannot be accepted without its English meaning, which points to the opposite of power: a state of vulnerability and piercing pain. In Wellington's words, "Aya, a goddess, lives, loves and aches beyond the human scale." This concept is an example of the "process of mutation" Brenda Cooper recognises in Oyeyemi's novel, through which "Yoruba and English words, images, rituals, and stories negotiate and mutate," thus creating a transit between two distant worlds ("Middle" 118). Yemaya's power, her Yoruba *ache* comes from her divinity, from Olodumare himself, the main god, whereas her English ache is born out of her own mutation, choosing to abandon her home, her face, her identity. As the novel says, "[s]he fled to be born. She fled to be native, to start somewhere, to grow in that same somewhere, to die there. She

didn't know just then that she wasn't quickening towards home, but trusting home to find her" (114).

Yemaya is the embodiment of Maja's own struggles, of her search of a home, of security. The two women "reflect a condition of being adrift" (Shamsie). Their paths intersect in not obvious ways, because they never really meet, but they are inseparable nevertheless. Yemaya is the patron of pregnant women, one whom Maja needs as she is expecting her first child. Even if she is not a devoted follower, Santería and, conversely Aya, is an integral part of Maja's life. It is part of her history, and thus of her identity. For instance, the role Santería plays in her life surfaces through her fond memories (or stories that she heard) of her Bisabuela Carmen (from whom she got her middle name, through which gesture the link between the two women is strengthened), who was a *babalawo*, a Santería priest. Maja identifies with her Bisabuela Carmen, whose credo was that "if you forget your ancestors you forget yourself. Isn't that what it is to run mad, to forget yourself?" (38). Her ancestors, her family, and their gods become parts of who Maja is, and memories become the most important elements of one's journey to find oneself. As Maja claims, "Mami's *apataki* tales aren't only about the gods; they flow and cover her family too, her memories place a mantle around Bisabuela Carmen, whose namesake I am" (37).

Beyond the strong ties this connection reveals about Maja and Santería, her mental link to Bisabuela Carmen is also evocative of the trebly fictional relationship between Madeleleine Elster and her great-grandmother Carlotta Valdes. I say it is trebly fictional, because one can identify the following three distinct fictional planes involved: firstly, the story is an artistic work, secondly, it is an artistic work inside Oyeyemi's fiction, and thirdly, it is the result of the cunning plot Gavin Elster contrives to murder his wife without getting caught. His story, as mentioned previously, claims that Madeleine is mentally tied to her long-passed great-grandmother, who had suffered great hardships in her life. Although fabricated, the story still has an effect both on the characters of the movie and on the ones watching it in Oyeyemi's fictional world. The movie, with the parallel it draws between the two relationships, further underlines the importance Bisabuela Carmen, indirectly, Santería and, to go one step further, her Cuban identity possess for Maja.

This Cuban identity is defined by a life that is constantly interspersed with supernatural and mythical elements, possibly with gods and goddesses involved in the fate of

the person. I agree with Niall Harrison, who in his review of *The Opposite House* remarks that the blending of reality with the magical, with the world of the gods, where Chango slides "into the space left between song and drumbeat" and pierces "veils of spiced smoke" (Oyeyemi 37) presents rather "a particular way of seeing the world," a peculiar life philosophy that governs the fictional world of the novel.

Maja's becomes a hybrid identity in which the West and its mythology, its culture mingles with the Yoruba gods and myths. The complexity inherent in her identity, the blurring of the boundaries between the two worlds manifests itself through Yemaya and her magical world. The basement of the somewherehouse where Aya moves has two doors, one opening onto London, the other one onto Lagos. Whereas the Lagos door maintains her connection to her origins, and is seemingly untainted, gradually the Western world seems to enter Lagos and Yemaya herself. For instance, when she returns to Cuba, in Habana she meets a watchmaker who resembles a character from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*: he places "a thick glass bottle on her palm, 'Drink Me' size from Wonderland when Alice was too big" (138). One of the greatest European stories of all times suddenly starts to taint Cuban mythology, rewriting its stories.

Furthermore, Aya's mother has an alter ego, whose name is Proserpine (or Persephone, as European mythology calls her). Dualities enveloping her character abound in the narrative: Proserpine, a European incarnation, is born out of Aya's Mama, as a new personality, who appears when her mother is pregnant with Aya, and is meant to kill her Papa, who made the mother fall and endangered the foetus. With naming this emergent personality, Aya's mother ascribes to her power and individuality, and thus she becomes a dangerous alter ego that starts to haunt the family. The legend of Proserpine also tells of her having two separate existences: "Proserpine signifies the seed-corn, which, when cast into the ground, lies there concealed, that is, she is carried off by the god of the underworld; it reappears, that is, Proserpine is restored to her mother. Spring leads her back to the light of day" ("Pluto and Prosperine"). Proserpine is either buried in darkness or reborn and restored to the light. The two states always interchange: "This is the world of the Diasporic, who does not live in one place; it is at the same time a European story, one of the myths on which Oyeyemi has been nurtured and which she has to place alongside her stories of African and Christian and merged gods and religions" (Cooper, "Middle" 112).

The gods are meant to provide believers with solace, with security, but in the world of Oyeyemi's novel they are just as lost as their worshipers. Yemaya consciously chooses to flee her home, but her new home is unsteady. Lesley Feracho, for example, recognises the "anxiety of displacement" in Yemaya's character (46), which Helen Cousins sees as mirroring "the impossibility of Maja's attempts to form a cultural identity based on her own history in Cuba" (3). These Orisha, and their mortal counterparts, face an identity crisis that can have fatal consequences. Possibly the most extreme instance is met through Amy, who appears in the somewherehouse, in Aya's world as an elusive, weightless mirage: "'Yemaya, I have the trick of crossing heaviness with lightness. I could jump in the air right now and not come down. I wouldn't go any higher, either. I'd just stay there. They'd ring bells and tell lies: a soul has gone to heaven" (193). She is a many-faced Orisha who has lost her memory, and consequently her self. Her crisis is so pronounced that she tries to commit suicide, she wants to escape Earth in the weightlessness she describes above. Amy has lost her true self, that of Ochun, as she abandoned her home.

Feracho claims that "Amy's dilemma reveals the dangers of an irretrievable original home and the difficulties of negotiating a process of hybridity that is in actuality more assimilationist than truly egalitarian" (47). Amy and Yemaya, the pantheon of the Orisha struggle with the same in-betweenness, rootlessness as their followers. Nevertheless, the myths surrounding them, the rituals of their worship function as a living and empowering cultural memory that strives to survive despite the new environment, the new world. The relationship between gods and mortals is never straightforward or unproblematic: "Those gods who trip us up, then haul us up, then string us up, who understand that it hurts, but also understand that it needs to. They're deadly friends from stories, their names braided into explanations for the heavy nights edged with uncertain light like dull pearls" (35). In Anita Harris Satkunananthan's words, this is the manifestation of "the intimate relationship" between the Orisha and the immigrants "within the psyche of hybrid émigrés" ("Otherworlds" 210).

3. The Somewherehouse

“A somewherehouse is a brittle tower of worn brick and cedar wood, its roof cradled in a net of brushwood. Around it is a hush, the wrong quiet of woods when the birds are afraid,” we read on the first page of *The Opposite House* (Oyeyemi 1). This is a magical house, possessing strange powers, emanating sweeping energies that affect its surroundings. The somewherehouse is Yemaya Saramagua’s new home, and consequently it appears in her story as an integral part of the world of the gods. It brings together the concrete and the abstract, the palpable with the elusive, the real with the magical: “On the second floor, rooms and rooms and rooms, some so tiny, pale and clean that they are no more than fancies, sugar-cubed afterthoughts stacked behind doorways” (1).

The house is conceptualised as incorporating duality in its very essence, with the basement containing two doors, leading Aya into two contrastive and distant worlds: “One door takes Yemaya straight out into London and the ragged hum of a city after dark. The other door opens out onto the striped flag and cooking-smell cheer of that tattered jester, Lagos – always, this door leads to a place that is floridly day” (1). London is darkness, whereas Lagos is light, the latter signifying Aya’s past, her origins, her identity. London, in contrast, is alien, a foreign place that robs the goddess of her face, of her personality, but gives her the possibility of a new beginning, of rebirth.

The somewherehouse, as its name suggests, is at once anchored and free: it is spatially conveyed, but it could be anywhere. The house is meant to project a neutral territory from which the two worlds can open up: a haven that functions as a temporary home to Aya and other beings connected to Yoruba beliefs (the Kayodes, Proserpine, etc.). As Oyeyemi claims in an interview, “it's just this kind of casual chaos that Yemaya is kind of hiding in while she tries to figure out where her home is; she doesn't really know where she belongs” (Martin). It is meant to mask her struggles, or to provide her with solutions to her loss of self, to her homelessness. But ultimately it is revealed to function more as a mirror of its own inhabitant, of the goddess, just as Oyeyemi formulates it: “it's almost the physical expression of her, like the two doors that kind of go to different places” (Martin).

The somewherehouse is a strange manifestation of its inhabitant’s psyche: it is an unreal world that is meant to house a goddess in crisis, and thus chaos becomes its most pronounced characteristic. It mirrors Aya’s state of mind, her own liminal experiences. Satkunananthan proposes a reading of the house as reflecting the psyche and its inner

workings, in which the floors evoke different states, with the basement suggesting a sort of "'descending'" ("Otherworlds" 208) into a layer of Yemaya's subconscious. The house is "organic" ("Otherworlds" 201), an integral part of life, capable of influencing the fates of its inhabitants. For instance, Proserpine, "who has come in through the London door with almost no luggage, her fingers threaded through the handle of a shopping bag; a patina of expensive sunshine," thus invading Yemaya and her past life, tainting it with London and the present, chooses the "room that Aya has never chosen to sleep in because it sticks out of the house's side" (Oyeyemi 128). Whereas Aya is searching for harmony and peace in the somewherehouse, Proserpine is the alien element who disturbs the peace. She is like a tumour that sickens Aya, and thus the house itself.

The somewherehouse is a liminal space, straddling London and Lagos, the North and the South, but also blending reality with the supernatural. It becomes the "embodiment of the fraught meeting place of in-between cultures" (Satkunananthan, "Textual" 47). To quote Brenda Cooper, "[t]he house is a crucible, which condenses history and enacts the process whereby African deities live and syncretize with foreign gods and myths, in Cuba and in London, or die in their failure to do so" ("Middle" 112). It is elusive, ungraspable, belonging to no one fixed place, but capable of transgressing and blending places, spaces. With its two doors in the basement, the somewherehouse embodies hybridity itself, it functions as a transit zone, maybe similarly to Augé's non-places that never constitute a home or any kind of fixture. This house reflects transience and mutability.

This magical house is "an imaginative space somewhere betwixt and between a real, historical London and a fantastical spiritual plain constructed out of syncretic Santería religious mythology," through which the novel "explores the trauma of cultural and bodily displacement" (Buckley and Ilott 1). Its purpose is to both separate and unite the two geographical points, and the two worlds. The most accentuated experience is of liminality, one that readers of the novel will share with the protagonists. I agree with Chloe Buckley and Sarah Ilott, who in their introduction to *Telling It Slant*, a collection of essays focusing on Oyeyemi's literary output to date, claim the following: "Her novels require their readers to occupy a liminal space, unable to anchor themselves firmly either in the 'real' historical world or in a purely imaginative realm" (1). The entire book is infused with a strong sense of insecurity, born out of the rootlessness all the characters of this fictional world exhibit.

To return to the plot of the novel, the somewherehouse connects Yemaya to both Lagos and London, and thus to her past and her future. Space and time intermingle so that they become impossible to separate. The house joins not only physical spaces, but blends physical worlds with supernatural worlds, and it represents a temporal location in-between realities, as Satkunananthan formulates it ("Otherworlds" 206). And although the house is part of Yemaya's world and narrative, its London door opens right into Maja's new home, and thus the house braces Aya's and Maja's worlds too. Their fates cross paths exactly through the somewherehouse, and they become integral parts of the construction: with Satkunananthan's words, they stand for disparate temporal realities represented as different layers in the somewherehouse ("Otherworlds" 208).

The somewherehouse in particular, but also houses in general come to represent states of the mind in *The Opposite House*. Even the novel's title focuses on the image of the house, which image becomes the manifestation of the psyche. It both reflects the mental states of its inhabitants, and influences the people who get in contact with it. The novel is replete with houses that surpass their concrete realities. For instance, in Yemaya's story the reader meets Amy, who is gradually revealed to be a Yoruba goddess like Aya, but who underwent such a drastic change that she is unrecognisable. Consequently Amy is unstable and elusive, and even tries to commit suicide, craving to disappear from this world. She "lives on the top floor of a tall house with stairs that go apologetically naked after their third rotation" (Oyeyemi 161). This image reminds one of Hitchcock's winding stairs, like the bell tower in *Vertigo*, which is a complex symbol of the psyche, of the feeling of vertigo as well, but also of the feminine. The nakedness of the stairs in Amy's home represents her own exposure and vulnerability, at once physical and mental.

The houses of *The Opposite House*, central in every respect to the novel, as quasi-characters, remind readers of Gaston Bachelard's definitions of the house in *The Poetics of Space*. This novel and Bachelard's treatise share a heightened focus on poetics, on the intimate exploration of space, one that differs from more widely practised geographical approaches to space. Bachelard's theory relies upon the claim that "[o]n whatever theoretical horizon we examine it, the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being" (xxxvi). The house, the home is the space that reflects upon our selves, our innermost worlds. The somewherehouse, together with all the other houses, flats featured in

Oyeyemi's novel, combines that unity and complexity Bachelard emphasises, which is manifested in the novel through the image of these houses as both intimate and extended, offering abode for the characters, but also encompassing entire worlds. And, just as Bachelard remarks, "imagination augments the values of reality" (3). It is the subject and their psyche that make that space into a whole, emanating both intimacy and universality.

The house is described with minutiae, reflecting upon the unity between the physical space and its almost ethereal inhabitant: "Amy's warm honey smell drugs every hollow; the immediate inside rectangle of doorways, the cracks in the corners of the window cases" (161). The smell once again, similarly to Yemaya's, is the powerful tool through which the goddess takes possession of her environment. In the somewherehouse, for instance, the air is "born in Aya's pans," the smell brings the house to life, or into reality, and it envelopes everything ("The smell clings to the rough blue carpet underfoot," 4) and everyone ("The smell ropes and rubs itself against your hair and skin," 4). The inhabitant's presence in both houses changes the very reality of the house, and a symbiotic relationship commences.

Amy's counterpart in the real world, in London, Amy Eleni also inhabits a peculiar space indeed. Although at first glance ordinary, there is something disturbing in the blandness of her home. The "deconstructed chest of drawers" (175) that is her flat points to a complexity in the order: it is a flat that never becomes a home: "There is waiting-room magic here, a polite insistence that these rooms are in fact a space you pass through on your way to somewhere else" (175). Amy Eleni's small, impersonal apartment is similar to the somewherehouse that captures a rather transitory state, with no promise of stability. The key to the connection between the flat and Amy Eleni may be found in the above-described blandness of the place. It seems that Amy Eleni constantly strives to be somebody, a person with an exciting background, with a rich heritage. But her looks and her name do not make that possible. That is why she is adamant about people calling her "Amy Eleni": "Eleni was her middle name but she took her Cypriot heritage seriously and found it hard enough to keep up when she looked like a common-or-garden variety English kid and had a surname like Lang" (33).

It seems that the two worlds of *The Opposite House* do function through opposing houses from the real and the supernatural universes of the characters. The above-presented characters and their houses work in patterns of interconnections and oppositions. And,

obviously enough, since there is a counterpart to Yemaya in the person of Maja, their homes also come to play central roles in the narratives. The somewherehouse is thus connected to the home Maja shares with Aaron, her boyfriend. Beyond the first impression of it being an ordinary flat, the reader realises that the home of the young couple possesses some hidden crevices and pockets that greatly impact the protagonist's state of mind. Maja is in a constant state of impatience, she cannot find herself in the new flat: "I'm still not used to Aaron's flat, even though I moved in four months ago, even though he calls it 'ours'" (18). The space is alien, personified and reminiscent of a cruel landlord, unwilling to accept the outsider, the foreigner: "The house is in the middle of a semi-detached row; always at attention, jutting straight up with a windowed stare that holds sleepy intelligence near its base, as if the right command could send it leaping sideways" (18).

This house, this home becomes a powerful representative of London, of life for the migrant in this Western metropolis. Contrary to utopian images of multiculturalism, Oyeyemi depicts a London that is uncomfortable, even hostile for her characters (Buckley and Ilott 5). As Chloe Buckley and Sarah Ilott remark, Maja's "London flat becomes a haunted space as the novel progresses, and its proximity to the bleak and decaying spiritual realm of the opposite house becomes increasingly apparent" (5). The flat, the house rejects Maja, and the novel's rather Gothic rendering of her experiences further deepens the supernatural connections between humans and gods.

Aaron's flat is at the bottom of this "converted two-floor house," which, interestingly, has a middle floor "forced between the green-carpeted staircase that leads up to Miss Lassiter's flat and the peeling wooden steps" (18-19). The two visible floors hide a third one, akin to the subconscious of the house that seemingly wants to expel Maja. And the painful process of the struggle between house and person becomes manifest through the appearance of a leak, one that originates exactly from this hidden floor. But this leak, this hostility actually originates from Maja herself: it is the reflection of her impossibility to find a home, to recover her roots. The leak, which "is too cruel, it bypasses me and talks to the other one who is not me" (221), becomes a maddening force that overwhelms Maja with its "self-orchestrated, maddening musical score for after dark" (122).

But this leak proves to be more than the house rejecting Maja as its new tenant. It is Maja's own subconscious manifesting through the drips that drive her mad. I agree with

Satkunananthan who claims that "the incessant leaking of the ceiling seems to correspond with Maja's pregnancy, and the annoyance caused by the leaking increases with Maja's grappling with her personal 'hysteric'" ("Otherworlds" 210). It is the pregnancy that makes Maja's instability more pronounced and her search for stability more urgent. And her "personal hysteric" comes to surface as more powerful than ever, manifesting itself through the leak, through her feelings about the leak. As Satkunananthan states, the leak "becomes the link between Maja's physical space and the living space of her 'hysteric' in a 'somewherehouse' that nestles between Lagos and London" ("Otherworlds" 208). Maja's hysteric and the flat (which are connected) create the link between the two worlds, since Maja's personal hysteric has an individual existence in the somewherehouse. It is both Aya and Proserpine, two forces that are connected but also contradictory, making manifest the struggles and conflict that define the hysteric. The house itself, which provides a home for both Aya and Proserpine, is defined by illogicality, by an aura of magic and contradiction. Its trees have branches that "brush the ground" and "fountain in twiggy brackets from earth upwards," whereas their roots "are buried in the sky" (214). Is this the ultimate image of uprootedness? It is the mirror image of Maja's world, but one that definitely incorporates a sense of impossibility.

The houses of *The Opposite House* are infused with a powerful symbolism, which I believe coincides with Paul Connerton's definition of certain houses as "loci of memory" (*Modernity* 21), continuously bringing into present their own and their inhabitants' past. As it can be seen in the novel, these houses, these spaces are not lifeless or static: "they are continually transforming what passes through them, for it is at the hearth that the different elements that enter the house, kin and affine, meat and vegetables, are mixed and blended, so that the hearth is materially and figuratively the site where the history of these transformations takes place" (Connerton, *Modernity* 21). They are powerful entities that not only reflect upon lives lived in them, but interact with the human selves, and act.

The somewherehouse, the most symbolic of these houses, is meant to keep the connection between South and North, between past and future intact. But the novel is replete with signs pointing to the impossibility of maintaining both worlds. When Aya flees to Lagos, that world already shows signs of the North, of the Western culture, tainting the South, invading the past. And at the end of the novel the Lagos door is "nailed shut" (250), there is

no return, the past disappears into oblivion. Gods and goddesses are unrecognisable, they even become amnesiacs who lose their past, lose their identity. I agree with Feracho who interprets "Yemaya's act of burning down the somewherehouse as a response to the trauma of forgetting, alongside Maja's mental deterioration, isolation, and unstable identities [that] seem to indicate failed desires of recovery and reconnection" (47). The act of burning gives the impression of finality, there is no turning back, the past is lost forever. However, the novel does not end on this note.

II. Maja/Yemaya

1. Hysterics

The two worlds of the novel, though they explicitly never intersect, are connected in more than one way. Santería as a religion bridging geographical distances, preserving shards of the past and, conversely, of the identity of its practitioners, is one of the links connecting Maja and her family to the world of the Orisha who inhabit the somewherehouse. Another spiritual nexus is conceived by Maja's "personal hysteric," as she herself calls it. Maja considers it to be an integral part of her psyche, like an alter ego that is always there in the background: "she is blank, electricity dancing around a filament, singing to kill" (29). It is elusive and dangerous, both appealing and repulsive: "designer made […], flattering and comfortable," always lurking, waiting to take over (29).

The hysteric as a distinct aspect of Maja's subjectivity is a defining element of her life, and it gets special attention in her narrative. The emphasis is peculiar, since it invokes more than one complex issue in connection to hysteria, femininity and trauma. In the previously mentioned interview given to Michel Martin, it seems that Maja's hysteric reflects on the hardships of being a young woman, of getting by in general. And indeed, the first presentation of the hysteric does facilitate a reading of communal sentiments ("Like every girl," 29) standing behind the conception of the hysteric, presenting it as something ordinary and normal. Furthermore, Oyeyemi enriches this reading by evoking a personal realisation about her own life, about her father who had an innate sense of women needing to talk more quietly (Martin). As a consequence, she and her sister became silent, as their father always asked

them to stop shouting when they were speaking at a normal volume, whereas he never considered his son's speech to be too loud. The hysteric is meant to provide liberation from under such constraints. This would be the first reading of the "alter ego."

One cannot bypass, however, the historical weight this term carries. It is a curious choice to include in a contemporary novel such a controversial concept, deemed for a long time as pejorative and offensive to womanhood. But Oyeyemi's text chooses a self-reflexive and ironic take that, nevertheless, is combined with the wish to redefine and redeem the hysteric for femininity, for humanity at large. Through the generalisation that claims that every girl has her own hysteric, through the casual relation to instances of self-abuse and suicide attempts, the hysteric becomes a vehicle through which mental instability is approached by the novel. In some instances the manifestation of the hysteric is presented as something "normal," and sometimes it is enveloped in such a heightened lyricism that it makes even self-mutilation beautiful:

> One night, drunk, drunk, drunk, I dropped my empty shot glass and a full for Luke, sat down beside the pieces and arranged them in my skin, twisting clear flowers planted to grow from my soles, my arms. It hurt. But wearing my hysteric, it became a matter of art and pain and so on. It was extreme, it was because of tension. (29)

As reviewer Olutola Ositelu remarks, by "presenting it in an everyday – almost mundane way," Oyeyemi "makes the reader aware of how easy it could be to cross the sanity line, how things that should raise alarm can become quite routine and ordinary to the sufferer." There is an effortlessness to the hysteric as it takes over, as Maja gives in to it.

Emphasis throughout the novel is laid on the gendered aspect of the concept. And there is a great history that is thus put into motion. Hysteria has been around for centuries: as psychoanalyst Anouchka Grose states, the term "hysterikos" was used as early as before the fourth century BCE for different "feminine" complaints such as "bad moods, seizures, and morbid thoughts – all of which were believed to be brought about by problems of the womb" (xv). Nevertheless, hysteria as a clinical condition was "invented" (Didi-Huberman) only at the end of the nineteenth century, by Jean-Martin Charcot, who "had famously 'scientificised' hysteria in the 1880s in France at the Sâlpetrière hospital, demonstrating the condition's symptoms in lectures using live subjects and cataloguing the symptoms through a series of published photographs and images (*Clinical Lectures*)" (Devereux 23). Charcot's student,

Sigmund Freud turned his attention towards hysteria and, together with Joseph Breuer, developed the new science of psychoanalysis (Devereux 24).

The real change came with Freud whose theories "situated hysteria not in a physical lesion but in a kind of internal psychical scar produced through trauma or repression" (Devereux 24). One of his realisations brings us closer to the connection between hysteria and memory as it will be analysed in *The Opposite House*. In one of his lectures titled "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena," Freud writes that "in hysterical patients there are nothing but impressions which have not lost their affect and whose memory has remained vivid" (37). This means that reality and imagination, impressions are interchangeable, and thus the concept of memory is shaken. For the hysterical person an impression can become realer than the real, and thus a new kind of remembrance is born.

Freud did not stop here, however. He furthered his theory by focusing on women and deducing that hysteria is a gendered pathological state, the result of women lacking male genitalia, and hence being scarred from as early as being born. As he writes, "the hysterical neurosis is nothing but an excessive overaccentuation of the typical wave of repression through which the masculine type of sexuality is removed and the woman emerges" ("General" 124). "Like every girl," invoked above, in Oyeyemi's novel receives an edge through this reading, showing an ironic take on the Freudian psychoanalytic theory. The novel does not shy away from expressing reactions to these earlier theories concerning femininity, such as Maja's stern claim that "[h]ysteria has got nothing to do with an empty womb" (223), reflecting on the "wandering womb" theories of yore.

So there is a constant ironic undertone to the quasi-character of the hysteric that functions as a double to Maja. To use Mark S. Micale's words, hysteria became a term used "as a dramatic medical metaphor for everything that men found mysterious or unmanageable" in women (320), and indeed Oyeyemi takes advantage of it. The novel embraces its characters' femininity, their complexity, and it constantly moves at the threshold of sanity/insanity. One of hysteria's greatest appeals for the novel can be summed up by Derritt Mason and Ela Przybylo's introduction to *ESC*: "hysteria is a 'great disorder' because it exceeds definition, escapes conclusive analysis, and persists as a slippery, enigmatic possession of the body; hysteria is a disorder that, in turn, disorders" (1). In *The Opposite*

House the hysteric becomes the embodiment and manifestation of the complexity of feelings and issues the protagonists exhibit and face. It is the very symbol of the ineffable.

In all the literary pieces figuring in this treatise, it seems that memory, remembering itself is connected somehow to a traumatic experience. Sometimes it leads to the loss of memories, and consequently to the loss of self, other times it leads to a radical redefinition of the identity of the protagonist, and so on. Very different manifestations can be met in the novels under investigation. And Oyeyemi's *Opposite House* filters the traumatic experience and the crisis of the self through the phenomenon of hysteria. Great emphasis is placed on the relationship between hysteria and time, the subject's connection to their past in particular. As Mason and Przybylo claim, "hysteria dwells in a kind of forgotten time or timelessness" (14), it always has a problematic relationship to time: "hysteria seems to collapse, stretch, and distort time, resisting linear temporality" (Mason, and Przybylo 14).

Elaine Showalter redefines hysteria as "a universal human response to emotional conflict" (7). Remembrance through hysteria will be distorted, always deviating from linearity, from coherence. What it reveals is a visceral experience of crisis, one caused by a past trauma that the subject is incapable of processing. "Through remembering and housing the prememorable and prephysical (of infancy) and the unbearable (of trauma), hysterical time opens us up on to startling spaces uninhabitable by spoken words, audible gestures, or culturally intelligible means of relating," state Mason and Przybylo, who thus shed light on the emphasis we need to place on looking at the protagonist in relation to her surroundings, as she experiences everything through her body.

As psychologist Richard A. Chefetz states, "hysteria is not always describable via language because traumatic emotional experience is partly embodied" (83). Maja's hysteric manifests itself in peculiar ways, it is symbolised by such body parts as the hair. The hair is a strong motif in *The Opposite House*, one that represents the greatest intimacy, closeness, expressed through corporeal connection. As Cooper remarks, hair "is at the cutting edge between the material and the figurative" ("Diaspora" 53). Maja's hair is gradually revealed to be the representation of her femininity, of her identity. When a boyfriend makes her cut her hair, she exhibits clear signs of disturbance that the boy registers: "he said he was unhappy that I didn't seem to love my hair in its natural state" (30). This story highlights the discrepancy between Maja and her boyfriend, between woman and man, having different

conceptions about the natural state of hair. This instance shows a poisoned individual who is coerced into surrendering herself. The result is visceral: "I ran a bath; the hysteric came and I was persuaded to try and drown myself" (30).

Maja's hair and hysteric belong together, and they are there to forbid Maja from surrendering her power, her identity. It is not surprising then that her hair is difficult to manage, and it is Amy Eleni (who also has a very distinct idea about her own hysteric) who can handle it. Amy Eleni knows Maja, knows her hair, and thus she brings out a new "personality" from them: "really my hair is simple – once it is washed and fed with coconut oil, it sighs and falls asleep" (67). Maja's hair emphasises her femininity, separates her from men, but it also highlights her African origins. In Cooper's words, "[t]he visceral texture of African hair stands for the racism that unites black people's experience outside of Africa" ("Diaspora" 53). This realisation brings hair closer to Maja's hysteric, since both manifestations prove to have dual roles for her. They anchor her to her past, to her origins, and thus they are meant to help her maintain her identity; but this anchoring that happens in the Western world always singles her out, never allows her to truly belong. It ultimately leads to a sense of liminal existence, Maja finding herself between two cultures, belonging to neither of them.

Cousins discusses the alien aspect of this experience too, when she focuses on the subject's positioning between the two cultures. As she states, women are "expected to retain aspects of the 'traditional' through multiculturalism's insistence on diversity (often reinforced by their own patriarchal cultures), they are also required by multiculturalism to conform to the host culture by dispensing with aspects of traditions which discomfort the host" (13). In Maja's case hair is a visible link connecting her to her African identity, and she notices how mothers ban their daughters "from straightening [their hair] and [help them] comb out into a fan" (Oyeyemi 93). But this, and its manifestation as her hysteric, is exactly that force that prevents her from conforming to the Western world, and thus finding a new home there.

The volatile nature of the hysteric is revealed most expressively through instances when it urges Maja to take her life, such as her realisation that "[t]here's someone inside of me, and she says I must die" (35). Although sometimes liberating, the hysteric is rather possessive, keeping Maja under her influence. It takes over her body, just like Amy Eleni's hysteric does with her (it "walks three paces behind me at all times, and when it's all a bit

much, I kind of hang back and she kind of hurries forward, and she jumps on my back and takes me down. Then she stands up in my place," 31). The motif of possession is how the transit between the two worlds is most easily captured: Yemaya, the Orisha migrating to a new world, is defined by possession: she, just as all the Orisha, needs to identify with Christian saints and Biblical figures in order to survive. But her embodying others does not stop here. She enters the body of Maja and, before her, that of her mother Chabella, through the hysteric.

And whenever she appears, a child, a new life is involved. And when the new life starts developing inside her, Maja's entire body reacts to it, senses the new arrival, which can be interpreted as a different kind of possession. As she claims, her hair tells her that "something was different" (9) inside her, there is a change in her body. And that is her pregnancy.

2. Motherhood, Womanhood

The two worlds – ordinary and supernatural – seamlessly weave into one another, with the characters becoming doubles or alter egos for each other. The hysteric, Maja's alter ego, both nurturing and volatile, is a force that creates the link between the two worlds, a force that links Maja with Yemaya Saramagua, the Orisha of the Yoruba religion. Even though Maja is sceptical about her mother's worshipping rituals, her belief, her hysteric creates a deep, instinctual connection that seems to truly unfold in her pregnancy. Her entire body gets under the influence of her hysteric, coupled with her son who is growing inside her. She senses that "something is happening here, something that doesn't fall into good, OK, or bad." She needs reinforcement, she needs a sense of security: "I keep thinking, maybe if I could just know what my son looks like, who my son is, then I will be all right" (120). Maja is not alone in this disturbing state; she acknowledges herself as the member of a long line of women who might have gone through similar experiences ("I have strangeness in my family, a woman who was a priest when she wasn't supposed to be," 120 – she turns to her Bisabuela Carmen in this moment of strangeness, since she strongly identifies with her foremother).

Maja seems to be possessed, possibly by Yemaya herself, during her pregnancy. But she is not the first woman to be possessed: "I have strangeness in my family" resonates with a

shared history (or "hystory," to use Showalter's term) of possession. Yemaya is principally the patron of pregnant women and, as such, she visits Chabella too during her pregnancy with Tomás, Maja's younger brother. Witnessing her possessed mother becomes a defining memory for Maja. One day her *Mami* descends the stairs "wrapped in nothing but a cloth of preternatural white, with strands of her hair swimming around her face, strands of her hair tied with little flags of white cloth" (107). Her entire body becomes a canvas for an overflow of feelings, and for the life slowly developing inside it: "Tomás became part of the outfit too: […] it was he that made the white flow" (107).

The scene abounds in feelings, unuttered words, happenings that the young girl senses and later, as an adult, understands in their complexity. Chabella puts on some folk music while revealing deep-seated frustrations about her childhood, connected to *apataki*, the dance of "the roots people, the ones who didn't have any money" (107). Chabella is in a state of trance, looking "wild, wilder than animals," a trait pregnant women seem to share in the world of *The Opposite House*. And as she dances, Chabella becomes "Yemaya Saramagua, a sure, slow swell in her arms and her hips like water after a long thirst, her arms calling down rain, her hands making secret signs, snatching hearts" (108).

The women in Maja's family seem to be most under the influence of their hysterics when they are expectant mothers. They sometimes fall into trance-like states, other times exhibit signs of delusion, or even madness. Mother teaches daughter about *Gelassenheit*: "the longing to let go and collapse under holy madness" (10). This *Gelassenheit*, according to Satkunananthan, is the result of these women's state of being between realities, with a hybrid voice resulting in an elision between cultures (57). *Gelassenheit* overpowers Maja in moments of crisis. The word resonates in her ears, and its power takes charge:

> I lift my head from his shoulder and touch my lips to the skin that crinkles over his Adam's apple. My teeth latch onto him and I clamp down hard, so hard that my teeth find each other again through his skin
>
> (he *shouts*)
>
> and I am not thinking anything in particular, just that I have to hurt him. (181, emphasis in original)

We see a woman who lost control, who became a monster, driven by a hunger for pain. She is reminiscent of the Western image of the vampire, or the embodiment of the soucouyant, the Caribbean soul-eating entity (Satkunananthan, "Textual" 44). Alison Rudd rightly points out the composite nature of the soucouyant, a phenomenon that comes to represent the mixture of

cultural influences the women of *The Opposite House* internalise: in Rudd's words, it is a "hybrid of vampire, ghost and zombie" (51). The phenomenon captures Maja's liminal state and her resulting obscurity, her desperate search for some cultural certainty.

