

RETHINKING URBAN SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY BRITISH WRITING

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A thesis submitted to the

University of Birmingham

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

College of Arts and Law

The University of Birmingham

September 2011

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Abstract

Rethinking Urban Space in Contemporary British Writing argues that the prose literature of its featured authors offers a unique forum through which to perceive and account for the multifarious agency of urban space. Chapter one examines the limitations of using the Marxist spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre, widely adopted by literary scholars, to account for the widespread appearance of abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces in contemporary British writing. The thesis then develops new ways of reading which, unlike Lefebvrian theory, allow such spaces to emerge as affective and narrative agents, shaping narrative form and action. Chapter two focuses upon reading abandoned spaces in the work of Iain Sinclair and Cheshire-born author Nicholas Royle; chapter three examines the agency of the subterranean city-space in narratives by Neil Gaiman, Tobias Hill and Conrad Williams; and chapter four interrogates the agency exerted by the hotel space in contemporary hotel novels by Ali Smith and Monica Ali. Throughout, the materialism of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer is combined with affect theory to stress the narrative and affective agencies achieved by such urban spaces, precisely due to their transcendence of the networks of production and exchange which dominate the capitalist-driven cities of their fictional worlds.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wish to thank my supervisors Deborah Longworth and Jan Campbell for their vital encouragement and expert guidance throughout this project. I am very grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for providing me with the essential support of a full Doctoral Award, and the University of Birmingham Graduate School for their financial and administrative support. I would also like to thank the staff and fellow postgraduates of the English Department for making the Department such a supportive one in which to pursue this research project, for giving me the opportunity to present my work at research seminars, and to gain essential training and teaching experience. I would also like to thank Dr Brycchan Carey (Kingston University), Dr Lawrence Phillips (University of Northampton), Dr Kirsten Seale (RMIT Melbourne) and everyone else involved in the annual Literary London Conference for allowing me to try out new ideas and gain feedback which has greatly influenced this work. Thanks also go to the staff of Lancaster University's English and Cultural Studies departments, for encouraging me to take up doctoral research.

A big thank you to my family and many friends for lightening the mood and helping me to keep a healthy perspective whilst buried brow-high in books. I am also grateful to Liam Bell and Gavin Goodwin (University of Surrey) and Ulrich Kinzel (Kiel University) for having faith enough to publish material which appears in this thesis. Last but by no means least, I would like to thank Nick Royle (Manchester Metropolitan University) for his support throughout this project, and for taking such a positive attitude to having his work analysed in such detail.

This thesis uses the Birmingham version of the Harvard System of Referencing, and English spelling. Parts of chapter two are set to feature in a forthcoming book chapter “That time at

St. George's": Abandonment, Affect and Spatial Agency in two novels by Nicholas Royle,' in *Writing Urban Space*, Goodwin, Gavin and Bell, Liam Murray (eds.) Winchester: Zero Books. Parts of the textual analysis of *London Revenant* and *Neverwhere* in chapter four are set to be published in the forthcoming article "'Rid Yourself of this Surface Mentality": Rethinking Urban Space in the Contemporary London Descent Narrative' (2011), to be published in the journal *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*.

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INTRODUCTION: INTRODUCING SPACE AS A NARRATIVE AGENT

A Question of Agency: Neil Gaiman's 'A Tale of Two Cities'

In *Worlds' End* (1994), the eighth volume of his *Sandman* comic series, Neil Gaiman presents 'A Tale of Two Cities': a story related to the tale's narrator by its protagonist, Robert. During his evenings and lunch breaks—liminal, 'in-between' times when he can escape his interpellation into the capitalist-driven city and shed his identity as an anonymous desk worker—Robert explores the hidden corners of his home city, only to find himself one day inside what he believes to be the dream-world of the city itself. Here, Robert converses with another marooned city-dweller, who suggests that 'if a city has a personality, maybe it also has a soul. Maybe it dreams. That is where I believe we have come. We are in the dreams of the city. That's why certain places hover on the brink of recognition; why we almost know where we are' (p.36). 'You mean that we're asleep?' replies Robert, only to be perplexed by the older man's reply: 'No. We are awake, or so I believe. I mean that the city is asleep. And that we are all stumbling through the city's dream' (*Ibid.*). Reflecting upon his journey as he confides in the narrator, an older, wiser Robert concludes that if, in fact, the city was dreaming:

“then the city is asleep. And I do not fear cities sleeping, stretched out unconscious around their rivers and estuaries, like cats in the moonlight. Sleeping cities are tame and harmless things. What I fear,” he said, “is that one day the cities will waken. That one day the cities will rise.” (p.40)

Concluding with this powerful image of the city as a sleeping beast ready to awaken and wreak havoc upon its human inhabitants, ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ thus responds to the postulation that ‘perhaps the city is a living thing’ (p.36), asking the reader to imagine whether the city-organism itself might potentially be just as ‘alive’ as its human citizens would like to think they are. What is even more intriguing about Gaiman’s tale however is his choice to explore the potential ‘life’ of the city by presenting it as a *dreaming* being. If the city can dream, then this doubtlessly infers that it might be in possession of the same unconscious apparatus—the same kind of psyche—as that of an advanced living being. The nuance which interests me in this case, however, is not so much concerned with the issue of whether attributing dreams to the city might allow it to be portrayed as ‘living’ or ‘not living’. Instead, my interest settles upon the endlessly complex notion of *agency* with which the case of Gaiman’s sleeping, dreaming city presents us.

This thesis responds to the way in which a certain vein of spatial theory so often adopted by scholars of literary studies gives overwhelming emphasis to human agency in accounting for the ways in which space—particularly urban space—is produced, and in which ‘space’ can be distinguished from ‘place’. Michel de Certeau makes this latter distinction by describing space as ‘*practiced place*’ (1984, p.117), arguing that ‘places’ become ‘spaces’ through their being brought to life through human actualisation, such that ‘the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers’ (*Ibid*). As chapter one will explain more closely, this accentuation of human agency in the production of urban space continues through many Marxist, material-historicist spatial theories like that of Henri Lefebvre, which emphasise space as a ‘social product’ (1991, p.27), and view the ‘production of the city’ as reliant upon ‘the production of human beings by human beings’ (1996, p.101). Even more contemporary scholarship portraying urban space as potentially subversive and unruly still

inherits this emphasis upon human agency: for example, Franck and Stevens's (2007) discussion of the 'loosening' of threshold urban spaces maintains that 'many urban spaces possess [...] possibilities for looseness [...], but it is people, through their own initiative, who fulfil these possibilities' (pp.10-11). Franck and Stevens repeatedly depict the threshold urban space as 'offered' or 'given' to humans in order to 'create' what they call loose spaces—spaces which are re-appropriated for means other than those for which they were originally intended (*Ibid.*). In other words, Franck and Stevens's account attributes the vast majority of its powerful verbs to humans and human agency, leaving urban spaces themselves as merely 'open' to human appropriation: as 'giving' or 'offering' human subjects the opportunity to 'create loose spaces' (*Ibid.*). Urban space as practiced place then, as a social product brought into being through human actualisation, places space-making agency overwhelmingly on the side of the social human being.

Despite this prolific bias towards intentional human agency in theoretical and cultural-geographical discussions of the 'production' of space, the central tenets of such spatial theory have nevertheless been conspicuously embraced by literary scholars seeking to explore spaces and landscapes portrayed in literary texts. As chapter one will detail, Lefebvre's spatial triad from *The Production of Space* (1974, trans. 1991)—which sees social space as produced and maintained through a constant, human-driven negotiation and between spatial practices, official spaces of representation and imaginative representational spaces—remains a popular theoretical framework applied by literary scholars in giving spatial readings of literary texts. There appears to be, therefore, something of an incongruity here. After the poststructuralist efforts made by Roland Barthes *et al.* to stress the ways in which literary texts circulate far *beyond* the human subject, and the suggestion that to shackle the text to the intentional production of a human agent or author 'is to impose a limit upon the text' (Barthes, 2010,

p.1325), it therefore seems peculiar that a spatial theory which prioritises the role of intentional human agency in the production of space should prove so popular amongst literary commentators seeking to account for the meanings and operations of space within literature. Gaiman's 'A Tale of Two Cities' on the other hand suggests that the city might 'come to life', to speak: this thesis will therefore explore what it might mean for literary studies if we were able to read texts through a lens of spatial agency rather than through that of a theory which keeps literary spaces within the fetters of the vocabulary of human production and agency. I will consider what the stakes might be for literature were we able to re-imagine the urban spaces found in a range of contemporary British literary texts as potentially exerting an agency other than that which they achieve, in schemes like de Certeau's and Lefebvre's, through being lived out or produced by human citizens. I aim to show the richness we can bring to the spatial readings of literary texts when, instead, we adopt a critical approach which overtly challenges the notion that it is principally through human agency and practice that urban spaces overcome inertia and are invested with life. These stakes will receive more close attention in chapter one: I first want to present a reading of Gaiman's tale, in order to elucidate and establish just what I mean by the notion of spatial agency.

First off, it would seem that through Gaiman's use of the dreaming metaphor, the issue of agency in the creation of urban space remains somewhat fraught in 'A Tale of Two Cities'. After all, according to Freud, we do not choose what we dream. Indeed, throughout *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud returns to the notion of agency when contemplating the forces by which latent dream content is transformed into the manifest content which we see in our dreams. Considering dreams as highly censored wish fulfilments, Freud asserts that rather than representing a complete suspension of mental function and agency, or as Dugas described, "“mental anarchy [...] the play of functions left to their own device and acting

without control or purpose” (cited in Freud, 1991, p.120), ‘dreams are given their shape in individual human beings by the operation of two psychical forces,’ one of which ‘constructs the wish which is expressed by the dream, while the other exercises a censorship over this dream-wish’ (p.225). Freud even goes so far as to describe these forces as ‘psychical *agencies*’ (p.228): what is crucial for Freud’s project in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is therefore not merely the claim that dreams represent a total dissolution of human will, but is rather the identification and examination of the operations of the precise agencies which *are* in fact involved in performing dream-work. Firstly, Freud explains, the action of ‘condensation’ compresses the wealth of dream-thoughts together to produce ‘a highly incomplete and fragmentary version of them’ (p.386), whilst ‘displacement’, in effect, protects the psyche by diverting emphasis away from the dream-thought, so that ‘the dream is, as it were, *differently centred* from the dream-thoughts—its content has different elements as its central point’ (p.414). ‘Dreams,’ Freud continues, ‘feel themselves at liberty, moreover, to represent any element by its wishful contrary’ (p.429).

By describing dreams as feeling themselves ‘at liberty’ to displace their central emphasis away from its original, anxiety-provoking dream-thought, Freud only further emphasises that we cannot choose what we dream. Whereas the accounts of space outlined above repeatedly attribute active verbs to human agents rather than the spaces which these agents ‘live out’, this quote captures a moment at which Freud semantically emphasises the dream as escaping or exceeding the psychical control of the dreaming subject. It is the dream, not the dreamer, that is ‘at liberty’ to act. According to Freud’s scheme, the figures of our dreams, like Robert and his companion in the dream of Gaiman’s fictional city, are manufactured and woven together by psychical agencies beyond the dreamer’s conscious command. There may well be a method behind the dream’s madness—a method which by no means attests to a simple

dissolution of the apparently rational mental processes over which we have control in our waking state. Ultimately however, the dreaming subject is by no means ‘at liberty’ to exert wilful agency over their dreams. Before fretting as to the exact danger posed by the sleeping city, the reader of ‘Tale of Two Cities’ must therefore ask themselves the degree to which the city in Gaiman’s story has *agency* over what it dreams. In Freudian terms, the model which Robert’s tale presents suggests that if humans are dreamed by the city, then they appear as the manifest content of the city’s dream: symbols of its true but repressed drives and desires. After all, it is from the latent dream-thoughts and not from the manifest content that, according to Freud, we are able to ‘disentangle’ the meaning of a dream (p.381). Robert and his fellows are therefore merely figures produced by the actions of displacement and condensation, presumably exerted by some kind of unconscious. So if humans are dreamt by the city, agency remains blurry—the implication is not necessarily that the city can ‘choose’ to dream us; for this reason, Robert concludes that ‘sleeping cities are tame and harmless’(Gaiman 1994, p.40).

In this sense therefore, so long as the city is sleeping the suggestion is that it, like the human dreamer, has little or no ‘control’ over the human subjects who wander through the manifest content of its dream. However, let us approach the tale from a slightly different angle. For, if we enquire not as to whether the sleeping city might have ‘control’ over us, but rather ask who or what it might be that performs the dream-work of the city’s reverie, then ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ can be read as a much more nuanced allegory of the ways in which the urban spaces found in literary texts might exert agency over their human subjects. It is therefore no coincidence that, as we shall see further in chapter one, Steve Pile’s engagement with Gaiman’s tale emphasises the way in which the performance of dream-work and the notion of agency are deeply entwined. According to Pile, ‘a whole range of agencies line up’ to

obfuscate, displace or censor meaning and motivations within urban space, just as Freud's processes of displacement and condensation perform the same operations on dream-thoughts (2005, p.58). Pile too then indicates that Gaiman's tale 'suggests that city dwellers live within the dreams that *cities create for them*' (p.40, my italics): a claim which clearly places agency on the part of the city itself. The city dwellers' agency is reduced in the face of a city-space which is somehow (superhumanly) in control of its own dream-work, actively 'creating' dreams, rather than passively enduring them. To reiterate the terms used above, it would here seem that the city-space itself is 'at liberty' to create its own dreams. In this case, Robert's and the narrator's anxiety is justified: dreaming becomes a flawed metaphor for the city-dweller's potential impotence at the mercy of the city itself. After this first assertion however, Pile avoids disembodiment of space by also emphasising the simultaneous role played by 'social forces' of the human urban milieu in the execution of this 'city-work', arguing that it is simultaneously through 'social processes' that the agencies of dream-work such as 'sequencing, juxtaposition, reversal, convergence and divergence' come to act (p.49). In Pile's reading however, this is not to say that 'A Tale of Two Cities' cannot be read as a parable for the notion that urban space might indeed exert an agency other than that which it achieves through the mediation of human actualisation: a central issue to which this thesis will respond.

When one looks even more closely at 'A Tale of Two Cities', the city *does* appear to possess a degree of agency over those who stumble through its dreams. In close reading, the landscape of the strange and unearthly city to which Robert gains access does indeed appear to have a dream-like structure. Objects, people and places prove deceptive, refusing to be contained by conventional laws of cause and effect or spatio-temporal operation. 'There is a spatial consciousness in dreams,' says Freud, 'since sensations and images are assigned to an

external space just as they are in waking' (1991, p.115); nevertheless, this spatial consciousness diverges dramatically from that to which we are accustomed in waking life. As Freud expands, '[d]reams are disconnected, they accept the most violent contradictions without the least objection' (p.119); indeed, this dynamic of contradiction is nowhere more profoundly experienced than in the spatiality of the dream. In dreams, we may appear to be in a certain place, only to then suddenly find ourselves transported to another, apparently without a logical thoroughfare between the two places. This is exactly what happens to Robert: 'the roads mixed him up, turned him around. Here, he would pass a cathedral or museum, there a skyscraper or a fountain—always hauntingly familiar, but he never passed the same landmark twice, could never find the road to return him to the landmark again' (Gaiman 1994, p.33). As a dreaming city, the metropolis of Gaiman's tale may not, according to Freud, have control over what or how it dreams. Despite this fact, Gaiman's very portrayal of the city as a dreaming entity invests it with an undeniable ability to profoundly disorientate its human subjects. A dreaming city thus becomes a useful analogy for urban space as highly confounding—as offering a different and therefore somewhat bewildering approach to space from the linear, logical one to which urban dwellers may be accustomed. Whether or not the dream is 'created' by the city itself, the resulting spatial arrangement—itself like a dream—demonstrates the notion that an urban space around which a fictional narrative is based might achieve agency over its human subjects and protagonists by *confounding* them, and by resisting their attempts to contain, rationalise or map the sprawl of the city space.

Engaging with Gaiman's tale therefore reveals that, within the negotiations and encounters of urban space endured by so many protagonists of modern literature, human agency is not quite as 'hard' as we might like to think. To glorify the notion of human agency denies or represses the otherness of the city. In 'A Tale of Two Cities,' the degree to which agency also

lies with the ‘space itself’ may still be fuzzy; what is clear however is that it is not only the social milieu of Gaiman’s fictional world that performs the dream-work which, in turn, produces the metropolis narrated in the text. It is therefore my claim that the affective and narrative potential of contemporary literature’s urban spaces do not rely solely on their actualisation through the rituals of production, social relation and reproduction acted out by human characters—or, in fact, by authorial agency. I want to argue that Gaiman’s tale is but one example of a contemporary fiction’s deep literary engagement with the issue of urban space exerting its own agency. Indeed, such an engagement was already evident in British urban fiction of the nineteen-seventies: the urban dystopia of J.G. Ballard’s *High Rise* (1975) is predicated on the apartment block’s agency to create ‘a new social type [...], a cool, unemotional personality impervious to the psychological pressures of high-rise life’ (p.36). Later in this thesis however, we will go on to see how abandoned, subterranean and hotel spaces have since received similar literary attention due to their potential to exert their own agency. Progressing from Ballard’s tower block however, we shall find that these spaces do not only work within literary narratives to delineate and create subject positions in which human protagonists’ agency at times appears subordinated beneath that of the space itself. We will also observe, for example, the ways in which placing an abandoned space at the centre of their narrative shapes the very form and structure of Iain Sinclair and Rachel Lichtenstein’s *Rodinsky’s Room*, as well as exploring how the subterranean Londons of contemporary London descent narratives work to re-shape existing models of katabatic narrative. I will investigate existing theory widely used to produce spatial readings of texts, interrogating the reasons why such readings can be seen to even further obfuscate and subordinate the potential narrative agencies achieved by the urban spaces around which literary texts are based. Firstly however, it would serve to pay more attention to what it means to speak of urban spaces as

agents in their own right: to where these ideas can currently be found, and how this might apply to reading the spaces represented in literary texts. A useful way in to this illumination is through a debate which has the issue of spatial agency and causation right at its core: namely, the discourses of spatial fear and agoraphobia.

‘The Space Itself’: Spatial agency in the cultural history of agoraphobia

The first portion of Anthony Vidler’s book *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture* (2002) offers something of a brief cultural history of space-related pathologies such as agoraphobia and claustrophobia. In tracking such a history, Vidler also provides useful context as to how the notion of spatial agency—of spaces having an agency which does not solely rely upon human actualisation—has manifested itself in some strands of major cultural and psychological theory over the past few centuries. His work therefore helps us towards understanding one important sense of what is meant by claiming that space has the ability to exert an agency of its own, and may be found to do so within fictional narratives. For, Vidler’s aim is to ‘explore the anxious visions of the modern subject caught in spatial systems beyond its control and attempting to make representations and architectural sense of its predicament’ (2002, p.1). In this sense, Vidler posits a human subject rendered to some degree impotent by its urban surroundings, as well as that of a city which confounds and resists any human attempt to control, map or rationalise it. Through charting the discourses surrounding agoraphobia, Vidler touches upon precisely the same notions of spatial agency flagged up by ‘A Tale of Two Cities.’ These are the notions which will prove crucial in my following exploration of the powers exerted by abandoned, underground and transient urban spaces to profoundly shape the narratives of a range of contemporary British literary texts:

from the powerful affective resonances of defunct cinema spaces in Nicholas Royle's novel *The Director's Cut*, to the memorial capacities of the hotel space in Ali Smith and Monica Ali's contemporary hotel novels.

To return, for now, to agoraphobia then, which Moore *et al.* define as 'anxiety about being in places from which escape might be difficult or in which help might not be available' (2002, p.197). Nevertheless, agoraphobia often defies such brief classification. In his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (vol. 1, 1973), Freud himself indicates the specificity and variation of agoraphobic symptoms, noting that 'one patient avoids only narrow streets and another only wide ones; one can go out only if there are few people in the street, another only if there are many' (p.311). Vidler therefore focuses upon three means of accounting for *peurs d'espaces* such as agoraphobia. The first of these schools of thought, for which Viennese architect Camillo Sitte was a prominent exponent, saw such disorders as essentially spatially stimulated, associating 'the causes of this new sickness of agoraphobia with the new space of urbanism', since in small-scale spaces, the condition was unknown (Vidler, 2002, p.28). Through this architectural lens, agoraphobia was seen as an essentially urban disease, and 'the notion of agoraphobia was quickly extended in popular parlance to embrace all urban fears that were seemingly connected to spatial conditions' (p.31), with many architects from the early 1920s 'arguing that urban phobias were precisely the product of urban environments' (p.36). As David Trotter points out, Sitte explicitly attributed an 1889 epidemic of agoraphobia to 'the emptiness and vast extent of the space carved out by "modern thoroughfares" such as the Ringstrasse' in Vienna (2004, p.465). In Sitte's accounts, 'it is the environment which must be held responsible for causing panic, not individual perversity' (*Ibid.*): in rudimentary terms, the 'cause' of agoraphobia was, according to this conceptualisation of spatial phobia, urban space itself. More specifically, Vidler cites the

example of art historian Aby Warburg, an agoraphobic who accounts for his disease as prompted not only by the development of metropolitan space, but also by the changing spatio-temporal experience of the modern condition: ‘a trenchant critique of the way in which space-conquering techniques—flight, wireless, telephones—seemed to him to be eroding any possibility for stable distance of reflection, the treasured Denkraum’ (Vidler, 2002, p.49).

Vidler then goes on to contrast this approach to two further accounts of the origins of agoraphobia: namely, that demonstrated by French neurologist Gilles de le Tourette, which subordinates the role of the space itself in favour of accounting for agoraphobia as ‘an inherited disease’ (p.33), and that of Freud, which Vidler portrays as reducing the stimulus of agoraphobia to ‘abnormalities of sexual life’ (p.34), meaning that ‘Freud rejected the idea that the space itself, or any material object of obsession, was a cause’ (37).¹ It is however Vidler’s aim to react against what he envisions as a denial of spatial agency in Tourette’s and Freud’s schemes, and to emphasise the ‘active role’ of the built space in these pathological conditions. He imagines whether a ‘psychoanalysis of architecture might be possible—as if architecture were on the couch so to speak [...] as a way of stressing the *active role* of objects and spaces in anxiety and phobia’ (p.13, my italics), thus broaching the notion of the built urban space as an agent in its own right. Vidler goes on to state that ‘whether or not these spaces are symbolic of something else, or the anxiety is thence transformed into an anxiety around anxiety itself,’ in the case of the apartments, windows, streets and squares which triggered attacks of agoraphobia in patients such as those observed by Freud, ‘it is [...] the *space itself* that is identified as the instigator of the initial attacks and [...] remains attached to the first fear’ (p.38, my italics). Even after accusing Freud of neglecting the role played by the ‘space itself’ in the formation of agoraphobia, Vidler nevertheless emphasises the way in which Freud drew

¹ This reading of Freud’s interpretation of agoraphobia is also endorsed by Carter, who claims that due to Freud’s emphasis on agoraphobia as a ‘self-fear displaced onto fear of the street [...] any possibility that his fear might have had an environmental origin is discounted’ (2002, p. 84).

‘maps’ to chart the site of phobias experienced by patients including Little Hans.

Consequently, Vidler argues, Freud draws a plan of the neighbourhood in which Little Hans’s fear appears to be rooted, as if he, ‘like his detective hero Holmes, found it necessary to draw the “scene” of the phobia, marking all the sites of every physical clue of psychic life’ (p.40). Subsequently, yet left unexplored by Vidler, Freud thus appears to spatialise little Hans’s fear, representing the phobia itself as a resistant psychic space, setting up and giving new meaning to spatial boundaries and landmarks found in the sufferer’s environment.² Nevertheless, Freud remains, in places, somewhat flippant in his approach to agoraphobia: for example, in the case of one nineteen year old girl who apparently ‘changed, without any visible cause, into a neurotic’, Freud asserts that ‘we will not concern ourselves much’ with her diagnosis as an agoraphobic, opting to dwell instead upon the patient’s sleeping problems (1973, p.304).

After Sitte and his contemporaries therefore, Vidler identifies something of a neglect of the role which ‘spaces themselves’ play in the formation of agoraphobia and related fears. Vidler warns against the potentially effacing effects of approaches which risk subordinating the agency of the ‘space itself’ beneath accounts which treat urban topographies as mere symbols or metaphors for anxiety itself, or as sites of psychic projection through which a more general anxiety becomes arbitrarily attached to the place where it was first experienced. Indeed, this theoretical and critical reduction of the role of urban spaces to that of mere metaphor, ‘backdrop’ or simply an opportunity for human agents to appropriate space is a matter with which this thesis takes deep issue. I aim to demonstrate the ways in which a range of contemporary British authors can be seen to react against such subordination by emphasising abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces as possessing their own narrative agency, with the capacity to construct the very shape and space of literary texts. My focus will range from

² This idea of phobia as fundamentally spatial in structure is discussed much more subtly and in more detail by Campbell and Pile (2011).

the much-discussed giant of psychogeographical writing Iain Sinclair and popular contemporary novelists Ali Smith and Monica Ali, through the fantasy-worlds of Neil Gaiman to the topographies of authors who have thus far attracted very little critical attention, including Nicholas Royle, Conrad Williams and Tobias Hill.

So, whether we endorse or question Vidler's assertion that Freud's psycho-sexual explanation of spatial phobia formation neglects the role of spaces themselves, Vidler's brief historicisation of agoraphobia allows at the very least for an elucidation of some of the notions to which this thesis will refer as 'spatial agency'. For, we may well argue that in accounting for agoraphobia, Vidler creates inappropriate dichotomies between spatial causation and biological ('human') causation on the one hand, and between spatial causation and 'internal' psychic causation on the other: binaries which are far less rigid in Pile's reading of dream-work in 'A Tale of Two Cities'. However, in making such a rudimentary distinction, Vidler's account undeniably draws attention to the idea of urban space as an agent in 'causing' phobic pathologies: a causation which is achieved through the modern metropolis's ability to confound and alienate its citizens. Furthermore, Capps & Ochs note that in narrativising their experience, the agoraphobic subject often 'does not portray herself as a person who purposefully initiates or causes actions. Rather, she tends to use grammatical constructions that put her in the roles of an experience or affected object, which render her relatively impotent' (1995, p.419). In the discourse of agoraphobia and in this thesis alike, wherever urban space is envisioned as provoking profound anxiety in the human subject due to its ability to confound that subject, so can urban space be said to achieve an agency of its own. Furthermore, where the urban landscape is portrayed as exceeding or trumping human capacities for rationalising and navigating the city to the extent that the subject feels a partial dissolution of their own agency, so again can city-space be described as possessing agency: an

agency, that is, other than that granted through the human actualisation which de Certeau and others describe as transforming ‘place’ into ‘space’. Subsequently, literary narratives which allow for the imagination of urban space as having its own agency are, following Vidler’s lead, taken to be those which substitute a treatment of urban spaces as mere metaphors or sites for the externalisation of a character’s state of mind for an approach which engages deeply with the narrative agency of urban spaces to shape literary form. This agency may be manifested as urban spaces initiate deviations in affective states within the narrative (chapter two), as they teach protagonists more fluid ways of conceptualising their relationship to space itself (chapter three) and as particular urban spaces re-visit their guilt and trauma upon protagonists who operate within them (chapter four). It is with narratives which foreground these operations of urban space that this thesis will concern itself, working towards a method of producing spatial readings of texts which are concerned not merely with how literature *represents* urban spaces, but rather with the ways in which these spaces act as literary narrative agents.

Spatial Agency and the Environmental Unconscious

Again engaging with the causation of spatial fear, Paul Carter’s notion of the environmental unconscious further suggests how we might move towards readings of texts which emphasise agencies and psychic structures belonging to the urban spaces around which these texts are centred. In *Repressed Spaces: The Poetics of Agoraphobia*, Carter presents a more radical explanation for the formation of agoraphobia than Vidler. Carter draws attention to Freud’s own agoraphobic tendencies by busy roads, contending that Freud repressed the fact that ‘the “heavy traffic” of which he was afraid was not, in the first instance, his own unruly instinctual drives’, but was rather ‘the immensely increased volume and accelerated pace of traffic in

Vienna's newly enlarged roads and squares' (Carter, 2002, p.8). As a result, Carter suggests that urban development like that experienced in late nineteenth-century Vienna means that spaces, as well as instinctual drives, can be repressed. For Carter, nineteenth-century urban designs like those promoted by Haussmann in Paris and Otto Wagner in Vienna confirmed 'the final triumph of rectilinear grid thinking', and hence 'they also repressed the ground, the boundless extension without which their figures could not be set off' (p.107). According to Carter therefore, urban development involved not only the realisation and actualisation of plans like those devised by Haussmann and Wagner: in turn, the implementation of such plans led to a process by which other possibilities for that particular space, and the history of the 'ground' upon which these new urban centres took shape, were repressed. As a result of this, Carter argues, is produced 'the *environmental* unconscious of the modern city' (p.9). Just as the Freudian unconscious represented 'a place where previously outcast emotions can gather, where thoughts that were refugees in dreams can be given an identity and reintegrated within the greater community of Western ideas' (p.106-7), so was this environmental unconscious home to all those spaces—that 'ground'—which had been forced into repression by the assault of modern urban development. 'Hence, the environmental unconscious,' Carter expands, 'stemmed from the violence done to the lie of the land' (p.107). Agoraphobic anxiety, Carter claims, manifests itself whenever a certain subject becomes aware of, or is able to 'tap into' this environmental unconscious, such that:

Freud's agoraphobia stemmed from his consciousness of an [unconscious] environment whose name could never be spoken. It could not be named because it had done nothing, it had committed no crime. At the same time, it exercised a palpable, if indefinable, influence (*Ibid.*).

This is a useful idea for two reasons. Firstly, Carter's characterisation of the Freudian unconscious as a 'place' in which outcast emotions might gather further questions Vidler's implication that Freud somehow de-spatialises phobias by emphasising their basis in psycho-sexual life. The very conceptualisation of Freudian psychoanalysis as a scheme focused around an unconscious which is itself a 'place', and which therefore relies upon a dynamic between inside and outside—between the internalised and the 'outcast'—suggests that processes of spatialisation and a Freudian account of phobia formation are not necessarily incongruent. Secondly, Carter evokes an environmental unconscious which contains the spaces and potential spaces denied and repressed by modern planning. Later in this thesis, I will explore the notion that urban spaces carry with them versions of themselves that were never actualised; or as Doreen Massey might express, the idea that urban spaces tell not only of what is made real in the city, but also speak of 'connections *yet to be made* [...] or not, potential links which may never be established' (2005, p.107). In this sense then, and as Carter's account of Freud's own agoraphobia suggests, even configurations of urban space which are never allowed to be realised in the modern city, and thus remain relegated to its environmental unconscious, can have a profound psychological and emotional effect upon the urban human subject.

For the purposes of this thesis, this is important for two reasons. Firstly, the abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces which permeate so much contemporary British urban writing, and to which I will devote the large part of my discussion, demonstrate precisely such a rag-bag of peripheral, obsolescent and anxiety-provoking spaces which may well find a home in an environmental unconscious. These spaces sit awkwardly with that of the capitalist-driven city and its networks: in many cases they are either explicitly excluded from (in the case of abandoned spaces) or are not quite wholly assimilated into (in the case of the

urban underground) the relations of production and social relation which so many Marxist accounts see as constitutive to the production of social space. Lying outside these frameworks of production and consumption therefore, these spaces remain difficult to articulate: they consistently fall outside the bounds of the representable and the mappable. As a result, I aim to address how and why contemporary British authors are drawn to such spaces, and how we might re-think the theoretical frameworks used to give spatial readings of texts, in order to make room for these disruptive spaces and to work towards a way of reading the urban spaces of literature as agents rather than mere figures of representation. As Rob Shields notes, ‘representations of the city are like still life portraits’ which serve to ‘make the city available for analysis and reply’; as a result, using the language of representation to account for the urban spaces told through literature and art almost necessarily implies an inertia—a fixing of the city into an ‘object’ in order to open up the city for human investigation (1996, p.228). In contrast, this thesis aims to allow for a reading of the ways in which urban spaces operate through and within texts, circulating between human subjects and influencing channels of affect and narrative as they do so. It aims to observe how literature allows us to see spatial agency at work, through its influences on form as well as textual representation. To simply discuss the ‘representation’ of abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces in contemporary British literature will therefore prove inevitably insufficient.

Secondly however, Carter’s environmental unconscious suggests that it is not only the manifest city lived out by human actors which has the power to move the human subject. Carter believes that spaces which never even come into fruition—which are repressed and denied realisation beneath urban projects like Haussmannisation—have the power to provoke an anxiety as great as that which Vidler attributed to the physical conditions of the accelerated and confounding built reality of the modern metropolis. Wherever this happens, therefore, I

contend that urban space can be described as achieving an agency of its own: an agency expressed through the fact that urban space need not even be immediately actualised or brought to life through human action in order to exert a ‘palpable influence’ over the affective states of its citizens (Carter, 2002, p.107). Furthermore, Carter’s notion of the spatial unconscious also points towards how we might read the urban spaces of the novels assessed in this thesis as exerting narrative agency, as well as an agency over the affective states and behaviour of their human subjects. For, if unrepresentable spaces are repressed into a spatial unconscious as Carter suggests, this offers us a way of thinking through how more unrepresentable, marginal urban spaces might act as something of a return of the repressed, influencing and shaping the structure and flow of the narratives which tell of them in a similar manner to that in which repressed drives in the psychic unconscious influence, shape and build dreams and phobias. Indeed, the stakes which such narrative spatial agency might hold for literature will be surveyed at much greater length in chapter two, which focuses upon the ways in which the abandoned spaces of contemporary British authors Nicholas Royle and Iain Sinclair explore the relationship between ‘unconscious’ urban spaces and fields of affect.

Bruno Latour and Agency: Rethinking the ‘Social’

The above discussion has helped to clarify the precise conditions under which urban spaces can be envisioned as taking on something of their own agency. We have also begun to touch upon the ways in which the notion of spatial agency might offer a way in to literary readings of texts which foreground urban spaces as narrative agents which exist and circulate between human subjects. From the outset however, it is equally important to emphasise that whilst I am interested in exploring contemporary British writers’ engagement with spatial agency, at the same time, it is by no means my intention to disembodify space: to suggest that space can

be described as having a completely independent existence outside of ‘lived space’, or of being lived out by human action. Rather, a more useful way into re-thinking notions of urban space and agency put forward in this thesis might be to suggest, as Bruno Latour does, that we need not do away with the notion of ‘the social’ and with human agency altogether. Rather, we need to reassess exactly to what it is that we refer when we invoke the notion of ‘the social’, and when we habitually attribute a ‘social explanation’ to so many phenomena. In *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour aims ‘to show why the social cannot be construed as a kind of material or domain and to dispute the project of providing a “social explanation” of some other state of affairs’ (p.1). Latour, and the Actor Network Theory to which his work is seminal, assesses how our reified notion of ‘the social’ has obfuscated the role and potential agency of *objects* in parallel to that of intentional human actors. Latour argues that the idea that objects might also be considered as actors or agents has not been granted due attention, since from ‘the very definition of actors and agencies most often chosen, if action is limited *a priori* to what “intentional”, “meaningful” humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer [...] could act’ (p.71). In other words, because the ways in which an object might be considered to ‘act’ appears so incommensurate with the apparently purposeful, intentional actions of human beings, the idea that objects might be considered as agents in their own right has suffered neglect in sociological discourse. As a result, a state of affairs has arisen in which human agents have come to be overwhelmingly portrayed ‘as the unique possessors of a characteristic range of identities and causal powers, with the result that they must be treated quite differently from nonhuman objects with their own distinctive properties and powers’ (Elder-Vass, 2008, p.456). It is as a reaction against this theoretical glorification of human agency over and above the potential agency of non-human entities that Latour therefore wishes to argue that ‘*anything* that does modify a state of affairs by making a

difference is an actor—or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant’ (2005, p.71). ‘In addition to “determining” and serving as a “backdrop for human action”’ Latour contends, ‘things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on.’ Hence, ‘we should be ready to inquire about the agency of all sorts of objects’ (p.76).³

Despite the fact that Latour focuses upon uncovering the potential agency of non-human material *objects* rather than *spaces*, his questioning of existing prejudices as to what may or may not be considered an ‘agent’ remains crucial to this thesis. For, as chapter one will elucidate, Henri Lefebvre’s account of the production of ‘social space’, so often appropriated by literary scholars to offer spatial readings of texts, suffers a shortcoming similar to that which Latour identifies as epidemic throughout much sociological discourse: namely, that agency is attributed overwhelmingly to the action of human beings, to the extent that any notion that ‘spaces themselves’ (to return to Vidler’s phrase) might also bear an agency which cannot be wholly attributed to their being lived out through human actualisation remains neglected. According to Latour, ‘social’ need not refer to social ties or relations as we are accustomed to thinking about them: rather, ‘social’ ought to instead denote ‘an association between entities which are in no way recognizable as being social in the ordinary manner, *except* during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together’ (2005, p.64-5). ANT thus has something in common with non-representational theory in geography, which sees society

³ In *The Transmission of Affect*, Teresa Brennan also offers an explanation as to why the narrative agency of space, as part of what she terms the ‘environment’, might tend to be neglected in discussions of agency, activity and transmission. Brennan claims that ‘[t]o be active is to carry out individual intention’ (2004, p.93); anything incapable of doing so is thus hailed as passive. The difficulty in conceiving of aspects of our environment like built spaces as being able to carry out such intentions comes in the fact that in order to be observed as ‘individual intentions’, these very intentional acts which designate the ability to possess agency ‘must, by definition, differ from the intentions of the environment’ (*ibid.*, emphasis added). To act, therefore, is to act against or upon the environment, to make the environment ‘bend’ to one’s ‘will’ (*ibid.*). By philosophical necessity therefore, the environment becomes assimilated as ‘passive’, incapable of either exerting an agency of its own or of participating actively in the transmission of affect.

as ‘a set of networks of heterogeneous actors who are able to produce moments by forging connections’ (Thrift, 2000, p.556). It is here that Latour’s wish to uncover the potential agency of objects offers at the same time a useful way of thinking through how the urban spaces of contemporary British literature exert their narrative agency, and how spatial readings of texts might ‘consider the city as a field of movements; a swirl of forces and intensities, which traverse and *bring into relation all kinds of actors, human and non-human, in all manner of combinations of agency*’ (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p.83, my italics).

A Note on Space and Place

This thesis therefore aims to devise ways of reading recent fiction which emphasise the affective and narrative agencies of the urban spaces portrayed in such fiction, rather than merely addressing itself to the ways in which such urban spaces are ‘represented’ by contemporary authors. We therefore must establish from the outset the terminology that will be used throughout this thesis regarding notions of ‘place’ and ‘space’. Indeed, we have already touched upon the ways in which the notion of social space embraced by Lefebvre gives overwhelming priority to the role of human agency in the production of space. Similarly, human geography’s conceptualisation of ‘place’ also displays such a priority. As Tim Cresswell notes, Lefebvre’s notion of social space and human geography’s configuration of place in many ways play ‘the same role’, a conclusion reached by Cresswell after defining place in contradistinction to space, claiming that ‘[w]hen humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way [...] it becomes a place’ (2004, p.10). In a discussion which aims rather to observe an interaction between human *and* spatial agencies then, both ‘place’ and ‘social space’ present themselves as fraught and deeply problematic terms to apply to the kinds of urban literary settings which this thesis will explore. They

emphasise intentional human action, and the room which they leave for the investigation of spatial agency is minimal. Subsequently, throughout this thesis I will refer to the abandoned hospitals and cinemas, the subterranean Londons and the transient hotel settings featured in this discussion as *urban spaces*, with the following qualification: namely, that I employ and evoke the term ‘space’ in the sense that it carries with it notions of openness, fluidity and potential with which human geography has invested it. Space, Cresswell notes, signifies ‘a realm without meaning,’ and thus a ‘realm’ which has not yet been completely appropriated or colonised by the actions of human beings, through processes such as ‘naming’ (2004, pp.10 & 9). Indeed, as Sara Upstone notes in her study of space in the postcolonial novel, ‘making space from place—re-instilling the undefined,’ may be just as subversive an action as ‘the action of redefining [...] place through territorial reclamation’ (2007, pp.3-4). Since both ‘social space’ and ‘place’ therefore imply the colonisation of geographical ‘spaces’ as humans graft names and meanings on to them, wherever the term ‘urban space’ is used in this thesis, the hope is that it rather implies potential and possibility; something yet to be brought under complete human control or containment, and which retains an ability to operate and circulate outside of individual human subjects.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one of this thesis will therefore examine the limitations of applying a spatial theory like that which Lefebvre puts forward in *The Production of Space* (1991) to a body of literature so preoccupied, like Gaiman in ‘A Tale of Two Cities’, with the notion that urban space possesses agency of its own. However, Lefebvre’s Marxian spatial scheme places its emphasis not only upon human agency and the production of ‘social space’, but also stresses the defining role played by a society’s dominant modes and relations of production as central

to the production and perpetuation of the patterns of social space through which that particular society is organised. Consequently, it becomes evident that to read the literary texts with which I shall engage through the lens of Lefebvre's spatial theory would be highly problematic. The authors upon whom I shall focus explore notions of spatial agency precisely through engaging with urban spaces which have been left outside of, made obsolete by or have not yet been fully assimilated into the dominant modes and relations of production which Lefebvre sees as so crucially constitutive of social space. They will, therefore, require a different approach. As a result, chapter one will outline in more detail the specific shortcomings of Lefebvre's theoretical framework, and the reasons why Lefebvre's spatial triad necessarily fails in accounting for the preoccupation with peripheral and ambivalent urban spaces found in so much contemporary British urban writing. Instead, I propose an approach from the angle of a rather different Marxist-materialist theoretical tradition represented by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, whose cultural commentaries pay particular homage to the potentially revelatory qualities of the neglected, derelict and subterranean corners of the urban landscape. Through such an approach, I argue, we might begin to explore how and why abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces offer themselves as such poignant settings for contemporary British writers, and why these types of spaces are particularly invested with narrative agency.

Furthermore, each chapter of this thesis will aim to respond to and widen the scope of a question asked by David James at the outset of his study of *Contemporary Fiction and the Artistry of Space* (2008): namely, 'to what extent do places [...] mediate our response to the very texture of narrative prose *by functioning not simply as background sceneries but as vibrant figures in their own right?*' (p.1, my italics). The ways in which spaces themselves

can move human subjects to emotion or can encourage us to reassess our relationship with selfhood, the other and space itself are examples in which urban spaces themselves can thus emerge ‘in their own right,’ or ‘modify states of affairs’ to use Latour’s vocabulary, be they affective, conceptual or psychic states. Most importantly however, the following chapters document some of the ways in which contemporary British fiction allows us to see spatial agency at work, and through which we are able to explore the narrative agencies as well as the representational possibilities of city-space. As a means of guiding the reader through discussion, the main body of the thesis will be organised in terms of ‘types of spaces’: namely, with chapter two focusing upon literary portrayals of abandoned sites; chapter three looking at tales engaging with subterranean areas and chapter four examining the narrative roles of transient spaces, focusing upon the hotel.

In chapter two I will focus upon the use of abandoned spaces in the work of urban fiction writer Nicholas Royle and one of the most eminent figures of British psychogeography, Iain Sinclair. I will outline the ways in which existing scholarship addressing the representation of ‘ruins’ in art, literature and cultural production in general neglects precisely what Vidler describes as the role of the ‘space itself’, reducing abandoned sites as employed in literary texts as mute symbols or metaphors for a more general social entropy or as mere externalisations of a protagonist’s degenerative mental state. In response to this, I explore the ways in which both Royle’s and Sinclair’s abandoned buildings lie crucially outside of society’s dominant modes of production, exchange and social relation, thus opening up entirely new narrative possibilities for the exploration of the relationship between space, causality and agency. The latter section of the chapter will focus upon the relationship in Royle and Sinclair’s work of abandoned space and affect, arguing that Royle makes the

abandoned space ‘work’ in his narratives rather like a field of affect which circulates transhumanly: that is, as a constant but often latent presence, at times actualised within the consciousness of the novels’ characters, but at other times lurking beneath and around the text, generating movements and channels of thought, association and action which propel the narrative forward. Furthermore, I shall investigate the ways in which both authors present abandoned urban spaces as spaces cast off by the working city, thus envisioning abandoned spaces as ideal settings through which to explore the human subject’s relationship with the ‘other’ as a relationship which need not rely upon production, possession, ownership and capitalist exchange.

Chapter three will turn to fiction which engages with the urban underground to produce what I go on to call contemporary urban descent narratives. Through an analysis of Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* (1996), Tobias Hill’s *Underground* (1999) and Conrad Williams’s *London Revenant* (2004), this chapter will explore a brief history of narratives based around a descent into an underground realm, arguing that these contemporary (London) novels challenge existing formulations of the descent narrative through their use of the subterranean ‘space itself’, as Vidler might have it. The agency achieved by London’s underground spaces within these novels, I will argue, originates in an ability to confound and disorientate the human protagonist, as was crucial in the dream-city of Gaiman’s ‘A Tale of Two Cities’. Taking this defamiliarising effect of the underworld even further, all three novels portray a subterranean city which plays a crucial role in their protagonists’ underground quests, posing a challenge in which the protagonists must open themselves up to new ways of conceptualising and re-thinking space. The confounding and unruly underworlds of each text present their protagonists with unmappable deep-shelters and mind-bending labyrinths which refuse to be contained by the linear, teleological rules through which space is conceived, lived

and managed in the aboveground city: a city in which the most popular approach to space involves the subject's fraught attempts to assimilate and master the city in which they find themselves. Furthermore, in discussing the poetics of agoraphobia, Carter acknowledges a correspondence between spatial anxiety and a tenuous sense of self, describing how R.D. Laing 'interprets space phobias as symptoms of a profounder ontological insecurity. A person who lacks a strong sense of his being in the world may, Laing says, fear *engulfment*—a “dread lest in any relationship he will lose his autonomy and identity—or *implosion*—a similar dread extended to external reality on general” (2002, p.33). Chapter three will therefore also investigate the ways in which the subterranean London of these contemporary descent narratives plays with the notion of the dissolution of the protagonist's self: a criterion held central to traditional models of literary descent into the underworld. My argument will first focus around the ways in which all three authors, like Vidler and Carter in their cultural histories of agoraphobia, envision spatial anxiety and ontological fragility as deeply entwined. This will then extend into an exploration of the idea that the subterranean London presented by Gaiman, Hill and Williams—a space appropriated by yet at the same time resisting aboveground, capitalist-driven attempts at mapping and rationalisation—is envisioned by all three authors as an entity with the agency to encourage protagonists to not only rethink their means of conceptualising space itself, but also to rethink their notion of selfhood. The real quest faced by each protagonist thus asks if they are able to adopt a more flexible, fluid approach to space and selfhood, and to entertain the notion that the relations between these entities are constantly in flux and cannot be rationalised or fixed.

Chapter four will demonstrate that it is not only in the fragmentary, peripheral and therefore more ostensibly 'postmodern' spaces of the city's abandoned and subterranean areas which stir contemporary British authors and their desires to explore the implications of urban

spaces acquiring something of their own agency. In this chapter, I will turn to Ali Smith's second novel *Hotel World* (2001) and Monica Ali's *In The Kitchen* (2009) in order to examine the role played by the hotel—an urban space perhaps most characteristically associated with Modernist tropes of homelessness and rootlessness—in contemporary fiction which engages with the relationship between affect, memory and spatial agency. The chapter will explore the hotel as a site of repeated return for Smith's hotel receptionist Lise and Ali's Head Chef Gabriel, both of whom come to experience the hotel as a space which gains an almost uncanny power through its refusal to forget the tragic deaths—of maid Sara Wilby and night porter Yuri respectively—which occur within it. The hotel may at first glance appear dramatically different from the spaces explored in chapters two and three; for instance, whilst abandoned and subterranean spaces can be characterised by their existence either wholly or partially outside of the matrices of the working capitalist city, the hotel cannot quite be considered so. Based upon the practice of exchanging temporary inhabitation of space for money, the hotel in fact appears very much embedded within the networks of commodification and monetary exchange which define the capitalist, consumerist city.

However, tracing the cultural resonances of the hotel back to Siegfried Kracauer's famous musings on 'The Hotel Lobby,' I will investigate the ways in which both Smith and Ali are nevertheless drawn to the hotel as a space with an irresistible ability to arrest human agency. Rather than viewing the hotel, as have sociological commentators such as Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan, as a playful space which offers those within it the opportunity to freely negotiate and re-work their own identities at will, this chapter will instead demonstrate how both Smith and Ali envision the hotel as an intruding force which, for both Lise and Gabriel, exaggerates the impoverishment of identity rather than allowing for its playful re-negotiation. Ultimately, the hotel as told by Smith and Ali will be revealed as demonstrating a much more

ambivalent relationship with capitalism as may be first perceived. Furthermore, this chapter will also consider the narrative agency of the hotel space—a notion which emerges in the work of Virginia Woolf—and the ways in which taking the hotel space as one’s literary subject matter may indeed have necessary and profound implications for the ultimate narrative structure of the resulting work. As a result, this section will represent the culmination of evidence unearthed throughout all the preceding chapters which implies that urban spaces and the agencies they achieve therefore have a profound influence on literary form as well as content. I will then conclude by assessing how the readings offered in this thesis *open up* the urban spaces of contemporary British literature to analysis through theoretical frameworks other than those like Lefebvre’s, which foreground notions of social space and human agency. I shall do so by challenging the classification of the abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces of contemporary British fiction as ‘liminal,’ suggesting that such a term implies a specific kind of narrative resolution conspicuously absent from any of my featured texts.

With literary responses to the contemporary British city—especially London—being wide ranging and vast in both number and scope, my choice of primary texts in chapters two to four aims to offer a selective cross-section of the kinds of contemporary British writing which deal closely with the issues of urban space, memory, affect, selfhood and the relation of these concepts to the notion of spatial agency. My choice is by no means an attempt to provide an exhaustive survey of the representation of urban space in contemporary literature: instead, my focus is contracted to a smaller number of exemplary texts in order to provide the close reading and textual analysis that is required in investigating how abandoned, subterranean and transient hotel spaces operate within and shape the narratives of contemporary authors. Furthermore, such a concentrated focus allows for a much more engaged exploration of the

ways in which such literary spaces challenge and exceed more traditional Lefebvrian readings. Uniting each of the chapters therefore will be the argument laid out in chapter one: namely, a thread in which textual analysis will be used to challenge the precedence set by Lefebvre's spatial theory and its persistent adoption by scholars in literary studies to produce spatial readings of texts. I will take issue with Lefebvre's thought, questioning its sufficiency in accounting for the preoccupation displayed by contemporary British authors with urban spaces which lie outside of or exhibit an ambivalent relationship with the dominant modes of production and social relation which, according to Lefebvre, produce, maintain and perpetuate the 'social space' of our Western late-capitalist society. Overall, my project draws attention to the issue of theory in 'spatial readings' of texts, asking that we carefully consider the context and relevance of a spatial theory like Lefebvre's before inflicting it upon the porous, uncontainable and often unruly urban spaces of the contemporary British novel.

CHAPTER 1: SPATIAL READINGS OF LITERATURE AND THE PROBLEM OF THEORY

Space, Spatial Theory and Narrative Form

In *Postmodern Geographies*, Edward Soja laments the paucity of critical attention paid to issues of spatialisation in social and cultural theory since the end of the nineteenth century. By this time, Soja argues, space had become theoretically subordinated in favour of issues of time, and a consequently ‘space-blinkered’ historicisation of society and social practice (Soja, 1989, p.11). However, a well-noted ‘spatial turn’ has since revolutionised theory as Soja once knew it: a spatial turn which Soja goes on to acknowledge in later work (2000, p.192), and which spreads from discourse within sociology and postmodernism into the theoretical agenda of all Humanities and Social Science disciplines. Most crucial for the project in hand therefore, this spatial turn has been profoundly felt throughout the discipline of literary studies. Indeed, in making his impassioned case for the importance of the spatial within critical theory, Soja refers to John Berger’s discussion of the modern novel as representative of the necessity to reassess and reassert issues of space in the latter part of the twentieth century:

We hear a lot about the crisis of the modern novel. What this involves, fundamentally, is a change in the *mode of narration*. It is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. And this is because we are too aware of what is continually traversing the storyline *laterally*. That is to say, instead of being aware of a point as an infinitely small part of a straight line, we are aware of it as an infinitely small part of an infinite number of lines, as the centre of a star of lines. Such awareness is the result of our constantly having to take into account the *simultaneity and*

extension of events and possibilities. (Berger 1974, p.40, quoted in Soja, 1989, p. 22)

Within his historical moment therefore, Soja identifies a need to both rethink issues of spatialisation and to address traditional historicism's 'submergence of space in critical social thought' (1989, p.4). In response therefore, *Postmodern Geographies* goes on to chart the rise of a Marxist, material-historicist tradition of thought arising in the 1960s, which began to re-introduce a critical 'spatial dialectic' as a means of analysing modes of production and society at large, to reveal that 'spatial structures and relations are the concrete manifestations of social structures and relations evolving over time, whatever the mode of production' (p.127). It comes in fact as little surprise that Soja identifies this reclamation of the importance of space as taking place initially within a largely Marxist tradition: in his later work *Postmetropolis*, Soja explains that the 'urban crisis of the 1960s'¹ saw previous modes of understanding urban space fall into obsolescence, and that it was 'into this theoretical and empirical breach, [that] new approaches to understanding the dynamics of industrial capitalist cityspace began to develop' (Soja, 2000, p.97). 'Most of these new approaches,' Soja notes, 'drew heavily on the writings of Marx and Engels,' and concerned themselves principally with explaining 'the spatial specificity of urbanism' through 'the social relations of class and power underlying capitalism as the dominant mode of production' (*Ibid.*). The potential of such approaches, Soja noted, was to reveal that space was neither a 'fixed, dead and undialectical' entity or empty container, nor a taken-for-granted concept of 'pure ideation and representation' (p.7): instead, space was social, and consequently was *produced*. Indeed, it is the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre and his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1974, trans.

