

# LLIDS /e'lidz/



Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies

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THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN  
POLYRHYTHMS  
JACQUES DERRIDA  
DIFFÉRENCE  
9/11 LITERATURE  
GATSBY  
SPECTRAL REALISM  
METAPHYSICS  
HAPTIC DISTANCIATION  
CHRONOTOPÉ  
HETEROTOPIA  
APORIAS OF TIME  
THE AMERICAN DREAM  
ATLANTIS  
THEATRICAL JAZZ  
QUEER TIME  
THE AMERICAN DREAM

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**LANGUAGE, LITERATURE,  
AND  
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES**

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## **Language, Literature, and Interdisciplinary Studies (LLIDS)**

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# EDITORIAL

*Deeksha Suri*

While the present issue, marking the beginning of the second volume of LLIDS, keeps us motivated to cover discrete perspectives on particular subjects, I must once again thank the editorial guidance of advisory board members and efforts of my team of editors, editorial assistants, peer reviewers, and interns for their immense contribution in helping me bring insightful research papers to our readers.

The Call for Papers for the current issue abridges perspectives on the rise of novelistic genre, branching out of its form into various modes of expressions, and tracing those critical junctures where a shift in discourse is encountered. Its concern is this ‘far from finished’ history of the genre as a model of existence along with its radical future in terms of themes, styles, questions, and ambiguities. Contextualized within the sensibilities of a particular age—with its perceived reality-shifts within the social, political, and cultural ideologies—the novelistic form evinces an “enquiry” into things “to discover the various dimensions of existence” (Kundera), and also reifies within its form a mirroring of the fragmentation of an established sense of reality.

The papers in the themed section of this issue respond to the theorization furnished in the Call for Papers by addressing as diverse subjects as juxtaposing of the socio-political implications of the historically disparate texts to offer a nuanced understanding of the problematic of class, capital, and race within the discursive space of American Dream; exploring reconfiguration of time within the temporal modalities of fiction; and underscoring the immediacy of dispelling rape-myths through the means of traditional patriarchal narrative itself. The special submissions in this issue traverse across the spatial manifold by developing discourse around the heterotopian chronotope to build a theoretical space that responds to the interpretations provided by Foucault and Frederic Jameson; contending with the parameters of linguistic space through the concepts of trace, difference, and substitution; and tracing the trajectory of theatrical jazz to facilitate the creation of a liminal space with reference to the undoing of conventional western realist modes of narratives.

The varied strategies of authorial articulation corresponding with these diverse subject-matters—literary engagement of the reader through

spectral and specular realism; discourse on liminality, queer time, and non-linear modes of writing; foregrounding of the problematic of projected mytho-historical space; critiquing American exceptionalism in the context of immigrants by reimagining Gatsby in post 9/11 novels; grounding of experiential time (in opposition to clock-time) in the narrative of sense-making through the field of semantic innovation; and contending the idea of the ‘open’ in Derrida as a reconsideration of metaphysics’ competence to admit gaps within its own framework—also manage to give a glimpse into the expanding boundaries of novelistic form and content.

To enhance the reading experience of *LLIDS*, we have also revised the design and formatting style of the journal which is indeed something to look forward to. I must conclude by thanking our scholars for their enthusiastic contribution to this issue and assure our readers on behalf of my entire team that we will continue to work towards rigorous academic research.



# CONTRIBUTORS

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## The Presence of *Gatsby* in the Absence of Towers—9/11 Literature and the American Dream

Talia Fishbine

In the nearly one hundred years since its publication, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* has invariably changed the landscape of American literature. With its poetic language and enduring themes, it is little wonder that the novel's structural elements have been reimagined in various literary projects. Intriguingly, Fitzgerald's work has lent itself especially well to the genre of 9/11 literature, particularly Colum McCann's *Let the Great World Spin* and Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*. Despite their disparate temporal settings, the underlying economic framework that contributes to the historical context in which these 9/11 novels are situated makes the insertion of *Gatsby* not only more germane, but also more conducive to an expanded discourse on the relationship between financial success and the racial "other" as a literary trope and mode of characterization. With consideration to the conceptualization of the American Dream, the way in which *Gatsby* is re-envisioned and invoked in McCann's and O'Neill's works, it functions to critique the sustainability of the overarching narrative of American exceptionalism as well as the problematic positioning of immigrants and minorities within this narrative.

Understanding the American Dream and its centrality to the thematic design of these works requires an acknowledgment of the way in which it is intertwined with capitalism as the U.S. economic system of choice. While the idea of the American Dream is popularly tied to the nation's immigrant story, its theoretical underpinnings provide a less romantic view. Indeed, Ray E. Canterbury briefly outlines the historical circumstances under which this idea arose:

During the Gilded Age (1870-1910), when cutthroat competition and unbridled capitalism led to the accumulation of wealth and capital in a few hands, a need arose to justify the excesses of the newly rich and their corrupt business practices. Thus emerged the "American Dream"—a blend of the Newtonian belief in a beneficent, finely tuned universe and the American versions of Calvinism and Puritanism, which condoned and encouraged the accumulation of wealth as a way of doing God's work. (297)

This establishes the connection between capitalism and the creation of the American Dream as well as the corruptibility of such a system. The overwhelming narrative about success in the U.S. that is disseminated, however, contributes to an erasure of this corruptibility—an erasure that *Let the Great World Spin* and *Netherland* reveal through their treatment of economic (and, not unrelatedly, racial) subordination.

Materiality is an equally significant factor that relates to the discussion of capitalism's essential role in the U.S. Peter Temin refers to the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Capitalism* when he states that one of the components of capitalism identified as being essential to the success of the economic system is "private property rights" (1003). While the issue of property and its ties to the American Dream are explicitly accessible in *Gatsby* with the extensive references to West and East Egg properties, it is more implicitly available in McCann's and O'Neill's texts. However, the immigrant status of each of the novels' Gatsby-esque figures subverts the ability of these prominent characters to achieve the same property and material wealth evidenced by Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*. Temin acknowledges a gap in the writings on capitalism, which further relates to the disparity between Gatsby on one end and the Gatsby-esque characters on the other; in large, this gap is a near erasure of the way in which slave labour was integral to the birth of U.S. capitalism (1011). The U.S. economy's growth and success owes itself to an enslaved workforce and this oppressed source of labour had—and, in many ways, has—no access to the very economy that it functioned to build. Though much research has suggested the probability that Gatsby is Jewish, the concept of "passing" makes this less obstructive to his attainment of material wealth.<sup>1</sup> The Black body, represented in both McCann's and O'Neill's books, becomes the literary realization of the ways in which race serves as the external mediating factor through which economic success is denied. This ultimately contributes to the perversion of one of the most tightly held narratives about the American Dream and, while Fitzgerald provides the initial criticism, McCann's and O'Neill's attention to the relative erasure of minorities and immigrants within the scope of economic success furthers that criticism. It is their work, overwhelmingly, that orients readers toward a new understanding of the American Dream.