Besides this aspect, however, one cannot ignore the sexual charge of this manifestation. Bloodsucking itself is sexual "with its penetration of a supine body and exchange of bodily fluids," and hence the soucouyant embodies female sexual voracity (Anatol 65). Maja's outburst becomes part of her being under the influence of her hysteric, her alter ego that reinforces her female identity. And this hysteric is the most pronounced as Maja is expecting her son. Her sexual body becomes the centre of all experiences, the outlet through which she expresses herself. That is how her previously cited instance of *Gelassenheit*, her surrender to madness, condenses the complex nature of her mental and physical state in pregnancy.

Her body, tightly linked to the new life gradually forming inside it, takes over language, becoming the most accurate communicator of her intricate state. In the previous unit I presented her hair's role in becoming a carrier of her feelings and a manifestation of her own self. Furthermore, Maja's entire body is in harmony with her mental state, and her knowledge of her son is uncanny, possibly delusional. Her waiting started very early on, when she was only five years old, and it never stopped (Oyeyemi 5). It seems that her entire life revolves around having a son. Even without medical reinforcement, she is certain that "my son is coming" (5).

Despite the incessant waiting, despite Maja's supernatural certainty, her relationship to her unborn son is complicated, often inimical. She feels that the time is not right, she is too young ("Twenty-four not being old enough, I want to tell my son, *Not now, please*," 16, emphasis in original), she is certain that "I am going to be a terrible mother; my son has raised the alarm" (5). Her body, with the child inside of it, shows signs that Maja interprets as prophecising her failure as a mother: "He is desperately pushing my stomach away from him" (5). Just as with Chabella expecting Tomás, the bump becomes part of the mother's body, but is also given autonomy and power. Maja dreads her son's approach, and as a result her own body becomes dangerous and scary: "I am scared to touch my stomach, not because it is tender, but because it has begun to swell beyond the point where it can be comfortably rubbed

with one hand. If I cup it with both hands the bump might rise to the space I allow it" (98). The gothic traits of this relationship are evident, just as Chloe Buckley shows (41).

Her unborn child often acts similarly to the soucouyant, the monster previously described, who sucks out the life of its host. Pregnancy itself is thus presented as a highly problematic issue, raising great insecurities, even conflicts inside the woman. Ketu H. Katrak, in her *Politics of the Female Body*, draws attention to the obtrusive nature of the patriarchal society in equating womanhood with motherhood. As she states, "[i]n many traditional societies, a woman's sole purpose is to bear children; motherhood is her sole and only identity" (209). Katrak discusses traditional societies, whereas Doris Witt, in her paper about eating disorders and black female identities, chooses a steep dialectical position, claiming that "[y]oung white women purportedly want nothing more than to be thin; young Black women, nothing more than to be pregnant" (248).

And indeed, Maja seems to conform to this predestination: she has been longing for a son from a very early age and, as I previously stated, it seems that her entire life is advancing towards the moment when she becomes a mother. However, there is an inherent resistance, noticeable in the previously presented instances, which shows that motherhood is problematic. In Cousins' words, "[f]or Maja, who has always expected to have children […] pregnancy is experienced as an almost malign seizure of her body" (14). She resists her son by "eating crap," but later gives in to his demands: "the boy needs seeds and fresh fruit and oily fish and folic acid and carefulness and stuff" (8).

The image of the child is replete with symbolic meanings. As it will be analysed later, the image of Maja's own childhood self haunts her throughout the novel, initially promising false certainty, later leading her into a crisis and destabilising her entire persona. Buckley draws a clear connection between Maja's unreliable memories as a child and her relation to the unborn child, which, according to Buckley, "she paradoxically conceives of as symbolic of a hopeful future *and* as a parasite that threatens to take over her body" (42, emphasis in original).

The complicated relationship between mother and son surfaces through the issue of consumption. Food and eating become the exteriorisation of Maja's psychological states. "Food: everything I eat, my mouth lets it go, my stomach heaves painful, sour streams," notices the pregnant woman, drawing attention to pains, or even to possible resistance against

the foetus (16). Her entire body seems to decay: "My breasts are rotten lumps hooked into my ribcage, and I can't touch my body at all, I can't" (16). Maja is distanced from her own body and, conversely, from her sanity. This body, taken over by the baby, feels alien and distant, forced into eating. When Aaron, Maja's boyfriend rather forcefully feeds her, she becomes objectified into a body that needs to pass food to the foetus inside: "In his eyes I am a throat working down red juice, I am a shaking hand and a spoon and beyond that his baby" (231).

Chloe Buckley interestingly remarks that "[i]n this novel, both children and mothers regurgitate food, expressing a double abjection that suggests this pouring of desire into the child is insupportable on either side" (54). Maja's struggles with her pregnancy are in the forefront of this rather abject dynamic, however, Maja's brother Tomás, as a child shows the other side of this spectrum, with Maja an attentive observer of his resistance. He seems to be elusive from early on, his sister feeling compelled to watch him for cot death, to shelter him from all dangers. Tomás suffers from reflux, he is unable to keep the food down, and through this condition the boy comes to contribute to the row of characters who have problematic relations to food, to consumption in general. Sarah Ilott claims that "[i]f eating signifies assimilation and a shared identity (shared cultural knowledge), then *The Opposite House* is more concerned with the failure to ingest, whether this is through anorexia, reflux, or morning sickness" (136). She understands Tomás's condition as reflecting on his identity, which is different from his family's since he is the only one born in the UK: "Tomás is presented as having a disrupted sense of identity – British, yet the wrong colour – causing him at one point to cover his face with edible white face paint in order to become invisible and run faster" (136). The failure of consumption becomes a statement, a sign of resistance, born out of his identity crisis.

With this complex attention placed on children and mothers, *The Opposite House* "both explores the burden placed upon the child and figures the child itself as burden" (Buckley 54). Besides Tomás's aforementioned struggles, as a counterpart to them one can think of Maja's conflicting feelings about her unborn son, which get expression through the imagery of a rat, invoked by her friend Amy Eleni. When she tells Maja that rats never stop growing, the resulting train of thought is rather disturbing, as it presents the foetus as a monster waiting to devour its own mother, its nurturer: "Say a foetus stays in the womb longer than nine months, what if it went on a growth bender? What if a baby got as big as its

mother?" (141), asks Amy Eleni jokingly, unawares of the fears and frustrations it raises in the expectant mother. Maja is fraught with tension between her fate of being a mother and the reluctance she feels in her pregnancy. And it gets expression through consumption.

As Cooper states, "[t]he material culture of food is also powerful in this writing and, like hair, performs a coded language from which to read off questions of subjectivity and citizenship" ("Diaspora" 53). Thus it not only reflects on Maja's pregnancy, but it rather touches upon her greatest crisis, that of her identity. Food, her love of it makes her an outsider in the Western world which is largely about diet and losing weight. The world Maja belongs to, however, revolves around the smell of food, the feasts people enjoy together. Even the Orisha place food in an accentuated position (remember, for instance, "the air born in Aya's pans, the condensed aroma of yams and plantains shallow-fried in palm oil, or home-smoked cod, its skin stiffened in salt and chilli," which pervades the entire somewherehouse, 4) .

Food is home, food is love, food is life, and that is what Chabella's extravagant sandwiches also communicate: "They're ostentatious and difficult to eat in public – by the time you curl your fingers around one and take a bite, the marinated pork or chicken has already spilled out from atop the onion- and tomato-stuffed cocoon of wheat-rich bread, and a shower of sandwich and salsa sauce spatters your hands and your lap" (32). Maja, the young child senses how inappropriate these sandwiches, these "works of slow-cooked love" (32) are in the Western world, and that is why she states: "You can't even lick your fingers as you would leaning on the table at home because you feel guilty, you feel embarrassed, you feel mad to have brought in such a luxury bed of a sandwich when everyone else is making do with the equivalent of string hammocks" (32). A sandwich like Chabella's is a clear sign of the child not belonging, and thus it becomes a source of discomfort and anxiety for the girl.

The contrast between the eating habits of Cubans and those of the British is recognised by Maja, who believes that Cubans can "weep copiously and at the same time eat slabs of steak" because they are not complex, whereas the British are famous for their hunger strikes (142). So the relation to food is cultural, it is revealing about the characters' ethnicity. Furthermore, it also serves as a uniting force among the people coming from outside Britain: as Sarah Ilott remarks, Oyeyemi uses "the dinner table as a site of national belonging and tradition" (135). The various families inhabiting the pages of the novel become easily recognisable through their cuisine, through their shared meals. However, as Ilott draws our

attention, these meals are not entirely harmonious, and eventually the dinner table will start to breed friction among the characters (for a detailed analysis of this aspect, *see* Ilott 135). To mention only one example, Maja and her white Ghanaian boyfriend, Aaron, share a love of *fufu*. However, as it turns out, Ghanaian *fufu* and Cuban *fufu* are not the same, and Aaron accuses his girlfriend of incompetence in preparing the dish.

Maja is caught between two worlds, and she struggles to conform to one or the other when, for instance, in her adolescence, she decides to lose weight and starts living on the smells of things. "When Chabella showed me recent pictures of my dimpled, glossy-haired cousins in Habana Vieja," claims Maja, she is happy, because – despite all their obvious advantages, she still considers herself more beautiful, simply because she is thinner than them (51). Eating and other bodily functions connected to it are complicated by the historical and cultural backgrounds of the characters that seep through the dinner table. As Ilott claims, "[f]rom the outset, food is constructed as a link to the past, through which traumatic memories haunt the present day" (147). Thus, the mouth, which serves as a central site of consumption and regurgitation, "functions as a site of historical memory" (Ilott 147): it "is the open wound, reminding of the perpetual incompleteness of identity construction and the impossibility of assimilation for migrants for whom a series of displacements preclude return and an atomised multicultural society thwarts new affiliations or modes of belonging" (Ilott 148).

One more instance of eating and its entailments needs our attention, since it leads to an even greater complexity in approaching consumption in *The Opposite House*. Amy Eleni's mother Despina refuses to eat and even though, according to her daughter, she is not anorexic and "doesn't give a shit about her weight" (141), her looks is unnatural, possibly even approaching the monstrous: "Despina is thin like being naked in public – you can see the beginnings of her teeth stamped in her face; you can see them through her skin when her mouth is closed" (115). Her effect on the girls is akin to that of the formerly mentioned soucouyant, who sucks the life out of all the girls around her. Only the father can eat freely, but "Despina stapled our stomachs with a tranquil gaze," remarks Maja (116). Maja parallels Despina with mothers from Chabella's *apataki* who are feared to eat their children's spirit (116).

And indeed, mothers in the world of *The Opposite House* are fearsome, and now and again they attack their own children. Despina, with her piercing gaze, forbids her daughter

from eating, and hence strips her of power, of autonomy. Between Chabella and her daughter there is also a constant friction sensed through Maja's narrative, but it reaches its apex in a shocking scene of choking. The abuse happens in a complex scene in which Maja and her mother witness a woman being raped on the street below their home. When Maja starts dialling the police, it seems that Chabella is overtaken by her hysteric: "Mami kissed my forehead, her arms dropped down around me; I stiffened because she was laughing and crying at once and I didn't know what it meant. Her hands clasped around my throat, and when I looked into her eyes I couldn't find her. Instead I saw something inky and strange rising" (149). Chabella loses control and tries to rob her daughter of her voice, because she herself does not have one. Chabella does not speak English, she cannot communicate with the police, and thus she feels threatened. The two worlds collide, and the woman is overwhelmed by her hysteric.

This becomes a paradigmatic moment in Maja's life, one through which she learns that she needs to protect her throat, her voice (149). Her throat becomes her most feared treasure, one that she always shields with all her power. Knowing this, the instance of Aaron force-feeding her gains further weight, as her most cherished member is under attack. Her throat, her voice thus becomes a central motif for Maja's "struggle for articulation and expression" in *The Opposite House* (Satkunananthan, "Textual" 41). The digestive system and the vocal chords are closely tied to express the protagonist's identity crisis, caught between two worlds, between two selves. What her throat, her vocal chords represent to Maja is a "struggle for agency" (Satkunananthan, "Textual" 42) that is extended to become the central focus of Oyeyemi's novel. It is also recognisable in "supernatural external manifestations" (42), in the doubling of the characters that stands for a doubling of worlds.

Chabella choking Maja, according to Satkunananthan, "can be located as [the site] of an ontological turmoil, the fear of articulation rendered complex and physiological" ("Textual 44). The relationship between Maja and her mother mirrors that between herself and the gods: a complex, even schizophrenic relationship sometimes defined by animosity, sometimes by love. Chabella, similarly to Maja, also has a double in the supernatural world of Yoruba gods. She is the embodiment of Aya's mother, her split personality, the appearance of Proserpine as a volatile, dangerous entity. Furthermore, the dynamic of the relationship between mortals is akin to that between worshippers and Orisha: Those gods who trip us up, then haul us up, then

string us up, who understand that it hurts, but also understand that it needs to. They're deadly friends from stories, their names braided into explanations for the heavy nights edged with uncertain light like dull pearls" (35).

Maja and the women of *The Opposite House* find themselves caught between two worlds, between the physical and the supernatural. They move freely through the spheres, achieving this freedom through their hysterics. They give in to the practice of *Gelassenheit*, slowly descending into holy madness, at the limit of voice and silence. Despite all her struggles to voice herself and thus understand her identity, Maja needs to realise that there are things that will never be uttered.

3. Embodied Duality

Maja turns to music for solace, she can find peace in a song, like the "blues about a woman who is alone and still and doesn't understand that she doesn't like it that way" (87). She can identify with this song, it touches upon her greatest fear and pain. The identification is so strong that it leads Maja into a trance-like state, feeling that her entire body reacts to the music. The pain is so powerful that "I lifted off my earphones gingerly and cupped my hands to my ears, expecting blood" (87). Music, singing is the means of expressing herself, and she realises it through her mother's desperate attempt to strangulate her. She is robbed of her voice, and thus she knows that it is this voice, the power lying within it, that she needs to protect at all costs.

Maja becomes a singer, and she gives voice to her feelings through music. As it could already be seen, mind and body are in harmony in Maja, one mirrors the other's state, and there is constant communication between them. Consequently, in her moment of crisis Maja loses her voice, she is incapable of singing: "Onstage, in the smoky dark, I shut my eyes, place my fingers around the microphone as if in prayer, and I cannot remember anything – not just my Cuba, but even the words to the song and my place in the music" (179). This is the first moment since her mother's attack when she loses her voice, and conversely loses her control over her life. The moment is tightly connected to her pregnancy and the attendant insecurity. However, although her pregnancy is partly the cause for her sense of crisis, it is not exempt from any danger. Maja's body and mind, all her fibres are connected, and her angst manifests

itself in her pregnancy. After telling band members about the indefiniteness of her condition, she senses that "warm, gelatinous arrows of blood are running down my thigh" (198). These are signs of degeneration and death, coupled with a "bad, natural smell; logical, like rotting" (198). Symbolically, this state (with signs of a possible miscarriage) reflects on her fears associated with losing her voice for ever, and part of her identity dying; and if one part dies, it seems that others follow suit.

Maja's entire body emanates the crisis, one that is elemental and life-altering. But what triggers this state of indeterminacy? "It's to do with Magalys, who said there was no singing in the garden in Vedado. Such words are surgical; a pole separates a man's grain and he survives, but no one knows him any more. With my Cuba cut away from under me, without that piece of warm, songful night, I am empty of reasons" (Oyeyemi 181). Magalys, Maja's childhood friend from Cuba, appears in the life of the young expectant mother, and robs her of her identity by claiming that "there was no singing in the garden of Vedado." Vedado gradually grows into a symbol, one that captures Cubanness, Maja's belonging. Maja's entire life is governed by her impressions of "her Cuba," one that resonates with music: "It's the five-year-old Maja that brings jazz into me, blocking my chest so that I have to sing it out," this Maja inhabiting "a myriad of saltwater noons whirring around the inside of Vedado" (44). This is the vivid image that Magalys suddenly destroys.

The garden in Vedado becomes the spatial symbol of Maja's identity as a Cuban. It testifies to her memories surpassing individuality, comprising a rich cultural memory, in the Assmannian sense of the word. Maja's memory is cultural, because it puts in motion a complex system that connects a collective. Different people manifest differently their pertinence to a culture: Chabella cherishes her altar, Amy Eleni voices it through her Cypriot middle name, and so on. For Maja singing becomes the tightest knot that links her to Cuba.

Magalys does not simply rob Maja of her memories of Vedado; she destroys Maja's Cuba memory, that defining image that has guided her through her entire life. Magalys's very presence, her person challenges Maja's memories of Cuba, and hence her entire identity that was built on these memories. As Lesley Feracho remarks, Magalys and music "become barometers of her levels of Cubanness" (45). Consequently, when her most cherished memory is challenged, when her image of Vedado as resounding with music disappears, she loses her own voice. Her music, the "five-year-old Maja that brings jazz into me" gives her a sense of

belonging, a way to grasp her identity in her complexity, in the different homes she needs to conform to. And Magalys erases the five-year-old Maja, she robs the grown-up Maja of any illusion of fixity right in her moment of greatest need: as she is waiting to bring another human being into the world.

Remembering is the only means through which Maja clings to her origin, to a definition of her self. Her memories are the ones she builds her entire future on. I agree with Feracho who recognizes that "Maja's understanding of her identity is continuously complicated by presence and absence: what is forgotten, erased, possibly irretrievably lost, remembered, or recreated" (48). The central claim of the novel reveals her problematic relationship to the memories, to her origin and identity:

> I was seven years old when we came here. I've come to think that there's an age beyond which it is impossible to lift a child from the pervading marinade of an original country, pat them down with a paper napkin and then deep-fry them in another country, another language like hot oil scalding the first language away. I arrived here just before that age. (12)

This is an instance that testifies to the complexity of Maja's feelings. She claims here that she was young enough to be able to start over in a different country, in the midst of a different culture. Nevertheless, throughout the novel Maja's words claim that her Cubanness is genuine, she does not forget where she came from. Thus, although she is supposedly free of the shackles of her past, of her Cubanness, in reality Maja desperately clings to her shards of memories that bring her back to Cuba, to her original home. Feracho also captures the paradox inherent in Maja's relation to her origins when she claims that "the role of memory [is] part of her connection to and separation from her sense of a national Cuban identity" (45).

Maja's memories of Vedado, of singing are the ones that give her solace and a sense of security. And there is one central memory that seems to remain intact: the memory of her family's leaving party. With the appearance of Magalys, however, Maja's one true genuine memory – the one that she clings to in her moment of need, the one on which she bases her entire career as a singer – is destroyed. As Magalys is starting to tell her own story of the events of the party, Maja's image gets shattered and "now there are gaps ripped through the image and the singing has turned to a mashed, static whine" (168). She desperately clings to the shards, she feels destroyed without a clear link to her Cuba.

With this moment remembrance is redefined: it is questioned and destabilised. Maja's memories cannot be trusted, and it seems that what takes their place is, in Feldner's words,

"nostalgia without memory" (148). So Maja was indeed deep-fried in another country, but she desperately searches for the lost one. Her true ambivalence towards Cuba starts at this point; first she separates herself from the country, from her origins, choosing to "pretend I am not from Cuba and neither is my son" (169), which later turns into her conviction that she should return to Habana. As Cousins claims, "Maja loses that 'usable past' or memory, beginning the process of assimilation by being forced […] to give up part of her cultural identity" (11), however, she refuses to do so. The concept of "home" is destabilised, and the dispersal of the memory should signal that the new country takes over this role, but Maja rather chooses to return to Cuba than to accept the change.

Maja's decision to return to Habana may project hope in regaining the past, and thus in reinforcing Maja's identity. However, the reader cannot help but sense that the journey is doomed to failure, and the novel testifies to the impossibility of return. It seems indeed that Aya, Maja's otherworldly counterpart already tried to go back, in vain. Yemaya strives to keep both doors – opening into London and Lagos respectively – open but, as time passes, Lagos shows signs of being tainted by the Western world, and finally this door is nailed shut. This powerful statement testifies to the impossibility of Maja's situation, who is twice removed: first from West Africa, then from Cuba, and hence experiences an acute sense of "placelessness," in Oyeyemi's words (Martin), or "unbelonging," as Feldner calls it (147).

The hybridity of these "removed" characters "is often experienced in a negative way and depicted to be leading to psychological and mental problems" (Feldner 147); for instance, it manifests itself in Maja through her hysteric. This alter ego testifies to the split suffered by her personality, by her identity, leading to a decision to distance herself from critical situations. This psychological detachment might have started as early as with her allegedly only complete memory of Cuba, while hearing a woman singing. The song is eerie, the child does not understand it, but it has an overwhelming impact on her: "the first notes felled me the way lightning brings down trees without explanation or permission" (45). This might be the powerful moment that prompts the split: Maja believes that it is the girl next to her that suffers a fit (45), however, Magalys, the actual girl later claims to remember the opposite of Maja's story (168). Cooper poses the following question: "Could Maja be protecting herself from the awesome intensity and scariness of this incident by splitting herself into a double and deflecting the fit onto the Other?" (115). And indeed, this could be the first moment when she

chooses to transfer the weight of the event (the lightning-effect of the song) onto an entity outside her, this time onto a real little girl. The assumption that it is Yemaya herself embodied in the singer (one that Cooper and Harrison both remark) further complicates the scene, conflating two worlds, proposing that this is the birth of Maja's hysteric, the entity that keeps the connection between the aforementioned two worlds alive.

What Maja embodies is placelessness itself, inhabiting at once two worlds and neither of them. Interestingly, it is Magalys, her childhood friend left in Cuba, rather than Maja, who captures most accurately the sense defining Maja's existence:

> 'I don't know, sometimes it just doesn't really feel like anywhere over here. I look at maps and stuff and none of the places seem real. I think that's what happens when you don't belong to a country, though – lines are just lines, and letters are just letters and you can't touch the meaning behind them the way you can when you're home and you look at a map and you see, instead of a place name, a stretch of road or an orchard or an ice-cream parlour around the corner. (167)

Places are empty of meaning, houses never constitute real homes for these people. That is the struggle Maja and Aya both face as they are snatched out of their true homes. The somewherehouse Aya inhabits is the very definition of elusiveness, a non-place that serves only as transit, never as fixity, never as home. It could be anywhere, it still sparks a constant listlessness in the people who come to stay. The somewherehouse is the symbol of emptiness, of the failure to find one's place. It is mirrored in the home Maja and Aaron share, a home that drives Maja crazy with the unstoppable leak.

It is the hysteric through which the characters in *The Opposite House* reach utter dislocation: they relinquish their body and become passive witnesses to the actions their alter ego – the hysteric performs. This state reaches its peak through *Gelassenheit*: this "longing to let go and collapse under holy madness" (10), inherited by Maja from her mother. It plunges the psyche into an abyss, dislocating it from its body, from its surroundings. This holy madness is a powerful trance-like state, connecting the physical world to the otherworldly dimension inhabited by the Yoruba gods: and its physical manifestation is the titular opposite house.

The houses in Oyeyemi's novel become the representations of "unbelonging," emanating the sense of displacement. Past and present interfere, but also intermingle, leaving the characters in a state of indeterminacy, mirrored by these very houses. The one memory Maja clings to is revealed to be constructed, an artefact meant to preserve the past and Maja's

Cuban identity. When it is destroyed, the entire world crumbles: Aya burns the somewherehouse to ashes, Maja is maddened by the leak that invades her mind. As Cousins states, "[t]he dual narratives suggest that there is indeed an irretrievable loss at work in the diaspora community represented by Maja's notion of 'my Cuba' – an imagined rather than remembered version of her birth place; Chabella's Santería worship; and the deterioration of the 'somewherehouse' and its inhabitants" (8).

According to Feracho, "Oyeyemi's representation of her protagonists' journeys of place and identity are the foundation for her scrutiny of multiple African diasporic experiences, namely the tensions of displacement, remembering, and forgetting" (45). And indeed, the two protagonists of *The Opposite House*, in all their actions, emanate insecurity and tension, and what is more, their entire environment projects the same kind of obscurity. For instance, as it was previously analysed, Maja's father considers Chabella's Santería worship a naïve clinging to their past, a past that should be released. He is the representative of the new home, where "these gods are historical artefacts" (36), standing in contrast to Chabella, "for whom Santería provides both a cultural, almost utopic connection to Cuba and Africa, and a contestatory identity to assimilationist discourses in multicultural Britain" (Feracho 45). Both choices comprise clear statements, mirroring their relationship to the old and the new, to their past and their present. Maja finds herself in between these two contradictory standpoints, trying to rely on shards of memory that would provide her with an illusion of memory, of reality, of knowledge about her lost home.

The signs emphasising this uncertainty towards belonging do not end with the parents, however. All the characters inhabiting the fictional world(s) of the novel show signs of the problematic and versatile nature of cultural memory. Maja's best friend, Amy Eleni insists on everyone using her middle name as well. She is thus the embodiment of obscurity, wishing to propagate her Cypriot origin while looking like a "garden-variety English kid." The true obscurity, or even paradox comes, however, with her statement, while still in school, that "[p]eople need to stop using love of some country that they don't live in as an excuse for their inability to shut up about it" (96), claiming that you cannot love a country if you choose not to live there.

Despite the obvious paradoxical nature of this statement I do not agree with Ositelu, who considers this "to be one of the most obtuse statements made in the book." She asks:

"since when did full time residency become the main factor with which to gauge one's regard for their country of origin?" I believe that what is really emphasised through this rather revolting statement of the young girls is exactly the perplexing effect their hybrid identity has on the girls. Amy Eleni's confusion in her stance – one moment celebrating her origin, the next berating classmates for doing the same – provides readers with insight into the conflicting thought processes and feelings that hybridity breeds in people caught between two worlds.

Aaron, Maja's boyfriend, is an even more complex example, since his inside and outside clash so violently that Maja is outraged by him. Aaron is a proud Ghanaian, trying to help his compatriots by tutoring children, but does all this while being a white man, which means that he automatically benefits from privileges arising from his skin colour. Maja contests this identity, she may even feel threatened by his security, while also outraged by his blindness concerning his advantageous appearance. As a revolt, she claims "[y]ou are no more Ghanaian than I am Cuban. So what if you can number your memories and group them in years one to eighteen? That country will not claim you when you are broken, when you have forgotten the trick of breathing easily – and you will have to learn how to resuscitate yourself" (178). This statement shakes all illusion of certainty, questioning both Aaron's and her own belonging.

Maja and her environment represent the utter insecurity, vacillating between two opposite poles, trying to come to terms with their own identity. It seems that the advent of her child is the true originator of her anxiety: the prospect of an offspring gives birth to Maja's pronounced need to find fixity in her life, to be able to identify herself. So the unborn child functions as a trigger for the crisis she faces but, at the same time, the novel testifies to a more complex role that can be ascribed to him. Paul Ricoeur, in his phenomenological study of memory, presents the phenomenon of corporeal memory: events, objects leaving an impression upon the body, linking body to the past (15). Although his theory focuses on the surface level of the body, often coupled with the soul, Oyeyemi chooses a peculiar manifestation of corporeal memory: the foetus itself.

A sort of otherworldly aura envelopes the foetus from the moment it is conceived. As it has been previously mentioned, Maja's entire life revolves around her waiting for her son. There is an eerie conviction with which Maja seems to know the newcomer. The pregnancy

test is a barely needed reinforcement, but she knows without any consultation that she is expecting a son. This child is the unborn memory itself; even his name testifies to the past, to honouring Maja's (and his) forefathers:

> His last name shall be his father's name.
> His second name shall be his grandfather's name.
> His first name shall be a name for his ownself, but unknown to him, all those fathers before his grandfather live in this name. That is something a mother has the power to do to her son. (5)

Oyeyemi operates with the mystical power a name possesses for its owner: in this case it functions as an archive, one that transposes the memories of the ancestors into the new life, the child. David Mitchell, in his *Bone Clocks*, uses the same mysticism enveloping names when he gives an immortal character a name that is almost infinite, capturing the previous selves they inhabited, thus preserving the essence of all those identities. Beyond the universal force we ascribe to naming, it needs to be mentioned that names possess an even more pronounced importance for Cuban families, where newborns receive the surname of both their mother and father, thus furthering the united legacy of both families. This opens up a new dimension for the characters of *The Opposite House*, when Maja's little brother Tomás is confronted with his lack of two surnames. In this case the missing double surname is the archive of the family's past life, since it testifies to their slave past. In light of this, Maja's careful decision concerning the naming of her unborn son is a gesture towards restoring the family into its rightful place, and presenting the child with the power inherent in the joining of these names.

Nevertheless, this tradition materialised in the names can also have an oppressive effect upon its bearer. Buckley asks: "how can the child emerge as a discrete identity, capable of transformation and renewal, when it is implicated in a chain of naming as belonging that ties it inexorably to the past?" (51). Through the invocation of this paternal lineage the mother erases herself, an act that further emphasises "the disintegration of identity she experiences as the pregnancy progresses" (51). Herein lies the paradox of naming, one that is further complicated by the realisation that the reader never really gets to know the name of the unborn child. In Buckley's words, this baby "becomes a source of psychological anxiety and physical abjection" (50) for the mother, the symbol of freedom and oppression at the same time.

Thus, the naming gesture itself is a sign, showing that the child's arrival signals not just a new life, but a fusion of past lives with the new one, his own identity. Maja knows him

intimately before even meeting him. Her entire body is defined by the pregnancy, a period that brings the past into the present. Since Maja's hysteric is at her full force during the pregnancy, just as it happened with Chabella before, this state opens these women's bodies not only towards their pasts, abut also towards other dimensions. In *The Opposite House* pregnancy and the hysteric create the link between the physical world and the metaphysical one, linking mortals to gods.

Maja is ultimately expecting an incarnation of Yemaya herself. Yemaya has already entered the world of the mortals, she traversed the seas on the slave ships, she was singing at the party of Maja's *Cuba memory*, and she entered the child while she was under the spell of her song. Since early childhood she has laid dormant inside the girl, waiting to materialise through Maja's pregnancy. This is corporeal memory shown in its greatest depth, with Maja's body becoming a palimpsest in which pasts and presents overwrite each other, physical and metaphysical dimensions take turns to manifest themselves.

Conclusion

The lives of Maja and Yemaya are interlinked by their past, but also by their future. The two protagonists of Helen Oyeyemi's *Opposite House* find themselves caught between two worlds: between their past selves and their present lives and, conversely, between two distinct planes of existence, namely the natural and the supernatural. The main focus of the novel falls on their struggles to find themselves, to anchor their existence in this in-betweenness. Maja and Yemaya complement each other: the former represents the personal story, the fate of the individual who wrestles with her hybrid identity. Hers is an intimate narrative that shows an expectant mother searching for fixity both for herself and for the unborn child. The latter, namely Yemaya, is a goddess of the Santería religion, an icon through whom the novel presents the fate of the collective. Aya becomes the voice, the life of the *Migrant*, of the masses of people forced to abandon their homes and to settle on foreign lands. The two characters together comprise the complexity of the state of in-betweenness, showing the personal and the collective aspects at once.

The central focus of this chapter was to analyse how these two characters, and through them the Migrant as an entity, manage or fail to balance the past with their present/future, and

how remembering functions in the new environment. In the investigation of identity I projected my attention towards the interplay between memory and space, and the numerous issues involved in their joint consideration.

The narrative shows signs not only of duality, but of a complex hybridity, too. Firstly, the novel is separated into two distinct narratives that follow the female protagonists separately. Yemaya's utilises a third person narrative, whereas Maja is given her own voice to relate the events of her life, spiced with her innermost feelings and thoughts. This choice deepens the intimacy of the latter's account, positing Maja as the singular character whose life is on display. Furthermore, her first-person narrative also ties in with her need for agency that manifests itself through her voice. Her being a singer is not just her job, or a calling, but that is how she is truly defined: her voice is closely tied with her identity, with her Cuban origins and English present.

The two narratives are never separated into chapters: their difference is sometimes clearly defined, but often the transition from one part to the other happens seamlessly. And similarly to their narratives, the two characters exist as separate entities, however, as it was shown, their lives are inextricably linked. And the text's hybridity testifies to several points that connect the protagonists. Dickinson's poetry, her life, her style pervade the pages of the novel, mixing the quotidian with the poetic, and lending an air of melancholy to its characters. Furthermore, the thick intertextual web opens up the novel, extends it towards other fates, other lives, and creates a closer tie between Maja and Yemaya.

The novel's title, also coming from Dickinson, captures both the duality and the sameness in the mortal woman and her otherworldly counterpart. The opposite house is both the unreachable and often coveted, and the place of doom (in light of Dickinson's poem). It is the somewherehouse: a place just as unreachable, elusive, but one that is meant to be home and fails to. The somewherehouse is the manifestation of Yemaya's psyche and, through her, of the consciousness of the migrant. Houses in the world of the novel project their inhabitants' personalities, but also their deepest fears, or their psychosis. Maja's new home strengthens her hysteric through its constant dripping, a sign of the animosity between human being and house.

The constant presence of poetry reflects on the blurring of boundaries; a blurring of both fictional and geographical boundaries. Hitchcock's *Vertigo,* the movie Maja and her best

friend have been infatuated with for the better part of their lives, is also a highly poetic work that centres on a female character who becomes the manifestation of a hybrid identity. Reality and fantasy are helplessly entangled, and her fate becomes a symbol for the girls of Oyeyemi's novel: the symbol for choice, for agency. The motifs Hitchcock's movie employs are transferred into the other fictional world, that of the novel, and thus they maintain a constant dialogic relation.

The term "narrative labyrinth," employed by several scholars analysing *The Opposite House*, is an apt image that captures the text's elusiveness and its diversified focus. The realist world of Maja and her family is intertwined with myths and the lives of their gods, London and Lagos are two distant and differing places that nevertheless can be accessed through the same basement of the somewherehouse. Maja herself embodies placelessness, a constant search for home, lost somewhere between Lagos and London, Habana and London. Her search and her panic seem to be prompted by her pregnancy, but ultimately the very same pregnancy will provide her with the answer to her greatest question.

This question refers to her identity, to her belonging, which she has tried to answer through her memories. Maja tries to define herself as Cuban, relying on shards of memories of her childhood in Habana, ones that actuate her cultural memory. Magalys, however, her childhood friend, the one who stayed in Habana and lived there, suddenly erases Maja's Cuba memory, and with that, she erases Maja's identity as she knew it. The novel problematizes this crisis of identity, negotiating between past memories and present existence. The main question at its core is whether this negotiation is ever successful for the migrant, for the subject who finds themselves between two worlds.