¹ Here, Soja refers to uprisings and cultural shifts including racial violence in America, deindustrialization (especially in America and the UK) and political unrest in Paris in 1968.

1991) that Soja particularly champions as ‘the most persistent, insistent and consistent of these spatializing voices’ (Soja, 2000, p.16).² Soja contends that more than any other single figure, Lefebvre ‘creatively initiated [...] a conceptual revolution in urban studies that would culminate [...] in a pronounced “spatial turn” that would be felt not just in urban studies but throughout all the human sciences’ (p.101).

Lefebvre’s theoretical efforts to re-conceptualise spatial categories nevertheless bring us back to Berger’s concerns about the modern novel, as quoted by Soja. For, as we shall discover, Lefebvre’s spatial theory developed in *The Production of Space* has been widely adopted by commentators in literary studies, as a theoretical framework through which imaginative, literary spaces can be seen to comment upon and re-shape the ‘real-world’ spaces which they represent. The kinds of seminal spatial thought lauded by Soja have therefore had a profound and formative effect upon the ways in which the spaces and landscapes depicted by literary texts have been theorised and read. Indeed, Soja no doubt draws attention to Berger’s concerns about the novel since they articulate the increasing spatialisation of narrative fiction: that is, narrative fiction no longer prioritises linearity, but instead has taken on multiple dimensions in order to make room for the simultaneity and extension of events and possibilities to which Berger refers. Issues of space and the foregrounding of spatiality have, therefore, profound effects upon the structure of literary and narrative form. Narrative fiction, it would seem, has ceased to take the geometrical shape of a *line*, and has in turn become a *space itself*: a three dimensional space which allows for events to unfold simultaneously, and for narrative time to thus loop back and forth as it constellates these simultaneous events which unfold across the narrative space.

² Soja did indeed see Lefebvre as ‘the leading intellectual figure inspiring the uprising’ of students against police in the Paris streets in May 1968, arguing for a rethinking of “the city” and calling for ‘taking control over the social production of cityspace’ (Soja, 2000, p.100). Soja therefore emphasised Lefebvre’s ‘marxified’ spatial theory as very much a product of its social, economic and historical moment.

This thesis, it ought to be noted, is not a thesis *on* literary form specifically. However, it does aim to offer a way of thinking about the effects of space upon literary form in different ways to those in which this interaction has often previously been investigated through the lens of Lefebvorean theory. One of the most recent and eminent accounts of the interaction between literary form and British fiction is given by David James (2008). James opens with questions as to how ‘landscapes themselves have a determining effect upon our engagement with the novel as a form,’ and the extent to which ‘places in fiction mediate our response to the very texture of narrative prose’ (p.1). Indeed, in ensuring that spatial readings of texts remain embedded too in notions of literary form—a case to which James is clearly committed—these are undoubtedly vital concerns. However, James bases his response to such concerns very much upon the *textual depiction* of place and landscape. His monograph seeks answers to such questions through ‘looking closely at the craft of landscape description,’ and using such textual representation as a measure of the influence of issues of space upon narrative form (p.7).

I, however, propose a rather different approach in my exploration of the urban spaces depicted in a cross-section of contemporary British literature. I insinuate an approach which does not merely interrogate the ways in which places and landscapes are textually represented, or the ways in which such settings mediate the reader’s response to the text through which they are portrayed. As stated in the introduction, my concern is neither with the fixedness of place nor the externality of landscape, but is rather the yet-to-be-formed potentiality of space, as characterised by human geographers. Consequently, in the light of Berger’s suggestion that modern narrative fiction be thought of as a more three-dimensional space, I aim to supply a mode of spatial reading which retains attention to the linguistic description of space, but which also assesses the influence of space upon the channels and

structure of narrative itself. My scheme will approach the contemporary novel as a space through which we can observe spatial narrative agency at work: that is, in which we are able to see depicted urban spaces exerting an agency over the ways in which simultaneous events and possibilities are drawn into narrative constellation within the text. The novel form then becomes a three-dimensional space through which depicted spaces circulate the text, constantly drawing the consciousness of character, reader and author back to certain geographical locations within the text: locations which, in turn, emanate beyond themselves and permeate the text, operating, as we shall see, in a similar manner to affective fields.

James warns that the more preoccupied literary scholars become with ‘envisioning’ the spaces depicted within a narrative text, ‘the less inclined we are to analyse the linguistic and cognitive processes that underpin that envisioning process’ (p.2). However, the askance perspective provided in my textual analysis will rather assess how the urban spaces depicted in the featured novels form part of the *cognitive process of each text itself*, so to speak. Like contents of Carter’s spatial unconscious, we shall see how and why abandoned buildings, subterranean Londons and transient hotel spaces persistently influence and drive narrative in certain directions, usually towards the novels’ compulsive revisiting of these urban spaces which thus become the narrative omphalos of each work. Like agents performing the kinds of dream-work discussed in our introduction therefore, it is thus, I will argue, that the abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces of contemporary British writing *perform* stylistic experimentation. A useful example—discussed at length in chapter four—is the way in which the affective and memorial powers and resonances of the Global Hotel in Ali Smith’s *Hotel World* exert an agency which repeatedly draws the characters’ consciousness back towards itself, creating a powerful narrative pull and psycho-spatial structure to what is otherwise a deeply fragmented novel. Nevertheless, presenting such a fresh means of

accounting for the relationship between space and literary form would necessarily fall into difficulty were we to revert, as have many literary scholars, to the Marxist scheme of social space presented by Henri Lefebvre. The principal purpose of this preliminary theory-based chapter is therefore to lay out in detail the central tenets of Lefebvre's thought, and the problems which Lefebvrian theory might pose to the kind of spatial readings of prose fiction which I hope to produce. My motivation is to pay attention to the importance of considering the genealogy of any theory before hastening to apply such theory to literary texts. I will also look further afield in order to discover, interrogate and borrow from alternative theoretical means of conceptualising the relationship between literature, space and agency, in the hope to arrive at a theoretical departure point appropriate to the kinds of spatial literary readings which I intend to practise.

Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*

In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre looks back upon what he describes as a 'Cartesian/Western Logos' (1991, p.4): a mode of epistemological thought reasserted by philosophers of the Enlightenment which persisted in separating categories of space from each other, leaving spatial theory in what Lefebvre portrays as a ruin of fragmented tatters.³ Lefebvre argues that such thought resulted in a gradual 'division which keeps the various types of space away from each other, so that physical space, mental space and social space do not overlap' (p.14). In other words, as mental and social space become dissociated, space-as-mental becomes privileged, reducing space to an ideational category (p.6). This in turn, Lefebvre argues,

³ It is worth noting here my awareness of Lefebvre's further works addressing the matters of city space, including the collection *Writings on Cities* (1996) and the recently translated *Urban Revolution* (1970, trans. 2003). However, due to the need for a close focus, the present work will principally base its critique upon *The Production of Space*—most specifically with Lefebvre's 'spatial triad,' since our task is to assess the interaction between spatial theory and literature, and it is this conceptualisation that has been most appropriated by scholars in literary studies to offer spatial readings of texts.

conceals both the constructedness of space and the ways in which spatial organisation works as a tool for the reinforcement and perpetuation of dominant ideology. ‘The modern field of inquiry known as epistemology’, Lefebvre laments, ‘has inherited and adopted the notion that the status of space is that of a “mental thing” or “mental place”’ (p.3).

Indeed, the revolutionary edge of Lefebvre’s observation here is difficult to appreciate within our own historical and critical moment. The aforementioned ‘spatial turn’ has presented us with account upon account of the construction and interaction between physical, mental and social space and practice: for example, the recent surge of interest in the writings of early twentieth-century urban commentators like Georg Simmel (Frisby, 1986 & 2001) and the literary urban memory-practice of psychogeography (see Coverley, 2007) have addressed the extent to which physical and social spaces impact upon the spaces of mental life and subjectivity. On the other hand, we are also familiar with accounts in the other direction, so to speak, as to the role of the imagination and mental categories in the construction of social and physical space (e.g. Donald, 1999), and the ways in which physical spaces become socially structured through processes more often associated with psychical space, such as ‘dream-work’ (e.g. Pile, 2005). As psychoanalytic approaches make us aware, literature too is shaped like the mind, with its manifest and latent content: its aesthetic form, its metaphors and its subtexts. As Berger’s earlier-noted comments suggest, literature is also a material space in and through which constellations of events and possibilities come together to form narrative. It is therefore little surprise that a spatial turn which consistently seeks to account for the dynamics between mental and material space has so deeply informed our reading of literary texts. Soja however pays particular homage to Lefebvre for providing one of the first theoretically consistent accounts in which physical, social and mental space are seen to underpin each other, whilst at the same time awakening the theoretical world to a *social* space

which should be considered as neither subordinate nor reducible to ‘mental space (as defined by the philosophers and mathematicians) on the one hand, and physical space (as defined by practico-sensory activity and the perception of “nature”) on the other’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p.27).

In order to escape the dualism of Cartesian and Kantian philosophies and their fragmentary treatment of categories of spatial experience, Lefebvre therefore proposed a ‘conceptual triad’ as a means of rethinking social space as fundamentally dialectic. And so, Lefebvre introduces his social space as working through the *tripartite* order of *spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces*. Spatial practice, Lefebvre describes somewhat elusively, ‘embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation’ (1991, p.33). In other words, through lived human practice, certain spaces within a society come to be associated with certain practices which become ‘approved’ within that space, so that ‘over time, spatial practices, the habitual routines of “place ballets” are concretised in the built environment and sedimented in the landscape’ (Shields, 1991, p.53). In turn, as Lefebvre stresses, ‘spatial practice ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion’, by reinforcing and reproducing the social relations of production through which a society might be perpetuated (Lefebvre, 1991, p.33). Secondly, representations of space, ‘which are tied to the relations of production and to the “order” which those relations impose’ (*Ibid.*), are identified by Lefebvre as ‘conceptualized space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers’ (p.38). Hence, this is space as is fed to us by ‘official’ and government bodies, often as charts, diagrams and maps, and serves, as Derek Gregory most eloquently depicts, as ‘constellations of power, knowledge, and spatiality—in which the dominant social order is materially inscribed’ (1994, p.403). According to Lefebvre, ‘the relations of reproduction are divided

into frontal, public, overt [...] relations on the one hand,' that is, those as are found within representations of space, 'and, on the other, covert, clandestine and repressed relations' (1991, p.33) which are embodied by the third and final concept of Lefebvre's triad: representational spaces. Generally dominated by representations of space, representational spaces describe space as 'directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols': that space 'which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate', and from which users can salvage something in order to make sense of space by 'making symbolic use of its objects' (p.39). Lefebvre thus stresses representational spaces as the space of artists and writers, the products of which 'are symbolic works' which sometimes 'set in train "aesthetic" trends' (p.42).

For Lefebvre therefore, spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces create social space through constant interaction: they overlay and underpin each other. For instance, Ian Davidson provides a useful concretisation of this dialectic through the example of an architectural plan for a domestic house. Despite the plan itself being an abstract *representation of space*, Davidson explains, someone entering that house will also come to read the domestic space according to the *spatial practices* one associates with certain parts of the 'home,' as well as the ways in which the inhabitants have appropriated the space as their own, through the symbolic, *representational space* of 'home' (Davidson 2007, p.36). Lefebvre's social space is therefore produced within a constant three-way dialectic with the mental and the material.

However, the third concept in his triad leads us back to the project in hand, and back to issues and conceptualisations of space within literary studies. For, not only does Lefebvre emphasise representational space as the imaginative space of artists and writers; as Gregory again sums up, representational spaces arise from 'the critical arts to imaginatively challenge

the dominant spatial practices and spatialities', helping to 'create alternative spatial imaginaries' (1994: pp.403 & 405). This idea then, of an artistic space from and within which the author might challenge the dominant or 'official' meanings of social spaces—a representational space reacting against received representations of space, to use Lefebvre's terminology—has therefore led to the absorption of Lefebvre's spatial theory into literary analysis, and has thus paved the way for a particular genus of spatial, 'Lefebvrian' reading of literary texts. It would therefore serve to pay attention to this model of Lefebvrian reading as one of the major means by which spatial theory has thus far been applied to literature, and ultimately to assess this theoretical approach's potential shortcomings in reading the abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces of contemporary British writing.

Applying Lefebvre to Literary Studies

One of the accounts most typical of this mode of Lefebvrian reading is that offered by Andrew Thacker in his monograph study *Moving Through Modernity* (2003). Thacker seeks to redress what he identifies as an 'enduring tradition' in which postmodernism is consistently presented as engaging with matters of *spatiality*, whilst modernism is typically portrayed as privileging 'the experience and representation of *temporality*' (Thacker, 2003, p.2, my italics). Thacker attempts to characterise modernism through a Lefebvrian interaction between representations of space and representational spaces strikingly similar to that highlighted by Gregory above. 'Modernism,' Thacker argues, 'was engaged in a diverse set of responses to the official representations of space in modernity, found in new forms of urban life' (2003, pp.20-21). Working from the premise that 'Lefebvre's work also stresses that the representational spaces found in literary texts are to be connected to material spaces and places,' Thacker presents a spatialised modernism, in which the representational spaces of

modernist texts ‘reflect, contest or endorse the geographical shaping of these *topoi* by various ideological representations of space’ (p.21). Modernist writers are thus seen to ‘appropriate spaces dominated by official meanings, producing representational spaces with quite different meanings’ (*Ibid.*); as an example, Thacker offers James Joyce’s re-imagination of Dublin in *Ulysses* ‘as an imperial outpost of the British Empire’ (*Ibid.*), whilst later on in his study giving a similar reading of Jean Rhys’s fiction as one which ‘always seems to offer a “representational space” that contests the dominant imperial “representation of space”’ (p.203).

Moving from modernism to the contemporary era, Ian Davidson similarly evokes Lefebvre’s concepts of representations of space and representational spaces as crucial structuring mechanisms of contemporary poetry (2007). Like Thacker, Davidson is keen to make use of Lefebvre’s insistence upon the interaction between representations of space and representational spaces, attempting to flag up the ways in which individual texts work, in part, through their deployment of such interaction. Peter Riley’s poem *Alstonefield*, Davidson describes, is a poetic ‘book-length response’ to a Peak District Village which, descriptively, presents itself as a mapping of, or ‘a representation of the place of Alstonefield’ (p.38). However, ‘within the description of the location the poem brings in other discourses, and most consistently that of the commodification of rural space’, opening up what Davidson describes as ‘other conceptual spaces that reflect back into the poem’ (*Ibid.*). The poem, like Joyce’s and Rhys’s fiction in Thacker’s framework, creates a representational space which challenges dominant representations of (rural) space, and for Davidson therefore, ‘[i]t is not simply that a poem is a representation of space or that it is a representational space, it is both simultaneously’ (*Ibid.*).

In Romantic studies however, the case is slightly different. Rather than placing most emphasis upon the aspect of Lefebvre's *oeuvre* which most ostensibly offers itself to literary analysis (namely, that of representational spaces), commentators such as Philip Shaw (1993) and David Cooper (2008) have rather chosen to contextualise Lefebvre as indicative of emergent theories of *social* space more generally. Cooper, for example, identifies Lefebvre as playing part in a wider body of 'Post-Heideggarian spatial theory,' and thus explores the potential which such theory might have for a reading of the neglected *socio-political* implications of Romantic space, in opposition to traditional approaches to Romantic studies in which 'recent work on the representation of place has been dominated by "green" readings and the emergence of ecocritical practice' (Cooper, 2008, p.810). On the other hand however, Michael Wiley's book *Romantic Geography* (1998) does not extend such 'Post-Heideggarian' readings to monograph form, and instead uses the same model of Lefebvrian analysis as that executed by Thacker and Davidson: namely, the interaction between textual, 'imaginative' representational spaces and dominant, 'official' representations of space. As Wiley describes, 'imaginative configurations of space—in literature [...] for instance—can affect reality by demonstrating "real possibilities" for alternative modes of social and political life' (1998, p.3); in other words, representational literary spaces can challenge and provide conceptualisations of spatial life different to those perpetuated by dominant representations of space and spatial practices. Wiley's project therefore is concerned with 'the extent to which Wordsworth's writing operates on the hope that his imaginative landscapes will influence real perceptions and practices' in this way (*Ibid.*).

Subsequently, Lefebvre's spatial triad offers commentators like Thacker, Davidson and Wiley the opportunity to conceptualise the interaction between the (imaginary) spaces depicted in literature and the material and social spaces of their chosen period. The triad also

acts as a means of accounting for the ways in which the imaginative spaces of literary texts respond to and challenge dominant modes of mapping and portraying material spaces across socio-historical periods. In reading the abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces of contemporary British fiction however, I aim to take a different approach. For, Lefebvre's characterisation of representational or imaginative spaces implicates that the imagination at work, which 'seeks to change and appropriate' lived space and unlock the symbolic potential of such space, is a human imagination (1991, p.39). However, as our previous discussion of notions of dream-work and the spatial unconscious suggest, my textual readings aim to allow for the exploration of the psychic and imaginative qualities of the depicted spaces themselves: of how the urban spaces depicted within texts share a consciousness with the characters that live them out, and of how these spaces refuse to forget the previous ideological or memorial baggage which they have accreted over time. Rather than merely reading the spaces of contemporary British literature as 'representational spaces' used by authors to launch challenges or commentary upon our era's dominant, authoritative representations of space, I instead pay attention to these spaces as sometimes *exceeding* human attempts to contain them either through imaginary containment or through available processes of mapping.

Consequently, a Lefebvrian reading of the kinds of literary spaces which I will explore in this thesis already appears insufficient. For, contemporary British authors are increasingly turning their attention to spaces which lie on the periphery of urban life: 'in-between' spaces which demonstrate fraught and ambivalent relationships with their society's dominant modes and relations of production; spaces which are often re-appropriated or re-developed. After therefore emphasising Lefebvre as a key thinker of space, and demonstrating his doctrine of social space as one of the most widely-adopted theoretical frameworks in the production of

spatial readings of literature, it already appears that the urban spaces of contemporary literature demand a different kind of spatial reading. A Lefebvrian reading like those summarised is not the most appropriate for unpicking the reasons as to why contemporary British urban writers are so drawn towards the peripheral, marginal spaces which act as narrative agents within their work. Indeed, whilst Lefebvre acknowledges that 'literary authors have written much of relevance' in the descriptions of space and place, he nevertheless contends that the spaces depicted in literature fail to offer a sufficient way in to analyses of material spaces, concluding that 'architecture and texts of architecture would be a better choice than literary texts proper' for such analytic purposes (1991, pp.14-15). 'The problem is,' Lefebvre justifies, 'that any search for space in literary texts will find it everywhere and in every guise: described, projected, dreamt of, speculated about' (p.15). Here, Lefebvre touches upon the multifarious and ubiquitous nature of space in literature, and its movement above and beyond the material and actualised spaces with which his priorities so clearly lie. However, where Lefebvre uses this as justification for the dismissal of literature as a medium through which to re-assess the operation of space, this thesis works in an antithetical direction to such a dismissal, exploiting these spatial possibilities of literature as the very reason why it ought to be used as a medium through which we can re-think the ways in which space moves, circulates and manifests itself. What Thacker *et al.* therefore fail to note is that to depart from a Lefebvrian perspective is therefore to depart from a theoretical standpoint which already negates the potential of literature to tell us new things about the nature of and operation of space.

This explicit dismissal of literary space is not the only fundamental difficulty which presents itself in the application of Lefebvrian theory to literary texts. In the next part of this chapter, I will detail three more deep-seated problems within Lefebvre's thought which pose

difficulties in reading the more specific kinds of abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces found in contemporary British fiction. In response to each of these three points, I will explore theoretical alternatives through which we might instead arrive at ways of reading which illuminate literature as a medium through which the narrative agency of urban spaces themselves plays out.

Problems with Lefebvrian Theory

i) Spaces Outside The Modes of Production

‘Lefebvre’s work needs to be understood in the context of his Marxism,’ says Stuart Elden (2001, p.810): a simple assertion which has huge repercussions for the task in hand here. For, Thacker, Davidson and the other producers of Lefebvrian readings of literary texts noted above may well, like Soja, acknowledge Lefebvre’s basis within an overtly Marxist, historical materialist tradition of philosophical thought. Nevertheless, the profound influence of this tradition upon Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of space, and the limitations which this influence places upon the range of literary spaces which may be read and accounted for through a Lefebvrian analysis, remain conspicuously silenced. For, Lefebvre’s Marxist sympathies lead to his production of a very particular kind of spatial theory: a kind in which society’s modes of production are of a paramount and forging importance. In Lefebvre’s spatial scheme, as Elden elaborates, the experience of space and time ‘was directly related to the historical conditions they were experienced within. For Lefebvre, of course, these historical conditions are directly linked to the mode of production: hence, the *production* of space’ (Elden, 2004, p.184). Consequently, this leads Lefebvre to his much reiterated assertion that the organisation and experience of space varies across each and every society: ‘I say each society,’

he reflects, ‘but it would be more accurate to say each mode of production, along with its specific relations of production’ (Lefebvre, 1991, p31). It is such that, ultimately, ‘each epoch produced its own space’ (Lefebvre, in interview with G. Burgel, 1987, p.31), or, as David Harvey describes, that ‘each distinctive mode of production or social formation will, in short, embody a distinctive bundle of time and space practices and concepts’ (Harvey, 1990, p.204).

Taking this into account, Lefebvre’s insistence that ‘social space’ is inextricably bound up with ‘the social relations of production and reproduction’ (1991, p.32) seems to pose little problem for the spatial readings summarised above. Shaw and Wiley focus on the well-known landscapes of Wordsworth, who addressed the contrasts between the newly-forming patterns of urban life and the rural landscape (see Book Seventh of *The Prelude*), whilst Thacker’s account focuses on the growing consumerist urban centres of British modernism, and Davidson applies Lefebvre to a poetic landscape which looks at commodification of rural space. The Wordsworthian landscape, the Modernist metropolis and the contemporary commodification of rural topography therefore lend themselves to a Lefebvrian reading, since all three represent spaces within which their ‘epoch’s’ dominant modes and relations of production can be read, and can consequently be seen to be deployed by their writers as a means of commentary upon the impact of industrialism, capitalism and late capitalism respectively.

However, this study looks at geographies which are much less widely accounted for. Its focus is, rather, literary manifestations of more troubling spaces, which sit more uncomfortably within Lefebvre’s spatial schemata. This discomfort arises because these spaces *lie outside* dominant relations of production and reproduction: either they have been left behind by modes of production (abandoned spaces); they represent a tense juxtaposition of capitalist and anti-capitalist spaces and attitudes towards spatiality (the subterranean spaces

we shall look at); or they exceed and resist the capitalistic efforts which try to assimilate them into the matrices of monetary exchange and the commodification of space (transient hotel spaces). Furthermore, whereas Lefebvrian interpretations such as Thacker's read literary texts or periods as representational spaces challenging the 'official meanings' of the 'real' spaces of their epoch (for example, Joyce's Dublin), the more indeterminate spaces of contemporary prose to be brought to light here are *not* so heavily shot-through with such meanings; complex, obscured or derelict, they may not have a clear, 'official' ideological meaning attached to them in the way that a capital city or a nation state might. In my argument nevertheless, this peripheral, obsolete positioning of such spaces both seduces and is mobilised by authors, giving space a residual or subversive power and thus explaining why such spaces are recurrently found to act as narrative agents in contemporary British prose. If *being left behind by or standing in ambivalent relationship to* society's dominant modes of production and reproduction are such crucial concepts then, perhaps Lefebvre's thought will prove insufficient in providing the tools for an adequate spatial reading in this case.

Again, however, it is important to draw attention to the motivations behind Lefebvre's work on space: this time, the fact that the part of his *oeuvre* upon which our focus falls (namely, *The Production of Space*), is principally a quest to discover how and why modern capitalism flourished when it did, and why it had persisted into his present day. Soja emphasises this, explaining the manner in which 'Lefebvre's writings are marked by a persistent search for a political understanding of how and why capitalism has survived from the competitive industrial form of Marx's time to the advanced, state-managed and oligopolistic industrial capitalism of today' (1989, p.91). Since this very 'survival of Capitalism, Lefebvre argued, was built upon the creation of an increasingly embracing, instrumental and socially mystified *spatiality*' (p.50, my italics), it is this motivation which

led Lefebvre to consider the implications of the production of space. Furthermore, *The Production of Space* is also underwritten by a desire to produce a 'better' space: 'another city, another space, another space for and of Socialism', in which people could reassert their right to the city (Merrifield, 2000, p.173)⁴. In light of these two points therefore, the first emphasising capitalist modes of production and the second envisioning spatial 'progress,' it is little wonder that in Lefebvre, we find little material that might aid in a reading of peripheral, obsolete or disused spaces. Still, the conundrum remains: spaces fallen out of or in severe tension with a society's dominant mode of production cannot be sufficiently accounted for by means of a theoretical framework in which modes of production are the principle determining factor.

This fact can be reiterated with reference to British Marxist geographer David Harvey, who draws upon Lefebvre (see Harvey, 1990, pp.218-221) and does in fact acknowledge the cultural 'significance of ruins' and outmoded objects (p.272), but explains this only as a reaction to the way in which modes of production from the nineteen-sixties onwards have created 'the dynamics of a "throwaway" society' in which individuals are forced to cope with 'the prospects for instant obsolescence' (p.286). In such a society, Harvey claims, ruins and artefacts from the past become 'valued commodities' (p.272) as people try to cling onto a sense of identity, shaken by 'the changing meaning of space and time which capitalism has itself wrought' (p.283). Even here therefore, investigation into the significance of the peripheral, liminal and obsolete is limited, with such a significance merely explained away as the result of changing spatio-temporal experience inflicted by late capitalism. Any exploration of the psychic or affective powers of obsolete, disused or overlooked objects and spaces is predictably, within a more traditional Marxist framework, absent. In order to widen the

⁴ Lefebvre speaks more of his influence by Socialist notions of the 'revival of the city' and his conceptualisation of employing 'fête' as a means of such revival in *Writings on Cities* (1996: see especially pp. 35 & 168).

investigation into contemporary writers' exploitation of abandoned, subterranean and transient topographies therefore, an alternative approach to the popular Marxian, Lefebvrian mode of spatial reading must be sought which makes critical, theoretical space for consideration of derelict, peripheral and indeterminate urban spaces.

An alternative to Lefebvre: Walter Benjamin

Before the reaffirmation of space by the Marxist historico-materialist tradition lauded by Soja, another vein of critical, cultural theory can be traced which may prove far more useful to the present work. Whereas the motivations behind Lefebvre's spatial theory necessarily diverted him from any close analysis of urban spaces beyond dominant modes and relations of production, the impetus driving this alternative theoretical agenda actively draws emphasis *towards* such areas. In the second half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, huge changes were about in the physical, social and economic climates of many major European cities. Haussmann's redevelopment of Paris and a corresponding sense of loss became a great preoccupation expressed in art forms ranging from Baudelaire's lyric poetry to Eugène Atget's photography of empty urban scenes. Meanwhile, a growing modern German metropolis and its fixation with image and spectacle led commentators such as Siegfried Kracauer to reconceptualise life in the 'embodiment of [...] spatial dystopia' (Frisby, 2001, p.25) that was Berlin, as captured in Kracauer's *Weimar Essays*. However, as an empathic commentator on the work of both Baudelaire and Atget, and a thinker to whom Kracauer paid notable homage (1995, pp.259-264), it is in the work of German philosopher, essayist and cultural critic Walter Benjamin that anxieties over the disappearance of a certain European urban landscape reaches its zenith, and that a consistent critical theory emerges in

which ‘the minutiae and marginalia of the urban setting’, not least ‘objects that are obsolete, outdated and ridiculous’ become crucial subject matter (Gilloch, 1996, pp.7 & 9).

Indeed, Benjamin wrote prolifically on the city. In a series of essays or ‘modernist miniatures’ as Andreas Huyssen describes them (2007), Benjamin pays tribute to Berlin, the city of his childhood in ‘A Berlin Chronicle’ (1932), as well presenting urban snapshot pieces on Naples (1924), Moscow (1927) and Marseilles (1928). Yet in bringing to light the pertinence of his cultural commentary for a reading of the obsolete, transient or indeterminate spaces which Lefebvre neglects, it serves to work against chronology, and begin with Benjamin’s unfinished *magnum opus* to which he added notes and fragments until his death in 1940: that is, his *Arcades Project*, or *Passagen-Werk* (1929-40, trans. 1999). At the outset however, the vocabulary of Benjamin’s critical method in *The Arcades Project* uncannily echoes that of Lefebvre: dialectics are again a primary issue, and as shall be discovered, Benjamin’s preoccupation with issues of commodity fetishism, reification and interactions between superstructure and infrastructure preserves a Marxian lexicon. However, as paying attention to the obsolete and marginal necessarily fell outside of Lefebvre’s scope, Kracauer points out that in Benjamin’s work, it is actually ‘entirely consistent with his approach’ to focus upon such spaces and objects as they form ‘the realm of the inconspicuous [...] the realm that history has passed over, and it is precisely here that it [Benjamin’s intuition] discovers the greatest significance’ (1995, pp.261-2): ‘For Benjamin, knowledge arises out of ruins’ (p.264). With *The Arcades Project* then, Benjamin wished to propose not a dialectics of social space, but what he describes as a ‘new, dialectical method of doing history’ which might act as an ‘awakening,’ rousing urban societies from their dream-like existence into which the rise of consumer capitalism had lulled them (1999a, p.389). Indeed, this focus upon

history may seem contradictory to the task in hand here, undoing the re-spatialisation of critical theory which Soja held in such high regard. However, I want to argue that Benjamin's dialectics instead offer a vital mobilisation of the city's overlooked corners, offering a theoretical 'way in' to ideas as to why late-twentieth and early twenty-first century authors might be drawn towards these obsolete or ambivalent spaces, outside, beyond or in tension with their society's dominant mode of production.

To understand this contention further, an understanding is needed of Benjamin's condemnation of notions of progress—particularly as assimilated into historical discourse—and his call for an 'awakening' from complacency and stagnation. Surrounded by an urban landscape dominated by the phantasmagoria of fleeting images, seas of faces, and expositions in which commodities were regarded for pure viewing pleasure, Benjamin characterises modern Paris as a 'collective consciousness [which] sinks into an even deeper sleep' (1999a, p.389): a sleep which prevents the collective from realising the truth-telling potential of many of the objects which exist in their midst. With capitalism however, Benjamin believed, came a 'reactivation of mythic forces' (p.390), amongst which was the myth of historical progress which he so condemned. Under the influence of this myth, urban phenomena such as architecture and fashion were presented as the ever-new to the sleep-walking urban collective, who failed to realise that such trends did in fact merely 'stand in the cycle of the eternally self-same, until the collective seizes upon them in politics and history emerges' (*Ibid*). To escape the illusive myth of historicism therefore, Benjamin proposed his 'new' way of reading the urban landscape and thus of 'doing history': namely, through a process of *dialectical imaging*. Rather than attempting to capture the past by constructing a *coherent narrative*, Benjamin instead hailed that the imagic *fragment* was to be the key to unlocking the past, and to 'interpret [...] these dream fetishes in which, in fossilized form, history's

traces survived' (Buck-Morss, 1989, p.39). In such images, Benjamin explains, fragments of urban life are wrested from their contexts both in linear history and in the urban landscape, and are brought into a strange juxtaposition with each other:

If it is a historical fragment it must be snatched from the false context on the historical continuum in which it is embedded and placed in our present. This wresting of the fragment from its encrusted context requires a destructive intention in so far as the false continuum is reduced to rubble. Its significance is realized at that moment in which we confront it with surprise, with shock.

(Frisby, 1986, p.216)

It is this resultant 'shock' that Benjamin believed could awaken the dreaming collective of modernity to their past, and to the illusions of their dreams. In the dialectical image, 'it's not that what is past casts light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past. Rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. [...] The relation of what-has-been to the now is dialectical: is not progression, but image *suddenly emergent*' (1999a, p.462). Most importantly here however, Benjamin believed that the most effective, awakening dialectical images through which the urban landscape might be wrung from its dream-like context were to be found with the detritus of the city: the abandoned, obsolete objects of urban life. As Benjamin describes, '[d]ialectical images are constellated between alienated things and incoming and disappearing meaning' (p.466), and are thus manifest within 'the last fleeting moments of the afterlife of the object, the precise instant of demise in which illusion withers and truth becomes manifest' (Gilloch, 1996, p.127). It is for this reason therefore that the disappearing Paris arcades became such a compulsive focus for Benjamin, as they stood as the epitome of such a threshold space on the

verge of extinction. These arcades are truly representative of urban spaces which have been left behind and rendered obsolete by a rampant late capitalist mode of production.

Subsequently, stumbling upon one in the modern metropolis dramatised the formation of a dialectical image, since within the twentieth-century city, the arcade appeared so archaic and *out of context*. The result, Benjamin proposed, was the creation of ‘an alarm clock that rouses the kitsch of the previous century to “assembly”’. This genuine liberation [of the arcade] from an epoch has the structure of awakening’ (1999a, p.883). Furthermore, Steve Pile (2005) has emphasised Benjamin’s focus upon the more inconspicuous, ‘obsolete and discarded’ (p.56) objects and spaces of the city as allied with Freud’s notion of displacement: a process through which we are led away from the crux of the dream-thoughts, such that ‘the dream is, as it were, differently centred from the dream-thoughts—its content has different elements as its central point’ (Freud, 1991, p.414). Pile thus suggests that Benjamin’s focus upon discarded and peripheral spaces thus flags up the idea that in the metropolis, meaning is often found where we’d least expect it, beyond the most ‘obvious’ or most ‘officially’ important places in everyday waking life; hence, in the analysis of both ‘dreams and cities, one cannot necessarily expect to find causality in those elements that appear to be most meaningful, most powerful, most affecting’ (Pile, 2005, p.57).

Subsequently, Benjamin’s dialectics prove crucial to the project at issue here. Firstly, through the crucial role given to spaces outside dominant modes of production, Benjamin’s critical framework reveals ambiguity and ‘in-between-ness’ as necessary conditions in the uncovering of history and truth. Secondly, underground and abandoned, derelict spaces represent for Benjamin further examples of alienated landscapes which lie in between ‘official’ meanings and are able to provide the re-contextualising effect of the dialectical image. For

example, in *Konvolut 'C'* of *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin pays special attention to subterranean Paris, portraying this underground world as one capable of the defamiliarisation felt in dialectical imaging, in which the 'names' (of Metro stations) 'have all thrown off the humiliating fetters of the street or square' of the upper world, thus disrupting the coherence of the 'linguistic network of the city' (1999a, p.84). Several pages later, Benjamin comments upon the demolition site of a building, illuminating the way in which obsolete, derelict corners of the urban landscape can produce a dialectical shock again by presenting objects, buildings or areas outside of their usual urban contexts. Quoting Theophile Gautier, Benjamin draws attention to the ways in which dereliction and demolition can be revelatory of the taken-for-granted urban structures through which the sleep-walking urban collective pass in ignorance:

Demolition sites [...] reveal, like the cross-section of an architectural plan, the mystery of intimate distributions.... A curious spectacle, these open houses, with their floorboards suspended over the abyss [...] their staircases leading nowhere now [...] their bizarre collapsed interiors and battered ruins.' (1999a, p.95)

For Benjamin therefore, the obsolete, neglected corners of the city hold within them the ability to awaken urban dwellers from their dulled and habitual perceptual approaches to the city-scape, and to history itself. Consequently, this critical tradition which emerges through Baudelaire and Atget to theorists including Benjamin and Kracauer provides a useful context for the contemporary literary texts to which this discussion will later turn. Spaces lying in tension with or peripheral to a Western society's dominant mode of capitalist production do in fact hold a crucial key to revealing the social and psychical dynamics of that society, and thus

carry with them a defamiliarising, revelatory power. Through examining Benjamin's address of the importance and potential agency of such spaces, we already begin to see the possibility of how this revelatory power might be expressed in literature, through the narrative agencies achieved by peripheral and transient spaces depicted in literary texts.

ii) Space with Agency

To reiterate then, one of the features which unites the authors upon whom I shall focus is the way in which their prose fiction creates a space in which to observe the narrative agency of peripheral and transient urban spaces at work. Emotionally-charged derelict or peripheral spaces circulate throughout the featured texts, becoming catalysts of narrative in their own right, determining the very patterns of action and the shape and structures of narrative. In other words, these texts explore the interdependence of human agency and a distinct kind of spatial agency, rather than solely emphasising the power of an exclusively human agency which brings space 'to life' through actualising practice.

For a number of reasons yet again associated with Lefebvre's Marxist agenda however, the concept of space taking on its own agency—of disrupting meaning and catalysing or directing narrative—finds little room in his theoretical *oeuvre*. It needs to be stressed once again that Lefebvre's aim was to explain how and why capitalism had come to survive into his contemporary moment. As Soja describes, '[u]nder advanced capitalism the organization of space becomes predominantly related to the reproduction of the dominant system of social relations,' and it is through such a constant reproduction that capitalism thus continues to survive (Soja, 1989, p.91). As a result, the only 'agency' or 'action' with which Lefebvrian social space is seen to 'answer back' to the forces of production is in its serving as a 'tool of thought and action' (1991, p.26); in other words, space produced by social forces acts as an

ideological tool by in turn *serving to perpetuate* the social order which ‘produced’ that space: in this case, capitalism. As Shields (1999) explains, space thus ‘continually recreates or reproduces the social relations of its production’ (p.159). Consequently, Lefebvre’s scheme only considers the concept of space taking on agency within this dialectical loop of a base-superstructure interaction.

Yet another factor which detracts Lefebvre from any sustained commentary on the possibility of space taking on its own agency is his inevitably consistent focus upon ‘the people’ and collective human agency. Indeed, Lefebvre’s work is driven by a vision of the people ‘reclaiming’ city space for themselves, re-appropriating the urban centre for celebratory practices which are unproductive, thus reaffirming the city’s use value so often subordinated by a focus upon its exchange value (as land) and its capacity for production (1996, p.66). Furthermore, Lefebvre is concerned with re-introducing *human and social* agency to spatial theory, in response to what he saw as epistemological thought’s elimination of ‘the “collective subject”, the people as creator’ leading ultimately to a ‘setting aside’ of the ‘concrete subject’ in favour of the impersonal pronoun ‘one’ (1991, p.4). Naturally therefore, Lefebvre’s preoccupation is with a reaffirmation of human, social agency in relation to space, rather than the agency of space itself. As Hywel Dix suggests however, in a spatial theory like Lefebvre’s, such an emphasis upon human agency is inevitable; in the late nineteen-sixties and the nineteen-seventies, Dix notes (in reference to Soja), the combination of geography and Marxism which prompted a re-assertion of spatial issues in cultural and critical theory sought to create a ‘new spatio-temporal dialectic [which] reveals how space itself is created as a process of *human intervention in a pre-human landscape*’ (Dix, 2010, p.65, my italics). Shaw (1993, p.77) does however argue that, through a ‘reimplantation’ of the body as central to lived spatial experience and thus rescuing spatiality out of ‘abstract translucency,’ Lefebvre

‘reintroduced a concept of agency’ to theories of spatialisation like those of Althusser and Jameson, which see the subject as incapable of resistance against the imposition of spatial structures. Once again however, this ‘agency’ is restricted to that of the human subject, with no consideration given to the agency which spaces themselves might achieve over human subjects. Nor does Lefebvre offer any commentary on the interaction between human and spatial agencies which, as we shall see is the case in Nicholas Royle’s fiction in chapter two, set up a dialogue between space and subject.⁵ Subsequently, the stakes for literature here mean that through a Lefebvrian reading, the urban spaces depicted within literary texts risk having their narrative agencies and affective potentialities overlooked. If viewed through a theoretical lens which so emphatically prioritises human agency, this allows little opportunity to uncover the potential of literature as a three-dimensional space in and through which we are able to see depicted spaces and settings move and circulate between and amongst the narrative’s human subjects or characters.

Once more however, I am not merely suggesting that Lefebvre *ought to have* paid more attention to the possibilities that space might harbour something of its own agency, so to speak. Rather, I yet again acknowledge that Lefebvre’s branch of Marxist historico-materialism *necessarily* finds no room for the debate of such issues, due to the very nature of its theoretical base. For, Lefebvre lamented that space came to be neglected by critical theory

⁵ For a similar prioritisation of human agency in discourses of cultural geography, see Franck and Stevens (2007) who identify the subversive possibilities of ‘loose spaces,’ (i.e. spaces often re-appropriated for purposes other than which they were originally intended), but insist that whilst ‘Many urban spaces possess physical and social possibilities for looseness [...] it is people, through their own initiative, who fulfil these possibilities’ and thus create loose space (pp.10-11). See also, for example, Jonathan Raban’s *Soft City* (1974; 2008), in which Raban states in certain moments of disorientation and alienation, ‘the city goes soft; it awaits the imprint of an identity. For better or worse, it invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in [...] Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form round you’ (p.2). Raban argues that we ‘mould’ cities ‘into our images’; unlike Franck and Stevens however, he does continue to acknowledge the role played by the city itself, adding, if not as something of a post-script, that cities, ‘in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them’ (*Ibid.*).

precisely because, like the commodity under capitalism, it had been *fetishised*. As Marx famously argued in *Capital*, the division of labour under capitalism meant that producers ‘do not come into social contact until they exchange the products of their labour’ (1976, p.165). As a result, rather than these labours manifesting themselves as ‘direct social relations between *persons*,’ they instead come to appear as ‘relations between *things*’ (*Ibid*, my italics). As a result of such fetishism, commodities take on a ‘mystical character’ (p.164) appearing as things-in-themselves, covering up the social relations through which their production comes about. For Lefebvre therefore, it is similar for space. His thesis therefore provides what Andy Merrifield portrays as a ‘spatialized reading of Marx’s famous analysis on *the fetishism of commodities*’ (2000, p.171). We have already seen Lefebvre’s lamentation over epistemology’s fragmentation of space into ‘its truncated parts’ (1991, p.89). Lefebvre goes on to compare this division to the division of labour, such that ‘instead of uncovering the social relationships [...] that are latent in spaces [...] we fall into the trap of treating space as space “in itself”, as space as such,’ meaning that we come to ‘fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities’ (p.90). So, to suggest that space might have its own agency which interacts with that of human subjects would be to go against Lefebvre’s critical convictions: such assertions would be seen as theoretically dangerous, further fetishising space and concealing the social relations from which this agency ‘really’ arises. It therefore makes sense that Lefebvre should steer clear of any such critical musings. Nevertheless, it remains that Lefebvre’s work is insufficient in providing a theoretical way in to the literary spaces upon which my work will concentrate.

Once again however, a reversion to Benjamin offers something of a theoretical framework which disrupts Lefebvre’s brand of Marxism and, if seen in constellation with literary texts,

might allow for literature to be seen as space in and through which urban spaces move with their own potentiality and agency. For, Benjamin too was of course also influenced by Marx and worked with a Marxian vocabulary. However, in *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin suggests something very interesting, which supports David Frisby's acknowledgement of Benjamin as an 'often unorthodox Marxist' (Frisby, 2001, p.28). For, taking issue with the conventional base/superstructure model of Marxist thought and Marx's proposals for the 'causal relationship between superstructure and infrastructure,' Benjamin suggests that the determination of the latter by the former is 'not reducible to a simple reflection,' but should instead be characterised as an 'expression' (1999a, p.392). Benjamin also refers to Freud here, noting that 'the economic conditions under which society exists are expressed in the superstructure –precisely as, with the sleeper, an overfull stomach finds not its reflection but its expression in the contents of dreams' (*Ibid.*). Indeed, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud admits that 'somatic stimuli' from the internal organs such as a full stomach are *insufficient* in explaining precisely 'the choice of what dream-images are to be produced' in a dream (1991, p.102). In light of this therefore, I want to suggest that Benjamin's joint evocation of Marx and Freud here advocates a more fluid reading of Marx than that implicit in Lefebvre's work. Where Freud illustrates that there is much more to the determination of dream-content than merely the 'reflections' of internal somatic processes, Benjamin similarly implies that there may be far more to social and economic life—far more room for extraneous relationships, resonances and agencies—than a simple base/superstructure interaction. Indeed, it is here that yet another similarity between Kracauer and Benjamin emerges, as Kracauer also questions the basic Marxist model in which superstructure merely 'reflects' base, arguing that:

theological language indicates contents which still remain contents when the economic situation from which they emerged has passed away. Each content is always connected with a specific situation, but it is often more than a mere reflection of it.⁶

Conceptualised through a theoretical framework like Benjamin's therefore, which questions Marxian notions of causation in social and economic life, *space* (particularly urban space), as a crucial component of such life, might thus be imagined beyond the enclosed loop of base/superstructure determination found in Lefebvre's work. Benjamin's distinction between 'reflection' and 'expression' is imperative here, since whilst the former suggests a passive echoing or mirroring, the latter rather implies articulacy, action, and therefore *agency*. Subsequently, with space being part of the infrastructure which Benjamin describes, we find a theoretical scheme which potentially allows for some entertainment of the notion that spaces might, somehow, mobilise an agency of their own which exceeds the traditional, Marxian societal model with which Lefebvre works. It will be part of the work of this thesis therefore to investigate this 'somehow' of spatial agency, through an examination of the treatment and narrative deployment of certain types of urban spaces in contemporary British prose writing.

In fact, Benjamin specifically attributes space with the language of agency throughout his urban writings, whilst at the same time, notions of action, causation and agency take on spatial metaphors. For example, 'A Berlin Chronicle' relates childhood memories through a sensitive and emotive account of two cities in which Benjamin found a home for himself: Berlin and Paris. Moving to Paris in 1933, Benjamin describes his coming to terms with the city and its streets, claiming that 'the city [...] disclosed itself to me' (1998, p.299), whilst the

⁶ Kracauer: 'Zwei Arten der mitteilung' 1929/30, p.4, cited in Frisby, 1986, p.122

corridors and classrooms of his Berlin childhood embed themselves in his dreams, ‘taking revenge’ on him and on the ‘horrors’ he felt as a schoolboy (p.302). Both these cases demonstrate that for Benjamin, urban space gains the right to be described through the language of action and agency over the human subject, through its intense emotional, historical and memorial attachments and resonances. Indeed, commenting specifically upon the ‘modernist miniature’ genre under which he places both Benjamin and Kracauer’s urban essays, Huyssen (2007, p.34) notes a common reversal within the genre, in which the ‘human subject becomes grammatical object; the empirical object becomes grammatical subject.’

Alongside this, Huyssen refers to Kracauer’s description of the quadrangle in his ‘Two Planes’ piece on Marseilles, in which he contends ‘[h]e whom the place finds did not seek it’ (see Kracauer 1995, p.38), locating Kracauer too in this tradition which persists in giving the language of agency to space and vice-versa. Huyssen argues that this subject-object reversal seen in both Benjamin and Kracauer’s ‘urban miniatures’ can be seen as part of an attempt to rethink time and space in an era in which binaries of public and private space and ‘the inside-outside division in subject-object relations’ were thrown into question (2007, p.37).

Consequently, rather than emerging from a theoretical basis which limits any discussion of spatial agency and prioritises the agency of the human and ‘collective’ subject as Lefebvre’s does, this alternative vein of urban theory begins to provide a language through which space can begin to be conceptualised and expressed as also reciprocally exerting agency over the human subject or observer.

Indeed, the idea of space having agency is not restricted to the work and the era of Benjamin and Kracauer. Suggestions of spatial agency are also found in more recent urban theory, particularly that of James Donald in his book *Imagining the Modern City* (1999). Donald discusses deconstructionist architects including Bernard Tschumi, paying particular

attention to their acknowledgement that the built city has the potential to exceed anticipation in a similar way to which we popularly think of technologies such as the Internet as exceeding their original, anticipated uses. Donald argues that urban behaviour cannot be controlled or directed solely through architecture and urban planning, since as architects like Tschumi suggest, it is errant to presume that ‘any particular piece of design or planning will have social consequences that are wholly predictable’ (p.140). ‘No longer can you assume that people’s experience of space will be determined by your plan for that space’ says Donald pertinently (*Ibid.*); thus we must realise that urban architecture cannot be used to inflict or force certain social outcomes since architects cannot ‘legislate the future,’ giving architecture ‘its subversive and creative power’ (*Ibid.*). This ‘power’ to which Donald refers, and the concept that the built urban environment has the ability to *exceed* human anticipation, strongly supposes that space has agency in response to both human planning and actualisation; the suggestion is not so much that human activity brings spaces ‘to life’, but rather that the unpredictability of space will necessarily lead to an unpredictability in human behaviour and experience. The work of Benjamin, Kracauer and Donald therefore suggests that a theoretical means might well exist through which to read literature as a narrative space within which this unpredictability might be observed. Prose fiction rests on the creation and relation of narrative and the crafting of a literary form appropriate to the relation of such narrative. We can therefore begin to see how the urban spaces depicted in prose fiction might be seen to disrupt or interfere with the narrative agencies at work in the shaping of narrative form, practicing their own ‘craft’ in the manipulation of the behaviour of both characters and the progression of the narrative itself.

In relation to the literary texts upon which I will focus in the forthcoming chapters, it is also crucial to point out the importance of subject positions in Benjamin’s conceptualisations of

spatial agency. Benjamin laments the fact that, once habit sets in, one can never retrieve the de-reifying gaze that one had upon first encounter with a city: when in the subject position of the ‘newcomer’ however, as Benjamin experienced during his time in Moscow in 1926-27. Here, urban space has the ability to ‘dummy’ and continually surprise the subject (1998, p.179). Indeed, this notion of habit as causing a dulling of one’s awareness and sensitivity towards the nuances of the urban landscape is echoed by Kracauer, for whom familiarity was again an important trope. For Kracauer, the key to understanding the modern city, its history and its masses lay on the very *surface* of urban life: ‘The position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its inconspicuous surface-level expressions’ (1995, p.75). However, due to the inconspicuousness of this surface—particularly in a German society so absorbed in distraction and spectacle (see 1995, p.326)—meaning was often missed, since, as for Benjamin, it was the very *familiarity* with such spectacles and their spaces which made ‘it all too easy to miss the broader significance’ by skimming over the taken-for-granted surface (Allen, 2007, p.33). ‘Familiarity,’ therefore, ‘has the potential to render them [i.e. urban spaces] all the more elusive’ (*Ibid.*).

Consequently, it follows that those who have not yet achieved such ‘familiarity’ with the urban landscape, or those who concern themselves with urban spaces which are not quite so ‘familiar’ are more open to the defamiliarising, ‘shocking’ potential of the city-scape, and are thus most likely to experience space as having agency: as having ‘a mind of its own’, so to speak, in its ability to disorient and confound the human subject. Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s thought therefore proves vital to the literary case-studies of this project, providing a hint as to why it will be important to address why so many of the featured authors focus upon protagonists who are both literally and emotionally *lost* (like Gabriel in Ali’s *In The Kitchen* or Richard in Gaiman’s novel adaptation of his BBC television series *Neverwhere*), or who

suffer conditions such as memory loss and narcolepsy (Adam Buckley in Conrad Williams' *London Revenant*): namely, that such authors are thus concerned with creating subject positions comparable to that of Benjamin's 'newcomer' and Kracauer's 'unfamiliar', from which the agency and disruptiveness of urban spaces can be felt most dramatically.

iii) Space and Actualisation

For the purposes of this discussion then, in extrapolating spatial cultural theory to provide a reading of literary spaces, it is important to observe where that theory invests notions of *agency*. For, this investment will inevitably determine not only the kinds of literary spaces to which the theory can be applied, but will also give clues as to whether spatial readings of texts produced through the lens of such theory will be shackled to notions of spatial representation, or will be able to extend into opening up literature as a forum for the exploration of spatial agency. Indeed, when theorising space and applying such thought to producing spatial readings of texts, notions of human actualisation are difficult to avoid, since it is traditionally such human action which has been popularly used to make the important conceptual distinction between 'place' and 'space'. Most famous perhaps is Michel de Certeau's description of space as '*practiced place*' discussed briefly in our introduction (1984, p.117). De Certeau thus elaborates that an inert place becomes space 'when it is caught in the ambiguity of an *actualization*' (*Ibid*, my italics), and that such actualisation is to a large degree determined by 'the actions of historical subjects,' through which place becomes space once it is associated with a certain history (p.118). We have already seen the necessary emphasis which Lefebvre places upon human actualisation throughout *The Production of Space*, an emphasis further elaborated in his more specific work on the urban condition: 'if there is a production of the city' Lefebvre claims, '[...] it is a production of human beings by

human beings, rather than a production of objects' (1996, p.101). As already stated however, this thesis is concerned with texts in which peripheral urban spaces *exceed* their being brought to life solely through intentional human action and agency, be this in their emphasis of human impotence or in the suggestion that urban spaces have their own narrative agency: that '[i]t is not merely that narratives are written onto the city transforming it into a meaningful text, but that the *action of sites prompt and start narratives*' (Crang & Travlou, 2001, p.172, my italics).