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<sup>1</sup>Just one of many examples, Michael Pekarofski writes that the "argument can be made that *Gatsby* is Jewish and that on many levels, this is really a novel about otherness, about passing" (57).

Finally, it is of no little significance that the invocation of *Gatsby* occurs in these samples of 9/11 literature given the representative nature of their historical settings which, despite appearing in works of fiction, provides authentic snapshots of their respective national climates. The attacks on the World Trade Center hold heavy symbolic weight insomuch that the towers were the physical manifestation of U.S. capitalism; not only were the towers home to numerous corporations and firms, but their position in a New York landscape was also, arguably, the very heart of the twentieth-century American Dream makes their collapse wholly symbolic. In this sense, their absence from the national landscape exposes an absence of actualized economic success for a group of people who were previously hidden in the shadow of the towers' greater narrative. When the attacks on capitalism are read as a simultaneous attack on the American Dream (which is not such a conflation when considered through the lens of their aforementioned linkage), McCann's and O'Neill's literature as the site of *Gatsby*'s rebirth reveals the contemporary implications of the narrative's position in the U.S.

Though McCann's novel depicts the stories of multiple characters in the New York area, a single excerpt serves as the space in which *Gatsby* is reimagined. In a section titled "A Fear of Love," readers assume the narrative lens of Lara, a woman who, along with her partner Blaine, is traveling down the FDR when their car hits a van occupied by John Andrew Corrigan, a poor Irish immigrant, and Jazzlyn Henderson, a prostitute of minoritized racial distinction.<sup>2</sup> Corrigan and Jazzlyn are killed on impact, and, motivated by a selfish self-perseverance, Lara and Blaine flee the scene of the accident. While the incident itself occupies only a relatively brief part of the book, its symbolic meaning holds essential commentary on the status of the American Dream as a fading vision.

Ironically, the use of the FDR as the site of the accident and subsequent deaths mirrors the site of the hit-and-run accident that kills Myrtle Wilson in *Gatsby*. Both locations are in-between places—places that are neither here nor there, but rather only exist insomuch that they connect two geographic points of greater significance. The vehicles, however, are necessarily deserving of closer analysis, since, as Jacqueline Lance states, "...the car itself further reflects each driver's socio-economic status" (26). McCann provides a description

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<sup>2</sup>McCann writes, "She looked half Mexican, half black" (28). While Jazzlyn's racial identity is moderately ambiguous, she is still representative of the Black body within the context of this work.

of Lara and Blaine's vehicle as a cared-for object, while Corrigan's van is an extension of the poverty he exhibits as a resident of a housing project in the Bronx. In this way, Lara and Blaine's car is also indicative of their socio-economic standing, which was predicated on the financial success Blaine garnered from making art films. Though the couple achieved relative success, it did not last long. Again, Lara's narration describes their socio-economic status, though this time it focuses on the downward spiral that followed the height of their achievement:

We had ... moved out of the city, kept our prize car—our only concession—and had lived without electricity, read books from another era, finished our painting in the style of the time, hid ourselves away, saw ourselves as reclusive, cutting edge, academic. At our core, even we knew we weren't being original. In Max's the night before—pumped up on ourselves—we had been stopped by the bouncers, who didn't recognize who we were. They wouldn't let us into the back room. A waitress pulled a curtain tight. She took pleasure in her refusal ... Blaine bought a bag of coke from the bartender, the only one to compliment our work. (McCann 120)

While Lara and Blaine's economic failure cannot be read as a failure of the American Dream, per se, it does speak to its fleeting nature. Unlike the narrative in which the American Dream is painted as a static tangible achievement, Lara's recollection shows that sustaining the dream is never guaranteed. However, if *Gatsby* is considered the character manifestation of the corruptibility and unsustainability of the American Dream, Lara is not McCann's literary equivalent. Her position as the narrator through which events are recounted positions her more closely alongside *Gatsby*'s Nick.<sup>3</sup> This, then, leaves another possible reading for the reimagined character of *Gatsby*—Corrigan.<sup>4</sup>

If the assertion that *Gatsby* is meant to be Jewish is taken as truth, and if this is further accepted as a depiction of his racial passing, then Corrigan is similarly positioned in McCann's text. As an Irish immigrant, Corrigan is simultaneously “othered”—indeed, the women

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<sup>3</sup>Lara, as the reimagined *Gatsby* narrator, differs from Nick in her emotional involvement. Though Nick appears to care for *Gatsby*, his guilt drives him to leave after *Gatsby* has been killed. On the other hand, Lara's guilt drives her to *insert* herself into the had-been lives of Corrigan and Jazzlyn in the aftermath of their deaths.

<sup>4</sup>The concept of Lara as a *Gatsby*-esque figure, though, will be returned to at a later point.

who work the streets have a preoccupation with his accent—and granted a space in which, because of his whiteness, he is able to escape the racial burden that other minorities must shoulder. Moreover, while Gatsby's obsession with Daisy leads to the collapse of his American Dream, Corrigan's obsession with the world's pain disallows him any access to the American Dream. To be sure, he has no economic value within the context of the book.<sup>5</sup> Though the motivating emotions of both characters are the same, they work in disjunctive ways; Gatsby's vulnerability in regard to Daisy drives him to achieve wealth at any means possible while the vulnerability Corrigan has for the world's downtrodden drives him to shun wealth. In the end, these vulnerabilities, though enacted in different ways, reveal themselves to be the characters' undoing.

Jazzlyn, while not a Gatsby-esque figure in any traditional sense, serves as one of McCann's most poignant commentaries on the failure of the American Dream. Unlike Corrigan, whose whiteness precedes him and thus grants him the privilege of "passing," Jazzlyn has no such experience. Her body is the only viable source of income she has, so, following in the footsteps of her mother, Jazzlyn works as a prostitute. Her situation thus encompasses the corruption of the American Dream; though the serviceable Black body is the foundation upon which U.S. capitalism—and, by extension, the American Dream—is built, her only access to that economy is by perpetuating the serviceability of her body. It is the recognition of this reality that creates distance between *Let the Great World Spin* and *Gatsby*; the presence of the Black body is only marginally available in Fitzgerald's work while McCann overtly corrects this negligence in his own work.