As I said at the beginning of my conclusions, Maja and Yemaya are connected both through their past and their future. But what happens to their past? Aya, seeing that the other god, Echun tries to light the somewherehouse on fire, takes his matches and sets it on fire herself. She embraces destruction, she chooses to erase the past, just like Maja's memories have been erased. But life does not end here. As I previously mentioned, there is a quasi-framework employed in the novel: the novel starts with, and Yemaya's story ends with the same prophecy-like words: "Sometimes a child with wise eyes is born." One might think that its second appearance signals death as contrasting birth, but through Aya's death a new life is born. We read the following:

If you are lucky, you lose a mother to get another.
If you are lucky, you shed a body to climb inside another. (252)

And, contrary to expectations, the novel does not end here. Maja's story is not finished yet. The fire symbolism is transferred to Maja's narrative, where it signifies the connection between mother and daughter: "Mami sleeps with a glow on her. I am smoke, the sign of her fire. She doesn't know that she's alight" (258). This fire Maja recognises is both the end and the beginning, death and life, and it is all united in the unborn child she is expecting. "Sometimes a child with wise eyes is born. And some people will call that child an old soul" (251). And indeed, it will be an old soul, one that has already surpassed multiple temporalities and spatialities, and now is coming to start again. Thus, while memories sometimes fail, the past is still reborn and survives through the new life, conceiving of a new kind of memory this way.

And it seems that Maja, after a long search for her identity, manages to accept her hybridity and agrees with Oyeyemi claiming: "maybe I'm just not anything in particular and that's okay" (Martin). Instead of struggles and an active search, it seems that at the end of the novel Maja finds peace in passivity, in acceptance. Returning to her childhood home, she gives herself to the sunset, to the moment: "Since light refuses to waste itself, it slips onto me, all over me. I lie down on my bed and I don't have to do anything else. Something else breathes for me" (256). Maja is the performative mixture of personas, of selves, of temporalities and spatialities coming together on the pages of *The Opposite House*. And finally, that house ceases to be the opposite one and becomes her own.

Emma Donoghue's *Room*: Conflicting Worlds

In a work focusing on memory in novelistic fiction it is impossible not to encounter several literary works that place trauma in the limelight. After a careful investigation of Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*, a novel that reacts to and resists the fashionableness of trauma today by focusing on the brain rather than on the mind, on the body and its interactions with its surroundings instead of the feelings and emotions the protagonist experiences, Emma Donoghue's *Room* places emphasis on a different experience of trauma. What the author accomplishes in this novel is the presentation of trauma as both a personal and a social event and experience, while also turning attention onto the pitfalls involved in discussing trauma that has become rather fashionable today.

Room (2010) operates a system of binaries that centres on the novel's two protagonists, namely Ma and Jack. Materialised in these characters is the duality of a life possessing memories and one lacking them. The question of traumatisation is tightly connected to these two states constantly contrasted: Ma is a young woman, kidnapped several years ago, and since then locked in a garden shed and methodically raped; Jack is her son, born in confinement, with no knowledge of the outside, with no memories preceding his life in the shed. Jack, the narrator-protagonist is capable of leading a rather carefree life, unaware of the dire circumstances of the prison he shares with his mother, whereas Ma's memories of her past life, of her youth make the ordeal inside Room even more unbearable.

The particular and the universal coexist in the fictional world of the novel, something that can be observed in several aspects, such as the detailed description of Room, a shed that is unique and unrepeatable for the hostages, but actually repeated in real life. As Donoghue claimed in an interview about the novel, she deliberately placed the two characters in a garden shed in America, so as to make the story unlike that of the real case of Elizabeth Fritzl, which prompted the writing of the novel in the first place. Although Donoghue strove to distance her story from the reality of an actual event, "after the novel was written, Jaycee Dugard and her children were discovered in America in a garden shed . . ." (Ue 102), which results in the story becoming both universal and particular. Furthermore, let me add that this garden shed could be virtually anywhere on the planet, and the fact that Jaycee Dugard emerged from one

testifies to the global nature of the issue. Room is at once everywhere and nowhere, it both exists and it does not, it is both real and magical.

The characters and the space they share for years are in constant interaction, one affecting the other. Room is not just a place, but rather a space that is timeless and limitless. It is deliberately conceived as an autonomous entity, resembling an island, singular and disconnected from its environment. The young boy born and raised in the confinement of this garden shed imagines it to be floating in outer space, surrounded by planets that zoom by. Furthermore, even the particularities of the actual shed as a spatially located entity are erased. There are no cultural traits hinting at a specific place on Earth. The garden shed could be located almost anywhere. This shed is the same as other garden sheds across the world, but also radically different from them. It encompasses a duality that is inherent to the globalised world: an entity that is both connected in a network and isolated from the world around it.

Room is changeable, akin to a living organism that adapts and reacts to its environment. Through the eyes of the child it is capable of infinite expansion, whereas the mother feels its contraction, its suffocation. *Room*, similarly to *The Opposite House*, through its title already places space into a central position. After a combination of the physical world with the metaphysical one, manifested in the houses of Oyeyemi's universe, in Donoghue's novel confinement is conflated with vastness through the personal, through the opposing perspectives of mother and child upon the same object: their prison. This conflict stems from and circles back to the differing psychological states, one resultant of years of abuse, the other one of successful shielding from the perpetrator.

One of the first experiences of our child narrator is formulated in the following way: "When Old Nick creaks Bed, I listen and count fives on my fingers, tonight it's 217 creaks. I always have to count till he makes that gaspy sound and stops. I don't know what would happen if I didn't count, because I always do" (Donoghue 46). Though Jack has no clear notion of what is happening, the reader is introduced thus into an existence filled with abuse (Ma's), witnessed by the innocent child. The chapter at hand focuses on the narratorial persona of Jack, through whom the aforementioned system of binaries can be investigated, which will result in a greater insight into the relationship between memory and trauma.

Since this novel is admittedly about confinement, issues such as rape, imprisonment, abduction will surface in the course of this chapter. As Libe García Zarranz remarks, "*Room*

tackles current affairs such as the impact of naturalized systems of confinement, imprisonment, and surveillance in contemporary Western societies, thus raising concerns about the impact of uneven globalization and strategies like the war on terror imposed by the U.S. after September 11" (72). However, greater emphasis is placed on the personal experiences of mother and child: on their visions of the world surrounding them, on their relations to the spaces they inhabit, and also on their own relationship, as the two are locked together for years. The child's experiences related in his narrative will be approached with the help of such concepts as *defamiliarisation* and *alterity*, the two being central for an understanding of the relationships enumerated here. The novel ultimately, through the practice of defamiliarisation, as it will be revealed in the course of the chapter, also reflects on fiction, on the question of reality, and on the body as "a general medium for having a world" (Merleau-Ponty 169).

Room utilises "point of view narration, which makes it the reader's task to decode the moral qualities of life, norms and values (manifested e.g. in social interaction, texts in the literary tradition, and media of other symbolic systems)" (Baumbach et al. 4-5). The events are witnessed from the perspective of a child with limited knowledge, which results, on the reader's part, in an experience of alterity, defined by Vera Nünning as follows:

> [Alterity] is accompanied by a destabilization of an accepted ethical framework as well as an uncertainty with regard to the fictional facts, thus creating indeterminacy with regard to interpretation and meaning. On the other hand, alterity is combined with the evocation of sympathy for the protagonists, which in turn is geared towards an acceptance, perhaps even an appreciation of "the other." (372)

The peculiarity of the novel and of its young narrator lies in the alterity that it brings to the fore. The process itself is twofold; firstly, Jack's narration and childlike perspective are filled with awe and amazement towards ordinary objects, he approaches events and actions deemed boring by adults with fascination. Secondly, the two main characters' alterity is observable through such instances as the bond between them and the issue of breastfeeding a five-year-old, their relation to their captor Old Nick, and the language of their communication.

The excerpt from the novel, quoted above, captures the particularities of the narration: *Room* only hints at the trauma continuously suffered by Ma, but only intuited by her young child, through whose senses and sensations the reader can conjecture the events. According to several scholars, *Room* can be categorised as a *captivity narrative*, reminiscent of Natascha Kampusch's or Jaycee Dugard's kidnapping memoirs (*see* Chi 29). The genre of the captivity

narrative was born in the early modern era: a "text devoted extensively or exclusively to documenting a real experience of subjugation in a foreign land" (Snader 1). Later on it came to be understood exclusively as an American genre, focusing on the relationship between Anglo-American captives and Native American captors (Snader 1). Today, however, the concept can be applied to a wider array of literary and nonliterary writing, with numerous scenarios for depicting the relationship between captor and captive. For instance, Elise Marienstras, writing about the depiction of white children in American captivity narratives, remarks that in traditional captivity narratives children are usually no more than passive victims (35), however, the popularity of child narrators is undeniably rising, thus the texts change perspective and focus, and alter the impact of the traumatic event. *Room* can be considered a captivity narrative of sorts, one that is more generalised, maybe even universalised, where a relationship similar to the Anglo-American self/ Native American other dichotomy materialises in the characters of Jack and Old Nick, as I will show later.

The perspective of the child is the one that allows me to interpret the novel as a new kind of captivity narrative. Kinga Földváry remarks about Jack's young and unusual narrative voice that it "encourages us to revisit our concepts of what is normal, ordinary or human, and what is not" (218). Furthermore, Sandra Dinter notes that the act itself of bringing this marginalised perspective of a child to the fore has a defamiliarising effect on literary texts (54). Consequently, Jack's voice will further deepen themes and issues surfacing through the concept of the captivity narrative. The novel, for instance, focuses on the phenomenon of the abject, a trait it shares with this genre. The entire experience of captivity is defined by Joe Snader through abjection, a state which I will approach in *Room* through Julia Kristeva's interpretation. Kristeva's abject is grounded in utter physical repulsion and disgust, it zooms in on the ultimate details of the body, on its fluids and its defects. The abject violates the order between the outside and the inside of the body (Kristeva 53) through objects that are either excremental or menstrual (71). The child's experiences in Room can be understood through the abject, with teeth falling out, Jack sucking on his mother's tooth, or during the event of Jack's escape, when his body feels out of control. For the child, however, none of these will provoke disgust: to him it is their captor who is going to become the ultimate embodiment of abjection.

The novel's every paratextual element forms an integral part of this isolated, but gradually expanding world. The first paratext, namely the title, concentrates all attention upon Room: an entity that is presented as unique through the omission of any article, and through capitalisation. With this gesture the garden shed becomes an autonomous being, one of a kind. It is Jack's friend, his entire world, since the boy never left its confinement and has no knowledge of the outside. In contrast to this, Ma's experience of Room, though also complex and unique, is very different: Room never becomes the personified, almost human-like entity, because, on the one hand, she knows that this shed is one of the countless garden sheds across the world, on the other hand, to her the environment never ceases to be hostile. It is her prison, the setting of her constant abuse.

The first part of the novel presents Room as the sole site of their life, and the chapter titles serve as markers of this extremely isolated and miniature world gradually expanding. The first section bears the name "Presents," a title that gradually gains several layers of meaning. Its first meaning is connected to the *in medias res*-type opening, with the reader encountering the two characters on Jack's fifth birthday, and learning about the gifts he receives. However, the reception of presents in Room is not limited to birthdays: "presents" could be a reference to "Sundaytreat" as well, a term reflecting a contradiction between its denotative and connotative meanings. The name refers to the day of respite and to gifts, both filled with positive connotations, whereas it is really about a painful negotiation of the most necessary means of sustenance that Ma needs to ask of her rapist. Furthermore, "presents" could also be understood as the plural of "present," the extension of the present into infinity, since the first chapter presents one more or less ordinary day of Jack and Ma's life, pointing to its repetition with only slight variations. Lucia Lorenzi draws attention to a similar interpretation when she points to the homonym "presence" that she, however, interprets as a focus on Room "as a distinctly private sphere, particularly for Jack." Whereas I agree with this element of privacy emphatically present in the first half of the novel, I also claim that the homonym in addition sheds light on the inescapability of their state, locked inside a soundproofed, reinforced garden shed. Thus, it refers to their continuous presence in this confined space and their mutual interdependence.

The novel's second section bears the title "Unlying," which refers to Ma's act of revealing an entire world that exists outside their four walls. This represents the first step

towards expansion and, in line with Lorenzi's interpretation, towards movement from private to public existence. The section is followed by "Dying," a title that also reveals more layers to its meaning. The chapter is tightly connected to the preceding one, and thus it bears the symbolic meaning of the world as Jack knew it gradually vanishing. Curiously enough and contrary to common practices, in the case of this title interpretation moves from abstract to concrete. Thus, the second layer of meaning refers to Jack's pretended death so that his mother's rapist, called Old Nick, would take him outside and hence would facilitate his escape. However, the rather unusual, maybe even shocking element of these events is conveyed by Jack's child persona who really thinks that he died. This is the moment that most complicates his internal processes and captures the relation he established with his surroundings. Consequently, this moment will receive substantial attention in my argument.

The two final sections, namely "After" and "Living," comprise the counterpart to the confined space of Room, since they bring the action into the outside world, a world that is completely new and alien to Jack. Lorenzi remarks that "After" is "a word which at once represents the reality of moving past imprisonment, but that also indicates the possibility to disrupt the often simplistic binaries of death/life, trauma/ordinary life, tragedy/ happiness." The last section of the novel is "Living", pinned against "Dying," and is symbolic of rebirth, of a new beginning for both Ma and Jack.

All the experiences of the child are anchored in the garden shed he considers not only his home, but also his entire world. He is the perfect representation of the Bachelardian assertion that "our house is our corner of the world. […] it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (4). This is literally true for the young boy, who is perfectly content in this small, rather humble space. However, the shed's existence for the characters is contradictory: Ma sees the inescapability and confinement in it, whereas for Jack Room is a space with endless possibilities, freedom and security. And although the second half of the novel takes place in Outside, the significance of Room does not tarnish, it even grows into a more complex one. It always serves as one side of the duality that comprises the core of the novel, a duality that can be captured through several binaries, among which Lorenzi, as quoted above, also mentions some ("death/life, trauma/ordinary life, tragedy/happiness"). Consequently, Room becomes even more important exactly when the movement out of it occurs, since that is the moment when it is really contrasted to the outside world. The memory

of Room never fades, it always lurks in the consciousness of both Jack and Ma. This place will ultimately comprise a quasi-framework to the novel, since Jack feels the need to return to it and say a proper good-bye to all the friends he had during his first five years of life. This, however, could be the moment when the binaries are resolved, when Jack's life will not be determined by the duality of inside and outside any more.

The purpose of the following unit is to investigate the binaries mentioned above and, most importantly, to relate them to the two characters, analyse their impact on Jack and Ma separately. The subsequent pages will focus on analysing the issues connected to Lorenzi's claim that "'After' is a space of complexity and paradox, wherein Ma, rather than Jack, ends up being the person who has the most difficulty adjusting to life outside of Room." "After" may indeed be the most complex section of the novel, exactly because this moment brings forth the numerous binaries and their problematic nature. However, the second part of Lorenzi's claim needs to be carefully examined, because the Ma – Jack duality proves to be complex and often shifting.

I. Room as Space

"All fictions are closed worlds, smaller than our own, and so it is not surprising that novelists are often drawn to represent very small worlds – boarding houses, hotels, a plague-sealed town, a single day in a prison, a bare room. These reduced spaces intensify the fictionality that made them: they are as bound as a book," claims James Wood as an introduction to his critical piece about *Room* (13). Indeed, the first half of this novel builds heavily on the inside/outside dichotomy, with the "inside" part being set in a very small space, an eleven-foot-square fortified garden shed. I agree with Wood who categorises the novel as "prison literature," with the strongly emphasised element of confinement, where minor, insignificant details are raised to utmost importance, sometimes to extremes, where days follow the same course, only with minor changes. The detailed rendering of one day in the life of this rather peculiar duo gives an accurate picture about the entirety of their lives, the five years spent together in Room.

Room unfolds in front of our eyes as a unique entity, once a place, but now turned into an abstract space that gains existence through its inhabitants and that, conversely, defines and affects the mother and son locked inside it. Although the reader, together with Ma, is very

aware of the exact dimensions of the garden shed, the first-person narration of the young child turns it into a complex, limitless, bountiful space of exciting games and various possibilities. The reality of the adult mother and her ordeal stands in sharp contrast with Jack's imagination that rewrites the space around him and even brings it to life. His vision of the shed is reminiscent of Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*, a work capturing the workings of the mind, the connections between mind and space. As Bachelard's famous definition states, "the house image would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being" (xxxvi), which in *Room* translates to the garden shed becoming the home, the friend, the world of the young child. The novel's first half charts the intimate connection between him and the space, contrasting it with the mother's rather different understanding of the same space.

The inside/outside dichotomy functions as an organisational device, since it accurately captures the contrast between the two halves of the novel, organised around confinement and escape, respectively. However, as I intend to show in the subsequent pages, this inside/outside is actually a central organisational device running through the entire work, defining the world views of the two central characters, and thus affecting the spaces they inhabit. Firstly, it is extended to the binary of reality/fiction, or, for Jack, reality/TV, largely due to the fact that the two prisoners have a TV in the shed, a connection to the outside world, which the mother, if she wishes to maintain her son's rather blissful state, needs to carefully limit and present as an isolated, imaginary world. This is further complicated with Jack's introduction to various cultural products: real stories and fictional masterpieces mingling excitingly in his youthful mind, in his unlimited fantasy.

1. Real v. TV

Inside Room, having no knowledge of a vast world existing outside of those four walls, Jack "presumes a reality of naïve singularities" (Wood 14). The avoidance of articles in naming the objects inside Room, the use of capital letters in the novel, all emphasise the child's view of the ordinary objects that has the power to turn them into extraordinary, unique ones. They, just as the garden shed, come to life, become the friends of the child who thus blurs the boundary between animate and inanimate. For instance, he feels closer to a spoon than to human beings, since the objects are in his proximity, and he can interact with them. As Donoghue explains,

"Room has a perfectly valid existence to Jack as a world. It doesn't seem small to him, because he's never experienced anything bigger. The Bath, the Bed, the Wardrobe, Under the Bed – these are all separate sort of sub-landscapes for him, and every object in the room is his friend" (qtd. in *NPR*).

Donoghue observed her five-year-old son's own language in order to create Jack's: "'I charted my son's language,' Donoghue explains. 'I followed him around like an anthropologist – writing down his strange grammar. And then I chose just a few of those classic 5-year-old traits to give to his speech. For instance, I love the way 5-year-olds try to make the past tense regular – they all say, 'I eated! I winned!'" (*NPR*). The peculiarity of the child's language exerts its influence over several aspects of the novel, the most important being that his "verbs animate the inanimate and anthropomorphize the non-human" (Ricou 77), and through this they reflect the way of thinking of the innocent child.

A representative example of his preference for the objects inside the shed is "Meltedy Spoon," a utensil I already hinted at above. As Jack explains, "I choose Meltedy Spoon with the white all blobby on his handle when he leaned on the pan of boiling pasta by accident. Ma doesn't like Meltedy Spoon but he's my favorite because he's not the same" (7). Besides the capitalisation and use of personal pronouns, which are meant to reflect on the personification of the surrounding objects, this example reveals another aspect of Jack's world view: while in Room, he believes that all these objects are singular. Furthermore, when he gets to choose from among more items of the same category, he chooses the one that is different from the others. This happens because he constantly seeks singularity, even despite the inadequacy or aesthetic drawback of the object at hand. Through this instance, one can find an example of his *pastless* self interacting with the history of human society. Jack's existence inside Room is experienced as a constant presence, an extended present, where everything is repeated *ad infinitum*. In contrast, singularity is defined through history, or rather through the combination of personal and world history. The child lacks knowledge of both of these, nevertheless, he is still drawn to the objects he subconsciously renders unique. Despite the isolation he is born and raised in, the boy espouses some peculiar social norms, largely due to the education he receives from his mother.

The significance of the friendship Jack cultivates with all these objects testifies to more than vivid imagination. The 121 square feet that surround him comprise an entirely

known territory that protects the child from all (real or imaginary) dangers. He needs to be aware of everything, the exact position of each object. Consequently, when in a scene Ma proposes to move the furniture around, her idea is met with shock and indignation. Jack's reaction is even more telling when he realises that his mother hid away a few pieces of chocolate to save them for his birthday cake. He demands the disclosure of the hiding place with the following vehemence:

> "What if I need a hiding place another time?"
> "Tell me!"
> Ma's not smiling anymore. "Shouting hurts my ears."
> "Tell me the hidey place."
> "Jack—"
> "I don't like there to be hidey places."
> "What's the big deal?"
> "Zombies."
> "Ah."
> "Or ogres or vampires –" (27-28)

This conversation hints at the child's fears, largely imaginary, however, there is that liminal character, Old Nick himself, his mother's regular visitor, who also emanates danger. This man is not much different from the zombies and ogres Jack mentions in the above quotation. The child cannot decide whether he is real or no more than a cartoon that occasionally steps out of the TV and into their Room. His confusion stems from his mother's difficult decision not to reveal to him that there is an outside world. However, since they have a TV in the shed, Ma devises an elaborate lie according to which everything seen on TV is fictional, and she needs to be careful for the plan not to collapse (she limits TV time to two shows per day, does not allow the watching of commercials, etc.). Consequently, one of the most elaborate textual devices of the novel that capture Jack's mental processes and world-building relies exactly on this dichotomy. In the beginning of *Room*, when his conceptualisation is still intact, he has the following train of thought:

> Bunnies are TV but carrots are real, I like their loudness. (…) Mountains are too big to be real, I saw one in TV that has a woman hanging on it by ropes. Women aren't real like Ma is, and girls and boys not either. Men aren't real except Old Nick, and I'm not actually sure if he's real for real. Maybe half? He brings groceries and Sundaytreat and disappears the trash, but he's not human like us. He only happens in the night, like bats. Maybe Door makes him up with a beep beep and the air changes. I think Ma doesn't like to talk about him in case he gets realer. (22)

The reality of Old Nick is questioned for several reasons. Firstly, he is not part of the "tribe of two," as Donoghue herself refers to Ma and Jack (qtd. in *NPR*); he does not live with them,

consequently the child cannot form a relationship with him that could prove his existence. Secondly, Jack never really sees Old Nick, since the child is always placed in Wardrobe, so that he remains out of sight (of course, this works both ways). Thirdly, the name "Old Nick," given by Jack, reveals that the boy identifies the real man with a cartoon villain that gave him inspiration for the name in the first place ("I didn't even know the name for him till I saw a cartoon about a guy that comes in the night called Old Nick. I call the real one that because he comes in the night, but he doesn't look like the TV guy with a beard and horns and stuff," 14). Lastly, and maybe most importantly, the man embodies ultimate liminality, since he is the only person capable of freely moving between the two worlds. He can surpass the threshold of Room or, for Jack, of reality/fiction, since the outside world is presented to Jack as Outer Space, with planets zooming by.

Nevertheless, this clearly demarcated world cannot be kept intact for long. The reasons are manifold, such as Ma's realisation that her captor was fired from his job, which means that he will soon run out of money and eventually kill them. Furthermore, Jack himself, as he grows, has more and more questions that gradually shake the foundation of Ma's lies. Further examples include the appearance of ants and mice, or Ma's slip when she tries to explain to her son why they need to be sensible with their list for Sundaytreat:

> "I just mean, he might have to go to two or three stores, and that would make him cranky. And what if he didn't find the impossible thing, then we probably wouldn't get Sunday treat at all."
> "But Ma." I laugh. "He doesn't go in stores. Stores are in TV." (29)

And finally, one dangerous slip is when Jack catches a commercial on TV showing the same painkillers as the ones his mother uses. Consequently, the space around Jack suddenly starts to contract and expand at the same time: Room loses its infinity, it is gradually shrinking, whereas the outside world is starting to get revealed to the boy. This double movement results in Jack's need to re-evaluate his entire life and world view. When the uniqueness of their little world is destroyed, Ma decides to reveal the truth to her growing son. As Ben Davies points out, "to undermine further the notion of Room-as-world and its ontological certainty in Jack's mind, Ma also describes to Jack in detail Room's former existence and its coming-into-being" (143). What Ma does is get into the layers of Room to reveal an existence so far unknown to the small child, which results in his own world being shaken. She explains it in the following manner: "it was a garden shed to begin with. Just a basic twelve-by-twelve, vinyl-coated steel. But he added a sound-proofed skylight, and lots of insulating foam inside the walls, plus a

layer of sheet lead, because lead kills all sound. Oh, and a security door with a code. He boasts about what a neat job he made of it" (85). Furthermore, since it seems from the above interpretation that reality for Jack is defined as palpable, Ma proves the reality of her story (she demystifies and defamiliarises Room, to use Davies' terms, 143) by making Jack touch the chain-link fence underneath the floor.

This moment is significant for Jack's spatial determination in different ways. While it crumbles the child's belief that Room itself is singular, paradoxically this act assigns a new type of singularity to it by the child's realisation that they are locked away from the world ("Room's not on any map," exclaims Ma, 112). With this instance Jack gets closer to Ma's experiences in Room, experiences that are related in great detail after she reveals the truth ("unlies") about their life. Davies defines her state in Room in the following way: "Room upsets Ma's being-in-the-world; her very location dislocates her and she lives in a disconcerting, distorted, and distorting time and space" (144), a realisation that is counteracted by Jack's rather funny observation that "before I didn't even know to be mad that we can't open Door, my head was too small to have Outside in it. When I was a little kid I thought like a little kid, but now I'm five I know everything" (102). I agree with Davies who claims that "this opening up of an outside world has a similar effect upon his understanding as being locked in Room initially had on Ma" (147).

The result of this "unlying" process is that the initial identification of Room with reality and that of TV with fantasy is destroyed. Nevertheless, although their escape is rather sudden for the child, he needs a longer process to re-evaluate his new surroundings, the world as he experiences it for the first time outside TV. As Davies remarks, even when outside, "Jack's strategy is to envision himself *in* something, to be *inside*" (147, emphasis in original), which is still reminiscent of the confinement in which he spent the first five years of his life. The moment of his escape from Room sets in motion the entire re-evaluation of the world as he knows it, consequently the two definitive dichotomies, namely inside/outside and real/TV crumble and challenge the child. Outside, in contrast with the promised freedom and happiness, presents Jack with a never-ending list of rules and complications. The narration testifies to several instances of total confusion regarding the world of the adults, such as the following example: "When I was four I thought everything in TV was just TV, then I was five

and Ma unlied about lots of it being pictures of real and Outside being totally real. Now I am in Outside but it turns out lots of it isn't real at all" (345).

It is important to mention here Sandra Dinter's findings regarding the complexity of the category of "real" that Jack experiences in the outside. As she claims,

> Various seemingly trivial experiences support Jack's theory of an 'unreal reality'. When Jack worries that his teeth might fall out because he did not brush them after eating a lollipop, Ma tells him, "It wasn't a real one … they make them with a kind of not-real sugar that's not bad for your teeth" (217). Moreover, Jack realizes that his grandfather is not "real" in the conventional sense because his grandmother remarried. (Dinter 65)

Consequently, the child experiences an outside that is difficult to accept and to conform to. It seems that all the world-constituting dichotomies fall apart. The spaces around him contract and expand at the same time, and the world, instead of freeing him, is rather suffocating for the child who feels lost in the infinite flow of information. He tries to make sense of the new reality, of the expanded space around him with the help of literature, a companion that he brings out into the world from Room, from his five-year-long confinement.

2. Fiction and Jack

"Unlying," the book's second unit, in which Ma is compelled to reveal the truth about the outside, builds heavily on Jack's conception about the real/TV dichotomy. Ma gives him a complex lesson about the concept of TV saying that, contrary to his initial thought that everything is fiction, "what we see on TV is… it's pictures of real things" (73), however, some of them, like Jack's favourite cartoons, have no real equivalents. Ultimately, this revelation leads the child into questioning his own status ("Are we still real?" 88). Sandra Dinter recognises the fundamental inquiry in this when she claims that "[Jack's] seemingly naive questions tackle philosophical problems which have haunted humankind for thousands of years and initiate the battle between the Romantic principles of innocence and experience" (62).

It is clear thus that the dichotomy itself is never straightforward, consequently it needs to be approached through its very instability. From this respect, one major area in the novel has not been tackled yet, and that is Jack's relation to fiction. The novel lays great emphasis on the fictional stories surrounding the child, and on Ma's struggles to make his childhood fascinating, to enrich his imagination. In spite of, but also due to the prison-like nature of

Room, Jack has enough stimulation through handmade toys such as Labyrinth and Snake, through routine activities turned into child's play, like Phys Ed or Parrot, and through the stories Ma tells him. Fantasy is triggered by a lack of stimuli in certain cases, and Room presents a peculiar combination of too much and too little stimuli. As critic Ron Charles remarks, "Determined not to rely too much on the TV, Ma makes sure that Jack is fluent in stories from the Bible, Shakespeare and Mother Goose, whose tropes and characters mingle comically in his imagination."

The above remark already hints at the heterogeneity of the cultural influences, since it points towards the interesting combination of high- and low-culture products. Tom Ue also remarks the abundance of references to popular culture, "ranging from *Dora the Explorer* to Eminem's 'Lose Yourself.' *Twilight* and *The Da Vinci Code* are books that Ma reads in her captivity" (103). These are elements that underline the contemporaneity of the novel, but also create a background for the story of two people living in confinement for years, while Kanye West and Lady Gaga are on the top of their careers. The fictional story of the abduction and confinement mingles with the reality of the Western civilisation and culture: a peek into the globalised world, where the harshness of their situation clashes with but also coexists with the glamour of celebrity life.

Fiction and reality mix in various ways, and the mother's stories she shares with her son create a rather funny medley of Biblical, fictional and real characters. This results in the child feeling just as close and friendly with the objects of her home, as with Baby Jesus or Dora the Explorer, the latter being a popular cartoon character. Animate and inanimate, cartoon and flesh and blood, all occupy the same plane of existence for Jack, as the following quote exemplifies:

> I wriggle around on her lap now to look at my favorite painting of Baby Jesus playing with John the Baptist that's his friend and big cousin at the same time. Mary's there too, she's cuddled in her Ma's lap that's Baby Jesus's Grandma, like Dora's *abuela*. It's a weird picture with no colors and some of the hands and feet aren't there, Ma says it's not finished. (22)

Jack makes sense of his world through stories and cartoons, he gains experiences and knowledge with their help and, at the beginning, they provide him with the adventures and challenges he misses in the confinement of Room. Beyond the widely accepted notion that stories and tales are an integral part of all children's education and growth, the stories Jack hears have an even bigger task: that of enriching the life lived in confinement. And Ma has a

seemingly endless supply of stories, ranging from fairytales, such as *Hansel and Gretel*, *Goldilocks*, adaptations like Prince Jackerjack, Gullijack in Lilliput, through canonical books, such as *The Count of Monte Cristo,* to real ones like the story of the Berlin Wall or that of Princess Diana. Jack is the hero of most of these stories, a boy who can travel and experience entire worlds through the stories. All these stories become connected to the two people who enrich their own reality and world with their help. Furthermore, as Nicola Barr asks, "really, what is a story of a kidnapped girl locked in a shed with her long-haired innocently precocious boy if not the realisation of the most macabre fairytale?" The connections between their own story and the ones they tell each other are more and more pronounced.

To give one brief example, I evoke *The Runnaway Bunny*, Ma's favourite story, which reflects on her greatest goal in Room, namely successfully raising her son and shielding him from the perpetrator. It captures a universal motherly fear of their child abandoning them, and their wish to always be there for them. This story becomes a powerful symbol of the relationship between the two: Jack senses Ma's connection to the story and intuitively recognises its meaning and importance for Ma. Later, when the mother attempts to commit suicide, the story's meaning changes, since he feels that it was his mother who abandoned him: "I'm not liking it tonight. I keep thinking what if it was the mother bunny that ran away and hid and the baby bunny couldn't find her" (367). His fears are palpable, and surface with power in his reunion with Ma when he bursts out: "I don't want to be your little bunny" (382).

Stories reflect on the world Jack and Ma live in, and they also provide help for the child coping with it. One story, a timeless piece becomes an anchor and guiding light for the boy facing the aforementioned simultaneous contraction and expansion of his world: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The fates of Ma and Alice seem to coincide on several points, also intuited by the unsuspecting child. Ma's abduction and confinement, for instance, are reflected in the story's famous scene of Alice trying to open the tiny door with the big key:

> Alice keeps being in a hall with lots of doors, one is teeny tiny, when she gets it open with the golden key there's a garden with bright flowers and cool fountains but she's always the wrong size. Then when she finally gets into the garden, it turns out the roses are just painted not real and she has to play croquet with flamingos and hedgehogs. (69)

The child's interpretation of the scene reveals his world view, once again, governed by the dialectic of real/unreal, which reflects disillusionment and confusion. Jack's rendering of Alice's story reveals how the character realises upon stepping outside that her initial belief

was flawed. Conversely, both characters, after leaving Room, have similar experiences: Ma cannot find her place in the world at first, since both she and the world have changed considerably, while Jack struggles to come to terms with a new, more complex reality. The story helps, it provides the child with the right tools to understand and deal with the new challenges he faces during his brave escape from the garden shed (*see* Donoghue 189-90).

Ben Davies claims that "Ma and Jack's literary exchange illustrates the peculiarities and complexities of literature – a form that is, Ma tells her son, neither 'true' nor 'false' but 'magic… a different kind of true' (71)" (158). The blurring of the boundaries is really fascinating here. I believe that the depiction of literature in *Room*, besides its multifarious purposes, presents us with the possibility to do away with the dualism of reality/fiction. The utilisation of numerous stories blurs the boundary between real and imaginary even more, rather supporting an amalgam of the two. In effect, space itself, be it the confinement of the garden shed, or the scary outside, is never limited, but is enriched and made comforting through Ma's blending reality and fiction.

Through books mother and son often reflect on their peculiar state inside Room. While still in confinement, in an effort to explain to her son their being in a prison, Ma says: "We're like people in a book, and he won't let anybody else read it" (112). In this way Ma creates an analogy between readers and her rapist, thus alluding to the power readers exert over the text, power over its very existence. According to Davies, "the analogy implies that characters occupy an indeterminate, threshold existence, within the text; they are a further exceptional element of the textual, narrative set" (157), which is an interpretation that reflects on their state itself. The analogy implies that for the outside world the two do not even exist, thus they find themselves in a "threshold existence" (Davies 157). This peculiar liminality further deepens after their escape, when Ma finds out that her father deemed her dead and had a funeral for her.