It is not in spatial theory or in Lefebvrian readings of texts alone in which is found an overwhelming emphasis upon the role of human actualisation in 'producing' space. Indeed, this emphasis is carried over into critical commentary upon the representation of space in contemporary literature, in which the *author* as well as the character of the urban human subject is given the pivotal active role in 'crafting' and bringing to life literary landscapes (James, 2008, p.7). For instance, David James's study *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space* remains an eloquent and comprehensive account of the interactions between space, landscape and literary form in contemporary British fiction. Nevertheless, James's work still resorts in many places to the language of human actualisation, describing the practice of 'scrutinizing how writers *actualize* landscapes through specific textual devices' (p.5, my italics). Preserving this lexis of human agency in the presentation or depiction of literary landscapes therefore also implicitly preserves a certain genus of spatial reading of literary texts. For, such a vocabulary emphasises literature as a means in which writers and readers might explore the ways in which the human subject re-imagines space or brings space to life, but also risks obfuscating literature as a medium through which we can also investigate the ways in which space operates reciprocally in opposition to the human subject. As the rest of this thesis aims to show however, many of the abandoned, subterranean and transient

spaces of contemporary British literature exert a shaping agency not only over their works' protagonists, but also over the narrative structure of the text as a whole. They lie latent and resurface, drawing characters repeatedly and involuntarily towards them, both physically and psychically. In contemporary tales of the urban underground, they irrevocably influence the protagonist in ways which inevitably influence the conclusion of the narrative. This thesis therefore responds by outlining a new approach to the urban spaces of contemporary British writing which allows for the exploration of notions of spatial agency, and why urban spaces' achievement of such agency, which does not solely rely upon human actualisation, proves so salient within contemporary literature. It remains therefore to provide some context for these notions, and to yet again identify an alternative to Lefebvre's heavily human-centred spatial theory which might allow a more appropriate reading of such literary urban spaces. Once again, it is the European Modernist tradition, most specifically Benjamin and Kracauer, which proves invaluable.

Benjamin's urban commentary is replete with suggestions that urban spaces hold within themselves alternative versions of themselves and alternative histories which were *never realised*: that is, versions of themselves which were never 'made real' through human actualisation. For example, Benjamin envisions what it might be like to construct 'Paris the dream city- as an aggregate of all the building plans, street layouts, park projects and street name systems that were *never developed*' (1999a, p. 410, my italics). According to Howard Caygill therefore, experience of the city is full of lost chances and failed encounters, such that 'for Benjamin, the field of such negotiation is not exhausted by actual past experiences of the city, but also those experiences which did never happen' (1998, p.119). Benjamin further expresses a belief that this almost ghostly, un-actualised city remains held within the material city ready to disrupt and multiply meanings for the discerning urban observer. Turning to 'A

Berlin Chronicle', Benjamin relays a small vignette about an aunt, and her occupation of a certain street in Berlin. 'Aunt Lehmann' lives shut up inside a house on 'Steglitzer Strasse' (1998, p.301): a street which takes its name from the Steglitz borough of South-West Berlin in which it is situated. However, Benjamin recalls his childhood inability to accept this actual 'story' of the street and its given name, explaining that for him, the resonances of the word 'Steglitz,' along with the vision of his aunt 'always enthroned in her bay window' (*Ibid.*) instead led him to recreate the street through his imaginative replacement of 'Steglitz' for 'stieglitz': the German word for goldfinch. For the young Benjamin, this evocation of 'a goldfinch in its cage bore greater resemblance to this street harbouring the aunt at her window than the Berlin suburb that meant nothing to me' (*Ibid.*), and so to him, the street forever becomes Stieglitzer Strasse. Indeed, Benjamin felt strongly about the growing association between the bourgeois and interiority, elsewhere arguing that through 'a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city,' the bourgeois subject attempted to reaffirm this private life inside their own home, such that '[t]he apartment becomes a sort of cockpit. The traces of its inhabitant are molded to the interior' (1999a, p.20). Benjamin's anecdote in this case demonstrates that although 'Stieglitzer' Strasse was never actualised—that is, the street was never 'actually' called by this name or renamed as such—its 'harbouring' of such bourgeois characters like aunt Lehmann, retreated indoors into the stuffy interiors of their homes, evokes an alternative version and meaning of the street in which the personal becomes political, and rather than hiding such characters behind walls and bay windows, the melancholy of bourgeois domesticity is brought starkly to light.

However, this example of the city's harbouring alternative, subversive, unactualised versions of itself is somewhat problematic. A counter-argument could be raised, claiming that what is crucial to the Steglitz Strasse story is not the revelation of an alternative, un-actualised

street, but is rather the motif of childhood, and that Benjamin's re-imagining of his aunt's neighbourhood as a child only goes to elaborate another notion widespread in Benjamin's work: namely, that '[t]he child provides a disruptive vision which disconcerts the stable, distant adult gaze,' and thus '[...] for Benjamin, the apparently error-filled knowledge of the child may serve, unintentionally, to reveal hidden facets of the cityscape' (Gilloch, 1996, pp.62 & 63). It is therefore important to point out that this portrayal of the urban landscape as a repository for un-actualised spaces and histories, which nevertheless have a power to haunt and imprint themselves upon the human imagination, is not exclusive to Benjamin's commentary on childhood, nor is it exclusive to Benjamin's work alone.

For instance, as we shall see in detail in chapter four, Kracauer depicts the hotel lobby as 'an inverted church' (1995, p.175), describing the way in which this secular waiting space bears an alternative version of itself in the form of an absurd kind of church. Amongst other features, Kracauer notes that '[t]he *equality* of those who pray is likewise reflected in distorted form in the hotel lobby', in that both spaces demonstrate the way in which 'when a congregation forms, the differences between people disappear, because these beings all have one and the same destiny' (p.178). Furthermore, Kracauer argues, '[t]he observance of silence, no less obligatory in the hotel lobby than in the house of God, indicates that in both places people consider themselves essentially as equals' (p.181). As John Allen describes therefore, like Benjamin, Kracauer sees 'how a space refers beyond itself, points to past as well as distant associations' (2007, p.31). Consequently, even if buildings continue to be actualised by urbanites only for their original intended purposes, these places still hold within themselves traces of the spaces or buildings which they could never be, and which, to the perceptive urban observer, they evoke so strongly. Subsequently, it does not necessarily take an act of human actualisation to realise 'possibility' within urban space, or to make that

possibility ‘real’. Un-actualised spaces are, Benjamin and Kracauer hint, just as ‘real’ as any other urban phenomenon.

The phenomenon of un-actualised urban space is however yet another concept which could have found no place within Lefebvre’s system of social space. The fact that Lefebvre envisioned habitual or ritual repetition leading to the embedding of certain spatial practices within particular urban spaces was discussed at the outset of this chapter: ‘These actions are themselves part of the constitution of the qualitative reality of sites as places where certain events and actions are *known and expected* to take place’, Shields describes (1991, p.53). Couple this with Lefebvre’s notions of representations of space, in which humans *conceive* of spaces through quantitative means such as maps and plans, and of representational spaces, in which “‘inhabitants” and “users”” appropriate and negotiate space ‘through its associated images and symbols’ (1991, p.39), and a pattern becomes clear: human *actualisation* is imperative in each branch of Lefebvre’s three-way spatial dialectic. Thinking back to Davidson’s example of the architectural housing plan discussed towards the opening of this chapter, it is only through the subject’s movement through the house which brings to life, so to speak, the dialectic interaction between spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces which for Lefebvre weaves together the social production of space. The human subject becomes the vital constellatory device which brings these dialectic forces into juxtaposition, whilst little room is made for an exploration of how spaces might intervene in such constellations by exerting their own agency in response. Due to Lefebvre’s Marxist commitment to redressing epistemological thought’s removal of agency from the ‘people’ or the ‘subject’ (1991, p.4), any exploration of un-actualised space is inevitably absent from *The Production of Space*.

The idea has, however, found its way into far more contemporary urban commentary. Most notably, Steve Pile evokes the notion of un-actualised space in discussing urban spaces' evocation not only of other, alternative spaces, but of other possible times and histories. Pile describes the ways in which Patrick Keiller's landmark film *London* (1993) allows for 'placing the fragments of the city into a history that could have been, re-establishing their ties to [...] other possible presents' (Pile, 2005, p.10). As an example, Pile cites Keiller's focus upon the 'urban wastelands of Wapping' during the British recession period of the late 1970s and early 1980s, arguing that 'these derelict places are not simply about emptiness, nor about the absence of history [...]. Such places [...] are full of ghosts who stir up a world where the jobs were saved and the people stayed' (*Ibid.*). Pile thus extends his discussion out of Keiller's cinematic method, reaching the assertion that urban spaces evoke a 'multiplicity of stories' and 'many time-spaces [...] only some of which are allowed to become real' (2005, p.15): in other words, urban spaces carry with them myriad un-actualised versions of themselves. Pile's reasoning however goes even further, showing that disrupting the relationship between urban space and human agency does not necessarily imply that such space somehow escapes becoming embroiled within power relations: the fact that 'only some' of the potentialities held within urban space are 'allowed to become real' clearly shows that matrices of power are still very much at work within the circulations and frameworks of non-actualised space. To speak of unactualised spaces is not therefore, by any means, to de-politicise or disembodify space, or to wrench space away from its deep embroilment in social and political issues of power and the maintenance of human-enforced hierarchy.

If however, through the application of ideas like Benjamin's and Pile's, we are able to theoretically account for the operations and influences of un-actualised space, the stakes for literature are high. For, remaining open to the idea that many urban spaces carry with them

alternative, un-actualised ‘versions’ of themselves will aid an exploration into the focus placed by many contemporary British writers upon spaces which possess *potential energy*: that bear the potential to shape narrative outcomes and evoke new possibilities for conceptualising space which gives a voice to the never-actualised. Furthermore, we have seen that Pile specifically cites derelict, abandoned spaces as replete with traces of alternative versions of themselves and alternative visions as to how history might have been. Similarly, I hope to show that the mythical resonances and other-worldliness of the underground city, along with the transient space of the hotel evoke a similar sense of capture, potential and longing which Pile attributes to the derelict landscape.

Non-Representational Theory

So far therefore, it has largely been a European Modernist-materialist approach (represented here by Benjamin and Kracauer) which has offered ways in to re-thinking our performance of spatial readings of literature by taking on board notions such as the potentiality of space and the psychic and affective influence of unactualised spaces. However, there is another vein of cultural geography to which notions of the un-actualised have become most critical, and which proves most salient to the discussion in hand. As highlighted earlier, the abandoned, subterranean and transient urban spaces which find their way into so much contemporary British writing often veer into the realm of the unrepresentable, lying outside of or in anxious relationship to their society’s dominant modes and relations of production. Subsequently, this means that such spaces lend themselves awkwardly to any kind of spatial reading which, like so many readings of the spaces depicted within literature, are based upon an interrogation of the ways in which urban spaces are *represented* in and through text. In order to see beyond such possibilities therefore, and to envision a means of approaching the

urban spaces of contemporary British writing in a way which acknowledges notions of unactualised space and does not insist on restricting spatial readings to discussions of representation, we must necessarily turn to *non-representational theory*, which holds a particular affinity to notions of *affect*.

Non-representational theory, as has emerged through modes of inquiry in cultural geography, takes as its premise the assertion that explaining ‘all human behaviour in terms of what we believe and how we consciously represent things to ourselves cannot account for the implicit familiarity and competence that are the hallmarks of everyday practical activity’ (Thrift, 1996, p.7). Thrift refers to a quote by H. Hall, arguing that what provides a context for our formation of such representations and beliefs, ‘is a non-represented and [...] non-representable background of familiarity and expertise’ (Hall, 1993, p.131, quoted in *Ibid*). In his later work writing alongside Ash Amin (2002), Thrift goes on to elaborate the huge implications which this has for the nature of human knowledge, cognition and practice, not least in terms of the negotiation of urban topographies. It seems strange, Thrift and Amin suggest, that so much writing on how humans conduct themselves and ‘produce’ city space should be based upon an approach which takes humans’ conscious representations of such space and its objects as the vital building block for theory, assuming ‘that the city is a site of cognitive operations, motivated, planned, based on rules and principles, intent on accumulating knowledge’ (2002, p.93). For, this appears incongruous with the fact that ‘some 95 per cent of human action,’ is ‘automatic,’ and therefore ‘non-cognitive’ (pp.85 & 93), including the embodied practices which help us negotiate cities, such as knowledge which ‘allows us to walk along crowded streets without bumping into people, and that allows us to remember the city from one city space to another without maps’ (p.85). The city therefore, according to Amin and Thrift, is constituted through countless numbers of *relations*, the

overwhelming majority of which are unconscious, and thus non-representable and notoriously difficult to capture, describe or fix. Consequently, instead of being ‘stored inside human heads’ as is so often assumed, knowledge which relates to urban space is in fact ‘stored in devices which form a part of a *transhuman system*, an ecology of mind which is distributed around networks rather than being held in just one place’ (p.93, my italics). It therefore follows that what Thrift and Amin call ‘the “in-between” of interaction is crucial’, with modern cities emerging as ‘spaces of flow and mixture, promiscuous “meshworks” [...] of different relations, rather than patchworks of different communities’ (p.81).

Already, non-representational theory reveals itself as pertinent to the present work. Through the work of Amin and Thrift, it helps to explain further that, if so much of our navigation of space is unconscious, then the emphasis which Lefebvre (amongst others) places upon human agency and human actualisation for the production of space is once again problematised. Moreover, rather than acting as a digression from the materialist thought of Benjamin and Kracauer, Amin and Thrift’s non-representational account of the subtlety of city life rather echoes the emphasis which both German thinkers placed upon paying attention to the neglected, obsolete or glossed-over corners of the urban centre, stressing the need to pay attention ‘to the little things that escape our attention because they have become so much part of everyday life, yet are constantly directing us here and there, often without us noticing’ (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p.91). However, non-representational theory has even more to contribute towards the importance of the un-actualised, and un-actualised space, in our experience of the city. This further contribution emerges from the fact that non-representational theory’s focus upon networks, flows, hierarchies of interaction and the transhuman has led to a surge of interest in the relationship between space, geography and a particular concept of transhuman interaction: namely, geographies of *affect* (Thrift, 2004;

Thien, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006; Barnett, 2008; Lorimer, 2008). Just as Amin and Thrift describe urban knowledge as dwelling within a transhuman system rather than within the individual, so conceptualisations of affect have described the way in which ‘affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs,’ such that ‘the “subject” is simply one nodal point in the economy, rather than its origin and destination’ (Ahmed, 2004, pp.45 & 46). Affect, therefore, cannot merely be conflated with the term *emotion*, alongside which it is often found. This is because affect is not something which can be completely captured or exhausted through human feeling and emotion; rather, it exists as something transhuman, only occasionally to be actualised through the human subject as a manifest emotion or feeling (see Thien, 2005, p.451). As Ben Anderson succinctly explains, ‘[t]here is not, first, an “event” and then, second, an affective “effect” of such an “event”. Instead, affect takes place before and after the distinctions of subject-world or inside-outside as “a ceaselessly oscillating foreground/background, or, better, an immanent “plane”’ (2005, p.736). Consequently, emotions and feelings occur merely as actualisations of this “plane”, and thus ‘*can never coincide with the totality of potential affective expression.* Movements of affect are always accompanied by a real but virtual knot of tendencies and *latencies* that generate differences and divergences in what becomes real’ (*Ibid.*, p.738, my italics). It is here, therefore, that the helpful association between notions of un-actualised space and affect become clear. For, just as Benjamin’s and Kracauer’s urban writings suggest that spaces carry with them haunting, unrealised versions of themselves, only some of which are actualised by history and thus ‘allowed’ to become real, so do networks of affect carry with them un-actualised forces and potentials, which have a deep effect upon the real (through the ‘differences and divergences’ which Anderson evokes), but which remain latent, transhuman, and thus never actualised through the individual subject. Affect therefore, as

Anderson articulates, ‘provides a point of view on the explosiveness of those virtualities that have been held in check but are *carried within* what has become actual’ (2005, p.739, my italics).

Understanding the possibilities offered by non-representational theory therefore has high stakes for the reading of literary texts. In his detailed discussion of the relationship between spatial representation and literary form, David James repeatedly refers to ‘emotion’ in order to account for the engagement between literary landscapes and the reader. For instance, James considers how ‘[n]ovelists succeed in connecting us emotionally with the domains they describe’, how ‘spatial descriptions [...] mediate our emotional response to fictional landscapes’ and how landscape descriptions ‘inform the reader’s emotional interaction with narrative textuality’ (pp.1, 10 & 5). However, the above discussion illustrates emotion as a moment of actualisation through the individual subject, whereas affect rather refers to fields of potentiality which circulate between individuals, and thus operate transhumanly. It therefore becomes evident that James’s vocabulary of emotion only goes further to emphasise a commitment to the spatial reading of literature through a framework which prioritises notions of human actualisation. Emphasis is placed upon the overt, individualised effects of landscape description, whilst the transhuman, affective influences of urban space on literary form, characters and readers remains silenced. James nevertheless acknowledges the importance of considering the ways in which ‘writers [...] imply that alternative spaces remain latent yet inferable amid the demands of the present’ (2008, p.68). Our discussion has however shown that a commitment to the categories of the human actualisation of space and individual actualisations of emotional response actually work to limit the reading of literature’s latent spaces, allowing little room for the exploration of space as a transhuman agent of narrative form. The work of Benjamin and Kracauer then, along with the insights of

non-representational spatial theory, will therefore provide a crucial context in exploring the very 'real' part which un-actualised (or no-longer-actualised) spaces play in the urban worlds of contemporary British writing.

The above discussion has therefore sought to provide a theoretical context through which we might envision new ways of reading literary spaces which might be especially appropriate to the abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces to which so many modern British authors are drawn. Despite its adoption by many literary scholars in producing spatial readings of texts, Henri Lefebvre's theoretical doctrine of social space has been found lacking in its neglect of spaces peripheral to society's dominant modes of production; its necessary avoidance of the idea that space harbours its own agency; and its failure to address the influence of un-actualised 'versions' of urban space. However, through the Modernist materialism of urban commentators like Benjamin and Kracauer, and cultural-geographical approaches like those of Donald, Pile and Thrift, we have uncovered a far more fruitful 'way in' to the investigation of the ways in which authors have been lured by such spaces in order to explore notions of the contemporary British city as a revelatory space whose agency often matches that of its human subjects. All that remains, therefore, is to translate these ideas into fresh and fruitful readings of literary texts.

CHAPTER TWO: ABANDONED SPACES AND AFFECT IN THE PROSE OF NICHOLAS ROYLE AND IAIN SINCLAIR

Why Abandoned Spaces?

In Nicholas Royle's fourth novel *The Director's Cut* (2000), the emotionally vulnerable protagonist Angelo displays something of an obsessive penchant for London's abandoned and defunct cinemas. He describes how, after being transformed into bingo halls or theme pubs, the dead cinema lives on within these buildings as a kind of spatial after-life, of which '[y]ou can tear down the screen, and bulldoze the walls, but you can never destroy the space itself' (p.167). For Angelo then, there is something special about space as a category. His beliefs suggest that spaces somehow live on, even when they are no longer brought to life by the production and reproduction of the human spatial practices which once defined them: in this case, those of cinema-going. Even when such spaces have been relinquished of the spatial practices which once defined them, the process of abandonment and redevelopment starkly outlines a building's ability to retain both concrete and psychic traces of its previous life. In other words, abandonment dramatises the means by which spaces fall outside of or are made obsolete by their society's modes of production, and in doing so thus exceed the explanatory powers of Marxist historico-materialist spatial theory like that of Lefebvre, as encountered in chapter one. On the other hand however, these residual spaces which have experienced abandonment—and in some cases redevelopment too—remain, for Angelo, identified with the revelatory obsolete spaces and objects held in such high regard by the vein of materialist cultural commentary epitomised by Benjamin and Kracauer.

According to Angelo then, apparently ‘dead’ spaces which have fallen into abandonment and are re-born as different kinds of spaces tell of the ways in which space retains a memorial and historical residue which does not rely solely upon its human actualisation. And, as the narrative structure of *The Director’s Cut* proves, holding such beliefs about space has profound effects upon narrative form. For, abandoned and redeveloped cinema spaces are invested with so much ‘power’ that they become the very omphalos of the novel: they are both the space which reveals the body and the subsequent mystery which sets up the narrative of the novel, and are also the spaces through which the anxieties and desires of the novel’s characters are brought to their zenith. They permeate the narrative: they are inescapable. Inevitably therefore, the abandoned spaces of contemporary British literature offer a way in to producing exactly the kinds of spatial readings of texts towards which this thesis strives: readings which free literary spaces from the vocabulary of representation and actualisation, and instead move towards ways of reading literature as promoting the agency of space as a narrative catalyst.

This chapter will therefore look in detail at the abandoned spaces which find their way into the work of Cheshire-born novelist and short-story writer Nicholas Royle and the heavyweight figure of British psychogeography Iain Sinclair: two British writers whose shared fascination with the ‘emotional routes’ of the city and its occult connections and histories have led some reviewers to draw comparisons between the two (Royle, 1997, p.7). Nevertheless, such comparisons have not sustained themselves within criticism, and whilst Sinclair remains one of contemporary British literature’s most perennially puzzling and widely-interrogated figures, commentary upon Royle’s work remains largely limited to online author interviews—which, incidentally, repeatedly touch upon his preoccupation with abandoned spaces. In drawing the work of these two authors together, I hope to use the more

uncharted spaces of Royle's fiction to create new constellations with Sinclair's far more critically well-trodden narratives, thus opening both up to readings which emphasise the agency of space and which thus free literature from the restrictive shackles of the kinds of Lefebvorean readings examined in chapter one.

Before moving on to discuss literature however, I will begin with a cultural historical journey that will observe the ways in which abandoned spaces—usually subsumed under the category of 'ruins'—have been captured by cultural producers and commentators alike, preoccupying both the artistic mind and the collective cultural imaginary for centuries. Such a history is necessary in order to elucidate the ways in which critical discussion has served to particularly bind ruined spaces to notions of representation and symbolisation, subordinating or even eliding any notion that abandoned spaces possess an agency of their own which does not entirely rely upon human actualisation. Charting such trends will therefore provide the ideal context against which to discuss how, with the help of Royle and Sinclair, I wish to do things differently, approaching abandoned spaces in a very different way and observing the stakes this has for providing spatial readings of Royle's and Sinclair's works. Through charting such previous manifestations of abandoned spaces we can observe the ways in which such spaces have become overdetermined with meanings and resonances, yet also begin to envision how we might use contemporary British literature to renegotiate these previous readings and move towards a reading of literature which frees abandoned spaces from the limiting schemes of both existing ruins discourse and the application of Lefebvorean theory. After sketching a context for the artistic depiction of ruined spaces, I will move in to discuss the ways in which abandoned space achieves narrative agency in a cross-section of Royle's novels and short fiction, paying special attention to how the movement of space through and within Royle's narratives can be accounted for through notions of affect as well as

representation. Then, I will use my reading of Royle's work to inform a focus upon that of Sinclair, paying attention to how the abandoned asylums of *London Orbital* achieve a similar narrative agency. The second part of my literary analysis will then turn to the ways in which both Royle's and Sinclair's narratives can be read as works in which abandoned spaces achieve and exert a narrative agency of their own by encouraging characters to adopt an approach to space and to otherness very different from that to which the goal-oriented consumer-city is accustomed.

Despite our focus upon literature however, the elegiac and subversive potential of the artistic capture of abandoned spaces has also been recently exploited by photographers. A post-war European tradition of post-industrial art-photography came to be epitomised in the nineteen-seventies by artists including Hilla and Bernd Becher in Germany—whose works focused around the functional yet defunct architecture of disused water towers, blast furnaces and gas tanks—and later in the nineteen-eighties by Belgian photographer Gilbert Fastenaekens's work on industrial wastelands. From the nineteen-nineties onwards however, developments in digital photographic technologies and increasingly widespread public access to the internet have seen the rise of a more off-kilter practice called 'urban exploration': namely, the 'seeking out, visiting and documenting interesting, human-made spaces, most typically abandoned buildings' (Ninjalicious, 2005, p.4). With the online exhibition of their resultant images, urban explorers demonstrate a hybrid practice lying at an interstice between art like that of the Bechers and Fastenaekens, activism against the ruin of industrial heritage, 'weird hobby' and extreme-sport. Nevertheless, as well as finding their way so prolifically into what might be hailed as sub-cultural practice, some of Britain's abandoned, derelict urban landscapes have more recently found a means of circulation through a corner of the mainstream London literature market, in works such as J.E. Connor's volume on *London's*

Disused Underground Stations (2001), and the publication of Paul Talling's *Derelict London* by Random House (2008), a work stemming from Talling's website of the same name.

In his comprehensive charting of the artistic use and representation of ruins through the ages, Michael Makarius quite simply notes that the 'economic changes that brought about the abandonment of many industrial buildings and sites [from] the 1970s' might help explain this recent re-sensitisation towards disused and abandoned space (2005, p.229). According to Makarius then, the greater the presence of disused buildings on Britain's landscapes, the greater reciprocal presence such spaces might hold within the collective British cultural consciousness. Indeed, with National Health Service restructuring leaving many local hospitals as empty shells on Britain's landscape, and the outsourcing of commercial production to cheaper, foreign climes leaving a similar scattering of abandoned industrial properties in its wake, such an equation would also appear to hold true in explaining the more contemporary penchant for disused, human-made spaces of which Royle's and Sinclair's work appears representative.

In his lengthy study of *Obsolete Objects in the Literary Imagination* (2006) however, Francesco Orlando expresses a dissatisfaction with the 'aberrant proposition' that 'an increase in the images of non-functional objects' like derelict buildings specifically in *literature* occurs merely 'because an increase of such objects has prevailed in the real world' (p.56). Orlando's comment therefore suggests that something other than the mere increased physical presence of abandoned buildings within a landscape is responsible for an artistic-literary preoccupation with such spaces. In other words, literary engagement with abandoned spaces exceeds mere 'representation' of the material landscapes with which texts engage. Bearing this crucial point in mind therefore, ruins discourse will prove right from the outset a counterpoint to rather than a starting point for the kinds of spatial literary readings which this thesis works towards.

Abandoned Spaces and ‘Ruins Discourse’

As early as the Quattrocento, Paul Zucker notes, ruined architectural structures were employed in Italian painting as a trope ‘to depict the place of the birth of Christ, the stable, as part of the dilapidated building’ (1961, p.120); but only in the seventeenth century did such structures become a ‘legitimate topic for painting’ in their own right, rather than ‘as a mere prop’ (*Ibid.*). Christopher Woodward explains in more detail that ‘in Britain, it is in the seventeenth century that ruins become a popular metaphor for the decay of individual life’, deployed in visual art as a symbol of human mortality and ‘a strong metaphor for death’ (2001, p.93).

Academic commentators on the cultural role of derelict landscapes however appear to reach a consensus, agreeing that it was the eighteenth century which saw ‘the climax of the widespread interest in ruins’ (Zucker, 1961, p.122). This climax is, by many scholars, attributed to the rise of the ‘picturesque,’ described by Woodward as ‘arguably England’s greatest contribution to European visual culture’ (2001, p.119); as a result, observations of the creative and artistic employment of ruins shift from an emphasis upon representations emerging out of Italian Renaissance art to a more close engagement with those evident in the work of English—and later, British—writers, artists and architects (Zucker, 1961; Janowitz, 1990; Roth, 1997; Woodward, 2001) . As the ‘first aesthetic to suggest beauty could be subjective, translating to the visual arts the theory that the mind works by the association of accumulated memories’ (Woodward, 2001, p.120), Woodward and others argue that picturesque sensibility saw a widespread movement towards an appreciation of architectural ruins as beautiful and pleasurable to behold: the ‘ruin as an object of melancholy beauty’ (Merewether, 1997, p.32). Furthermore, commentators note that eighteenth-century Britain also saw the ruin depicted as a form of ‘brag’: ‘a monument to the ancestry’ of well-

established, wealthy families (Woodward, 2001, p.126). Depiction of ruins in early nineteenth-century Britain have also been read as architectural boasts: for example, in the case of architect Sir John Soane, whose commissioning of artist Joseph Gandy to produce a painting of his Bank of England complex in ruins is read by Woodward as either a means by which to show Soane's architectural 'achievement through a kind of cross-section,' or as a boast aimed at rival architect John Nash, that whilst Nash's 'flimsy' terraces would disappear over time, 'the remains of the Bank would be as impressive as those of classical antiquity' (pp.164 & 165). Similarly, Anne Janowitz argues that as 'England' became equated with 'Britain' in the shifts towards imperialism, industrialism and global capitalism, 'the authority of antiquity was one thread in the fabric of a common nationality' (1990, p.3). This rising emphasis upon the notion of nationality therefore, Janowitz contends, led to ruins being employed as 'a visible guarantor for the antiquity of the nation' (p.54): a symbol of Britain's longevity and endurance as a nation state.

Observers have also charted a more specific *literary* use of ruined buildings and landscapes from the eighteenth century onwards. A trend emerges in late-eighteenth-century Romanticism's poetic fragments in which the ruin symbolises 'the vanity of human constructions. [...] Typically, the ruin motif is introduced in order to point out the vanity of pomp and glory' (Janowitz, 1990, p.12), thus providing both a strong poetic image and a moral lesson, as human architectural production is rendered transient and impermanent through nature's reclamation of such sites. As literary Romanticism continued into the first half of the nineteenth century, the ruined building's openness to re-appropriation by nature became increasingly salient, as 'ruins not only signal mortality, they point at a deep belonging to the natural world' (Roth, 1997, p.5). For instance, Percy Bysshe Shelley demonstrated a particular fondness for the ruin as a juxtaposition of the work of nature and that of 'man,' in

which the ruin ‘promised the inevitable victory of Nature’ over human production (Woodward, 2001, p.64).

In what might be conceived as a more gothic tradition, Carolyn Springer notes Byron’s employment of ruins as ‘generic metaphors of the human condition,’ more specifically a ‘reflection of the poet’s ruined imagination’ (1987, p.6), an inclination echoed across the Atlantic in the work of Edgar Allen Poe, whose scenes of dilapidated architectural settings in his short tales are read in ruins discourse as ‘parallels’ of the ‘mental ruin of narrative self’ demonstrated by Poe’s principal characters (McNutt, 2006, p.16). Moving through to the latter part of the nineteenth century however, accounts of literary applications of architectural dereliction become somewhat thin on the ground. Continuing in the gothic tradition, Orlando pays attention to Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), accounting for the dilapidated building into which Enfield and Utterson see Hyde disappear at the opening of the narrative as a symbol of things to come: ‘the first tear in the material of efficient everyday normality’, the derelict streetscape is portrayed as an early indicator to the reader that the tale belongs to the genre of the ‘fantastic’ (Orlando, 2006, p.43).

After the Second World War then when texts such as Rose Macaulay’s *The World My Wilderness* (1950) examined the condition of post-war Britain through an engagement with its war-ruined landscape, the twentieth century offers little in the way of creative, innovative readings of literary ruins.¹ The disorderly and ruinous landscapes of British literature since the nineteen-seventies have, in congruence with Makarius’s view quoted above, largely been accounted for as reflections of economic and political entropy. As a result, rather than the predominantly rural ruins of British Romanticism, literature of the late twentieth century

¹ The twenty-first century has however seen an array of original commentary upon the ruins and derelict landscapes of Great Britain, including Owen Hatherley’s *A Guide to the New Ruins of Great Britain* (2010) and Michael Symmons Roberts and Paul Farley’s recent *Edgelands* (2011). Nevertheless, these recent accounts have a focus upon material history rather than literary accounts of ruins.

extends the steps taken by the more urban gothic of Poe and Stevenson, portraying ruin and abandonment as features of the *urban* rather than the pastoral landscape. In a similar vein to Makarius, Janowitz trivialises the inclusion of ruined topographies in the British literature of the nineteen-eighties, in which ruins are, she argues, used ‘banally, to mirror a condition of economic decay’ (1990, p.2). Brooke and Cameron go little further by assessing literature like that of Margaret Drabble, profoundly influenced by Thatcherism, as texts in which derelict and disorderly urban landscapes merely stand in for a *fin de siècle* reign of disorder and madness, used not so much as ‘metaphors for national and moral decay’ but seemingly, rather, as metonyms, ‘as shorthand for that decay’ (1996, p.652). Moving into the twenty-first century, this economic and political emphasis persists, as Colin Hutchinson provides an overview of the role of the abandoned church in the contemporary novel, concluding that such a structure is made to reflect ‘the loss of collective ties’ inflicted as a legacy of Conservative rule and privatisation, whilst also standing as a ‘symbol of [...] the current state of leftist political aspirations in contemporary British society: neglected, abandoned, defeated and half-forgotten’ (2007, pp.227 & 244).

This brief account of the ways in which scholarly discourse has mapped the uses of derelict landscapes and disused buildings in art and literature is in no way intended as either comprehensive or exhaustive. Neither do I argue for the validity of the historicist narrative into which the above account subsumes such discourse. The purpose of the above summary is, rather, to emphasise ruins discourse’s recourse back into the pitfalls of the threefold problematisation of Lefebvre’s work outlined in chapter one. What the above account is composed to demonstrate therefore is that in ruins discourse, the role of abandoned and/or derelict spaces in British cultural production has overwhelmingly been accounted for in three

ways: either as a metaphor or metonym for a wider-reaching national, cultural or psychic 'state'; as an externalisation or means of glorifying the human subject or the nation; or as a 'symbol' whose primary focus is to perform a commentary upon the works of human production. In the first of these categories come the examples of the seventeenth-century use of ruins as a 'metaphor' for death (Woodward), Springer's account of Byron's employment of ruins as a metaphor for 'the human condition', and the three final examples cited above in which Janowitz, Brooke & Cameron and Hutchinson attempt to investigate contemporary literary uses of derelict, abandoned urban landscapes as 'mirrors', metonyms or 'symbols' of economic and political decline. Where ruined and forsaken literary geographies are explained away thus as mere reflections, metaphors or symbols, we are faced with a familiar situation in which disused spaces themselves become implicitly subordinate to the state-of-the-nation or to the individual or collective human subject which they are said to represent. Just as was found to be the case with Lefebvre's spatial theory in chapter one therefore, ruins discourse thus undermines any notion that such spaces might have an agency of their own. Rather than paying attention to the possibility that ruined and abandoned spaces might actually act as catalysts for narrative, commentators such as Woodward *et al.* restrict explanations of abandoned spaces' appearance in art and literature to the mere act of 'standing in' for something 'greater' than themselves, thus denying any discussion of how literature might instead be read as lending itself to the display of the narrative agency of abandoned space.

The second of these categories of classification can be split into two. Firstly the 'ruin' as an externalisation of the inner life of the human subject is most prominent in McNutt's reading of Poe, in which the 'mutable or unstable sites' of Poe's settings are repeatedly depicted as 'parallels' for the 'mental fragmentations' of his protagonists (McNutt, 2006, p.14). Once again, this echoes the limitation of Lefebvre's work in which the role of the space becomes

secondary to the role of the human subject, and its actualisation through the actions of that subject.

Janowitz's comments upon the ruin as a boast of national steadfastness and Woodward's reading of Gandy's Bank of England painting rather demonstrate a reading of artistic ruins as glorifications of self and nation. In both cases, derelict landscapes are interpreted as brags which glorify the individual or the nation at the expense of closer engagement with the ruined spaces themselves; indeed, the final section of this chapter will reveal a rather more complex dynamic occurring between abandoned space, self-glorification and annihilation of the spatial 'other'. Then, finally, we have the issue of over-emphasis upon the human production of built space, which even further allies the limitations of ruins discourse with those of Lefebvre's theoretical work. For example, in his reading of Shelley in which the architectural ruin sees 'the work of nature' pitted against that of 'man', Woodward prioritises that which the literary representation of ruined or abandoned spaces 'has to say' about the nature of human production (2001, p.64). Acknowledgement that such spaces may possess their own agency and enter into reciprocal affective transmissions with human subjects is nowhere to be found. Indeed, be it a boast as to the grandeur of human architectural achievement, a commentary upon the transience of the products of human labour or the fate of human production and construction in an unstable economic climate, a trend resonates throughout the examples related above in which ruins are overwhelmingly seen as symbols or metaphors employed by cultural producers to comment, first and foremost, upon the very people and modes of human production by which these spaces have been left behind.

Existing ruins discourse therefore sits uncomfortably with our aims to read literature as a space through which to see the transhuman operations and movements of abandoned space at work, since the role of the ruin is so consistently subordinated beneath the human subject who

creates, beholds or moves through it. The narrative possibilities offered by such spaces due to their participation in webs of connection and exchange *other than* the dominant human modes and relations of production find little room for exploration. It therefore becomes evident that neither a conventional Lefebvrian reading nor a reading which follows the trends of recent scholarly accounts of ruins discourse will prove sufficient for the work in hand. For, neither allow for an interrogation of the ways in which abandoned spaces' precise positioning outside of dominant capitalist modes and relations of production allows for their appearance in literature as powerful narrative agents, interacting with human subjects in far more subtle and myriad ways than merely serving to represent, symbolise or externalise aspects of individual and collective human subjectivities. Furthermore, another problem persists with applying the kinds of ruins discourse discussed above to the abandoned spaces found in the work of Royle and Sinclair: namely, a problem which resides in the conflation of the terms 'ruins' and 'abandoned spaces.' In *Wasting Away* (1990), Kevin Lynch notes that in both individual and cultural consciousness, the idea of the 'ruin' often in fact conflicts with that of 'abandoned space'. Lynch records the responses of twenty one interviewees asked to distinguish between 'ruins' and 'abandoned places', noting that the former were received as 'something old, romantic and disconnected from their ordinary lives', in which the consequent 'remoteness in space and time drains them of any emotion but curiosity' (pp.217-8). For Lynch's respondents however, abandoned places were viewed as being much 'more recent and closer to home', and as a result 'feelings are uneasy and unpleasant' (p.219). Indeed, this unease in the presence of recently abandoned spaces as opposed to more ancient ruins is echoed by Jean Starobinski, who claims that '[w]e do not muse calmly before recent ruins, which smell of bloodshed: we clear them away as quickly as possible and rebuild' (Starobinski, 1987, p.180, quoted in McNutt, 2006, my italics).

Indeed, the disused spaces which proliferate in both Royle's and Sinclair's work certainly appear to fall under Lynch's category of abandoned spaces rather than ruins: they are unsettling, anxiety-provoking and are thus vulnerable to becoming prey to the kind of sanitising redevelopment projects in which Sinclair sees the abandoned asylums which litter the periphery of London disappear and become housing estates: 'protected enclaves with no memory', 'no-places' which are 'bereft of civic identity' (2002, pp.164, 168 & 268). As we have already seen however, Benjamin on the other hand sees ruins of the recent past as all the more worthy of attention, due to their ability to reveal cutting and subversive memories which resonate *beyond* the received versions of memory and history which persistently favour society's ruling classes due to an ideological 'empathy with the victor' (Benjamin, 1999b, p.248). More recently, Dylan Trigg has also worked to reverse the priority given to ancient rather than 'modern' ruins: he claims that Roman or Grecian ruins 'can no longer serve as objects which subvert our philosophical assumptions,' since they 'have been entrenched [...] in the sphere of the heritage trail', losing their 'original potency' as they are re-appropriated by this dominant form of history towards which Benjamin demonstrates such scepticism (2006, p.xxv). Contemporary ruins however, Trigg argues, 'have yet to submit to simple aestheticism, which annihilates their potential to disrupt convention,' and thus 'are close enough to the present to mirror an alternative past/present/future' (xxvi). For Trigg therefore, like Benjamin, it is those sites which have recently passed or are in the process of passing into obsolescence which might prove the most revelatory. Rather than merely serving as metaphors or symbols for the psychic states of the human subject or the nation-state at large, insights like Benjamin's and Trigg's rather suggest how recent-ness of abandonment invests spaces with the ability to intrude and disrupt received notions of the organisation of space and its positioning within traditionally linear models of temporal experience. Where recent ruins

(Lynch's abandoned spaces) are found in literature, they will therefore potentially offer an insight into how urban spaces can be read as disruptive narrative agents, thus far exceeding the accounts of ruins discourse outlined above. To test this theory, we must turn to the literary texts at issue.

Abandoned Spaces, the Transhuman and Affect: The Fiction of Nicholas Royle

Fascinated by the narrative possibilities created by abandonment, many of Royle's narratives emanate from and compulsively return to obsolete and forsaken spaces. In so much of Royle's work, such spaces actively *stimulate* narrative rather than serving as a mere backdrop or metaphoric motif within the text; in his three most recent novels *The Matter of the Heart* (1997), *The Director's Cut* (2000) and *Antwerp* (2004), it is an event which happens within an abandoned space which sets up the narrative. The first of the three texts is centred on a mysterious event which takes place within a room in the abandoned St George's hospital formerly at Hyde Park Corner in London. Through stories told by the secondary character Max to Chris, the narrator of the novel, we learn of Danny, a highly elusive friend of Max's who sneaks into the abandoned hospital and has sex with his girlfriend, 'Z', in the room in question. From then on however, the text is replete with hints that 'something else' happened in that room that night, and both the reader and Chris are simultaneously taunted as Max suggests that 'perhaps [...] you don't know as much about that night [in the abandoned hospital] as you think you do' (Royle, 1997, p.142). In *The Director's Cut* however, the narrative begins with a demolition site on Tottenham Court Road, as a collection of older buildings are bulldozed to make way for a new complex of shops and entertainment venues. In the demolition, the body of a man wrapped in celluloid film is discovered within the remains of an abandoned cinema. Not unlike the disused hospital in *Matter of the Heart*, the

ruined cinema then sets into motion a narrative, this time tying five of the novel's principal characters together, implicating them all in an equivocal murder story as the reader discovers that fifteen years before the novel is set in 1998, the quintet used the same abandoned cinema as their setting for a film featuring the suicide of a desperate man called Iain Burns, condemned to a slow death through tertiary syphilis. Finally in *Antwerp*, it is a disused water tower in which the first of a series of young women is found dead which sets up a murder mystery narrative early in the text, in which the perpetrator insists upon holding his victims hostage within various abandoned buildings across the Belgian city.

Indeed, writing a rather different and more sensitive form of ruins discourse to those discussed above, Tim Edensor, who has written extensively on the aesthetics and cultural significance of industrial ruins, admits that abandoned spaces possess a distinctive power to initiate and produce narrative: a fact which emanates throughout Royle's fictional repertoire. With their 'ambiguous or unintelligible' disorderly contents, their 'disconnected fragments, peculiar juxtapositions, obscure traces of the past, involuntary memories, inferred meanings' (Edensor, 2007, p.250), abandoned spaces invite narrative construction through their suggestive material and historical unfinishedness: 'ruins can equally stimulate conjectures and prompt the creation of improvisatory narratives,' Edensor concludes (2005b, p.142). Subsequently, it becomes evident that in fiction such as Royle's, abandoned spaces far exceed mere symbols, metaphors, or externalised backdrops. There is a definite power and agency to be accounted for here which is neglected, as we have seen, by both Lefebvorean theory and by many existing scholarly works on the role of ruined landscapes in art and literature.

Using the demolition site as a revelatory narrative device in both *The Director's Cut* and in his short story 'Christmas Bonus' (2000), Royle's work rather harks back to Benjamin's worldview in which the obsolete, neglected parts of the city—including the demolition site—

are capable of deconstructing lived urban experience. In *The Director's Cut*, the demolition site initiates the narrative of the so-called 'BUILDING SITE MURDER' (p.21); in 'Christmas Bonus',² 'demolition teams' at the opening of the story reveal both an abandoned photography studio and a sealed room which similarly set into action a narrative of intrigue surrounding the central character Kerner, his photographic career, and his fixation with photographing women with a likeness to his now-departed lover (2000, p.33). For Royle then, as for Benjamin, it is where city spaces fall into dereliction, come apart and become removed from their previous functional networks of production and consumption that new, revealing stories take shape.

Nevertheless, abandoned spaces do not merely set many of Royle's narratives into action. They also continue to perform narrative work even when they are *not* directly actualised within the consciousness of Royle's characters. To clarify this concept calls for a closer look at the role played by the abandoned hospital in *The Matter of the Heart*. As mentioned above, after the early relation of Danny and Z's sexual misadventure in St. George's, the hospital and its secrets persist as the derelict room in which they transgressed persistently circulates and saturates the novel's narrative. After learning of Danny and Z's misdemeanour, the reader is then introduced to Charlie, a secondary character who suffers a massive heart attack whilst making love to his partner Yvonne in a hotel room. As it transpires, the narrator Chris recounts that since Danny's misadventure, the abandoned site at St George's has been redeveloped into a hotel, and 'of course, the room Yvonne and Charlie had in the fancy hotel was the same room used by Danny and Z all those years before' (Royle, 1997, p.20). Firstly, the phrase 'of course' here implies inevitability; rather than existing as a mere 'product' (or waste-product) of human social relations as Lefebvre might envision, Chris feels the

² This short story focuses upon Andrew Kerner, a character from *The Director's Cut* whom Royle felt to have underused in the longer novel.

abandoned hospital exert a power and agency of its own, able to determine the fate of the novel's human characters. More importantly however, this notion is borne out right through the novel. Moving through the narrative, we find a fictional historical account of crazed doctor George Maddox who grimly fails the world's first heart transplant in exactly the same room over one hundred years previous to Danny's exploits. The abandoned hospital then persists in lurking beneath and haunting the text, fuelling the narrative flow and working to create suspense. For example, even when Chris flies from London to America to visit Charlie in his convalescence, the hospital follows him across time and space, bubbling to the surface as Charlie repeatedly insists '[t]hat hospital, that room [...] It's some kind of place' (p.83). Moreover, Chris is left constantly vexed by thoughts such as 'whether the night in the abandoned hospital had affected his [Danny's] mind' (p.164), as Danny's car is repeatedly linked to the murder of a woman out in the Antipodes. Then, suddenly, whilst the couple are holidaying in Australia, Chris's girlfriend Joanna is kidnapped, leading Chris on a vast search of the desolate Australian bush-land in her pursuit. A traveller for most of the novel, Chris is a pawn to the powers of space, flummoxed by the nondescript and unfamiliar topography of the Australian bush. Nevertheless, most vital for the purposes of this discussion is the fact that the narrative agency behind the events which drive him fruitlessly across Australia is, yet again, the abandoned hospital. For only as the novel reaches its *dénouement* do we learn, through analepsis, that Danny and Z were caught *in flagrante* in the disused hospital by a security guard who tied Danny up and proceeded to rape Z right before him. Danny however managed to escape, murdering the security guard with a blow to the head and disposing of the body in the disused hospital's incinerator. Back in the present time-space of Chris's narration, the reader then discovers that Danny has in fact since murdered Z, breaking her neck in the door of his car since their shared experience inside the abandoned hospital meant that 'she knew

too much' (p.224). It is also revealed that Danny too is responsible for the kidnap of Joanna, again as a result of 'her knowledge of what had happened that time at St. George's' (p.291). As Chris laments, 'It all went back to St. George's, and what certain people knew about St. George's and what had happened there' (p.223).

In *The Matter of the Heart* therefore, one might argue that the abandoned hospital acts as something of a vortex, exerting a narrative pull in which the structure of the narrative and the consciousness of the characters are persistently drawn back to the building's indeterminate history, intrigue and undeniably disconcerting power. Whilst the abandoned St. George's hospital and the tales of intrigue which surround it do undeniably 'suck' characters in, so to speak, identifying the hospital as a vortex does not suffice. For, it simultaneously undermines this sense of a movement *outwards*: the manner in which the abandoned space exceeds its geographical location in London, and emanates outwards to follow Chris as he journeys across continents. Royle embeds the abandoned hospital into the text as an *undercurrent*, a latency constantly threatening to be made manifest within both the narration and the consciousness of the novel's characters: as an explanation for someone's motives, or as a conduit bringing together the fates of the principal characters. Such a movement fails to be evoked by the vigorous, inward retraction suggested by the term 'vortex.' Consequently, a more appropriate means of accounting for the employment of St George's throughout *The Matter of the Heart* rather harks back to the theories of affect outlined in chapter one, particularly Ben Anderson's conceptualisation of the affectual field or 'plane' which operates through 'excessive movement [...] circulation, flow, transmission' and, even when not actualised through the production of manifest human emotions, carries with it a 'real but virtual knot of tendencies and latencies that generate differences and divergences in what

becomes actual' (Anderson, 2006, pp.736 & 738). Indeed, Anderson's account closely echoes the way in which the abandoned St. George's hospital moves in *The Matter of the Heart*; the way in which the abandoned hospital works as precisely such a 'plane', sometimes actualised within the consciousness of the characters, but at other times lurking beneath and around the text, generating movements and channels of thought, association and (ultimately) action which propel the narrative forward and thus, just as Anderson describes, creating these divergences and developments in the 'actual' world of the text.

By acting in the same way as Anderson describes of an affectual field or plane then, Royle's disused spaces work precisely as do movements of affect. They do not owe their existence merely to social forces, nor are they constituted solely through the spatial practice and actualisation of human subjects as Lefebvre's spatial scheme might have it. Nor are they reduced to a life as mere symbols or externalisations of a particular 'self' or psychic state, as scholarly discourse has so often characterised the ruin. Instead, the abandoned spaces of Royle's fiction demonstrate that such spaces also exist and operate *transhumanly*. This becomes clearer in Royle's later novel *The Director's Cut*, in which spaces outside of or left behind by late capitalist modes and relations of production again possess an agency which does not solely rely upon their actualisation through human practice, and literary narrative emerges as the ideal forum through which to observe this spatial agency at work.

The compulsion towards abandoned spaces takes on another layer in *The Director's Cut* when the youngest and apparently most psychologically vulnerable of the fated film crew, Angelo, reveals his obsession with abandoned and redeveloped cinemas briefly mentioned above. Before the making of his grim snuff movie, Iain Burns educates Angelo in the way of the disused movie theatre: 'this is where the love affair is consummated [...]. Believe me, this place and others like it- they're the ones that have the power. They'll never die.' (Royle, 2000,

p.89). From then on, Angelo invests in the belief that these departed cinema spaces have ‘souls,’ and that, somewhere in London, he will find a place where all these souls and the saturated emotion of decades of cinema-goers reside together: a place he fantasises as the ‘Museum of Lost Cinema Spaces’ (p.170). In the abandoned cinema, Angelo believes, ‘[y]ou can tear down the screen and bulldoze the walls, but you can never destroy the space itself.’ (p.167). Angelo thus stakes the claim that spaces have some kind of existence *outside* their actualisation through human spatial practice, and hence furthers the idea to which Royle introduces us in *The Matter of the Heart*: namely, that space *exceeds* the produced, the concrete and even that to which we commonly refer as the social, which Lefebvre sees as such a crucial building block in what he calls the ‘production of space.’ Instead, Angelo’s idea that his beloved cinemas live on after abandonment and demolition interferes with Lefebvre’s notion that space is a result of and means of perpetuating modes and relations of production—is only brought into ‘becoming’ by human production, actualisation and spatial practice. The persistence of the abandoned cinema space as something of an *idée fixe* throughout the novel therefore means that both *The Matter of the Heart* and *The Director’s Cut* demonstrate narrative fiction’s ability to illuminate the ways in which we can envision space as working *transhumanly*, moving amongst and between human subjects as well as being produced through human production and actualisation. As seen in chapter one, ‘transhuman’ does *not* imply an operation totally independent of or above the human. Rather, it describes that quality by which affect is only *occasionally* actualised through the human subject as a manifest emotion or feeling, the rest of the time remaining unactualised yet ever-present, ‘distributed around networks rather than being held in just one place’ (Amin & Thrift, 2002, p.93). As Anderson expresses however, even when unactualised, the affective field still holds the power to influence that which is manifest or ‘actual’. In precisely this way then, Royle’s abandoned

settings show that spaces, like fields of affect, circulate, haunt and move people to emotion, even after dereliction and demolition: that is, even when they are *not* physically present, manifest or actualised. It is by paying attention to the ways in which abandoned spaces work as narrative agents within Royle's texts, shaping and directing narrative form and affective outcomes, that this quality of space can thus be observed. The abandoned St George's hospital persists in driving the narrative current back and forth even when it is not immediately actualised in the minds or on the lips of the novel's characters, whilst for Angelo, London's disused and forsaken cinemas retain a life-force even after they cease being actualised as showcases for films, or even disappear for good. These spaces are able to transcend their fixed geographical locations in order to 'circulate' affectively just as they circulate Royle's texts, and in doing so can carry with them unrealised, unactualised potentialities, just as Benjamin and Kracauer envisioned in their suggestions that certain architectural spaces carry with them unrealised versions of themselves and of other potential future cities, only some of which are 'allowed' to become a 'real' part of urban history as we know it.

The idea that Royle's narratives demonstrate transhuman qualities of space is even further supported by a 'two-way interaction' between abandoned space and the human subject which is repeated elsewhere in his fiction. This form of human-spatial interaction is most clearly exhibited in *Antwerp*, in which an elusive murderer, profoundly disturbed by the emotional and sexual abuse he suffered as a child, slays a series of young women after holding them prisoner within a variety of abandoned spaces across the Belgian city. Describing his process of choosing his temporary derelict abodes, the 'killer' declares that 'once you make the first exchange—fragments of dreams leaking out of your head, in exchange for information, traces of the past, institutional memories travelling the other way, *two-way traffic*—you'll be unable

to switch. You'll both possess and be possessed' (Royle, 2004, p.82, my italics). This not only shows space's agency to deeply affect and move the human subject, but also proposes the existence of a transhuman body of memory—an unconscious, perhaps—which both human subject and space *share*, and through which a dialogue is set up between the dreams and memories of both entities. Once again, this shared unconscious appears to operate just as Anderson and Amin and Thrift describe of the operation of the affectual 'plane': that is, acting as a multi-nodal network rather than being stored or contained in one single place, body or mind, and thus characterised by motions of circulation and flow across and between the entities involved. Entering into the abandoned space acts as an actualisation of this powerful shared affective field, which renders impotent any agency the human subject might have to resist becoming one with the space: to resist 'switching,' as the Antwerp killer expresses.