The acknowledgment of Corrigan's and Jazzlyn's socio-economic status highlights a disturbing point that, in its own way, is also highly reminiscent of *Gatsby*: a lack of economic success becomes the justification for a lack of human compassion. Just as Myrtle's death is treated with little compassion— "...[t]he 'death car' as the newspapers called it, didn't stop: it came out of the gathering darkness, wavered tragically for a moment, and then disappeared around the next bend" (Fitzgerald 137)—Corrigan's and Jazzlyn's deaths become the site for *Lara's and Blaine's* suffering and

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<sup>5</sup>Interestingly, there is an arguable connection between this lack of economic viability and the earlier historical framework regarding oppressed labour. While certainly not oppressed in the way of slaves, the Irish suffered a tumultuous labour history in the U.S., suffering intense discrimination and widespread denial of employment.

inconvenience. Indeed, the events directly following the moment of collision are described by Lara thusly:

Blaine went around to check on the damage that was done to our car, the smashed headlight, the crumpled fender ... and he let out a little groan of despair, and I knew it was for the car, and our unsold canvases, and what would happen to us shortly, and I said to him: Come on, let's go, quick, get in, Blaine, quick, get a move on. (McCann 118)

This provokes a troublesome question: would Lara and Blaine have left the scene of the accident if they had perceived greater economic worth from the people whom they hit? Here Lara abandons her initial position of objective narrator (a position similar to that of Nick) and moves with Blaine into a space of carelessness more evocative of Daisy and Gatsby: “The status of the upper class is at once gracious in its advantages and privileges but not worthy of aspiration and vision in its callous treatment of those below” (Canterbery 302). This is where Lara again can be read as a Gatsby-esque figure; she seeks only to protect herself and her partner, giving no consideration to the magnitude of the tragedy in which she has played a role. Unlike Fitzgerald’s Gatsby, however, she is redeemable. She allows the guilt for her complicity in Corrigan’s and Jazzlyn’s deaths to steer her toward compassion. This indicates that the decline of the American Dream becomes utter failure at the exact moment when humaneness is abandoned—a concept substantiated by Gatsby’s demise and Lara’s redemption.

While an isolated section in *Let the Great World Spin* falls under the jurisdiction of a reimagined *Gatsby*, the entirety of *Netherland* has the markings of Fitzgerald’s greatest work.<sup>6</sup> Hans van den Broek, a Dutch financier, relocates from London to New York for the purpose of work. It is here that he meets Chuck Ramkisson, a Trinidadian whose greatest passions are cricket and America. In many ways, Hans fulfills the role of *Gatsby*’s Nick; not only does he provide narration that is reasonably removed from the emotional experience of his subject<sup>7</sup>, but his socio-economic status stands in contradistinction

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<sup>6</sup>In an interview conducted by Charlie Reilly, O’Neill states that “Netherland, of course, is a retrospective novel, and retrospection is inextricably linked to longing” (7). Even in the most general consideration of tone and narratorial orientation, *Netherland* echoes the style of *Gatsby*.

<sup>7</sup>Benjamin Schreier observes that “[Nick is] both eyewitness and participant, at once disdainful and attracted” (164), the same can be said of Hans.



with Chuck's, highlighting the privilege—or lack thereof—that contributes to their disparate economic standings.

The race of these characters is not coincidental when discussing their socio-economic statuses. Chuck is wholly concerned with establishing his “Americanness,” and it is through his sensitivity that readers are first made aware of the significance of the racial distinction that exists between himself and Hans. In a letter he writes to Hans, Chuck calls him “...a member of the first tribe of New York, excepting of course the Red Indians” (O’Neill 58). Chuck sees Hans’s whiteness as something that he would like to emulate, which is the greatest irony: Hans is able to move between Europe and the U.S. and, despite having no particular predilection for being seen as “American,” is able to automatically pass as such; Chuck, on the other hand, wants nothing more than to be seen as American yet must constantly struggle to establish and authenticate this identity.<sup>8</sup> This is best evidenced by the changing of his name from Khamraj to simply “Chuck.” Michael Pekarofski writes that

the Anglicizing (or “Americanizing”) of ethnically or religiously identifiable names, either to simplify them or deliberately to mask their origins, was certainly not an uncommon practice for immigrants and subsequent generations, especially in a climate of intense anti-immigrant sentiment. (59)

The landscape of post-9/11 U.S. is an exemplification of the heights to which anti-immigrant sentiment can soar. Minorities, particularly those who originate from other countries, are often viewed as potential threats to a so-called American way of life. Chuck’s changing of his first name, then, is understandable within this context; his name precedes him and so there is an intrinsic logic in adopting a more “American” name. However, the fact remains that Chuck can do nothing to change his racial distinction. It is this, more than anything else, that precludes him from achieving the American Dream, since his race determines his societal positioning and disallows him from accessing an American identity in the same way that Hans can.

Because Chuck has limited access to traditionally accumulated economic success, he makes his money by way of involvement with an

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<sup>8</sup>As Hans recalls: “[Chuck] told his own story constantly, and the autobiography might succinctly, and clankingly, have been titled *Chuck Ramkissoon: Yank*” (O’Neill 133).

illicit gambling market. Placing this within a historical consideration of immigrant economic viability, Pekarofski writes that the production and distribution of liquor during the Prohibition was often the only gateway to financial success available to immigrants (54). He notes further, however, that this gateway remained narrow for many of the immigrants who pursued it (Pekarofski). While the time period that Pekarofski refers to is not the same as the one in which Chuck exists, the description is nevertheless helpful in explaining his involvement with an unsavory racketeer.<sup>9</sup> Given the ways in which American nativism affects immigrant employment opportunities, gambling grants Chuck the quickest access to the kind of wealth he associates with the achievement of Americanness.

In addition to his involvement with racketeering, Chuck harbors a hope that he will be able to achieve the American Dream by launching a cricket club. The unfortunate irony in his choice of sport is that it has little chance of providing him with the success he so desperately seeks. In explaining the history of cricket's rise and decline in the U.S., Jeffrey Hill asserts, "...cricket remained strongly associated with immigrant groups who played the game partly to maintain their ethnic identity" (221). Though cricket, in many ways, is similar to baseball—and, as Hill states, was equally well-positioned to become the nation's preferred sport—the connotation it has taken on in regards to racial "others" has made it unlikely, if not impossible, for Chuck's goal to be anything more than a pipedream. Moreover, the element of class, which is not removed from race, becomes significant within the context of American sports since, according to Robert Johnson, Jr., "...within our class system, a particular sport may become identified with a particular economic status" (32). Considering the immigrant association to cricket through the lens of economic status (as described by Pekarofski), the sport then takes on a lower economic valuation by virtue of its racial identification.

The use of cricket as the novel's chosen sport also implies the corruptibility of the American Dream, particularly when considered alongside *Gatsby*. Fitzgerald's work, while not overtly focused on sports, does mention baseball with the underlying purpose of showing the violability of an athletic activity with significant ties to the economy. Much to Nick's shock and horror, *Gatsby* reveals that his associate Wolfsheim was responsible for fixing the 1919 World Series.