The inside/outside dichotomy is an organisational foundation, but it goes beyond this aspect and ultimately pervades Jack's, the protagonist's entire world view. The issue is captured in the above-quoted analogy too, that returns through Jack, thus pointing towards the impossibility of getting from inside to outside: "But she said we were like in a book, how do people in a book escape from it?" (130). Even after the escape this dualism seems to continue to haunt the child, and a solution comes very appropriately towards the end of the novel, when

the two are already placed in Independent Living. He says: "one day I wonder if the windows open. I try the bathroom one, I figure out the handle and push the glass. I'm scared of the air but I'm being scave [a portmanteau of "scared" and "brave"], I lean out and put my hands through it. I'm half in and half out, it's the most amazing –" (393). When Ma, scared, catches Jack and pulls him back, he explains: "I wasn't falling, (…) I was being in and out at the same time" (393). This scene captures one of Jack's greatest wishes coming true but suddenly interrupted. I believe that this is the true moment that marks the success of their escape, and thus the dispersal of the analogy.

II. Bodies in Room

The experience of Room, of the space mother and son live in for years, is rendered through their bodies. The child narrator communicates his bodily impressions, as they comprise a direct link to his surroundings. Touch, sight, sound and smell are all enhanced in his narration, which create a visceral experience for the reader. As Merleau-Ponty points out, "The body is our general medium for having a world" (169), and the bodies of Ma and Jack become central transmitters of their feelings, relations, of their understanding of the world around them. The space itself that these characters inhabit becomes embodied, and thus it should be approached through the sensorium I mentioned in the methodological chapter of this enterprise. Every change in the perception of space occurs through and consequential to the senses and emotions of the person whose body occupies that particular space. In the following I will focus on the interplay between the characters of Donoghue's novel and the spaces which they interact with. Their approach to space is never neutral, but rather intimate. The two main characters exhibit different understandings of their surroundings, and their sensory impressions differ considerably, which is largely due to the different worlds they come from: one being born outside, knowing the world, the other born and raised in total isolation, only knowing the garden shed.

1. Abject Bodies

Corporeality, the sensory experience of his surroundings plays a substantial role in Jack's life, and thus it becomes central to the novel. Its manifestations are multifarious and need to be carefully examined, since I claim that spatiality cannot be discussed without considering the involvement of bodies and how they relate to other bodies in space. Of course, this claim seems obvious, however, I recognise a new tendency in literature of placing a greater emphasis on the interrelation, thus shedding a new light on the issue of bodies in space (*see* Setha Low's "Embodied Space(s)", for instance).

As it was stated already, the narrator-protagonist of Donoghue's novel cultivates a rather peculiar relationship with the objects surrounding him, and with his home itself. This intimate friendship can be explained through the previously mentioned theory that those things are real to the boy which are within his reach. Consequently, the objects in Room are just as real as he and his Ma are, furthermore, he approaches them as if they were alive. Nevertheless, the opposite movement is also conceivable, which manifests itself through Old Nick, the only character from the outside who has access to their small world. He "reduces" Ma and Jack to an object-like existence, "to forms of bestial life through the sovereign-like power Old Nick has over them in Room" (Davies 153).

To Old Nick, Jack barely exists, since he is always out of sight. On rare occasions when he takes notice of the child's existence, he refers to Jack through the pronoun "it," emphasising the fact that he does not acknowledge the boy as a human being. This state is facilitated by Ma who, meanwhile, is reduced to her sexual self. His exertion of power over Ma is reflected in the marks he leaves on her neck, marks that the child also recognises as signs of Old Nick's authority. Besides the rapist, Ma also defines herself and her child as leading a subhuman existence: she claims that "I bet we're cheaper to keep than a dog. We don't even need shoes" (89). If we return to the interpretation of "Sundaytreat," which I tackled in the introduction to this chapter, in light of the rather animalistic existence the duo leads, the term "Sundaytreat" may also remind one of dogs who get treats if they are obedient, just like mother and son, who are deprived of the necessary means of sustenance if Old Nick is displeased.

It seems that all characters living in the confined world of Room straddle the threshold between human and inhuman existence. In a different way, but Old Nick also appears for and through the boy as something beyond human. His name assigns him a Devil-like character:

someone who always comes at night, a creature that Jack never really sees, and consequently is barely real to him. Davies further extends the significance of his name to encompass the characters of Satan/Santa (153), since he, for the child, is clearly a complex mixture of the dangerous, even monstrous being and the supplier of goods. He both has complete authority over Ma and Jack, and brings them Sundaytreat: gifts, just like the benevolent Santa, a.k.a. Saint Nick.

Returning to Jack and Ma, it needs to be noted that the dynamism between the two is also often conceived on the level of their bodies. Breastfeeding in itself comprises the most intimate bodily relationship imaginable, however, it can also be approached through Julia Kristeva's concept of the *abject*. Kristeva's abject is grounded in utter physical repulsion and disgust towards the body and its excrements, as it was previously defined. Breastfeeding, through which the woman's body is completely redefined, is a peculiar manifestation of the abject. As Zsuzsanna Lénárt-Muszka remarks, the "image of the passive, desexualized maternal body is destabilized via the act of breastfeeding" that basically creates a "dissonance between the mother as nurturing and mother as erotic" (354). This issue provides further views into the two people's animalistic existence inside Room.

Besides breastfeeding, the novel exhibits other signs of the two characters' abject existence in confinement. For instance, one can think of Jack's bodily behaviour in the course of his escape from confinement. When Ma realises that their existence in Room is compromised, she devises an escape plan involving Jack who needs to pretend to be dead. The child is wrapped in Rug so that Old Nick would take him to a dump site. According to the plan Jack needs to wriggle out of Rug, jump from the truck and run for help. Naturally, the child is terrified by this whole ordeal, consequently his body reacts to it on "multiple levels of abjection, in Kristevan fashion, having to deal with corporeal fluids, fear, fantasies of dismemberment, and violence" (García Zarranz 68): "The *beep beep* again, then the click, that means Door is open. The ogre's got me, fee fie foe fum. Hot on my legs, oh no, Penis let some pee out. And also a bit of poo squirted out my bum, Ma never said this would happen. Stinky. *Sorry, Rug*" (137, emphasis in original).

Possibly one of the most complex testimonies to Jack's experiencing the world through his body is Rug itself. From the very beginning of the novel, Jack seems to cultivate a very close relationship with this particular object, in spite of, or maybe exactly because of its

rather repulsive state, since it bears the traces of the most important moments of Jack's life: "I look down at Rug with her red and brown and black all zigging around each other. There's the stain I spilled by mistake getting born. 'You cutted the cord and I was free,' I tell Ma. 'Then I turned into a boy'" (4). Rug represents Jack's birth, but also his death, and alternately his only companion in the outside, while his mother, following her suicide attempt, is at the hospital. Jack insists on taking it everywhere, even in the "Independent Living," which should symbolise a new beginning. Although Ma wants to get rid of it, as she reflects on what it represents to her (the traumatic events connected to Room, its repulsive condition: "Jack, it's all frayed and stained from seven years of—I can smell it from here. . .," 305), Jack replies with: "Yeah and I was born on her and I was dead in her too" (305), thus underlining the object's defining role for the child.

Dominique Hétu remarks that "[h]is strong emotional and physical attachment to the rug shows again the particular relationship Jack has with the nonhuman" (163-64). Nevertheless, the rug has a much more complex significance for him, showing how he himself is a fascinating embodiment of the abject. His intimate connection to Rug is emphasised exactly through the object's repulsive nature. While the entire world, including Ma, would like to destroy such a filthy and ragged thing, he clings to it because this rug represents his entire life. However, its role surpasses representation, since this rug is always a meaningful part of all of the focal events in Jack's life: its stain reminds Ma of Jack's birth, his pretend dying happens in it, he further stains it during his escape from Room. All these bodily fluids soaking the disgusting object endow Rug with a special significance that makes it invaluable. It comes to life through the bodily fluids that are integrated into its weave, it shares atoms with Jack, it becomes part of the boy.

Ultimately the most accurate picture of the relationship between Jack and the world is captured through his own body and its interaction with the lifeless objects surrounding it. Hétu provides the following exhaustive definition of the processes captured in *Room* and also in *Sous Béton*, by Karoline Georges:

> These encounters with nonhuman objects participate in these children's processes of identity formation and challenge the conventional logic of identity that characterizes their respective worlds, shedding light on the constitutive vulnerability of the relational field in which the two young characters and the perceived objects surrounding them are interdependently transformed. (159)

Consequently, Jack's reaction to his surroundings, his handling of the objects represent the centre of his persona, they capture most accurately the development the child undergoes. Furthermore, Hétu's following claim underlines this chapter's main argument as well, namely the involvement of abject phenomena and one's relation to them in all considerations of the body. As she remarks, "these encounters between the protagonists and surrounding things cause moments of wonder that create both a discomfort and a certain amazement at the new perspective on the world that emerges from that meeting with a particular thing or nonhuman figure" (159-160). What one encounters mostly through the child protagonist is a distinct approach to the body-surroundings interplay, a more pronounced rendering of the continuous processes underlying the body's existence among lifeless objects. What the reader may remark is how "bodily and social spaces leak into each other or inhabit each other" (Ahmed 100, qtd. in Hétu 160). The traumatic experiences following Jack's escape from Room and his new life in the Outside will thus be tightly connected to this phenomenon captured by Sara Ahmed, as his leaving the shed results in a sharp fissure and the new surroundings provoke new bodily reactions, thus revealing an intimate connection between body and space.

2. The Bond between Mother and Son

In the second part of the novel, after the escape, the doctor treating mother and son claims that Jack is "like a newborn in many ways" (Donoghue 182). Although Dr. Clay's observation is medical, this statement can be applied to the child's relationship with his mother, too. Inside Room Jack grows in total isolation, with only a TV serving as a quasi-link with the outside world. The results of this isolation become truly visible after their escape from the confinement, for instance through Dr. Clay's above-quoted diagnosis. Besides this, Jack behaves like a baby in his connection with his mother as well. The close bond they share is reminiscent of infants and toddlers to whom their mother means the entire world. However, due to confinement, the psychological progress of the child is hindered, and he can be said to be stuck in the Lacanian *Imaginary Order*: the fundamental narcissism by which the human subject creates fantasy images of both himself and his ideal object of desire. Jack recognises that his body is separate from the world, from his mother, and this causes him anxiety and the demand to identify with someone. While in confinement, Jack is incapable of progressing into

The Symbolic Order, which would turn the demand into desire, and would facilitate his coping with others. Consequently, he is characterised by a constant striving for identification with his mother.

The child's impossibility to detach himself from his mother comes to the surface in numerous instances already inside Room. The narrative emphasises the two characters sharing everything, even a toothbrush, a towel, etc. There is no personal possession/private property, consequently the child does not get the chance to come to terms with this concept. After their escape, his first disturbing experiences are connected to exactly this discrepancy that he cannot really wrap his head around. The bond between mother and child is so tight that he cannot imagine a moment away from her. Consequently, to him sharing a bed with his mother is the most natural thing in the world. However, this is gradually, then more and more abruptly shattered. The first instance is barely noticeable: "There's a super thick white towel we can use each, not one to share. I'd rather share but Ma says that's silly" (215). The separation is accelerated when Ma receives a gift from her brother:

> Back in our room on the bed there's a little machine with a note from Paul, Ma says it's like the one she was listening to when Old Nick stole her (…)
> "Let me."
> "It's called 'Bitter Sweet Symphony,' when I was thirteen I listened to it all the time." She puts one bud in my ear.
> "Too loud." I yank it out.
> "Be gentle with it, Jack, it's my present from Paul."
> I didn't know it was hers-not-mine. In Room everything was ours. (275)

The effects on the child first faced with the necessity to detach himself from his mother are visible. A process that comes naturally to most children becomes a disturbing experience because of its belatedness and suddenness. Right after the escape his mother is faced with the impossibility of her situation: she would like to regain her life as she left it seven years ago. However, the world has changed, she has changed and, most importantly, she returns with a child. The tension inherent in the clash of all these affects her son as well. The boy who has been raised with discipline, a clearly and meticulously organised timetable, in the outside is allowed to eat whenever and whatever he wants. While this freedom would be liberating to most kids, to a child who has never known that this kind of freedom is even possible, it is suffocating. All these aspects represent the ways in which the environment affects Jack.

The intimate bond between mother and child is facilitated by the surroundings themselves. The result is a strong connection between the two, one that seems unnatural to the

reader born and raised in a world governed by social norms. Their relationship itself becomes the ultimate abject, symbolised by a tooth that Ma lost and gifted to Jack. The complexity of this image is gradually revealed in the novel, starting with an innocent saying. Ma, looking at her son in the mirror, exclaims: "[You are like] the dead spit of me" (8). This, for a five-year-old is rather inconceivable, since the child is still incapable of understanding metaphors. Consequently, everything that comes from Ma becomes her "dead spit," just as her bad tooth which finally falls out. Jack becomes inseparable from it: he often puts it in his mouth, sucks on it, places it in his sock before his escape, talks to it ("*Are you there, Tooth? I can't feel you but you must be in my sock, at the side. You're a bit of Ma, a little bit of Ma's dead spit riding along with me*," 171, emphasis in original), clings to it in the outside, while his mother is in the hospital recovering after her suicide attempt.

Kathleen Walsh goes even further and remarks that the tooth "is much like a pacifier, and in that the comfort Jack gets from the action of sucking it resembles the comfort and from the action of sucking involved in breastfeeding." This is the ultimate object reminiscent of his extremely tight bond with his mother. However, the connection itself changes substantially with the time spent apart, while Ma is treated after her suicide attempt. I agree with Walsh who claims that when Jack "returns to Ma their relationship appears to be more stable and he is slightly less dependent." She attributes this heightened independence to the fact that Ma stopped lactating, and thus "her body's physical limitations prevent them from continuing the same mother-and-infant relationship they had for his first five years." Indeed, it seems that breastfeeding itself is of paramount importance to both characters, mostly to the little boy for whom this represents the strongest bond between him and his mother.

The issue of breastfeeding provides readers with further insight into the dynamics of mother and son and, furthermore, into their relation with the outside world. As Alison Bartlett asserts, "breastmilk has always meant more than 'just' breastmilk. It has always been used to represent other things: nurturing, nature, even knowledge and creation, or simply comfort" (1). XiaoFang Chi, upon analysing *Room,* also recognises the nurturing aspect of Ma nursing Jack, further developing into self-sacrifice. Besides preparing herself portions of food that equal Jack's, and foregoing meals altogether in favour of her son, Ma sacrifices herself through the act of nursing as well:

> On the outside, this phenomenon seems strange to many, however, whilst in captivity it is a means to provide sustenance and comfort to her boy. Since she cannot procure food for Jack

> herself, and Old Nick is an unreliable source, the only way she can provide for Jack is by breastfeeding at the expense of her own body. The breastfeeding robs Ma of her already limited source of nutrients and, as a result, her teeth are decaying at an alarmingly rapid speed. Breastfeeding in Room can be seen as a symbol of Ma's motherly love and commitment to Jack. (Chi 41)

However, one may extend the argument and claim that the act of breastfeeding is empowering not only for Jack but for Ma as well. Lénárt-Muszka approaches breastfeeding narratives as a genre, and recognises the following common traits:

> A common element of some breastfeeding narratives in literature is that they involve passive subjects becoming active agents of their own narrative: childbirth and associated bodily functions are conceived by them as writing, giving, constructing, performing, and engendering, thus, highly empowering experiences. (354)

These observations reflect on Ma's narrative as well, a narrative of confinement and rape, where her only refuge is her own son and her self-sacrifice for him. Through breastfeeding, she gains control over her son's, and thus her own life, she recovers some of the authority she lost when she was locked into the garden shed.

Furthermore, breastfeeding is not only symbolic of the strong connection between Ma and Jack but also the facilitator of this very connection. It is partly this act that keeps the two together and thus makes Jack depend on his mother. Let me invoke one instance, pertaining to the outside section of the novel, which sheds light on the significance of breastfeeding for the two. At the police precinct, while interrogated, Jack, oblivious of social norms, wants his usual milk:

> I'm still thirsty, I lift her T-shirt again and this time she puffs her breath and lets me, she curls me against her chest.
>
> "Would you, ah, prefer…?" asks the Captain.
>
> "No, let's just carry on," says Ma. It's the right, there's not much but I don't want to climb off and switch sides because she might say *that's enough* and it's not enough.
>
> Ma's talking for ages about Room and Old Nick and all that, I'm too tired for listening. A she person comes in and tells the Captain something.
>
> Ma says, "Is there a problem?"
>
> "No no," says the Captain.
>
> "Then why is she staring at us?" Her arm goes around me tight. "I'm nursing my son, is that OK with you, lady?" Maybe in Outside they don't know about having some, it's a secret. (Donoghue 199-200)

This scene captures the awkwardness of the situation, the shock experienced by people in general at the sight of a mother breastfeeding her five-year-old son. The scene witnessed above can be described through Kristeva's concept of the abject: characterised by bodily fluids that violate the order between outside and the inside of the body (Kristeva 53),

grounded in the basic sense of utter disgust. Kristeva claims that exactly because of its role in maternity the female body is considered to be the abject sex: a body of milk, excrement, menstrual blood, childbearing (70-72). This vision further deepens the discrepancy between mother and son (confined in Room for years) and everybody else. Nevertheless, the mother's reaction is also very telling. On the one hand, one can sense embarrassment in her words, since she knows that what she is doing goes against the unwritten rules of Western society. There is something latent that is indirectly expressed through the act of nursing. On the other hand, she exhibits a gesture of shielding her son, which reflects on the act itself: it both empowers and leaves them vulnerable. All this complexity is captured by Jack who still barely realises that there is a discrepancy between inside and outside.

Consequently, the weaning puts an end not only to breastfeeding but also to the mother-son bond as it was previously highlighted. The end of nursing does not entail complete independence, total distancing, but it brings about a new relationship between the two, one that, according to Walsh, is more stable because Jack is not so dependent on Ma any more. Tom Ue draws attention to a scene following their reunion, which captures their highly-altered relationship: the two fight and Jack protests by shouting "I don't want to be your little bunny" (Donoghue 305). Ue here identifies the son accusing his mother of selfishness due to her suicide attempt. However, although there are heated sentiments at play in this scene, it is also representative of the changes both characters went through, changes that point towards a healthier future relationship. The novel itself seems to undermine Ue's interpretation, and Donoghue during an interview also claimed that "the parent-child relationship [is] inherently unstable, bipolar; a constant push-and-pull to achieve a lively balance" (105). Ultimately, the novel captures the complexity of the parent-child relationship, all this being placed into a peculiar setting that heightens the senses, deepens the bond.

III. Remembrance and Trauma Inside and Outside Room

In terms of remembrance, the novel follows its clear dichotomy of inside/outside, through which the two characters shed light on different aspects of remembering. It functions in the following manner: the mother-son dualism is conceptualised as the existence v. the lack of memories, which is ultimately tightly connected to the inside-outside binary. Since Ma comes

from the Outside, she possesses and clings to the memories she acquired there, whereas Jack, born and raised inside the shed, has no memories whatsoever. However, the situation changes after mother and son escape from the garden shed: the child turns to his memories about Room to seek comfort and security, whereas the seven years meant an ordeal for Ma, who is trying to forget.

1. Inside

The fascinating nature of Jack's state inside Room lies in this complete lack of memories. The key to deciphering this existence without memories can be found in the very space he inhabits. The previously analysed space of the shed, with its every inch thoroughly known to Jack, facilitates an existence in a continuous present. Just like the day presented at the beginning of this chapter, there is a constant repetition with so insignificant variations to it that the days are impossible to discern. The term "continuous present" could lead one to the conclusion that all this is due to a trauma suffered and repeatedly relived by the duo. Nevertheless, what we encounter in their living inside Room is ultimately characterised not by trauma but by the sensorial, the bodily experiences of their surroundings, of their world.

On the level of the language utilised by mother and son, as well as on the often discordant dynamics witnessed between the two, two different world views surface. For the mother memories form an integral part of an individual's personality, identity. The process of growing itself is highly reliant on the retention of core memories that will affect one's life. All this conception comes from the Outside, from societal norms that Ma grew up with. However, Jack experiences a world without a society, without norms, and thus he never really needs to reach back to certain memories.

In considering Jack's peculiar state, defined by a visible lack of memories, we need to return to Halbwachs's essential theory of how memories are created or born and retained. Throughout his thesis, Halbwachs emphasises the social conditioning of memory, which leads us to the literal sense of the name "collective memory." I wish to remind readers at this point of one of his claims, quoted in the methodological chapter of this work: "No memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (43), says Halbachs, who establishes the social frame of reference that is of

paramount importance for individual memory. What this implies, as Jan Assmann explicitly states, is that "a person who has grown up in complete isolation […] would have no memory because memory can only be fashioned during the process of socialization" (22). The child is not part of society, he and his mother are like characters from a book, isolated from the outside world, and as a consequence he cannot form real memories. Numerous previously analysed examples come together at this point to attest to this very peculiar situation we find Jack in: phrases, sayings, metaphors do not make sense to him exactly because of his isolation. As Assmann states, "[e]ven the most personal recollections only come about through communication and social interaction. We recall not only what we have learned and heard from others but also how others respond to what we consider to be significant" (22), and his mother is not enough to provide such a richness of impulses that the world, that society would.

In contrast to the child, the mother, coming from a world saturated with impressions, where she spent her childhood and her adolescence, enters Room filled with memories of a happy life, memories of food, sweets she is craving (as she watches TV, she sees "commercials for food I remembered, my mouth hurt wanting it all," 118), memories of her family. Her kidnapping and repeated rape result in a traumatised individual, a person who sometimes freezes into a nonresponsive, almost catatonic state that Jack conceptualises through saying that "Ma is Gone." Her recurring state shows the clear signs of traumatisation, something that Bessel van der Kolk, Dutch psychiatrist, terms as "depersonalization:" "blank stares and absent minds, the outward manifestation of the biological freeze reaction" (72).

The child's narratorial voice allows for a subtle yet powerful rendering of Ma's experiences and feelings, without turning the novel into a "horror story or a tearjerker" (emmadonoghue.com). The trauma inherent in Ma's life inside Room is counteracted by Jack's rather carefree existence in the same space. His innocence, his appreciation of the little things in life, his friendship with such objects as *Meltedy Spoon* all successfully counteract the cruelty happening to Ma in the background. This novel is a peculiar captivity narrative, utilising a child narrator, which thus opens up new ways of thinking about abduction, rape and confinement and their psychological effects. This narrative decision may be considered a conscious choice to not favour either of the victim/perpetrator binary, and so present a more detached vision of the dynamism between the two. As Lorenzi remarks, the perspective of the

perpetrator would mirror their control over their victims' bodies, whereas voicing the perspective of the victim could result in the readers' over-identifying or misidentifying with the character (20).

The five-year-old Jack is a largely unsuspecting bystander, greatly shielded from the perpetrator, who only intuits that something traumatic is happening to his mother. Placed inside Wardrobe whenever Old Nick visits his mother, Jack is out of sight, insignificant and almost completely inexistent for the perpetrator. He, however, is still witness to certain sounds, to certain signs the man leaves behind during his visits. The creaking of the bed, haunting us readers, does not bear the same weight for the boy. His narration, as this example reminds us, is largely based on his sense impressions, on his body experiencing its environment, and thus it remains to the reader to decode the events behind these impressions. A constant feeling of unease, of tension is present inside Room, which makes the task of decoding the child's experiences, of identifying the events behind them straightforward.

The tension Jack senses in Room is extended to his entire world view inside the small garden shed, one that I previously defined through the dichotomies of inside/outside and real/TV. For instance, Old Nick, whose name already emanates danger, reflects the child's feelings towards him, his reality, his existence is questioned by the boy, as he embodies a liminal existence inconceivable for Jack. His previously quoted conception about Old Nick's reality reveals not only the clash between the two worlds Jack knows about, but also his mother's disturbing connection to the perpetrator: "Men aren't real except Old Nick, and I'm not actually sure if he's real for real. Maybe half? … I think Ma doesn't like to talk about him in case he gets realer" (23). This instance reveals the mother's attempts at keeping the man and boy as far away from each other as possible, furthermore, it also hints at the possible traumatic feelings his name may trigger in Ma.

Jack's descriptions of their days reveal complex processes and feelings that are evoked in the most subtle way possible. Slowly and gradually, more and more elements of the terror surface for the attentive observer who notices Ma's struggles to escape. Their daily routine is carefully organised to encompass various activities that would facilitate Jack's physical and mental growth; yet, some games have a more complex purpose than to entertain and educate the child:

> After nap we do Scream every day but not Saturdays or Sundays. We clear our throats and climb up on Table to be nearer Skylight, holding hands not to fall. We say "On your mark, get

> set, go," then we open wide our teeth and shout holler howl yowl shriek screech scream the loudest possible. Today I'm the most loudest ever because my lungs are stretching from being five. Then we shush with fingers on lips. I asked Ma once what we're listening for and she said just in case, you never know. (Donoghue 50)

Besides "Scream," the reader also gets acquainted with a game called "Keypad," which consists of Ma giving Jack various numerical combinations to enter into the keypad that locks the door of their prison. Or, it happens that Jack wakes up to Ma repeatedly flashing the lamp that is placed right under Skylight, trying to send Morse-code messages to the outside.

Although Jack proves to be a sensitive boy who is even capable of noticing irony, I would not claim, contrary to Lucia Lorenzi, that he is totally aware of the power Old Nick has over his mother. He senses the tension, he is aware of his mother's pain, as Lorenzi herself presents in detail; for instance, after an altercation between his mother and Old Nick, Jack notices the marks of strangulation on her neck and says: "I see her neck again, the marks that he put on her, I'm all done giggling" (Donoghue 68). Yet, it cannot be stated that he is fully aware of all the traumatic events, as then he would exert similar symptoms to those of his mother.

I agree with Földváry who claims that "Jack, a fruit of a forced sexual union, is not shown to be as traumatised as would be expected. Whenever Old Nick, her perverse captor, comes to get his sexual satisfaction from Jack's Ma, her efforts to hide the little boy appear to be successful and she manages to protect Jack from physical and psychological injuries" (212). Jack believes that the entire world is the garden shed and this very garden shed is more than his home: it is his friend, together with all the objects that are addressed by proper nouns, since they are unique and also alive for him. He can make everything into a game, and seems to have a carefree life in Room. The contrast between the two characters is palpable throughout the entire first half of the book; however, it is most pronounced when Ma realises that their captor was fired from his job, which means their approaching death. This moment clashes with the child who is content in his world measuring eleven foot square. The realisation brings her to the decision to attempt escape. She needs to "unlie" to her son, who is consequently highly overwhelmed as a result of his world suddenly and exponentially growing.

2. Outside

The confined world of Room is the site of the different lives mother and son lead, of their relationship both to each other and to their prison. Although Jack is highly sensitive to his mother's pain and suffering, he is successfully shielded from Old Nick, he does not feel endangered. The perpetrator remains barely more than a silhouette the child sometimes glimpses from Wardrobe. Everything the duo does, activities meant to educate the child, to give him physical fitness, even to escape from confinement (Keypad, Scream, etc.), they are all presented as child's play, and enjoyed by the boy. His experiences of life inside Room stand in contrast with the reader's understanding of the real hardships Ma faces. One representative example of this contrast is connected to Ma's toothache, the decay of her teeth and of her body in general. The seemingly minor detail of Ma suffering from a toothache is gradually revealed to be connected to her first years spent in Room, when she tried to shield herself from her rapist through lax hygiene, but also signals the effect of depression and malnutrition over her body. Jack, however, senses none of these underlying issues, and he believes his mother who gives up most of her ration of food in favour of Jack, claiming that she is not very hungry.

He does not feel the seriousness of his mother's situation, and consequently can make it into a play, where he pretends to have a toothache as well, just to get to suck on an ice cube. Although the boy thinks of the whole issue as mere game, his mother's subsequent momentary scare when thinking Jack's teeth started aching is also highly revealing:

> "I think I have a bad tooth too."
> Ma wails, "Oh, Jack."
> "Really real for real. Ow, ow, ow."
> Her face changes. "You can suck an ice cube if you want, you don't have to have a toothache."
> "Cool."
> "Don't scare me like that."
> I didn't know I could scare her. "Maybe it'll hurt when I'm six."
> She puffs her breath when she's getting the cubes out of Freezer. "Liar, liar, pants on fire." (51)

These and other subtle scenes disclose more and more complex mental processes that can be attributed to Ma, whereas Jack remains mostly unaffected by all this. The change commences, as it was stated before, with Ma's realisation that they are in danger, and with her plan to escape with Jack's help. The careful planning, together with the preparation of Jack himself, finally resulting in their successful escape, proves to be the novel's true start in discussing

trauma and remembrance exhibited individually by Jack and Ma. Captivity narratives usually end in the escape, suggesting that all problems are solved through it, however, here the mental processes and hardships seem to intensify with this moment, ultimately putting to test entire world views and also the mother-son relationship that was so close-knit inside Room.

Ma's life inside Room is largely defined by the traumatic ordeal and by her struggles to give her son as happy a life as possible. She needs to live together with the traumatic experience of her abduction, and of the constants visits of her perpetrator. One would expect her escape to be the end of traumatisation, the beginning of a new, free life, however, she is further traumatised by the outside world she encounters after such a long period of absence. She was taken as a young university student, and she returns as a mother who lived in confinement. The greatest clash materialises between her idealised vision of her life outside and the realisation that it will be very difficult to re-integrate. Or, to put it in other terms, her memories of the world, of her life clash with the actual experience of the reality awaiting her. As she formulates it, "I keep messing up. I know you need me to be your ma but I'm having to remember how to be me as well at the same time and it's…" (Donoghue 277). She is conflicted by this new identity that she recognises in herself, claiming that in confinement she always craved company, and her newfound dislike of it is not how she remembers herself (Donoghue 405). This identity crisis is very differently treated by her doctor and nurse. Dr. Clay automatically attributes all changes to the traumatic hardships suffered by Ma – "You had to change to survive" (Donoghue 405) –, whereas Nurse Noreen points out: "Don't forget, you'd have changed anyway. Moving into your twenties, having a child – you wouldn't have stayed the same" (Donoghue 406). The great discrepancy comes from the fissure that occurred between her life inside Room and the world outside. The isolation and the lack of contact with the outside world result in alienation, in Ma feeling out of place when she should feel reintegrated.

The greatest manifestation of this clash occurs during an interview organised to satisfy the media's great interest in their story of confinement and escape. Lorenzi asserts that though Ma feels frustrated by these "traumatic narratives imposed on her," as demonstrated by the above quotation, the urge to impose these narratives is often what is really traumatising (25). During the aforementioned interview, the journalist deliberately provokes Ma by asking her questions that were previously agreed upon as taboo, such as the stillbirth she went through

before Jack was born. The most severe blow comes when the interviewer suggests that Ma's decision to keep Jack may have been a selfish act as she could have given him up for adoption: "It would have been a sacrifice, of course – the ultimate sacrifice – but if Jack could have had a normal, happy childhood with a loving family?" (Donoghue 297). The scene of the interview thus illustrates "the ways in which the media's insistent framing of traumatic narratives is, in many ways, precisely that which creates or compounds an individual's trauma" (Lorenzi 25).

The inclusion of the media into the novel serves as a metanarrative element, drawing attention to the meticulous self-reflexivity of the work itself. Through this, the novel highlights the authority and also the inherent danger of literature and media. Consequently, in spite of Ma fighting against the traumatic narrative that the interviewer imposes ("It wasn't an ordeal to Jack, it was just how things were," 296), it gradually fills her with more and more insecurity, resulting in depression and ultimately a suicide attempt. As Bonnie Hanson points out, "Ma's attempted suicide is a striking deviation from the structure of traditional captivity narratives in that Jack's most traumatic moment in the novel comes after his release from captivity" (60).

Contrary to Ma, her fears, and Dr. Clay's (or the society's) conceptions about Jack's life inside the fortified garden shed, to him life in Room was the only way of living, when he was content with everything. His greatest problem in this new world will be learning to remember, differentiating the past from the present. While still inside Room, the problem of the lack of memories is barely noticeable, like in the following instance, when Jack proposes:

> "Let's do a race at the same time."
> "Sounds like fun, doesn't it," she says, "but remember once we tried it and I banged my shoulder on the dresser?"
> Sometimes when I forget things, Ma tells me and I remember them after that. (19)

This and other examples usually provide a fun, light-hearted undertone to the novel. In the first half of the book, every time the reader encounters the word "remember," the issues connected to it seem minor, with no weight whatsoever. The shift comes with the moving out, with Jack leaving Room for the Outside world. The experiences of him being put on Old Nick's truck, the surroundings "zooming" around him, the lights, all these comprise a turning point for the child. This is the first moment when reliance on memories is of paramount importance. For the success of the child's escape he needs to memorise the order of the

actions he has to take, a list that seems almost impossible to retain for the child inexperienced in memory processes. The learning process is difficult and demanding on Jack who is and continues to be highly overwhelmed by all this while being in the Outside.

The outside world poses great challenges for the child. In the confinement of Room the child's days were mostly the same, with only minor variations, there was a soothing stability that required no work of memory. He inhabited a system he was born into, knowing no other reality, having no need to keep hold of the past. This system shatters the moment Jack leaves Room and faces a vastness that seems chaotic, even paradoxical, and he feels lost in all the new spaces opening up in front of him. With the movement outside, the *present-ness* of his life in Room becomes the past, a part of his life that will require the faculties of remembrance. His remembrance shows complexity in that all the memories of the garden shed, of his object friends come naturally to him, whereas he struggles to come to terms with and remember all the new aspects and rules of his life outside of Room. This contrast shows the alien nature of the new world, and its overwhelming effect on the child.

While doubt and insecurity seem to be central elements of their life in the outside world, Jack is certain that his security and home was inside Room, whereas the world is big and complicated and overwhelming. His anxiety connected to his new life outside is reflected in the nightmares that only appear after their escape. The first instance of his dreaming recounted by Jack himself comes right after their escape, and is a fascinating blend of his experiences inside and outside Room: "In the night there's vampire germs floating around with masks on so we can't see their faces and an empty coffin that turns into a huge toilet and flushes the whole world away" (270). Another of his dreams combines the image of the man who helped after the escape with the remorse caused by him keeping more toys than he was allowed, and also with the fear connected to what he previously heard about crazy people sending them excrement ("Then Ajeet is all crazy putting Raja's poo in a parcel to mail to us because I kept six toys, somebody's breaking my bones and sticking pins in them," 271). All of these and subsequent nightmares are a way of trying to come to terms with the overwhelming outside which, due to its proportions, complicated rules, and him losing his mom (at least for a while), is scary and unfathomable. However, the aforementioned clash is visible here as well, when Dr. Clay interprets the dreams as a coping mechanism trying to forget about the traumas suffered in Room ("Now you're safe, it's gathering up all those scary

thoughts you don't need anymore, and throwing them out as bad dreams," 273). Society imposes the narrative of trauma upon the child, the outside world believes that his experiences in confinement needed to be traumatic, whereas Jack is certain of its opposite: "I don't say because of manners, but actually he's got it backwards. In Room I was safe and Outside is the scary" (273). Therefore, the child is shown to experience trauma exactly there where he would be expected to find safety, family, and freedom.