In this sense therefore, Royle's abandoned spaces again take up a parallel with the obsolete or overlooked corners of the landscape prevalent in Benjamin's urban writings, envisioned as having the power to stimulate recollections and revelations through *mémoire involontaire*. As Graeme Gilloch explains, Benjamin's concept of the revealing 'shock' of 'the dialectical image draws inspiration from the Proustian *mémoire involontaire*: of a 'moment in the present brings with it the fleeting recognition of an occurrence or sensation in the past' (1996, p.114). As opposed to *mémoire volontaire* which describes a critical, volitional act of conscious recollection, *mémoire involontaire* embraces 'only what has not been experienced explicitly and consciously' by the subject (1999, p.157), and thus provides access to the 'shocks' of memory against which consciousness usually protects us. Discussing access to *mémoire involontaire*, Benjamin quotes Proust's claim that often, '[t]he past is hidden outside [...] of intellect, in some material object.... which we do not suspect' (1999, p.403). As Mike Savage

expresses however, Proust's and Benjamin's thought here extends to place and space, in that 'places continue to bear the traces of past experiences. It is therefore possible that revisiting them may at some time evoke the past and in the same moment unlock past hopes and desires' (2000, p.42). Indeed, throughout his montage piece 'One Way Street', Benjamin 'uses urban wandering as a device on which to hang a series of reflections which seem to be *triggered by the phenomena of the built environment*' (*Ibid.*, p.35, my italics). As a mode of remembering which therefore lies beyond the powers of active human recollection and volition, Benjamin's *mémoire involontaire* thus closely echoes the arresting and inescapable 'traces of the past' to which a communal experience with this shared spatial, transhuman unconscious grants access in the above example from *Antwerp*. As Benjamin describes, some memories cannot be unlocked by human agency alone: what is required is a deep engagement with the space itself in which these memories have become embedded. Consequently, what Royle demonstrates even further in *Antwerp* is the fact that spaces are not only 'produced' through interactions and social relations between human beings as Lefebvre might have it, but rather exist as participants in complex transhuman networks of affect, bearing a reciprocal power to move and affect human subjects with their own memorial, historical and emotional relations and resonances. The discussion of the relationship between literature and space therefore no longer remains tied to the aforementioned, critiqued vocabularies of representation and human actualisation: rather, Royle's work demonstrates how literary narratives focalised through apparently deranged or delusional characters open up opportunities for the reader to re-envision the dynamics of the human-spatial relationship as one in which the space is as equally capable of 'possessing' the human subject as the subject's logic and agency are of possessing the space.

Production, Exchange and Abandoned Spaces

Our next task is therefore to ask why it is the depiction of abandoned spaces in particular which allows literature to be read as a medium through which we can observe the transhuman movements of space and the re-negotiation of the human-spatial interaction. Why is it that, of all spaces, it is those which fall outside of their Western society's late-capitalist modes and relations of production that exude such a narrative agency? In answering such a question, it is no coincidence to notice that, in all of the works discussed above, Royle sets up a contrast between the abandoned spaces which saturate his narratives and the networks of production and exchange which dominate the working parts of his fictional urban topographies. For example, Danny in *The Matter of the Heart* is reported to have his own 'lucrative import/export business in Chinese pornography' (p.10), whilst later in the novel he is revealed as 'working as an importer [...] [of] Eastern European spirits', making money through importing and selling 'Bulgarian wines' and 'Transylvanian plum brandy' to exclusive clients in Soho (p.165). As examples of what Tim Edensor describes as normative 'commodity flows' (2005b, p.69) according to which the city operates, Danny's work lies in stark contrast to his obsession with the abandoned hospital, a space which has relinquished its part in any such economic networks of production, use or profit-making. For, as Jonathan Raban expresses, the relocation of material industry away from urban centres may well mean that cities are now less huge sites of production than they are 'nerve- and distributive-centres of industry': however, despite the subsequent fact that 'the average city worker' is no longer a 'producer' of goods, s/he nevertheless, like Danny, 'helps to handle and transmit goods,' or 'transports other workers,' and thus remains firmly embedded in the 'flows' of profit making and commodity and monetary exchange which typify the operations of the late capitalist city (Raban, 2008, p.94).

Such a contrast between these networks of urban exchange and the obsolescence of the abandoned urban space is even more clearly expressed in *The Director's Cut* through the character of Jenny Slade. One of the few female *personae* of the novel, Jenny is a model whom film-maker Richard Charnock repeatedly *uses*—both professionally and sexually—and is highly accustomed to being a mere pawn in networks of monetary and sexual exchange. However, when she meets Angelo inside the complex of disused exhibition halls which once stood in Shepherd's Bush, Jenny discovers true affection for the shy young man, feeling that 'for once, she was actually in a beautiful place where no-one wanted anything of her other than that which she wanted to give' (p.289). As Benjamin describes in his commentary upon the exposé of 1939, 'world exhibitions glorify the exchange value of the commodity' (1999, p.18), and thus despite once having been showcases for the celebration of human production and consumption, the now-abandoned exhibition halls provide Jenny with a setting in which she feels freed from the dominant economic and sexual networks which persist in reducing her to a commodity. In contrast to the working city-space, '[n]o-one has any business in a ruin [...]. It does not continue business as usual' (Ginsberg, 2004, p.44): the same is indeed true of the more recently abandoned spaces which fascinate Royle.

Royle's disused and redeveloped spaces therefore emphasise Tim Edensor's notion that when abandoned, an institutional or industrial building 'is no longer a site of a production process dominated by future oriented projects and targets' (2005b, p.125), and thus stands 'in contrast to their formerly functional, productive state' (2007, p.234). However, Rebecca Solnit describes how 'an urban ruin is a place that has fallen *outside* the economic life of city', thus providing a home for practices which exist 'outside the ordinary production and consumption of the city' (2006, p.90, my italics). "'Functionally disconnected" from the wider city and its economic opportunities' then (Amin & Graham, 1999, p.13), Royle's

abandoned buildings become disembedded and removed from the kinds of monetary, economic networks within which Danny and Jenny are normally implicated. Rather than merely singling such spaces out as useless or as ‘waste’, Edensor argues that this removal rather leaves abandoned spaces open to ‘new human and non-human networks’ which do not take their meaning from dominant modes of production and exchange (2005b, p.67). It figures therefore that such spaces suggest themselves as ideal narrative devices for the exploration of the ways in which space might also work according to and as part of networks *other than* those of capitalist or consumerist modes and relations of production, upon which Lefebvre places so much emphasis. Falling out of such networks of exchange ‘frees up’ disused spaces from previous meanings determined by their productivity and function, allowing them instead to be seen as part of these ‘new’ or ‘other’ networks which include the often transhuman circulation of affect and affective transmission. The importance of paying attention to spaces which are abandoned, defunct or threatened with demolition and redevelopment is therefore nicely demonstrated through Royle’s work, which in turn thus stakes the claim that it is through engaging with these ‘removed’ spaces that literature is seen not only as a medium which represents space by investing it with symbolic, metaphoric or externalising qualities. Rather, literary narratives like Royle’s instead emerge as a means through which we can re-negotiate our very relationship with space, and envision the effects which the dissolution of capitalist and consumerist networks might have upon the ways in which space is allowed to move and circulate.

Ideas of the Transhuman in the Work of Iain Sinclair

The revelatory potential of the city’s obsolete, peripheral spaces inevitably now draws us towards the work of Iain Sinclair, for whom such spaces are an incessant point of repeated return. For, as Rod Mengham notes, Sinclair’s work repeatedly evokes the tenet that ‘[i]t is

only the abandoned, disused, semi-derelict structures that can be trusted to absorb the relevant experience and become repositories [...] “of memory, of pain”, whilst “[i]t is canonicity that disqualifies buildings [...] if they acquire any kind of official status, the energy does not pass through them’ (2002, p.63). Indeed in many reviews, a dedication to the pursuits of tracing the city’s ‘emotional routes’ (Royle, 1997, p.7) and narrative ‘omphalos’ (p.293) has earned Royle comparisons with Sinclair, and their mutual preoccupation with abandoned space only gives further weight to this comparison. In his walks around the M25 recorded in *London Orbital*, Sinclair envisions this urban periphery, littered with abandoned Victorian institutions and disused Ministry of Defence properties, as ‘the point where London loses it, gives up its ghosts’, thus identifying this outer circle as ‘the place that will offer fresh narratives’ (Sinclair, 2002, pp.3 & 16). Singling out peripheral spaces as defamiliarising, revelatory and as initiators of narrative thus draws immediate comparisons with Royle’s fictional works explored above. Furthermore *London Orbital* also continues Royle’s notion that a shared unconscious or transhuman field might exist between the human subject and space: a realm to which abandoned spaces disembedded from dominant networks of production and exchange seem to allow a privileged access. Not only in Royle’s fiction then but also in Sinclair’s fiction and hybrid docu-fiction does literature emerge as a medium through which the transhuman qualities of space—here abandoned space—can be observed, read and conceptualised.

Before proceeding with a closer look at Sinclair’s texts however, a justification must be made addressing my choice to focus principally upon Sinclair’s more recent work, at what may appear to be the expense of paying attention to earlier formative texts such as *Lud Heat* (1975) or *White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings* (1987). Emphasis will rather be placed upon *Liquid City* (1999), *Rodinsky’s Room* (1999) and *London Orbital* (2002), which as well as

being considered ‘later’ texts in Sinclair’s *oeuvre* have two further features in common: features which explain their particular and crucial relevance to the task in hand here. Firstly, all three works are, to some degree, collaborative projects. In these books, Sinclair establishes a dynamic of collaboration in which his own narrative voice sets up something of a meta-analysis, commenting upon, bringing into check and agonising over the ethical implications of his collaborator’s or his fellow walker’s methodologies. Does Marc Atkins’s urban photography in *Liquid City* equate to a destructive will to possess the city through acts of capture in which ‘image will outweigh reality’ (p.59)? Does Rachel Lichtenstein’s similar fascination with cataloguing the possessions found in David Rodinsky’s abandoned room above a Princelet Street synagogue put her in danger of colonising and thus also seeking to possess the abandoned space? These questions, as we shall discover, become central to Sinclair’s collaborative voice in *Liquid City* and *Rodinsky’s Room*, a voice which restlessly negotiates the tension between recording, representation, memory and ownership. It is in a close reading of these particular works therefore that one comes to an understanding of how Sinclair envisions abandoned spaces as powerful points of convergence for issues of appropriation, domination and possession: that is, the very same issues with which his collaborative narrative voice so often wrestles. Secondly, these texts also demonstrate Sinclair’s ventures into narrative walks and quests which diverge from those of his and Atkins’s earlier ambulatory expeditions in *Lights Out for the Territory* (1997). For, whilst the walks navigated in *Lights Out* take Sinclair and Atkins to London’s hidden, graffiti-ridden liminal spaces—to ‘[t]he zone that has no interior or exterior, where anyone can pause, and no one is at home’ (p.101)—they nevertheless keep the wandering pair within the urban centre. In texts such as *Rodinsky’s Room* and *London Orbital* however, the urban centre has become over-appropriated; the city’s central spaces—even those which were once forsaken—have

become ‘public property’, with ready-made historical and corporate meanings and ‘false legends’ inflicted upon them (Sinclair & Lichtenstein, 1999, p.324). They have, as Rod Mengham describes, become canonised. Indeed, Sinclair’s anxiety concerning the over-appropriation of the urban centre begins very early on in his career in *Suicide Bridge*, originally published 1979. Here, Sinclair champions the traveller as one who has ‘escaped the fattening & over-informed vortex of the centre where the city-dweller, unravelled by centrifugal motions, has fallen victim to a weight, an ever-increasing density of myth,’ in which ‘myth,’ as for Benjamin, is conventional, misleading and stunts the imagination (1998, pp.151-52). In these later works therefore, Sinclair’s commentator- and walker-personae are driven outwards, away from the urban centre and out into the lesser-mapped hinterland of London’s periphery and, in the case of *Rodinsky’s Room*, to the foreign, painful geographies of Jewish Poland which inform the Rodinsky story. The choice made in this discussion therefore to focus upon these particular examples of Sinclair’s non-fictional work is once again made clear: attention will be drawn to these texts due to their deep engagement with the contestation inherent within the appropriation of abandoned spaces, and the ways in which narrative form is shaped and influenced by the tensions between the agency of such spaces and others’ attempts to subordinate them beneath stories of the individuals who find, record and tell of these spaces.

Looking at his work in closer detail, Sinclair too suggests something of a ‘two-way’ interaction between spatial and human consciousness. Again, such conceptualisations fascinate Sinclair from early in his career: once more in *Suicide Bridge*, Sinclair notes that in man’s need for ‘continual extensions of place’ come simultaneous extensions ‘of what mind is, extensions of boundaries [...] always, more & more ground for the consciousness, & more

consciousness for the ground', demonstrating how the consciousness belonging to 'man' is complemented by a consciousness belonging to space itself ('the ground'), neither of these consciousnesses however being mutually exclusive (1998, p.150). In *London Orbital* however, Sinclair more specifically echoes Royle's anxious fascination with spaces like St. George's Hospital, in which 'major surgery' was once performed. According to Sinclair, it is from such spaces that emanate 'tales of patients, during that period when consciousness is lost, when they sink into meat-memory [...] reveries of floating, becoming one with the orbital sunstream, the cars on the road [...] the ecosphere of the parkland' (2002, p.200). Sinclair thus suggests that the abandoned hospital space, like St. George's in Royle's *The Matter of the Heart*, achieves the power and agency to stimulate narrative. Sinclair however combines this with the 'two-way' sharing of a porous, transhuman unconscious by the human subject and the abandoned space itself demonstrated by Royle in *Antwerp*, suggesting that the disused hospital actively *remembers* the experiences and dreams of ex-patients who, under anaesthetic, were able to commune with their surroundings and a spatial unconscious. To move back to affect theory then—this time in the terms of Teresa Brennan's posthumously published work *The Transmission of Affect*—the concentration of past human experience and suffering within the hospital space results in a lasting transmission of affect to the edifice itself, re-making the abandoned hospital building as a repository for intense affective fields. As a result, the suggestion is that a second transmission of affect then occurs when present human subjects, here represented by Sinclair's persona and his fellow walkers who are filled 'with dread' (Sinclair, 2002, p.198), come into contact with the now-disused site: again, the contained discreteness of subject and space is breached, with spaces once again being seen to achieve an agency to move people to emotion and offer access to ex-patients' long-forgotten dreams even after the buildings' 'working lives' are over.

Sinclair's further evocation of the transhuman sharing of dreams and affects which occurs between abandoned spaces and their human explorers extends yet another critique presented in the opening chapter of this discussion: namely, that of Steve Pile's reading of the urban landscape as organised through Freudian processes of dream-work. As briefly observed in chapter one, Pile combines aspects from Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and Benjamin's urban writings to argue that urban experience is shaped as dreams are shaped, through processes of dream-work such as the displacement, condensation and overdetermination of wishes, energies and meanings. Once again stressing the importance of the notion of spatial agency beyond human actualisation however, Pile remains vague as to which agencies exactly perform this dream-work: the city-space itself, its social urban milieu, or a combination of the two (see Pile 2005, p.49).

In Sinclair's narratives however, urban space achieves the ability to dream in its own right: to influence human dreaming and memory, and give us the strange juxtapositions and displacements which are found in dreams and which are so revered by Benjamin as capable of producing revealing dialectical images. 'The orbital [...] motorway sweeps up London's mad dreaming' affirms Sinclair (2002, p.202), the suggestion being, I would argue, that the city dreams as much as its inhabitants whom, as Brian Baker notes, are so often 'evacuated' from the streets of Sinclair's London (Baker, 2007, p.143). Whilst the urban centre dreams, its peripheral and marginal spaces, littered as Sinclair notes with spaces which are abandoned, derelict or in the process of often tyrannical redevelopment, 'do' the dream-work, filtering ('sweeping') the city's latent dream thoughts and instead producing a realm of bizarre architectural and affective juxtapositions like those which Pile notes are characteristic of a dream's manifest content. Freedom from the urban centre in *London Orbital* works as

freedom from normative 'context' does for Benjamin therefore, meaning that on the city's margins, 'the heterogeneous, incongruous objects excavated from the urban site may be juxtaposed in alternative patterns to produce mutual illumination' (Gilloch, 1996, p.112). Whilst the relegation of institutional spaces (especially asylums), wastelands and ethically questionable redevelopment projects to the city's perimeter may represent an attempt to keep the metropolitan centre free from 'pollution', in Sinclair's work it is also made to suggest that dream-work is carried out by and within these marginal areas, hinting that *these* are the places that can really reveal urban histories, attitudes and memory-patterns, despite their literal displacement from the urban nucleus. As Sinclair expresses, the urban core often proves unyielding for many urban puzzles and 'obsessions' such as his fascination with the disappearance of Whitechapel synagogue caretaker David Rodinsky; what is required in such cases is a journey outwards to that revealing urban edge at which 'London lost heat, lost heart, gave up its clotted identity' (2002, p.133). Consequently, the most potent and revelatory urban meanings are not in the centre where we expect to find them, but instead find only dominantly-'approved' spaces such as Sinclair's urban nemesis the Millennium Dome, described in *London Orbital* as a 'fungus [...] empty of content' (*Ibid.*, p.17, my italics). Rather, they are located in the derelict hospitals, decommissioned Ministry of Defence sites and violated/redeveloped Victorian properties which manifest themselves on the city's outer rim. Sinclair thus echoes Benjamin's predilections towards the peripheral and the obsolete, insofar that '[f]or Benjamin, the truth content of a thing [here, a space] is released only when the context in which it originally existed has disappeared, when the surfaces of the object have crumbled away and it lingers precariously on the brink of extinction' (Gilloch, 1996, p.14). Urban dreams are unravelled at the city's periphery.

It is therefore no surprise that Sinclair's narratives are born out of disused, peripheral urban spaces whose transmissions of affect across the city invest them with a powerful ability to instigate and to set in to action the motion of narrative forms. For, it is within and around the abandoned spaces (usually asylums) of the urban periphery that, for Sinclair, space becomes caught up at the interstice between two narrative genres: namely, that of alternative and anti-heritage history, and that of the sanitising accounts of property developers seeking to develop such sights into housing enclaves. Indeed, both Kerner in Royle's 'Christmas Bonus' and Sinclair's walker-narrator in *London Orbital* diagnose London as suffering from a Jamesonian 'Death of Affect' (Royle, 2000, p.37; Sinclair, 2002, p. 269), Sinclair in particular allying this death with the redevelopment of defunct urban spaces into 'science parks and executive housing,' creating a 'realm bereft of civic identity, tradition or human values' (*Ibid.*, p.268).

So, despite their being *recent* ruins rather than the ancient ruins usually considered as aesthetically 'beautiful' or compatible with the 'ruin sensibility' upon which much of the ruins discourse discussed at the outset of this chapter focuses, the abandoned spaces found in both Royle's and Sinclair's work do not only possess the agency to set literary narrative into action. Rather, reading the work of both writers through the lens of spatial agency also allows us to read literature as an exposition of the ways in which the abandonment and redevelopment of space has a profound effect upon both affective and narrative possibilities. For, as the redevelopment of Angelo's cinemas into soulless multiplexes and the transformation of London's asylums into housing ventures portrays, processes of urban redevelopment and their colonisation of abandoned property restricts and dictates the narratives which are made available in and around such spaces, and limits the movements and transmissions of affect which keep our cities feeling and alive. As Nigel Thrift contends, one

of the reasons for which spatial theory has turned towards notions of affect comes in the fact that space's ability to facilitate affective responses and circulations has been strategically exploited by urban planners, demonstrating the ways in which affect in the urban environment has become deeply bound up in hierarchies of power. Thrift identifies a series of 'developments' each 'illustrative of a tendency towards the greater and greater engineering of affect' (2004, p.64). One of these affect-centred development strategies is 'the careful design of urban space to produce political response. Increasingly, urban spaces and times are being designed to invoke affective response', Thrift argues (p.68). 'The result is that affective response can be designed into spaces' Thrift continues, as 'a form of landscape engineering that is gradually pulling itself into existence, producing new forms of power as it goes' (*Ibid.*). In the light of Thrift's musings then, the lamentations of both Angelo and Sinclair's narrator over urban redevelopment's role in the death of affect therefore illuminate urban planning's fierce restrictions upon the affective repertoire of our urban landscape. Referring back again to Pile's idea of alternative urban pasts and futures, this means that only a fraction of the affective responses to which spaces have the potential power and agency to move us are 'allowed' to become 'real' or realised as actual manifest emotions. That the abandoned and redeveloped spaces of contemporary British writing can be read thus has consequent high stakes for literature, identifying creative writing as a means through which to redress this limitation in the available narrative and affective repertoires of peripheral urban spaces, and to re-instate the narratives of such spaces which the colonising effects of redevelopment have wiped away.

Abandoned Spaces, Pathology and Approaching the 'Other'

Surveying the ways in which both Royle's and Sinclair's work explores the relationship between abandoned space, affect and the transhuman suggests further reasons as to why a historico-materialist spatial reading like that encouraged by Lefebvre's theory proves insufficient in illuminating contemporary literature's engagement with abandoned space. Indeed, in identifying the explanatory limitations of both ruins discourse and Lefebvre's concept of the production of space at the beginning of this chapter, the notion that both bodies of work 'glorify' the human subject at the expense of space itself became evident. Interpretations of ruined space like those given by Janowitz for example, persist in prioritising what a ruin 'has to say' about the nature, longevity or transitoriness of human *production* rather than about the space in its own right or how that space, once ruined, might take on a power of its own which does not rely solely upon human production, spatial practice and actualisation. As with Lefebvre, emphasis rests with the role of the people, not the role of the space, which profoundly affects our abilities to envision literary narrative as a vehicle for the agency of space. What remains to be investigated in this final section of the chapter therefore is the manner in which, for Royle and Sinclair, experience of abandoned spaces has the power to change the way in which one approaches that which is 'other' to the self, producing a world-view which may be construed as imbalanced or even 'mad,' but which can also be read as emancipating and revelatory. Furthermore, I want to argue that narrative is in some degree shaped, particularly in Sinclair's writing, by the tension between a self-glorifying appropriation of abandoned space, like that found in the readings of ruins discourse, and a more ethical approach which allows the space to 'come through' and speak for itself. Subsequently, many of Sinclair's collaborative works possess a narrative form which is profoundly shaped by narrators' and characters' negotiations of such tension. Once again

therefore, we are able to read our chosen literary texts as a forum for the myriad ways in which abandoned space achieves the agency to shape narrative structures.

Paramount here are, as mentioned above, the equations construed by both Royle and Sinclair between mental aberration and experience of abandoned space. Indeed, such an equation may seem far from strange: it could be quite easily conceived that city-scapes littered with abandoned and re-possessed properties merely represent the sickness of our post-industrial Western urban landscapes. Indeed, urban-based writing—either fictive or otherwise—has long portrayed a relationship between the urban labyrinth and mental imbalance in those who experience it. In *London Orbital*, Sinclair himself asserts that ‘[t]he person who undertakes research into the city’s history, minutiae and odd particulars will become unbalanced. Identification with London’s biography is too intense’ (p.208). Sinclair’s sentiment here is also echoed throughout a wide body of British fiction which takes the city and urban life as its subject matter: the mental hospital out-patient cast of Michael Moorcock’s *Mother London* (1988) pose questions as to exactly how ‘sane’ a life an urban setting can possibly sustain; in Geoff Nicholson’s *Bleeding London* (1997), Judy Tanaka fixates upon having sex in as many locations across London as she can whilst city-walk guide Stuart London harbours a compulsive and imbalanced desire to walk every street in his London A-Z; and outside London, Joel Lane’s hauntingly dark short story collection *The Lost District* (2006) probes the ambiguous and disturbing ways in which the crumbling landscape of Birmingham’s urban sprawl becomes a home for a cast of characters wracked with sado-masochistic, perverted and even homicidal urges. However, in neither Royle’s nor Sinclair’s work does the relationship between aberrational mental states and the experience of ruined space resemble that discussed in so much scholarly ruins discourse, in which the ruined or

derelict building ('setting') is portrayed as a mere externalisation or metaphoric/metonymic representation of a character's mental state. The case with Royle and Sinclair seems far more complex. To investigate further therefore, and to interrogate this relationship between specifically abandoned and redeveloped spaces, mental 'disorder' and the narrative negotiation of approaching the spatial 'other,' we will again turn firstly to Royle's fiction.

Once again, it is *The Director's Cut*'s Angelo who epitomises this vital juxtaposition between apparent mental aberration and an approach to abandoned space. Angelo's desire to keep the essence—the 'soul'—of the disused and redeveloped building alive often verges upon what his fellows might view as imbalanced. Obsessed with abandoned cinemas and insistent upon seemingly bizarre practices such as collecting empty video cases which he claims hold within them a 'small part of that space' and atmosphere of his beloved defunct cinemas (Royle, 2000, p.167), Angelo is judged on more than one occasion to have 'lost the plot' by his fellow characters (p.155). He also becomes increasingly feminised as his obsessions escalate; shy, obsessive and physically thin and pale, Angelo appears in some degree commensurate with Henry Maudsley's typical nineteenth-century expression in which psychiatric patients often display a 'want of manliness', with a 'shy', 'nervous' comportment coupled with a weak, 'emaciated' body (see Skultans, 1975, p.87). To a slightly more subtle degree comes David Rosen in Royle's short story 'The Space-Time Discontinuum,' who in his job as a commercial property consultant is led towards to a seemingly rational, economically dominant view of space as something to be colonised and redeveloped. On the other hand however, David admits to carrying out his 'own urban explorations' in which he enters disused spaces purely to explore and thus achieve an alternative relation with space as an object. Rather than something which can be completely 'possessed', through urban

exploration and a seemingly obsessive absorption in abandoned spaces, David grows to an understanding of the idea that spaces might have their own agency, and asks whether his loss of any feeling of ‘control’ whilst within such spaces ‘had anything to do with my meddling with space [...]. Was I breaking the rules? Was the city resisting me?’ (Royle, 2006, p.57).

Re-thinking Mental Aberration and Otherness in Abandoned Space

With obsessive beliefs in the after-life and ‘soul’ of abandoned spaces and a conviction that the city has the power to act against human appropriation, both Angelo and David Rosen could be read as sufferers of mental imbalance, exaggerated by the dysfunction of the urban setting which sustains them. Rather than retreating immediately to an interpretation which implies ‘madness’ however, I wish to make a different argument. As we saw from Janowitz’s and McNutt’s respective readings of Byron and Poe, to Brooke & Cameron’s analysis of literary images of the disordered city at the turn of the twenty-first century, abandoned spaces in literature have often been interpreted as representations or externalisations of psychic aberration and disorder. In the work of Royle and Sinclair however, I want to demonstrate the way in which each writer re-thinks this ‘madness’ as something far more complex, and as something which has far greater stakes for literature and for the possibilities of narrative form. It is my argument therefore that the apparently strange behaviours and compulsions displayed by Angelo and David Rosen in their relationships with abandoned spaces are *not* merely the result of pathological psychologies. Rather, they are actually consequences of abandoned spaces’ ability to teach and open subjects up to new possibilities in ways of approaching the ‘other’, or the object: a relationship upon which the very essence of literary and artistic representation is based. Subsequently, rather than simply representing delusional thought-patterns, both Angelo’s and Rosen’s faith that urban spaces have a life, soul and ‘resisting’

agency of their own instead demonstrates that, through their intense engagement with such open-ended, indeterminate spaces, both characters come to acquire a new, anti-normative approach to that which lies outside themselves.

To make this a little clearer, Tim Edensor describes the manner in which ruined buildings offer an aesthetic alternative to that to which we are so often accustomed in modern urban life. Disembedded from processes of production and ‘commodity flows’ (2005b, p.69), ruined spaces and the artefacts left within them become oddly juxtaposed or ‘indecipherable and out of place’, thus granting the opportunity to envision ‘an alternative way of relating to objects which goes beyond buying and possessing them’ (*Ibid.*, p.123). In making such an observation, Edensor closely echoes second-wave French feminist Hélène Cixous’s notion of an *écriture féminine*: a mode of writing and representation characterised by an approach to the other/ object which allows this other to come through—to be expressed in its own right from an appropriate distance—rather than merely annihilating or appropriating the other in order to possess it and to glorify the self. In Cixous’s words, the aim of such writing is ‘not to absorb the thing, the other, but to let the thing present itself’ (1991, p.63). Any object or other displays difference in that it distinguishes itself from the self; the risk in modes of representation therefore is that this difference may be annihilated, and the other merely incorporated into the self rather than given its own voice. Cixous’s thought therefore takes us away from a treatment of the space-as-other as executed by both Lefebvre’s spatial theory and traditional ruins discourse. In the former, spaces themselves are to some degree ‘annihilated,’ subordinated to the human relations and processes of production which ‘produce’ them; in the latter, the abandoned space is similarly annihilated as it is repeatedly read in terms of its relationship with human production and a glorification of subject and nation, rather than as an ‘other’ worthy of both representation and agency in its own right.

In their contact and exploration of abandoned space therefore, Angelo and David Rosen's seemingly obsessional behaviour and 'strange' thoughts of spaces taking on a life of their own independent of human actualisation is the result not of mere 'madness' or pathology reflected outwardly by the derelict-space-as-metaphor trope. Rather, their behaviour and thought-patterns demonstrate an acceptance of a way of approaching the 'other'/ object which deviates vastly from consumer society's emphasis upon exchange value and the possession of commodities or products. This approach, as Rosen implies, is one learned through 'meddling with space' (2006, p.57): through experiencing and giving oneself over to the alternative aesthetics of abandoned, unruly spaces which Edensor describes. Indeed, this alternative approach to the other is also nicely demonstrated in *The Director's Cut* through the encounter between Jenny Slade and Angelo noted above. So used to being objectified through her role as a model and actress and treated by other male characters as a 'thing' to own, possess and use, Jenny finds peace as she kisses Angelo in the abandoned buildings once used for the 1908 Franco-British Exhibition, feeling, as has already been seen, that 'no-one wanted anything of her other than that which she had to give' (2000, p.289). Unlike serial philanderer Richard Charnock therefore, Angelo is instead capable of approaching Jenny according to that 'alternative way of relating' to the other which Edensor sees as cultivated through an experience of disorderly, de-contextualised abandoned spaces and objects: an approach which instead of seeking purchase and possession rather nurtures Jenny's 'trust' and longing to 'stay' with Angelo in the peace of the derelict building (p.290). As Benjamin's discussions of the role of peripheral places and things in dialectical imaging suggest, and as Angelo and David Rosen demonstrate, obsolete spaces and marginal objects can therefore teach us new ways of knowing: modes of understanding which may be so removed from those which late capitalism engrains within us that they may be construed as imbalanced or even mad. Literature therefore

is revealed not merely as a medium which shackles abandoned spaces to a vocabulary of representation, and a vicarious life of metaphoric or metonymic substitution for aspects of the human psyche. Instead, we are able to read the ways in which narrative events and outcomes are subtly shaped by the abandoned space's ability to nurture alternative approaches to otherness, and whether or not individual characters are invested with the ability to take such lessons on board.

That Royle's ideas of space, madness and approaching the other are also profoundly bound up with the transhuman operation of space throughout his narratives can be accounted for through reference to the work of Teresa Brennan. Although Brennan's work on *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter, it is worth pointing out here the relevance which Brennan's observations of affective transmission bear in helping to understand the role played by abandoned spaces in Royle's fiction. Brennan begins her book with the rhetorical question: 'Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and "felt the atmosphere"?' (p.1). Brennan puts this feeling down to what she describes as the 'transmission of affect', a concept which she argues 'was once common knowledge', but as the Enlightenment's cult of the individual began to permeate philosophical thought, such transmission was disregarded as 'it was assumed more and more that emotions and energies are naturally contained, going no further than the skin' (p.2). The above examples from *Antwerp* therefore once again reinforce that Royle's abandoned spaces operate in the same, transhuman way that affect has been theorised and envisioned. If affect, as Brennan postulates, is permeating, unfixed and able to flow between and among subjects, then 'the idea of transmitted affects undermines the dichotomy between the individual and the environment'(p.7). And, indeed, such an undermining is precisely what

comes through so strongly in Royle's *Antwerp* killer. Brennan describes the act of feeling the 'atmosphere' in a room as partly biological: when affect is transmitted from one subject to another 'the "atmosphere" literally gets into the individual,' causing physiological changes such as hormonal fluctuations and neuronal stimulation (pp.1 & 10). The transmission of memories and thoughts between the killer and his abandoned dwelling-places in *Antwerp* can also be expressed in Brennan's terms as a transmission of affect, in which the boundaries between individual and environment are thoroughly breached. Far from being contained within the individual, affects are thus stressed as transhuman, capable of movement from one entity to another. From Brennan's work therefore, it can be concluded that some of the power of Royle's abandoned spaces comes about in their abilities to act as transmitters of affect, rather than merely having the affective burdens of human subjects projected onto them, as was found to be the case in the readings of Byron and Poe found in ruins discourse.³

Literature becomes a space through which we see the affective transmissions between urban spaces and human subjects at work, rather than merely offering representations of urban spaces which seek to glorify, externalise or stand in for these subjects.

The concept of letting the other come through or 'present itself' also evokes Brennan's concept of the transmission of affect. Brennan emphasises the Western world's obsession with keeping the body intact and impermeable, in which the self is idealised as 'a private fortress, personal boundaries against the unsolicited emotional intrusions of the other' (2004, p.15). If affects are capable of being transmitted then, this mode of thought prioritises a model

³ Brennan's work is only concerned with 'the transmission of affect and energy between and among human subjects'; the roles which aspects of the 'environment' (e.g. spaces) might also play in such affective transmissions lies 'outside the scope' of her book (p.8). The argument made here therefore that spaces *can* act as worthy parties in the transmission of affect is therefore my own inference made through a reading combining Brennan's work in a reading of Royle's fiction. Brennan's claims concerning differences between the environment and the human subject will be addressed later in this chapter.

of transmission as *imitation* rather than one of *merging*. If the self is seen as an impenetrable and discrete unit, this problematises the notion of letting the other come through the self to achieve representation in its own right: the self as ‘private fortress’ suggests that nothing ought to breach its boundaries. Yet, through their strong affective resonances and subsequent role in the ‘two-way’ dynamic in which the space’s ‘atmosphere [...] gets inside’ the individual (p.1), Royle’s abandoned spaces act not only as a strange, powerful and ambiguous ‘others’ in themselves, but also as an interface through which characters are given the opportunity to convene and merge with the others these spaces once housed. For example, through gaining access to these abandoned spaces, Angelo ‘felt the mingled emotions of a thousand departed cinema-goers,’ to the point that ‘Angelo now became one of them for a few brief seconds’ (Royle, 2000, p.277). Rather than appropriating or imposing his own agenda upon his beloved defunct cinemas therefore, Angelo uses his access to the disused spaces as an opportunity to let the others that once resided within these spaces ‘present themselves’—to use Cixous’s term—and live again, albeit fleetingly. This proves Angelo’s sensitisation to this alternative approach to the other which Edensor sees as nurtured through one’s experience and exploration of abandoned space, showing also that Angelo is capable of what Brennan describes as ‘more permeable ways of being’ than those which glorify the self as an emotionally contained discrete entity and thus deny the possibility of affective transmission (Brennan, 2004, p.12).

However, not all Royle’s male protagonists are quite so receptive to this alternative approach to the other fostered through experience with abandoned space. Elsewhere in Royle’s fiction we find the ‘killer’ in *Antwerp*, Richard Charnock’s psychotic alter-ego Munro in *The Director’s Cut*, and Danny in *Matter of the Heart*, whose obsessions with abandoned spaces manifest alongside more malicious, violent and even homicidal behaviour.

For instance, *Antwerp*'s serial killer performs a ritual in which he kidnaps his victims and holds them hostage within his choice of the city's myriad abandoned buildings. There, he moulds mannequins in the form of each victim before murdering them: a practice hardly congruent with the non-sexual, non-objectifying approach to the other displayed by Angelo towards Jenny Slade in *The Director's Cut*. Indeed, the killer instead appears to display an exaggerated form of the annihilating need to 'possess' the other which counters Edensor's alternative aesthetic of abandoned space, and which defies Cixous's recommendations for approaching the other. For the killer, it seems, abandoned space appeals as a prime location for annihilation and death of the other to occur, specifically recording graffiti markings littered around an abandoned tuberculosis clinic including 'The place to die', 'Kill frenzy,' and 'Fuck you' (Royle, 2004, p.79). Similarly in *The Director's Cut*, serial 'Tube Murderer' Munro installs himself into the disused space of Wood Lane Tube station which he transforms into a macabre archive for the body parts of his victims, including 'eyes [...] kept in jam jars' and 'a pair of gloves made from human skin' (p.296 & 297). And thirdly, as we have already seen, Danny from *The Matter of the Heart* is responsible for the death of a security guard inside the abandoned St George's hospital, and the death of his girlfriend 'Z' as a result of what happened 'that time at St. George's' (Royle, 2000, p.291), apparently supporting Chris's opinion that 'a clinical psychologist would have had a field day with Danny' (p.165).

In Royle's narratives however, abandoned space is by no means reduced to a mere externalisation or metaphor for the deviant mental states of these more malicious characters. For, in their 'normal' lives away from the ruins upon which they are so fixated, all three of the *Antwerp* assassin, Munro and Danny are involved in work practices deeply bound up with the commodity flows and relations of exchange and production which Lefebvre emphasises as

instrumental in the production of space, but which Edensor stresses are suspended and exceeded in the aesthetics of obsolete, abandoned sites. Immediately previous to the start of his killing-spree, *Antwerp*'s murderer is described as having worked for a business 'that manufactured mannequins for retail display' (p.92), participating therefore in a line of work deeply bound up with the exhibition, sale and exchange of commodities which reduces the individual human other quite literally to the status of object. Munro meanwhile appears in *The Director's Cut* as the evil alter-ego of film-maker Richard Charnock, who suffers from multiple personality disorder: 'While Munro was partially aware of Charnock's existence as an 'alter', Charnock was never aware of Munro', explains the novel's frame narrator (p.299). Munro/Charnock's 'day job' therefore consists in making dubious adult films, capturing women in a vicious cycle of exploitation with threats such as '[i]t's either this, or kiss goodbye to your acting career' (p.224). Again therefore, Munro/Charnock's work is profoundly entwined in the network of processes and relations in which a product is created and exchanged for money as well as sexual titillation, in the midst of which Jenny Slade becomes the objectified and annihilated female other. And finally, as was mentioned earlier, Danny's everyday work also implicates him within networks of monetary and sexual exchange in his business of importing foreign alcohol products and circulating Chinese pornography.

Engaging with abandoned space however removes each character from these modes and relations of production and exchange upon which their professional identities depend. When *Antwerp*'s protagonist Frank uncovers one of the killer's derelict hiding places, he discovers one of the killer's grim, victim-modelled mannequins, commenting that 'it doesn't exactly look mass-produced' (Royle, 2004, p.197). In abandoned space therefore, the killer surrenders his manufacture of a mass-produced product, just as his abandoned hospital-turned-lair has

long-since surrendered its position within the 'working' urban fabric of social relations and modes of production. Similarly, the abandoned Tube station and railway sidings occupied by Munro take him outside of the networks of production and exchange upon which his alter-ego Charnock's film business relies, just as gaining access to the abandoned St. George's hospital removes Danny from these very same networks: the networks upon which his work in imports and exports is also based. As each of the men's curiosities are captured by abandoned spaces therefore, a tension arises in which the non-productive nature of abandoned space subverts and denies access to the networks of labour, production, exchange and objectification upon which each man relies for his working identity, either as a producer of mass-produced mannequins, a film-maker or an importer of goods. Whereas the above discussion revealed the apparent mental aberration displayed by Angelo and David Rosen as demonstrative of a new, fluid approach to the other nurtured through each character's experience of the alternative aesthetics of abandoned space, what manifests as mental aberration in the 'killer', Munro and Danny is rather a reaction *against* accepting this new approach which Angelo and Rosen embrace. For whilst abandoned spaces may offer access to long-forgotten affective fields and new ways of conceiving the world around us, they also undermine our working lives as producers, revealing the transitoriness of human production and thus questioning the value of human labour. This is not, however, to say that these ruined spaces' significance merely consists in symbolising 'the mutability and impermanence of all human works', as emphasised in so much ruins discourse (McNutt, 2004, p.1). Royle's work rather suggests that *removing oneself from* the dominant modes and relations of production can have two consequences: seductive and playful, or ambivalent and unsettling. In Royle's fiction, the fraught, masculine urban subject either assimilates and adapts to a new, accepting approach to objects, spaces and others as Angelo and David are able, or becomes overwhelmed by the

urge to reassert his powers of human appropriation against this more characteristically feminising approach. Risking having their identities as working men compromised therefore, the *Antwerp* killer, Munro and Danny turn to domination, violence and murder to retain ‘a temporary sense of equilibrium’ (Royle, 2004, p.185). Learning from a critique of Lefebvre’s spatial theory then which engages with his neglect of spaces which fall outside of dominant modes of production, we discover that previous accounts such as Brooke and Cameron’s claim that, in contemporary literature, ‘the psychosis of the killer is mirrored by a psychosis of the urban landscape’ (1996, p.644), profoundly underestimate the affective relationships and transmissions between human subject and spatial other which work like Royle’s illuminates. Put more plainly, literature’s relationship with ruined spaces need not stop at the reflection or symbolisation of a character’s psyche: instead, approaching Royle’s texts in terms of affect rather than representation shows how the narrative form of Royle’s texts and the outcomes for certain characters are fundamentally determined by the lessons which abandoned spaces have in store. Acceptance or rejection of these lessons determines whether a character be identified as a protagonist or an antagonist respectively.

Approaching the Other in Abandoned Space: Sinclair’s Collaborative Work

However, it is not only in Royle’s work that abandoned spaces take on narrative agency through their abilities to challenge protagonists’ means of relating to the others, objects and spaces with which they interact. Just as Royle’s narratives demonstrate this friction between capabilities and inabilities to allow abandoned space to move one towards a more malleable and fluid relationship with the other, so does much of Iain Sinclair’s collaborative work

operate through a similar tension. Indeed, so many of Sinclair's collaborative texts display a narrative form in which Sinclair's acerbic prose sets up a conflict with a second 'voice,' be it Marc Atkins's photographic methodology of approaching city spaces in *Liquid City* (1999), or Rachel Lichtenstein's almost obsessive cataloguing of and research into the 'truth' behind the disappearance of Whitechapel synagogue caretaker David Rodinsky in *Rodinsky's Room* (1999). Sinclair's method appears more subtly in *Liquid City*, his commentary adopting a critical tone as he highlights what he believes to be Atkins's desire to possess the city and its spaces through capturing them in his art. 'Whatever he notices shall live' (p.59), says Sinclair of Atkins somewhat ambiguously; 'he wants it all. London in a cardboard folder' (*Ibid.*). With his penchant for capturing and cataloguing the city therefore, Atkins's approach to his urban surroundings thus risks annihilating the difference and unique agency of the city-space-as-other, in order to glorify the self as a researcher and discoverer of urban truths or secrets. As in his critique of the corporate regeneration of the Victorian asylums in *London Orbital* therefore, Sinclair again bemoans a contemporary tendency to impose one's own agenda upon urban space, at the expense of letting the otherness of this space express itself. To express the true complexity and precariousness of the city therefore, Sinclair counterbalances Atkins's potentially dubious photographic approach with a narrative form in which the 'other'—the peripheral urban space—is allowed to come through of its own accord within the narrative. On '[t]oday's walk', Sinclair declares, 'we don't know what we are looking for. And won't recognise it even if it bites our ankles' (2002, p.62). Consequently, Sinclair hints at the possibility of suspending the compulsion to appropriate urban spaces into one's own self-glorifying agenda, and thus to open oneself up to shocks and acts of revelation more akin to Benjamin's involuntary dialectical images than to Atkins's acts of labelling, cataloguing and possession.

However, it is the abandoned, disordered and initially indecipherable space of Rodinsky's room that acts as a narrative agent, allowing Sinclair's work to be read as a space formed through the competing tensions between two opposing approaches to the object or other. As Rachel Lichtenstein explains on her first visit to the abandoned synagogue at number nineteen Princelet Street, 'I was told [...] that an orthodox scholar called David Rodinsky used to live in the attic rooms above the synagogue. One day in the late Sixties he disappeared and his locked room had not been disturbed for over a decade' (Sinclair & Lichtenstein, 1999, p.22). Using his abandoned room as a starting point for clues, traces and possible beginnings to the narrative she seeks to weave, Lichtenstein makes it her mission to uncover the story of what exactly happened to Rodinsky: '[s]he was the caretaker *in absentia*. Her task was to tell the story in which she now had the central part. To uncover the mystery of David Rodinsky by laying bare her own obsession with his life and work' (p.79). Even in the setting out of Lichtenstein's 'task' therefore, a tension becomes evident. A suspiciously abandoned space, lacking in 'official' meaning and without an authoritative 'story' to guide interpretation, Rodinsky's room offers itself up as a strange other, rather than a space to be subsumed into a dominant, 'official' historical narrative of the kind which Benjamin would so abhor. On the other hand however, Sinclair identifies that the very unchartedness of this abandoned room simultaneously makes the space vulnerable to a more tyrannical approach which Sinclair sees epitomised in the threat of 'those who would appropriate it for their own ends' (Gregory-Guider, 2005, par. 19). Uncharted spaces present a quagmire of potential ethical dilemmas for the explorer and recorder of urban space, and such spaces are thus highly vulnerable to over-appropriation. Early on in his career in *Suicide Bridge*, Sinclair muses:

Where there is unclaimed space, unwritten land, there is the quest, & there is mining, a sickly clawing, not only for the minerals, crops, dead artefacts, but also for mythologies. What tales the land holds buried. Drag them out with grappling-irons and tractors, record them. Hoard the images in mausoleums with chained walls & uniformed attendants. What we walk is myth flattened into space. (1998, p.150)

So in Sinclair's later work does this fear resonate even louder since, as Gregory-Guider expands, 'a tension mounts over the course of *Rodinsky's Room* as Sinclair's attempts to maintain the otherness of Rodinsky's story begin to contrast with Lichtenstein's demystification of Rodinsky's life' (par. 22). However, it is equally salient to see Sinclair's and Lichtenstein's narrative schemes as distinct approaches to the otherness of *abandoned space* and the possibilities which it holds, as well as merely means of approaching Rodinsky the man. Can Lichtenstein achieve what Royle's Angelo and David Rosen achieve and allow abandoned space, with its strange juxtapositions and removal from networks of commodity flow and production, to teach her that alternative way of relating to objects which Edensor describes as transcending possession? Or will her fixation upon Rodinsky's room merely grow into a mental aberration like that displayed by Royle's murderous characters, resorting instead to an annihilation of difference and a championing of one's own agenda? Consequently, it is in this way that Rodinsky's abandoned space and its affective powers set in motion a narrative tension which establishes *Rodinsky's Room*'s enthralling ethical dynamics.

Throughout *Rodinsky's Room* then, the abandoned space persists as an inescapable absent-presence, continually renewing this ethical tension which characterises the book's narrative

form. Left behind by the networks of economics, religion and ‘business’ which dominate the city, Rodinsky’s room is, like the abandoned spaces in Royle’s texts, ‘no longer a place of business, no longer a site for worship, and not yet a museum’ (Sinclair & Lichtenstein, 1999, p.177), thus offering itself up as a space in which meaning is up for grabs, and the chance to access new, transhuman networks, aesthetics and relationships to others are possible. Being so open to new meanings however, such abandoned space also risks self-glorifying appropriation by its explorers. Throughout the narrative of *Rodinsky’s Room*, Lichtenstein’s Rodinsky quest is portrayed as deeply bound up in her own story and sense of self: she is ‘too connected to the building by my own history to give up’ (p.27), with Sinclair quick to comment upon the risks she runs of submitting to urges towards ‘ownership’ and ‘possession’ of the space (p.78). Rachel seeks ownership, Sinclair admits, but ownership ‘[b]y love’, as ‘the first person who needed revelation rather than confirmation’ in compiling the story behind Rodinsky’s forsaken room (pp.78 & 86). At the same time however, Sinclair never lets the reader forget how the provocative, de-contextualised objects contained within the abandoned room constantly and unavoidably refer back to ‘the ardently desired other’ of Rodinsky (p.81), and thus the very open-endedness of the deserted space shows how even the most sensitive of archivists can be tempted to ‘bend the past to colonize the present [...] [to] force the territory closer to his reading of it’ (p.177). As Robert Bond observes, ‘Sinclair is more interested in the *process* of the investigation and decipherment of narratives and traces of the city’s history, than in any potential uncovering of fixed facts, or positive act of understanding’ (Bond, 2005, p.168). In order to allow the abandoned space to teach her against spatial appropriation therefore, Sinclair’s caustic narrative warns Lichtenstein against assimilating Rodinsky’s disused home into any rigid or commodifying ‘official’ account of history or heritage.

As was observed in Royle's work, Sinclair's narration in *Rodinsky's Room* also draws close connections between the approach to otherness as encouraged by abandoned space and the role played by abandoned space in affective transmission. For, Sinclair expands upon a fear which he expresses in *Lights Out for the Territory* of 'The English disease', which he laments 'is precision, gradgrind facts. The ambition to quantify the ephemeral' (1997, p.93). Sinclair is adamant to point out that as Lichtenstein's meticulous cataloguing of the objects found in Rodinsky's room whets her appetite for the 'fixed facts' which Sinclair sees as so limiting, something happens, in return, to the affective repertoire of the room itself, and to its ability to move its visitors to emotion. 'As she found out more and more about the man and his family, the ones who had lived so long in this room,' Sinclair declares, 'so the room itself was impoverished, de-energized' (Sinclair & Lichtenstein, 1999, p.270). In Sinclair's narrative then, the affective agencies of the abandoned space dramatise the risks which Lichtenstein runs should she fail to evade the temptation of exploiting the abandoned space's open-endedness by annihilating its agency. We have already seen the ways in which insensitive redevelopment of disused architectural spaces is denounced by both Royle and Sinclair as exaggerating the 'death of affect' across our urban landscapes: similarly, Sinclair warns, Lichtenstein's excavation of the Rodinsky story out of the space he left behind risks reducing the affective repertoire of such an evocative and moving place. As Lichtenstein discovers, through the affective resonances and the historical and memorial ties which circulate through and emanate from the room, Rodinsky's abandoned abode, like the derelict St. George's hospital in Royle's *The Matter of the Heart*, exceeds its geographical location, extending across countries, generations and cultures. The quest for an understanding of Rodinsky and his family's poor adaptation to life in Britain leads Lichtenstein to Poland, to the streets where Polish Jews were shot 'after being forced to smash up the gravestones of their families then

pave the roads with them' (Sinclair & Lichtenstein, 1999, p.229). The room also leads back out to the 'asteroid belt' of abandoned asylums which litter London's periphery as Lichtenstein searches for the final abode of Rodinsky, and uncovers how the Western world and its psychiatric nomenclature 'deeply misunderstood' his kabbalistic lifestyle (p.300). By reducing the room to a single story however, a reductive act which Sinclair implies Lichtenstein must work hard to avoid, risks 'de-energising' Rodinsky's abandoned space by pinning the room down geographically, temporally and narratively, telling us how to 'feel' about the space, rather than letting the space-as-other come through with all its myriad and location-defying potentiality and affective energy. In other words, subjecting the room to reductive archival practices risks fixing the narrative of the room, ossifying it into a space which stands to be *represented* rather than a space which constantly moves through and circulates narrative, setting up the narrative tensions through which it ought to be told. Left indeterminate, the abandoned Princelet Street synagogue carries with it so many potential, unrealised versions of itself: through the stories and memories of members of East London's Jewish community, artists, the media, urban planners, the heritage industry and activists against its redevelopment. As a result, the space operates transhumanly and affectively, bringing with it an inconceivable array of potentialities and possibilities to move individuals to emotion. Sinclair's fear of 'de-energising' then warns that s/he who meddles with abandoned space bears a responsibility not to act as do the redevelopers of Angelo's beloved cinemas or Sinclair's revered Victorian asylums: that is *not*, in their approach to the abandoned-space-as-other, to manipulate and thus narrow the affective powers of such space to the point at which some affective responses are 'allowed', whilst others, as Pile might express, are forgotten, silenced and never allowed to become real. As the fraught tensions which structure this collaborative work thus demonstrate, Sinclair envisions a narrative

situation in which the abandoned space is allowed to tell itself—to inherently shape the narratives which tell of it through its transhuman operations—rather than being fixed and solidified through its associations with any single, ‘official’ narrative.

Through a close look at works by Royle and Sinclair therefore, abandoned spaces are shown to have great narrative agency both in fiction and in ‘documentary’ non-fiction. Similar once again to Royle’s use of the abandoned space as a ‘plane’ which circulates the text, at times actualised, at times latent, yet persistently driving the narrative along, David Rodinsky’s abandoned room and decommissioned synagogue spread out to haunt Sinclair’s entire *oeuvre*, operating cross-textually as a parallel ‘plane’ never far from consciousness. For Sinclair’s obsession with the Rodinsky story does not stop at *Rodinsky’s Room*, but manifests itself as Rodinsky’s abandoned spaces bubble to the surface in *Liquid City*, *London Orbital*, *London: City of Disappearances*, and even in ‘The Keeper of the Rothenstein Tomb’, a short story by Sinclair included in *Timeout London Short Stories Volume Two*, a volume edited by Royle. Peter Barry also acknowledges the manner in which abandoned and redeveloped spaces in Sinclair’s work refuse to be contained within the space of a single text and rather circulate trans-textually, describing how ‘Claybury hospital has become for Sinclair a kind of outlying [...] vortex: it features as the epi-centre of the Rodinsky book, of *Dark Lanthorns* and of *London Orbital*’ (2007, p.48). Furthermore however, we have seen that the abandoned space plays a central role in the narrative tensions and dynamics which shape the prose in much of Sinclair’s non-fiction. Indeed, as the above discussion has shown, the disused or derelict built space proves a crucial narrative device for the setting up and re-working of two crucial debates: firstly, in raising the ethical issue as to which approach to the other, object or space-as-other the writer ought to prioritise; and secondly as an ideal way into the debate as to

how space can be tyrannised by human appropriation, whilst at the same time possessing the agency to deeply affect the human subject, sometimes against that subject's will.