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<sup>9</sup>Incidentally, *Netherland's* racketeer Mike Abelsky is not only Jewish like *Gatsby's* racketeer Meyer Wolfsheim, but they are also described in similarly unflattering ways.

Johnson makes the argument that “...in choosing a sport symbolically to comment on the state of the American Dream, Fitzgerald knew that baseball could reach more people” (35). The way in which baseball is deeply integrated into the American identity makes its corruptibility a source of piercing commentary—one that illuminates the fact that the narratives held most dear by the U.S. are not exempt from exploitation. The use of cricket, then, in *Netherland* is especially telling; not only does Chuck’s racketeering involvement insinuate corruption that can be applied to his involvement with cricket—and, by extension, the American Dream he associates with it—but the use of a sport that does not garner much popular national recognition is symbolic of the way that the present failure of the American Dream often goes unacknowledged in the shadow of more idealistic narratives. Just as Chuck’s choice to promote cricket as a new national pastime has little basis in reality, the achievement of the American Dream also has little basis in reality for many people.

Though there is not a character who is necessarily meant to be the reimagination of Daisy, the symbolic meaning she holds is clearly present. At one point, Hans finds himself in a graveyard with Chuck and notices that he is, most unwittingly, standing on a gravestone engraved with the name Daisy. Here, it is necessary to look past the idea of Daisy as an individual and recognize what she represents for Gatsby: she is the actualization of his American Dream, the very “object” that would validate all of his accumulated wealth.<sup>10</sup> The absence of a physical Daisy-like character is a morose indication that there is no possibility for Chuck to actualize his American Dream. Moreover, the fact that he unwittingly stands on the gravestone engraved with her name is evidence that not only are his dreams unachievable, but he, unlike Hans and the readers, has no awareness of the reality that he faces. O’Neill’s interview with Charlie Reilly reveals the overarching commentary of this plot element: “We’re living in a globalized world, and as a consequence, the American Dream narrative which is commonly attributed to *Gatsby* simply doesn’t work as a current premise” (13). This globalized world that O’Neill refers to, unlike the era of Prohibition, uniquely characterizes the era of 9/11 and post-9/11 America. Thus, the reimagination of Fitzgerald’s criticisms of the American Dream functions best when placed within literature that occupies this temporal landscape.

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<sup>10</sup>Fitzgerald substantiates the representative nature that Daisy comes to embody, writing: “There must have been a moment even that afternoon when Daisy tumbled short of his dreams—not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything” (95).

In an intriguing narrative inversion, the ending of *Gatsby* becomes the beginning of *Netherland*. Indeed, O'Neill's work essentially opens with the moment in which Hans is informed of Chuck's death, whereas Fitzgerald ends his work with Nick's discovery of Gatsby's death.<sup>11</sup> However, their overarching sentiments about human nature are hauntingly similar. The manner in which *Gatsby* closes is one of the most recognizably poetic moments in the novel:

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther...And one fine morning——

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

(Fitzgerald 180)

This passage, simultaneously hopeful and poignant, suggests that current and past events—political, economic, social, and racial—become the mediating force against which the hope of the future must necessarily struggle. O'Neill opens his novel in a similar way, “You might say, if you're the type prone to general observations, that New York City insists on memory's repetitive mower—on the sort of purposeful postmortem that has the effect, so one is told and forlornly hopes, of cutting the grassy part to manageable proportions” (4). In a like manner, this passage suggests that individuals must constantly struggle to make past and present moments manageable. This ties well into an idea that Kirk Curnutt articulates thusly: “As much as a symbol of endurance, the image of the boat borne ceaselessly into the past is one of *stasis*” (90; emphasis in original). The idea extends to the metaphor of the mower as well, allowing *Netherland* to join *Gatsby* in this revelation of stasis. Despite Gatsby's and Chuck's best efforts their economic situations are never permanently improved though there are few moments of perceived upward mobility. This need within the economic contexts of the novels to subject the focal characters to a financial equilibrium (what goes up must come down) is the most telling sign that the American Dream cannot be sustained—or, at least,

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<sup>11</sup>That both deaths occur in or near water—Gatsby in his pool and Chuck in the Gowanus Canal—holds symbolic reference to baptism. There are two possible readings for this symbolism which are elucidated by the remainder of the paragraph: on one hand, this might indicate that, despite the authors' critiques of the American Dream, any hopes of the rebirth of its sustainability rest in the tireless optimism of those who pursue it; on the other hand, this may be irony in its finest form, indicating that any possibility for the rebirth of its sustainability is already dead.

not in the way that the mythologized narrative of American exceptionalism envisions.

The brilliance of 9/11 literature such as *Let the Great World Spin* and *Netherland* to invoke *Gatsby* is not simply the linguistic expertise with which the corresponding themes are expressed, but also the way in which these novels become the site to reimagine and reconstruct the classic novel. Race becomes the basis for the “othering” of the newly conceived Gatsbys, an act which functions to bridge a blatant gap that exists in the original work: “[Carlyle Van] Thompson casts *The Great Gatsby* as a product of Fitzgerald’s anxiety about the racial other transposed onto the established American narrative of class aspiration” (Schreier 159). This anxiety, then, is addressed not only by casting the post-9/11 *Gatsby* characters as immigrants, but also by inserting the Black body—and the economic implications of that body—into the foreground of the novels. When the American Dream is considered with regards to the experiences of minority community the luster it once held as an unequivocal truth is irrevocably tarnished.

In many ways, this is even more apparent in the modern U.S. economic climate. Wage gaps and the shrinkage of the middle class—both exacerbated by the element of race—have called into question the applicability of the American Dream that now exists largely in a mythologized state. By assuming Fitzgerald’s criticism of the American Dream and reimagining it in a contemporary space, McCann and O’Neill categorically reject previous literary erasures and minimizations of the unique immigrant struggle to equitably access economic success. Interpreting the collapse of the World Trade Center as the collapse of an assumptive American Dream, the modern reimaginings of *Gatsby* project themselves onto the very space of absence. Accordingly, the way in which *Gatsby* translates so smoothly into the realm of a post-9/11 literary landscape is almost uncanny; indeed, Roger L. Pearson contends that “[t]he American dream is not to be a reality, in that it no longer exists, except in the minds of men like Gatsby, whom it destroys in their espousal and relentless pursuit of it” (645). With all the theoretical nuances stripped away, this is the reality that remains: the American Dream is unachievable for many and unsustainable for countless more. It is a nativist myth that justifies American exceptionalism, and its economic erasure of minorities and immigrants within the larger narrative is demonstrative of the problematic way in which this fable operates to perpetuate class differences.

What remains to be investigated, then, is whether the critical assessment of an achievable and sustainable American Dream as the vehicle by which these authors ultimately achieve *their* American Dreams is contradictory to the overarching integrity of the works and their respective commentaries.