What is witnessed throughout most of the "Outside" chapters of *Room* is a child completely shaken in his knowledge about the entire world, a boy who eventually questions his own existence, his own reality. And the most detailed signs and processes capturing this overwhelming insecurity transpire on the level of Jack's body. Several instances can be mentioned, all connected to the duality the boy experiences between the safety of his object-friends and the hostility of the surrounding world. Jack's relation to the objects comprising Room surpasses that which the society would deem "normal," "healthy." To the child living in confinement the dichotomy between animate and inanimate does not exist, he can just as easily nurture powerful feelings towards a tooth, towards a rug, as towards his own mother. Everything he gets in contact with is endowed with complex symbolic meanings that imbue ordinary objects with singularity.

Objects that are seemingly redundant for the outside world, rich in stimuli, become essential to the child exactly because the newly discovered world proves too overwhelming. The scene of escape captures with accuracy the conflict the child experiences, and this could be the most powerful scene because it renders Jack's first steps into the extended world. When Old Nick places the child rolled into Rug, the staggering scene depicting his journey and escape relies completely on his experiencing everything through his senses, and his deep connection with his mother's tooth:

> Another light whizzing by over. Things sliding in the sky that I think they're trees. And houses and lights on giant poles and some cars everything zooming. (…) I'm holding on to the edge of the truck, it's all hard and cold. The sky is the most enormous, over there there's a pink orange bit but the rest is gray. When I look down, the street is black and a long long way. (172)

This is also the first moment when he questions his own reality ("I'm not in Room. Am I still me?" 172), a question to which only the tooth can provide a somewhat soothing answer: this tooth symbolises his mother, it evokes her to Jack, who thus can be *scave* enough to escape. In consequence, he realises and accepts that what he experiences is real, a new kind of real ("I'm

zooming along in the truck for real for really real," 172).

Ultimately it seems that both mother and child show the dual nature and effect that memories can have on the subject, but they do it in contrastive ways. Inside Room, memories of her previous life fuel her longing for the outside, for her lost life; when she escapes, memories of her confinement, coupled with the changes she underwent, hinder her from simple reintegration, from (re)gaining a normal life. Although one would expect Jack to experience similar feelings connected to the garden shed, to him that place is the one that means home. The final question is whether Jack is capable of going on, of separating himself from Room, from his existence inside it.

Conclusion

Emma Donoghue's *Room* presents a very distinct facet of both memory and trauma. After McCarthy's *Remainder*, this novel shows a different interconnection between the two issues, focusing on how the existence of certain memories can have a traumatic effect on the subject, whereas their lack can facilitate a (quasi-)blissful existence. The investigation wished to shed light on the intricate nature of remembrance and trauma, how they manifest very differently in the case of the two characters, and how they do not conform to society's conceptions. This novel is more than a traditional captivity narrative: it goes beyond the usual traumatic tropes, re-utilises them and places them into a new focus. In choosing the present the aftermath to the traumatic event, in revealing the complexity of life after escape, Donoghue shatters the wide assumption that hardships end with the end of confinement. Ma's suicide attempt comes to symbolise the far-reaching effect of the traumatic experience, inescapable in the life following escape. Jack's facing of the new world and his resultant anxiety further underline the complexity of the experiences of the victim.

I believe that this novel, similarly to McCarthy's *Remainder*, and still very differently, proposes to challenge the fashionableness of trauma, the ever-increasing attention and sensationalisation it receives nowadays. These novels seem to coincide with Jeffrey C. Alexander's treatise on the social aspects of trauma. The novel at hand accomplishes it by emphatically contrasting the private with the public, the intimate with the social. The novel itself is a testament to the problematic nature of the medium that handles traumatic stories: on

the one hand, it focuses on the devastating effect the media can have on the victim (think of Ma's suicide attempt after the interview), on the other hand, its own coming into existence is intricate. Inspired by the real-life events of the Fritzl family, Donoghue strove to remove it from the source story by generalising, despatialising, universalising her own novel, however, it still proves problematic as the novel became a best seller.

Beyond the theme of trauma, *Room* is a testament to the relationship between mother and child. It depicts the dynamic between the two, the tight connection and love alongside the resultant feeling of suffocation and imprisonment. Furthermore, the voice of the child narrator provides insight into the rich imagination and world view of a five-year-old. The child projects naïve wonderment, a pure enjoyment of life, a beauty on its own. The particularities of his language provide a different emphasis than the trauma itself: the reader gets a peek into the workings of a child's mind. His love for the surrounding objects, such details as him favouring Meltedy Spoon, however, testify to more than the presentation of a child character. Jack becomes the true embodiment of alterity. On the one hand, his own relation to his surroundings proved to emphasise this, on the other, he and his mother ultimately incorporate alterity through their tight bond, through nursing. This aspect of the novel sheds light on the characters' peculiar spatial relations, but also on the book's organisational device of dichotomies (real/TV, Ma/Jack, inside/outside).

The spaces Jack experiences are not only mere surroundings, but they are the very facilitators of events happening to him. Furthermore, even experiencing and internalising them happens at the level of embodied processes, namely through the child's sensorium who consequently conceives of the entire world in terms of objects that are insignificant to everybody else but essential to him. Nevertheless, a serious change occurs that is most emphatically evoked in the final scene of the novel: in the two people's first and final return to the garden shed. This moment is imbued with a distinct sense of unfamiliarity, which stands in stark contrast with Jack's view of Room before their escape, the certainty that it is the world, the singular, perfect home. All his senses revolt against it from the first moment: "We step in through Door and it's all wrong. Smaller than Room and emptier and it smells weird. (…) Nothing says anything to me. 'I don't think this is it,' I whisper to Ma" (413). This is the moment when change is really irreversible: Jack lost his peculiar connection to the objects inhabiting Room, and thus separation is complete. The ambivalence of his final statement

encompasses the immense complexity that is played out in between space and trauma: “I look back one more time. It's like a crater, a hole where something happened” (414).

The titular Room symbolises existence itself: a space that is rich and scarce at the same time, capable of infinite expansion and infinite contraction, based on whose viewpoint is at the forefront. Perceived, conceived and lived space (the Lefebvrian notions capturing the different aspects of space) coexist and often clash through the two main characters, Jack and Ma, whose lives in Room are very different from each other. In this fictional world built on extreme dualities, memory as such is an issue that might not be in such an accentuated position, but ultimately one realises that its existence or lack is the one that defines the fates of the people inhabiting the fortified garden shed. Although the surface would present this novel as a story of kidnapping and confinement, the child’s perspective extends it into a complexity that handles the intimate relationship between mother and child, with all its beauties and hardships, sometimes a prison-like experience in itself, the rich imaginative world created by children, and the beauty of language itself. Room changes and affects its inhabitants, who, on their own turn, also redefine this space on several occasions. The final visit, evoked above, signifies the true turning point, the moment of a new beginning, one that gradually turns life inside Room into memories.

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*: The Subject as Archive

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) fits into the author's gradually expanding oeuvre, which is meant to comprise an "überbook" (Harris; Metz 121). Each novel engages in asking different questions that preoccupy humankind, such as mortality, transcendence, souls travelling across ages, across characters, the effects past, present and future exert upon each other and on humans, time and space and their mutual impact on the self, on subjectivity itself. The novel at hand combines these aforementioned themes into a study of the subject that finds itself at the juncture of time and space, of past and future, of here and there.

Thus when Hywel Dix, academic of Bournemouth University, terms *Cloud Atlas* a "borderless world" (15), this characterisation points to several identifiable layers and meanings in the novel. The first level of interpretation falls under one of the two central themes of my undertaking, namely space and its conceptualisation by the novel. Furthermore, this borderlessness reflects on the novel's handling of time as well: its complex temporalities will shed light on processes of remembrance, the concept of memory, and a new aspect of my investigation into memory studies: the archive and, more specifically, the subject becoming the archive.

When terming the novel a "borderless world," Dix lays emphasis on the reader's standpoint, claiming that the novel's structure, its disparate chapters "invite the reader to cultivate a mental image of the world when looked at from a point outside it" (15). Experienced from such a perspective, the world as seen in Mitchell's novel, according to Dix, is portrayed as "a single unbounded entity" (15), an observation I find myself in agreement with. Paradoxically it is exactly the work's heterogeneity, with its jumps through time and space, its interrupted chapter structure that convey a special unity and coherence, one that erases both geographical and temporal borders. *Cloud Atlas* engages several stories, operating as a "multiple-focus" text, in which the reader encounters recurrent beginnings introducing ever-new tales (Altman 264-65). In the words of Ryan Trimm, "[a]s narrative beginnings establish setting, each fresh opening emphasizes time and place anew" (9), and this facilitates a rich spatiotemporal multiplicity.

Besides the aforementioned aspects of borderlessness, it can be identified as functioning in the form of both a structural and thematic key component: in the multiplicity of

styles and registers activated in the novel's six distinct chapters. Nicholas Dunlop accurately terms Mitchell's writing style as "an inclusive and technically adventurous generic bricolage" (201). Generically, the novel under investigation should be characterised as "translit," a term coined by Douglas Coupland to describe a new kind of novel that "collapses time and space as it seeks to generate narrative traction in the reader's mind." Furthermore, Patrick O'Donnell characterises the novel as follows: "The 'certain' house at which one arrives in reading Mitchell – the novel one holds in one's hands – is typically composed of many parts and genres, the architecture being neither carpenter's gothic nor that of the sedimented multinovel, but a capacious assemblage of narratives connected to each other in differential patterns" (1). The polyphony of genres in the novel includes journal, novel, letters, oral storytelling, etc.

The purpose of this enterprise is to argue that in the intricate world of *Cloud Atlas* space and memory mutually influence each other, and they are ultimately proven to be united in the subject. The novel operates with several spatiotemporal planes that are already mirrored in the novel's structure. The interrupted chapters, together with the different characters inhabiting their worlds, offer more than a fragmented reading experience: they present disparate versions of the events, temporalities running in parallel, where the focus seems to be random. Nevertheless, the world of the novel is not chaotic: the web of symbols subsequently analysed reveals a world governed by connections, by unity in singularity. The centre of Mitchell's fictional universe is the subject, a subject that is the composite of numerous personas scattered across temporalities and spatialities. I wish to prove that the subject created thus ultimately embodies a living, shifting, expansive archive that contains the story of humanity itself.

The archive has generally been considered as a danger to memory, as a container that not only draws attention upon the forgettability of memories, but it actually contributes to their disappearance. The novel at hand provides readers with a different understanding of the dichotomy of memory/archive: the subject embodying cultural memory, through its surpassing disparate spatio-temporal dimensions, gradually becomes also the archive, a redefined archive that needs to be analysed in light of the personas embodying it.

I. Structure and Temporality

Similarly to most scholars discussing the novel, I also believe that a careful investigation of its structure leads me to a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's main themes. The book's structure goes into thematic depths and creates a constant interplay between form and content, which gradually become barely discernible from each other. This interplay is also reflected in the numerous interpretations about the novel's six disparate stories. One notices that all interpretations are guided by the text itself: the terms applied by scholars originate from the novel, and thus the work presents readers with a double and contradictory gesture: it interprets itself, shows a great amount of metafictionality, and at the same time mocks itself, and satirises each attempt at deciphering it. To use Victoria Adams's words, the "text comments explicitly on its own polytextual tendencies as part of its narrative, openly bringing the reader into the debate through the diegesis, despite being marketed as [a] novel" (40).

The plot of the book spans through several centuries (starting from the 18th, and going into the 22nd century, and a post-apocalyptic world), guides the readers to disparate parts of the planet (either through jumps or through the characters' strolls), and thus creates a fictional world that thwarts any considerations of a clear beginning and an end. The first story, namely "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," follows its titular character as he witnesses the consequences of colonisation and slavery in 1850-51, on the South Pacific. The next unit ("Letters from Zedelghem," Belgium, early 1930s) features the young composer Robert Frobisher, who is employed as an amanuensis to Vyvyan Ayrs, and who will create his masterpiece while in his employment. The third story, namely "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery" focuses on the young titular journalist as she investigates a nuclear power plant in Southern California (early-mid 1970s). "The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish" takes place in the novel's present (early 2000s), featuring a sleazy publisher who, while thinking that he is checking into a hotel, is admitted into a nursing home in England. The final two chapters guide the readers into the future: "An Orison of Sonmi~451" presents a corpocratic society where Korea used to be (around 2100), while "Sloosha's Crossin An' Ev'rythin' After" focuses on Zachry Bailey's post-apocalyptic story (Hawaii, 3000).

Due to the interrupted chapter structure, the novel's last unit is no real ending to the work: it is actually situated at the centre of the novel, and is the only chapter that runs uninterrupted. All the other ones envelope this core story, creating a complex chain where everything is connected.

1. Symbolic Structure, Structural Symbols

One way to capture the structure and time conception of *Cloud Atlas* is through the Russian doll, the object whose name appears in two separate scenes of the novel. The doll first appears in the name of a musical composition by Vyvyan Ayrs, the reclusive English composer living "in the Belgian backwaters" (Mitchell 45). His *Matryoshka Doll Variations* alludes to the structure of the entire novel, where each story is embedded in the one following it. Furthermore, it is one of the motifs that connect the novel with Mitchell's other works, thus reinforcing the author's aspiration for an "überbook." In his second novel, *Number9Dream* (2001), during one of the fantasies of its protagonist, evokes an otherworldly cinema in which the poster advertising the movie *Panopticon* features "a row of screaming Russian dolls" (26).[7] However, this structural conception creates a "reverse Matryoshka effect" (McMorran 164), a vision that is also evoked by a freakshow that appears in the Sonmi-chapter: "Gaze upon Madame Matryoshka and her Pregnant Embryo" (Mitchell 353). The image reverses the relationship between the individual chapters: the embryo becomes the mother, and thus, as Will McMorran remarks, the central chapter ("Sloosha's Crossin'") is "the ultimate mother" to all the other chapters (164).

Later on, the image of the doll appears in the Luisa Rey-chapter, as a clearly formulated theory of time:

> One model of time: an infinite matryoshka doll of painted moments, each "shell" (the present) encased inside a nest of "shells" (previous presents) I call the actual past but which we perceive as the virtual past. The doll of "now" likewise encases a nest of presents yet to be, which I call the actual future but which we perceive as the virtual future. (Mitchell 409)

Isaac Sachs's theory builds on the dichotomy of actual and virtual time, and emphasises the importance of memories in shaping one's past. According to Sachs, the actual past event gradually falls into oblivion and, conversely, the virtual past event, "created from reworked memories, papers, hearsay, fiction – in short, belief – grows ever 'truer'" (408). Consequently,

[7] Mitchell's early novel might enrich the reader's understanding of the meaning and relevance the image of the Russian dolls conveys, through a fictional world where reality and fantasy constantly intertwine, and dreams seem to give birth to ever-newer dreams and imaginings. The novel builds layer upon layer in the protagonist's quest for answers, for his family, while it makes us aks the following question, in Eiji Miyake's words: "Am I in one of those dreams where the closer you get the farther away you are?" (24).

the virtual past takes over from the actual past and, as Sachs claims, it has its influence on one's present and future, too. This consideration is connected to the aforementioned image of the pregnant embryo, as both open up time and space for infinite variations. Sachs' theory is one of the central claims of the novel about temporality and remembrance.

The Russian doll, the image that reflects Sachs' theory, occupies a significant place in the different ways the novel approaches its own structure. Thus, several critics would adopt this as the key concept in deciphering the composition of the novel (Eaglestone 96; Hopf 109; Ng 107; O'Donnell 75; Dix 119; McMorran 164). Besides the doll, several interpretations use the image of a nest to convey the novel's structure (Childs and Green 35; O'Donnell 74; Boulter 131; Shanahan 138), a metaphor that also comes from Isaac Sachs. And indeed, the image of nested dolls provides an insight into the deeper meanings proposed by the novel. As Peter Childs and James Green note, "[a]s globalisation forges new patterns of human interaction, interconnectedness and awareness, the nested layers of stories within stories […], and their mixing of different modes of reality, articulate the fluidity and multiplicity of contemporary relations and subjectivities" ("The Novels" 26). In light of this observation, the novel's structure mirrors the state of our own globalised world, where distant points, different selves are connected through invisible links. Anthony Elliott and John Urry, for instance, propose a theory according to which "[t]hose meeting in distant places can discover that they are in fact connected through a relatively short set of intermediaries," and they claim that there are "'six degrees of separation' between any two people on the planet" (4). Mitchell's novel reflects upon this heightened networked world through a complex system of symbols and interconnections that pervade the work's fictional universe.

After encountering the abrupt interruption of the first chapter, the reader already intuits that the traditional, chronological narrative structure will not apply to *Cloud Atlas*. The attentive reader may, however, recognise several interruptions besides the chapter breaks. For instance, as Adam Begley observes, "the first half of Ewing's narrative […] is itself cut in half by the narrative of the savage Autua." Furthermore, the Moriori man's name also reveals a structure that functions like *mise-en-abyme*: the name is a palindrome that reflects on the novel's structural composition, where the first chapter will also end the book. Consequently, when the narrator-protagonist of the fourth chapter, namely Timothy Cavendish, states that "Time's Arrow became Time's Boomerang" (Mitchell 149), one notices that the symbolic

meaning of this boomerang is applicable to the structure of the novel (see De Cristofaro 247; Parker; O'Donnell 18). However, since Cavendish further develops this theory, critics focus more on the following statement: "Time, no arrow, no boomerang, but a concertina" (369).

The boomerang is an apt metaphor to the extent that the novel both starts and ends with "The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing." It definitely captures a clear detachment from any possibility of interpreting its structure as an arrow. Nevertheless, similarly to the previously mentioned theory of actual versus virtual time, this duality of arrow-boomerang will also need to be later analysed as two paradigmatic conceptions of time: linear versus cyclical. Although Cavendish's stance alludes to the mutually exclusive relationship between the two conceptions, the novel gradually reveals that they function together. Both of them, when considered in isolation, are deficient: the arrow fails to capture the chapter structure and, conversely, the temporal conception of the novel. As Diletta De Cristofaro remarks, "[t]he arrow embodies the sense of an ending that the structure of the novel complicates throughout" (247). However, the boomerang also fails to capture these, since its metaphor would allude to a return to its starting point, which never really happens. Although the chapters gradually build up to the sixth and the only complete one, from the middle of the novel onwards the reader witnesses the further unfolding of each individual chapter, with clear progression.

With both the arrow and the boomerang proving deficient, Cavendish's imagery of the concertina starts to fascinate some of the critics (O'Donnell 95; De Cristofaro 247). As De Cristofaro claims,

> The concertina-like structure articulates a critical temporality as it resists a telic closure, warps the deterministic linearity of apocalyptic history and of traditional plots, and links the various recurrences of the will to power in the novel, foregrounding the dystopian implications of apocalypticism, from colonialism to the future neo-colonial biopower of corporations and anthropogenic environmental crises. (247)

She emphasises throughout her interpretation the anti-apocalyptic structure of the novel. This observation may seem paradoxical at first glance, since the two centrally located chapters of *Cloud Atlas* explicitly address apocalyptic themes, but its anti-apocalypticism is made possible by the very structure of the work. Although the apocalypse as catastrophe is definitely featured in Mitchell's writing, it does not signify any kind of true ending or closure whatsoever. Beyond the post-apocalyptic story of Ha-why (future Hawaii), the very composition of the novel thwarts all attempts at closure: the chapters start gradually unfolding again, showing a reverse movement in time. Furthermore, the existence of each individual

story and character is facilitated by and preserved through characters we encounter in the following chapter. Each story belongs to a different genre, even medium, but stress falls on the fact that all of them are preserved for posterity, and they survive through the other characters who read, watch or listen to them. With this structural and thematic choice the novel transcends the apocalyptic theme and ultimately unravels a different kind of temporality.

This new temporality can be approached through the image of the musical instrument evoked by Timothy Cavendish. As a metaphor for time, the concertina requires a closer investigation. It is made up of "two hexagonal or square wooden endpieces, which carry the reeds and the buttons that control them, […] linked by folded cardboard bellows" (Montagu, qtd. in De Cristofaro 249). What is interesting about the instrument is the way its folds constantly change, expand and compress, a characteristic that sheds light on how temporalities work in the novel. Time becomes malleable: at once linear and cyclical, or something completely different from both of these, but it is definitely ever-changing. As time's boomerang fails to return to the starting point, the novel reveals the changes, time's mutability as its central interest. I agree with De Cristofaro, who claims that "the concertina as a model of the novel's structure suggests that what goes on between [the beginning and the conclusion] is not the repetition of the same, as in eternal recurrence, but repetition with difference" (250). Through this metaphor the symbolic web of the novel can also be positioned in the new time-conception.

The structure of *Cloud Atlas* provides critics with several other possible interpretations.[8] However, I will focus on only one more, which brings together all the threads outlined in the previous paragraphs. This interpretation approaches time as a musical composition: an artwork, a creation that is free, unbridled and unforeseen. The central metaphor of the novel, namely the one that became its title, also appears in the name of Robert Frobisher's, the second narrator's greatest musical composition (*Cloud Atlas Sextet*). This title points both towards temporality (conceived as an atlas of clouds: attempting to chart the

[8] Many critics, for instance, focus on the metaphor of consumption when analyzing *Cloud Atlas*. Hywel Dix claims that one narrative "is sandwiched between two halves of another narrative" (117), or Luke Hortle, among others, focuses on the theme of predacity in the novel, as also reflected in its structure (Hortle 255; Hopf 119; McMorran 165). Furthermore, Mitchell himself also uses the language of consumption when interpreting it: "each narrative is 'eaten' by its successor and later 'regurgitated' by the same" ("Genesis"). Nevertheless, I will only tangentially touch upon these themes, since it is not this paper's intention to analyse the issues of predacity, cannibalism, slavery, etc. in the novel.

fortuitous movement of the clouds) and structure (the sextet reflecting on the six stories comprising the narrative). Frobisher describes his composition as a "'sextet for overlapping soloists': […] each in its own language of key, scale, and color. In the first set, each solo is interrupted by its successor: in the second, each interruption is recontinued, in order" (Mitchell 2004, 463). This conception about the musical piece harmonises with the way the six consecutive narrators of Mitchell's novel take turns to inhabit totally disparate worlds, embodying different personas.

Consequently, I agree with the interpretation put forth by Peter Childs and James Green that "the image of Mitchell's novel as a musical composition suggests that each of its narratives should be understood as symphonic movements of a larger whole" (*Aesthetics* 150). This is visible in the "cacophony of voices" (McCulloch 16), in the numerous genres and styles and media through which the different chapters are rendered. This gesture may be understood as "erasing literary and cultural boundaries," through which we are presented with the "nomadic journey of six interconnected or intratextual narratives," as Fiona McCulloch remarks (15). This investigation proposes to outline the novel's aspiration towards encompassing totally disparate elements, thus creating an amalgam of voices, temporalities and spatialities, which will result in a borderlessness that is both liberating and chaotic.

2. Actual Times, Virtual Times

The structure of *Cloud Atlas* not only reflects on, but defines temporality as conceived in the fictional world of the novel. In a 2016 interview, David Mitchell notes: "linguistically time is singular, but actually it's plural – there are so many different kinds of time. There's a lifespan […] there's geological time […] there's reincarnation time […] these tiny, tiny moments where vast things can happen" ("Interview"). In the following, I will focus on the conception of time as figuring in the novel, which reveals sometimes parallel, sometimes contradictory understandings of its workings. Past, present, and future, with both their virtual and actual manifestations (mirroring Isaac Sachs' interpretation from "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery"), continuously invade each other's planes, and they ultimately comprise a new way of understanding the passing of time itself. The temporal planes and their movements create a

fluidity that allows conflicting conceptions of time to exist side by side, gradually revealing the concept of time itself to be a quasi-protagonist in the novel.

First of all, time as cyclically conceived needs to be placed under scrutiny. Several aspects of the narration point towards a cyclical understanding of time. The fact that the novel opens and closes with the same narrative, as previously shown, testifies to the validity of the cyclical approach. Furthermore, there is the issue of a mysterious birthmark appearing on almost every main character's body. As Jonathan Boulter remarks, the distinct and distant geographical and temporal sites "are linked by structural and symbolic echoes" (133), as a kind of reincarnation or the soul's transmigration. However, beyond these symbolic elements lie even more complex signs pointing towards a recurring temporality.

In the novel's second story, Vyvyan Ayrs, the eccentric composer writes a symphony named "Eternal Recurrence," directly alluding to Friedrich Nietzsche. It seems that Robert Frobisher's storyline (the one he shares with Vyvyan Ayrs) is infused with Nietzsche's philosophy. His stay at Zedelghem, as he starts reading *Also Sprach Zarathustra,* is pervaded by such harmony and possibly metaphysical impressions that he claims: "Nietzsche was reading me, not I him" (Mitchell 63). Furthermore, Frobisher, before committing suicide, claims he is comforted by "Nietzsche's gramophone record" (490). Thus, after completing his musical masterpiece, he imparts the following philosophy to the readers of his letters:

> Rome'll decline and fall again, Cortés'll lay Tenochtitlán to waste again, and later, Ewing will sail again, Adrian'll be blown to pieces again, you and I'll sleep under Corsican stars again, I'll come to Bruges again, fall in and out of love with Eva again, you'll read this letter again, the sun'll grow cold again. Nietzsche's gramophone record. When it ends, the Old One plays it again, for an eternity of eternities… (490)

This conclusion brings the protagonist peace of mind, a solace that turns his suicide from a desperate, depressed deed into a reassurance that everything will happen again, and the thought of this cyclicality soothes him. Interestingly, Heather J. Hicks remarks that "his youth and the extremity of his act invite a reading of Nietzsche's much debated notion of cycles as a destructive alternative to history's 'unspeakable forms'" (66). It is indeed possible to read Frobisher's suicide as a sign that the cyclical temporality is negative. Hicks' observation is also underlined by Diletta De Cristofaro's remark that it is no mistake that Frobisher's, not anyone else's, act becomes so tightly connected with cyclicality. Furthermore, De Cristofaro recognises a consistent pattern that highlights the negativity inherent in the cyclical temporal understanding: "when hearing a song about eternal recurrence, Timothy [Cavendish] is

horrified," the clones of the Sonmi-chapter, "which should, by definition, represent the return of the same, are instead as 'singular as snowflakes' (191)" (247). Rose Harris-Birtill considers the novel's involvement in cyclicality to be "an ethical thought experiment […] whose non-linear cyclicality refuses the possibility of meaningful change" (171). In light of this consideration, the novel would suggest "a paradoxically anti-temporal model of temporality" (Harris-Birtill 171), meaning that it hinders all progression, all change, and instead all it really provides is the constant recurrence of the same events. Consequently, though cyclicality seems to soothe Frobisher, it conveys a strong sense of fatality to the novel.

I believe that the novel consciously harbours insecurity in the reader, and that is why it chooses to build up a theory of cyclicality just to deconstruct it later. On the one hand, one should be sceptical about the numerous theories of time, but, on the other, we can never completely discard any of them. The novel's structure is more than a formal choice: it actually performs the different manifestations of time. One of its gestures is to propose cyclical time as a solution to the deficiencies of linear time, and hence to those of history itself. It functions as an experiment meant to find out whether there is a way out of the apocalypse. As it was previously shown, the novel achieves the surpassing of the apocalyptic events by bringing the stories right into the apocalypse and even beyond, into a post-apocalyptic world, and then it revisits the formerly started and interrupted tales and continues them in a reverse order. The last moment coincides with the ending to the first story, Adam Ewing's, a character whose name in itself is symbolic of beginning and end: it reminds us both of the inception of mankind and of its doom.

The temporal planes and their interrelations surface not only in the structure, but on different thematic levels, too. The linear time conception does not get too much space in the novel, however, its appearance is revealing. It is Timothy Cavendish, the aging publisher who proposes a rather philosophical train of thought, which may be understood as the counterpart to Frobisher's, one that reveals an insight into the world's relation to the elderly:

> Behold your future, Cavendish the Younger. You will not apply for membership, but the tribe of the elderly will claim you. Your present will not keep pace with the world's. This slippage will stretch your skin, sag your skeleton, erode your hair and memory, make your skin turn opaque so your twitching organs and blue-cheese veins will be semivisible. You will venture out only in daylight, avoiding weekends and school holidays. Language, too, will leave you behind, betraying your tribal affiliations whenever you speak… Only babies, cats, and drug addicts will acknowledge your existence. So do not fritter away your days. Sooner than you

> fear, you will stand before a mirror in a care home, look at your body, and think, E.T., locked in a ruddy cupboard for a fortnight. (Mitchell 180-81)

Consequently, the linear temporality that ultimately turns "Cavendish the Younger" into a member of "the tribe of the elderly," is a rather frightening one, possessing no true progression, only gradual destruction. This is the image of a person gradually withering away, a clear counterpart to Frobisher's choice to end his life. The paradox of this state Cavendish envisions and embodies lies in the realisation that, although Western societies consider aging to be the natural flow of life, it is exactly these societies that shun the elderly, consider them a nuisance and close them up in nursing homes.

As Heather J. Hicks claims, "[i]n Cavendish's blackly comic account of aging we see the ravages of a secular, linear conception of time that has no larger meaning or purpose – an ontology that constructs the aging human body exclusively as a site of decay and shame" (64). It seems at this point that the cyclical time is clearly a better choice for humanity, since the linear one proved to lead the self into decay rather than progress. Nevertheless, we cannot forget that Frobisher's "eternal recurrence" is seethed in bleakness and inescapability. Consequently, so far no time conception has given these characters any possible way out of a dire life.

"The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish," besides a critique of linear time, has an also ironic approach towards cyclicality. When Cavendish arrives at Aurora House (quite an evocative name, but he believes he is checking into a hotel), he is certain that "[i]n the morning life would begin afresh, afresh, afresh. This time round I would do everything right" (175). But, to use Hicks's words, "[i]n a parody of rebirth, when Cavendish awakes, he discovers that he will now be treated as a helpless baby," and his "body becomes a palimpsest of linear and cyclical narratives, both of which can be deployed by the institutional apparatus of the nursing home to deny him agency and to strip his life of meaning" (65).

Consequently, linearity and cyclicality coexist in Cavendish's story, and their coexistence can be extended to the entire novel. Although they appear again and again, both are ultimately surpassed, and thus a novel understanding of time is required. For the purpose of capturing the phenomenon I will borrow Fiona McCulloch's term of "space-time compression" (152), a term that accurately mirrors time's shifts and changes inside the stories. To stay with Cavendish's narrative, upon entering Aurora House he remarks: "My watch was stuck in the middle of last night" (171), and thus the measuring of time itself is doomed to

failure inside this bubble. As McCulloch remarks, the "residents are stuck in limbo" (152), and Cavendish realizes: "I was stuck in Aurora House all right. A clock with no hands" (372). This is a statement that re-enforces the metaphor of the clock as representative of a new understanding of time. Timothy Cavendish's ordeal represents in miniature the grander movements happening on the novel's macro level. His insights reflect upon the stance the work itself gradually identifies with as it navigates through the disparate chapters, through the shifts through time and space.

Before immersing myself into the analysis of the "space-time compression," another example from the text's micro level sheds light on how linearity and cyclicality are ever-present in the text and they will never be totally erased. Besides Cavendish's adventures in Aurora House, one may recognise in the novel's fifth story ("An Orison of Sonmi~451"[9]) a different manifestation of the interplay between the arrow and the boomerang, the two metaphors employed in the previous unit to capture the linear and cyclical time conceptions.

Contrary to Cavendish's, in the story of Sonmi~451 the cycle appears as the central mechanism through which time is understood by the clones of the future Korean corpocracy. As Hélène Machinal remarks, "[i]n Sonmi's world, temporal perspective has been eradicated, the past does not exist anymore, historical perspective is denied: this is a way to control the minds of individuals; it enables the ruling power to prevent human beings from having access to philosophical and political perspective" (137). Sonmi's story is presented as an interview conducted by an Archivist of the corpocracy, storing the conversation on a device called "orison," which will preserve the audio-visual material for future historians of the regime. Sonmi~451 is one of the numerous clones devised to work as slaves, deemed inferior to humans (who are termed as "consumers"). Right at the beginning of the interview the clones' sense and understanding of time gains centre stage, since it appears as a deviation from the human norm: the archivist always asks prisoners (such as Sonmi) to recall their earliest memories, however, with a clone this question seems futile, since "[f]abricants have no earliest memories, Archivist. One twenty-four-hour *cycle* in Papa Song's is indistinguishable from any other" (187, electronic), she claims.

[9] Because of the intricate publishing history of this novel, today there exist several textual variants, most noticeable and different in the Sonmi-chapter. A simplification to these discrepancies can be found in the print versus electronic versions of the novel, and this is what I will take into consideration. In my analysis of this unit, I will principally employ the citations coming from the print version, and when the electronic text is important for the analysis, I will make note of its source.

This eternal cyclicality is partly facilitated by "Soap," a substance serving as the clones' food, also containing "amnesiads designed to deaden curiosity" (189, electronic). The slaves' sense of time is governed by outside forces, and beyond the 24-hour-cycles a certain linear understanding (and the illusion of progression) is assisted by the system: "Papa Song announces the passing hours to the diners, so I noticed the time of day, dimly, yes. Also we were aware of passing years by annual stars added to our collars, and by the Star Sermon on New Year's Matins. We had only one long-term future: Xultation" (190, electronic). Despite this imaginary world projected (literally) in front of the clones as motivation, these clones really "embody the archetypal model of identity associated with cyclical understandings of time" (Hicks 68), and consequently this depiction comes to represent "everything that is dangerous about a cyclical view of time" (Hicks 68). Thus, the Sonmi-chapter further deepens the novel's entire reflection not only upon cyclicality, but on a grander scale upon time itself.

It is true that "the fabricants literalise the notion of eternal return" (Hicks 68), a notion that is omnipresent in the novel. Nevertheless, though one may be tempted to interpret this chapter as foreshadowing the unavoidable doom of humankind, materialising in the forthcoming apocalypse, it would be misleading to analyse the novel by considering this to be its grim ending. The novel instead proposes a way out through the previously introduced new conception of time: one that combines linearity and cyclicality, and surpasses them. As it is again and again proven by the novel, appearances are deceiving. The clones, for instance, are really "as singular as snowflakes" (Mitchell 191), although humans might fail to perceive their differences. Furthermore, past, present and future cease to be accepted as exclusive entities: there is a plurality and constant interplay among them. At this point Sachs' theory of actual and virtual time gains further importance, since it makes possible the overlap of and interchange between several time planes (pasts, presents, futures), similarly to the concertina, the musical instrument whose folds are ever-changing and zigzagging.