CHAPTER THREE: THE AGENCY OF THE SUBTERRANEAN CITY-SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY LONDON DESCENT NARRATIVES

Introducing Subterranean Spaces

In the previous chapter, we discovered that when freed from the Lefebvrian vocabulary of the human production and actualisation of space into social space, literature can be explored as a forum which opens up new ways of conceptualising the dynamic relationship which exists between space and human subject: between the individual and the spatial, transhuman unconscious. As found in Royle's and Sinclair's narratives, spaces which lie *outside* of the city's dominant modes of production and social relation exemplify potentially subversive sites through which authors can examine the relationship of urban space to a variety of networks of transmission: not networks of monetary exchange or the reproduction of social space, but rather of affective circulation. However, there is a space far more ancient than the abandoned building that has long been a prominent focus for reams of cultural production; a space which continues to preoccupy a significant number of contemporary British writers today. That space is the underground, or the subterranean: a space beneath the earth as we know it. From the hell of Dante's *Inferno* to the recent burgeoning interest in Britain's abandoned tunnels and tube stations (Connor, 2001; Emmerson, 2007; Long, 2007; Warrender 2007), representations of underworlds and subterranean sites have persisted as powerful subjects of and settings for a huge gamut of works of art, photography, alternative history and, by no means least, literature. For as well as paying attention to the mythical and theological resonances of underground spaces, and in more recent times to the assimilation of the urban underground into technological and utilitarian everyday life, commentators have charted the

emergence and mutation of a phenomenon known as the *descent narrative* (Holderness, 2007, p.279) or *katabatic narrative* (Falconer, 2005, p.27): a narrative in which a protagonist descends, or is forced to descend, to a realm below the earth as part of a formulaic story in which certain recurring motifs can be identified.⁴ Once again, Walter Benjamin hints towards a reason for this perennial preoccupation with the underground. For, Benjamin singles out subterranean city spaces as bearing a similar potential to move the subject to emotion and to provoke memories beyond human volition and control as disused spaces on the verge of extinction. The city's underground has the ability, Benjamin hints, to exert an agency of its own, calling to and leading people down from the city above. The subterranean city thus acts as an unavoidable undercurrent or unconscious of the waking world:

Our waking existence is a land which, at certain points, leads down into the underworld—a land full of inconspicuous places from which dreams arise.

All day long, suspecting nothing, we pass them by, but no sooner has sleep come than we are eagerly groping our way back to lose ourselves in the dark corridors. (1999a, p.84)

This chapter then takes the literary concept of the descent narrative alongside Benjamin's suggestion in order to explore the ways in which notions of spatial agency might allow us to read contemporary narratives of subterranean as well as abandoned spaces as demonstrative of a movement and agency achieved by urban space which does not always solely rely upon human actualisation. In the previous chapter, I began with an exposé of some of the principal ways in which the artistic and literary employment of ruined spaces had been previously accounted for by scholars, highlighting such 'ruins discourse' as disproportionately emphatic

⁴ See Falconer, 2005, p.43 for a detailed list of these motifs, which will be discussed at greater length later in the discussion.

upon the use of ruined spaces to comment upon and symbolise human acts of production and psychic states. This contextual introduction also demonstrated the various meanings and connotations accreted by ruined spaces over the past five hundred years, in order to set up my intentions to find new ways of opening up literary spaces and their overdetermined meanings to allow for a mode of reading literature as an advocate for the affective and transhuman quality of space. Consequently, I shall begin this chapter with a similar contextual piece, introducing some of the long and complex tradition through which literary undergrounds have travelled in order to arrive at the descent narratives and underworlds we recognise today. In the body of this chapter, we shall see unruly and disruptive undergrounds interfering with preconceived models of the katabatic tale, leading to a contemporary re-writing of more traditional models of the descent narrative in which literary form thus becomes a space into which the urban underworld intervenes, exerting a narrative agency of its own. Nevertheless, the undergrounds of the contemporary novels assessed here are replete with echoes and evocations of the kinds of traditional undergrounds and descent narratives from which they simultaneously distinguish themselves. The subterranean spaces of these novels and their particular disposition towards exerting a confounding agency over human subjects cannot therefore be fully appreciated without tracing their genealogy. This contextual exercise will allow us to acquaint ourselves with the descent narrative as a textual and affective space which carries with it inevitable and myriad latencies and resonances which repeatedly work to influence the actuality of the fictional world being created in each case. I shall briefly chart the appearance of two particular modes of novelistic descent—the European wilderness descent narrative and the urban descent narrative—which have been kept conspicuously apart by existing commentary upon the literary and cultural role of subterranean spaces. By giving an introduction to these previous forms through which subterranean spaces have found

expression and movement within literary narrative, I thus hope to envision how more contemporary novels of urban descent draw upon the motifs and spatio-temporal experiences offered by each respectively.

When moving on to discuss the literary texts at hand therefore, the distinctive structure of the descent narrative will also influence the narrative structure of my argument. Whereas chapter two largely separated the analyses of Royle's and Sinclair's work discussing one and then the other, the structure here will be somewhat different. Firstly, since this chapter requires a concentrated focus upon one particular narrative genre rather than any author's broader *oeuvre*, we will look at novels by three authors rather than two in order to provide enough material to substantiate the arguments being made. Furthermore, as we have already noted, descent narratives possess a formulaic structure as is typical of most genre fiction. Textual analysis in this case will therefore involve comparing the employment and re-working of a range of motifs and formulaic narrative components across texts, in order to outline how the agency of the underground space itself might be seen, in each novel, to interfere and intervene in more received models of traditional descent narrative. Consequently, due to this need to constantly compare and contrast narrative elements across texts, I shall interweave commentary on my three featured novels rather than dividing the chapter up to talk solely on one novel, followed by another, followed by the third. The hope is that this structure will draw more emphatic attention to the consistencies displayed by all three texts in the ways in which they advocate the subterranean space as a narrative agent in its own right. As with abandoned spaces, the underground Londons of the contemporary novels discussed below are not wholly assimilated into the aboveground city's dominant modes of production and relation upon which Lefebvre's notion of social space places so much emphasis. My argument will therefore be that the agency of the subterranean space acquired through its positioning both inside and

outside of capitalist city life encourages a new kind of London descent narrative which transcends the explanatory powers of both Lefebvrian theory and existing definitions and models of katabatic narrative. There will also yet again be a need to exceed readings which focus primarily upon the *representation* of subterranean spaces, rather allowing the reader to see spatial agency at work within the narrative, as the underground space itself possesses the agency to push the novels' protagonists towards a *denouement* which requires a radical revision of their very conceptions of space itself.

Representations of Subterranean Spaces over Time

David Pike's extensive work on the representation of subterranean worlds throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries consistently stresses that the underground comes to us today with a huge mythical, ideological and representational baggage, accumulated through its myriad artistic, literary, cultural and historical appropriations. What Pike describes as 'the metaphorical confines of today's underground' thus consist of a rag-bag of residual representational and ideological connotations, 'which contain the tangled remains of Hell, of nineteenth-century Paris and London, of the modernist city, and of the two world wars' (2007, p.10). No matter how the subterranean is portrayed in the present day therefore, '[t]he underground fascinates not merely because it contains all that is forbidden but because it contains it as an unimaginably rich, albeit inchoate and intoxicating, brew of other times, places and modes of being in the world' (2005, p.197). To unpick the component ingredients of this subterranean 'brew' must consequently be our first task.

With their potential to fascinate and intoxicate as Pike describes, worlds beneath the earth's surface have consistently inspired tales relating the experiences of aboveground beings who

find themselves on journeys through various underworlds. Graham Holderness plots the emergence of the ‘descent narrative’ right back to ‘classical descent journeys’, executed ‘either for the purpose of seeking information, or with the intention of delivering one of the dead from bondage in the underworld’ (2007, p.297). Holderness’s example here is the descent narrative of Homer’s *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus ‘journeys to the mouth of the underworld and opens a portal,’ in his search for the seer Tiresias (p.279). The definitive tale of Orpheus and Eurydice meanwhile epitomises the latter type of narrative, ‘in which one of the living travels to the underworld to rescue or recover a dead friend or lover’ (p.280). Holderness also identifies the Christian Messianic descent as a third genus of ‘ancient’ descent narrative; this time however, the protagonist journeys into an underworld not to retrieve esoteric information or to rescue an individual, but rather ‘to preach to, and liberate, the dead’ (p.281). Not to be ignored are also the later literary underworlds of the fourteenth century, including, of course, Dante’s *Inferno*, the quintessential infernal descent narrative.⁵ Furthermore, Rosalind Williams suggests that the persistent appearance of descent narratives on into the fifteenth century owed to the popularity of the ‘imaginary voyage’ narrative (1990, p.10); emerging during a century in which voyages of discovery like those of Columbus were at the forefront of consciousness, Williams argues that these narratives of imaginary journeys set a precedent from which the tale of descent can be seen as an offshoot.

We can already see therefore the ways in which literary undergrounds have been invested and saturated with enduring meanings which resonate with some of the most consistently re-told stories of the Modern Age. Consequently, Pike finds Lefebvre’s spatial triad of spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces a useful critical tool in

⁵ Whilst the author acknowledges the world of Dante’s *Inferno*, based on Virgil’s *Aeneid*, as a formative literary underworld, the focus of this thesis is to move towards a particular vision of the specifically material *urban* underground. Consequently, space allowances have required that mention of the largely theological or metaphysical Hell of *The Inferno* be kept brief: for detailed commentary on the role of the underworld in Dante’s text, see Wetzel, 2002, pp.375-394.

approaching subterranean worlds, since the model ‘provides an interpretative model for untangling the threads of that constellation without losing sight of their interrelationships’ (2007, p.14). According to Pike then, Lefebvre’s triad allows one to consider the underground—like any space—simultaneously in terms of an abstract representation of space, a representational space of the imagination, and as a site deeply bound up in spatial practice, without having to give precedence to any single ‘strand’ of the underground’s past assimilations and appropriations. For example, the representation of London’s Underground through Harry Beck’s definitive Tube map demonstrates the ways in which subterranean spaces have been subsumed under what Pike describes as a modernist, abstract ‘conception of space as a coherent, homogenous whole’ (2002, p.107). The development of underground railways also points towards underground spaces’ embroilment in human spatial practice, becoming fully assimilated into the everyday routines of commuters and tourists alike. At the same time however, the underground also remains a mythical, ‘clandestine’ and imaginative representational space; Lefebvre himself comments that Roman civilisation and early Christianity persistently evoked a ‘space filled with magico-religious entities’ which ‘linked to the earth or to the subterranean’ (1991, p.231). However, although Lefebvre argues that antiquity’s abstract representations of space have ‘collapsed,’ ‘[i]ts representational spaces, however, have survived: the realm of the dead, chthonian and telluric forces, the depths and the heights’ (*Ibid.*). Despite huge shifts in our conceptions and experiences of space therefore, ‘[h]idden, clandestine, subterranean spaces,’ Lefebvre asserts, continue to speak of ‘fertility and death, of the beginning and the end, of birth and burial’ (p.242). Subsequently, it makes sense to see Pike drawn to Lefebvre’s model, due to its apparent ability to account theoretically for the salience of the underground without neglecting any aspect or ‘thread’ of

the web of myriad discourses, practices and representations at whose intersection subterranean space is located.

Nevertheless, as we look further into Pike's work on urban undergrounds, his championing of Lefebvre's spatial triad in this case becomes problematised. For, just as Benjamin saw the derelict and obsolete parts of the city as potentially the most revelatory, so does Pike attribute some of the subversive power of the underground to a similar quality. The world beneath the city may indeed, through the development of subterranean railways and the like, have been assimilated into capitalist urban life. What is crucial however is that at the same time, parts of the urban underground remain conspicuously *outside of or beyond* the capitalist networks of the surface world. Pike notes that '[t]he advancement of capitalism leaves behind a trail of obsolescence: overexploited land, superfluous labor and outmoded commodities,' arguing that 'these mines of things, places, people, techniques and ideas end up both figuratively and literally underground, in the garbage dumps and landfills of the world' (2005, pp.12-13). In other words, what makes the subterranean world such a potentially powerful site from which to re-evaluate the apparent order of aboveground life is, in large part, its status as 'the trash heap of the world above, the place to which everyone, everything and every place posing a problem or no longer useful is relegated' (Pike, 2007, p.2). Immediately therefore, Pike's reading of subterranean representation presents yet another version of one of the crucial problems to which this thesis responds: namely, the use of Lefebvre's spatial theory to account for the cultural significance of a space which provokes fascination *precisely due to* its status as a place of waste and obsolescence. By the early twentieth century, Pike continues, the case may well have appeared that 'the mysterious world beneath nineteenth-century Paris and London had been rationalized and excavated as a complex system of drainage pipes,

underground railways, pneumatic tunnels' (2007, p.117). Nevertheless, as Pike's previous 'trash heap' comment suggests, and as the contemporary novelists to whom I shall later turn are all too much aware, there remain corners of the subterranean city which resist such colonisation and rationalisation, and refuse to be contained by any attempt to appropriate the underground world as merely an extension of the consumer-driven, capitalist city above. The disused Underground stations, the sealed off service tunnels, the sewers, the worlds which we imagine may exist beneath our feet and the races whom we imagine may inhabit them: all of these echo Pike's notion that despite its utilitarian assimilation into everyday life, the underground city can also be thought of as a space partially outside of, beyond or even eluding the 'rationalising' forces of capitalism and consumerism. A clear link then starts to emerge between the underground and abandoned space, since neither fit comfortably into Lefebvre's scheme, which prioritises the role played by a society's dominant modes and relations of production in creating and reproducing social space. As the contemporary texts examined in this thesis suggest therefore, some of the most subversive of these spaces are those which lie at least partially *outside* of, or which have been left behind by their society's dominant, capitalist modes of production and social relation.

Once again therefore, the stakes for literature here are high. The increasing incidence of narratives which focus upon the revelatory potentials of subterranean space only go to show that, as with Royle's and Sinclair's abandoned spaces, contemporary British literature demands that we develop spatial readings of texts which do not solely express space through the fixing and ossifying vocabularies of representation and human actualisation. We must take the peripheral urban spaces found in so much contemporary literature from stock religious or mythological 'backdrops' to spaces with their own agency: an agency achieved in part due to

their positioning outside the networks of mainstream capitalism and consumerism. In performing such readings, narrative literary forms allow us to see urban spaces take on the powers to catalyse, direct and divert narrative, and thus take on an agency of their own. To do this, we must also chart how the subterranean space has become inextricably linked, through the work of certain writers, to these notions of existence outside of and beyond dominant modes of production and social relation, and of spatial agency.

Towards a Context for the Urban 'Secondary World' Underground

i) 'Wilderness' Descent Narratives: Remoteness and Removal

'Strange and fantastic works,' Peter Fitting emphasises, have long since 'used the subterranean setting as a location for social satire and utopian imagining. The discovery of a hidden or lost civilization inside the Earth is an opportunity to describe some other society as a way of critiquing one's own and of imagining an alternative to it' (Fitting, 2004, p.12). Progressing from her discussion of the imaginative journey narratives of the fifteenth century, Rosalind Williams however acknowledges that the underground was most emphatically brought to light as a dominant preoccupation in literature and the arts during the nineteenth century, when 'the quest to recover the truth about the past by digging ever more deeply was a central project of nineteenth-century science' (1990, p.17). Indeed, Fitting's recent anthology of fictional subterranean journeys and civilisations further demonstrates how notions of journeying underground in order to uncover truths did indeed extend into a great deal of the descent narratives seen to emerge during the nineteenth century. Fitting's principal focus however is the notion of the 'hollow earth', a vein of scientific thought attributed principally to American army captain John Cleves Symmes Jr. As Fitting describes, Symmes held the belief that:

the earth is hollow and habitable within; containing a number of solid concentric spheres, one within the other, and is open at the poles twelve or sixteen degrees. I pledge my life in support of this truth, and am ready to explore the hollow, if the world will support and aid me in my undertaking.
(cited in Fitting, 2004, p.4)

This belief was also echoed by British astronomer Edmund Halley and, as Fitting's anthology charts, gave rise to numerous descent narratives which explore scientific conceptions of the hollow earth. Yet, in accordance with Symmes's emphasis upon the 'poles' as the principal portal through which to gain entry into the subterranean world, the narratives highlighted by Fitting appear to lead away from the notion of the *urban* underground with which this thesis is occupied, and instead adopt the form of *wilderness* descent narratives: that is, where the protagonist's conveyance to the subterranean world occurs during their exploration of a remote and far-removed geographical setting.

Fitting refers to Collin de Plancy's adventure story *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* (1821), which responds directly to the scientific hypotheses of Symmes and Halley. In this largely forgotten narrative, the protagonist survives a shipwreck off Greenland's coast, only for a whirlwind to draw him and his fellows down into a world beneath the ground (Fitting, 2004, p.132). There, they encounter a race of underground peoples who are highly advanced, but whose origins are never revealed. Fitting then moves on to discuss Jules Verne's *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* (1864), another wilderness descent narrative in which the narrator Axel, along with his uncle and their guide Hans, descend through a volcanic crater in Iceland whilst following the route of a sixteenth-century explorer. The party find themselves within an inner world populated by prehistoric creatures including 'the ichthyosaurus and plesiosaurus' (2009,

p.159), and human beings ‘more than twelve feet tall’ (p.186); however, Fitting is keen to portray Verne as a principally scientific author responding to conceptions of the hollow earth, over and above any employment of the underground setting as a site from which to launch a social critique (Fitting, 2004, p.147). Even Edward Bulwer- Lytton’s *The Coming Race* (1871), the next descent narrative featured in Fitting’s collection, brings us yet again to a wilderness descent rather than an urban underground. Bulwer-Lytton’s tale focuses upon the discovery of a highly advanced underground race called the ‘Vril-ya,’ who are ‘destined to return to the upper world, and supplant all the inferior races now existing therein’ (2002, p.78). In *The Coming Race*, descent occurs within the ‘recesses’ of a ‘mine,’ when the protagonist becomes fascinated with his ‘friend’s explorations [...] into the vaults and galleries hollowed by nature and art beneath the surface of the earth’ (p.8). In other words, Fitting again keeps distance from *urban* undergrounds, limiting his scope to descent narratives preoccupied with uncovering truths of natural science in an underworld accessed through a geographically remote wilderness.⁶ Due to Fitting’s preoccupation with tales influenced by scientific notions of the hollow earth, his anthology therefore neglects urban undergrounds in favour of those delved by explorers and adventurers out in the wilderness.

It is Pike however who moves on to discuss a contemporary nineteenth-century fascination with the *urban* underground. As Pike describes, with the development of complex drainage systems and underground railways, it was also during the nineteenth century that the ‘urban landscape superseded the countryside or caverns and mines as the primary location of actual subterranean spaces’ (2005, p.1). Despite being kept conspicuously apart by the selectivity of both Fitting’s and Pike’s studies, the development of the *wilderness* descent and a

⁶ Also mentioned by Fitting are Willis George Emerson’s *The Smoky God* (1908) in which the protagonist’s descent occurs during a fishing trip in the Arctic (pp.161-2) and Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *At The Earth’s Core* (1914) in which the two principal characters find themselves at the earth’s core after setting out in a desert on an attempt to explore below the earth.

preoccupation with *urban* undergrounds appear to explode at the same period in European history. However, schemata of categorisation like Fitting's which insist on keeping wilderness and urban descents apart has profound effects for literature, and for the ways in which we read the subterranean journey as a narrative form. For, regarding the novels to which I shall subsequently turn, Conrad Williams' *London Revenant*, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and Tobias Hill's *Underground* all use the subterranean city to offer a sometimes fantastical perspective of removal from the aboveground world, but at the same time take a specifically London-based, 'real-life' urban setting as a crucial node of comparison and contrast against their respective 'underworlds'. What is required therefore is a critical movement which will bring Fitting's and Pike's commentaries back into constellation with each other: which allows subterranean narratives to be appreciated as a 'subgenre of the *fantastic*' (Fitting, 2004, p.7, my italics), whilst also promoting a deep engagement with the *material* city, and with notions of human detritus. To account for the development of this underground dialectic therefore, and to arrive at a suitably informed place from which to begin an analysis of the subterranean Londons related by contemporary British writers, it might serve to turn next to one of the most paradigmatic texts of the literary urban underground: namely, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862). In observing Hugo's relation of Valjean's descent into the Parisian sewers, we move towards an appreciation of the ways in which literature allows for the display of a subterranean space which is simultaneously fantastic *and* material, promoting the agency of the subterranean space as a quality which denies the notion that these two characteristics of the underground be held as mutually exclusive.

ii) 'Urban' Descent Narratives: The Dialectic of Above and Below

Pike asserts that Hugo's text belongs to a realist tradition based on the Baconian assumption that truth lies hidden beneath, and 'the social investigator, *as much as the natural one*, must dig downward to find the truth- in this case, the truth about the poor' (2005, p.155, my italics). For Hugo therefore, priority is given to truths which reflect upon the social structure of the aboveground world, rather than to an empirical, scientific interrogation of the underworld and the life forms to which it might be home.

In working towards a context for the contemporary London descent narrative, what is crucial about Hugo's text is that it explicitly addresses the idea of an urban underground which at the same time mirrors yet is also 'other' than the aboveground city: mid-nineteenth-century Paris, Hugo contends, 'has beneath her another Paris, with roads and intersections, its arteries and alleyways—the Paris of the sewers' (1982, p.1063). Like the texts included in Fitting's anthology therefore, Hugo's literary underworld provides a perspective of 'removal' from the city of everyday bourgeois life; a removal, however, which this time does not rely upon the geographical remoteness of the subterranean wilderness threshold, but is rather centred around social commentary, with Hugo's underground Paris rather providing a space away from the social and productive relations which govern aboveground. As Hugo expresses, '[w]hen one has spent one's time on earth suffering the windy outpourings which call themselves statesmanship, political wisdom, human justice, professional probity, the robes of incompatibility, it is soothing to go into the sewer and see the mire which is appropriate to all this' (p.1065). 'To political economy,' he asserts, the Paris sewer 'is a detritus, and to social philosophy a residue' (p.1075), thus bringing us immediately back to Pike's conception of the underground as the 'trash heap' of the surface world and strongly suggesting the underground as a repository for all that is cast off by the ideologies which rule the social, political and productive world above. Nevertheless, Hugo's passage here also implies a dialectic which will

prove crucially important to the contemporary texts upon which I shall focus: namely, that to understand the ‘soothing’ perspective of removal from the capitalist, bourgeois city which the underground offers simultaneously *requires* that this aboveground city remains a conscious presence in the text, providing a point of constant comparison and a reminder of the urban social order which on the one hand has attempted to rationalise the underground, whilst at the same time has produced it as a space of waste and ‘mire’ for all that urban life consumes and renders obsolete. Indeed, Hugo stresses that ‘[t]oday, the sewer is clean, cold, straight and correct [...]. A revolution has taken place’ (p.1071). However, Hugo’s constant textual comparison between subterranean and surface cities reveals that even the reformed sewer ‘was a sort of dark, multi-armed polyp which grew with the city above it. When the city put out a street, the sewer stretched out an arm’ (*Ibid.*). Hugo’s text thus suggests that even this attempted rationalisation of the underground has had no waning effect upon the ability of the underground to take on an agency of its own, anthropomorphised as an uncontainable body which ‘grows’ exponentially beneath the urban surface. Progressing towards the proclamation of the sewers through which Valjean treks as an ‘underground sponge,’ which does not ‘allow itself to be conquered’ (p.1079), Hugo thus moves towards presenting an urban descent narrative in which the elusive and disorientating subterranean city necessarily problematises an approach which assumes that any space can be wholly mastered, mapped and controlled by the human subject. Hugo’s novel thus sets in place the roots through which will develop an urban underground with its own specifically narrative agencies, the operations of which are shown to us in their zenith through the literary forms of the contemporary London descent narrative.

The ambivalent relationship of the urban underground with capitalism and the capitalist city's dominant modes of production later becomes the emphasis of Fritz Lang's seminal film *Metropolis* (1927). Michael Minden argues that the landscape of *Metropolis* is a German vision of New York, inspired by Lang's visit there in 1924, 'his marvelling response to the Manhattan skyline and illuminated urban canyons of the city and—privately—his alarm at a city that seemed animated by the perpetual anxiety born of universal exploitation' (2000, p.341). Crucial to the discussion at hand however is the way in which Lang's fictional city presents an underground which is *layered*, explicitly portraying the underground as a space which is both deeply assimilated as a space of labour, capitalism and exploitation, yet also of resistance against such assimilation. 'Deep below the earth's surface lay the workers' city', says the film's subtitling; even further underground however are the catacombs, the spaces of resistance in which the workers gather after their shifts to hear preacher Maria deliver inspirational speeches about the potential coming of a 'mediator', who will overcome the unjust gulf between the 'head' of *Metropolis's* ruling class and the 'hands' of its oppressed workforce. This is juxtaposed with a paradisaical, utopian space for the rich, with races and games set against magical gardens. It is not my intention here to conflate the filmic representation of urban underworlds with those from literary narratives. However, observing *Metropolis* as a spatial form whose narrative moves in and between these different subterranean layers also demonstrates how looking at film in particular—a form which tells stories through images and spatial trajectories as well as just text—is a useful means of accreting experience in envisioning space as possessing narrative agency. Film's potential rests in the fact that it allows for links between narrative and space to emerge which do not necessarily rely upon notions of representation: film does not rely solely upon the textual representation of spaces but is rather able to move between different spaces without the

overwhelming impression of direction from any omniscient human or imposed narrative agency. As a result, film allows a way in to observing the forms of cultural production as spaces whose narratives are catalysed and energised by agencies other than those exerted by their human protagonists.

Furthermore, *Metropolis* is frequently read as a descent narrative, telling of a journey into the underworld by a protagonist who seeks information and truth: Alan Williams (1974, p.18) describes a lack or '*manque*' at the opening of the film in which Freder, the son of Metropolis's ruler Joh Fredersen who keeps the hoards of the city's homogenised workers enslaved under his command, 'discovers his lack of *knowledge* of the workers which institutes the next portion of the narrative in which he descends' (see also Elsaesser, 2000, p.53). Elsewhere, commentary on *Metropolis* has allied the film with the Messianic descent narrative noted by Holderness; Freder's descent into the workers' world of machines leads to his exaltation as the long awaited 'mediator' between the head of the master and the hands of the workers, meaning that in this sense Freder 'is quite explicitly presented as a Christ figure' (Rutsky, 2000, p.219). *Metropolis* also sees the coming together of an urban underground with a model of descent narrative which involves a dissolution and re-working of the self (and to which more attention will be paid in due course): Freder Jnr., upon realising the suffering of his father's workforce, announces to one of the workers that he wishes to swap lives with him, taking over his work at the machine in what can be read as a willing dissolution of self, swapping his white, ethereal robes for the worker's overall.

The underground Londons with which Williams, Gaiman and Hill present us lie at an obvious intersection of the underground discourses identified so far. Like the strange worlds

of De Plancy and Verne *et al.*, these authors' literary London undergrounds house strange peoples and provide deeply defamiliarising spaces of removal from everyday life aboveground. Like the sewers of Hugo's Paris, these contemporary subterranean Londons are sprawling, confounding and consistently defy human attempts to rationalise and contain them. And finally, like Lang's *Metropolis*, the contemporary writers' London underworlds consist of a web of different pockets and layers, some of which are deeply entwined in the operations of the consumerist city above, others of which are unassimilated, unmapped and potentially subversive. For this reason therefore, the subterranean Londons portrayed by Williams, Gaiman and Hill perfectly capture the kind of underground which this discussion seeks to explore and account for: namely, an underground which is at the same time both of and other than the capitalist-driven surface world, and whose consequent hybridity proves instrumental in the contemporary author's re-writing of the urban descent narrative. As Rüdiger Görner describes, London's underground is a '[l]abyrinth of labyrinths: the maze in the underworld. London's underground canals, rivers, the Underground system. Down in the depths [...]. For the Londoner spends a good part of his life in this underground, in poorly-ventilated shafts, in overcrowded trains' (2007, p.37). Görner thus illustrates the space beneath London as a mixture of the ancient and unruly (the rivers) and the man-made business and lifestyle venture (the Tube). However, it is only because of its close assimilation into the networks of capitalism that subterranean London offers contemporary authors the opportunity to combine the everyday and the familiar with the unfamiliar, in order to present an uncanny *reductio ad absurdum* of the highly ordered, managed and capital-driven city aboveground. Furthermore, as was seen in *Metropolis*, this slippage between the appropriated and un-appropriated spaces of London's underground will no doubt give each novel a spatial dimension: a three-dimensional narrative form across and through which different manifestations and

connotations of underground space move and circulate, capturing the human protagonist in their web of agency and potential energy as they do so. As a result, we now turn to examine more precisely the ways in which the contemporary London descent narrative envisions subterranean London as capable of encouraging even the most stubborn of human protagonists into a deep re-conceptualisation of their very relationship to selfhood, otherness and space.

The ‘Self-Defining’ Descent Narrative

In Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* (1996), Tobias Hill’s *Underground* (1999) and Conrad Williams’s *London Revenant* (2004), the unshakable ideological and representational baggage of the underground rises persistently to the surface. All three novels evoke a number of the classical and traditional descent narrative genres noted above, including descent in order to discover esoteric knowledge, descent to rescue or avenge a loved one and descent which echoes that of Messianic redemption. In these novels however, none of these previously addressed models of descent narrative take precedence. For, rather than as a means towards the discovery of knowledge, vengeance or the redemption from sin, it is rather as the crux of a crisis of selfhood that descent into London’s underworld occurs for each of Gaiman’s, Hill’s and Williams’s protagonists. Consequently, the model of descent narrative which closely allies all three novels is one which has not yet been explored in detail, but is identified by Rachel Falconer in her study *Hell in Contemporary Literature* (2005) as a classical katabatic narrative. In her study, Falconer describes this form of narrative as a descent to some kind of Hell, which forms a ‘transformative passage, the destruction and rebirth of the self through an encounter with the absolute Other’ (p.1). Falconer continues, arguing that ‘Western culture is saturated with the idea of a self being forged out of an infernal journey’ (p.4); as a result, she

contends, ‘the katabatic journey, which is structured as a descent to the interior and return, has become one of the principal ways of “telling the self” in modern times’ (p.27). In more detail, Falconer proceeds, this particular kind of descent narrative consists of:

coming to know the self, regaining something or someone lost, or acquiring superhuman powers or knowledge. The descent requires the hero to undergo a series of tests and degradations, culminating in the collapse or dissolution of the hero’s sense of selfhood. (p.3)

Immediately, the protagonists featured in all three novels featured here can, at first glance, be read as fulfilling such criteria. Firstly, all three central characters begin their respective tales expressing a need to ‘regain’ some notion of coherent selfhood: a notion which, at the outset of each novel, seems to prove somewhat ‘lost’, elusive and increasingly tenuous for each protagonist. For Richard Mayhew in *Neverwhere*, Gaiman’s narrative suggests a dislocating gap in Richard’s sense of self which stems from unresolved childhood experience: ‘[a]s a child, Richard had had nightmares in which he simply wasn’t there, in which [...] nobody ever noticed him at all’ explains *Neverwhere*’s omniscient narrator (Gaiman, 1996, p. 60). Furthermore, the death of both his parents has instilled in Richard a bereft feeling of lost origins and ontological frailty: ‘Richard’s own parents were both dead,’ the narrator confirms, describing how Richard had spent the last few days of his mother’s life ‘sitting beside her bed. Sometimes she had known him; at other times she had called him by his father’s name’ (p.58). Indeed, the loss of or estrangement from one’s parents and the consequent alienation from the most immediate source of one’s own back-story is just as emphatic a motif for Hill and Williams. In *Underground*, his first published prose novel, Hill presents a narrative that shifts back and forth: chapters following protagonist Casimir’s days as a Tube worker, set in the

present day and related by an omniscient narrator, are punctuated by sections telling of Casimir's childhood back in Poland, in which he is granted his own first-person narrative voice. As John Berger's quote noted at the opening of chapter one might suggest, *Underground* thus resembles a three-dimensional space in and across which various agencies bring narrative strands and events into constellation, at the very narrative centre of which lies the London Underground. As the novel transpires, latter sections of the book feed back to inform the former, revealing Casimir's alienation from his own origins and consequent tenuousness of self. Casimir's uncertainties reside with his mother, who disappears whilst her son and his father embark upon a trip in which Casimir is initiated in his father's black-market business of smuggling materials for the manufacture of chemical weapons. 'My mother I never saw again,' says Casimir to Alice, the ethereal homeless lover he meets on the Underground, 'after she left, I couldn't live with my father. I stayed in youth hostels [...]. Then on the streets' (Hill, 1999, p.177). Furthermore, Hill's narrative slowly reveals Casimir's mother's Jewish heritage, and we discover how the twelve-year-old Casimir was told that his mother was sent during the war 'to the camps. Buchenwald. Her whole family died there' (p.198). As a result, Casimir grows up refusing to believe that his mother ever suffered from the Alzheimer's disease with which she was diagnosed, instead insisting that '[w]hat my mother has is not a disease. It is that she wants to forget so much' (p.159). As a result of the loss of his mother's testimony and his increasing estrangement from his father, Casimir is left with a deeply fraught and incomplete sense of selfhood, questioning '[h]ow is it that I came to be born?' (p.243).

Indeed, underlying the anxieties and often fragile mentality of Adam Buckley, the protagonist of Williams's *London Revenant*, is a very similar anomaly. Like both Richard and Casimir, Adam's dislocated sense of self resides with his mother, who died of an aneurysm

whilst writing a letter to her sister, the last words of which appear unexplained at the outset of the novel: 'Adam is fine too, reading lots this summer, he looks [...]' (Williams, 2004, p.5). As Adam comes to admit, 'I've spent so much time, too much time, trying to work out how she was going to end that sentence' (p.169). His mother's unfinished letter captures poignantly Adam's inability to ever determine or discover himself through his mother's eyes, setting up a tenuous sense of self which underlies Adam's story and further reflects that aspect of Falconer's descent narrative criteria in which a disrupted sense of self requires action from the protagonist in order to reclaim the selfhood that has apparently been 'lost.'

Secondly, all three novels further follow Falconer's model as each protagonist, with their fraught and insubstantial sense of self, embarks upon something resembling an underground quest, or 'series of tests' as Falconer describes, which ultimately move them towards the rebirth of self which Falconer emphasises. After unsuspectingly coming to the aid of an injured girl he finds lying in the street, Richard is rejected by his fiancée Jessica and strangely becomes invisible to all in the world of aboveground London: 'It's like I've become some kind of non-person,' he expresses (Gaiman, 1996, p.63). In an attempt to seek some answers, Richard sets off in pursuit of Door, the strange girl whom he rescued, and in doing so is drawn into her strange home of London Below, whose inhabitants speak to rats and eat rooks and ravens. Richard then becomes embroiled in a quest in which he and Door must pass a series of 'ordeals' in order to collect a unique key from the possession of a company of Black Friars: a key which will ultimately lead to information as to the murderer of Door's family and Richard's restoration to London Above. Richard's task in the Ordeal of the Key is to undergo a test of character and self-belief, in which he is taunted by and must resist apparitions of himself in the guise of loved ones from his aboveground life, who try to convince him that his

underground ordeal exists only in his imagination, brought on by ‘some kind of nervous breakdown’ (pp.253-54). To complete the series of tests and reach the Angel called Islington who, it is believed, can ultimately restore Richard to his previous aboveground life, Richard must then also slay the Beast of London, which resides within the labyrinth beyond which Islington can be found. In Hill’s novel, Casimir’s is a quest which takes him through areas of underground London which exceed even his extensive knowledge of the capital’s subterranean tunnels and passageways. London’s landscape and the idiosyncratic lives (like Casimir’s) which weave in and out of the capital are a recurring theme through much of Hill’s work: the skyline of a near-future London excessively driven by the circulation of digital money haunts his later novel *The Cryptographer* (2003). Better known as a poet however, London features as ‘an object of love’ (Szirtes, 2006) in Hill’s collection *Nocturne In Chrome and Sunset Yellow* (2006), with a tube passenger’s inability to ‘disconnect’ from surface, consumerist life granted specific exploration in his verse ‘To a Boy on the Underground.’ In *Underground* then, Casimir takes it upon himself to find the perpetrator of a string of crimes in which young women are being pushed underneath Tube trains; his quest however also evokes the model of descent embarked upon in order to avenge a loved one, since the criminal in question turns out to be a previous, abusive foster-parent of Casimir’s underground-dwelling lover Alice. Unlike Richard and Adam, Casimir chooses this quest for himself, declaring ‘[w]ill you help me find him? I want him found’ (Hill, 1999, p.88), and judges himself in his failings when he goes into shock after discovering one of the killer’s victims, lamenting ‘I would liked to have been stronger’ (p.131). Nevertheless, it remains a subterranean quest.

Finally, Adam’s quest in *London Revenant* is slightly more complex. Diagnosed by his doctor as suffering from narcolepsy, the narrative transpires to reveal that during Adam’s so-called blackouts, he is actually transported into a realm beneath London, a home for the city’s

missing persons who have been recovered by sentinels of the underground world in order to take up a new life there. What appear to be attacks of narcolepsy are therefore transformative passages in which Adam descends below ground and becomes his subterranean alter-ego Monck, 'chosen' by Odessa, a senior member of this London underworld, to pursue and capture the unruly Blore: a being once belonging to the underground community, but who has now turned apparently evil, pushing commuters under Tube trains and threatening to betray and expose his fellow 'Undermen' in their plan to dig through into their long-coveted secret underground city, Beneoethan. "I've been chosen..." says Monck, "Odessa selected me for a task. She wants me to hunt down Blore. The man who threatens all this [...]. She wants me to drop him before he exposes us Topside" (Williams, 2004, p.160). Subsequently, the fact that Richard's quest is one in which he confronts apparitions of himself, that Casimir's involves a questioning as to his own strength, and that Adam's must be carried out by his underworld doppelganger even further suggest that Gaiman, Hill and Williams present their readers with tales of descent which fit the criteria of Falconer's model of traditional katabatic narrative, central to which is the dissolution of the protagonist's previous self.

However, there are two crucial issues raised within each novel that problematise such a straightforward reading. For, what is most salient for our present work is that both these issues are fundamentally *spatial* in nature and concern the hybrid nature of the underground and its potential to exert agency over those who attempt to master it. The former of these issues surrounds the fact that all three protagonists' tenuousness of self is accompanied conspicuously by an exaggerated sense of dislocation in urban space; the latter addresses the nature of and role played by the specifically urban underground London evoked by each author.

The Relationship between Selfhood and Spatiality

The first of these issues arises in the quests or tests faced by each protagonist during their time spent beneath London. We have already established that each text meets Falconer's criteria by involving the central character in such tests of self, character and deftness after experiencing feelings akin to a loss or crisis of selfhood. The first way in which all three novels conspicuously *exceed* Falconer's conditions for the self-shaping descent narrative however comes in the fact that each of Richard, Casimir and Adam/Monck not only suffer a tenuous sense of self, but also experience a simultaneous difficulty in getting to grips with the vastness of London, and in relating to the organisation and complexity of city-space itself. This may, indeed, come as little surprise, since psychological discourse has recently stressed the manner in which neurobiology 'sees the neural processing of information placing the organism in space as an underpinning to a sense of self' (Katz, 2005, p.1213). Howard M. Katz notes a correlation between patients' reports of dreams in which 'space was poorly defined, foggy, or unbounded', and a corresponding 'fragile [...] sense of self' displayed by these same clients (p.1228). In other words, Katz notes that patients whose dreams demonstrate an inability to locate oneself in space and to use space creatively and productively often also display a weakened sense of self. Subsequently, Katz concludes that 'observations of the close relation of a more free use of space and an expanded sense of self support a notion that "our space *is* ourselves"' (p.1215). Relating a very similar argument to literary studies, Jane Augustine also notes that the city is more likely to be portrayed as an 'active agent' for fictional protagonists who feel 'rootless,' are 'in physical and cultural flux' and are 'shaky and

uncertain in personal identity and consciousness' (1991, p.74).⁷ Subsequently, both Katz's and Augustine's keenness to equate a tenuous sense of being with an equally tenuous sense of spatiality here echoes Paul Carter's reading of R.D Laing noted earlier, which emphasises Laing's belief that spatial fears are often phobic manifestations of some deeper 'ontological insecurity' (Carter, 2002, p.33). Here, therefore, do we begin to see the ways in which these contemporary urban descent narratives engage deeply with the issue of spatial experience itself, and the ways in which exposure to a confounding underground setting can encourage radical revisions of the ways in which one conceptualises such experience. For, it is no coincidence that neither Gaiman's, Hill's nor Williams's protagonists are indigenous Londoners. Richard, moving to London from a 'small Scottish town' (Gaiman, 1996, p.1), feels at the outset of *Neverwhere* as if 'he was leaving somewhere small and sensible that made sense for somewhere huge and old that didn't' (p.5). Indeed, before adapting *Neverwhere* into novel form, Gaiman and British comic Lenny Henry initially devised and launched the tale as a 1996 television series. In the series, Richard is portrayed by British actor Gary Bakewell as possessing a distinctive Scottish brogue which not only sets him apart from the less conspicuous English accents of his aboveground peers including Jessica and work colleague Gary, but also identifies him as a non-native Londoner. Furthermore, Richard finds existing representations of the capital deceptive and confusing, a consternation brought to light as 'he realised that the Tube map was a handy fiction that made life easier but bore no resemblance to the shape of the city above' (p.10). In *Underground*, Casimir is an even more conspicuous outsider or new-comer to London: a Polish immigrant who, parted from his mother and estranged from his father, wonders aimlessly beneath subways and railway arches

⁷ A similar argument identifying a contiguity between tenuous feelings of selfhood and a tenuous sense of space is made by Hermione Lee in her biography of Elizabeth Bowen, to which Lawrence Phillips refers in his reading of Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* in his study *London Narratives* (2006): 'What has always ominously characterized her [Bowen's] treatment of place is the loss of self. When places cease to function properly, their inhabitants lose selfhood, and are doubly disinherited' (Lee, 1981, p.158, quoted in Phillips, 2005, p.17).

as part of ‘an old habit, the looking for someone familiar in these lost places’ (Hill, 1999, p.58). And thirdly Adam, whose move to London comes after leaving his childhood home of Warrington in the North West of England, is found at the opening of *London Revenant* lamenting that ‘lately London appeared to me more and more as an alien city in which I no longer felt welcome’ (Williams, 2004, p.7). Frustrated by his difficulties in coming to terms with the complexity of his adopted metropolis continues further into the narrative, Adam feels as if ‘London was the lock on a safe that I had the combination to, but all of the numbers on the dial had rubbed off’ (p.81). As Lawrence Phillips describes as characteristic of the ‘newcomer’ to London therefore, all three protagonists ‘profoundly lack the close association with any part of the physical city as lived space’ which might offer the feelings of rootedness which they so lack (2006, p.108).

It goes without saying that the increasing illegibility of the city is a well-established theme in contemporary London writing. As the narrator of Martin Amis’s *London Fields* bemoans, ‘[t]here was a time when I thought I could read the streets of London. [...] But now I don’t think I can. Either I’m losing it or the streets are getting harder to read. Or both. [...] The streets are illegible. You just cannot read them anymore’ (1990, p.367). What is definitive about the contemporary London descent narratives assessed here however are their extensions of the trope of London’s illegibility into an exploration of the ways in which a feeling of ‘loss’ of self occurs simultaneously, for the urban subject, with an inability to sufficiently conceptualise, master and ‘know’ the city in which they find themselves. The materiality of London’s underground space, it would appear, and the protagonist’s relationship to it, proves somehow significant in these particular narratives of the underground in a fashion for which Falconer’s criteria do not account. To discover more about this saliency of the underground space itself, so to speak, requires reading on to find yet another pattern threaded through all

three texts in which the space beneath the city intervenes and disrupts all three protagonists' attempts to master London—and indeed, any space—for themselves.

Firstly, just as Richard begins to feel that he has begun 'slowly, by a process of osmosis and white knowledge [...] to comprehend the city' (Gaiman, 1996, p.10), his relation to space is thrown back into disarray after his encounter with Door. As he first descends below ground in order to find Door with his underworld helper the Marquis de Carabas, Richard admits 'that he did not know very much about what went on beneath the streets of London' (p.49), and is repeatedly chastised by the sarcastic Marquis for his 'total ignorance' of subterranean life (p.144). In the first section of his underground quest to track down Door, he is led by another helper, the rat-speaker Anaesthesia, to the Floating Market: a bartering event held regularly in London Below, in a shifting location. Having to cross a high and hazardous bridge to reach the market, Richard begs "'Can't we get to the market some other way?'" to which Anaesthesia equivocally replies 'We can get to the place it's in [...]. But the market won't be there'" (p.103). Incredulously Richard retorts "'But that's ridiculous. I mean, something's either there or it's not. Isn't it?'" to which Anaesthesia merely shakes her head (*Ibid.*). The linear laws of time and space which Richard strived to master in the upper world simply do not apply in London Below. Just as Hugo presented the Paris sewers of *Les Misérables* as sprawling and unconquerable therefore, so does the underground's ability to confound any human attempt to contain and understand it highlight subterranean London as a narrative agent, embroiling the protagonist even further into its confounding spatio-temporal knots.

Once again, the other texts follow suit. Early in *Underground*, Hill presents Casimir as confident in his abilities to navigate the Underground: 'The feeling of control in the tunnels and halls [...] the underground's great extent and age were things he learned later, but the sense of order has never gone away, not yet' (Hill, 1999, p.8). Indeed, ownership of

underground space means a great deal to Casimir, as we find out when his younger self accidentally discovers some old mines near his childhood home: 'I get another loose stone and scratch my name zigzag across the walls; KAZIMIERZ. Now it is mine, a secret place deep in the woods' (p.116). Furthermore, he rejoices when the subterranean city proves him right, validating the knowledge he has acquired as he deftly measures his way through the Tubes tunnels, '[e]xhilarated to have got something right; the concrete fact of the abandoned station, here in front of him' (pp.138-39). However, when women begin to mysteriously fall in front of Tube trains, and bizarre graffiti appears in areas of the Underground system thought inaccessible to the public, Casimir begins to 'wonder [...] how much he has ever understood of the system' (p.92). His sense of mastery over subterranean London starts to falter, and the vast underground city starts to exceed his existing knowledge structures:

'I was wrong, he thinks. With the thought comes the dizziness [...] as if he is losing control [...] the blueprint in his mind fades and falters. Casimir realizes he does not know where all the doorways go. The feeling of dizziness rises in him again...' (p.40)

Indeed, the uncontainable and confounding subterranean city yet again interrupts the protagonist's attempts to master his spatial environment in *London Revenant* too. In response to the sense of intense disorientation and tenuousness of self which characterise his life in London, Adam tries to seek a city which will externalise and glorify himself: 'London was meant to be my map, something that would reflect me, give me more of a clue as to who I was and what I could do with myself. But all of its streets were being dug up, or barricaded, or designated No Entry' (Williams, 2004, p.64). He remains intensely possessive about city-

space, wanting it to tell him something about himself; like the young Casimir, he has the desire to ‘find my own secret place, my own pocket’ (p.96). Adam’s friends then mysteriously become overtaken by the compulsion to seek out London’s ‘Lost Places,’ and in order to uncover ‘some lost text, a key that would unlock the city’s underworld’ (p.138), they adopt an almost scientific line of enquiry, consulting books and maps in an attempt to discover ‘the skull beneath the skin’ (*Ibid.*). Such vocabulary thus strongly evokes the ‘digging down into the earth,’ quest-for-truth model of nineteenth-century science which echoes so strongly throughout the wilderness descent narratives of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Europe. Thus, after concluding that gaining mastery over London’s sprawl will somehow help his fellows to regain a ‘sense of who they really are’, Adam decides ‘I wanted in on it’ (p.85), and follows his friend Iain into a world in which streets excavate themselves and one discovers ‘turnings off main roads where, on the map, there shouldn’t be any’ (p.89). However, rather than conquering both the city and his feelings of alienation, Adam instead finds that his narcoleptic ‘fugues’—in truth, his descents into the underground city and into his subterranean alter-ego—‘were occurring with increasing frequency’ (p.163), leaving him with more and more ‘chunks of time’ in which “‘I don’t know where I am, what I’m doing or who I’m with’” (p.111). This leads Adam to even further abandon hope of restoring any coherent sense of self, asking whether society ‘dilutes us to a point where we can never regain ourselves?’ (p.164). The pattern is therefore rather more complex in *London Revenant* but is still very much present: the protagonist’s attempt to combat a sense of alienation by achieving mastery and control over the London metropolis is overthrown by the intervention of subterranean forces.

‘Hybrid’ Underground London and Spatial Agency

It is here that we come to the second manner in which all three novels further exceed the model of katabatic narrative outlined by Falconer. For, *Neverwhere* sees Richard's newly-achieved means of conceiving and conceptualising space thrown into profound disarray by the peculiar, space-bending world of London Below. *Underground* follows Casimir as the unsettling events taking place on the Tube and his discovery of a homeless community living in the Underground system begin to deeply question his sense of 'control' over his surroundings. *London Revenant* tells of how Adam's attempts to gain a sense of ownership over London and thus recover some coherent sense of self are foiled by the pull of the subterranean city, which continues to claim him and further exaggerate his feelings of disorientation and alienation. Ultimately therefore, it becomes clear that these contemporary novels of the urban underground cannot be contained within Falconer's model, in which a feeling of loss leads to descent underground and a series of tests resulting in the dissolution and eventual rebirth of the protagonist's self. Gaiman's, Hill's and Williams's narratives are, indeed, rather more complex. In each novel, subterranean London expresses a narrative agency which persistently confounds and contradicts each protagonist's existing knowledge of and relationship to space, to themselves and to others. Furthermore, these novels offer descent narratives in which an *integral part* of the protagonists' 'tests' is precisely the question as to whether the underground city can successfully teach each protagonist a new way of approaching, relating to and conceptualising space, encouraging them to abandon a rigid sense of the monadic self and to be brought instead towards a means of existing and relating to the spatial environment which is more fluid, and which does not always grant agency exclusively to that human self.

In chapter two then, we saw how abandoned spaces offered writers like Royle and Sinclair opportunities to explore how such spaces might encourage protagonists to adopt an approach

towards space (and to the ‘Other’) based *not* upon the need to possess or to master: the needs which tend to overwhelmingly govern such relations in the capitalist, consumerist-oriented cities of Royle’s and Sinclair’s texts. It was here that we turned to see how Walter Benjamin champions the derelict corners of the city as providing potentially revelatory dialectical images, suggesting that obsolete spaces and marginal objects can teach new ways of knowing which consumer capitalism may find counter-intuitive, and thus may even be construed as imbalanced or mad. This act of ‘teaching’ is thus precisely the role given to the underground space in all three of Gaiman’s, Hill’s and Williams’s novels, constituting an extra layer to these descent narratives which, as we shall see, cannot be accounted for by Falconer’s model of self-defining katabatic narrative. Nor, indeed, can it be theorised through Pike’s suggested use of Lefebvre’s spatial triad to account for the complex multifarious nature of the subterranean world.

Underground spaces are, however, categorically different from abandoned spaces. The latter, as contended in chapter two, offer protagonists new possibilities in approaching space, objects and the Other due to their dissociation from teleological nexuses of capitalist productivity. Subterranean London however is not so clearly dissociated from the capitalist city. Like the every-city of Lang’s *Metropolis*, the subterranean Londons of Gaiman’s, Hill’s and Williams’s texts are crucially *both* inside and outside capitalism: on the one hand, they are vital thoroughfares for the City’s commuters and for the marketing messages of the world’s largest companies; on the other hand, they represent an unruly and unmappable labyrinth of tunnels, passageways and potentially fantastical places which refuse to be contained within the apparently rational organisation of the utilitarian Underground. In other words, these underground realms do not encourage a new means of relating to one’s surroundings through the same kind of removal from the capitalist-oriented city as is represented by the abandoned

urban space. Instead, it is rather the inside/outside hybrid nature of Gaiman's, Hill's and Williams's subterranean Londons which constitutes the crux of their protagonists' 'tests.' For, the crucial question posed by these contemporary descent narratives is whether Richard, Casimir and Adam respectively can renounce the narrow-minded attitudes to space, time, selfhood and experience represented by the capitalist underground, and instead accept the new approach encouraged by the more unearthly and unruly subterranean spaces which they experience, allowing them to emerge reborn from their journey of descent.

The Descent Narrative as the Underground's 'Lesson'

Indeed, for all three authors featured here, the very fact that subterranean London is both assimilated into the life of the capitalist city whilst also being the antithesis to that city—as a space of waste, obsolescence and potentially of magic—makes London's underground the ideal narrative device through which Gaiman, Hill and Williams can explore the above issue. As we shall discover, it is in their rude juxtaposition of capitalist-driven surface life with the counter-intuitive and the obsolete that the subterranean cities of contemporary London descent narratives act as something of a *reduction ad absurdum* of what Peter Brooker observes as 'an unprecedented combination across the urban spaces of contemporary cities of physical proximity and socio-economic distance' (2001, p.7). These hybrid literary undergrounds also interrogate the ways in which space is capable of intervening in the conventional structure of formulaic narratives, exerting an agency which deviates narrative form away from pre-conceived models such as those identified by Holderness and Falconer, towards new forms within which fictional protagonists' usual means of conceptualising spatial experience are actively challenged. In *Neverwhere* for example, the juxtaposition of a capitalist Underground in which one finds oneself 'kicked and buffeted by commuters' (Gaiman, 1996, p.256) and the

non-capitalist 'London Below' in which bartering and self-sufficiency dominate, plays an integral role in the tests with which Richard is confronted in his quest to avenge Door and to return 'home.' As noted earlier, Richard's first test is a test of character in which he finds himself 'filthy, covered in black, encrusted dirt [...], standing on a platform of a busy Underground station, in the heart of rush hour' (pp.252-53). He is then confronted by apparitions of himself, who take the guise of his ex-fiancée Jessica and his work colleague Gary. Richard's second-self elusively urges him to "[l]ook at this place, try to see the people, try to see the truth... you're already the closest you've been in a week to reality..." (p.252), a scene evocatively realised in the fourth episode of the initial televised series of *Neverwhere*, in which Richard's confrontation with Jessica's and Gary's apparitions are spliced and interrupted by split-second flashbacks from his aboveground life. As the Ordeal unfolds however, the meaning of his apparitions' challenge becomes clear. When Richard asks Jessica's image whether her appearance is part of his 'Ordeal' in order to extrapolate the desired key from the Black Friars, his second self chides "[l]isten to yourself [...] Can't you tell how ridiculous all this sounds?" (p.253), whilst Jessica's image tries to convince Richard that his subterranean adventure is nothing more than a delusion brought on by a nervous breakdown (p.254). Gary's image then replaces Jessica's, and continues to negate Richard's experiences in London Below, discrediting Door and Anaesthesia as 'imaginary friends' (p.255). The advertising surfaces of the Underground then join in to taunt Richard: 'The posters advertised credit cards and sports shoes and holidays in Cyprus,' but as Richard stares at them, 'the words on the posters twisted and mutated. New messages: END IT ALL was one of them. PUT YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR MISERY. BE A MAN-DO YOURSELF IN. HAVE A FATAL ACCIDENT TODAY' (p.257).