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# **The Tale of *The Magic Mountain* in the Analysis of Paul Ricoeur**

*Chavdar Dimitrov*

## I. Introduction

Even though the intention to avoid identifiable semblances between the intellectual initiative of Thomas Mann and his predecessors is probably an adequate one, the thematic of *The Magic Mountain* forms a web which becomes an ongoing “polyphony.” Rodney Symington notes that Mann acknowledged the technique of counterpoint as applied “...in the most complex and all-pervasive way.” While such a prose can be compared to a succession of musical pieces, to the extent that an inter-relation is recognized, the reader is invited to interpret a flow of ideas (Symington 9, 10). As a result, the novel offers possibilities which provoke various associations. Whether its structure is a vehicle for the expression of philosophical reflections (Symington 11) remains a question to be answered. The allusiveness of textual composition is doubled: “self-referential” and “outward,” that is, to myths, to literature, to music, to history, etc. Both kinds are related to the application of Mann’s principle that everyday events may be interpreted as mythical (Symington 20-1). In this respect, the sense of the cultural problematic of changing epochs is mixed with another dimension. To this is added the intervention of WWI which finally closes what has been a search within a very broad field which includes mind, world, and the intricacies of life. Commenting on this encyclopedian yet ambiguous accumulation, Selin Ever hints that the main achievement of the novel is its form (106).

Along this thread, *The Magic Mountain* succeeds in creating an imaginary space that is outside historical time. While at the end “discordance wins out over concordance,” the novel’s narrative brings an awareness of the multiple temporalities of modernity (McCracken 278). While the time in Sanatorium Berghof is marked by rituals (Ever 111), the Alpine seclusion hosts an option for the peculiar ‘experience’ of an altered level of consciousness. Mann’s interest in this subject promises a re-interpretation of his mature approach. For example, Ever describes the technique to present “the overpowering detachment of time from history” (111), which draws the distinction between ‘temporality’ and ‘timelessness.’ Paul Ricoeur chooses to investigate these aspects of Mann’s writing or rather the so-called attempt to narrativize “‘irreconcilable’ temporal perspectives” (McCracken 27). For Ricoeur, the modernist novel detects “...temporalities that are more



or less extended, offering in each instance a different figure of recollection, of eternity in or out of time [...]” (1985, 101). This description does not exclude ways for reaching out towards what Michael Bell has described as the ‘organization of time as myth.’

## II. The play of tense and fictive reality

The introductory issue becomes complicated when ‘subjective’ and ‘progressive’ inclinations are involved, separately or together, with the above-mentioned theoretical couples. In a similar vein, Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* (Part 3) distinguishes *tales of time* (universal time feature of the transformations that affect the situations and characters in narrative) from *tales about time* (those in which “...it is the very experience of time that is at stake in the structural transformations”) (101). Ricoeur’s claim for such a division is build upon the distinction between utterance and statement. Harald Weinrich (1973) introduced the latter starting from the first effort to verbalize experience which develops into the dissociation of the system of tenses from lived time. The structural perspective between asserting and narrating falls inside a grammar of tenses (Ricoeur 1985, 65-6). Weinrich applies “textual linguistics” in positioning the value of a tense throughout a text.<sup>12</sup> In his book the analyses devoted to temporal transitions—to the “...passage from one sign to the other in the course of the unfolding of the text” (199)—constitute a syntagmatic complement to the paradigmatic division of tenses. Ricoeur takes this passage from a paradigmatic point of view to a syntagmatic one as a lesson for a study of time in fiction (1985, 73). In Weinrich’s work the relation of interlocution guides the reception of the message in order to allow an initial distribution of the tenses. The ‘world’<sup>13</sup> common to the interlocutors is affected by a purely syntactic distinction (Ricoeur 1985, 67), but the typology of tenses preserves a mimetic feature where the syntactic distinctions (*i.e.* the function of signaling and guidance) result in an “initial schematic partitioning of the world” (Ricoeur 1985, 72-3) in which the relations of narrated and commented worlds to the world of *praxis* are only held in suspension. Despite the established break between *tenses* and *time*, by entering the realm of fiction, the conservation of temporal intention of the tenses can be observed along the axes of communication which relay their distribution. Freeing the latter from the categories of lived time—“neutrality” with respect to time (Weinrich 44)—is crucial for defining

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<sup>12</sup>A text is composed of “...signs arranged in a linear series, transmitted from speaker to listener in a chronological sequence” (198).

<sup>13</sup>Understood as the sum of possible objects of communication, without any explicit ontological implication.

the tenses of the narrated world. In Weinrich's view the "as if" of the past and the imperfect tenses, oriented toward an attitude of relaxation (withdrawal), make the world of concern (the preoccupying surroundings) more complex. That the respective groups of tenses—of lived past and of narrative—do not mix goes to underline the persistence of an attitude of relaxation within the tension. In the novel, a genre born out of this involvement-in-withdrawal, they remain superimposed (Weinrich 35-47; Ricoeur 1985, 69-70). For Ricoeur, this relation of the past tenses (filiation and breaking-off) first expresses the past and then, "...by a metaphorical transition that preserves what it supersedes," states an entry into fiction with an oblique reference to the past as such (1985, 75). In Weinrich's analysis the subjection of retrospection and anticipation to temporal conditions follows from the linear character of the speech chain. He asserts that the *preterite*<sup>14</sup> family of narrative tenses signals only an entry into the narrative and that the notions of future and past can be eliminated, while for Ricoeur these signals retain a connection with the expression of past as such as well as a filiation with the "as if" kind. Here Ricoeur evokes Husserl's discussion of this filiation by neutralization—an oblique reference to the past through the process of phenomenological suspension—and Eugen Fink's definition of *Bild* as putting mere "presentification" (*Vergegenwartigeri*)<sup>15</sup> under the same terms. By neutralization of the "realist" intention of memory all absence becomes, by analogy, a quasi-past and every narrative speaks of the unreal as if it were past. In conclusion, if there are no metaphorical relations (produced by neutralization) between narrative and memory, we cannot explain narrative tenses too as parts of memory (Ricoeur 1985, 74). Without this oblique reference to the structure of time we cannot understand what anticipation or retrospection—the primitive retention-protension structure of the living present—means.

Maurice Natanson's book, *The Erotic Bird: Phenomenology in Literature*, is relevant to these considerations as it collates tropology and transcendental phenomenology. It presents a viewpoint where phenomenological concepts may be said to be 'in' literature. Re-deploying both the metonymical structure of reality's "spatial horizon" and the metaphorical structure of reality's "temporal horizon" amounts to 'showing forth' the results of enquiry in the context of fiction

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<sup>14</sup>Imperfect, perfect, pluperfect verbs, in themselves indicating that the action has taken place in a past relative to the time of utterance.