The concertina becomes the central metaphor, one that most accurately captures the essence of the "space-time compression," the time conception that surpasses linearity and cyclicality. The image of this musical instrument opens up the text for infinite possibilities in combining both spatial and temporal planes. Despite this freedom, the text never becomes chaotic, because there is one central element that holds it all together: the self. The human (or

nonhuman) subject, in the case of *Cloud Atlas* comprised of different subjectivities scattered across time and space, proves to be the centre of this novel in all respects.

I agree with Patrick O'Donnell who sees the multitude of chronotopes and forms of intertextuality as revealing "the liminal conditions of identity in history" (95). Furthermore, the two stories analysed here seem to occupy central positions in reflecting upon this innovative temporality that is tightly connected to the individual. O'Donnell further remarks that both "Sonmi~451's and Timothy Cavendish's figurations of time lay stress upon temporariness as the primary condition of time, and contingency as its primary relational element or 'glue'" (96). Their stories open up our consideration of the past as one of the numerous versions running parallel to and crossing each other, further extending this realization to the present and the future.

As Gerd Bayer remarks, *Cloud Atlas* "takes aim at one of the central pillars of the utopian mode: its trust in the reality of time and the benefits of temporality" and instead "creates a dense network of cross-historical connections" (346). What Mitchell achieves in this novel is the complete destabilisation of the linear time, and thus of history itself. Frobisher's theory is extended to the entire book, and this concept of virtual time overriding the actual time leads to the elimination of the boundary between reality and fiction in the world of *Cloud Atlas*. Time and space become malleable, and there are unlimited possible moments that sometimes do not exclude each other, but rather coexist.

II. Symbolism and Identity

The infinite possibilities could convey a sense of chaos, however, as I have mentioned before, the self, meaning a composite identity, will hold all threads together. From a different perspective, as Patrick O'Donnell's previously cited remark emphasises, the time and space compressions in the novel bring the issue of identity to the fore. Consequently, the main question I am asking is how this identity is construed and understood in the novel. After introducing six, at once parallel and consecutive stories, the novel turns back to its inception: the title. And this title provides the definition of an identity that is materialised in numerous disparate characters inhabiting the pages of *Cloud Atlas*. At the end of Adam Ewing's story we read the following:

> ‘He who would do battle with the many-headed hydra of human nature must pay a world of pain & his family must pay it along with him! & only as you gasp your dying breath shall you understand, your life amounted to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean!’
> Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops? (529)

These words are uttered at the end of the novel, which fact would lead readers into conceiving of them as a conclusion to the book. Nevertheless, the novel, by abandoning the linear narrative, opens up to several possibilities in tracing its interconnections, in organising and ordering its temporal planes. Adam Ewing’s chapter is both the first and the last one: a starting point and a return, but never really an ending. These above-cited words are closely related to the novel as a whole, and through them we revisit previously formulated definitions of identity.

The citation starts with a rather bleak view on human life, one coming from Ewing’s father, who believes that a person’s acts, his self amount “to no more than a drop in a limitless ocean.” Adam Ewing, however, turns this realisation into a universal and unifying power: “Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?” Thus from insignificance we get a more positive view of humankind, one in which joint forces may succeed. And indeed, after Ewing there come several characters in the novel, fighting and losing, but they will ultimately join together (through the narrative itself, and through the different art forms we encounter in the novel), never losing hope. Contrary to Luke Hortle’s interpretation, namely that “in this fantasy of a ‘multitude’ of lives welcomed into the human’s ambit, the novel submits to the very erasure of difference” (271), these drops remain distinct and identifiable throughout the novel, with each character adding a new facet to the composite identity they form together. I believe that the novel emphatically preserves the different identities and retains individuality in all its characters. This aspect will later be elaborated through the symbol of the comet-shaped birthmark that can be found on a particular character’s body from each spatiotemporal plane.

1. An Atlas of Clouds

Before a thorough investigation of the birthmark, however, we need to analyse the thick web of symbols and motifs to be found in the novel. For instance, the aforementioned symbol of the ocean is tightly connected to the cloud: an image that becomes a central allegory in the

text. Both images show a complexity that allows for different interpretations. Casey Shoop and Dermot Ryan, for example, point out the double meaning of the word "drop" when they ask: "Does it function in Ewing's formulation as an event or merely a quantity?" (102). In their answer they claim that "[t]he metaphor of the ocean that closes the novel, like the image of the cloud atlas that gives the novel its title, acknowledges the protean nature of human history but risks translating that history into a substance that simply changes form" (102). This insight is significant, since it highlights the ambiguity of language itself, and the multiple possible interpretations to the novel.

As I have already mentioned before, it is possible to interpret the novel as having a negative resolution: progress is just an illusion, slavery and oppression will always prevail, since "the weak are meat the strong do eat" (Mitchell 507). But the images of the ocean and the cloud have a different emphasis: they present constant motion, action, two entities that are ever-shifting, changing. What they emphasise thus is the event itself, and the joining of forces that has the power to change the future. Even if individual chapters and characters present failures, through a double but interconnected manoeuvre, the novel surpasses all individual defeats and can always overwrite them. This double manoeuvre consists, on the one hand, of the joining of characters and, on the other, of the multiplicity of temporal and spatial planes that exist alongside each other.

The metaphor of the cloud atlas highlights this very mutability, just as Cavendish laments: "What wouldn't I give now for a never-changing map of the ever-constant ineffable? To possess, as it were, an atlas of clouds" (389). This metaphor may capture and preserve more the individuality inherent in the hectic movements of the clouds. And what further emphasises the phenomenon's uniqueness is an artwork, a musical composition titled *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. The instruments, the sounds represent the individual characters that lead separate lives in the distinct chapters, but are also interlinked through a symbolic web.

In a representative scene Zachry, the main character of the central unit, interprets the clouds as the metaphors for souls, while he witnesses his native tribe being slain by the enemy:

> I watched clouds awobbly from the floor o' that kayak. Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies, an' tho' a cloud's shape nor hue nor size don't stay the same, it's still a cloud an' so is a soul. Who can say where the cloud's blowed from or who the soul'll be 'morrow? Only Sonmi the east an' the west an' the compass an' the atlas, yay, only the atlas o' clouds. (324)

His wish echoes that of Timothy Cavendish, and at the same time it reinforces the realisation that fate is unknowable. Nevertheless, the unfathomability of life, of the future is the one that prompts actions, makes people fight. Hélène Machinal recognises in these ruminations a "correspondence between the mapping of the human on earth (or in books and tales) and the ever changing fragile atlas of clouds in the sky is the keynote on which Zachry's central tale ends" (12). Hywel Dix notices in Zachry's words the implication that "islands and civilizations, like people, have life cycles that arise, mature and become obsolescent" (119). His remark connects the imagery of the clouds back to the conception of time in the novel. However, while Dix emphasises the finality that can be identified in Zachry's scene, in the nature of clouds one may recognise the possible futures too. O'Donnell captures this aspect of the metaphor as follows:

> *Cloud Atlas* thus comprises a novel-universe plied with multiple pasts and futures (including those of Mitchell's other novels) as stories emerge and are "allowed" to collide, the jagged edges of their fractional partiality coming into contact, their cross-hatchings presenting sporadically as characters, cultures, and histories converge and split at random points. (81)

O'Donnell identifies a "fractal structuring" (81) to the novel, which is an image that accurately captures both the interconnections among the individual stories and lives, and the chance inherent in nature and its fractal forms. Clouds reflect souls and their infinite mutability, which O'Donnell terms as "the paradox of identity" with "the myriad nomads, slaves, artificial intelligences, escapees, scientists, artists, entrepreneurs, con artists, and genetic clones that inhabit Cloud Atlas" who, however, are "all 'souls' that replicate themselves and corporeally migrate across space and time" (84). Indeed, we can interpret the novel as capitalising on the transmigration of souls. However, I agree with O'Donnell, who claims this "is to be distinguished […] from any simple […] concept of the reincarnation of a singular identity across centuries since the 'migration' inevitably takes place intermittently, sporadically, as the consequence of chance contact or circumstance across multiple identities" (80).

2. Comets and Birthmarks

After detailed considerations of the titular symbol, one of the central ones governing the narrative of the novel, what ensues is the investigation of the other omnipresent entity: the

comet-shaped birthmark. It is a minor sign that can be found on the body of one particular character from each story. It is first mentioned in Frobisher's letters, who writes to Rufus Sixmith about his new lover playing with the birthmark (Mitchell 85). Conversely, Luisa, while reading the correspondence, recognises the mentioned mole and tries "to get a clearer view of a birthmark between her shoulder blade and collarbone. […] it is undeniably shaped like a comet" (124). Besides these two characters, others also possess the comet-shaped birthmark, such as Timothy Cavendish, Sonmi~451 and Meronym, the Prescient visitor living in Zachry's home.

This symbol, as it appears in the novel's every chapter, has led many critics into interpreting it as a representative symbol for the transmigration of souls. I have also touched upon the issue from this perspective, however, I believe that at this point clarifications are necessary. Although I claim that a certain kind of transmigration does occur, and the human soul comprises the novel's centre, all this needs to be understood in a more abstracted context. The birthmark represents the link that connects identity and time, the self and the spatiotemporal compressions. Childs and Green remark that it is the "metaphor of humanity's shared journey through time" ("The Novels" 34).

The concertina-like temporal and spatial conception definitely opens up the novel towards a different understanding of time. The birthmark serves as a palpable yet elusive sign of the bridge between the self and the mixture of actual and virtual times. Nevertheless, as a counter-movement, the novel consciously resists all statements that a transmigration of souls would manifest through the navel. Mitchell himself claims in an interview: "Reincarnation is a beautiful and elegant theory, and I wish that I could believe in it. But alas, I can't, no," and so it is "just a symbol, really, of the universality of human nature" ("Cloud"). Furthermore, Cavendish remarks that the insinuation of the shared birthmark in *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery* (the novel) is "far too hippie-druggy–new age" (373).

Although this stance concerning the birthmark would seem to contradict the concertina-like structure, actually the former comes to facilitate the understanding of the latter. As Diletta De Cristofaro claims: "The birthmark engenders a sense of spatiotemporal compression and extension that can be pictured through the contraction and expansion of concertina folds and encapsulates the way in which the teleology of apocalyptic/narrative logic is warped and subverted in the book" (249), and thus the novel is open for both

contraction and expansion. Consequently, what the mole expresses is the ineffability of the world (past, present, future, particular and universal, etc.).

Possibly the most accurate grasp of this duality and, at the same time, fluidity, is O'Donnell's koan: "everything is always the same; nothing is ever the same" (70), since, as Berthold Schoene remarks "humanity is invariably the same, but different" (119). Thus, although the birthmark bears a unifying power on the characters, it also symbolises their differences and the distances among them, temporal and spatial alike. The choice, for instance, of having no one clear protagonist to the story, points to the resistance to unification, "to a unified self, time or place," as Fiona McCulloch formulates it (147). The subject is decentred, it is a multiplicity in itself, and its power to master the spatiotemporal planes lies in this very diversity. The birthmark accompanies one character from each plane, and thus comprises the identity as situated temporally and spatially, at once opening up towards and also resisting universality.

The shape of the birthmark can be understood as bearing significance in the universe of the novel. The comet, as Gautama Polanki remarks, "is meta-figurative," since it "connotes a sign whose very essence it is to recur," and thus it ultimately becomes "a symbol for leitmotifs in general" (20-21). What is more, De Cristofaro makes the claim that "the orbits of the comets make them recurrent phenomena, an element that corresponds to the repetitive patterns the device points to, while the tradition that sees these celestial bodies as omens of disaster hints at the apocalypse looming over the novel" (249). So in this birthmark there lurks both the cyclicality and the imminent disaster it is associated with.[10] Conversely, each character endowed with the mole "forms part of an orbital trajectory across time and space" (McCulloch 149).

After investigating how the birthmark brings together subject and time, and its distinct shape, what remains is to focus on the corporeal aspect behind choosing such a symbol: it is the body housing the mole that conflates the individual and the universal. O'Donnell terms the mark "a vestige or remnant that suggests how the past corporally resurfaces in the present and the future" (70). The most evocative instance of the birthmark's reflection upon the body containing it may be found in Sonmi's story.

[10] It may be revealing to read the comet from *Cloud Atlas* with the one from Mitchell's first novel, *Ghostwritten* (1999). Beyond Mitchell's conscious tendencies of comprising an "überbook," the comet seems to have a deeper universal significance in these two novels, symbolising at once creation and destruction.

Sonmi, despite being created, a clone *genomed* for certain purposes, bears on her body the same sign as the human characters preceding and succeeding her in the novel. Through this character the mole receives a complex meaning: it points not only towards her inclusion in a universal pattern, but in the context of the world she inhabits the birthmark also adorns her with uniqueness, with difference: another clone calls it "Sonmi~451's stain" (Mitchell 205). Through this character the relationship between mind and body is polarised in the novel, since the birthmark in the end comes to symbolise her ascension and thus the clash between her cloned body and "human"-like intellect. As McCulloch remarks, "Sonmi's transpositional birthmark serves as a genetic tattoo that links her to the wider infrastructure of planetary life, complicating her relationship with humans rather than isolating her to the segregated non-human role that has been imposed upon her 'kind'" (153). Nevertheless, to her the clash is superable. While at university, a pair of students marvels at her communicative skills, an instance through which the outside's binary system is revealed:

> "It must be hell," said the second, "to have an intelligent mind trapped in a body genomed for service."
>
> I had grown as attached to my body as he had to his, I responded. (232)

Whereas the students perceive her identity as incompatible, Sonmi finds no difficulty in embracing the duality of her persona. The birthmark functions at once as a bridge and a divider between body and mind, between the particular and the universal. However, since Sonmi~451's case proves to be distinctive, one that adds further depths to the issue of identity through the body, this "posthuman body" (*see* Hortle 258-60) demands further investigation.

The narrator of the novel's fifth chapter differs considerably from the others, since Sonmi is "subhuman," a clone *genomed* to serve in a future subterranean fast-food restaurant. In this corpocratic society clones are manufactured to cover vast areas of work, they are the new slaves of the regime, significantly distinguished from their human counterparts. Firstly, they are not given "Soulrings," whose consequence is that the fabricants' movements, their existence is substantially limited. Secondly, their internal mechanism and appearance are also highly outstanding. In terms of looks one can think of the students' reaction to an "ascended" clone trapped in an "inferior" body: in the society's conception the body mirrors the mind, and the clones are in every aspect inferior to humans.

The appearance of the ascended clone gives rise to self-reflexivity in an ironic instance when a fashion scout praises the supposedly human person's effort in adopting the looks of a clone:

> […] when Hae-Joo went to the hygiener, a ruby-freckled woman with a teenage complexion but telltale older eyes apologized for disturbing me. "Look, I'm a media fashion scout," she said, "call me Lily. I've been spying on you!" And she giggled. "But that's what a woman of your flair, your prescience, my dear, must xpect."
> I was very confused.
> She said I was the first consumer she'd seen to facescape fully like a well-known service fabricant. Lesser strata, she confided, may call my fashion statement brave, or even antistrata, but she called it genius. She asked if I would like to model for "an abhorrently chic 3-D magazine." (237-38, electronic)

In this metatextual moment the novel reflects upon its own claims about body and soul, and deconstructs the entire conception. The differences surface in the food clones digest, namely Soap: a substance endowed with symbolic meanings, since it is inedible for humans, and is widely associated with cleanliness, hygiene and sterility. The other aspect of Soap, namely its component fat (see Hortle 258) is later highlighted in the novel, when Sonmi~451 witnesses what is actually happening during "Xultation."

Papa Song's "golden ark" (357) promises an Eden in Hawaii, where the *twelvestarred* fabricants are rewarded for their hard work with a life of consumption. They sing Papa Song's Psalm over and over, jubilantly waiting for their new, free life to begin on a dream-like island (a recurring island, mind you, in the universe of *Cloud Atlas*). But this new life never begins. Instead, Sonmi~451 witnesses a "slaughterhouse production line" (359), where clones are processed for protein, for Soap. The cycle is complete and the bodies come to feed new bodies.

Sonmi~451 is one of the clones, and thus she is meant to take part in the above described cycle, however, she is the one who manages to break it. She is that character in Mitchell's novel who is at the same time very different from the others, and also tightly connected to them. She is the manifestation of the novel's constant deconstructive tendencies: in this case the boundary between clone and human, between the natural and the artificial body is broken down. She embodies a liminal state, one characterised by the constancy of change, by inhabiting not one exclusive category. Her body, by bringing together two worlds, by drawing attention towards itself, becomes a symbolic trope in the novel.

Bodies, their states, their existences recur again and again in accentuated instances. The first chapter introduces Adam Ewing catching a man who gathers teeth on the beach. This man is Henry Goose, who claims: "In days gone by this Arcadian strand was a cannibals' banqueting hall, yes, where the strong engorged themselves on the weak" (3). This initial remark gradually perpetuates a powerful principle that will be extended to the entire novel: "The weak are meat the strong do eat" (508); what is more, it transcends the universe of this novel and, for instance, appears as early as in *Number9Dream* (341). Cannibalism, although usually relegated to the distant past and uncivilised tribes (starting in a similar way in this novel, since it first presents the Maori and Moriori tribes as representing this dynamic), in Mitchell's work gains both concrete and symbolic meanings that pervade the entire world of the novel.

As a counterpart to the uncivilised, even barbaric nineteenth-century tribes, the supposedly advanced 22nd-century state of Nea So Copros brings the same quote into the focus, since its very mechanism requires constant consumption. This is the ultimate capitalist society where Catechism Seven states that "[a] Soul's value is the dollars therein" (341), and "[u]nder the enrichment laws, consumers have to spend a fixed quota of dollars each month, depending on their strata. Hoarding is an anticorpocratic crime" (237). So body and soul in this future world are reduced to mere corpo(-)reality, and finally they are stripped of this aspect as well.

The majority of society is dying: they inhabit cities and spaces that "reek of waste and sewage" (331), the people there have "skin enflamed by prolonged xposure to the city's scalding rain" (331), or they are "migrants with enceph or leadlung" (332). The migrants mentioned here flee various places of the country for the promise of better ones, all in vain. The soil is poisoned[11] beyond repair: "malaria, flooding, drought, rogue crop genomes, parasites, encroaching deadlands" (332) paint a picture of a world unstoppably approaching utter destruction. This is the ultimate *Untermensch*, destined for death: "Every conurb […] has a chemical toilet where the city's unwanted human waste disintegrates quietly, but not quite invisibly" (332). Thus consumption, the destruction of the weak is complete through this symbolic representation. However, it is this same chapter that addresses straightforward

[11] Poisoning is a recurring motif in *Cloud Atlas*. For instance, besides the entire world of 22nd-century Korea being rapidly poisoned in the environmental catastrophe, the protagonist of the first chapter is also gradually poisoned by Henry Goose.

cannibalism as well, as it deals with processing fabricants for food, recycling them for future fabricants and *purebloods* alike.

A reference to the future world defined by cannibalism can be found as early as in "Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery." Childs and Green remark the dual meaning identifiable in this novel's title. One interpretation reflects upon the interrupted narratives, the nested structure of the entire novel, which presents, and even gives life to, fragmented characters, with identities scattered across time and space. As Frobisher remarks: "A half-read book is a half-finished love affair" (65): an ironic statement, since the novel offers just that. Nevertheless, these "half-lives," according to Childs and Green, are "as much an allusion to the dispersal of subjectivity and text as a reference to radioactive decay. In Mitchell's writing, people and stories constantly recite and recompose both themselves and each other" ("The Novels" 39). It can be interpreted as a prophecy forecasting the possible effects of the nuclear reactor (an approaching disaster), it foreshadows the dying people and world of Nea So Copros, thus uniting the particular with the universal, and ultimately directing readers' attention upon the body. For instance, corporeality and narrative join in with one another in Luisa Rey's thoughts while reading the final eight Frobisher-letters, already quoted above: "She removes one of the yellowed envelopes, postmarked October 10, 1931, holds it against her nose, and inhales. *Are molecules of Zedelghem Chateau, of Robert Frobisher's hand, dormant in this paper for forty-four years, now swirling in my lungs, in my blood?*" (Mitchell 453, emphasis in original).

The chronological list of civilisations built around Goose's first law of survival (508) ends with Zachry Bailey and the warring tribes of the Valleysmen and the Kona. Civilisation goes full circle: people fight the same wars, the world is governed by the same mechanisms as preceding the colonisers. Nevertheless, in Zachry's story an isolated moment requires our attention: an instance that focuses on the body and its significance. When Zachry is only twelve, he gets a girl (Jayjo) pregnant. "But then Jayjo's waters busted moons too soon an' Banjo fetched me to Cutter Foot, where she was laborin'. The babbit came out jus' a few beats after I'd got there" (253). The body, being too young, fails. Later on, however, Zachry is haunted by his undeveloped baby: "He was kickin'n'wrigglyin' like he'd done that day Quick, Zachry, said the man, cut your babbit a mouth so he can breathe! I'd got my blade in my hand so I carved my boy a smily slit, like cuttin' cheese it was. Words frothed out, Why'd you kill

me, Pa?" (257). The baby's mouthlessness haunts Zachry in his nightmares because it robs the child of the possibility to fight: to symbolically speak up for itself and thus to have a chance. The mouth is associated with action, with authority. Its lack, consequently, is the ultimate manifestation of helplessness, of the exposed body.

Hence, the body is captured both as the opposite of the soul, and as the extension thereof. The coexisting duality is, once again, at play, with Sonmi's character being the most developed example. Each chapter, however, presents a distinct approach towards both components of this binary. What they all accomplish is to make impossible any clear distinction of the two, and to create a permeable road that sometimes brings them closer together, at other times distances them. The soul appears first as a pure entity, one, however, that is taken advantage of, leading to the perdition of a tribe. As a counter-movement, the Sonmi-chapter presents the soul as the centre of consumer society, equalling money: this is the utter exhaustion of the concept. However, the novel does not leave it at this meaning: the sixth chapter, with Zachry in its focus, brings back a people who regain the appreciation of the human soul, one that is enriched by all shifts and changes, and one that is united with the body. The main character of each unit presents readers with a definition of body and soul together at play.

3. Multiplicity and Singularity

The novel's characters are interconnected on several planes, and the comet-shaped birthmark is the most accentuated symbol uniting selves and, conversely, conflating disparate temporalities and spatialities. Despite all these, the novel resists all homogenising tendencies: this is where a seeming paradox surfaces and, at the same time, the symbol of the ocean is clarified. It is the central claim of this book to highlight and preserve the multiplicity of the characters, the singularity of each of them.

Let us take a look at the narrative methods and symbols employed in outlining the network of identities. Beyond and together with the aforementioned birthmark one finds several textual instances when some fragment of consciousness is shared by two distinct and distant characters. In a first occurrence Frobisher, while lying in bed with his lover, "'[…] dreamt of a … nightmarish café, brilliantly lit, but underground, with no way out. I'd been

dead a long, long time. The waitresses all had the same face. The food was soap, the only drink was cups of lather. The music in the café was'—he wagged an exhausted finger at the MS—'this'" (80). This dream is the manifestation of the union between two distant temporal and spatial planes that are united through music: through that composition that encompasses the creation of the world of the novel. Frobisher unwittingly dreams about Papa Song's, the future McDonald's-like establishment, where Sonmi~451 works and imbibes Soap with the other fabricants of Nea So Copros.

The novel's following unit presents an even greater complexity. On the one hand, it shares a character with "Letters from Zedelghem," namely Rufus Sixmith, who used to be the composer Frobisher's lover. The twist lies in the fact that "Half-Lives" is a novel inside the novel, and thus it presents a doubly fictional world. This would mean that all its characters are fictional inside the universe of the novel, however, Sixmith becomes a key component of the crime story: this time he works as a scientist employed to examine the new nuclear reactor Luisa Rey decides to investigate. As Luisa is reading the correspondence between Frobisher and Sixmith, she cannot help but feel that there is a deep connection between her and the former: "Luisa has reread Sixsmith's letters a dozen times or more in the last day and a half. They disturb her. […] It is […] the dizzying vividness of the images of places and people that the letters have unlocked. Images so vivid she can only call them memories" (121). Her sense of connection is further re-enforced when she reads about Frobisher's birthmark: the same shape as hers.

Finally, the same musical composition will create the ultimate mental link: she needs *Cloud Atlas Sextet* for investigative reasons, however, when she unwittingly hears the music in the shop she describes it as "pristine, riverlike, spectral, hypnotic… *intimately familiar*," and she is convinced that she *knows* that music. (425, emphasis in original). Luisa's connection to Frobisher is palpable. A final example to this would be the moment when she receives the last letters of the exchange between Frobisher and Sixmith, a moment when she asks: "*Are molecules of Zedelghem Chateau, of Robert Frobisher's hand, dormant in this paper for forty-four years, now swirling in my lungs, in my blood? Who is to say?*" (453, emphasis in original). Indeed, who is to say? But the characters and fictional worlds present a thick web of interconnections, and this web enforces the particular temporal and spatial conception of the novel, the zigzagging of moments, of places.

The Luisa Rey-story almost swarms with allusions to other temporal planes. In the fictional work written by Hilary V. Hush Luisa Rey passes a vessel advertised in the following manner:

> CAPE YERBAS MARINA ROYALE
> PROUD HOME OF THE *PROPHETESS*
> BEST-PRESERVED SCHOONER IN THE WORLD! (448)

The *Prophetess* is none other but the ship on which Adam Ewing travelled from Chatham Island to Hawaii. Upon passing the vessel, "Luisa is distracted by a strange gravity that makes her pause for a moment and look at its rigging, listen to its wooden bones creaking. […] Luisa's birthmark throbs. She grasps for the ends of this elastic moment, but they disappear into the past and the future" (448). This and similar fleeting moments, sensations pervade the novel's disparate chapters, bringing together the different identities.

The line of connections to the Luisa Rey-story does not end here. Timothy Cavendish (the protagonist of the following unit), after suffering a stroke, unwittingly recounts a character's name from "Half-Lives": "A stroke? Two-stroker? Stroke me? Margo Roker had a stroke. Margo Roker?" (370). A character steps out of the fiction Cavendish is reading and, in his delusional state, becomes a quasi-companion in his distress. As Hopf remarks, this woman "becomes intertwined with the foreign personages surrounding him at the retirement home, and as he stumbles toward awareness she is arguably just as 'real' to his muddled consciousness as they are" (109).

A more cloaked example of a shared consciousness (or memory) is found in the Sonmi-chapter, where, upon escaping from corporate headquarters, the car transporting Sonmi~451 swerves off the road, and in that moment she "remember[s] the drop: it shook free an earlier memory of blackness, inertia, gravity, of being trapped in another ford; I could not find its source in my own memories" (330). Since "ford" is the corpocracy's new word for cars, this peculiar memory brings the reader once again back to Luisa Rey who, as she traverses the bridge leading out of Swannekke Island (the place of the nuclear reactor), is attacked by a hitter hired to kill her, and her car plummets into the water. Sonmi~451, from a significant temporal and spatial distance, relives the same experience, coupled with the same sensory impressions as Luisa's. This instance is revealing not only because of the mental connection it marks, but also because it emphasises a sensorial experience: it is not the

conscious mind seeming to remember a moment belonging to a different character's life, but the corporeal sensation that overwhelms Sonmi~451.

Beyond these more obvious intratextual links we may find symbolic webs that further deepen the connections. Firstly, one could mention a curious choice of symbols, and that is the hydra. Let us start with the more pleasant and humorous utilisation of this symbol, namely by Robert Frobisher, who upon being invited to the van de Veldes' town house (a family he gets acquainted with during his stay at Vyvyan Ayrs's house), calls the daughters "a hydra of heads" (466), like a unified monster that has the express wish to prey on the poor man. Or, the ascended Sonmi~451, upon attending university, remarks that "when I departed from the lecture theatre, a fifty-headed hydra of questions, miked walkmans and flash nikons pounced" (232). Nevertheless, beyond these rather *trivial* utilizations of the monster, we may encounter some more telling examples in the novel.

First, and most explicitly, the word appears as the name given to the nuclear reactor Luisa Rey starts to investigate. As it is gradually revealed, the reactor built on Swannekke Island "isn't as safe as the official line. Isn't safe at all, in fact" (100), and thus with its grand inauguration not only the reactor is proved to be a monster, but more importantly the corporation behind it, which goes on a killing spree to bury all information about the inherent dangers in its enterprise.

It is possible that the remnants of this Hydra, the nuclear reactor building, are the ones we re-encounter in the Sonmi-chapter, when one night she seeks shelter in a "concrete bloc signed HYDRA NURSERY CORP" (339). This Hydra, however, becomes the womb where clones are manufactured, and so the symbolism is reversed: after numerous deaths the building creates life. It provides Nea So Copros with an infinite amount of fabricants meant to serve the corpocracy. Nevertheless, although the building's main role may be reversed, what Sonmi sees in it is akin to a factory line, one which gives life to clones just for it to be taken from them in twelve years. Thus the building stands for doom, for inevitable death. The seemingly futile fight is revisited in the novel's final lines, in the famous Ewing-quote that starts with the following: "He who would do battle with the manyheaded hydra of human nature must pay a world of pain & his family must pay it along with him!" (529).

After the symbol of the Hydra we should also return to the soul Zachry mentions in his ruminations: "Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies, an' tho' a cloud's shape nor hue nor

size don't stay the same, it's still a cloud an' so is a soul" (324). And indeed, as it is evoked by the comet-shaped birthmark, it really seems that in the world of *Cloud Atlas* souls randomly travel from one body to another. The symbolism attributed to souls, however, does not end here. One may recognise a pattern in which the word itself appears at different moments, in different contexts, thus enriching its meaning, but also sometimes providing it with different undertones.

Our first encounter with the word "soul" happens through Adam Ewing's investigations into the two warring tribes, namely the Maori and the Moriori, upon which he realises that "[s]ince time immemorial, the Moriori's priestly caste dictated that whosoever spilt a man's blood killed his own *mana* – his honor, his worth, his standing & his soul" (12). Ironically, it is partly this beautiful creed that dooms the fate of these peoples. The Maori, although they possibly share kinship with the Moriori, "proved themselves apt pupils of the English in 'the dark arts of colonization'" (14), and thus they turned the Moriori into their own slaves.

The ironic twist on the word "soul" is further complicated in the novel's fifth chapter, telling the story of Sonmi~451, an ascended fabricant who joins Unionism to fight against the slavery of the clones. In this story of 22nd-century Korea (Nea So Copros) people, a.k.a consumers have "Soulrings," contrary to fabricants who are forbidden from consuming, but are promised a future (Xultation) which would transform them into "consumers with Soulrings" (190). The implanted chip also creates a spatial dichotomy between humans and clones by virtue of the fact that its existence allows humans to move freely, whereas clones without "Souls" are restricted in their movements. This is undoubtedly a twisted reconceptualisation of the human soul as becoming no more than an emptied out object that allows people to do the only thing they come to covet: consumption. In Sonmi's statement we encounter a dying world where those in charge choose denial and the "parroting [of] Catechism Seven: 'A Soul's value is the dollars therein'" (341).[12]

[12]As a side note, it could be remarked that the symbolism of the "soul" appears in an interpretation provided by Kelly Frame, who identifies a consistent appropriation of religious terminology in the Sonmi-chapter. As she remarks, besides the "soul" separating fabricants from consumers, "[t]he Fabricants in the restaurant are 'servers' managed by a 'Seer'; they operate under 'Catechisms' pronounced by their 'Logoman', Papa Song; and they ritualistically chant to Papa Song and genuflect by '[making] the sign of the dollar' (CA 187, 188, 190)."

Adam Ewing's words at the end of the novel have a double significance in light of the Sonmi-chapter. Ewing utters the following: "one fine day, a purely predatory world shall consume itself. Yes, the Devil shall take the hindmost until the foremost is the hindmost. In an individual, selfishness uglifies the soul; for the human species, selfishness is extinction" (528). These words are both premonitory and retrospective, since temporally they come before the events captured in the fifth chapter, but in the novel, spatially, they come after we read Sonmi's story. These two moments paint a bleak picture of the world.

Nevertheless, Zachry's story (which interestingly bears numerous similarities with the Maori-Moriori relationship witnessed in the first unit) may turn the bleak vision around, hinting at a possible reinstatement of the soul. Zachry's tribe ascribes great significance to their icons, and the "Icon'ry" functions as a sacred place that brings them spiritual enlightenment. When their Prescient guest, Meronym asks about its meaning ("Is icons a home for the soul? Or a common mem'ry o' faces n'kin'n'age'n'all? Or a prayer to Sonmi? Or a tombstone wrote in this-life with messages for next-life?" 270), the question already signifies the multiple meanings the icons really possess. The answer given by Zachry might be a complex definition of the soul itself, as he claims that the Icon'ry "held Vallesmen's past an' present all t'gether" (270). As Cristina Diamant remarks, "[f]or Valleysmen, the Icon'ry is sacred because its logic is tautology, as for any god" (220). No explicit description of the Icon'ry is ever provided by the novel, nevertheless, one may recognise in it the artistic thread that gradually reveals an ever-growing significance in the book, like in the case of the previously discussed musical piece.

Indeed, it seems that art is the ultimate bridge that brings together not only past, present and future, but disparate temporal and spatial planes, as well as very different identities. As Gerd Bayer remarks, "the novel resorts to music, film, literature, and biography to explain how humanity manages to bridge time through the creation of timeless values" (348). The different chapters all present us with several artistic manifestations, such as Ewing's journal, Frobisher's music, Luisa's thriller, Cavendish's movie, and all these comprise a link through which one artistic expression helps the succeeding character, at times bridging several chapters and worlds. These connections are so thoroughly conveyed and rendered to the reader that it seems that the novel's "characters are constituted in and of literature" (Hopf 110). Consequently, I cannot agree with Shanahan's following remark:

> Zachry's carved icons, the dendroglyphs Adam Ewing stumbles upon, and the people, religions, ideas, technologies, and media forms that repeatedly go up in flames over centuries in *Cloud Atlas*, even Frobisher's ethereal music, all stand in the end as mere proxies to be seen through on the way to apprehending more permanent because disembodied glimpses of souls as clouds in time. (139)

Contrary to this view, it seems that these artistic products are the only ones that can really form a strong enough link capable of bridging both actual and virtual temporalities, bringing together fiction inside the fiction with "mere" fiction, and ultimately creating something lasting. As Bayer claims, "*Cloud Atlas* presents art as existing outside of time, in the very realm traditionally reserved for religion and, later, enlightened science" (348). Its power and timelessness comes from the fact that "it touches some aspect of [the characters'] humanity" (Brown 88). The *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, as the central artistic manifestation, is echoed throughout the novel, through several centuries and lives, ultimately bringing characters and readers alike to the reassuring question: "Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?" (529).