In this sense, Gaiman's very setting of a subterranean London which holds both capitalist everyday life and otherworldly experience in such close balance actively constitutes Richard's underground 'test' by presenting him with the ultimate juxtaposition. On the one hand, he can succumb to the media messages and to the narrow-minded judgements of the aboveground capitalist world epitomised by Jessica and Gary, and accept his descent as merely the delusion of a deranged and suicidal state of mind. Alternatively, he can reject this version of 'reality', as his other-self describes, and trust that the strange underground world of London Below, with its peculiar inhabitants and apparently inexplicable spatio-temporal laws, is just as 'real' as the aboveground world of which Richard was once part. At the climax of his ordeal, Richard finds in his pocket a talisman given to him by Anaesthesia earlier in his journey, and in doing so finds the strength to resist the taunts of capitalist surface mentality. Divided by the demands of both worlds, Richard does then indeed experience something of the dissolution of self which Falconer proscribes: 'Richard had no idea who he was, anymore; no idea what was or what was not true; nor whether he was brave or cowardly, mad or sane' (p.259). Despite this however, rather than throwing himself in front of the next train as the station's twisted billboards suggest, 'he knew the next thing he had to do,' and boards the train which takes him back to London Below, and to his quest to find the Angel Islington (*Ibid*). The implication in *Neverwhere* therefore exceeds that put forward by Falconer's criteria for the traditional katabatic narrative, as the dissolution of self experienced by Richard becomes all part of his 'test.' As Katz might well suggest, becoming accustomed to strange spatial laws and disorienting experiences below ground has a profound effect upon Richard's concept of selfhood. Able to experience and entertain the thought of existing in a state other than that of the monadic, coherent self which he attempts to forge for himself in his previous aboveground life, Richard steps onto the train. In doing so, he not only rejects the capitalist, consumerist

surface-city's reading of his descent as mental aberration, but he also implicitly accepts the 'reality' of London Below and, with that, accepts the possibility of a realm in which space operates very differently from the laws to which he is accustomed. For in London Below, as seen in Richard and Anaesthesia's journey to the floating market, a journey is not merely a means of reaching one's destination. Rather, journey and destination are intertwined in ways that the surface mentality finds hard to conceive: the means by which you reach a place becomes part of that place itself. Furthermore, London Below presents the possibility of a world in which spaces are not linked by material conjunction devices such as the streets, roads and pathways to which we are accustomed in the linear-bound surface world. Instead, as is shown in Door's grandfather's construction of an 'associative house,' London Below entertains other means of bringing different spaces together: in the associative house, rooms are 'scattered all over the Underside', and are brought together to form a building not by their physical proximity but by the 'memories' and resonances through which they are linked (p.84). In other words, spaces are brought together not through concrete but through affective and memorial associations. In passing his test therefore, Richard chooses to accept as 'real' a world which requires that one abandon one's commitment to the notions of self and the spatio-temporal relations which govern the capitalist-driven aboveground city. It is thus, therefore, that Gaiman presents a descent narrative in which the underworld into which the protagonist descends teaches them a new approach to selfhood and spatial relations: a teaching which is integral to both the protagonist's test and his dissolution of self, as Falconer might describe. The narrative crux of Gaiman's descent narrative is therefore constituted in the agencies of an underground London which brings together both a capitalist-driven world and a logic-defying anti-capitalist life in close juxtaposition, presenting both Richard and the reader to consider the respective realities and madnnesses of each. Richard's initial descent, as we saw earlier,

came in response to his despair at his invisibility, with the implicit hope of regaining his subsequent 'lost' feeling of selfhood. However, what *London Below* teaches him is that he cannot merely regain a 'lost' sense of selfhood as Falconer's model might suggest, but instead must transform the way in which he thinks about selfhood entirely. It is the very intricacy of the subterranean space itself which thus pushes the descent narrative here to its climax, emerging as an agent which interacts with Richard and, indeed, a harbinger for ingenuity and innovation in a usually conventional and highly-formulaic literary form.

The case is more subtle yet similar in *Underground*. Again, Hill presents a subterranean London which yokes together both the capitalist-driven city-space with the strange, unsettling and uncontainable underground spaces home to those who have fallen into a life outside of aboveground society, like Casimir's lover Alice. For Casimir however, the Underground is not merely a space of advertising and commuting as is emphasised in *Neverwhere*; it is also a space of labour. According to his supervisor Adams, Casimir needn't fear for his job as a Tube station assistant, since enough 'dirt ends up' in the Underground 'to keep you in work for years' (Hill, 1999, pp.7 & 8). Furthermore, Casimir realises that London's Underground is not only a source of labour and livelihood for himself, but also for countless other immigrants like himself, as he 'thinks of the staff list, the eclectic muddle of names from Africa and East Europe. The Underground has always been a place for immigrant workers. There are never enough people willing to work the tunnels' (p.60). Indeed, just as apparitions and the media images of the Underground try to bind Richard to the narrow thought patterns and spatial conceptualisations of the surface world, Casimir is repeatedly interpellated in a manner which attempts to keep his identity shackled to the capitalist-driven underground of labour. More subtly than in Richard's 'test' however, the way in which Casimir is thus interpellated is

through the recurring motif of naming, and through the way in which various members of the underground community choose to address him. In the first of the chapters which looks back upon his childhood, young Casimir asserts ‘I am Kazimierz’, hence emphasising the fact that Casimir and ‘Cass,’ as he is referred to by his work fellows, are Anglicisations of his Polish name. During working hours, Casimir’s name is repeatedly compromised by his colleagues, who ask ‘Cass- what’s his other name? Mikhail, probably. Rasputin or something. I don’t know’ (p.49). Whilst the foreignness of Casimir’s name keeps him firmly identified as one of the endless list of London’s immigrant underground workers, the repeated Anglicisations of his name invented and reinforced by his work colleagues even further attempt to fix Casimir’s identity as a cog in a London Underground characterised by labour, work and dominant, capitalist modes of social relation.

For Casimir however, the issue of naming bears even deeper significance with the revelation of his Hebrew middle name ‘Ariel,’ which translates as ‘lion’ (p.120). This middle name therefore associates Casimir with his mother’s Jewish heritage, as going into town to meet her one day, the young Casimir describes how ‘[s]he gathers me up and she whispers my other name, *Ariel*, our secret’ (p.76). As Casimir grows up however, the retrospective chapters of *Underground* relate his increasing efforts to deny or repress this Hebrew name; when his childhood sweetheart Hanna addresses him as ‘Ariel,’ the young Casimir retorts ‘[d]on’t call me that’ (p.108). At the close of the novel however, after having chased Alice’s carer—also the Tube murderer—through stairways, shafts and deep-shelters even further below London’s surface than the Tube tunnels themselves, Casimir is faced with a similar test and dissolution of self as that experienced by Richard during his Ordeal at Blackfriars. Pursuing the carer back into the tunnels of the civilian Underground, Casimir’s chase leads to the carer’s mortal injury in the path of an oncoming Tube train. Casimir’s test therefore, of catching the criminal and

avenging Alice, appears fulfilled. However, again echoing Richard's Ordeal in *Neverwhere*, Hill's evocation of an underground London which closely juxtaposes spaces of labour with spaces which are mysterious and refuse to be contained by Casimir's Underground 'knowledge', presents Casimir with an even further test. For, the very end of the novel sees Casimir take the carer in his arms and carry him towards Alice, concluding with the words, '[n]ow he can see Alice in the tunnel mouth. The light is behind her. He walks towards it, not looking back' (p.248). This movement towards Alice as the emphatic final action of the novel is therefore deeply symbolic. For, not only is Casimir fulfilling his test and avenging his underground lover by delivering her former abuser to die at her feet; he is also purposefully moving towards the only person in the present time-space of the novel to address him by his Hebrew name: 'You're stupid, Ariel Casimir' (p.222). Consequently, Casimir's final movement towards Alice can be read in a similar way to Richard's rejection of the taunts of the capitalist underground epitomised by his apparitions and the Tube's distorted advertising messages, and his choice to rather trust in the 'reality' of London Below. For Casimir, the first option would be to remain a drone in the capitalist-driven Underground, interpellated by Anglicisations or fabrications of his name spawned and perpetuated by the subterranean workforce, and confined to a subterranean city in which all spaces are accountable, mappable and can be brought under human control. His other option however is to choose a relationship with Alice, demonstrating a placement of trust in the more unruly, clandestine underground London which Alice inhabits and embodies: 'there are places she knows which we may not even have mapped' (p.184). Movement towards Alice however also represents Casimir's choice to reacquaint himself with his mother and his Jewish heritage, through a movement towards the only person in London who addresses him by the 'secret' name his mother gave him. For the purposes of this discussion therefore, this re-acknowledgement of his maternal

inheritance through Alice demonstrates how Casimir's experience within subterranean London itself delivers him towards both a new approach to space and to conceptualising selfhood.

Indeed, early in the novel, Casimir associates his mother with a fluid sense of spatiality, as his younger self narrates the manner in which 'Mother brought the story of Alice [In Wonderland] from France. Every time she drinks from a bottle, the whole world changes. Caterpillars as big as cows' (p.73). Casimir's memories of his mother are therefore bound up with a space-bending story in which objects and dimensions are neither fixed nor easily conceivable, and which thus offers a *new* approach to objects and to space itself in which the apparently inanimate takes on an agency previously thought impossible, or at least improbable. In moving towards Alice therefore, Casimir can thus, like Richard, be read as renouncing underground London as a rationalised and containable entity, and instead choosing to trust in the 'reality' of a spatial scheme like that of his mother's stories: a scheme in which space might, indeed, have an agency of its own, at times eluding human mastery and control. Indeed, as his pursuit of the carer leads Casimir into the deepest recesses of underground London in which he feels as if he 'is swimming out over some oceanic shelf' (p.234), the subterranean city and Casimir's childhood home of Poland begin to merge together as the narration of the chase transpires. Bringing together and concretising past and present therefore, underground London becomes a narrative agent which pushes the narrative towards its *denouement*. The tunnels Casimir traverses become almost indistinguishable in his mind from the mines he explored as a child, as 'for an instant the station fades back round him. He can smell the forest, which is also the smell of home' (p.238). Further still, with the carer in his sights, Casimir 'thinks of Poland again; the birch trees, whiter than snow. The carer's skin is white as the birch' (p.240). Just as Pike might describe therefore, the underground can never shake the past associations, resonances and memories with which, for Casimir, it is already so highly

invested. In finally emerging from the tunnel in which the carer is injured, Casimir then experiences a final shift in which the Underground, with its affective and memorial reverberations, breaks down the geographical boundaries between his new and old homelands, bringing the two immediately together as '[h]e tries to remember where he is coming out. London or Poland. The deep forest or Astrakhan' (p.247). Hill subsequently also exceeds Falconer's prescription for the self-defining descent narrative, employing a hybrid subterranean setting with the agency to collapse geographical barriers and defy aboveground laws of space and separation. As with Richard's Ordeal in *Neverwhere*, so in *Underground* does the agency of the underground space intervene in the structure of conventional narrative form, leading to narrative conclusions which re-write narrative models like those captured by Holderness and Falconer. Yet again, subterranean London presents a protagonist with yet a further 'test': namely, one in which he must put at risk the belief that 'in the Underground he knows everything' (p.238), and instead allow his underground experience to bring him to an acceptance of that more fluid, less masterful approach to space as featured in his mother's stories. In reaching such an acceptance therefore, Casimir also moves towards an ability to accept his own hybridity: rather than seeking to achieve a coherent, monadic sense of self with a sound mastery of London's city-space, Casimir's subterranean re-acquaintance with his maternal heritage demonstrates his acceptance of himself as the child of both Jewish and non-Jewish inheritance. As in *Neverwhere* therefore, Hill's descent narrative refuses to be contained within Falconer's criteria, as the hybrid subterranean city once again constitutes the protagonist's underground test: a test which involves not only the traditional acts of rescue, vengeance or the retrieval of information emphasised by Falconer, but also challenges the protagonist to discard their preconceived ideas as to the laws of space, time and location. In turn, the real test for both Richard and Casimir comes in whether they can leave behind their

aspirations to conquer and master the complex geography of London, and instead allow the subterranean city to instruct them in the ways of more fluid approach in which the underground space itself, with its powers to disorient and to break down geographical barriers with its weighty ideological, representational and memorial baggage, achieves an agency which acts back against human attempts to control and contain it.

Subterranean London therefore performs a diversion and subversion of the narrative form of the descent tale: a firm sense of spatiality and self are not coveted end-points, but rather restrictive surface-mentalities, the renunciation of which leads both Richard's and Casimir's stories to their respective conclusions. Indeed, this pattern continues in *London Revenant*, in which the world beneath London is emphatically expressed as a rude juxtaposition of capitalist and anti-capitalist impulses. From the outset of the narrative, the protagonist Adam notes the manner in which the penetration of London's capitalist agenda below ground has produced a space in which Londoners are at their most detached: 'Down there, people acted differently, it was almost a social requirement that nobody spoke to each other, that misery or boredom surfaced on each face' (Williams, 2004, p.9). In antithesis to this however is the character of Blore: a 'Topsider'-cum-underground-dweller who apparently turns evil, pushing commuters beneath Tube trains and threatening to expose his fellow subterraneans' plans to break through into the secret underground city of Beneoethan. Only at the very end of the novel however does the reader discover that Blore's killing spree is an act of resistance against the way in which subterranean London has become both a space of exploitative labour (as it is for Casimir) and an extension of the sleep-walking capitalist city above, as for Adam. Blore reveals that his great-grandfather was killed whilst excavating tunnels for the world's first deep-level underground railway, "the City of London and Southwark Subway" (p.224).

Again therefore, *London Revenant* echoes with resonances of both the descent embarked upon in order to avenge a loved one *and* the Messianic, redemptive descent narrative identified by Holderness, as Blore envisions himself as carrying out a redemptive mission, in memory of his great-grandfather, attempting to wake Topsiders from their sleepwalking lives and their complacent attitudes towards life and survival: 'London was suffocating from the weight of all the crap being unfolded into it' thinks Blore, and it is his 'impossible task' to 'try to unburden the city' (p.55). Blore abhors the way in which contemporary living in the age of late capitalism and consumerism has led so many people into a monotonous habit of merely existing rather than living, in which 'we live so close to each other and we never talk' (p.83). As a result, Blore argues that 'people [...] need to be shocked out of themselves, into new selves. Shock is what is needed' (p.197). Blore's statement here bears a double significance. First of all it identifies *London Revenant* as exceeding the parameters of Falconer's traditional katabatic criteria, suggesting that not only the protagonist of the tale but indeed the entire population of London are 'lost', and need to be led into a dissolution and rebirth of self. Secondly, the fact that Williams has Blore express the aim of his work as creating 'shock' also brings us immediately back to Benjamin's notion of dialectical imaging, in which 'the outmoded could provide an experience of shock, releasing repressed but familiar elements into new and potentially revolutionary constellations' (Poggi, 2003, p.400). I shall return to this point later, in the conclusion to this chapter. What remains to be pointed out for now is that despite the fact that Blore's 'mission' may well echo a number of the classical models of descent narrative outlined above, Williams rather uses Blore's vehement condemnation of capitalist-driven life on the Underground to set up a sharp contrast to the 'misery' and 'boredom' of commuters of which Adam takes note. This therefore highlights the fact that, just like Gaiman's and Hill's, Williams's novel can also be seen to exceed the self-defining

katabatic narrative outlined by Falconer, again employing a subterranean city-setting which both reinforces yet also reacts against the capitalist-driven agenda of the aboveground world: a city-setting which will also, ultimately, exerts an agency of its own as it plays an integral and formative part in Adam's underground test.

Indeed, *London Revenant* begins by situating Adam as very much embedded within the 'surface mentality' (p.206) of the capitalist, consumerist city. He stumbles across a 'strange sign' (p.8) which has been spray painted on abandoned houses, 'bus stop shelters,' and 'underpass walls' across the city (p.9): a sign which the novel's *dénouement* reveals as a plan charting the way into a secret underground city to which the 'lost' inhabitants of subterranean London have been trying to gain access. At the start of his story however, Adam appears committed to the mindset of his media-saturated consumer-culture, reading the map as 'some slick new advertising campaign, for some new breed of alcopop maybe, a series of teasers that would gradually be revealed to a public growing more and more curious' (*Ibid.*). This act of misreading therefore quite clearly demonstrates the way in which Adam's 'surface mentality' constitutes a blindness to the possibilities of what lies below London, beyond the immediately conceivable civilian Underground, and to the possibility of the existence of a spatial realm which defies human, 'surface' attempts to read, control and master it. Indeed, despite his desire to 'get in on' his friends' attempts to discover and claim ownership of London's 'secret pockets' and forgotten places (p.85), Adam's apparently closed-minded approach to space is further emphasised by his ignorance as to the potential and power of urban spaces which are not part of the working city's matrix of production and consumption. Covering a shift as a building site security guard for his friend Iain, Adam is approached by fellow guard MacCreadle, who affirms, "[i]t can be a beautiful building site, this, [...]. It fair bristles with potential, this place, don't you think?" (p.97). Adam, however, fails to share in MacCreadle's

wonder, merely deeming the place ““a shithole”” (*Ibid.*). MacCreadle despairs, warning Adam that he ““should spend a bit longer looking at places like this”” (*Ibid.*).

Like both Richard and Casimir therefore, Adam’s underground ‘test’ takes on an extra dimension in which the subterranean city itself challenges him to open his mind to spatial laws and possibilities which defy those according to which the surface-city operates. For not only is Adam, in the guise of his underground alter-ego Monck, given the task of ‘dealing with’ Blore. Additionally, the contrast Williams sets up between the deadened monotony of the commuter Underground and the magical and mysterious subterranean world to which Adam’s second-self Monck belongs once more emphasises that for Adam, as for Richard and Casimir, the underground test or quest also requires that he make a choice between two possibilities. He can remain as ‘Adam,’ shackled to his identity as a ‘Topsider’ and committed to the consumer-mentality of the aboveground city, unable to open his mind to the potential revelatory possibilities of spaces which lie outside the working life of that city. Alternatively he can, as encouraged by his subterranean companion Coin, ‘rid yourself of this surface mentality,’ and instead awaken himself to the ‘potential’ of the city’s liminal spaces, and even work towards accepting the reality of ‘a subterranean city that our forebears had pursued for centuries, a place many of us thought never existed’ (p.206). In other words, like Richard’s and Casimir’s, Adam/Monck’s underground ‘series of tests’ demonstrate a lucid, British-fiction example of a notion which Jane Augustine observes in the novels of Theodore Dreiser, Saul Bellow and Alison Lurie, in which the fictional city may exert an agency over a protagonist by ‘acting as a will or force or pressure upon him or her, producing a decision or reaction which would not have occurred otherwise’ (1991, p.74).

Again, like Richard and Casimir, Adam appears to embrace this lesson that subterranean London holds for him, and the narrative agency of the subterranean city exerts its influence

upon the novel's narrative resolution, pushing Adam/ Monck towards 'choosing' the underground. When the inhabitants of Underground London finally succeed in digging through into their long-coveted subterranean city, their action causes what those on the surface describe as an 'earthquake,' causing mass destruction to London's landscape and creating 'a new topography of urban mesas and buttes created from mangled traffic and the erupted complex of the Paddington Basin' (Williams, 2004, p.179). Adam however despairs at the ways in which aboveground London responds to this destruction, with 'a string of benefit concerts for the dead,' plans for a new pedestrianised city and the decision to merely seal off and thus repress the city's relationship with the Underground: 'The city was being given a facelift,' Adam laments, 'and people were buying into it' (p.211). Just like Richard's act of accepting the reality of London Below during his 'Ordeal' therefore, and like Casimir's final, emphatic movement towards Alice and thus towards the more fluid relationship with space which she and his mother's stories represent, Adam's final act also sees him renounce his 'surface mentality'. Adam/ Monck accepts the reality of London's subterranean Other, declaring that 'Topside' London 'was as real as anything my sleep-scarred mind had created. All that mattered, that was real, that had to be real, was here, now in front of me' (p.227). In re-descending at the end of the novel to a life in Beneoethan, the secret underground city, Adam/ Monck thus also chooses a relationship with urban space which, rather than being based upon the mastery and self-glorification which he seeks throughout the novel, is instead based upon a two-way form of interaction in which Adam/ Monck allows the unmapped underground to exert its agency and influence over him, rather than merely treating this agency as a source of fear and anxiety:

I got to the bottom and began walking, *allowing the tunnels to inspire me and draw me in*. Nourishing me. I felt lit from within, radiant [...] as I strode deeper into the earth [...] towards Beneoethan. I was looking forward to exploring the new city, sharing the surprises of its sprawl. (p.227, my italics)

As Katz might predict therefore, Adam/Monck's revisions of the ways in which he conceptualises and locates himself in space is accompanied by a simultaneous reconsideration of his approach to the notion of selfhood. In recognising the reality and the agency of the underground city, Williams's protagonist is brought to an acceptance of his existence as a dual-self—as Adam/Monck—as having both a Topside and a subterranean identity which are thus at odds with the coherent and tangible sense of self: with this 'sense of who they really are' to which Adam's friends think their interrogation into London's secret, hidden places earlier in the novel might lead (p.85). Indeed, the moniker 'Monck' is given to Adam since it was in the street of the same name that he was originally recovered and taken underground as a missing person. Nevertheless, the name also evokes the memory of George Monck, a professional soldier most renowned for fighting on *both sides* in the English Civil War. Consequently, choosing to accept his underground calling as Monck at the end of the novel can thus be seen as a moment at which Williams's protagonist accepts his identity as a dual-self, of which the aboveground component is by no means the most 'sane' or 'real'.

The contemporary London descent narrative therefore becomes less preoccupied by the restoration of a 'lost' sense of self as Falconer's criteria suggest, and is rather more focused upon the ways in which subterranean London demands that the protagonist re-learn both selfhood and spatiality as multifarious and porous. In this sense, this new conceptualisation of selfhood in which Adam/Monck is instructed by his subterranean environment echoes that championed by Teresa Brennan's work on affect as observed in chapter two: namely, the

challenging of the Western model of an impenetrable, monadic self ‘as a private fortress’ with ‘more permeable ways of being’ (Brennan, 2004, pp.15 & 12). Surely enough, as Falconer’s criteria convey, *London Revenant* does portray a protagonist who, during in a crisis of selfhood, descends into the underground only to ultimately emerge reborn from a collapse or dissolution of the self. Again however, Williams’s narrative exceeds that modelled by Falconer, introducing this further dimension in which the very spaces of subterranean London present the protagonist with a further test. This test is one in which the protagonist is presented with the opportunity to renounce his commitment both to the notion of the coherent, monadic self and to the need to master and control urban space: in other words, the conceptualisations of self and space according to which the aboveground, capitalist-driven city operates. Instead, like both Richard and Casimir therefore, Adam/Monck allows the subterranean city, with its surprising and confounding juxtapositions, to instil in him an entirely new approach both to spatiality and selfhood, rather than merely ‘regaining’ an existing sense of self which has been ‘lost’, as Falconer would have it. In all three of *Neverwhere*, *Underground* and *London Revenant* therefore, the very narrative purpose of the protagonist’s descent is not merely to fulfil the task of gathering information, the act of redemption or the recovery of a loved one from the underworld, as the previous accounts of the descent narrative observed at the outset of this chapter might emphasise. Nor does the descent merely represent a dissolution and rebirth of the self through a series of challenges as Falconer describes. For Gaiman, Hill and Williams rather, as we have discovered, the chief purpose of descent into the subterranean city beneath London is to offer the anxious, alienated subject the opportunity to re-evaluate their relationship to the city in which they find themselves, using the hybrid, capitalist/ anti-capitalist underground to encourage them to reconsider their very conceptualisations of space, ‘reality’ and selfhood. It is, therefore, the narrative agency of subterranean London that diverts

the narrative form of each novel away from the tropes of return and resolution mapped by Falconer. For Gaiman, Hill and Williams, unmappable undergrounds subvert the very mapping processes by which critics such as Holderness and Falconer attempt to categorise and identify descent narratives as representative of the formulaic structure of genre fiction. These unruly undergrounds do not ‘fit’ these previous categorical moulds: moulds which find little space for the discussion of the agency of the underground space itself. In the case of each novel discussed here however, it is the hybrid structure and the counter-intuitive spatio-temporal laws of the subterranean city which push each novel to its conclusion as each respective protagonist takes on board the new approaches to space and selfhood ‘taught’ by the underground: subsequently, through such a reading, we are able to see the ways in which the diversion of narrative form from established to fresh models of descent narrative can be substantially accounted for by the narrative agencies of the very spaces to which such narratives compulsively return.

Back to Benjamin: Accounting for Contemporary Descent Narratives

Towards the opening of this chapter, acknowledgement was given to David Pike’s enthusiasm for the use of Lefebvre’s triad of spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces in accounting for subterranean space in all its nuances and cultural appropriations. Again however, as in the case of abandoned spaces, the question was posed as to the legitimacy of using Lefebvre’s theory—one which stresses social space as both produced by and perpetuating a society’s dominant modes of production and social relation—to account for the literary employment of a genus of urban space which appeals to contemporary authors precisely due to its ambivalent relationship with or disassociation from such modes, and to the narrative agencies achieved by such settings as a precise consequence

of this ambivalence or dissociation. Furthermore however, any attempt at accounting for Gaiman's, Hill's and Williams's hybrid subterranean Londons through Lefebvre's scheme from *The Production of Space* falls into further difficulty when we look at Lefebvre's musings on the subterranean within this particular work. It is to this difficulty then that I wish to turn in conclusion here, moving instead towards framing the subterranean city found in contemporary British descent narratives according to a more Benjaminian scheme which allows for the exploration of the urban underground as a hybrid, complex and often confounding space.

As we have already seen, it is unsurprising that Pike should be drawn to Lefebvre's spatial triad, especially owing to the emphasis which Pike places upon the underground as highly retentive of its previous ideological, representational and memorial resonances. Indeed, Lefebvre pays special attention to the subterranean when exploring the assertion that 'in space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows' (1991, p.229), continuing to explain, as highlighted earlier, the ways in which the Christian tradition inherited from Rome a space full of 'magico-religious entities' which the subterranean continues to evoke today (p.231). However, Lefebvre's acknowledgement is limited to his discussion of the underground as a representational space of antiquity: as a set of images left over from more ancient civilisations, which persist in evoking 'the realm of the dead, chthonian and telluric forces' (*Ibid.*). As a result, Lefebvre's examination of the subterranean is largely restricted to his discussion of absolute space: that is, a phenomenon by which a usually 'agro-pastoral space' is, 'through the actions of masters or conquerors,' re-appropriated and assigned a new role. Whilst still being viewed as part of 'nature,' so to speak, the space then also becomes invested with some sacred, 'magical' or 'cosmic' significance (p.234). This significance is then assumed to be

attached to that space quite naturally, even though, as Lefebvre warns, it is actually inflicted by the processes of political power, which have ‘wrenched the area from its natural context,’ and invested it with this secondary meaning (*Ibid.*). As an example, Lefebvre offers the way in which subterranean areas, or ‘depths [...] enter the service of absolute space’ by taking on the meaning of a space of death, as opposed to ‘heights,’ which in absolute terms become invested with meanings of ‘power,’ representative of ‘the heavens’ (p.236).

For Gaiman, Hill and Williams however, the subterranean city far exceeds the ‘magically’ invested meanings of Hell and death. On the one hand, the subterranean spaces of contemporary descent narratives *are* mysterious and *do* carry mythological resonances: for instance, Casimir’s movement towards Alice at the very close of *Underground* sees him poignantly ‘not looking back’ (Hill, 1999, p.248), clearly playing on the underground’s evocation of one of its oldest and most predominant myths: that of Orpheus’s descent into the underworld. On the other hand however, the *materiality* of the subterranean space also matters: the very physical way in which the underground city juxtaposes capitalist and non-capitalist practices and lifestyles is crucial here, as is the manner in which the subterranean Londons of these contemporary descent narratives play very literally with our existing notions of space and spatial relation, just as the associative house and the floating markets of *Nowhere* do for Richard Mayhew. In order to theoretically account for a subterranean city which is at the same time mysterious and ‘magical’, yet also poses some very real, material challenges to our aboveground conceptions of space therefore, it is once again the work of Walter Benjamin which proves to exceed the explanatory possibilities of Lefebvre’s scheme.

Indeed, much commentary on the work of Benjamin has paid attention to his evocation of the underworld, particularly that of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Paris in *The Arcades Project*. Many commentators have found Benjamin’s representation of Modern Paris

to be infernal or hellish: 'In the representation of Hell as the essence of modern society,' argues Susan Buck-Morrs, '*The Passagen Work* examines, literally, the underground of Paris, its systems of subterranean passageways' (1991, p.102). Concerning Benjamin's relationship to the subterranean city however, Buck-Morss, like Pike, chooses to focus upon the way in which Benjamin's vision of modernity as endless repetition, and the illusion of novelty as the mere reiteration of what has gone before, can be read as infernal. For instance, Buck-Morss claims that in *The Arcades Project*, 'Modernity's mythic temporality reanimates as contemporary social types the archaic figures of Hades, whose punishments are echoed in the repetitiveness of Modern existence' (p.103). Similarly, Pike likens Benjamin's definition of 'time in modernity as the endless repetition of the same thing disguised by the illusion of its novelty' to equivalent situations in the Hell of antiquity, such as the endless repetition of Prometheus's punishment, in which Hell is constituted in having his liver infinitely eaten, re-grown and again eaten by an eagle (1997, p.208).

A close look at *The Arcades Project* however also reveals that Benjamin's engagement with the forces of the subterranean is by no means limited to his vision of modernity as a space of Hell. What Benjamin's fragmentary notes achieve, which Lefebvre's focus upon the mythical 'absolute space' of the underground does not, is an evocation of the subterranean city as a hybrid space: a material space which holds within itself myriad possibilities for both capitalist and anti-capitalist practices, imaginings and appropriations. On the one hand, just as all three of Gaiman, Hill and Williams emphasise with their hybrid, 'inside/ outside' undergrounds, Benjamin captures subterranean Paris in its assimilation as a space very much belonging to the burgeoning capitalist nexus of the city above. For example, he stresses the subterranean city's embroilment in urban networks of monetary exchange, as a space of civilian transportation which, costing 'two francs,' is 'so much less expensive and less

hazardous than the Paris of the upper world' (1999a, p.85). He also makes note of 'underground sightseeing in the sewers' (p.87), capturing the subterranean city as it thus enters the networks of monetary exchange and spatial commodification which constitute a tourist industry. As his notes on the Arcades demonstrate however, Benjamin clearly saw the underground as possessing many other simultaneous possibilities and potentialities, not only embedded within the commodifying practices of the capitalist-driven city, but also as a space of origin for urban legend, cultural production and transmission and revolution. In reference to the former of these three categories, Benjamin cites J.F. Benzenberg's note that "[t]he legend according to which one can see the stars by day from the tunnels of the Paris quarries" originated in an old mine shaft "that was covered over on the surface by a stone slab in which there is a small hole [...]. Through this hole, the daylight shines into the gloom below like a pale star" (pp.89-90). For Benjamin though, the subterranean city gives birth not only to legendary tales but also to cornerstones of culture, exemplified in his quotation of Hugo's note in *Les Misérables* that "a broad long cellar" beneath the Châtelet de Paris, into which "men condemned to the galleys were put [...] until the day of their departure for Toulon" was, as the result of these men's bondage, the place where "almost all the argot [colloquial slang] songs were born" (p.93). And thirdly, Benjamin's citation of Engländer's note on the "June Insurrection" of 1832 indicates that "[m]ost of the prisoners were transferred via the quarries and subterranean passages which are located under the forts of Paris," emphasising the prisoners' re-appropriation of the subterranean city as a community space, in which they "gave all the passages names of Paris streets, and whenever they met one another, they exchanged addresses" (p.89).

Like the multi-layered urban underworld of Lang's *Metropolis* therefore, the picture of subterranean Paris which Benjamin traces in his *Arcades Project* is one in which spaces of

capitalist-motivated monetary exchange and industry are found side-by-side with other more reactionary spaces: spaces, that is, of great mythical significance; cultural resonance; activism and, subsequently, collective memory. Through his fragmentary portrayal of the subterranean city therefore, Benjamin achieves what Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, cannot: namely, he accounts for the subterranean city as endlessly multifarious, bringing spaces of capitalism and anti-capitalism into close juxtaposition, just as is emphasised by Gaiman's, Hill's and Williams's contemporary descent narratives. Moreover, Benjamin's acknowledgement of the myriad faces of the underground city also allows for his exploration of a further idea which has proved central to this chapter as a whole: namely, the idea that experience of the subterranean spaces beneath the city can intrude in and interfere with existing narratives of spatial experience, 'teaching' us new possibilities in conceptualising space and spatial relation. Addressing the Paris Métro, Benjamin notes how the experience of urban space differs below ground. The linking devices which yoke parts of the aboveground city together, thus allowing us to construct and imagine it as a coherent whole, are absent underground. In the Métro system for example, Benjamin describes the way in which areas of the city 'have all thrown off the humiliating fetters of street or square,' and rather than being yoked together in a 'linguistic network of the city' which makes the metropolis navigable, there is 'nothing more of the collision, the intersection,' and rather 'each name dwells alone' (1999a, p.84). Once freed from the 'fetters' of the surface city which seek to bind all locations together in a unified and homogenous whole, these spaces become invested with their own agency to move, confound and disturb those who come across them: punctuated only by periods of 'darkness,' the places to which the Métro transports its passengers 'are transformed into misshapen sewer gods, catacomb fairies [...] into whose jaws [...] thousands of anemic young dressmakers and drowsy clerks every morning must hurl themselves' (*Ibid.*). Further on, Benjamin refers to the

dissociative effect of Métro stops, making it ‘difficult to believe that up above they all run out into one another, that under the open sky it all draws together’ (p.519). As a result, Benjamin’s respect for the underground as a confounding space which sometime defies the desires to control, master and to render the city coherent and knowable identifies it as an ideal space through which to exemplify the very project of his work on the Arcades: namely, ‘to realign historical materialism, removing Marx’s imposition of a teleological narrative, and replacing it with a history that defies any concept of “total truth”’ (Murray, 2007, p.54). Underground, as Benjamin highlights, the ‘imposed’ teleological mindset and linear approach to space which characterises the surface city simply does not and cannot hold. For this very reason, Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* provides a theoretical framework for the subterranean cities presented by Gaiman, Hill and Williams, all three of which influence their respective contemporary London descent narratives towards conclusions which rest upon the protagonists’ acceptance of the strange, space-bending order of the subterranean city as just as ‘real,’ or constituting just as much “truth” as the apparently ordered, homogenous, capitalist-driven surface world.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONTEMPORARY HOTEL NOVEL AND THE AGENCY OF THE HOTEL SPACE

Why the Hotel Space?

So far, this thesis has explored the agencies acquired and exerted by abandoned spaces and subterranean spaces in a range of examples of contemporary British writing, observing how these texts display the capabilities of urban spaces to operate transhumanly and to exert an agency which does not solely rely upon human actualisation and social ‘production’, as Henri Lefebvre might express. These spaces do not fit neatly into the matrices of production, exchange and social relation through which the working, capitalist-driven surface city operates, as Lefebvre’s Marxian lexis might have it. According to Lefebvre, ‘it is the forces of production and the relations of production that produce social space’ (1991, p.210); however, abandoned spaces are left behind and made obsolete by these forces of production, leaving them open instead to assimilation into more affective networks of circulation, long after they have outlived the ‘social’ human practices through which they were once actualised. The subterranean spaces of chapter three differ slightly, this time juxtaposing the appropriation of the underground by the capitalist city above with those pockets of the underground city which resist such appropriation. Presented with this juxtaposition as they descend into the subterranean city, protagonists of contemporary London descent narratives are moved towards contrasting the conceptualisations of space, self and other which appear ‘sane’ in the capitalist surface world with the often alternative, confounding and counter-intuitive modes of spatio-temporal experience which operate below ground.

It may therefore appear somewhat tangential to now turn to the hotel spaces of contemporary British fiction. For, the hotel might seem the very epitome of a space which

perpetuates the networks of exchange upon which the capitalist city is based. Investigating the role of the hotel in German and Austrian literature, Bettina Matthias points to the way in which capital acts as a ‘leveller’ or common denominator for hotel guests, meaning that ‘[t]ime and space are available to anyone as long as he or she has the money to buy, that is, rent them’ (2004, p.327). Marc Katz also claims that ‘the hotel, as microcity, is a site of exchanges of all sorts—information, money, services, goods,’ thus singling itself out as the quintessential space of urban late capitalism (1999, p.139). In the hotel then, space is not only sold or hired to guests as a commodity. In addition, this portrayal of the hotel also echoes Lefebvre’s argument in *The Production of Space* concerning late capitalist urbanism’s detachment from what he calls ‘natural space’ (1991, p.329): ‘In the most modern urban planning [...] *everything* is produced: air, light, water—even the land itself,’ which certainly does evoke the excessively lit, air-conditioned, carefully-constructed leisure space of the modern hotel (*ibid.*). Previously then, we have focused upon how a cross section of contemporary British literary texts act as advocates for the agency taken on by spaces which display an ambiguous and subversive positioning outside, or at least in partial resistance to, the dominant modes and social relations of production in their given society, to use Lefebvre’s terminology. Why now turn to hotels, which seem to play such an overwhelming part in promoting and perpetuating such capitalist-driven mores, and thus in turn, as Lefebvre would have it, might appear simultaneously to perpetuate the spatial relations and organisations of late capitalism?

The first answer to this comes in the fact that novels such as Ali Smith’s *Hotel World* (2001) and Monica Ali’s *In the Kitchen* (2009) show the hotel space as possessing a far more complex relationship with capitalism than the above quotes might suggest. In chapter three, we mentioned Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* and its portrayal of the subterranean city as

constituting many pockets and layers, some representing exploitative labour, others offering spaces of resistance against this labour. So, in a similar way, is the hotel space of contemporary fiction stratified into many different areas which in their own ways answer back to and resist the imposition of conventional narratives of respectability and hospitality: in the contemporary texts to which I shall turn, the hotel spaces accessible only to members of staff are explored extensively, as well as the guest rooms and hotel lobby which have been granted wider acknowledgement in theory and cultural studies. Secondly, I want to argue, the hotels which feature in contemporary novels like Smith's and Ali's are worth attention since they bring together the affective potentiality of space so prevalent in abandoned spaces, with an agency to confound the human subject and deeply affect one's approach to selfhood, like that experienced by protagonists of contemporary London descent narratives. Indeed, Joanna Pready vaguely yet suggestively describes the hotel as a space which 'has a visible effect on the transactions and events that take place within it,' implying the hotel space as a potential site through which to explore notions of affect and agency, and which may even become 'a subject in its own right' (2009, pp.48 & 54). This chapter therefore aims to extend and give a more detailed shape to Pready's intriguing yet somewhat ill-defined conceptualisation of the hotel space as one which possesses a 'level of agency' or 'sense of subjectivity' which 'is not exactly similar to that predicated of a human subject' (p.54).

In the following chapter, I will chart the portrayal of the hotel across pivotal instances of sociological and cultural theory—particularly Kracauer's seminal discussion of the hotel lobby—in order to move away from a Lefebvrian reading of the hotel space towards one which lends itself towards a reading of the agency of the hotel space as expressed through Smith's and Ali's novels. In order to provide a context for the contemporary hotel novel and to trace the emergence of literary hotel spaces which achieve their own narrative agency, I

will also address the relationship between the hotel space and literary modernism—the movement with which the transient and alienating effects of the hotel space have been most traditionally associated. In then moving through an account of the ways in which the hotel appears as a stimulus for narrative in the detective novel (again a phenomenon noted by Kracauer), I will move towards envisioning how literature might advocate the narrative agency of the hotel space.

Indeed, as we shall see in my textual analysis, both Smith's and Ali's novels persistently return to a death event which has occurred inside the hotel space: *Hotel World* centres around the death of chambermaid Sara Wilby who falls to her fate during a prank in which she bets colleague Duncan that she can fit inside the hotel's dumbwaiter; the narrative of *In The Kitchen* is persistently haunted by the accidental death of Yuri the night porter, who drunkenly falls and hits his head on the hotel's basement stairs. I want to argue that in both novels, the hotel space fights back against attempts to silence the less favourable narratives which are held within it, and which may sully its reputation as a hospitable space. The hotel finds itself ultimately unable to forget the suffering and death which occurred within its walls and, I want to propose, manifests this difficulty by creating pathologies in the human subjects whose job it is to present the favourable face of the hotel to the public: Lise and Duncan in *Hotel World*, and head chef Gabriel from *In The Kitchen*. Through such an approach therefore, the contemporary hotel novel like Smith's and Ali's can be read as a web of competing narratives, at the centre of which lies the hotel space and its affective abilities to influence both human subjectivity and narrative form. Such novels therefore become narrative spaces within which both author and reader can explore the transmission of affect between the hotel space itself and the human subject, rather than exclusively between one human subject and others.

The Hotel Space and Conflicts with Lefebvorean Theory

The hotel spaces of contemporary fiction represent yet another urban site which sits somewhat uncomfortably with a Lefebvorean reading. Both sociological and literary studies of the hotel space have turned to Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* in order to theoretically account for the hotel and its spatial complexities, but it is part of the job of this chapter to interrogate the suitability of applying such readings to hotel fiction. Discussing the hotel as a potentially 'liminal' space which allows staff and guests alike to enter into subversive play with normative social codes, Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan state: 'We would also suggest that Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualisation of space as a dialectical triad of lived, perceived and conceived space holds opportunities for hospitality researchers to holistically examine what might otherwise seem to be diverse research interests under these three conceptual categories' (2006, p.770). They envision that Lefebvre's notion of representational space might be used to 'interrogate how hotels are configured in the social imagination as "representational spaces"' which make room for clandestine activities (p.771). The hope is to emphasise the hotel as 'more than simply an operational entity, but a cultural construction which exists in lived, perceived and conceived as well as physical space' (*Ibid.*). Pritchard and Morgan are not alone in arguing for the potential usefulness of Lefebvre's spatial triad in reading the hotel space: Joanne Pready also refers to Lefebvre's 'three-way dialectic' as 'possibly the most helpful attempt at defining space in recent times' (2009, p.43).¹ Indeed, the contemporary novels upon which I will focus do draw attention to the hotel space as home to the kind of 'clandestine' practices typical of Lefebvre's representational spaces (1991, p.33). Sara's re-appropriation of the dumbwaiter as part of her prank in *Hotel World*, and Gabriel's

¹ Like many of the Lefebvorean readings of literary texts outlined in this thesis, however, Pready's study again relies upon notions of the human actualisation of space implied by spatial theory like Lefebvre's, as she states: 'humans create built space through conception and production and have some effect on the space itself through usage [...] due to different types of characters entering the spaces and using it in different ways' (p.48).

discovery of illegal trafficking networks ‘selling on’ female members of hotel staff in *In The Kitchen* could be said to identify the hotel as precisely such a Lefebvrian representational space: a space imaginatively re-appropriated in ways which subvert or challenge ‘dominant social orders and [...] the categories of social thought’, whilst also exemplifying the kind of ‘clandestine and underground spatial practices, which suggest and prompt alternative [...] restructurings of institutionalised discourses of space and new modes of spatial *praxis*’ as is characteristic of the representational space (Shields 1991, p.54). It is therefore little wonder that the hotel, as a site which invites this imaginative re-appropriation of space, should seemingly offer itself up to an analysis courtesy of Lefebvre’s concept of representational space.

As we touch upon the issue of imaginative re-appropriation however, such a Lefebvrian reading of the hotel space becomes problematised. For, Pritchard and Morgan’s focus lies upon the ways in which those who work inside and who patronise the hotel realise its subversive potential, whilst the hotel space itself is read as somewhat passively offering ‘conditions of freedom and opportunity for those open to such adventures’ (2006, p.762). If the hotel is to be considered in terms of Lefebvrian representational space however, attention must also surely be paid to the way in which the hotel is re-appropriated by the imagination of the artist or author, as well as by its staff and guests: representational space is after all, as Lefebvre contends, not only the space of “‘inhabitants” and “users”, but also of some artists and [...] writers’, since it is the ‘dominated [...] space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate’ (Lefebvre 1991, pp.39 &33). Looking at the hotel space through the lens of literary studies therefore becomes all the more enlightening if we are to interrogate Pritchard and Morgan’s contention that hotel studies might benefit from a conceptualisation according to Lefebvre’s notion of representational space.

For, another argument about the manifestation of the hotel space in literature presents a rather different view, suggesting that Lefebvre's notion of representational space might be insufficient in accounting for literary manifestations of the hotel space, certainly from the Modernist period onwards. At the same time, this alternative approach demonstrates yet another way in which we might say that space—this time specifically the hotel space—takes on narrative agency. The argument to which I refer makes interesting claims as to the ways in which an author's focus upon the hotel space shapes literary form. It is Ayako Muneuchi who advocates this argument most emphatically in her exploration of the agency of the hotel space in Virginia Woolf's early modernism. Muneuchi argues that Woolf's focus on the hotel in *The Voyage Out* (1915) forges the development of her distinct mode of modernist narrative, allowing a unique 'shift of authorial perspectives' between guests and hotel spaces (p.175). Muneuchi maintains that 'Woolf's exploration of life in the hotel thus causes her narrative to deviate from the traditional narrative formulae. It demands new methods and helps Woolf to grasp the novel, modern themes and styles' (*Ibid.*). These new narrative methods, Muneuchi argues, then became 'central to the modernist art that Woolf later develops', such that 'we may now say that the narrative peculiarities in the novel can be largely attributed, quite naturally, to the depiction of the dominant setting of the hotel' (p.174).

Muneuchi's argument is indeed a strong one, drawing deterministic links between the literary form of what she homogenously describes as Woolf's 'modernist art' and the spaces to which Woolf's narratives are persistently drawn. I do not aim to make such an argument, concentrating instead upon the ways in which hotel spaces move and circulate throughout the contemporary hotel novel, acting as a psychic and affective point of repeated return for the human subjects who spend so much time within them. Nevertheless, the contemporary texts upon which I will focus preserve something of this modernist fragmentation and tenuousness

of self, exaggerated by the strange juxtapositions which the idiosyncratic space of the hotel brings together. For example, Smith splits *Hotel World* into five sections each told through the focalisation of a different character with their own unique relationship to the hotel; consequently, *Hotel World* preserves the shifting perspective which Muneuchi identifies in Woolf's hotel-based novel. Muneuchi's argument is therefore an extreme yet notable effort to emphasise the potential narrative agency of the hotel space, rather than representing the hotel space as merely populated and re-appropriated by inhabitants and users on the one hand, or artists and writers on the other, as with Lefebvre's representational spaces. Muneuchi's claims deserve mention as they suggest that one's experience of the hotel space might in some way influence the ways in which the imagination 'appropriates', writes and re-writes that space: a notion for which Lefebvre's account of representational spaces leaves little room.

Furthermore, Muneuchi's argument suggests that the (author's) human imagination does not possess full appropriative control over its approach to and re-imagining of the hotel space, as Pritchard and Morgan might suggest by offering a Lefebvorean reading of the hotel. Through Muneuchi's ambitious argument then, we once again are led towards the notion that literature and narrative form can be conceived as media within which the agency of space can be seen to operate, even if this narrative spatial agency is achieved through much more subtle, affective means than the spatial determinism evoked by Muneuchi.

An Alternative Look at the Hotel: Siegfried Kracauer

It is not my aim to give an extensive history of the development of the hotel in British society: this task has already been fulfilled comprehensively by Bettina Matthias (2006) and Martina Krebs (2009) in their discussions of the role of the hotel in European literature, the former placing an emphasis upon Austrian and German texts. Nevertheless, we have found

Lefebvre's representational space an insufficient tool in accounting for the complexity of and the agency wielded by the hotel space upon the imagination of those who seek to narrativise it. As a result, before looking more closely at the hotels of contemporary fiction, it would serve to track backwards a little through history, to identify the ways in which the hotel space has already been conceptualised, seeking existing ideas which might once again help us towards freeing the hotel space from the ossifying vocabulary of representation and offer alternative, more revelatory ways of reading the nuances of the hotel space as found in Smith's and Ali's texts. It is here then, once again, that our attention should turn to the modernist materialist tradition which has proved a guiding light throughout this thesis in helping to understand the revelatory possibilities of often overlooked corners of the urban landscape and, even more importantly, as implying that such spaces might achieve an agency which does not exclusively rely on their human actualisation. For, one of the most renowned commentators upon the hotel space is none other than Siegfried Kracauer, whose urban writings we addressed back in chapter one.

Kracauer famously dedicated a section of his work on the detective novel (1923-5) to the hotel lobby. Characteristic of his early diagnosis of modernity's "sundering" of the self from its bonds with God' (see Frisby, 1986, p.116), Kracauer portrays the hotel lobby as 'the inverted image of the house of God' (1995, p.175), the latter as a place of community bound by faith and prayer, the former bringing people together only in the name of emptiness and nothingness, 'a shelter for the transient and disconnected' (Vidler, 1991, p.43). Nevertheless, Kracauer maintains that '[t]he *equality* of those who pray is likewise reflected in distorted form in the hotel lobby', since both spaces demonstrate how 'when a congregation forms, the differences between people disappear, because these beings all have one and the same destiny'

(Kracauer, 1995, p.178). Subsequently, despite Kracauer's insistence that 'the lobby is the space that does not refer beyond itself' (p.177)—that is, its sole purpose as a space is to encompass the aimless figures gathered within it—the fact that Kracauer's comparative exercise here enables a dialogue between the lobby-space and the church demonstrates a malleability of city-space through which otherwise disparate buildings can be brought into startling, if hypothetical, juxtaposition. Even more crucial to the discussion in hand however is the fact that throughout his *Weimar Essays*, Kracauer expresses an urban sensibility which, unlike Lefebvre's spatial scheme, creates room for an exploration of the idea that urban space takes on its own agency: an agency which seizes upon a comparative impotence of the human subject.

Kracauer, Hotels and Spatial Agency

In chapter one, we noted Huyssen's (2007) observation that the urban essays of both Benjamin and Kracauer often place the human subject as grammatical object, whilst the object in turn is portrayed as the grammatical subject. Urban space is thus granted the language of agency, as in Kracauer's description of the quadrangle in his 'Two Planes' piece on Marseilles, which pivots on the evocative phrase '[h]e whom the place finds did not seek it' (1995, p.38). Indeed, the notion of spatial agency in this short essay does not stop here, as Kracauer proceeds to claim that 'no-one seeks the quadrangle' and yet not only do they find themselves in it, but they also find that the space exceeds itself, that 'it expands toward the four sides of the world [...] it is a square without mercy' (p.39). In this sense therefore, the urban space acts upon the human subject in a scheme such that the space itself seeks out and arrests the human subject, rather than vice-versa. As well as making room for the possibility of spatial agency, Kracauer's lexis and musings over the urban spaces of modernity

simultaneously emphasise the arrest of human agency in such an environment. Esther Leslie notes Kracauer's engagement with capitalism's reduction of humans to mere units in the 'interrelating patterns' of mass production, compromising their humanness and '*removing their autonomy* or decision-making processes' (2007, p.39). Indeed, Frisby notes a shift in Kracauer's reasoning from his initial belief that 'change' rested with the action of 'human beings' to a position which rather emphasised the impotence of the human subject, in which 'the circumstances of society condition those of the individuals.' (Kracauer, 'Zwei Arten der Mitteilung,' 1929-30; cited in Frisby, 1986, p.122). Consequently, an arrest of human agency within the capitalist metropolis is a salient issue for Kracauer, and the specific case of the hotel lobby is no exception. Somewhat similar to a church, Kracauer notes, a hotel lobby brings together a collection of people under one roof who largely observe a silence in their togetherness. In the hotel lobby however, as opposed to inside the church, the apparent equality of all who come together within that space represents 'an equivalence that signifies not fulfilment but evacuation': according to Kracauer, that which unites the people in the hotel lobby is not 'based on a relation to God but on a relation to the nothing' (p.179). Through the aimless, self-referential and undirected nature of many of the behaviours found in the hotel lobby ('waiting' and 'lounging'), and the fact that the people in the lobby space have little more transcendental uniting them other than their aimlessness, Kracauer explains that 'it is in this way that a person can vanish into an undetermined void, helplessly reduced to a "member of society as such" who stands off to one side' (p.179). This evacuation of the human subject and consequent descent into emptiness and sameness demonstrates just how Kracauer's hotel lobby suggests itself as a space in which human agency is compromised, opening up the possibility for the investigation of other kinds of agency at work within the hotel space: even, we might argue, the agency of the hotel space itself. Through its

combination of allusions to human impotence and its attribution of active verbs such as ‘seek’ and ‘expand’ to urban spaces themselves, Kracauer’s work therefore validates a reading in which the weakening of human agency can be seen to occur simultaneously alongside a situation in which urban spaces take on a life and agency of their own. As we shall observe later in this chapter in discussing the role of the hotel as a site of ‘repeated return’ for the troubled psyches of Smith’s and Ali’s protagonists, such a theoretical framework will prove crucial to the exploration not only of the hotel lobby but of other hotel spaces in the contemporary novels upon which I wish to focus, and the ways in which these hotel spaces exert an influence over narrative outcomes for the protagonists in question.