<sup>15</sup>According to Currie (30), Ricoeur borrows the term from Muller. See Ricoeur (1985, 78). Other connotations are Heidegger's term 'presencing' and Augustine's notion of *distentio*: the inclusion of the past and future within the present. For a discussion see Simms (82).

(Natanson 61, 64; Crowell 270-71). In “Phenomenology Is the Poetic Essence of Philosophy: Maurice Natanson on the Rule of Metaphor” (2005), Steven Crowell continues to expound on this matter by pointing out that it is difficult to obtain the result’s content in a movement of description that notates a series of connections (which are far from being a story-line, but belong to “intentionality”). In the realm where the noetic intends the noematic,<sup>16</sup> a description tracks a path traversed in consciousness’ own time (Natanson 4, 14-5). A formation of correlates arises as a “purely meant modality of being” (22)—an “irreality” that carries “no ontological weight” (24). What is *meant* “...presents itself in precisely the way it presents itself” (Crowell 272-73). As “evident,” it is the sense of my being in a world which is a “fictive reality” (Natanson 37). Being “for me,” my encounters, experiences, etc, compete for significance in a reverie. At this point the task of getting results depends on what sort of literature we are dealing with. While Natanson’s phenomenology adopts Husserlian transcendental,<sup>17</sup> he takes an existential turn towards phenomena “...intersubjectively recognized as fugitive to cognition, but naggingly present in our daily lives” (9–10). The trace of the transcendental is uncovered as the uncanny which challenges the mundane (56). Seen from the borderline of experience, the familiar appears to “win out” over the strange (53). For this reason, if phenomenology explores the origin of the familiar, Crowell asks: How does it describe the essentially unfamiliar? (274). For Husserl, commitments to the “reality” of an intentional experience are bracketed. The correlative focus encompasses noematic (meaningful) built-ups and noetic acts (Crowell 274-5).

Nevertheless, phenomenology may become an art of ‘reduction’ by employing tropes in order to delineate the correlative field and to disclose its uncanny origins in the transcendental. Natanson dubs Husserl’s reduction “a perpetual reconnoitering of the *life-world*” (Natanson 42). It is an “inherently poetic” and philosophical idea (6, 7). Adding the concepts of horizon, sedimentation, and current of existence threaten to identify the work of phenomenology with literary imagination, but in Natanson’s view its terminology is united in the notion of fictive reality (Crowell 276). Constitution has to do only with the aspects “which are born of *consciousness*” (Natanson 18). The latter is conceived on its own

<sup>16</sup>In the *life-world* the correlates are taken for granted; ‘intentiveness’ of consciousness is hidden from the ordinary activity of perception (Natanson 26).

<sup>17</sup>“[d]istinction between the empirical-psychological and the phenomenological-transcendental” (Natanson 128); the transcendental must avoid concepts that pertain to the discipline of psychology.

“terrain”—the purely *meant* order of the fictive (30). Hence, the term “constitution” is a trope that signifies the sense in which reality is “made.” Understanding this character has to do with the role of literature (Crowell 277). If we accept the dichotomy of ‘common sense’ and ‘poetic imagination,’ and say that the fictive lies in-between, we must insist that the intentional content of imagining is not identified with a psychological act. The fictive is that which is neutral, for example, the emotional charge of references to poetic entities or to reality (Natanson 31-2). The difference between these two cases is irrelevant for understanding meaning which cannot be reduced to either of the elements of a correlate (Crowell 278). The integrity of the fictive (irreducible to the content of the author’s or the reader’s minds) sets the relation of philosophy and literature. Natanson’s approach to the transcendental making that underlies the *life-world* is through the kind of constitution that belongs to literature (Natanson 31). In reading emerges a unity of meaning that transcends both the specific words and their animation in the mind. This structure exists only in a performance which is constrained by a work (*ergon*) that has freed itself from its author (Crowell 279). As a form, the intentional correlate takes hold of oneself when a moment in “internal time-consciousness” is transformed into structure. Phenomenology inquires into the horizontal structure of the *life-world*<sup>18</sup> in order to uncover the origins of the *meant* (Crowell 280).

The notion of horizon sums up intentional objects standing out “...against the background of their spatial and temporal surroundings” while keeping “their halos, their fringes” (Natanson 45). According to Natanson, the trope (as a kind of messenger of the *apriori*) tracks the movement of perceptual consciousness, that is, contains the key to the nature of fictive reality (131). In a perspectival sense, the *external spatial horizon* stretches out from what is immediate to a thing into a near-complete indeterminacy. It is occupied by co-variance, presence and absence, concealing and revealing (Crowell 281).<sup>19</sup> In tropological terms, this structure of the *life-world* has a metonymical character. Horizontal spatiality cannot be reconstructed in terms of objective determinations. Governed by relations of proximity and contiguity, it exhibits an always shifting, metonymical structure—the pre-predicative meaning of what stands out is constituted, in part, by what is “near” it. However, Natanson points to a ‘vertical’ history of the pre-predicative realm” —the ‘sedimentation’ of meaning. This

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<sup>18</sup>The *life-world* involves “pre-given” (already meaningful) situations and “pre-predicative” aspects of things (Natanson 44).

<sup>19</sup>The properties of a figure cannot be circumscribed from their functional relation to a surrounding ‘ground.’

dimension is “...the building up of past experience to constitute the present” (50), which belongs to an “internal horizon” (130) that also constitutes the *meant* as such. It is neither the objective genesis of some content of consciousness nor clock time. Hence, the phenomenological return to origin, which explores the internal horizon that belongs to what is encountered in the *life-world*, cannot be carried out with the ordinary resources of history. Asking about this sort of structure is an inquiry into the sources of transcendental consciousness (50). Keen on distinguishing, Husserl developed an account of passive synthesis, but his doctrine of association failed by treating the internal (temporal) horizon on the model of the external, namely, as a matter of contiguity (Crowell 282).