III. Space and Memory

After detailed considerations of the temporality and web of motifs in the novel, leading to a careful analysis of the self and its relation to the fictional world, I have arrived at my central question: how does the process of remembrance function in this fictional world? Or, more precisely, how do memory and space relate to each other, influence one another: how is memory conceived in space, how is space affected by memory? So far we have witnessed different instances of this interconnection, and *Cloud Atlas* will further enrich the array of different conceptualisations. One of my central claims is that contemporary fiction does more than bring back a nostalgic past, something lost through focusing on memory. These novels are actually in search of an alternative to history. What is more, I am arguing that they have found a powerful alternative in memory itself. David Mitchell's novel, at first glance, seems to be the exception since, as Casey Shoop and Dermot Ryan argue in their joint paper on *Cloud Atlas*, the novel does have close connections to the issues of Big History (93-95). However, this affiliation already testifies to the novel's wish to find alternatives to the traditional understandings of history.

Shoop and Ryan accurately remark that "Big History's attunement to both smaller and larger scale temporal rhythms offers a way out of human history that seems, at once, seduced by the narrative of progress and condemned to repeat the catastrophe that invariably follows in its wake" (95-96). The definitive proof for the novel resisting history resides, again, in its claim about the numerous possible pasts, presents and futures running in parallel. This vision opens up time itself, and cancels any exclusive linear temporality. The further numerous allusions to cyclicality and an even more complex temporal conception, represented by the concertina, deepen the novel's resistance to traditional history and provide alternatives to our conception of time. Through this different conception of time the novel ultimately surpasses previous understandings of memory too: in a concertina-like temporality memory and its workings need to be reconceptualised.

1. Subject and Space

Corporeality becomes a complex issue that encompasses both the subject's inner world and its relation to the world. The positioning of the self's body is random by far. As Fiona McCulloch formulates it, "Mitchell's multi-layered narrative shifts across a spatiotemporal spectrum, simultaneously containing Victorian, twentieth-century and futuristic protagonists. […] Through this he level[s] and equalise[s] the space between through the umbilical birthmark of panhuman relations" (149). This panhumanism is a powerful motif running through the novel, however, I cannot agree with McCulloch's claim that it would reject "unified individualism" (149). It is exactly the duality of individualism and universality that the novel promotes through, for instance, the birthmark that becomes the symbol for the characters' disparateness, but also for their connection. This birthmark does not assume any sort of actual soul crossing, but rather maps the intricate web of connections among different identities scattered across time and space.

I have already analysed the different temporal planes and their relation to each other, but how does space interact with the individual and, more importantly, how does it affect the identity? It is Sonmi~451 who remarks: "I understood one's environment is a key to one's identity, but that my environment, Papa Song's, was a key I had lost" (238). These words signify the ascension (both mental and physical, since she actually surfaces from

underground) of a clone into knowledge and into the world, with its attendant dangers, with her fears. Furthermore, the above quote also reflects on a state of rootlessness, of transitoriness that is becoming more and more pervasive in Western societies. The place we call home is often lost or abandoned, supplanted by transitional places, increasing time spent in the *non-places* Marc Augé defines, in a state of nomadism. As McCulloch reflects: "By transpositioning each section that spans from the 1850s to a post-apocalyptic future, Mitchell resists the territorial fixity of Western hegemony and presents a philosophically nomadic text of border crossings" (142).

The world of Mitchell's novel is a complex entity based on a close interconnection with the subject: with the characters of the six distinct chapters. The spaces these characters inhabit present a "unique environment" that will frame the subject (Trimm 14). As Ryan Trimm formulates it, worlds are "encountered from within but are altered by those who discover themselves within them" (14). The characters and the spaces they exist in mutually affect each other, and the subject will come to alter the environment they find themselves in. Trimm then goes one step further in claiming that there is not only a link between self and space, but the self is ultimately a part of space, experiencing it from within: The sense of the world locates and discloses itself only within and through the material and the corporeal, through embodied selves" (14). The two are interdependent and also constantly affecting each other. The plural Trimm uses is also revealing, since through it the stress falls on multiplicity: on the amalgam of characters and spaces that form rhizomic connections in *Cloud Atlas*.

The places the characters inhabit serve, on the one hand, as a distinct type of characterisation. On the other hand, they themselves are characterised by the people through whom we encounter them. Thus, what the reader witnesses in the novel is the mutual effect the environment and the subject exert upon each other. Another aspect of their complexity lies in the interconnections the novel abounds in: it seems that although we are dealing with six disparate stories with their own protagonists, all of them scattered across a large spectrum (further sliced by the chapter interruptions), there is nevertheless a pattern of repetitive schemas, one that further highlights the dualism inherent in *Cloud Atlas*: the dichotomy of the individual and the universal, spiced with a cyclical design.

One of the most apparent examples of such a play can be captured through the island chain of Hawaii, situated in the Pacific Ocean. "David Mitchell's stories can also be regarded

as 'spatial trajectories' which connect and organise the physical and mental landscapes that his characters occupy, and it seems that the island plays a significant role in this cognitive mapping of narratives" (Schmitz 5).[13] It is significant that, although the novel presents the planet as an entirety, it still resorts to a repetitive pattern in its setting. Hawaii has an appearance in three of the novel's chapters. Chronologically the first instance would be ""The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing," in which the *Prophetess* transports Adam to Honolulu, where, with the help of Autua, his life is saved from the progressive poisoning by Henry Goose. Thus the island of Oahu serves as a haven, and also as a quasi-resolution to Adam's story and journal. The second instance is presented in the world of 22nd-century Korea, when and where clones working in Papa Song's, after twelve years of service, are promised to be taken to the paradisiacal island of Hawaii. However, as Sonmi realises, the ship meant to transport the fabricants is nothing more but an abattoir recycling the clones. Finally, the post-apocalyptic tribe of the Vallesymen (Zachry's people) lives on Hawaii, the island that becomes one of the few still inhabited places on Earth, housing peoples reverted to a primordial lifestyle as a result of losing knowledge and memory of essential skills. It seems that this particular island is meant to reinforce hope, to serve, once again, as a safe haven in a world filled with people with murderous intent, in a society that inhabits a rapidly dying world: "Nea So Copros is poisoning itself to death. Its soil is polluted, its rivers lifeless, its air toxloaded, its food supplies riddled with rogue genes" (341). Nevertheless, Hawaii is not very different from the places characters flee to come here: it is also governed by consumption, or the apocalypse itself.

The island of Hawaii becomes a symbol of the fate of humankind, one that is more and more devoid of humanity. Hélène Machinal aptly observes:

> From the imperial expansion based on a eugenistic ideology which is part and parcel of the Industrial Revolution, to the dehumanization inherent in a post-human society based on the systematic annihilation of any individual hint of deviance from the collective frame enforced by the central political and economic authority, the threat underlined in this novel boils down to the disappearance of humanity. (7-8)

Apparent progress, various attempts at building a society, a world of success all amount to the same result: the loss of humanity. In light of this realisation Meronym's task as a cartographer

[13] Eva-Maria Schmitz dedicates a paper to investigating the islands of Mitchell's four novels, with a detailed analysis of the several islands figuring in *Cloud Atlas*. As she claims: "Aside from serving as utopian or Arcadian imaginaries and places of refuge, then, islands in David Mitchell's novels are frequently subject to processes of both peaceful and forceful colonisation, cultural clashes, corruption and impending threat" (15).

of the post-apocalyptic world Zachry inhabits is extended to mapping "the human dimension the tribe has retained" (Machinal 8). And this gesture ultimately brings together all the characters the novel deploys, since Meronym's mapping will be extended to encompass the entire fictional world and its different stories.

Beyond or despite the repetitive patterns in this fictional world, let us not forget about the borderlessness that is a significant trait of this universe. Patrick O'Donnell accurately terms the journeys taken by the novel's characters as rhizomic (6). The rhizome is a key concept in the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose principal characteristics are as follows:

> unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature […] The rhizome is reducible to neither the One or the multiple. […] It is comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overspills. (21)

Similarly to the rhizome as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* balances the aforementioned patterns with chance occurrences, and with the fact that there is no clear centre to the novel. The symbolic charge of the title is meant to further emphasise this aspect. Furthermore, we cannot forget about Isaac Sachs' theory concerning virtual and actual temporal planes, whose very existence testifies to the randomness inherent to the world of the novel. The future each character ends up with is one of the numerous possible futures laid in store for them.

In light of these considerations, if we return to Sonmi~451's imagery of the key that she lost, we realise that this loss, beyond the word's denotative meaning, also possesses the prospect of a new world, new sites opening up to her. As McCulloch remarks, "she realises the benefits of nomadically crossing intellectual and physical thresholds in transposing subjectivity beyond the familiar so that she no longer recognises that naive self" (152). To capture the concept of the nomad, I will use Rosi Braidotti's following definition: "Nomadic becomings are rather the affirmation of the unalterably positive structure of difference, meant as a multiple and complex process of transformation, a flux of multiple becomings, the play of complexity, or the principle of not-One" (145). Sonmi as a nomad gradually extends into a metaphor in the novel: Mephi, a Unanimity boardman, upon realising that the clone's knowledge is ever-expanding, and thus her identity progressing, calls her an "inner émigré" (227). This term points towards her state as being displaced, still in the stage of being lost

(after leaving Papa Song's), facing the dangers of her newfound freedom. Nevertheless, with her actually becoming a nomad, a sojourner across Nea So Copros, she finds a mature identity in joining the resistance movement.

In *Cloud Atlas* there is a fluidity characteristic of both characters and their environments. The multiplicity inherent in both structure and content represents the core of the novel, in line with Braidotti's principle of "not-One." There is a constant rapport between the self and the surrounding world, which requires the self to capture "the outside world by making itself receptive to the totality of an assemblage of elements, in an almost geographical or cartographic manner" (Braidotti 145). The mapping Braidotti mentions resonates with the central metaphor of Mitchell's novel, namely the cloud atlas. The cloud atlas invites readers to chart and map the multiple webs interspersing the novel (characters, places, symbols, etc.), but it also reflects on the identity as the ineffable which, nevertheless, one constantly attempts to capture.

In this universe, characters are linked to each other and to the places they inhabit. The distinct selves come together to highlight the interplay between the individual and the entire cosmos, just as it is embodied by Meronym, Zachry's Prescient visitor: her name denotes "part of something but which is used to refer to the whole of it" (Oxford Dictionaries). Childs and Green extend this linguistic sign, claiming that "[i]n Mitchell's fiction everything seems to be demonstrably a part of the larger whole. Each character is a meronym of the web of relations entangling all the others" ("The Novels" 32). This character, together with the others, contains in miniature the entire world she inhabits, she stands for the environment that is filtered through her body. She, together with the other selves inhabiting different spatiotemporal planes, is both the part and the whole, the individual and the universe.

2. Memory and the Archive

The different characters of Mitchell's universe are the parts that together comprise a whole: the subject who unites virtual and actual times, pasts, presents and futures, and this subject embodies them all. Characters from distant temporal and spatial planes exhibited numerous signs of connection among them. The previously outlined symbolic web works towards creating a unity in their difference and distance. One of the most elaborated symbols, the

comet-shaped birthmark functions as a conductor through which memories are linked and gradually organised into a complex archive preserving them. The preservation process falls in line with the general understanding of the archive as a container, as a fixed deposit of sorts. However, the archive in *Cloud Atlas* surpasses its existence as a mere preserver, requiring a re-evaluation of its relationship to memory.

Mitchell's novel, through its broadening of the concept of the archive, sheds light on an ongoing process in contemporary theories. Thus, I believe that a short outline of the theoretical background is operative. The concept comes from Greek (*arkheia*), meaning "public records." Jacques Derrida, relying on Freud, emphasises the complexity of the Greek term, on which he bases his definition of the archive. He claims that the term means both commencement and commandment: "The name apparently coordinates two principles in one: the principle according to nature or history, *there* where things *commence* – physical, historical, or ontological principle – but also the principle according to the law, *there* where men and gods *command* (…) –nomological principle" (Derrida 1, emphasis in original). To this Amit Pinchevski adds a third sense, the topological one, according to which "the archive involves a certain location, the place where some things are collected and kept, then consigned to the collection." What this implies is exclusivity, which relies on "collecting what presumably does not exist anywhere else," on the one hand, and "controlling accessibility to the archived collection," on the other (254-55).

The topological sense seems to be the determining one in the history of definitions of the archive. To quote Jonathan Boulter, "[t]he archive, as traditionally conceived, is a location of knowledge, a place where history itself is housed, where the past is accommodated" (3). What this reveals is an age-old conception of the archive as storage, something fixed, a place or space that passively holds the selected material. As a result of this approach to the archive, it has been relegated to the fringes for centuries. To quote Pinchevski, the archive remains "external to the everyday, to the here-and-now of living memory" (254),

Derrida recognises that the subject is "always already inhabited by its own loss," and thus it "becomes an archive, a site, where loss is maintained and nourished" (Boulter 1). Hence, the subject becomes the centre that brings together past, present and future: the self becomes the archive that preserves the event. This conception surpasses the understandings of

the archive "as working toward a preservation of what has been," testifying instead to an authoritative way of working "to mark out the space of beginnings and futurity" (Boulter 3).

The archive in the Digital Era, however, has undergone substantial changes. A new interpretation is based on the electronic audio-visual technologies: with their help, archiving has become a constant process, an active involvement that is democratised, open, inclusive rather than exclusive. Archiving and the collective memory work together in shaping and reshaping social life and identity. It "can now be viewed as a form of social intervention, a participatory social practice, which turns the archive as a whole into a collective project" (Pinchevski 256). What Mitchell's novel proposes is the combination of the two: it plays with our concepts of time, compresses and folds them, while the archives function both as preservers and as living entities that take part in the events, in the world they inhabit.

In Mitchell's novel the archive as a phenomenon extends as the story unfolds, as newer chapters and characters surface in the narrative. As it preserves the entire fictional world inhabited by Adam Ewing, Robert Frobisher, Luisa Rey, Timothy Cavendish, Sonmi~451, Zachry and many other characters, the novel we hold in our hands is the greatest, most encompassing archive. This motif is further emphasised in the novel: different books perform the task of archiving a character's life story, such as Adam's journal or Hilary V. Hush's novel about Luisa Rey. Besides books there is an abundance of media through which events are preserved for future generations: Frobisher's letters, a film made about Timothy Cavendish's life (a doubly metatextual element, because Cavendish fantasises about the film's creation, and later on, through Sonmi, the reader learns that it has actually been made), the orison capturing Sonmi's testimony (and her life) before her execution, and finally Zachry's yarnin', a return to the original and purest form of archiving: orality. The final narrative receives an emphatic position in the line of archiving techniques: the narrator "is presented as the owner of a collective memory which is part of the tribe's culture; thus, words become the stepping stones of a renewal of humanity" (Machinal 8). Zachry's story, thus, is a return to the origins in all senses: it returns to the purity and directness of storytelling, reliant on orality and presence, but it also unites all the previous stories into a coherent whole, and hence the character becomes not only the owner, but the very embodiment of collective memory.

One of the main issues that emerge is connected to the question of loss. As I stated before, for Derrida the archive "marks a space of anxiety, precisely, an anxiety about the

possibility of loss" (Boulter 4), and thus it contains an inherent paradox, for, based on this approach, the archive is meant to preserve something that will be irretrievably lost, thus dooming it to failure. The moments captured in and by the novel show these archives at work, preserving a life story across space and time. Nevertheless, this moment does not erase the underlying feeling of loss, of the inevitability of oblivion. But contrary to Derrida's claim that this loss is always inherent and approaching, I recognise in *Cloud Atlas* an elaborate attempt to fight it.

The entire book builds on the different archiving techniques and their impact on time. As Martin Paul Eve, in his close reading of the novel's text(s) claims, archiving as a major issue pervades all levels of the work, even its own textuality: "Mitchell's novel even plays with these archival concepts at the level of the edition, yielding textual variants across electronic and print media" (52). Eve believes that this gesture transforms the novel "into a metatextual work that queries the stability of any archive, even while linking the technologies of history to power" (52). Through this, Mitchell's book captures a pervasive anxiety that defines the contemporary world, resonant of Derrida's focus on loss.

As Diamant remarks, "[e]specially in a world where cyberspace is a reality rather than wishful thinking, society is obsessed with storing information. The archival impulse is to process more data and, in turn, hopefully to generate more profound insight. All this is done in the name of self-preservation" (211). What is not explicitly stated here by Diamant, but still very present, is the fact that this impulse for storing is born out of a constant fear of disappearance, of loss. Humanity strives to preserve its past, to retain its memories, and their destruction would mean a catastrophe. The novel plays with these scenarios most expressively through the Sonmi-chapter, in which the ascended clone embodies this duality: she is both an archive in herself and a danger to the collective memory. Thus the problematic nature of archiving is embedded in the narrative, however, it seems to be counteracted not by the individual archives (as enumerated above), but by their joint consideration: art itself. Robert Frobisher's music survives and transmits something across the entirety of the novel: its disparate times and spaces, and the different records of lives come together to capture an event that joins them.

The all-encompassing event is ultimately recognisable in the characters of the novel. I agree with Boulter in his conclusion that the subject becomes the archive (5). Furthermore, I

claim that this recognition will provide the key to understanding how memory works in the spaces of the novel and, conversely, how they mutually influence each other. Boulter defines the subject in the following way: "As crypt, as archive ventrilocated by history, the subject begins to offer itself as a site to be heard, to be read, to be interpreted" (7). Since Mitchell's novel employs multiple subjects that thwart any attempt at centralization (it is impossible, for instance, to identify any one main character), we are dealing with a peculiar type of decentred (or even shattered) subjectivity (*see* Boulter 10).

These considerations may lead one into identifying a powerful universalising tendency that erases the subject. Boulter, for instance, reaches this conclusion when he interprets the novel as testifying to a "universalising antihumanism" (15). Although he claims that "individual interiority is radically threatened with erasure" by the very structure of the novel (134), I believe that it is precisely this structure that preserves the individuality of each character. For a closer look at how this works, I will resort once again to the story of Sonmi~451, this time extended into Zachry's post-apocalyptic chapter. Sonmi's testament, her voice, her appearance, her essence are all captured in the orison, an egg-shaped device that "*will be archived at the Ministry of Testaments*" (Mitchell 187, emphasis in original).

The orison presents a rich array of symbolic meanings: it becomes one of the few remnants of the world as it was known before the apocalypse. It is preserved by the last technologically advanced peoples, the Prescients. As their name suggests, these peoples are considered among the primitive tribes to possess visionary qualities, which is again the result of the inversion of temporalities: they are powerful and supposedly prophetic exactly due to their knowledge of the past, due to their memories. The primitive tribes have no memories, and consequently they have lost their skills, their capabilities. The Prescients thus embody remembrance and the power it denotes.

The orison becomes one palpable instance of memory. Meronym, the Prescient woman visiting the tribe of the Valleysmen, shows this egg to Zachry, and provides the following explanation: "*An orison is a brain an' a window an' it's a mem'ry. Its brain lets you do things like unlock observ'tree doors what yo jus' seen. Its window lets you speak to other orisons in the far-far. Its mem'ry lets you see what orisons in the past seen'n' heard, an' keep what my orison sees'n'hears safe from f'getting*'" (290, emphasis in original). This is a revelation to the man who believed that Sonmi was a deity. Consequently, the vision and Meronym's

description present the worshipped entity (who, according to the Valleysmen, "had been birthed by a god o' Smart named Darwin," 290) as a mere human being, or even less than that: a "*freakbirthed human*" (290, emphasis in original). The revelation about Sonmi's true identity does not take away from the Valleysmen's appreciation of her.

The meaning of the word "orison" sheds light both on how the tribe originally worshipped her, and how this relationship strengthens with the new identity: the word means "prayer," which on the one hand reflects on the people believing her to be a deity, and on the other it redefines the testimony Sonmi gave to the archivist. The testimony archived on the orison becomes a symbolic prayer for change, for a different world. In both cases, Sonmi is a symbol in herself. As Boulter remarks, "The orison contains the appeal to and from a long-dead, spectrally preserved Sonmi, an appeal that has placed a burden of responsibility on both this primitive tribe, which worships her, and this advanced group, which sees her not as a deity, but a figure of ethical action, a figure, more precisely, of the ethical life" (136).

Sonmi as a subject and the orison capturing her are capable of surpassing centuries and of giving meaning to a group of people. Although the Valleysmen do not understand her language, it seems that words at this stage are superfluous: her mere presence is more powerful, and the only thing that is needed to preserve her self. The silvery egg is even passed down from father to son, and this son instructs his listeners (and readers) as follows:

> Sit down a beat or two.
> Hold out your hands.
> Look. (325)

His instruction is the moment that invites the reader on a journey of stories folding upon one another, preserved through each other, ultimately finding a haven in the hands of a man who does not even understand them. Luke Hortle claims that "by holding the orison, the human is constructed as a containing presence for the entire novel" (269). Indeed, this moment can be extended to encompass a universal invitation to take part in the storytelling, to capture and preserve the self. With Berthold Schoene's words, "it is the novel's navel, its axial nadir and central turning point, simultaneously its ending and its recommencement" (119).

The subject in its diversity, the multiplicity of selves contains both the place for and the mechanism of memories. And the process is visceral: it is intimate, filtered through the corporeality of each individual. One can find abundant instances in the novel that reflect on the meeting of temporalities and spatialities in the body of a character. Here we can remind

ourselves of Luisa Rey reading Frobisher's letters, feeling like molecules of Frobisher, of his existence are "*now swirling in my lungs, in my blood*" (Mitchell 453, emphasis in original). Or another one of the numerous examples shows how corporeal Sonmi's quasi-memory is of Luisa Rey and her car being tossed into the river: her own drop with the ford "shook free an earlier memory of blackness, inertia, gravity, of being trapped in another ford" (330). As Setha Low claims: "The space occupied by the body, and the perception and experience of one's body and space, contracts and expands in relationship to a person's emotions, state of mind, sense of self, social relations and cultural predispositions" (96).

These memories are ineffable, purely corporeal, and thus elusive. They transcend distant temporalities and spatialities, but not only that: they transcend subjectivities. This is how memory and remembrance are redefined by *Cloud Atlas*. Linearity, and thus history is replaced by the concertina, by the spatiotemporal compressions that have the self at their core. Memories are in constant motion, capable of transgressing numerous spatio-temporal planes and uniting disparate personalities. Memories infuse the body of each individual character, they enter the cellular level, and gradually the self and memories become inseparable. The birthmark shared by the characters of the six chapters becomes the symbol of overcoming the danger of loss: its appearance on the bodies of selves belonging to such different timelines, fictional and sometimes doubly fictional worlds, symbolises the constant motion and subsistence of a collective consciousness.

I started the analysis of the archive in *Cloud Atlas* by claiming that the novel itself is the greatest, most encompassing archive of them all. And indeed, beyond the comet-shaped birthmark, beyond the characters inhabiting the novel's universe there is the writing itself, archiving the different stories for the reader. The differing registers, styles, genres invoked by *Cloud Atlas* raise the entire preoccupation with archiving and remembering to yet another level. This is just as much part of the structural and thematic criss-crossing Mitchell employs throughout the book as, for instance, the symbolic web, the virtual and actual times, or the multiplicity of personas interlinked.

The novel toys with the infinite possibilities variants can yield an artistic work: Eve's complex analysis of the textual milieu of the novel testifies to the intricacy of Mitchell's undertaking. History as singularity is erased, the novel as a finished, closed work is surpassed, since there are several versions of Mitchell's novel coexisting. Furthermore, the blending of

such genres as the travel narrative, crime novel, satirical social commentary, dystopia, science fiction, etc. ultimately creates a peculiar literary universe by invoking the various motifs, genres and patterns. I agree with Machinal who describes the novel as "kaleidoscopic (,) playing on genres, fragmentation and continuity and implicitly proposing a reflection on the future but also the definition of humanity" (1). The multiplicity of genres serves as a gesture to surpass generic, temporal and spatial limitations alike, introducing "a cartography of the human" (Machinal 1).

The diverse genres, all interconnected, form a continuity, a fluidity that erases borders and extends the concept of the archive itself. Together with Machinal, I recognise the different patterns of the novel, investigated throughout this chapter, enforcing the aforementioned continuity, ultimately creating a consciousness straddling space and time. And that consciousness surpasses not only the spatio-temporal limitations, but also those of the novel, extending to the reader, too. Through this literary universe created by and through the novel, *Cloud Atlas* becomes an archive on its own, one that prompts the reader to mobilise their textual and cultural remembrance.

Conclusion

The reader of *Cloud Atlas* gradually becomes a quasi-character who is engaged in the process of remembrance. The work reveals the interconnections and the ensuing flexibility the culture of remembrance exhibits: the archive has become flexible and changing, genres, just as temporalities and spatialities, coexist and affect each other, their boundaries are either erased or reconceived. Adam Ewing's final words at the end of the novel reinforce its formal and thematic complexity: "Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?" (529). The novel's structure, with the interrupted narratives folding upon each other, is closely aligned with the intricate symbols enmeshing these chapters.

The disparate characters, who exhibit both temporal and spatial distances (or even greater ones, like belonging to separate fictional universes), are connected on a visceral level. The various bodies become the sites where the spatio-temporal planes meet, collide, overlap, etc. Their bodies are palimpsests that testify to the multiplicity of (hi)stories: the multitude of drops becomes the symbol for the scattered but still united selves that ultimately create "a

communal web of the world" (Ho 359). The subject of *Cloud Atlas* is not one unified entity: it is the amalgam of subjectivities, shattered identities that maintain their singularity, but also unite in this borderless, endless world. Identity is both singular and multiple, constituted by the joint forces of memory and space, manifested through stories, through narratives. The multiple texts, the different media blend fiction with reality, intertwine fictionalities in order to create a universe where the actual and the virtual are interchangeable. Pasts, presents and futures run in parallel, chance and the subject decide what gets centre stage. Temporalities fold upon each other and reveal ever-new narrative threads.

The novel has no real beginning and, conversely, no straightforward ending. Its structure allows for further expansions into infinite stories, versions, characters inhabiting both virtual and actual spheres of existence. Nevertheless, this world is never chaotic, and never really hopeless. Although the themes and symbols themselves, pervading the novel, could point towards an inevitable apocalypse, in the sense of disaster extinguishing life and erasing the world as we know it, it always goes one step further. It surpasses the apocalypse, and gives voice to a hopeful future.

My reading of the novel was aimed at demonstrating that in spite of, or alongside, the cyclicality working as a determining force, both the novel's structure and content are more approachable through the concept of the concertina. This musical instrument provides a key to understanding the disparate chapters folding upon one another, it helps chart the interrelationships among them, but the concertina also emphasises the multiple spatiotemporal planes operating in the world of *Cloud Atlas*, connected through the subject. The concertina opens up the fictional space and facilitates the existence of multiple actual and virtual times. Furthermore, it being a musical instrument, the concertina becomes the symbol for music and, on a more encompassing level: of art itself. Starting with musical compositions like "Eternal Recurrence" (by Vyvyan Ayrs) and, more importantly, Frobisher's *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, music not only reflects on the novel, but it enriches it, complements it, and finally soothes it in the sometimes apocalyptic, at other times chaotic swirl of events.

The memory is just as elusive as the multiple spatiotemporal planes operating in the world of the novel. A comet-shaped birthmark unites consciousnesses, selves from different worlds, but what it does is more than create the illusion of transmigration. The birthmark connects the selves on a cellular level: it brings to the fore their corporeality, the body as the

most intimate way of experiencing moments, and of remembering the past, the future. It is through the body that the subject becomes the true archive, one that surpasses loss and instead operates as a preserver and a constantly changing, living organism that moulds the archived event. The definition of the archive proposed by the novel brings it close to the workings of the memory: not fixed but fluid, with a mutual influence it shows between the subject and the event archived and remembered.

Although "your life amounted to no more than a drop in a limitless ocean" (529), music, art, and the self are living archives that preserve and vitalise memories, the entire world. Characters in Mitchell's novel read each other's diaries, novels, watch films about each other's life, experience existence anew and thus propagate continuation. With the unavoidable ephemerality there is also the promise of something surviving: in the music, in the birthmark (body), in the self. Hence, there is no better conclusion than Bailey's instructions:

> Sit down a beat or two.
> Hold out your hands.
> Look. (325)

Conclusion

The chapters of this dissertation presented four contemporary British novels in which memory and space are more than just background to the story. Countless other literary pieces focus on spatiality, temporality or remembrance, but what these four novels exhibit is an emphatic problematisation of these phenomena together. The novels present issues and questions connected to time, space and memory in such pronounced ways that they ultimately become quasi-protagonists to the works. All of them focus on the interplay between memory and spatiality, through various approaches, utilising different lenses. I believe that these works show a growing tendency in the novelistic fiction of the twenty-first century, one that is defined by diversity.

My intention was to attempt to decipher the current Zeitgeist, or at least investigate some prominent trends and movements underlying contemporary fiction. That is partly the reason why I chose authors whose literary career started around the turn of the millennium. What I contend on the pages of this enterprise is that, although memory and spatiality have always been present in all literature, the twenty-first century presents a heightened interest in them together. They have become more than just setting and background to character developments, they are significant forces that actively participate in events, they shape and mould identity.

There are numerous studies proposing to chart and map contemporary British literature, or contemporary literature in general, as I exemplified in the methodological unit of this work. These substantive writings identify several emergent trends and paths on the contemporary literary scene. Some treatises focus on spatiality as a central aspect of some contemporary novels, others centre on temporality, investigating novelistic fiction from different viewpoints, such as its relation to previous trends and periods, its dealing with the past in the form of memory or history, etc., and then others choose a more explicitly political common thread, such as Thatcherism and its aftermath, or (evading) class in British fiction.

However, it is my firm belief that the younger generation of writers exhibits signs of a new kind of sensibility, one that has not been discussed before. This sensibility is the composite of a heightened attention to and interest in the interrelationship between space and time, one that manifests itself through the connection between memory and spatialisation. The

careful investigation of these two phenomena in four contemporary novels started me on a journey into the investigation of the subject in the fiction of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The literary texts under scrutiny here presented us, on the one hand, with different facets of the connections and manifestations of memory and spatiality and, on the other hand, with new ways of identity formation. The self at the beginning of the third millennium exhibits powerful signs of crisis, through traumatised individuals, through the liquefaction and destabilisation of borders and thresholds, through a constant sense of in-betweenness (between inside and outside, genuine and artificial, micro and macro, private and public, self and community, or between disparate points in space and time). The purpose of novels I analysed here seems to be asking questions rather than answering them, to posit the new or changed problems of the self in the twenty-first century, and thus to shed light on current concerns.

Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2001), as the first novel figuring in this work, presents a peculiar, maybe even unexpected picture of the interaction between memory and space. Instead of thematising remembrance and its shaping the identity of the protagonist, the novel's precept is the absence of defining memories and its devastating effect on the (purposefully) unnamed narrator-protagonist. The character's anonymity reflects both on his greatest desire for authenticity and on his failure. To him, authenticity means the genuineness of his motions, of his position in the spaces he inhabits, of his thoughts. Attaining this would result in his seamless integration into the universe, one that would provide him with the longed-for anonymity and union with the world around him. This namelessness, however, can also reflect on his constant but inadvertent return to victimhood, a state of utter defencelessness. It is this state that ultimately holds the key to his undoing: he becomes a puppet in the show that keeps him prisoner, the spaces he incorporates into his re-enactments gradually take over control and devour the enactor himself. And finally, he both becomes and fails to become the titular remainder, a paradox that drives him mad and leads to an unresolvable quandary he cannot escape.

Remainder is about a man whose memories are deficient, and this leads to an incomplete existence. The trauma of an accident erases not only the memories of that event, but it exerts its power over the protagonist's past, rewriting (or, more accurately, erasing) moments, defining memories of his life. The protagonist's life becomes governed by absences he desperately tries to turn into presence, voids that he struggles to fill: the re-enactments of

ever-bigger projects are desperate attempts at finding meaning, however, the only thing governing them is affects, his sensorium. The spaces, the city he tries to possess become a powerful entity that, with its labyrinth comprised of remainders, holds sway over the protagonist, and makes dealing with his absences impossible. In the end it seems that it is his desperate struggle to attain authenticity that turns authenticity itself (and his own existence) into its opposite.

The Opposite House (2007) centres on the exploration of fluidity, playing with geographical, national, spatial, and even fictional boundaries, and showing how the world of migration affects individuals and peoples alike. The two storylines, namely Maja's human and Yemaya's transcendental one, intertwine to show the complexity of experiencing placelessness, insecurity. Memories are caught in a simulacrum, as the subject creates them to re-enforce her identity, to find herself. Maja's identity crisis is interestingly prompted by her pregnancy, a state that lends readers visceral experiences about the protagonist's struggles. Maja's body becomes the conduit through which everything is felt and lived, a body caught between self and hysteric, self and foetus. This very private experience is extended into the public through the world of the Orishas inhabiting the *somewherehouse*, a house with its own consciousness, capable of connecting disparate points of the world. In this novel, geography is created and shaped by the experiences themselves, by the identities inhabiting it.

Donoghue's *Room* (2010) places the particular and the universal into a dynamic that constantly shifts the power relations between the two, and the characters' stance in their middle. Spatial contraction and expansion happens at the same time, but in different directions for the two main characters, Ma and Jack. From the limited perspective of the child, Room and the first five years of his life offer him infinity, a world replete with impulses, with infinite possibilities, with the vast universe being right outside the door. And this world only gets smaller and smaller, more and more confining, restricting as the reality of their situation is revealed. Escaping from Room, moving out into the world paradoxically makes him experience a sense of confinement for the very first time, a world filled with rules and restrictions where his movements, his entire self is limited, repressed. In contrast to the child's private experiences, the adult reader also perceives the real dimensions of the confinement, and the gradual expansion of the space around Jack and his mother. As the analysis of the individual chapter titles revealed, the novel's units add layer upon layer, as the world is slowly

revealed in its complexity to the young protagonist. The physical reality of the chain-link fence underneath the floor of their home, the smallness of the garden shed, as its walls are measured in a game, all these details reveal the dire reality of this confinement, one that was successfully counteracted by the boy's vivid imagination. The presentness of this existence, with moving out and exploring the world, becomes past, becomes a memory. These moments, however, build towards the novel's ending, when Jack returns to Room for one last time and cannot recognise it for what it was during those five blissful years he spent there. Memory and reality fail to meet, with this moment signifying the need for the child to separate from the past, to let that previous existence die in and with Room.