‘Purpose’ and Agency in the Hotel Space

Kracauer’s work on the hotel lobby also proves vital here in forging further links between the hotel space and the other spaces explored in this thesis. In our earlier examination of the role of abandoned spaces in the work of Nicholas Royle and Iain Sinclair, these disused sites’ positioning outside of their society’s dominant modes and relations of production proved crucial, and created a key point of conflict with the explanatory powers of Lefebvre’s theory as outlined in *The Production of Space*. No longer in working order, the abandoned and apparently non-productive urban space offers a position of removal from what Tim Edensor calls ‘the *purposive directionality* of most city movement’—experience of time and space within such sites is therefore no longer restricted by the urge towards speed and efficiency upon which so much urban experience relies (Edensor, 2007, p.242, my italics). As we have seen, this also allows for abandoned spaces to be re-imagined as participating in previously unanticipated transhuman affective networks.

This notion of removal from the purpose-driven directionality of urban life can also be found in Kracauer's writing on the hotel lobby. Indeed, Kracauer describes in some detail the way in which guests arriving in the hotel lobby become 'guests in space as such—a space that encompasses them and has no function other than to encompass them' (1995, p.175). In the European modernist metropolis which Kracauer observes, space therefore features as an object of consumption. The hotel lobby thus epitomises the kind of space whose only purpose appears to be the enveloping of those who gather inside it in a state of transition: a purpose which, rudimentarily, has very little purpose at all, or as Kracauer describes in homage to Immanuel Kant's emphatic phrase from *Critique of Judgement*, "“purposiveness without purpose”" (p.177). 'Purposive activity' therefore, in the hotel lobby, is 'bracketed' as Kracauer explains, giving way to 'a freedom that can refer only to itself and therefore sinks into relaxation and indifference' (p.179). Kracauer thus envisions that the hotel might offer the human subject a 'groundless distance' from the everyday; a distance required to not only engage in the act of criticism, but which also creates a situation in which 'the person sitting around idly is overcome by a disinterested satisfaction in the contemplation of a world creating itself, whose purposiveness is felt without being associated with any representation of a purpose' (p.177). Yet again therefore, Kracauer presents the hotel lobby as a space in which the 'world', or the human subject's surroundings, possess the agency to 'create' themselves, whilst the human subject merely sits back and observes this creation. Indeed, as Joanne Pready notes, Kracauer's suggestions here hint at how 'the hotel space represents an extreme example of how space can overpower an individual' (2009, p.66): an overpowering which never, for Kracauer, loses that traditionally modernist sense of alienation, such that the 'togetherness' which binds visitors 'in the hotel lobby has no meaning. While here, too,

people certainly do become detached from everyday life, this detachment does not lead the community to assure itself of its existence as a congregation' (p.176).

In contrast to Pready's reading however, which emphasises alientation and vacuousness, this position of removal from purposiveness is not necessarily a negative experience for Kracauer. Despite Kracauer's reiteration of terms such as 'disinterest' and 'indifference' to describe those who sit, lounge and observe in the hotel lobby, John Allen highlights that by attempting to effectively read the all-too-familiar surface life of the modern metropolis, Kracauer's 'aim is to defamiliarise the familiar' (Allen, 2007, p.22); in doing so, the hope is to allow for those embroiled in the superficial life of the city to be 'struck by the momentary insight that someday all this will suddenly burst apart' (Kracauer, 1995, p.327).² So, to be in Kracauer's hotel lobby is to observe the general purposive motives and actions of the city—to watch the world 'create itself'—whilst being removed from that world, within a space which removes one (or 'brackets' one off) from those purposive networks. Furthermore, Kracauer's increasingly critical attitude towards capitalism led him to the conclusion that 'just like science, capitalism possesses a deep indifference to the "what" of things': a space of partial removal from the capitalist networks of the metropolis like that offered by the hotel lobby therefore could quite easily be conceived, in Kracauer's *oeuvre*, as potentially revelatory (Kracauer, *Das Leiden Unter dem Wissen*, p. 41, cited in Frisby, 1986, p.113). Yet more similarities therefore appear between the hotel space and both the abandoned spaces and subterranean spaces which we have already seen give protagonists a fresh, potentially

² Dylan Trigg (2006) makes a similar argument as to the potentially revelatory 'disinterestedness' achieved in the hotel lobby. Trigg states that 'those who inhabit the lobby do so with a detachment from the everyday; they are temporally relieved of seeking out the good and agreeable for the reason that nothing particular stands out as such' (p.5). Trigg makes his argument through Kant's distinction between disinterested delight (available in the hotel lobby) and interested delight, which is produced through the agreeable and the good. According to Trigg, the disinterested delight available in the hotel lobby offers a space of removal from a mentality which is based upon seeking out that which will either satiate our desire or lack, or that which is directly and purposively 'useful'.

revelatory distance and point of reflection upon the ‘working’ city due respectively to their complete or partial disembedding from the teleological, purposive networks of the capitalist city.

Contextualising the Contemporary: The Hotel in Modernism

Nevertheless, Kracauer’s commentary on the hotel lobby was not born out of a social and cultural vacuum, and numerous more recent critics who focus upon the representation of the hotel space have identified the hotel as the ideal setting to reflect the apparent rootlessness of the human subject of modernity. According to Matthias (2004), the hotel embodies a typically modernist condition of ‘anonymity, constant change [...] and the individual’s loss of any significant [...] bonds to the space s/he inhabits [which] mark the experience of modern man’ (p.328). Subsequently, Matthias continues, ‘hotels must then be considered the quintessential metaphor and the breeding ground for the experience of modern life as Walter Benjamin, Georg Simmel, or Siegfried Kracauer have described it’ (*Ibid*). We have already seen Muneuchi’s discussion of the role played by the hotel in the earlier modernist novels of Virginia Woolf, and Kracauer’s own work on the hotel lobby from the mid-nineteen-twenties. Moving diachronically further into later modernisms, Britzolakis makes a similar observation in relation to the work of Jean Rhys, arguing that in Rhys’s fiction, the hotel is employed as the epitome of a modernist feeling of anonymity and ‘homelessness’: for example, Sasha Jensen’s lament that she must return every day to ‘the Hotel-Without-A-Name in the Street Without-a-Name’ (Rhys, 2000, p.120) captures a hollowing out of subjectivities which Britzolakis describes as ‘allegorical of modernity’ (2007. p.460).

Indeed, it is worth pausing here on the theme of Modernism to address a pattern which appears threaded throughout this thesis as a whole. For, as is evident above, the Modernist

period saw the emergence of detailed critical and conceptual work on the hotel space: the emphasis of this discussion however is to use such work as a means of working towards ways of reading the agencies of the hotel space as expressed in recent British fiction. Emphatic of the kinds of modernist anonymity and transience stressed by Kracauer in his examination of the hotel lobby, the hotel might thus appear to sit uncomfortably beside the more unbounded, porous and fragmented post-industrial spaces explored in earlier chapters. However, to make this counter-argument also implies drawing a binary distinction between the modern and the postmodern: a dichotomy of which many scholars and commentators alike remain ostensibly critical. In his wide ranging study *Modernity and Metropolis*, Peter Brooker warns against the imposition of such a dichotomy, instead wishing to ‘stress the coexistence of “modernities”, each realised in its own time of the present and bearing the traces of past forms and possible alternative futures’ (2002, p.11). In light of Brooker’s comment here, it would most certainly appear that the late twentieth and early twenty-first century texts assessed in this thesis do indeed bear traces of temporal as well as spatial pasts, bringing forward earlier twentieth-century tropes of urban space forward into the present, re-imagining them in the context of present and future preoccupations. For example, two tropes which Brooker identifies as having been labelled by literary and cultural commentators as overtly ‘modernist’ include the characterisation of the Western colonising self ‘as stable and normative’, and also the challenge presented to this model of selfhood by the otherness of the many modernist writers and artists who were themselves ‘émigrés who brought their own otherness and the otherness of world cultures’ to Modern European cities (p.21). It is therefore not difficult to observe the ways in which the protagonists of the contemporary London descent narratives assessed in chapter three of this thesis bring echoes of earlier ‘modernities’ into their own contemporary historical moment: none of them are native to London, and thus represent a type of émigré

similarly able to open up the city through the gaze of the Other. Simultaneously, they are also taken on journeys into a contemporary subterranean London in which a stable and normative sense of selfhood simply no longer holds sway. Particularly for Casimir however in Hill's novel *Underground*, the plight of the London subject who is not a native Londoner is, at the outset of the twenty-first century, also tied up with anxieties surrounding multiculturalism and international terrorism. To introduce modernisms and their tropes at this late stage in our discussion as useful contextual tools for our featured contemporary texts is therefore no anomaly. Rather, the hotel's status as a space which rather more obviously carries within it the traces of previous 'modernities' merely opens a more explicit window upon the ways in which *all* the contemporary literary representations of urban space investigated in this thesis can be seen to re-imagine and bring into the contemporary moment more typically 'modernist' tropes.

Moving across the Atlantic and into later modernisms of the nineteen-forties and -fifties, we find American realist painter Edward Hopper's melancholy and somewhat voyeuristic pieces depicting anonymous characters within the hotel space, such as *Hotel Room* (1931), *Hotel Lobby* (1943), *Hotel By a Railroad* (1952) and *Hotel Window* (1956), or even simply the facade of hotel establishments, as with *Rooms For Tourists* (1945). Giving away very little contextual information about their depicted scenarios, human subjects and their motives within the hotel space, Hopper's paintings leave a gap between what the viewer sees and how much they can 'know' about or construe the scene presented before them, such that, as James Peacock observes, the viewer 'resorts to acts of compensatory narrative construction' in order to make sense of the *mise-en-scène* (2006, p.79). Indeed, the examples of both Rhys and Hopper prove important to the discussion in hand, as both point forwards in time to the

contemporary narratives which I wish to interrogate. Firstly, in my analysis of Ali's *In The Kitchen*, I hope to demonstrate that the contemporary British hotel novel remains influenced by the modernist trope of the hotel as representative of rootlessness and homelessness, yet to argue that such novels also necessarily re-work this trope courtesy of the movement of the hotel throughout their narrative space, thus exposing the hotel space itself as directly provocative of protagonists' feelings of rootlessness, rather than as a setting which merely reflects or externalises such feelings. Secondly, as Hopper's elusive hotel vignettes display, the hotel space often presents the onlooker with a scene in which they must narratively 'compensate' for the clues which the hotel space refuses to give, thus confounding our human ability to 'read' the scene. In the contemporary hotel novel therefore, more modernist tropes of the hotel as a space which resists an easy 'reading' of its everyday scenes yet again become incorporated into an exploration of how the hotel space, like the abandoned or subterranean urban space, might be seen to possess agency.

Hotels and Narrative: The Hotel and the Detective Novel

It would now therefore serve to look at the hotel's role in literature to provide a more specifically literary context for the contemporary hotel novel. For as noted above, Kracauer's characterisation of the hotel lobby appeared as part of a survey of the detective novel, already suggesting an affinity between the hotel space and narrative construction. As Vidler stresses, Kracauer envisioned the hotel lobby as 'the paradigmatic space of the modern detective novel, and thus as epitomizing the conditions of modern life in their anonymity and fragmentation' (1991, p.43). Indeed, his focus on the hotel lobby comes to the fore as he attempts an aesthetic argument to demonstrate the ways in which the composition of 'aesthetic organisms' requires the collection of fragments of 'muddled material,' and the infusion of these fragments with

‘intentions that help it [this material] become transparent’; in other words, Kracauer clarifies, to create an ‘aesthetic organism’ is to create a ‘totality that in some way disfigures the entirety of experienced reality and thereby enables one to see it afresh’ (Kracauer, 1995, p.174). The detective novel’s strength, Kracauer contends, comes in taking ‘blindly scattered elements of a disintegrated world’ of modernity, and creating from these fragments something of a whole, self-contained system, which Kracauer refers to as a ‘one-dimensional unreality’ (*Ibid.*). In this system, unlike in ‘real’ life, characters ‘give an account of themselves and divulge their hidden significance,’ such that the society in question is reflected back at itself in a far more coherent form than that in which it is usually accustomed to seeing itself (*Ibid.*). Kracauer argues that like the hotel lobby, the detective novel is populated by ‘emptied-out individuals’, thus explicitly revealing society’s emptiness and mirroring it back for its members to see more clearly: ‘just as the detective discovers the secret that people have concealed, the detective novel discloses in the aesthetic medium the secret of a society bereft of reality, as well as the secret of its insubstantial marionettes’ (p.175). For Kracauer then, detective novels ‘hold a refracted mirror in front of that which is civilised out of which a caricature of its obverse essence stares back at it’ (Kracauer, *Schriften 1*, cited in Frisby 1986, p.127).

In Kracauer’s assessment here, as is true throughout his *Weimar Essays*, the one-dimensional surface life of the city and its distractions are invested with the potential to reveal the secrets of the modern condition. However, a vital question remains which will prove crucial in my later examination of Smith’s and Ali’s texts. In her very recent study of the role played by the hotel in fiction, Martina Krebs notes that ‘another hotel topic in fiction is crime, as hotel rooms seem to be ideal places for secret conspiracies, theft or murder’ (2009, p.47), suggesting that this propensity towards intrigue does not stop at the lobby, but continues further into the hotel too: the hotel space lends itself not only to the fictional creation of a one-

dimensional society of characters and secrets, but is also more fundamentally conducive of *narrative*. In his commentary upon the hotel lobby and Kracauer's characterisation of the lobby space, Douglas Tallack offers some answers as to why this might be the case. In the hotel lobby, Tallack explains, 'the conventions of behaviour produce a fairly small number of possible scenarios,' which produces a situation commensurable with 'the formulaic quality in detective fiction' (1998, pp.11-12). More specifically, Tallack continues, 'the checking of a watch or a brief exchange of glances stimulate a hermeneutics of suspicion, a preoccupation with the visual signs or clues which will turn banality into intrigue, routine into a plot' (p.12). As with Hopper's paintings then, Tallack notes how the viewer of the hotel scene is thus drawn to create a narrative in order to fill in the gaps and assimilate the scene as part of a story leading up to the moment of capture. However, the inclusion of Hopper's work here suggests that this effect of narrative stimulation is not reserved exclusively for the hotel lobby, but rather persists in other hotel spaces too which might equally be fraught with interpretative gaps, including the guest room (*Hotel By a Railroad*, *Hotel Room*), rooms of unknown purpose (*Rooms By The Sea*) and even the facade of the hotel building (*Rooms for Tourists*).

The British Detective Novel

Translating Kracauer's and Tallack's commentary across to look briefly at the British detective novel, this notion of the hotel space as one which lends itself to narrative formation certainly seems to ring true. Arguably the quintessential hotel mystery story, Agatha Christie's *At Bertram's Hotel* (1965) reveals a superficially smart, quaint London hotel to be the headquarters of a huge crime syndicate. However, even though the hotel at first seems apparently sedate and antiquated to Christie's prolific sleuth Miss Marple, she remarks early on a feeling that 'even at Bertram's [...] interesting things could happen' (Christie, 2002, p.34).

Indeed, this shows the persisting relevance of Marc Katz's note that hotels of the nineteen-twenties were often marketed on their '*narrative possibility*: the hotel was frequently promoted as a place where "things happen"' (1999, p.139, my italics). Furthermore, Matthias similarly argues that 'guests will come to the hotel to [...] enjoy the hotel's endless narrative possibilities' (2004, p.328), whilst Krebs acknowledges the way in which the hotel brings people together under one roof, creating a space in which 'human fates and lives combine' (2009, p.100). For Christie as for others therefore, the juxtaposition of characters thrown together within the hotel space suggests the hotel as the ideal setting for the 'whodunit' crime narrative. In Christie's tale, Bertram's hotel acts as a juxtaposing narrative device which brings together celebrity mother Bess Sedgwick, her estranged daughter Elvira and her unlikely hotel-attendant-husband Michael Gorman, embroiling them in a sinister plot which leaves Gorman dead by a bullet to the chest.³ A range of members of the clergy and of high society are also brought together under the roof of Bertram's, setting the scene for potential scandal amidst those whom it might be thought least likely. At one point, Chief Inspector Davy ('Father') explicitly employs a list of Bertram's patrons as a text which he hopes might give clues or yield 'a kind of pattern' in his investigations (p.305).

More than thirty years later, Jo Bannister's mystery novel *The Lazarus Hotel* (1997) takes place in a high-rise hotel far larger and more labyrinthine than that featured in Christie's mystery story. Like Christie however, Bannister exploits the hotel as a narrative device through which a group of characters, united in an enclosed space, might become conveniently entangled in a tale of mystery and intrigue. Gathered under the pretence of attending a

³ Christie's tale evokes a much earlier hotel mystery novel *The Grand Hotel Babylon* (1902) by Arnold Bennett, in which, upon purchasing an upmarket London hotel 'situated on the Embankment,' American Millionaire Theodore Racksole fires 'celebrated' head waiter Jules (p.7) for misconduct, and thus becomes embroiled in a plot which leads to the murder of his daughter's friend Mr. Dimmock, and the mysterious disappearance of Prince Eugen of Posen. Indeed, the revelation of a hotel staff member as the unexpected secret husband (Jules in Bennett's text, Gorman in Christie's) of a female character involved in the hotel mystery-plot acts as a crucial plot device in both *The Grand Hotel Babylon* and *At Bertram's Hotel*.

personal development course at the refurbished Lazarus Hotel, the group are actually ‘hunted down and their presence engineered by someone whose identity they didn’t know, whose motives they didn’t understand and whose intentions they couldn’t begin to predict’ (pp.140-1). As it transpires, the identity of the instigator is revealed as that of the father of a dead young woman in whose life each of the characters played a part. Before their ‘whodunit’ narrative takes precedence then, both Christie’s and Lazarus’s novels begin by strongly implicating the role of the hotel space itself as crucial to the dynamic of the novel, and to the protagonists’ sense of selfhood and space in general. For example, Miss Marple’s visit to London in *at Bertram’s Hotel* is mostly spent ‘walking [...] nostalgically around’ noting how much the rest of the city’s squares and buildings have been ‘remodelled’ (p.140). Bertram’s however remains oddly familiar: practically unchanged since Miss Marple visited as a girl, Bertram’s is presented as a traditional yet suspiciously un-altering space set against a London which is changing voraciously. Indeed, later in the novel, Marple discovers that this conspicuous veneer of quaint, parochial comfort “‘was a performance—not real’” (p.305). Miss Marple is therefore left with a prevailing unease: her expectations subverted and confounded by the hotel, she laments that ‘there *was* something wrong with this place’ (p.229).

In Bannister’s novel, the hotel space yet again plays a part in challenging protagonist Richard Speke’s sense of spatiality. As an ex-television war journalist, Richard’s identity once relied on his possession of a masterful but intuitive approach to and means of navigating space:

What I can do—could do—is operate in places most people can’t. I know which side of a street to walk to avoid snipers. I know my way around, even

places I've never been before. [...] I can get into areas that are supposed to be closed, reach people who're supposed to be inaccessible, and get out with a story. (p.7)

However, when Richard arrives at the Lazarus, the geometry of the hotel challenges his impeccable sense of space: 'The building was so tall that from street level perspective distorted the shape [...] lines [...] bulged and narrowed according to rules that had nothing to do with load-bearing' (p.12). Richard is confounded, and again the hotel appears invested with the power to throw the protagonist's conceptualisation of space into disarray: 'Richard Speke had regularly found his way to spots so remote they were missing from their own country's maps. Now, assailed by doubt, he studied the letter [...] wondering if he'd come to the wrong place' (p.14). Just as we saw above in Allen's reading of Kracauer's work, so does the hotel space appear for both Christie and Bannister as a site capable of defamiliarising the familiar: of confounding Miss Marple's surface expectations of the archaic Bertram's, or challenging Richard's mastery of space. Nevertheless, this focus on the agency of the hotel space to disturb or subvert the protagonists' preconceptions of both the hotel and of the arrangement of urban space itself is short lived in both novels. Indeed, the very term 'whodunit' portrays an emphasis upon the role of human agency and action within the mystery narrative: no matter how salient the hotel setting may appear in Christie's and Bannister's novels, this salience is ultimately subordinated beneath the question of *who is responsible* for the murky goings-on which transpire as each narrative progresses. In the rest of this chapter however, I will argue that the hotel spaces found in works by contemporary authors like Smith and Ali demand a re-writing of this kind of hotel narrative. In this re-writing, Kracauer's notion of the hotel lobby as offering a potentially revelatory subject position from which to see the world 'creating itself' persists, as does the notion of the hotel as a space particularly conducive to narrative. So too

does the connection between the scale, layout and surface appearance of the hotel and the challenge to characters' existing conceptions of spatiality and identity, made briefly by Christie's and Bannister's texts. However, these more contemporary texts, I will argue, place the hotel space as a much more vital agent in the stimulation of narrative and in re-thinking the connections which have dominated much of this thesis so far: namely, the connections between urban space, affect, memory, narrative and agency. Both Smith's and Ali's novels, we shall find, rather explore the hotel as yet another prime setting which speaks of the interaction between space and selfhood, the narrative role and agency of the built urban space, and once again, as in the previous chapter, of the importance of the hotel as a space which lies both inside of yet also at a tangent to dominant networks of capitalist exchange and production.

Ali Smith's *Hotel World*: The Hotel Space, Selfhood and Pathology

To continue from where Kracauer's work and Christie's and Bannister's novels leave off, Smith's *Hotel World* brings us back to the hotel lobby to tell the story of Lise, the Global Hotel receptionist. Each of the novel's five main sections is told through the focalisation of a different female protagonist: Sara Wilby the dead chambermaid; homeless woman Else who begs outside the hotel; Lise the receptionist; Penny the superficial petty-journalist sent to review the hotel; and finally Clare Wilby, Sara's sister, who dons her dead sibling's uniform in order to infiltrate the hotel and uncover the now-empty lift shaft down which Sara fell to her fate. It is Lise's narrative however which most closely unites issues we have thus far explored, including the relationship between a tenuous sense of selfhood and spatial agency, and the ability of urban spaces to set in motion fields of affect which profoundly influence the narratives told about them.

Lise's tale opens to find her bedridden with a mysterious, debilitating condition, the symptoms of which include extreme tiredness, depression and memory loss. Whilst Lise's ailments echo Smith's own experience of chronic fatigue syndrome, her condition also involves spatio-temporal disturbance. The monotony of spending many successive hours lying in bed leads Lise to an experience of time and space in which stasis and frantic movement appear merged together and which she compares, just like Casimir in Hill's *Underground*, to the world of Alice in Wonderland: 'a second of time was stretched so long and so thin that you could see veins in it,' accompanied by the disorienting feeling of plunging constantly down a well, 'the sides of the tunnel flying up past her at thousands, maybe millions of miles an hour' (Smith, 2002, p.84). Furthermore, Lise appears to manifest agoraphobic symptoms, as the reduction of her world to one single bedroom means that 'to see a city full of people walking, smoke rising, cars roaring, days happening, was terrifying' (p.89). Accompanying these symptoms is Lise's threadbare sense of self, emphasised as she tries to fill in a work incapacity questionnaire about her illness and is left facing a phrase which mirrors the void she feels inside herself: 'I am a () person' (p.85).

In a reverse of the pattern identified above in the hotel detective novel, the hotel in which Lise had worked for eighteen months before falling ill only becomes *increasingly* implicated in the manifestation of her symptoms: she suffers a distinct inability to leave the hotel behind in her illness, as emphasised through the actions of her mother, Deidre. In the process of producing an 'epic poem' in homage of the hotel space which is 'to be called "Hotel World"', Deidre interrogates her daughter whilst on her sickbed, hungry for details of hotel life, insisting that Lise 'concentrate for Deidre. Lise. Lise? Tell me anything. Anything about the hotel [...] write them down for me as and when you remember them, things that happened. Anything you remember' (pp.93-4). As part of the noise that surrounds Lise in her

disorienting illness, her mother's hotel memory-game and her symptoms become explicitly melded together: '*write down the things you can remember for me*, the poet-mother was saying. *Write down your symptoms*, the lady doctor was saying' (p.94). Smith therefore hints towards a relationship between Lise's pathology and the hotel space which she quite literally cannot leave behind.

Indeed, this implication persists even further into Lise's section of the narrative. Forced into 'making an effort to think about the hotel' (p.98), but unable to recall the idiosyncratic details which her mother demands, a memory is stirred in Lise's brain which she cannot quite place. 'It was something about baths, about a bath, something to do with a bathroom' is all that Lise can recollect, a TV advert for bubble bath interfering with and blocking any further recall of the memory (*Ibid.*). From the previous section of the novel however, the reader perceives that Lise's half-memory echoes a recent occurrence in which, as a philanthropic gesture, Lise invites the homeless Else to spend a night in the hotel free of charge. Intimidated by the hotel environment however, Else flees her room before the evening is out, leaving the bathroom taps running and causing a flood which is later blamed upon the carelessness of a hotel maid. What is even more significant however is the short temporal space separating this event which half-stirs Lise's memory and the death of Sara Wilby. Indeed, other parts of the narrative reveal that it was the very same evening that Lise allowed Else into the hotel that Clare Wilby gained entry to The Global and exposed the boarded-up lift shaft down which her sister fell.

Consequently, Lise's narrative reveals an intriguing dynamic. When Lise actively tries to recollect details from her previous working life inside the hotel, these details elude her. Nevertheless, when Lise attempts to distance herself from the hotel, the narrative only retracts to place her right back inside it. For instance, on her sickbed, Lise insists on unplugging her

telephone when her mother leaves the house, clearly demonstrating resistance against her previous role as the hotel's receptionist: a role punctuated by answering constant telephone calls and the persistent repetition of the phrase 'Good evening, Global Hotels, can I help you?' (p.97). Immediately after this act of resistance however, the reader is asked to 'imagine Lise's memory opening,' as they are transported back to a time before Lise fell ill and, indeed, back to the hotel, to find 'Lise, behind reception, [...] at work' (p.101). Furthermore, this shift in time—which leads the narrative to relate an evening in the life of Lise as a hotel receptionist—takes Lise back dangerously close to Sara Wilby's death: she makes a slip of the tongue, remarking to fellow employee Duncan that '[i]t's dead tonight,' 'dead' being an 'unsayable word' for Duncan, since 'everybody who works there knows [...] he was on the top floor with Sara Wilby when she did it' (pp.105 & 106). As an employee of the hotel which has seen this tragic death occur in its midst, Lise's behaviour is constantly checked against and determined by the persisting imminence of the tragedy which has occurred inside the hotel space.

It is here, therefore, that the link implied between Lise's symptoms and between the hotel space itself snaps into focus. Like the subjects in Kracauer's hotel lobby, Lise is robbed of her human agency. This is expressed in the text in two ways: firstly, in the short period between Sara Wilby's death and the onset of her mysterious illness, Lise is forced to constantly check her behaviour, always watching her words for the charged meanings which Sara's death might give them ('It's dead tonight'). Indeed, this arrest of Lise's human agency is only then made more explicit by her illness, in which Lise is capable of little except lying in bed. Moreover, the spatio-temporal disorientation which Lise experiences as part of her illness reiterates her condition as one in which the partial arrest of her human agency also results in an obliteration of her ability to master and 'know' space. This becomes evident as Lise's disarray is

presented in spatial terms: 'Lise's world spun: in its spinning, the names of all its places were loosened and jettisoned off the sides of it, leaving nothing but blanks, outlines waiting to be rediscovered and renamed' (p.119). However, unlike Kracauer's human subjects, Lise does not experience the dissolution of her human agency as solely the result of the state of disinterest instilled by the space of the hotel lobby. Instead, the 'disinterest' of Lise's illness appears to bear a greater meaning in Smith's text, and it is here, I want to argue, that the role of the hotel space itself causes Smith's hotel narrative to extend yet exceed the ideas expressed in Kracauer's cultural commentary on hotel spaces, and in the British hotel detective novel. Like Kracauer, Smith presents the hotel as a site which exerts a strong agency of its own over Lise; unlike Christie's and Bannister's novels however, this agency is not then subordinated beneath a 'whodunit' narrative heavily prioritises the role of human agency and responsibility. Instead, I propose to read Smith's narrative as if it *is* the hotel space which robs Lise of this agency, this time by emphasising Smith's hotel space as working in two crucial ways, both of which closely echo the roles played by the abandoned and subterranean spaces covered in previous chapters. The first of these techniques comes in presenting the hotel as an urban space which refuses to forget the tragedy which has happened within it; the second technique sees the hotel work as a site of access of blockage for Lise, pulling her back towards it yet at the same time eluding her, whilst also, in places, provoking involuntary memories beyond her volitional control.

The Hotel Refuses to Forget

Looking specifically at tourist interest in geographical locations associated with fictional detectives, Dutch scholar Stijn Reijnders employs the concept of the 'guilty landscape' (*schuldig landschap*) coined by Dutch writer and artist Armando (2009, p.175). This notion

claims that as a result of the crimes which have apparently taken place there, a landscape becomes a place of suffering, pain or death, in which place as well as person can be thought of as 'guilty'. Reijnders thus presents yet another eloquent way of expressing how spaces might take on their own agency and responsibility: 'The power of the term "guilty landscape" is that it assigns an active role to the landscape. Just like people, landscapes can harbour guilt' (Reijnders, 2009, p.175). However, Reijnders elaborates that a guilty landscape is a landscape which, after having played home to an atrocity, is thought to 'flourish and prosper as if nothing had happened, thus erasing or camouflaging the traces of the past' (2008). It is my argument therefore that The Global Hotel in *Hotel World* rather acts as the *opposite* of Reijnders' guilty landscape in this instance. We saw above the ways in which her threadbare memories of life at the hotel bring Lise within touching distance of the memory of Sara's death. Furthermore, a large portion of the evening that we see Lise behind her Reception desk is taken up by her contemplation of Sara's death, and the ways in which this event has become engrained in the hotel space itself, noting that 'Global Hotels made it compulsory for members of staff from this branch to attend Sara Wilby's funeral,' whilst Lise becomes convinced she must have 'known' Sara, since the hotel brought them together 'on the same rota for the first of the two nights Sara Wilby worked at the Global' (pp.108 & 109-10). Rather than going on to 'thrive' after a tragedy within its walls as Reijnders describes of the guilty landscape, The Global Hotel is rather *unable* to forget or erase both its part in Sara Wilby's death and the event itself, forcing its sorrows to re-manifest themselves in a pathological form through characters like Lise and Duncan. For, in addition to the onset of Lise's strange illness soon after Sara's death, the text suggests that fellow employee Duncan requires 'therapy' for depression after making the fatal wager with Sara that she could fit inside the hotel's dumbwaiter (p.107). Both Lise and Duncan then fall victim to pathologies

instilled by the memorial and affective capabilities of the hotel space to hold onto the horror of the death which occurred within it. Unlike Reijnder's guilty landscape therefore, The Global Hotel is unable to forget Sara's death, revisiting both Sara's and its own suffering through the provocation of pathological symptoms in its staff.

Furthermore, Lise's debilitating impoverishment of identity, selfhood and memory even further extends our discussion of the interaction between space and affect in contemporary British writing as observed in chapter two. There, we saw Teresa Brennan's focus upon affective transmission between humans, neglecting discussion of the possibility that such transmission might take place across and between human and non-human subjects. In *Hotel World* however, Ali Smith uses the Global and its profound effect upon Lise's illness to produce a narrative which advocates the idea that affective transmission might take place between the space itself and the human subject. We have already seen Brennan's expression of affect as permeating, unfixed and able to flow between and among subjects, such that 'the idea of transmitted affects undermines the dichotomy between the individual and the environment' (Brennan, 2004, p.7). In *Hotel World* therefore, Smith undermines this dichotomy even further, suggesting yet another way in which the built urban environment might exert a reciprocal agency over the human individual: namely, by revisiting its own pain through the stimulation of psycho-somatic symptoms in those who must live and work inside its affective fields on a daily basis, so close to where tragedy has occurred. Yet again therefore, *Hotel World*, like many of the texts we have looked at so far, uses the notion of spatial agency to promote a more fluid approach to selfhood which appreciates the self as open to intrusion and affective transmission, rather than as an emotionally contained discrete entity: those 'more permeable ways of being' on which Brennan lays so much emphasis (p.12).

‘Repeated Return’: The Hotel as a Site of Access and Blockage

Indeed, Smith’s focus upon the profound ways in which the hotel becomes embedded within Lise’s psyche does not stop at the account of her evening at work behind the reception desk, nor at this constant motion in which the hotel space and its resonances draw Lise back to the death of Sara Wilby. Just like the disused St. George’s Hospital in Royle’s *Matter of the Heart*, so the hotel space persists in following Lise across time and space. Smith notes that ‘Global International PLC’ to whom the fictional chain of Global Hotels belong, suggest that ‘site duplication’ (that is, the standardisation and homogenisation of their branches) leads to ‘psychological security, nostalgia and [...] repeated-return’ of customers (Smith, 2002, pp.109-10). This notion of ‘repeated return’ becomes doubly meaningful for Lise, as the hotel becomes a site of repeated-return for her consciousness: a return that is at times greeted with resistance as the hotel refuses to yield the details which Lise strives to remember, whilst at others transports Lise back to her time behind the reception desk whether she wills it or not.

For example, techniques of prolepsis are used in Lise’s section of the narrative which anticipate and track the influence which the hotel space will have over her, and the extension of this influence into her future. This prolepsis also demonstrates both the way in which the hotel confounds her in both the present and the future, thus acting as a measure of her depression and memory-loss. For instance, the severity of Lise’s amnesia is gauged in references to the familiar environment of the hotel lobby: ‘In bed ill in six months time, Lise will be unable to recall the precise scent of the Global lobby’ states the disembodied narrator of Lise’s section of the novel (p.111). A similar technique is employed in relation to the hotel’s combination lock code, and the fact that ‘in six months Lise will be unable to remember this code’ (p.114). In both these instances, the hotel thus acts as a site of memory-

blockage for Lise, disallowing her access to her previous working identity and denying her the ability to create a coherent narrative of self which helps to tie past, present and future together: ‘a story [...] somewhere, insistent, strung between this place and the last and the next, and she was trying to remember it’ (p.84).

On the other hand, the hotel also manifests the ability to provoke involuntary memories throughout Lise’s illness and recovery:

In two years’ time, on holiday in Canada and desperate to get out of a sudden spring snowstorm, she will shelter in the Ottawa Global and as she enters its lobby will unexpectedly remember small sensory details of her time working for Global, detail she would never [...] have imagined she even knew (p.111).

For Lise then, the hotel acts as a reference point of repeated return against which she comes to measure the degree to which her illness distances her from her previous life, fracturing any coherent self-narrative. Furthermore, the centrality of the *familiar* – of the generic decor and atmosphere of the Global Hotel chain to these sudden surges of memory from Lise’s unconscious emphasise Pready’s suggestion that it is their very ‘universal, or generalized style, monotonous and sterile’ that ‘give hotel spaces their peculiar power’ (2009, p.58). Like the abandoned hospital in Royle’s *Matter of the Heart*, the standardised Global Hotel remains a latent presence for Lise, in places actualised through a return to her consciousness as a point of frustrating blockage or unpredictable access to memory and her previous identity. Just like Kracauer’s quadrangle in ‘Two Planes’, the hotel, for Lise, ‘expands toward the four sides of the world’ (Kracauer, 1995, p.39), following her across time and space, constantly testing her

memory and self-concept. In this sense, despite its homogenisation, the hotel lobby space succeeds in eluding and confounding Lise as she struggles to remember details of her work there, but then simultaneously confounds her by suddenly and involuntarily provoking memories even when she is spatially removed from the hotel branch in which she used to work. Consequently, rather than becoming subordinated beneath questions and investigations of human agency, Smith's hotel space persists as a figure of agency throughout. As Matthias (2006, p.5) claims, 'while people come and go, the hotel remains the one stable factor throughout'; this is precisely, I want to argue, how the space of *The Global* operates in *Hotel World*. The glue holding Lise's tenuous self-narrative together, whilst in other places denying her access to memories and thus further fracturing this narrative, is indeed the hotel space itself. Such a reading allows us to approach Smith's novel as precisely the kind of narrative envisioned by Matthias, in which the hotel 'provides the unifying principle where story-telling could otherwise appear scattered, and [...] can rise to the status of an autonomous player at a time when a coherent literary character has become difficult to create' (p.5). As a site of repeated return then for Lise, the hotel space becomes a space of the uncanny. As Nicholas Royle⁴ notes, the phenomenon of the Uncanny remains bound, as Freud's 1919 essay on the subject suggests, to 'a sense of repetition or "coming back"-the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat' (Royle, 2003, p.2). As Royle demonstrates, Freud exemplifies this compulsion to repeat by referring to 'the lover each of whose love affairs with a woman passes through the same phases and reaches the same conclusion' (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, p.292, cited in Royle, 2003, p.90). Just as the unconscious compulsion to repeat in Freud thus reduces the human subject's agency over their own actions and relationship choices, so then does the hotel encourage Lise

⁴ Nicholas Royle, scholar from University of Sussex, not to be confused with Nicholas Royle, the author of *Matter of the Heart* and *The Director's Cut* discussed at length in chapter two of this thesis.

into an involuntarily repeated pattern in which the hotel returns as simultaneously a reminder of and also as point of blockage for memories of her life before illness. The hotel then is, for Lise, an uncanny double: a site of both access and resistance; a repository for memories which are both familiar and unfamiliar. Through such a reading, Smith's novel emerges as a space within which to observe the movements of the hotel space between and beyond the consciousness of individual characters, and the narrative and affective agencies which the hotel space exerts through these movements.

It is not solely in *Hotel World* however that the hotel space constitutes a site of repeated return which, unlike Reijnders' guilty landscapes, refuses to forget the tragedy which has occurred within it. Indeed, both these concepts are re-iterated by Monica Ali in her recent novel *In The Kitchen*, set principally in the kitchen of the Imperial Hotel in London. The narrative follows Gabriel—head chef at the Imperial—as he appears to suffer a mental breakdown following the accidental death of a night porter, Yuri, in the kitchen basement. Immediately, motifs found in Smith's contemporary hotel novel are seen to recur in Ali's text. Firstly, the narrative opens with the hotel becoming a site of death and interrogation. Furthermore, Gabe's resulting mental aberration once again suggests that the hotel space is capable of re-visiting its tragedies through the provocation of pathological symptoms in those who work and live in close proximity to the scene of this tragedy. Yet again in *In The Kitchen*, Kracauer's notion of the hotel space as one of transience and impersonality offers clues as to why Ali is drawn towards the narrative possibilities of the hotel space, in a novel which focuses on issues of multiculturalism and the experience of living and working as a newcomer or immigrant in London: a city in which life moves increasingly quickly, and the urban landscape is under constant redevelopment. *In The Kitchen* however sees the feeling of

transience emphasised in Kracauer's and Tallack's hotel lobby discourse extend to the workers' quarters of the contemporary hotel where staff members are themselves transient: in some cases literal refugees, like Gabe's assistant Benny from Liberia. As we shall see however, Gabriel's itinerant staff re-create the hotel as a space which persistently throws Gabriel's sense of identity and selfhood into fragmentation and doubt, just as the Global Hotel does for Lise.

Monica Ali's *In The Kitchen*: A Crisis of Selfhood, Identity and Spatiality

Above, we observed how the hotel, with its memorial and affective resonances, provokes in Lise a sickness which strips her of her human agency to 'master' space.⁵ Indeed, a very similar pattern occurs for Ali's protagonist Gabriel. Gabe owns his own property in the city: a flat which is part of a converted school development 'which now was his alone' (p.35), and which gives him a vantage point over London. As the novel progresses however, Gabe's ability to master space comes under huge threat, as he displays a tenuous sense of self which once again appears simultaneous with a reduced ability to map and manage his spatial being in the city. For example, the bar at which Gabe is a regular customer suddenly closes and is re-possessioned without explanation, leaving Gabe pondering upon how 'he used to know a dozen places. He used to know this town', but is rather left with the overwhelming feeling that 'London was slipping away from him. The longer he lived here, the less familiar it became' (Ali, 2009, p.286). As the novel progresses, Gabe's ability to navigate and master the city only deteriorates as he finds himself on the wrong tube line for what should be a routine journey into work: 'Going in completely the wrong direction when he'd done this journey so

⁵ Preddy also notes the correspondence between a tenuous sense of identity and a subsequent tenuous sense of spatiality for Else in *Hotel World*, whose refusal to consider her own reflection in a hotel mirror highlights her inability to feel comfortable in the hotel space, working to 'articulate the vexed relationship between the individual and the space, and thus the character's frail sense of identity' (2009, pp. 162-3).

many times [...]. At King's Cross he studied the underground map as if he's never seen it before' (p.348). Gabriel is therefore eluded by his work-place and is left bewildered and lost.

In turn, his tenuous sense of self becomes exaggerated: 'What am I? The question pinged round and round plaintively until, firing faster and faster, it took on a sharper edge. What am I? What am I? A nobody? A Nothing? A zero?' (p.372). When Gabe eventually finds his way, it takes for his phone to ring and give his recorded message—'You are through to the office of Gabriel Lightfoot, executive chef of the imperial hotel'—for him to realise '[t]hat's me [...]' this is my office and that is me' (*Ibid.*). Like Lise therefore, Gabe's attempt to salvage a coherent narrative of self sees him simultaneously repelled by and drawn towards the hotel often against his own volition; as the examples of the failed journey to work and the telephone message show, the hotel has the agency to both elude Gabe and to interpellate him, with little apparent intervention by Gabe's own will. Both Gabe and Lise therefore find their own identities and memories to be somewhat compromised by the agency of the hotel space. What emerges here therefore is yet another way in which the agency of the hotel space itself provokes both Smith and Ali to re-write established forms of hotel narrative, deviating from and subverting some of the ways in which the hotel space has been envisioned by previous commentators, most particularly where issues of *identity* are concerned. Indeed, many of the scholars of hotel space to whom we have made reference in this chapter portray the hotel as a place in which identities become progressively malleable: a place of emancipation from the hegemonic hierarchies of the domestic home, in which one might thus achieve a certain 'freedom' to reassess and reshape one's identity (see Matthias, 2004, p.326). Similarly, Pritchard and Morgan portray the hotel as a space in which playfulness opens up the opportunity to freely redefine one's identity at one's own liberty, highlighting hotels as 'places where the meanings and the fluidities of our personal identities [...] can be confirmed

or (re) constituted' (2006, p.767). Furthermore, Krebs argues that hotel cooks occupy a particularly ambiguous position, not belonging to higher management whilst simultaneously achieving a distinction from other more minor staff, such that 'the cooks can thus construct an identity of power and importance which the other employees cannot share' (2009, p.132).

In Lise and Gabriel however, both Smith and Ali demonstrate that identity play is not quite so voluntarily available within the hotel of contemporary British fiction. For Lise and Gabe respectively, the hotel is not the site of freely and playfully negotiable identity as many commentators have portrayed it. We have seen the ways in which the hotel works for each protagonist as a site of access and blockage, at times preventing both Lise and Gabe from achieving mastery over space and over their sense of selfhood. At the same time however, as seen with Lise's involuntary memories in the Canadian hotel lobby and in Gabe's sudden jolt back into himself prompted by the recorded message of his office telephone, the hotel also intervenes to offer scraps of information which both characters might use as a means of reaffirming their own identities and self-narratives. What is crucial however is the fact that this reaffirmation occurs not according to the will of either protagonist, nor as the result of some subversive identity-play for which the hotel becomes a mere stage. Rather, it is the hotel space itself which teases and plays with the protagonists, at times denying them access to memories or to means of spatial mastery which might help them cling to a coherent self-narrative, whilst at other times snapping them back into their work-defined identities as hotel staff beyond their own volition. The situation envisioned by Matthias, Krebs and Pritchard and Morgan therefore becomes inverted, and the hotel space does not act as a benign stage for the performance and re-negotiation of new identities. Instead, the hotel employee's identity is deeply bound up with the hotel space itself, which possesses the agency to both memorially and geographically elude the human subject, 'shocking' both Lise and Gabe, as Benjamin

might describe, into involuntary memories of their previous selves. Indeed, Ali goes one step further in emphasising the hotel's intervention in Gabriel's sense of selfhood and identity. Ali places heavy emphasis upon the wide ethnic variety of Gabe's staff: Liberian Benny feels stories are a refugee's most prized possessions; Suleiman is a conscientious and profound Indian sous-chef and chef Nikolai was once a talented obstetrician back home in Russia. As Christopher Tayler argues in his review of *In The Kitchen* for *The Guardian*, the racial diversity of his staff and the community which they create leaves Gabriel with a deep 'envy of clear-cut identities and the presumed social solidarity of immigrant communities. "Fuck you," Gabe thinks at a veiled woman in the street, "for having what I don't"' (2009). To reintroduce Kracauer's commentary on the hotel lobby is therefore enlightening here. For Kracauer, 'it is a facade of pleasurable anonymity which keeps people in the hotel lobby from staring into the emptiness of their existence, and people lose their individuality behind the "peripheral equality of social masks", the left over of a shared set of values or sense of community that held together older societies' (Matthias, 2006, p.39). Indeed, in the example of Gabe, Ali proves that it is no longer solely in the hotel lobby that the protagonist is faced with the revelation of his own emptiness in contrast to other societies from which s/he feels distanced. Interrogating what it means to be British in an increasingly multicultural society, Ali also shows that the hotel kitchen, with its itinerant and ethnically diverse staff, is more than capable of forcing Gabe to confront the emptiness of his own existence: an emptiness and impoverished sense of self and identity which is only exaggerated in the face of the profound and vibrant characters with whom the hotel kitchen juxtaposes him every day of his working life.

'Repeated Return' and the Hotel Narrative in Monica Ali's *In The Kitchen*

Bearing all of the above in mind, it therefore becomes possible to read both *In The Kitchen* and *Hotel World* as narratives advocating the agency of the hotel space to act as a site of repeated return for those who occupy its space on a routine daily basis. We saw above how The Global in *Hotel World* acts as a recurring presence and absence for Lise, persistently and often involuntarily acting as the yardstick against which she measures the extent of her self-effacing pathological symptoms. Following Lise across space and time, the Global moves like a field of affect: a force of potentiality which is, every so often, actualised through Lise's consciousness often against her own volition, as her experience in the Canadian lobby demonstrates. For Gabriel, the Imperial Hotel works in a similar manner, but this time acts rather as a site of repeated return for his *unconscious* rather than his consciousness, in the form of a series of dreams which escalate in severity as the narrative develops. Immediately before Gabe begins to feel that London is 'slipping away from him' (Ali, 2009, p.286), he confides in colleague Nikolai about a recurring dream in which he is repeatedly transported to the 'catacombs' of the hotel to find himself beside the body of Yuri, the Ukrainian porter who fell to his death down the pantry stairs at the opening of the novel. Each time the dream recurs however, the scene which Gabriel faces becomes more grotesque, the body being surrounded by mountains of food and feeding maggots. Increasingly desperate to uncover the meaning of this dream and pushed ever closer to the brink of nervous breakdown, Gabriel seeks counsel from Nikolai, who concludes that Gabe is in need of "[a] Freudian analyst" (p.286). Just as Lise's illness is portrayed in *Hotel World*, so does Nikolai emphasise that Gabriel's dreams represent an arrest of human agency even more exaggerated than that implied in Kracauer's work, as Gabe's nightmares make Nikolai ponder: 'Do we control even the basic [human] functions? Can you wake when you want to? Sleep when you want to? Can you forget your dreams?' (p.288). Moreover, we saw above the ways in which the Global Hotel acted as a site

of both access and blockage for Lise, returning her to events which take her back in time, dangerously close to the death of Sara Wilby. Subsequently, we see a very similar dynamic at work in Ali's text, as Gabriel's recurring dream also persists in transporting him right back to the scene of the tragic death which occurred in the hotel space: this time the death of Yuri, which, '[w]hen he looked back, he felt that the death of the Ukrainian was the point at which things began to fall apart' (p.7).

Uniting both Smith's and Ali's texts therefore is the notion of the hotel as a space which fails to forget the pain and death which has occurred within it, and persists in revisiting this pain through the provocation of pathological symptoms on those who work in close confines to the affective fields set in motion by tragedies such as the deaths of Sara and Yuri. For Lise this manifests itself in the symptoms of her elusive illness, for Gabe it occurs through the recurring stimulation of his disturbing dream. In both cases, the hotel's ability to visit its own misfortune upon those who work within it here offers a more clearly defined example to support Joanna Pready's suggestion that 'the hotel possesses some form of agency, or subjectivity, which [...] affects the lives of the characters that inhabit it,' and highlights in more illuminating detail Pready's observation that 'characters in hotel novels often react to the intensity of their surroundings by exercising extreme reactions to events that occur within the area' (2009, pp.54-55 & 92). Subsequently, where for Kracauer it is the overwhelming human presence of 'unfamiliar people' which populates the hotel space with 'ungraspable flat ghosts,' in Smith's and Ali's novels it is rather the hotel space's own insistence on revisiting the pain of its literal 'ghosts' (Sara and Yuri) upon its employees which constructs the hotel as a haunted space (Kracauer, 1995, p.183).

However, Ali's text goes further in offering an explanation as to why the hotel space provides a prime narrative site within which to explore the urban space's provocation of

pathological symptoms within its human subjects, as it fails to forget or repress the death which has occurred within it. This explanation therefore resides in the importance of *reputation* for the hotel space, and the way in which preserving this reputation involves a careful monitoring and manipulation of the narratives which are preserved and reproduced about the hotel space. As Marc Katz observes, it falls to the management and staff of a hotel ‘to develop strategies to play down any rupturing events like crime or domestic violence that may take place on the premises’ (1999, p.140). This extends, Katz argues, to any instances of death within the hotel space, in which case “‘suppression is as good as expression’” (*Ibid.*). Katz’s most crucial comment however comes in his claim that, when scandal or tragedy occurs in the hotel space, ‘[r]etaining control of the hotel narrative was a form of moral hygiene meant to protect the good name and commercial viability of the house’ (*Ibid.*). In other words, a vital role of the hotel management and staff is to maintain control over the hotel narrative, to ensure that the more unfavourable narrative possibilities offered by the hotel space do not enter general circulation and risk sullyng the reputation of the establishment. Indeed, a nascent version of this idea is expressed in Christie’s *At Bertram’s Hotel*, where the upkeep of Bertram’s excellent reputation is of pinnacle importance and plays a part in the suspense and scandal of the mystery narrative, its ‘useful [...] reputation’ acting as a means of deception, initially leading police to the errant belief that the hotel is the ‘one place in London that was absolutely above suspicion’ (Christie, 2002, p.166). Control of the narratives which are told about the hotel is therefore crucial: once this control begins to break down, and the hotel takes on a narrative agency of its own, scandals are uncovered.

In fact, this notion of control over the publicisation and legitimacy of hotel stories is made explicit throughout *In The Kitchen*. For example, Gabriel recalls an instance in which manager of The Imperial, Mr. Maddox, demonstrates an awareness that his hotel once played

home to Charles Chaplin's controversial escapades with underage flapper girls; he has, however, ensured that this hotel-story 'remained curiously omitted from the hotel brochure' (Ali, 2009, p.26). When Gabriel is successfully interviewed for his job and thus becomes a member of hotel staff in his own right, Mr. Maddox is however happy to reveal the story as an amusing anecdote to heighten Gabe's sense of intrigue surrounding his new workplace. From early in the novel then, the reader is made aware that The Imperial is caught in a complex web of management and control: as the hotel space threatens to 'leak' stories of Yuri's death and other historical scandals like Chaplin's, so is action taken to suppress these narratives from entering into general circulation, in order to preserve the hotel's good name and exclude these unfavourable tales from becoming an embedded part of the fabric of the hotel space. Similarly in *Hotel World*, publication of the story of Sara Wilby's death means that The Global risks becoming a curiosity, as guests are drawn to the hotel 'keen to see the location of the death' (p.108), whilst we have already seen how Lise is forced to check her language for fear of reminding both herself and Duncan of Sara's accident. What Lise's illness and Gabriel's dreams demonstrate however is that in their respective novels, both Smith and Ali explore the idea that the hotel space itself might answer back to this censorship imposed upon the narratives and versions of itself which are allowed to be circulated and actualised. By inflicting repression and preventing the hotel space from offering up and offloading its more painful stories freely and at will, the hotel is all the more unable to forget or dissipate the pain experienced within it. Consequently, the hotel revisits this pain all the more fiercely upon its employees, afflicting them with psychosomatic symptoms and disturbing nightmares respectively. The hotel refuses to be moulded into a single, favourable, reputation-saving narrative which might be sold in Mr. Maddox's 'brochures', and manifests this refusal by provoking pathological symptoms in those whose job it is to maintain the public face of the

hotel: in other words, the hotel's narrative agency matches that of its human subjects, and in doing so sets up a strong channel of affective transmission between the tragedy-ridden space itself and the residing human subject. Through the exertion of an agency which overcomes human-imposed censorship of the hotel narrative, the hotel also becomes a contemporary space of the uncanny, proving that some of its stories cannot be hidden, but rather must come to light through the suffering of those who work in its close confines.