According to David Wood (2001, xxxvi), the analysis of representations of temporal structures must rescue its descriptions from the uncanny. As an emphasis on this position, Mark Currie adds the search for a clear relation to the structures of the novel and to their effects in the world (1). Such are his own theses in *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (2007): the presence requires a kind of self-distance; the present is to a large extent apprehended as the object of a future memory. This tense-based theory starts with fiction, but aims to describe narrative as a mode of being (150). Through the formal logic of temporal structure and a form of internal time, narratology attends to the ways the present is marked by the future (Currie 28). This approach to ‘temporal reference’ is an alternative to the conception that the topic of time is specific only to few narratives, for example, the Modernist novel. Ricoeur frames fiction’s engagement with time within the latter. He builds upon the tension between narrated time (*erzählte Zeit*) and the time of narration (*Erzahlzeit*). This relation was accentuated by Gunther Muller in *Zeiterlebnis und Zeitgerüst*<sup>20</sup> (1968; Ricoeur 1985, 80). He introduces the term “armature of time” [Zeitgerüst] (229-311) as the interplay between narrated time and the time taken to narrate. On the other side of Muller’s essay, the lived experience of time is the ground of life indifferent to meaning. No intuition can give the meaning of this time, which is never more than intended indirectly by the analysis of the “armature of time.” Thus, Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* is concerned with the “poietische Dimension” of “lived” time (303) which is the numinous par excellence. The program of *Morphologische Poetik* aims to uncover the way in which the quantitative relations of time agree with the qualities of time belonging

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<sup>20</sup>Muller, Gunther. *Morphologische Poetik*. Edited by Elena Muller. M. Niemeyer, 1968.

to life itself. While Ricoeur insists that the fundamental time is “codetermined” by the above-mentioned tensional relation and by the resulting “laws of form” (80-1), his theory for description of narrative temporality is additionally complicated by a conjunction with cosmology and phenomenology (Currie 32-3). As Currie notes, thinking about a combination of the aspects of time does not challenge time’s one-directionality. Subjective and objective time may seem aporetic, but not in such a way that the forward direction of time is questioned. In terms of a present that is crossed by protentions and retentions, there are various sequences, but the anachronous (as such) are also related to an external time. In dealing with aporias of time, Ricoeur’s decision is to avoid aligning phenomenological time with life of the mind and cosmological time i.e. with the outside world (Currie 77).<sup>21</sup> He thinks both experiences of time as distinguished parts of consciousness, but what Ricoeur demonstrates less well, in Currie’s opinion, is the cooperation between them (78). In Ricoeur’s solution, an anachronous arrangement in memory just confirms the order from which it digresses, and in such a way that the intelligibility of remembered events depends on the reconstruction of their chronology. The representation of memory does not question the forward movement of time (Currie 78).

### III. The topic of time – between pervasive prolepsis (Currie) and implicit double temporality (Ricoeur)

As we noted earlier, Ricoeur assigns to the ‘*tales about time*’ a special role. The very experience of time is ‘what was at stake’ in their developments. Such a proposal is deemed to imply specific fictional narratives where the topic of time predominates. Currie aims to translate ‘*aboutness*’ into the claim that all novels should be viewed as such tales. He subverts the division by giving an account for the concept’s area, that is, for the sense of ‘*on the subject of*’ (32): at the level of thematic content of the novels addressed to the idea of time. Saying that ‘what is at stake is the dimension of time’ does not solve the problem of explaining the meaning of ‘*aboutness*.’ Ricoeur must demonstrate such a sense as fundamental only for the *Zeitroman*.<sup>22</sup> When Mann calls *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*) a

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<sup>21</sup>A point of view which conceives and perceives a kind of cosmological time, from within human experience (the mind), is not the same thing as the difference between the experience of time and actual time.

<sup>22</sup>Editor’s note: *Zeitroman* or “time-novel”. This term is applied in German to novels which are primarily concerned with an author’s critical analysis of the age in which he lives. Some *Bildungsroman* may be regarded as *Zeitromane*. source: <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803133418787>

*Zeitroman*, he means that its object is “time in its pure state” (Ricoeur 1985, 76), but defining ‘*about time*’ in this case meets several topics that vie for ‘what is at stake’ (Ricoeur 1985, 112, 115-16; Currie 2). On a level of interrogation, for Currie, ‘Is this a novel about time?’ turns out to be less focused than ‘What does a novel know about time?’ which links to how it relates what it knows to the knowledge of life (111) or what domain of understanding contemporary novel might occupy (Currie 1). Another aspect of the area of resonance is the narrative technique which places time at the forefront of a novel’s less content-based concern. Is it only because of the temporal logic of storytelling that experiments in the novel are exploration of a grand theme? Within the traditional scheme,<sup>23</sup> Currie classifies three types of prolepsis. *Structural* (2): between the time locus of the narrated and the time locus of the narrator, or the function inherent in all fiction as *tales of time*. This binding (to the *preterite*) is a mark for anticipation in the sense of the present as structurally retrospective (39). It generates a theory which connects the temporalities of reading and living in the way expressed as follows: there is a hermeneutic circle between the presentification of fictional narrative and the depresentification of lived experience (31-2).<sup>24</sup> *Narratological* (1): the time locus of the narrated; the anticipation of future events within the universe of narrated events. *Rhetorical* (3): between the time locus of the narrator and the time locus of the reader; the anticipation of an objection and the preclusion of that objection by incorporating a counter-argument into the discourse (31). Often viewed as forms of experimentation, 1 and 3 point to features which indicate a conscious concern with narrative temporality in *tales about time*. Currie must show that the three forms operate in a hermeneutic circle.<sup>25</sup> When the boundaries between these categories of anticipation are questioned, Ricoeur’s distinction between the conscious and the unconscious concern with narrative temporality also comes into question; as

<sup>23</sup>Narrated time (1) is anterior to the time of narration (2) which is in turn prior to the time of reading (3).

<sup>24</sup>This formula refers to a temporal structure of the human experience of time; see Heidegger (304–11, 352–8). In living, the presentification refers to the kind of envisaged preterite we use to deprive the today of its character as present; we project forward to an envisaged time of narration in order to render the present as narrated time (Currie 30). See Heidegger’s discussion of anticipation (444).

<sup>25</sup>Although this account arrives at complications, what remains is the idea that the moment of the present might be structured by an anticipation of the retrospective time of narrating. Currie admits that 1 is not properly named, because the anticipation of future events in a fiction counts as prolepsis only when that anticipation is true, which would require an actual excursion into the future of narrated events; while 1 depends on the relation to an existing fictional future, 3 aims at the preclusion of the event anticipated. See Currie (39).

corollary, we see that the so-called ‘*about time*’ aspect is relevant in the case of a novel for which time does not seem to be what is principally at stake.

Ricoeur’s distinction implicates that narrative has a conventional temporal logic which is not *about time* (Currie 2-4). From this angle, the elaboration consists in analysing double narrative temporality. This option designates figures which go beyond the everyday sphere of *praxis* and *pathos*. For instance, the conflict between internal duration and external clock time, which could still be attributed to Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, is not what is at stake in Mann’s example. When Peter Brooks qualifies *anticipation of retrospection* as the master trope of narrative logic (Currie 23), he speaks about the tense conditions of fiction, where anticipation is structural insofar as the present is lived in grammatical acknowledgement of the time of narration, which is a future that is already in place. In reading we decode the preterite as a kind of present. In this basic structure Currie identifies a prolepsis which is involved in all narrative (30). Instructing us in the presentification of the past, fiction also robs us of the present. It encourages us to go ahead within the time locus of narrated events which creates the teleological retrospect (33).