Cloud Atlas (2004) presents its readers with an expansive world, in which six individual but interlinked stories and fates are scattered across time and space. As I already hinted at in the introduction to this work, I consider this novel to be an accurate synthesis of the three books preceding it, as it centres on the connections between self and world, always bringing into focus the micro and the macro at once. With the different worlds, stories, fates exhibited in the disparate chapters, the novel sometimes functions as comment on certain issues encountered before, and extends the list with further considerations. The stories span centuries and the globe, with the first chapter leading the reader back into the eighteenth century, the central one plunging us into a post-apocalyptic world of a new beginning which, nevertheless, bears striking similarities with Adam Ewing's story of racism, slavery, corruption, and intertribal wars. The novel toys with the pre-established categories of our society, such as uniqueness versus repetition (or commonality), private and public, civilisation and barbarism, progress versus stalling, and so on. The binaries of these categories are constantly challenged and redefined, just as the duality of memory and archive and, what is even more challenging, memory and forgetting is also reconceived. Ultimately, the six chapters unite to create the universal image of memory, which is partly comprised of the aforementioned archive and forgetting. The selves inhabiting these worlds embody one facet, one existence of this universal, complex being.

The previously analysed novels usually operate with clearly defined dichotomies that in some way determine the novels' fictional world, and also the personas of their characters. I believe that this dualistic system is resolved in *Cloud Atlas*, in which the dichotomy is broadened into a triad: that of memory, archive, forgetting. And these together create a new

kind of world history, one that always originates from the subject. Characters, spaces, memories, temporal planes are plaited onto each other, just like the concertina, and thus the work charts expansions and contractions that characterise its entire universe.

One of the realisations of this undertaking was that memory and space, or time and space, if you will, truly interlock in the phenomenon of globalisation. The four novels of my choice, written and published in the first decade of the twenty-first century, all address various manifestations of the globalising processes that are most emphatically felt at the beginning of this new millennium. The novels sometimes achieve this on a more latent plane, not as directly as Mitchell's work does, but they all exhibit signs of a very contemporary world in which the self, its surroundings, its existence are all rapidly redefined. The novels testify to a certain borderlessness that does away with clear delineations, with strict categorisations, instead deploying fluidity, a state of constant change and movement. The protagonists exhibit signs of subjectivity in crisis, and all four novels strive towards a resolution centring on this very subjectivity. However, in all four cases, the resolution, or happy ending is still some way off, or at least never unequivocally realised. The crises are not averted, but these young artists seem to have shifted emphasis onto the battle itself instead of the solution.

Let me turn to *Cloud Atlas* for examples one final time. It functions as a synthesis in my work also from the standpoint of thinking about globalisation. This is the novel that very openly addresses numerous issues that are deemed central to the understanding of globalisation. Such issues – very disparate ones, indeed – are cloning, modern slavery, environmental catastrophe, or the digital archive, among others. The six distinct moments in time show clear similarities amongst themselves, hinting at a cyclicality that assigns a negative outlook on the fictional world presented therein. For instance, slavery appears in the first chapter, the most distant temporal point of the novel, giving a certain reassurance to readers that this shameful stain in human history is relegated to the past. However, a modern version resurfaces in the 22nd-century story of Nea So Copros, a re-invented Korea partly populated by clones that are deemed subhuman. With this gesture the novel erases all possibility for redemption, showing instead how humanity falls into the same ways again and again. With this large spectrum, extended over centuries, over the entire world, what *Cloud Atlas* really does is capture the present moment in its crisis.

This dissertation was meant to outline the beginnings of a research I intend to continue and expand in the future, with the purpose of investigating several aspects of contemporary novelistic fiction. In the future, I wish to work with other authors and novels not only of the Noughties, but also from the 2010s. My purpose is to map as many intersections between memory and spatiality in the fiction of today as possible, because I believe it will lead me to a greater understanding of these novels' problematisations of the self. Charting the various ways in which memory and space come together and influence each other will bring me closer to newer definitions of subjectivity in the contemporary world, as it is conceptualised by the novels of today.

At this point I wish to only mention a few authors and novels that I intend to incorporate later, such as David Mitchell's *Number9Dream* (2001), Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003), Evie Wyld's *After the Fire, a Still Small Voice* (2009), Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012) and Jon McGregor's *Reservoir 13* (2017). Any one of these novels could have been inserted into the present dissertation, revealing new, different facets of the memory-space relations, but they will gain stage in the extension of this work. I consider these five novels to present further paradigmatic issues for the discussion of my central phenomena. It is possible to find other contemporary British novels tackling similar questions, but in these cases several other factors were weighed in, such as the age, nationality and social background of the authors, the other issues that the novels present, such as trauma, nostalgia, etc. Every one of these literary works presents us with a unique perspective on the subject and on how memories and spatialities influence it and, in turn, are influenced by it.

Accordingly, the five other novels enumerated above will serve as further considerations into the complexity of the interplay. They will broaden the horizon in more than one respect. For instance, in some cases memory and imagination present a complex mixture, sometimes imperceptible, in which reality and fantasy become interchangeable. In another novel the war as a sweeping force occupies a central position, with three generations of men being variously affected by it. In yet another approach to memory and space a metropolis becomes the protagonist of the novel, as a living organism that actively shapes the lives of its inhabitants.

These various works give me the opportunity to investigate a current trend in novelistic fiction, one that reacts to general preoccupations in contemporary society, in our

lives. Our pronounced relationship to time has changed considerably. Firstly, humanity's trust in history being shaken, it has turned towards an array of parallel histories and towards memory. Secondly, spatiality has come to the forefront of our attention, occupying a central position next to time. In the contemporary world our heightened experience of place and of placelessness, the existence and/or disappearance of distances, of boundaries is addressed by current theories and by these literary works. These are the interconnections, new directions I wish to investigate, starting with this dissertation, and hopefully evolving into a book.

Works Cited

Acheson, James, and Sarah C. E. Ross (eds.). *The Contemporary British Novel since 1980*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2005.

Adams, Victoria. *Doing it by the Book: The Uses of Paratext in Creating Expectation and Determining Structural Genre in Contemporary British Fiction*. Ph.D. thesis. Newcastle University, March 2011.

Agostinho, Daniela, Elisa Antz, and Cátia Ferreira (eds.). *Panic and Mourning. The Cultural Work of Trauma*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2012.

---. "Introduction." In: Agostinho et al. pp. 1–24.

Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Trauma. A Social Theory*. Cambridge: Polity P, 2012.

Allen, Richard. "Hitchcock's Legacy." Leitch and Poague. 572-91.

Altman, Rick. *A Theory of Narrative*. New York: Columbia UP, 2008.

Anatol, Giselle Liza. *The Things That Fly in the Night. Female Vampires in Literature of the Circum-Caribbean and African Diaspora*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2015.

Anderson, Ben. "Becoming and Being Hopeful: Towards a Theory of Affect." In: *Environmental and Planning D: Society and Space* 24 (2006): 733–752.

Arias, Santa. "The Geopolitics of Historiography from Europe to the Americas." Warf and Arias. 122-136.

Assmann, Aleida. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization. Functions, Media, Archive*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.

---, and Linda Shortt. "Memory and Political Change: Introduction." *Memory and Political Change*. Aleida Assmann, Linda Shortt (eds.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 1-16.

---, and Sebastian Conrad. "Introduction." *Memory in a Global Age. Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*. Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (eds.). new York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 1-16.

Assmann, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization. Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011.

---. “Globalization, Universalism, and the Erosion of Cultural Memory.” *Memory in a Global Age. Discourses, Practices and Trajectories*. Aleida Assmann, Sebastian Conrad (eds.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 121-37.

Augé, Marc. *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. John Howe (trans.). London: Verso, 1992.

---. “Paris and the Ethnography of the Contemporary World.” *Parisian Fields*. Michael Sheringham (ed.). London: Reaktion, 1996. 175–81.

Aughey, Arthur. *Nationalism, Devolution and the Challenge to the United Kingdom*. London: Pluto P, 2001.

Auiler, Dan. Vertigo*: The Making of a Hitchcock Classic*. New York: St. Martin’s P, 1998.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Maria Jolas (trans.). Boston: Beacon P, 1964.

Bradley, Ian. *Believing in Britain. The Spiritual Identity of ‘Britishness.’* London: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

Barr, Nicola. “Room by Emma Donoghue.” *The Guardian*. Published 1 August 2010). https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/01/room-emma-donoghue-review-fritzl. Accessed 1 August 2017.

Bartlett, Alison. *Breastwork. Rethinking Breastfeeding*. Sydney: UNSW, 2005.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Globalization. The Human Consequences*. Cambridge: Polity P, 1998.

Bayer, Gerd. “Perpetual Apocalypses: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* and the Absence of Time.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 56:4 (2015): 345–354.

Baumbach, Sibylle, Herbert Grabes, and Ansgar Nünning. “Introduction: Values in Literature – the Value of Literature.” *Literature and Values. Literature as a Medium for Representing, Disseminating and Constructing Norms and Values*.

Begley, Adam. “David Mitchell, The Art of Fiction No 24.” *The Paris Review*. 2010. http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6034/the-art-of-fiction-no-204-davidmitchell. Accessed October 2010.

Belton, Robert J. *Alfred Hitchcock’s Vertigo and the Hermeneutic Spiral*. Kelowna: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Bentley, Nick, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson. *The 2000s. A Decade of Contemporary British Fiction*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Bollen, Christopher. "Tom McCarthy Is No Longer a Well-Kept Secret." *Interview*. 13 March 2012, http://www.interviewmagazine.com/culture/tom-mccarthy# . Accessed 3 October 2016.

Boulter, Jonathan. *Melancholy and the Archive. Trauma, Memory, and History in the Contemporary Novel*. London: Continuum, 2011.

Bowker, John, ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997.

Boxall, Peter (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction: 1980-2018*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2019.

Brace, Marianne. "Helen Oyeyemi: Purveyer of Myths Turns Her Focus to Cuban Deities." *The Independent*. 18 May 2007. http://www.independent.co.uk/ arts-entertainment/books/features/helen-oyeyemi-purveyor-of-myths-turns-her-focus-to-cuban-deities-449273.html. Accessed 21 September 2019.

Braidotti, Rosi. *Transpositions*. Cambridge: Polity, 2008.

Brown, Kevin. "Finding Stories to Tell: Metafiction and Narrative in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*." *Journal of Language, Literature and Culture* 63:1 (April,2016): 77–90

Buckley, Chloe, and Sarah Ilott. "Introduction." Buckley and Ilott. 1-22.

--- (eds.). *Telling It Slant. Critical Approaches to Helen Oyeyemi*. Eastbourne: Sussex Academic P, 2017.

Buckley, Chloe. "Gothic Children in *Boy, Snow, Bird*, *The Opposite House*, and *The Icarus Girl*." Buckley and Ilott 38-58.

Cabo Aseguinolaza, Fernando. "The Spatial Turn in Literary Historiography." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 13.5 (2011): https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1903. Accessed 27 May 2018.

Caruth, Cathy (ed.). *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995.

Casey, Edward S. "Public Memory in Place and Time." Kendall R. Phillips (ed.). 17-44.

Chefetz, Richard A. "Hysteria and Dissociative Processes: A Latent Multiple Self-State Model of Mind in Self Psychology." *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 37: 2 (2017), 82-94.

Charles, Ron. "The teeny, tiny world of little Jack." *Washington Post Book World*. Published 15 September 2010. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2010/09/14/ST2010091406651.html. Accessed 10 Sept. 2017.

Childs, Peter, and James Green. *Aesthetics and Ethics in Twenty-First Century British Novels Zadie Smith, Nadeem Aslam, Hari Kunzru and David Mitchell*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013.

---. "The Novels in Nine Parts." In Dillon (ed.). 25–48.

Churchill, Winston S. "Speech on Rebuilding the House of Commons." October 28, 1943. In: *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897–1963*. Ed. Robert Rhodes James. New York: Chelsea House, 1974. 7:6869–71.

Clark, Mary Ann. *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion*. Westport: Praeger, 2007.

Colombino, Laura. *Spatial Politics in Contemporary London Literature. Writing Architecture and the Body*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Connerton, Paul. *How Modernity Forgets*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.

---. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.

---. "Seven Types of Forgetting." *Memory Studies* 1:1 (2008): 59-71.

Cooper, Brenda. "Diaspora, Gender and Identity: Twinning in Three Diasporic Novels." *English Academy Review* 25:1 (2008), 51-65.

---. "The Middle Passage of the Gods and the New Diaspora: Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*." *Research in African Literatures* 40: 4 (Winter 2009), 108-21.

Coupland, Douglas. "Convergences. 'Gods Without Men,' by Hari Kunzru." *The New York Times*. 8 March 2012. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/11/books/review/gods-without-men-by-hari-kunzru.html. Accessed 15 May 2018.

Csordás, Thomas J. "Embodiment and Cultural Phenomenology." *Perspectives on Embodiment: The Intersections of Nature and Culture*. Gail Weiss and Honi Fern Haber (eds.). New York: Routledge, 1999. 143-164.

Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (CMEB). *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*. London: Profile Books, 2000.

Cousins, Helen. "Unplaced/Invaded: Multiculturalism in Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*." *Postcolonial Text* 7:3 (2012), 1-16.

Davies, Ben. *Sex, Time and Space in Contemporary Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

De Cristofaro, Diletta (2018) "'Time, no arrow, no boomerang, but a concertina:' *Cloud Atlas* and the anti-apocalyptic critical temporalities of the contemporary post-apocalyptic novel" *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 59:2 (2018): 243-257.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. Trans. Paul Patton. New York: Continuum, 1995.

---. "The exhausted." In: *Essays critical and clinical*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith, and Michael A. Greco. London: Verso, 1998. pp. 152–174.

---. *A Thousand Plateaus. Captialism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1987.

DeLillo, Don. "In the Ruins of the Future." *Harper's Magazine*. December 2001.

Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Eric Prenowitz (trans). Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995.

Devereux, Cecily. "Hysteria, Feminism, and Gender Revisited: The Case of the Second Wave." *ESC* 40:1 (March 2014), 19–45.

Diamant, Cristina. "Archiva(b)l(e) Bodies and Cyber Afterlife in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*." *Caietele Echinox* 34 (2018): *Posthumanist Configurations*. 218-28.

Dickinson, Emily. "There's been a Death, in the Opposite House." *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Thomas H. Johnson (ed.). Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1890. 185-86.

Didi-Huberman, Georges. *Invention of Hysteria*. Alisa Hartz (trans.). Cambridge: MIT P, 2003.

Dillon, Sarah (ed.). *David Mitchell. Critical Essays*. Canterbury: Gylphi, 2011.

---. "Introducing David Mitchell's Universe. A Twenty-First Century House of Fiction." In Dillon (ed.). 3–24.

Dinter, Sandra. "Plato's Cave Revisited. Epistemology, Perception and Romantic Childhood in Emma Donoghue's Room (2010)." *C21 Literature: Journal of Twenty-First Century Writings* 2:1 (Oct 2013).

Dix, Hywel. *Postmodern Fiction and the Break-Up of Britain*. London: Continuum, 2010.

Doane, Mary Anne. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002.

Donoghue, Emma. *Room*. London: Picador, 2010.

---. "Room." *emmadonoghue.com*. 11 Jan. 2015. Accessed 2 Sept. 2017.

Duff, Kim. *Contemporary British Literature and Urban Space. After Thatcher*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Duncan, Paul. *Alfred Hitchcock*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials, 2004.

Dunlop, Nicholas. "Speculative Fiction as Postcolonial Critique in *Ghostwritten* and *Cloud Atlas*." In Dillon (ed.). 201–24.

Elliott, Anthony, and John Urry. *Mobile Lives*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Eve, Martin Paul. *Close Reading with Computers. Textual Scholarship, Computational Formalism, and David Mitchell's* Cloud Atlas. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2019.

Feldner, Maximilian. *Narrating the New African Diaspora. 21st Century Nigerian Literature in Context*. Graz: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

Fenton, Steve. "Indifference Towards National Identity: What Young Adults Think About Being English and British." *Nations and Nationalism*, 13:2 (2007): 321–339.

Feracho, Lesley. "Engaging Hybridity: Race, Gender, Nation, and the "Difficult Diasporas" of Nalo Hopkinson's *Salt Roads* and Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House*." *South Atlantic Review* 82: 4 (Winter 2017), 31-52.

Foucault, Michel. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16(1), 1986.

Földváry, Kinga. "In Search of a Lost Future: The Posthuman Child." *European Journal of English Studies* 18:2 (31 August 2014): 207-220.

Frame, Kelly. "The Human World is Made of Stories." *Postmodernism and the Planetary in the Novels of David Mitchell.* Ph.D. Thesis. UNSW Canberra at ADFA. November 7, 2016.

Frank, Michael C. "Imaginative Geography as a Travelling Concept." *European Journal of English Studies*. 13:1 (2009), 61-77.

Freud, Sigmund. "General Remarks on Hysterical Attacks." *Dora: Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*. New York: Touchstone, 1997. 120–24.

---. "On the Psychical Mechanism of Hysterical Phenomena." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. vol. 3: *Early Psycho-Analytic Publications*. James Strachey (trans.). London: Hogarth, 1962. 1-26.

García Zarranz, Libe. *Queer TransCanadian Women's Writing in the 21st Century: Assembling a New Cross-Border Ethic*. Ph.D. thesis. Edmonton, Alberta. Fall 2013.

Garde-Hansen, Joanne. *Media and Memory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011.

---, et al. “Introduction.” *Save As ... Digital Memories*. Joanne Garde-Hansen, et al. (eds.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Geier, Ted. *Kafka’s Nonhuman Form. Troubling the Boundaries of the Kafkaesque*. Houston: Palgrave, 2016.

Gibbons, Joan. *Contemporary Art and Memory. Images of Recollection and Remembrance*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

Grabes, Herbert. *Making Strange: Beauty, Sublimity, and the (Post) Modern Third Aesthetic*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008.

Greenberg, Mark S., and Bessel van der Kolk. “Retrieval and Integration of Traumatic Memories with the ‘Painting Cure.’” In: *Psychological Trauma*. ed. Bessel A. van der Kolk. Washington, D .C.: American Psychiatric P, 1987.

Griffin, Gabriele. “British Writing and the Limits of the Human.” *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction: 1980-2018*. Peter Boxall (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2019. 69-88.

Grose, Anouchka. “Reclaiming Hysteria.” *Hysteria Today*. Anouchka Grose (ed.). London: Karnac Books, 2016. xv-xxxi.

Haeffner, Nicholas. *Alfred Hitchcock*. Harlow: Person Education Ltd. 2005.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *On Collective Memory*. Lewis A. Coser (trans.). Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1952/1992.

Hanson, Bonnie. *Child-like Voices: Relating Trauma in* A Stolen Life *and* Room. Diss. Laramie: U of Wyoming, 2013.

Harris-Birtill, Rose. “‘Looking Down Time’s Telescope at Myself’: Reincarnation and Global Futures in David Mitchell’s Fictional Worlds.” *Kronoscope* 17 (2017): 163–81.

Harris, Paul A. “David Mitchell in the Laboratory of Time.” *SubStance* 44:1 (2015): 8–17.

Harrison, Niall. “*The Opposite House* by Helen Oyeyemi.” *Strange Horizons*. 30 July 2007. http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/reviews/the-opposite-house-by-helen-oyeyemi/. Accessed 7 Sept. 2019.

Hartog, François. *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time*. Saskia Brown (trans.). New York: Columbia UP, 2003.

Hazell, Robert. “The Future of the Union.” *Political Quarterly* 78:1 (2008): 101–112.

Head, Dominic. *The State of the Novel: Britain and Beyond*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

Hétu, Dominique. “Of Wonder and Encounter: Textures of Human and Nonhuman Relationality.” *Mosaic* 48:3 (September 2015): 159-174.

Hicks, Heather J. “‘This Time Round:’ David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas and the Apocalyptic Problem of Historicism.” *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century. Modernity beyond Salvage*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 55–76.

Hirschkind, Charles. “Is There a Secular Body?” *Cultural Anthropology* 26/4 (2011): 633-47.

Hitchcock, Alfred. *Vertigo*. 1958.

Ho, Janice. “Review of The Cosmopolitan Novel by Berthold Schoene.” *Modern Fiction Studies* 57.2 (Summer 2011): 358–60.

Hopf, Courtney. “Discursive Identity through Narrative Form in Cloud Atlas.” In Dillon (ed.). 105–26.

Hortle, Luke. “David Mitchell’s Cloud Atlas and the Queer Posthuman.” *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory* 27:4. 253–74.

Hubbard, Phil, and Rob Kitchin (eds.). *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2011.

Huyssen, Andreas. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Ilott, Sarah. “‘The genesis of woman goes through the mouth’: Consumption, Oral Pleasure, and Voice in *The Opposite House* and *White Is for Witching*.” Buckley and Ilott 132-151.

“In Donoghue’s ‘Room,’ A Child's World Of His Own.” *NPR*. Published 27 Sept. 2010. http://www.npr.org/2010/09/27/130143360/in-donoghue-s-room-a-child-s-world-of-his-own. Accessed 2 Sept. 2017.

James, David. *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space. Style, Landscape, Perception*. London: Continuum, 2008.

Katrak, Ketu H. *Politics of the Female Body. Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2006.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.

LaCapra, Dominick. “Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?” *History and Theory* 55 (October 2016): 375–400.

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

Leitch, Thomas, and Leland Poague (eds.). *A Companion to Alfred Hitchcock*. Malden: Blackwell, 2011.

Lénárt-Muszka, Zsuzsanna. "Transgression, Shame, and Rebellion: The Politics of Breastfeeding in African American Literature." *6th Interdisciplinary Doctoral Conference 2017. Conference Book*. Pécs: Doctoral Student Association of the UP, 2017.

Lorenzi, Lucia. "'Am I Not OK?': Negotiating and Re-Defining Traumatic Experience in Emma Donoghue's *Room*." *Canadian Literature*. (Spring-Summer 2016): 19. http://www.canlit.ca/ . Accessed: 10 August 2017.

Low, Setha. "Embodied Space(s). Anthropological Theories of Body, Space, and Culture." *Space and Culture* 6.1 (February 2003): 9-18.

---. *Spatializing Culture. The Ethnography of Space and Place*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Machinal, Hélène. "Cloud Atlas. From Postmodernity to the Posthuman." In Dillon (ed.). 127–54.

Marienstras, Elise. "Depictions of White Children in Captivity Narratives." *American Studies International* 40.3 (2002): 33-45.

Martin, Michel. "Oyeyemi's 'Opposite House.'" *NPR*. 26 June 2007. https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=11384738&t=1576597898553. Accessed 5 Sept. 2019.

Mason, Derritt, and Ela Przybylo. "Hysteria Manifest: Cultural Lives of a Great Disorder." *English Studies in Canada* 40:1 (March 2014), 1-18.

Massey, Doreen B. *For Space*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2005.

Matthews, Peter. "*Vertigo*: Alfred Hitchcock." *Sight and Sound*. 13 July 2018. https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/polls-surveys/greatest-films-all-time/vertigo-hitchcock-new-number-one. Accessed 10 Sept. 2019.

McCarthy, Tom. *Remainder*. Richmond: Alma Books, 2007.

McCulloch, Fiona. "'Around We Go': Transpositional Life Cycles in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*." *Cosmopolitanism in Contemporary British Fiction. Imagined Identities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 141–63.

McFarlane, Alexander C. “The Severity of the Trauma: Issues about Its Role in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.” In: *Beyond Trauma. Cultural and Societal Dynamics*. Ed. Rolf J. Kleber et al. New York: Plenum P, 1995. pp. 31–54.

McLean, Iain, and Alistair McMillan. *State of The Union*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.

McMorran, Will. “*Cloud Atlas* and *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveller*.” Dillon (ed.). 155–76.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception.* Colin Smith (trans.). London: Routledge, 1958.

Metz, Joseph. “Genre Beside Itself: David Mitchell’s *The Bone Clocks*, Pulp Intrusions, and the Cosmic Historians’ War.” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 58:2 (2017): 121–28.

Micale, Mark. S. “Hysteria and its Historiography: A Review of Past and Present Writings (ii).” *History of Science* 27.:4 (1989), 319-51.

Mitchell, David. *Cloud Atlas*. London: Sceptre, 2004.

---. “‘Cloud Atlas - David Mitchell.’ Interview by James Naughtie.” *Book Club. BBC Radio* (3 June 2007). https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b007mdcg. Accessed 6 August 2018.

---. “Genesis.” *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/apr/16/ featuresreviews.guardianreview23. Accessed 16 Apr. 2018.

---. “Interview by Rose Harris-Birtill." *Personal Interview*. 12 Feb. 2016.

---. *Number9Dream*. London: Sceptre, 2001.

---. “Secret Architectures: A Conversation with David Mitchell,’ *The Agony Column, Bookotron*, 16 May 2005. http://trashotron.com/agony/columns/2005/05-16-05.htm. Accessed 2 June 2018.

Modleski, Tania. “Suspicion: Collusion and Resistance in the Work of Hitchcock’s Female Collaborators.” Leitch and Poague. 162-180.

Montagu, Jeremy. “Concertina.” Alison Latham (ed.). *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.

Morrissey, Belinda. “A Domestic Geography of Everyday Terror: Remembering and Forgetting the House I Grew Up In.” *Geography and Memory. Explorations in Identity, Place and Becoming*. Owain Jones and Joanne Garde-Hansen (eds.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 184–198.

Morton, Tom. "Novel Idea. Omer Fast's film adaptation of Tom McCarthy's book, *Remainder*." *Frieze*. https://frieze.com/article/novel-idea/. Accessed 1 October 2016.

Moslund, Sten Pultz. "The Presencing of Place in Literature. Toward an Embodied Topopoetic Mode of Reading." *Geocritical Explorations. Space, Place, and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies*. Robert T. Tally Jr. (ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 29-46.

Munslow, Alun. "Introduction: Theory and Practice." *Experiments in Rethinking History*. Alun Munslow, Robert Rosenstone (eds.). New York, Routledge, 2004. 7–12.

Ness, Patrick. "Reality Studio." *The Guardian*. 12 August 2006, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/aug/12/featuresreviews.guardianreview. Accessed 3 October 2016.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*." *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.

Nünning, Vera. "Ethics and Aesthetics in British Novels at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century." *Ethics in Culture. The Dissemination of Values through Literature and Other Media*. Astrid Erll, Herbert Grabes, and Ansgar Nünning (eds.).

O'Donnell, Patrick. *A Temporary Future: The Fiction of David Mitchell*. Bloomsbury, 2015.

Orwell, Roger. "What's Left Behind: An Interview with Tom McCarthy." *Catastrophe*. Spec. issue of *Static* 7 (2008): 4 pages. Web. 21 May 2014.

Ositelu, Olutola. "*The Opposite House*." *African Writing Online*. Oct/Nov 2007. https://www.african-writing.com/ositelu.htm. Accessed 5 Oct. 2019.

Oyeyemi, Helen. *The Icarus Girl*. London: Bloomsbury, 2005.

---. *The Opposite House*. London: Bloomsbury, 2007.

Phillips, Kendall R. (ed.). *Framing Public Memory*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2004.

---. "Introduction." Kendall R. Phillips (ed.). 1-16.

"Pluto and Prosperine." http://www.online-mythology.com/pluto_prosperine/. Accessed 15 August 2019.

Polanki, Gautama., 2018. "The Iterable Messiah: Postmodernist Mythopoeia in *Cloud Atlas*." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings* 6(3): 9 (2018): 1–26.

Prieto, Eric. *Literature, Geography, and the Postmodern Poetics of Space*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Radstone, Susannah, and Katharine Hodgkin. "Regimes of Memory: An Introduction." *Regimes of Memory*. Susannah Radstone, Katharine Hodgkin (eds.). London: Routledge, 2003. 1-22.

Rausch, Andrew J. "*Mean Streets* (1973)." In: *The films of Martin Scorsese and Robert De Niro*. Lanham: The Scarecrow P, 2010. pp. 1–26.

Reading, Anna. "Memory and Digital Media: Six Dynamics of the Globital Memory Field." Neiger et al. (eds.). 241-52.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Kathleen Blamey, David Pellauer (trans.). Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2004.

Ricou, Laurie. "The 'As If' of the Child's World: An Introduction to Child Language and the Child in Literature." *Everyday Magic: Child Lanuguages in Canadian Literature*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987. 1-13.

Rudd, Alison. *Postcolonial Gothic Fictions from the Caribbean, Canada, Australia and New Zealand*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2010.

Rushdie, Salman. "Imaginary Homelands." *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. Granta, 1991, pp. 9-21.

Saikali, Andrew. "Obsession, Obsessively Told: A Review of Tom McCarthy's *Remainder*." *The Millions*. 26 February 2007, http://www.themillions.com/2007/02/obsession-obsessively-told-review-of.html. Accessed 2 October 2016.

Salisbury, Laura. "Translating Neuroscience: Fictions of the Brain in the 2000s." *The 2000s. a Decade of Contemporray British Fiction*. Nick Bentley, Nick Hubble, and Leigh Wilson (eds.). London: Bloomsbury, 2015. 83-114.

Satkunananthan, Anita Harris. "Otherworlds, Doubles, Houses: Helen Oyeyemi's *The Opposite House* and *White Is for Witching*." *GEMA Online* 18:4 (November 2018), 201-15. http://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2018-1804-13. Accessed 10 Oct. 2019.

---. "Textual Transgressions and Consuming the Self in the Fiction of Helen Oyeyemi and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie." Hecate 37:2 (Nov 2011), 41-69. <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=839237267208677;res=IELLCC> ISSN: 0311-4198. Accessed 19 Dec. 2019.

Schillinger, Liesl. "Play It Again." *The New York Times*. 25 February 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/25/books/review/Schillinger.t.html. Accessed 2 October 2016

Schlögel, Karl. *Im Raume lesen wir die Zeit: Über Zivilisationsgeschichte und Geopolitik*. Munich: Hanser, 2003.

Schmitz, Eva-Maria. ""No Man is an Island": Tracing Functions of Insular Landscapes in David Mitchell's Fiction." *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings* 6(3): 6 (2018): 1–25.

Schoene, Berthold. *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009.

Sen, Arijit, and Lisa Silverman (eds.). *Making Place. Space and Embodiment in the City*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2013.

Shamsie, Kamila. "The Gods Go Abroad." *The Guardian*. 12 May 2007. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/may/12/featuresreviews.guardianreview19. Accessed 4 Sept. 2019.

Shanahan, John. "Digital Transcendentalism in David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*." *Criticism* 58:1 (Winter 2016): 115–145.

Shoop, Casey, and Dermot Ryan. "'Gravid with the ancient future:' *Cloud Atlas* and the Politics of Big History." *SubStance* 44:1 (2015 Issue 136): 92-106.

Short, John Rennie. *Global Dimensions. Space, Place and the Contemporary World*. London: Reaktion Books, 2001.

Showalter, Elaine. *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*. New York: Columbia UP, 1997.

Skerry, Philip. J. *Dark Energy. Hitchcock's Absolute Camera and the Physics of Cinematic Spacetime*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Smith, Zadie. "Two Directions for the Novel." *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays*. Penguin, 2009.

Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.

---. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Malden: Blackwell, 1996.

Tew, Philip, and Rod Mengham (eds.). *British Fiction Today*. London: Continuum, 2006.

Thrift, Nigel. “Space.” *Theory, Culture & Society*. London: Sage. Vol. 23(2–3, 2006): 139–155.

Trimm, Ryan., 2018. “Spirits in the Material World: Spectral Worlding in David Mitchell’s *Ghostwritten* and *Cloud Atlas*.” *C21 Literature: Journal of 21st-century Writings* 6(3): 8 (2018): 1–28.

Tygstrup, Frederik. “Affective Spaces.” In: Agostinho et al. pp. 195–210.

Ue, Tom. “An Extraordinary Act of Motherhood: A Conversation with Emma Donoghue.” *Journal of Gender Studies* 21:1 (March 2012): 101–106.

Urry, John, and Anthony Elliott. *Mobile Lives*. London: Routledge, 2010.

van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score. Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Penguin, 2014.

Vermeulen, Pieter. *Contemporary Literature and the End of the Novel. Creature, Affect, Form*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Walsh, Kathleen. “Mother and Father. The Dual Role of the Single Parent in Room.” *Medium*. 18 Jan. 2016. https://medium.com/@kathleenjuliamary/mother-and-father-the-dual-role-of-the-single-parent-in-room-e36c62a26dc5. Accessed: 1 Sept. 2017.

Warf, Barney, and Santa Arias (eds.). *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2009.

---. “Introduction: the Reinsertion of Space in the Humanities and Social Sciences.” Warf and Arias. 1-10.

Warf, Barney. “From Surfaces to Networks.” Warf and Arias. 59-76.

Warnock, Mary. *Memory*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.

Weinrich, Harald. *Lethe: The Art and Critique of Forgetting*. Steven Rendall (trans.). Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.

Welles, Orson. *The trial*. 1963.

Wellington, Darryl Lorenzo. “Between East and West.” *Washington Post*. 15 July 2007. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/07/12/AR2007071201959.html?nav=rss_print/bookworld. Accessed 7 Sept. 2019.

White, Duncan. “Satin Island by Tom McCarthy, Review: 'Induces Mania'.” *The Telegraph*. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/bookreviews/11436670/Satin-Island-by-Tom-McCarthy-review-induces-mania.html. Accessed 15 April 2017.

White, Susan. “A Surface Collaboration: Hitchcock and Performance.” Leitch and Poague. 181-98.

Wisker, Gina. *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction. Carnival, Hauntings and Vampire Kisses*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Witt, Doris. “What (N)ever Happened to Aunt Jemima: Eating Disprders, Fetal Rights, and Black Female Appetite in Contemporary American Culture.” *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong. The Black Female Body in American Culture*. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (ed.). U of Michigan P, 2002. 239-62.

Wood, James. “Rite of Corruption.” *London Review of Books* 32:20 (21 Oct. 2010): 13-14.

XiaoFang Chi. *Closet Children: Growing Up in Confinement in Twenty-First Century Memoirs and Fiction*. MA Thesis. 25 June 2015.

Young, Allan. *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.

Zähringer, Raphael. *Hidden Topographies: Traces of Urban Reality in Dystopian Fiction*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017.