Furthermore, this notion of the hotel 'answering back' to attempts to censor and control those versions of itself which are allowed actualisation through the circulation of narrative again brings us back to the issue of Modernisms addressed earlier in this chapter. For, the hotel of contemporary British fiction brings side-by-side both the inheritances of literary Modernism and the uses of affect theory as a tool through which to explore the operations and circulations of contemporary urban spaces. Both literary modernism and affect theory demonstrate a concern with the what-is-allowed-to-be-made-real in the metropolis: a concern which of course deeply informs this thesis as a whole. For instance, Britzolakis notes that crucial to Jean Rhys's late modernism is a portrayal of the European metropolis's alienation of 'ethnic "strangers"', creating a marginalisation of otherness which 'marks a founding repression of other geographies and temporalities' (2007, p.460). In other words, the presence of these ethnic 'strangers' in the metropolis points to alternative geographies and narratives which are kept from being made real: that is, kept from being actualised as part of the modern metropolis. As a result, just like the hotel-stories which are censored from mainstream circulation, the presence of these ethnic others in urban space is disturbing and unhomely, representing a version of urban existence which, rather than being actualised within the modern city, must instead exist only as field of potentiality. Through the readings offered above however, we are able to see how the contemporary British hotel novels assessed here

advocate the agency of this field of potentiality, allowing us to see what happens when the hotel space's narrative others push their way back into both human and spatial consciousness.

This notion of potentiality therefore brings us immediately back to the issue of affect, and to Ben Anderson's contention that the actualised emotions produced by a field of affect 'can never coincide with the totality of potential affective expression. Movements of affect are always accompanied by a real but virtual knot of tendencies and latencies that generate differences and divergences in what becomes actual' (2005, p.738). As the above discussion shows therefore, both Smith's and Ali's hotels can be seen to operate in a similar way to the other kinds of urban spaces explored in this thesis: namely, by carrying with them narratives and memories often denied actualisation, yet which persist in moving and affecting human subjects, thus influencing the 'actual' of the fictional world. The abandoned, subterranean and hotel spaces of contemporary British fiction therefore carry into the current historical moment the subversive powers of literary modernism's 'ethnic strangers': they represent repressed, censored and unsettled topographies which nevertheless linger in the city as fields of potentiality, exerting an agency even when the human powers which order the metropolis seek to prohibit them from becoming real.

The Hotel's Ambivalent Relationship to the Capitalist City

As well as representing a site characterised by competing narrative agencies, the hotel also denotes a site in which space becomes a commodity: sold or hired to those who can afford it, hotel space—according to Matthias—unites its guests in the sense that capital acts as a 'leveller' for all those who have the means by which to gain access to the hotel space. Where space is exchanged for money therefore, it remains imperative that the reputation of that space be upheld in order to justify the amount of money paid by guests for access to that space. This

issue therefore returns us to a matter addressed briefly in the opening sections of this chapter: namely, the relationship between the hotel space and the dominant networks of exchange according to which the capitalist city operates. To conclude this chapter, we now turn to explore this issue in more detail, and to examine the ways in which the hotels of both Smith's and Ali's texts closely parallel the subterranean cities in chapter three. For, in each novel, the hotel space unravels itself as heavily embedded within the narratives of mainstream urban capitalism, whilst simultaneously harbouring more resistant spaces which provide the opportunity for the circulation of alternative narratives.

Indeed, Alice Bennett describes *Hotel World* as a novel based around 'circles of economics' (2009, p.49), arguing that Lise's gift of allowing Else a room in the hotel leads to 'a chain of events that unintentionally becomes an economic circle' (p.43). Bennett claims that networks of investment, exchange and change permeate the novel, which works according to a dynamic set up by debts incurred by each of the central characters. Despite being open to such an economic reading however, I do not wish to argue that Smith's hotel brings all guests down to an equal and homogenous level due to their shared ability to pay for access to the hotel space. Instead, I rather wish to demonstrate how Smith emphasises the diverse idiosyncrasies of hotel guests, and the way in which the hotel space brings together opposing characters and worldviews, just as the subterranean Londons in chapter three juxtapose attitudes and approaches to space and selfhood from both the capitalist city above and the often counter-intuitive city below. This juxtaposition of worldviews which originate both inside and outside of the capitalist city's dominant social relations of production is represented explicitly in *Hotel World* by the coming together of journalist and hotel-reviewer Penny and Else, the homeless woman whom Lise grants access to the hotel for a night.

A striking contrast of attitudes to space and surroundings characterises Penny and Else. The reader's first encounter with Penny finds her in her hotel room at work on her review of *The Global Hotel*. Creating spatial clichés as she forces the hotel space into her formulaic tabloid jargon, Penny collects a stockpile of phrases from which she intends to spin her own hotel narrative: 'If you're looking for the classic place, the ideal place, the flawless place...' (p.130). However, as Penny emerges from her room to find Clare Wilby beating down the panel covering the lift shaft down which her sister Sara fell, she stumbles across Else attempting to escape from her room, and the hotel thus creates an unusual social juxtaposition which exposes Penny's misreading and ignorance. Initially, she believes Else to be 'some kind of druggy eccentric guest or maybe even a minor ex-rock star' (p.139). As Penny's section of the narrative continues and she accompanies Else for a walk around the city, her commitment to the capitalist driven city is further exposed. Her thought processes prove dominated by notions of property ownership and possession, as she presumes that Else's interest in peering longingly into the windows of family homes belies a desire 'to buy a house' (p.155). Furthermore, on discovering Else's homelessness, Penny's only viable response is monetary as she writes Else a large cheque, only to efface this gesture when she later calls the bank and has the cheque cancelled.

Else on the other hand is excluded from these networks of monetary exchange and consumerism in which Penny's life is so deeply embedded. Beholding the scenes which lie behind the windows of the houses at which she gazes, Else enjoys the scene inside without any compulsion to master or 'know' exactly what is going on, whilst Penny's focalisation concentrates only on what is missing and what cannot be decoded or explained, asking Else if she 'knows' the people inside, and trying to interpret the scene: 'They were outside a window with its curtains open: they could see in. A child, a girl, sat on a sofa reading a book. A

woman came into the room, said something' (p.157). In other words, Else appears far more able to surrender her human agency in order to sit back and watch the world 'create' itself, as Kracauer might have it. She is unfamiliar with Penny's newspaper *The World*, and demonstrates a more fluid approach to space which disrupts Penny's capitalist-entrenched mindset, describing to Penny that if one accepts that one is lost, then one cannot become lost: 'If you know you are [...] then you're not about to be it, lost' (p.165). In other words, Else suggests that to accept that one's surroundings may be confounding and may possess a disorientating agency over the human subject is to lessen the anxiety of being 'lost' by refusing constriction by the demand for purposeful and directed movements experienced in the 'productive' capitalist city. Being homeless, Else can therefore be likened to the 'disinterested' subject in Kracauer's hotel lobby who is to some degree disconnected from the networks of productivity and exchange which dominate the capitalist city. Excluded from such networks, Else's liminal situation also echoes that of the abandoned spaces explored in chapter two, left behind by their society's dominant modes and relations of production. The contrasting characters of Else and Penny thrown together by *The Global* in *Hotel World* demonstrates a juxtaposition of the different approaches to space, self and other which are available in the hotel, and which can be brought into tension and revelatory combination as the hotel throws guests into contact with each other. In this respect, the hotel echoes the subterranean city of the contemporary London descent narrative, whose crucial role is to force into juxtaposition above-ground and below-ground approaches to space and to selfhood, in order to question the apparent sanity of the former and the madness of the latter.

This contrast of worldviews thrown together inside the hotel features similarly in *In The Kitchen*, though this time the clash comes not between two guests, but between staff members

Gabe and Nikolai. When Gabriel confides in Nikolai about his recurring dream of Yuri's body, the pair's discussion turns towards '[d]estiny, fate, predestination', with Nikolai affirming that, 'as a man of reason and science,' he is prone to disagree with the notion of human free will and agency (Ali, 2009, p.288). In discussing why Yuri's death might be haunting Gabe, Nikolai however demonstrates an alternative approach to causation. He suggests that the dream shows Gabe taking some responsibility for what happened to Yuri; Gabe however disagrees, asking '[h]ow could that be my fault?' (p.291). Nevertheless, Nikolai's reply demonstrates a mode of thought with which Gabriel's Western capitalist mindset is unfamiliar. 'I did not say fault,' corrects Nikolai, 'I made a speculation about your feeling of responsibility—for the world in which we live, for the kind of world in which there will always be more Yuris, struggling to exist' (*Ibid.*). Gabriel however struggles to understand, merely retorting that 'I didn't make the world [...] I just have to live in it. Same as you' (*Ibid.*). By the end of the novel however, the fact that the hotel space has thrown he and Nikolai together leads Gabe, like the protagonists of the contemporary London descent narratives, to a more permeable mindset in which he is able to hold the apparently incongruous possibilities of randomness and causation in mind, without having to explain either notion away. Gabriel ponders that to avoid slipping on the pantry floor, 'Yuri could have dried his feet, but he didn't. It was all random and utterly inevitable. Gabriel saw it both ways, and between these two ways of seeing he felt not the slightest contradiction' (411). We saw in chapter three the ways in which the underground London of contemporary descent narrative lies both inside and outside of the realm of appropriation by the capitalist city above, thus bringing into juxtaposition the two very different approaches to space which characterise above and below, and thus constituting a large part of the choice faced by the protagonist in the urban underworld as they undergo their underground 'tests.' For these protagonists, the

crucial test lies in whether or not they are able to open their minds to the more confounding conceptualisations of space according to which the subterranean city operates. Similarly then does the hotel space bring Gabriel and Nikolai together to create an analogous juxtaposition of worldviews and opinions on human agency and causation, in which Gabriel is forced to confront Nikolai's scheme in which randomness, causation, agency and responsibility form a complex web rather than merely the sets of binary opposites to which Gabriel is accustomed.

That the contemporary urban hotel maintains a much more ambivalent relationship with the networks and commodity flows of capitalism than critics like Matthias and Katz might envision is even further emphasised by Ali. For, the circles of labour and exchange which fuel the narrative flow of *In The Kitchen* are not all necessarily linked to the mainstream capitalist business of the hotel. Like the subterranean city, the hotel lies partially inside yet also at a subversive tangent to mainstream monetary exchanges and commodity flows. Emphasising the lives of staff members rather than solely those of hotel guests, there is no doubt that both *Hotel World* and *In The Kitchen* emphasise the hotel as a space of labour: we saw above how both Lise and Gabriel are involuntarily interpellated by their hotel work space, reiterating that their self-concepts remain to some extent shackled to their identities as hotel workers. In Ali's novel however, the hotel is even more strongly highlighted as a space of labour, the kitchen in particular being the hotel space which 'despite numerous refurbishments and refittings—retained its workhouse demeanour, the *indelible stamp of generations of toil*' (p.19, my italics). Furthermore, manager Mr. Maddox goes so far as to implicate the hotel space as one of exploitation, asserting that "“there's only two things certain in hotel life,” [...]. “Number one: to make your margins you screw every last drop of blood from your workers. Number two: they screw you right back' (p.96). However, the exchange of wages for labour is not the only economic 'circle' which operates out of The Imperial Hotel. As Gabriel's suspicions are

aroused by shady meetings between kitchen porter Ivan and housekeeping matron Branka, he discovers that the hotel is playing host to far more sinister networks of exchange: namely, human trafficking. Gabe finally uncovers the plot in which ‘he [Ivan] gets girls from the hotel [...] and he sells them on’ (p.363). The perfect combination of public and private, the hotel provides rooms convenient for the secret *rendez-vous* whilst also bringing together a body of female staff readily available for trafficking. Subsequently, the hotel reveals itself as the perfect space for the execution of these illegal networks of labour and trafficking: ‘You’ve got a ready-made supply of girls. None of that business about getting them away from home, smuggling them, all that shit’ (p.365).

We have already seen how the hotel brings together uncomfortable combinations of guests and staff members: a co-existence of personalities and backgrounds which may rarely occur in normal life. In doing so, the hotel brings into close juxtaposition a variety of world views, attitudes and conceptualisations of time, space and human agency from which protagonists of the hotel novel either learn (as Gabe does) or fail to learn, and continue their lives in a state of capitalist-induced blindness and inertia, like Penny. In this sense therefore, we are able to read the hotel space of contemporary British fiction as working in a similar way to the subterranean city of the contemporary London descent narrative, acting as a space in which existing conceptualisations of space, selfhood and agency come under challenge and debate. On the other hand however, the hotel space is also seen to parallel the abandoned urban space, offering the ideal spatial layout for clandestine practices such as human trafficking, open not only to assimilation and redevelopment by the capitalist, consumerist city, but also to alternative networks and flows, including those of affective transmission and those of the more insidious trafficking of human beings and illegal, illegitimate labour power. In

conclusion however, we are brought full circle to the issues with which we began this chapter: namely, the ways in which the hotel of these contemporary novels challenges the kinds of Lefebvrian reading which it has attracted from cultural and sociological commentators. The hotel spaces of Smith's and Ali's novels possess the pathology-provoking powers in reaction to the censorship of certain strands of the hotel narrative, as well as an inability to forget the pain and suffering which have occurred within them. Subsequently, they do not fit as comfortably into Lefebvre's conceptualisation of the representational space as commentators like Pritchard and Morgan might believe, since implicit in such representational space is the notion that human agency might imaginatively re-appropriate such space as it wills. In the cases of Lise's illness and Gabriel's breakdown however, we have seen the manner in which the contemporary hotel narrative instead envisions the hotel space as arresting the agency of its "inhabitants" and "users" (Lefebvre, 1991, p.39), just as Kracauer describes of the hotel lobby. Those who inhabit and make use of the hotel space are therefore far from being at liberty to re-appropriate the hotel according to their own will, as the hotel space repeatedly acts as a site of simultaneous access and blockage, drawing the protagonist back towards the tragic event of death which it cannot dissipate or leave behind.

One issue nevertheless remains. For, Martina Krebs too resorts back to Lefebvre in accounting for the ways in which the hotel singles itself out as a prime site for the creation of narrative opportunity. Krebs claims that '[a]ccording to Lefebvre, encounters are needed to form social space [...] and are essential for social interaction. If nobody met anyone there would be no story to create' (p.100). Taking her cue from Lefebvre and his insistent focus upon the production of *social* space, Krebs emphasises 'encounter' here as a fundamentally social occurrence, in which people come together with other people thus creating the encounters which set narratives into motion. Indeed, this might appear to ring true above,

where we uncovered the hotel's potential in bringing together strange juxtapositions of characters and thus forcing differing attitudes towards space, selfhood and causation into contrast. There is however an inevitable danger here in attempting to argue that both Smith's and Ali's texts support Krebs's claim which, drawing upon Lefebvre's focus upon social space, implies that it is the social encounters made possible by the hotel space which bring that space to life, and which make the predominant contribution towards the stimulation and movement of the hotel narrative. This danger is, of course, that making such a claim merely resorts back to the kind of thinking from which this thesis attempts to break: namely, the mode of thought which prioritises human agency as a social force which actualises space, and which thus traps the spaces of literature within the language of actualisation and representation whilst the potential agency of the space itself remains obfuscated. However, in her discussion of the notion of 'encounter' in the work of Lefebvre and others, Sara Nadal-Melsió points to another way in which the notion of encounter might be conceptualised which is much more compatible with the central tenets of this thesis. Nadal-Melsió draws attention to Bulgarian thinker Tzvetan Todorov's characterisation of the encounter, in which 'the essence of sociability [...] is an acknowledging of the other, which is also a way to acknowledge the self, creating a realized moment of reciprocity, the encounter' (2008, p.169). The crucial lesson that the contemporary British hotel novels assessed in this chapter have taught us however is that this 'other' need not be a human other. In the examples of both Lise's illness and Gabriel's mental imbalance, we have seen that contemporary British writing explores the hotel as a prime site highlighting the possibility that affective transmissions might take place between human subjects and urban spaces themselves, rather than merely between human subjects as Teresa Brennan emphasises. In a similar way, it would be errant to presume that, for instance, Gabriel's adoption of a more fluid and less polarised notion of

randomness and causality is due solely to his encounter with other human subjects like Nikolai. For it is the hotel too that, as we have seen, refuses to be silenced as to the death and scandal which have occurred within it, and as a result revisits this pain by inflicting recurrent and disturbing dreams upon Gabriel who must spend every day of his working life in close confines of the space in which Yuri's death occurred. Indeed, that the hotel space itself exerts an agency over Gabe and contributes actively to the provocation of his dreams is shown explicitly in the text: in his dream, a light emanated from the hotel basement 'sucks him down' to the site of Yuri's accident, such that 'he is nearly at the place though *he would turn from it if he could*' (p.128, my italics). Just like Lise's debilitating illness then, so the unconscious operation of the hotel space dramatises the process of robbing the sleeping Gabriel of his human agency, drawing him back to the scene of death against his own will. It is through conscious and unconscious encounters with the hotel space therefore, and *not* solely with his colleagues, that Gabriel also reassesses his own notions of what causality and agency are, and what might be thought of as a 'cause' or an 'agent'. Not only does the contemporary hotel narrative thus explore the hotel as a space with a terrifying agency of its own which answers back against acts of censorship inflicted upon the stories which are allowed to emanate from it. What Smith's *Global* and Ali's *Imperial* also demonstrate is the fact that the 'encounter' which sets narratives into motion need not be a conventionally 'social' encounter between human subjects—guests, visitors or hotel staff—as Krebs's Lefebvorean interpretation might describe. Instead, what the contemporary hotel novels assessed above show is that in the simultaneously public and private space of the hotel in which narrative control and the upkeep of the establishment's reputation are priorities, the encounter becomes an event which takes place not only between human subjects, but is re-

imagined as the intersection between person, place, affect and memory which the scandalised hotel space perfectly facilitates.

CONCLUSION

Urban Space and Narrative Form

Over the preceding three chapters, I have analysed in detail the myriad roles played by abandoned and redeveloped, subterranean, and transient hotel spaces in the writing of a range of contemporary British authors, some of whom have already attracted much scholarly attention, whilst others remain comparatively obscure. It has been found that despite their apparently contrasting structures, mythological significances and literary and cultural histories, what unites these three distinct kinds of spaces towards which so many contemporary British authors have almost compulsively turned is their ambivalent, problematic relationship with notions of productivity, monetary exchange, consumerism and linear purposiveness which define the contemporary city. It is indeed this common characteristic which, throughout this thesis, has provided the foundations of a critique of Henri Lefebvre's spatial theory and its widespread adoption by scholars to provide spatial readings of literary texts.

As proposed in our introduction, each chapter of the thesis has responded to and extended David James's question as 'to what extent do places [...] mediate our response to the very texture of narrative prose *by functioning not simply as background sceneries but as vibrant figures in their own right?*' (2008, p.1, my italics). Furthermore, in the sense of paying attention to the interactions between urban spaces and human subjects within a section of contemporary British writing, this thesis has also addressed James's further issue as to how these 'settings' might be seen as 'scenes of process and reciprocity, rather than as an aspect of fiction to be described in inert, topographical terms' (p.7). A caution which rings throughout James's argument however originates in his insistence that, in borrowing theoretical

frameworks from cultural geography in order to investigate literary texts, we should never neglect the issue of literary *form*. ‘The more we become immersed in envisioning habitats through the words on the page,’ James argues, ‘the less inclined we are to analyse the linguistic and cognitive processes that underpin that envisioning process’ (p.2). Subsequently, he concludes that ‘we therefore can’t evaluate the pertinence or resonance of where a novel is set without fully understanding how its settings influence the composition of narrative form’ (p.167).¹ What is problematic however, and where this thesis intervenes in James’s critical schema, is James’s conspicuous retraction into the language of exclusively human agency and actualisation of space, as briefly addressed in chapter one. James maintains that an exploration of contemporary writers’ responses to the built environment should also necessarily ‘attend to the specificity of narrative form’ employed by these writers of place (p.3). Considering how the critic might go about such a reading, James nevertheless concludes that this ought to be done through ‘scrutinizing how writers actualize landscapes through specific textual devices’ (p.5).

As outlined in chapter one however, to speak of authors ‘actualizing’ landscapes through their textual composition risks running into the same limitations as spatial theorists like Lefebvre and de Certeau, by neglecting and even denying the narrative agencies achieved and exerted by the de-industrialised, threshold and transient spaces of the post-industrial urban landscape. Indeed, this very conscious, purposive use of space by the author which James evokes further echoes Lefebvre’s notion of the artist’s or writer’s creation of consciously constructed representational spaces, through which artists and writers might answer back to the dominant spatial constructions and representations of space in their contemporary

¹ James’s stress on issues of form here resonates with Andrew Thacker’s earlier emphasis in *Moving Through Modernity* (2003): ‘We need to reconnect the representational spaces in modernist texts not only to the material spaces of the city, but also to reverse the focus, and try to understand how social spaces dialogically *help fashion the literary forms* of the modernist text’ (p.4, my italics).

historical moment. For instance in chapter one, we saw how Lefebvre's notion of 'representational spaces' has been adopted by literary commentators to explain how certain authors and literary periods (especially modernism) can be seen to set up representational spaces within which writers 'write back' against the dominant spaces of representation of their day. We know that Lefebvre characterises representational spaces as that space 'which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate', and from which users can salvage something in order to make sense of space by 'making symbolic use of its objects' (1991, p.39). Subsequently, as we saw Derek Gregory explain, representational spaces arise from 'the critical arts to imaginatively challenge the dominant spatial practices and spatialities', helping to 'create alternative spatial imaginaries' (1994, pp.403 & 405). In any Marxist theoretical scheme, the agency of the author to 'create' *is* to some degree necessarily restricted, since within such frameworks artistic products are seen to be part of the superstructure largely determined by the dominant modes of production at a society's base. However, in both James's proposition as to how critics should go about reading literary writings of place, and in Lefebvre's characterisation of representational spaces as the space of artists and writers, we see the active and voluntary verbs once again exclusively given over to the human agent or author.

Subsequently, this thesis has strived to develop new ways of reading a range of contemporary texts in order that the obsolete, subterranean and transient spaces which permeate them need no longer be expressed solely through the vocabulary of representation and actualisation, or to a theoretical framework which, like Lefebvre's, finds little room for discussion of those urban spaces which lie in ambivalent tension with their society's dominant modes and relations of production. Rather, emphasis throughout the present work has been to

employ notions of affective transmission and the transhuman to envision the ways in which these spaces circulate contemporary prose texts, acting as narrative agents in their own right.

In response to James's study then, which may at first appear similar in aim and scope to the present work, I hope that this thesis has demonstrated that an investigation of narrative form in relation to a text's spatial setting need not necessarily resort to a critical framework and vocabulary in which the author is presented as a masterful wielder of human agency over the malleable landscapes of their work. The importance of abandoned, subterranean and transient urban spaces in contemporary fiction and the fact that their narrative appeal comes largely due to their ability to achieve an agency of their own cannot be emphasised enough in this case. For, we have seen such an agency to be expressed not just in the effects of such spaces upon the protagonists that explore them, but also in their influences upon narrative form as well as content, to address James's anxiety. Where James thus argues that one cannot address spatial readings of texts without attending to narrative form, what this thesis rather shows is that one cannot address the narrative form of contemporary British fiction which engages closely with urban spaces *without* attending also to the agency achieved by these spaces within the narrative.

For example, we have seen defunct and redeveloped spaces operate as latent affective fields directing the consciousness and narrative trajectories of Nicholas Royle's protagonists: for example, the abandoned St. George's hospital in *The Matter of the Heart* circulates the text transhumanly, 'causing divergences in what becomes actual' in the text, precisely as we've seen Ben Anderson describe the motion of an affective field (2006, p.738). At the same time, we have observed the power of abandoned spaces like Rodinsky's room to set up the ethical and affective tensions which in turn shape the very narrative form of Iain Sinclair's collaborative work. We have also traced the ways in which a hybrid subterranean city caught

between the consumerist, commuter surface-city and the more counter-intuitive spatio-temporal laws of a fantastical underworld actively shapes the structure of contemporary London descent narratives, forcing protagonists towards a narrative *denouement* constituted in their re-imagination of their conceptualisations of space and selfhood. Here also do these texts thus remain exemplary of the notion that spatial agency *shapes* narrative form and narrative resolution, in this case even leading contemporary authors to produce texts which exceed and defy previously identified models of katabatic narrative. Finally, we then saw in detail how the hotel space of Ali Smith's and Monica Ali's contemporary hotel novels can be read as circulating each text as a point of repeated return for protagonists, with the agency to shape narrative through its ability to re-visit its own tragedies and losses upon those who work within it. By operating in this way, the hotel space thus sets up a crisis of identity for hotel-worker protagonists which forms the narrative climax of both Smith's and Ali's novels. By emphasising the influences which abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces have upon the affective and memorial subjectivities of the chosen novels' protagonists therefore, this thesis has answered James's anxiety about the neglect of issues of literary form in spatial readings of texts, precisely through drawing attention to the issue of spatial agency and the ways in which the agency of these spaces is observed through their influence on narrative form. We might even go so far as to say that authors are drawn back to certain types of urban spaces since these spaces *choose* the author as much as the author chooses them.

Modernity, Postmodernity and the Materiality of Urban Space

With the emphasis this project has placed upon issues of affect and affective circulation in the conceptualisation of urban spaces within contemporary British writing, one thing which

remains to be noted is the position of the *material* city in this thesis. For, much time has been spent addressing the ways in which the abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces of contemporary British fiction problematise spatial theories like Lefebvre's which, despite their emphasis upon the social 'production' of space and its actualisation through human practices, have been widely adopted by literary scholars in investigating the representation of certain landscapes across a broad historical body of English literature. What remains to be explicitly addressed however is the way in which the present work has also implicitly responded to another body of theory on the urban: this time, a more traditionally 'postmodern' discourse which sees the material city as having been subsumed by and dissolved into a hyperreal metropolis of representations. Indeed, despite being a critical discourse most often applied to North American cities and textual landscapes, Urszula Terentowicz-Fotyga (in reference to Soja, 2000) uses this framework to give a reading of texts by Zadie Smith, W.G. Sebald and Iain Sinclair. Terentowicz-Fotyga works with the argument emphasised by Edward Soja, which states that "the industrialist capitalist city, with its decidedly fixed referents and established urban epistemologies" has been supplanted by the cybercity, the *city of flows*, impossible to map out and incapable of supporting identity (150)' (p.306, my italics). In his comprehensive study *Postmetropolis*, Soja expands such an argument in more detail, outlining the ways in which approaches to urban space and representation have been profoundly influenced by the canonical postmodern theory of Jean Baudrillard, whose doctoral thesis panel featured none other than Henri Lefebvre himself.² In these conceptualisations of city-space which rely heavily upon Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum, Soja describes how '[a]n increasing blurriness intercedes between the real and imagined city, making "the city" as much an imaginary or simulated reality as a real place'

² Baudrillard's doctoral panel also comprised Pierre Bourdieu and Roland Barthes.

(2000, p.151). As a result, Soja notes how, in such accounts of the urban, '[t]he city is often portrayed as volatile, unstable, and indeterminate,' such that it 'eludes representation', and thus concedes to the postmodern 'ruins of representation' (pp.306 & 307).

Soja does not argue by any means that this typically Baudrillardian reading of the postmodern city is the most fruitful. He cannot however cannot deny the apparent authority acquired by such traditionally postmodern readings of city-space, and to account for this authority turns back towards earlier historical roots, describing the 'urban crisis' of the nineteen-sixties as 'a time of accelerated change when seemingly all that was solid and dependable in the recent past melted into the intensely unsettling "air"' (p.96), thus giving weight to the notion of a loss of urban materiality. A classic example of the embodiment of this loss of materiality in urban space in fiction, as offered by Terentowicz-Fotyga, is Auster's 'City of Glass' from *The New York Trilogy* (1985). Despite their emphasis on the dissolution of identity and the ways in which abandoned, subterranean and transient urban spaces appeal to authors precisely through their associations with the instability and porosity of space, identity, memory and selfhood, the contemporary novels upon which this thesis has focused again sit uncomfortably next to accounts of the urban which rely upon notions of the hyperreal or excessive simulation. In fact, in stark contrast to the suggestions made by such discourses, these novels and the urban spaces which they take to their hearts seem to *reassert* the materiality of the city rather than mourning its loss. Indeed, nowhere is this dedication to the materiality of space made more explicit than in Smith's *Hotel World*, when the spirit of deceased Sara Wilby is so distraught at her loss of the ability to inhabit material space that she attempts to re-possess her own material body, 'hoisting her shoulders round me and pushing down into her legs and arms and through her splintery ribs' (p.14). Through her laments as to the extent to which she will miss the sensual experience of colour and 'the shapes of women

and men' (pp.7-8), 'it is in fact,' as Joanne Pready notes, 'the materiality of life that Sara misses' (2009, p.117).

Indeed, the materiality of space echoes throughout the case-study chapters of this thesis. The material aesthetics of abandoned space (as emphasised by Tim Edensor), the material organisation and spatial layout of subterranean London and the simultaneously public-and-private physical spaces of the hotel which retain and remember what happened within them all work to reassert the materiality of urban space rather than to emphasise its dissolution into the cyber-city as a phenomenon of fleeting images and simulacra. As we have seen, the city of contemporary British writing is certainly a 'city of flows': namely, the 'flows' identified by affect theory discourses, which have allowed us to perceive the ways in which contemporary novelists envision urban spaces as operating like affective fields to subtly influence and catalyse narrative action. However, in contrast to the virtual reality, cyberspatial flows which Baudrillardian readings see as constituting contemporary city-space, to the present work, *materiality still matters*. So often in this thesis have we borrowed ideas from the materialisms of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer in order to chart and form a vocabulary of spatial agency: to envision how the city's material traces (in Benjamin's case) and its material surface structures (in Kracauer's) might invest urban space with potentially revelatory qualities which might intrude and burst through the soporific veil of modernity, above and beyond the agency of modernity's sleepwalking human subjects. As Graeme Gilloch describes, Benjamin's imaginative and textual salvage mission to uncover the roots of this modern condition placed profound emphasis upon 'material entities—spaces, representations and practices [...] visual remains that document the spaces of nineteenth-century Paris and the origins of modernity' (1996, p.23). Therefore, rather than relying upon the kind of Baudrillardian reading which so informs Terentowicz-Fotyga's work on contemporary fiction

and the urban, this thesis therefore rather seeks to keep a close affinity with the materiality of the city and the urban spaces which so fascinate contemporary authors. In his study of London writing after 1945, *London Narratives* (2006), Lawrence Phillips also emphasises the persistent materiality of city-space as represented in recent literature. Phillips draws attention to post-war literary dystopian Londons, of which he takes the London of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to be the epitome. In his insightful reading of Orwell's novel, Phillips emphasises the Party's attempts to appropriate and alter the history evident in the fabric of the city in order to serve their own ends, through the alteration of street names, date inscriptions and the like (2006, p.39). Nevertheless, just as Benjamin envisioned the material objects and spaces of the city as holding the potential to explode through the reified 'myth' of mainstream history, so does Phillips describe the way in which the *material* city represented in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* persists in evoking pre-revolution London despite the Party's attempts to censor such intrusions and create their own London mythology. For example, Phillips refers to the way in which Winston's recollection of picking up a prostitute at one of London's major railway stations preserves a material spatial practice of the reader's contemporary, pre-revolution London, showing the 'persistence of the past in the material places and spaces of the city' (p.41). In Phillips's words then, it is ultimately 'the specificity of individual experience and memory founded on the *material space* and place of the city' which uncovers the Party's failure in their attempts to 'remake' the city 'in its image' (p.47). Retaining this notion of the material city as exerting a force of resistance against attempts to contain and rationalise it have therefore been as crucial to this thesis as they are to Phillips's reading of Orwell's novel.

The persistent relevance to this discussion of the Modernist materialist theories espoused by Benjamin and Kracauer thus further problematises the drawing of a dichotomy between the

Modern and the Postmodern. We are thus once again drawn towards Peter Brooker's more subtle conceptualisation noted in chapter four, which rather envisages 'the coexistence of "modernities", each realised in its own time of the present and bearing the traces of past forms and possible alternative futures' (2001, p.11). In their insistence upon the very materiality of the urban spaces which so consistently evoke their fascination, the contemporary novelists featured in this thesis therefore bring the Modernisms of Benjamin and Kracauer into their current historical moment, rather than renouncing the notion of urban materiality for notions of immateriality and unreality *qua* Baudrillard. As well as addressing what Brooker identifies as something of an unnecessary dichotomy between modernisms and postmodernism, this project's focus on the materiality rather than the immateriality of the urban landscapes of contemporary British fiction exposes the risky assumptions made in setting up a further binary opposition: this time, the opposition between the material city and the 'unreal,' simulated city of the hyper-real. Indeed, Terentowicz-Fotyga sets up precisely such a dichotomy in her study of the city in contemporary fiction, arguing that texts tend either to emphasise the immateriality or *unreality* of the city (which, she argues, is the case in Zadie Smith's *The Autograph Man*), or in the opposite direction, bombard the reader with spatial references and focus on 'experiencing the *materiality* of urban space, the physical expanse of the urban sprawl' like Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2009, p.323, my italics). The urban spaces of the novels featured in this thesis however contrast with Terentowicz-Fotyga's portrayal of the city in Smith's *The Autograph Man*: a novel in which she contends that 'the real city is displaced and erased by representations' (p.308). Rather, in the texts of Royle, Sinclair, Gaiman, Hill, Williams, Smith and Ali alike, a focus upon abandoned, subterranean or transient settings shows city-spaces answering back against and exceeding the representations imposed upon them. The London Underground, for example, turns out to far exceed both the tidy map of

coloured lines which Richard has printed on an umbrella at the opening of *Neverwhere* and also outstrips the mind-maps imposed upon it by Casimir in *Underground*, whilst the redeveloped asylums which punctuate Sinclair's walker-narrator's journey round the M25 in *London Orbital* consistently refuse to be silenced by the sanitising discourses of real estate companies re-presenting such sites as lifestyle-enhancing living spaces. It is as a result of these acts of resistance that urban spaces thus succeed in confounding the human subject, provoking the need to re-think more masterful approaches to space. Consequently, rather than being reduced to a procession of simulacra by having its 'reality' displaced by representations of itself, the city which emerges through the texts featured in this thesis merely subverts and denies the power of such inflicted representations by refusing their validity. In the two-way interaction between the human subject and urban space therefore, this emphasises a notion central to this thesis as expressed by Jonathan Raban, which states that in response to human spatial practices, cities, 'in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them' (1974; 2008, p.2). Indeed, resisting the infliction of representations thus indicates yet another of the multitudinous ways in which the urban spaces of contemporary British writing can be seen to adopt and exert an agency of their own.

The Issue of 'liminality'

However, in asking what it is that abandoned, subterranean and hotel spaces have in common which might explain their particular propensity towards wielding narrative agency over the form of prose texts throughout which they circulate, there is another salient term which I have deliberately and conspicuously avoided. This term, inevitably, is *liminal space*, or *liminality*. For, according to much existing theoretical work on the subject, the abandoned, subterranean and transient spaces towards which the contemporary British authors assessed in

this thesis are drawn could feasibly be brought together under the umbrella term of *liminal* spaces. Abandoned spaces are perhaps the most obvious with which to begin. As Charles LaShure (2005) notes, the term ‘liminal’ was popularised by Arnold Van Gennep’s introduction of the expression into the discipline of anthropology in his 1909 work *Les rites de passage*. With etymological roots in the Latin word *limen*, meaning ‘lintel’ or ‘threshold’³ LaShure emphasises that Van Gennep’s notion of liminality is extrapolated from discourse on ‘rites of passage such as coming-of-age rituals and marriage,’ which consist in a triad structure of ‘separation’ from one’s usual society, a ‘liminal period’ in which they are ‘stripped of the social status’ they possessed before the ritual, and then ‘reassimilation’ into society (LaShure, par. 3-4). The liminal stage is thus named since it therefore signifies a period of time in which the individual undergoing the ritual exists in an ‘in-between’ state of suspension, caught in an identity-effacing gap between separation and reassimilation. Retaining this notion of the liminal as that which thus lies ambivalently ‘in-between’ received social structures, Rob Shields (1991) explains that ‘classically, liminality occurs when people are in transition from one station of life to another, or from one culturally-defined stage in the life-cycle to another’ (p.83).

Liminality therefore lends itself well to Benjamin’s urban musings: as we saw in chapter one, Benjamin’s brand of historical materialism takes the notion of ‘in-between-ness’ as crucial, championing those spaces which lie on the cusp between existence and extinction. Like the Parisian arcades, Benjamin claims, such spaces are endowed with the revelatory potential to uncover the history and truth behind the modern urban condition. As was then demonstrated, this penchant for the in-between spaces of the city persists in contemporary fiction, in the work of writers of place such as Nicholas Royle and Iain Sinclair. Like

³ This definition is taken from *The Oxford Latin Mini-Dictionary* (1997).

Angelo's beloved abandoned cinemas in Royle's *The Director's Cut* and the evocative disused asylums of Sinclair's *London Orbital*, abandoned spaces do represent urban spaces captured, just as Shields describes, in transition from one part of their 'life-cycle' to another. No longer a functioning part of the city's productive fabric, defunct spaces like Royle's cinemas and Sinclair's psychiatric hospitals are either ravaged by decay and dereliction or are in the process of being re-assimilated into this legitimised urban fabric as new developments. As Maree Pardy notes, 'urban renewal' or redevelopment is, unfortunately for Angelo and Sinclair's autobiographical walker-narrator, becoming a common means in the neoliberal, urban West of combating waste and idleness through the 're-ordering of space to make it fit for purpose' (2010, par. 18). Perhaps then part of the appeal of abandoned spaces is that they *are* liminal, since they exist in-between the heavily surveyed and regimented structures of 'productive' urban space. As a result, viewing abandoned spaces as liminal might also seem to account for their being particularly open to assimilation into the new human and non-human networks which Tim Edensor emphasises, and which we addressed in detail in chapter two. After all, '[l]iminality represents a liberation from the regimes of normative practices and performance codes of mundane life because of its interstitial nature' (Shields 1991, p.84); describing the abandoned spaces towards which authors like Royle and Sinclair find themselves drawn as liminal therefore may explain how such spaces open up access to new affective networks and new meanings within urban space—networks and meanings which fail to emerge within the dominant urban matrices of production and social relation. After all, within liminal spaces, 'people, symbols and objects are encountered outside cultural frames of reference and normal instrumental relations,' allowing for 'escape from social convention and the exploration of new possibilities' (Stevens, 2007, p.74) through which Sinclair's and Royle's characters are able to negotiate new relationships between space, self and other.

Rooted in the notion of the *threshold* space between entry and re-assimilation, the liminal might also seem particularly appropriate to the investigation of subterranean spaces within descent narratives. To cross into a subterranean world indicates precisely such a threshold experience, leaving the familiar structures of the aboveground world and venturing into the often unregimented depths of the city's subterranean Other. The notion of 'liminality' as a period of transition also seems appealing in relation to the specifically *self-defining* descent narrative which we have seen emerge from texts such as *Neverwhere*, *Underground* and *London Revenant*. As LaShure's and Shields's descriptions illustrate, the term 'liminal' as borrowed from anthropological discourse describes a period during which an individual is stripped of identity: a stripping which might be seen as commensurate with the tenuousness of self and subterranean dissolution of identity experienced by Richard Mayhew, Adam/Monck and Casimir as an integral part of their descents beneath London. Moreover, the protagonists of Gaiman's, Hill's and Williams's descent narratives also seem to fulfil LaShure's notion of the liminal individual as one who has 'temporarily fallen through the cracks, so to speak' (2005, par. 14). Encouraging protagonists to reconsider their very attitudes and approaches to space and selfhood, the subterranean city could therefore be held as a 'liminal' space, a 'gap between ordered worlds [where] almost anything may happen' (Turner, 1974, p.13), and the protagonists of contemporary London descent narratives might be simultaneously termed liminal characters, whose status is 'socially and structurally ambiguous' (LaShure, par. 7).

As transient spaces occupying a potentially subversive threshold between private and public, commentators have also depicted the hotel as a characteristically liminal space. Pritchard and Morgan for example portray hotels as 'liminal travel spaces' (2006, p.762), whilst hotel guests, like other tourists 'have also been described as liminal people, occupying some kind of threshold state' (p.764) between their outside-world identities and the potential

for suspension of such identities offered by crossing the hotel threshold. Pritchard and Morgan's account again evokes Van Gennep's notion of the liminal phase of ritual, in which the participant is stripped of the identity to which they usually lay claim in general society. Indeed, Kracauer's description of the hotel lobby as a place in which human subjects can achieve a state of removal and consider the world around them 'off to one side' (1995, p.179) suggests that the threshold of the hotel entrance leads one into a liminal space set aside from the identities and practices of the street. Furthermore, Pritchard and Morgan acknowledge that '[h]otels can be interpreted not simply as liminal spaces, but also contested spaces, where employees and guests are subject to surveillance and scrutiny' (2006, p.768). Indeed, as heavily striated and surveyed spaces in which the management of bodies through space works to create discrete subject positions such as staff member and guest, hotels also contain numerous spaces which occupy a threshold in-between such subject positions. Corridors, lifts and the hotel lobby are simultaneously used by staff and guests; indeed, in *Hotel World*, the Global Hotel's dumbwaiter is emphasised by Smith as precisely such a threshold space. As the site of Sara Wilby's death, the dumbwaiter lift becomes not only a threshold space between the floors of the hotel, or between staff quarters and guest spaces, but also becomes a threshold space between life and death, and, for Sara's sister Clare, between knowledge and unknowing, as she infiltrates the hotel and uncovers the now sealed-off lift shaft in a desperate attempt to understand how and why her sister fell to her death. Subsequently, it is easy to see why the notion of the liminal space is so crucial for Pritchard and Morgan in their investigation into identity-play and power circulations in the hotel space, and why they conclude that '[t]o enter a hotel is to cross an imagined threshold into a liminal place which is strange, yet familiar, which offers freedom for some, but constraint, risk and unease for others' (769-70).

The Problem with Liminality

In all the above exposés associating the urban spaces of contemporary British fiction with notions of liminality, there nevertheless resides a common and fundamental problem.

Developing his account of liminality, Charles La Shure emphasises it as a *temporary* state, heavily reliant upon the fact that the subject involved (the initiate or liminal figure) will be *re-integrated* into their society as they emerge from their initiation ceremony. In this sentiment he is indeed not alone: Vincent Anfara also describes how the liminal phase of ritual is necessarily followed by a stage of ‘reaggregation,’ which in turn echoes Van Gennep’s notion of the final stage of ritual as consisting in a ‘reassimilation’ into society (1997, p. 22). In LaShure’s words therefore, ‘liminality is a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point, and as such it is a temporary state that ends when the initiate is *reincorporated into the social structure*’ (par. 14 my italics). This reincorporation or reassimilation then also implies that the temporarily liminal individual returns, as LaShure goes to explain, to ‘a relatively stable state once more’ (*Ibid.*).

So, as easy as it may be to do so, we are left with something of a predicament in classifying the urban spaces to which many contemporary British authors are drawn as *liminal* spaces, as much existing theory would have us do. For, the notions of liminality explored above originate in the patterns of ritual and rites of passage. Subsequently, considering both this fact and LaShure’s notion that the liminal describes a phase in-between a start and end point, application of the term ‘liminal’ to describe both spaces and individuals has high stakes for the study of literature and issues of narrative form. Were we to call the abandoned, subterranean and hotel spaces of contemporary British fiction ‘liminal spaces’, and the protagonists of the featured novels ‘liminal individuals’, the implication remains that, according to scholarship on issues of liminality, we would expect to see them follow narrative

trajectories which correspond to LaShure's pattern: at the conclusion to the narrative, these spaces and characters would be re-assimilated respectively into the fabric of the capitalist city or the social structure from which they originally deviated, regaining a stable identity and thus providing narrative resolution. In the texts featured in this discussion however, this is simply not the case, and a retraction to the model of starting point – liminal passage – re-assimilation into society would necessarily fail to account for the ways in which placing the abandoned, subterranean or transient urban space at the centre of these novels subtly forces the authors in question to rework and rewrite previous models of ruins discourse, descent narratives and the hotel novel.

In the case of abandoned spaces, we have seen in detail the ways in which Royle and Sinclair exploit in their writing the very notion that abandoned sites 'live on' after demolition and redevelopment, as Angelo expresses of his coveted defunct cinemas in Royle's *The Director's Cut*. Indeed, the power and agency of urban space which resonates throughout Royle's novel (and indeed his work as whole) originates in the fact that these spaces remain unresolved: rather than merely being re-assimilated into the urban fabric as scholarly accounts of liminality might posit, redeveloped abandoned spaces persist affectively and imaginatively for Royle, moving the human subject to emotion even when not manifested in their original form. In this case therefore, the re-assimilation upon which liminality relies for its classification as an interstitial period or space contradicts Royle's vision that abandoned and redeveloped spaces acquire an agency of their own precisely through resisting redevelopers' attempts to silence and engulf them back into the utilitarian ethic of the urban fabric. The same of course is true of Sinclair's asylums in *London Orbital*, whose affective and memorial resonances resist redevelopers' attempts to sanitise their sites in order to, as Maree Pardy describes of urban renewal, 'develop urban space in ways that enable the production of

vibrant, clean, safer places' (2010, par. 4). The abandoned spaces which so shape both the content and form of Royle's and Sinclair's narratives are therefore *never* quite assimilated into history and hence are never quite resolved: they refuse to forget, and continue circulating both Royle's and Sinclair's texts, affecting and moving human subjects as they remain trapped in a purgatorial state between presence and absence, memory and forgetting. Subsequently, it is precisely the fact that the abandoned spaces upon which they focus *refuse* reassimilation into the capitalist urban fabric that Royle and Sinclair respectively produce narratives fuelled by abandoned spaces never quite put to rest, or narratives shaped by the ethical dubiousness and inevitable failure of a collaborator's attempt to assimilate the abandoned space into a received or approved historical discourse. If liminality is a short-lived phase of being whose existence depends upon a necessary re-assimilation into existing structures of society and order, then to describe Royle's and Sinclair's narratives as texts which deal with 'liminal' spaces becomes highly problematic.

In the case of contemporary London descent narratives like those presented by Gaiman, Hill and Williams, we have closely examined the ways in which all three novels' protagonists refuse re-assimilation into the aboveground, capitalist world from which they descend. Moreover, it was also found that all three of *Neverwhere*, *Underground* and *London Revenant* present protagonists who are not only non-natives to London, but who also never quite achieve a comfortable assimilation into their respective urban fabrics at the outset of their narratives. In fact, one trait which unites Richard, Casimir and Adam is their shared difficulty in coming to terms with London's vast geography according to their normative, masterful attempts to understand the city and claim corners of it for themselves. It is this very difficulty which singles out all three men as characters in need of the new approach to space encouraged by the confounding and counter-intuitive spatial laws of the city's underworld. In the

contemporary London descent narrative then, Van Gennep's and others' 'separation,' 'liminality' and 'reassimilation' model doesn't quite work: as is demonstrated by their shared tenuousness of selfhood and spatial reasoning, Gaiman's, Hill's and Williams's fragmented and fragile subjects are never truly assimilated into the fabric of the working metropolis to begin with, whilst they thus unsurprisingly refuse re-assimilation into the surface city at the novels' respective conclusions. For a space or person to achieve liminality however implies, according to Van Gennep, Turner, LaShure and Anfara alike, that space or person is ultimately reintegrated into the community or society from which they were separated to undergo the liminal phase of their ritual. In contrast, none of Gaiman's, Hill's or Williams's novels follow such a narrative trajectory. We have already seen in detail the way in which the narrative agency of the hybrid subterranean city encourages each protagonist to make a choice which in turn produces a form which necessarily re-writes the katabatic narrative of re-assimilation, as is implied by Rachel Falconer's model. If such reintegration or re-assimilation does not occur therefore, it becomes questionable as to whether the contemporary London descent narrative can accurately be described as a literary form based upon 'liminal' spaces and protagonists.

The hotel spaces which play such a pivotal role in Smith's *Hotel World* and Ali's *In The Kitchen* also pose further problems for the application of the collective term 'liminal spaces.' By scrutinising the quotidian experiences of hotel *staff* rather than guests, both Smith and Ali explore a class of subjects far less able to participate in the kinds of free identity-play which Pritchard and Morgan portray as being open to hotel guests. The hotel teases both Lise and Gabriel by acting simultaneously as a site of access and blockage to memory and identity, thus acting as a narrative agent which accelerates both protagonists' crises of identity and forces both novels towards their *denouements*. Even when reaffirming their identity as hotel

staff, the hotel space does so not according to the will of either protagonist, nor as the result of some subversive identity-play for which the hotel becomes a mere stage. Rather, the hotel space itself toys with Lise and Gabriel, at times denying them access to memories or to means of spatial mastery which might help them cling to a coherent self-narrative, whilst at other times re-interpellating them back into their work-defined identities as hotel staff beyond their own volition. To describe these hotel spaces as ‘liminal’ is therefore highly problematic, since such spaces do not fit easily into the utopian vision of subversive liminal urban spaces set out by Pritchard and Morgan, which allow for free identity-play or even the voluntary suspension of identity, as in the liminal phase of ritual. Even when Lise is away from *The Global* on long-term sick leave, and Gabriel wanders away from *The Imperial* in his spatially-disorientated anxiety attack, the hotel space persists in following them: it is not a space which the hotel staff member enters only then to leave it behind, as LaShure and Anfara describe of the liminal stage of a ritual. Precisely because the hotel spaces in Smith’s and Ali’s novels are unable to forget the tragedies which have occurred within them, and subsequently because they then circulate the narrative and act as a point of repeated return for Lise and Gabriel alike, identifying these hotel spaces as ‘liminal’ is inherently problematic. For Smith and Ali, rather than signifying a threshold to be entered, crossed and then left, the hotel space represents a threshold which, once crossed, has the ability to expand and persist throughout the protagonist’s life, never quite to be left behind or resolved. Once again therefore, this poses problems for reading the contemporary hotel novel as a form which treats the hotel space as ‘liminal.’

Additional to the above pitfalls of grouping abandoned, subterranean and transient literary settings together as ‘liminal spaces,’ a further problem persists in which overwhelming emphasis is often given exclusively to the human actualisation of ‘possibilities’ offered by

spaces in-between the received networks of surveillance and social space of the city. Quentin Stevens describes the ‘liminal moments’ which arise in threshold spaces, when ‘people experience release from the limitations and order of spaces,’ thus defining liminal spaces as those in which ‘conventions get loosened through people’s diverse playful behaviour’ (2007, p.74). In other words, liminality is something achieved through spaces being appropriated and ‘lived out’ by human subjects, leaving little room for the consideration of the agency of the space itself. This thesis has taken the exploration of spatial agency through contemporary British writing as a central tenet: so long as discourse on liminal spaces thus displays a neglectful attitude towards the agency which urban spaces might exert above and beyond human actualisation, the concept of liminality should thus be used with care, if at all. The notion of liminality, as seen above, lacks the flexibility and openness to account for narrative forms other than the very linear model of separation, liminality and re-assimilation implied by the application of notions of liminality to literary studies.

Opening up Literary Urban Spaces to Analysis beyond ‘Liminality’

Rather than using liminality as a convenient umbrella term beneath which to conflate the abandoned, subterranean and hotel spaces of its featured literary texts, this thesis has proved that what instead unites these literary spaces is the challenge which each present for that Lefebvorean mode of reading texts which, as shown in chapter one, has proved popular with many scholars in literary studies. Rather than the neat, linear narrative plot and resolution suggested by Van Gennep’s ritual model of separation, liminal phase and re-assimilation into society, what we have found to rather characterise the urban spaces of contemporary British writing is indeterminacy, irresolution and constant circulation through and around the text: a circulation set up courtesy of these spaces’ ambivalent relationships with their societies’

dominant modes and relations of production and exchange upon which Lefebvre lays such emphasis. If we are to successfully open contemporary British literature up to readings which account more sensitively for the ways in which abandoned, subterranean and transient hotel spaces are shown to circulate literary narratives, and in doing so influence and provoke re-writings of established narrative forms such as the katabatic narrative or the hotel mystery story, we cannot rely on notions of liminality. We must transcend liminality, and look elsewhere. It is for this reason that the term ‘liminal’ remains conspicuously absent from the textual analyses presented in this thesis.

Indeed, it is rather the process of opening up literary texts and their urban *milieux* which lies at the heart of this project. It has not by any means been the purpose of this thesis to disembody space, and to merely replace the idea of the acting human agent with the spatial agent: that is, to say that spaces ‘cause’ or influence subjectivities or states of being, when other factors do not. It is by no means my intention to suggest that space, for the writers upon whom I focus, has a completely independent existence outside of ‘lived space’. Rather, my aim has been to emphasise the importance of new ways of *opening up* literary narratives to analysis, in order to reveal literature as a crucial medium through which we can begin to engage with the narrative and affective agencies of urban spaces in their own right.

What I hope this thesis has demonstrated therefore is that whereas for Latour (2005) an acknowledgement of the agency of non-human entities is to be found nowhere, in contemporary British literature, the agency of spaces is found and felt everywhere. Overall, I hope that despite a methodology which has involved a close focus upon spatial readings of contemporary British texts, I have nevertheless drawn attention to an issue which touches and is relevant to the work of scholars and students across the discipline of literary studies;

namely, to contemplate the context and implications of a theoretical scheme very carefully before attempting to apply it to any text. What ultimately unites the abandoned, subterranean and transient hotel spaces which seduce such a broad spectrum of contemporary British writers is therefore not some vague or imprecise notion of liminality, but is rather a common problematisation of existing popular means of creating spatial readings of texts, demonstrated in detail by the close readings offered in the previous four chapters. The final word of this thesis is therefore one which we can carry into our future dealings with literature and theory: namely, that we carefully consider the context and relevance of a spatial theory like Lefebvre's, and of a concept like that of liminality, before presuming their suitability to sufficiently account for the narrative agencies of the unruly abandoned, subterranean and transient urban spaces of the contemporary British novel.

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