According to Ricoeur, the “schematism of the narrative function” is an imaginative re-description which creates new meaning. While the verification of this “ordering of events” is uncertain, its ongoing validity is in a temporal structure. The primacy of narrative understanding is due to the cultural transmission which underlies our familiarity with tradition (genres) (Ricoeur 1985, 29-60; Jervolino 141). William Dowling sees the *discordant concordance* of emplotment as central to Ricoeur’s logic of narrative sequence. This definition is based on the teleological movement that drives the story towards an anticipated conclusion. *Time and Narrative* treats this formal principle as a consequence of narrative structure: as two sides in the correlate of “grasping together” heterogeneous occurrences (Dowling 5-6). Ricoeur’s reinterpretation of the concept of *muthos* starts from a semantics of action; in order to explain to ourselves the other, we draw upon the *probable* (Aristotle) (Dowling 4). Furthermore, Dowling points to an implicit a-historical sense of a common humanity throughout *Poetics* (7). The purpose of *poiesis* is to represent a recurring human event (a self-contained reality). In the same sense, for Ricoeur, the structure of tragedy, as *holos*, implies a development that is not taken from experience. In other words, Aristotle offers a perspective which resembles a gaze from outside that



takes creation as a timeless whole (Dowling 9-10). According to Dowling, adopting such a view on the logic of narrative causality, Ricoeur's analysis crosses over to *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> (Dowling 8-9) or to the implication of plot which moves both forward and backward. Grasping as a whole means that the forward motion of events in a story comes into collision with *recognition*: Aristotle's *anagnorisis* (or the moment *telos* is revealed). In drama this perspective is absorbed into the elements of the structure. Ricoeur concentrates on *diegetic narrative*, where the association is with a narrator who exists outside the story's horizon and gives visibility to its *double temporality*.<sup>26</sup> While the latter is generated by the *preterite* family of tenses, the production of unity primarily signals the sense of an ethical whole after the break with historical time (Dowling 11-2).

#### IV. Ricoeur on the aspects of narrative consciousness

According to Ricoeur, "...the tenses rediscover designations of time omitted by textual linguistics through "*refiguration*" (*mimesis*<sub>3</sub>)". This notion takes us into the region of the act of comprehension through which a story comes to life in those outside of its imaginary world (Dowling 14). Ricoeur argues that an alteration of consciousness must also take place in a world of mortality. While "*refiguration*" demands a greater respect for the claims of literary autonomy, the semantics of action guarantees moving back and forth between the fictive and the actual. The possibility for intersection is rooted in similar semantics of pre-narrative structure. Ricoeur also insists that reading another version of reality comes forth with the impossibility of not seeing it that way (Dowling 14-6). Thus, his theory of *mimesis* suggests a certain structure (or event) for conceptualization.

According to Ricoeur, on the background of the tension which the 'experience' of the supposed true nature of time brings in what is needed is to encompass more aspects (Currie 78). He argues that it takes more than the notion of clock time to describe the apparatus of public history and collective experience that gives the backdrop to private thoughts and actions of characters. Reminding of Nietzsche's 'monumental history,' Ricoeur refers to 'monumental time' in his own description of the power of novels as: "[...] the variety of relations between the concrete temporal experience of various characters and monumental time. The variations on the theme of this relation lead

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<sup>26</sup>1) The narrated story moves forward in the sequence of ordinary time; 2) intimations of a *totum simul* in the narrative voice serves as a continuous reminder that the story is being grasped as a whole.

fiction well beyond the abstract opposition we have just referred to and make of it, for the reader, a powerful means of detecting the infinitely varied way of combining the perspectives of time [...]” (1985, 108; Currie 129). A point about literary works is that the narrator’s look on events may diverge from the total perspective. The latter becomes more abstract, but nonetheless exists as an ideal possibility (Dowling 88). What are we to do when the two do not coincide? For Ricoeur, thinking about the meaning of literary narrative begins with the limitations which determine the narrative voice as a trustworthy source and involve the notion of discontinuity. The narrator observes, but does not intervene in events; recounting is without power to impinge on the fictive consciousness (Dowling 93). When characters speak, the reality to which narrator’s discourse belongs is suspended. Thus, we have two extremes: 1) in surpassing even the most perceptive characters, the total perspective is an advanced consciousness which resembles a magnetic pull towards which everything is being drawn; 2) the unreliable narrator, the sole source of information, fails to understand the details in the events, that is, obscures proper comprehension of the narrated world and allows for another point of view (consciousness) within the text—an *implied* “voice” which “carries the reader with him in judging the narrator” (Booth 159; Dowling 94-5).

To the phenomenological implications of this situation is added the fact that in the reading of a sentence, words come in one’s mind which, like the author’s, are subject to the conditions of possibility for all human experience. What Ricoeur means by this picture is that everything the reader knows comes from the words on the page, plus, s/he imagines or perceives a consciousness behind, not identical with or reducible to the words themselves. When the work is taken up to be read the immanent within a text is set free in the consciousness of the reader (Dowling 96)—a world begins to take shape as a setting of actions/events that transcend the marks on a page. This principle holds for a narrator whose perspective is projected as a unity existing independently. Between the two mentioned extremes, a wholly immanent narrative consciousness may be visualized as a set of concentric spheres: 1) centre—characters as volitional beings in circumstances (a self-contained world of motive and action); 2) indication that the narrator has already had time to look back on the significance of a whole; 3) the consciousness in which the story comes alive (Dowling 98). If, after dwelling in the imaginary, what is brought about by *works* may be carried back into the everydayness, on what terms such an interval can happen in mortal time? (Dowling 16-7) Ricoeur’s theory of ‘*implied reader*’ pays respect to literary autonomy

and to ordinary reality. He borrows this term from Wolfgang Iser for suggesting an audience projected by the work itself. Anyone who adopts the point of view of the reader addressed in the book is involved in a depersonalization of consciousness (Dowling 99). To take up this position is to divest one's own particularities and only leave a disembodied consciousness as the medium of "transcendence within immanence." The only thing kept is semantics of action (mimesis<sub>1</sub>) —a bridge to characters who dwell within a similar realm. Their understanding of existence is rooted in the primordial stratum of social or communal consciousness. Thus, we find ourselves at the beginning; everyday life (in a time of almost unconscious dwelling) generates narrative. The universally shared grasp of volition, motives, choices, and goals, is in accordance with narrated time in which alone the world of human concern takes shape (Dowling 100-1). But in the passage from the capacity of narrative to utter the time of mankind to the ontic problems of refiguration, Ricoeur's intent is on asking: "to what degree a philosophical reflection on narrativity and time may aid us in thinking about eternity and death at the same time" (1984, 87). In Dowling's review (86-7, 98) this reaching out to absolutes is summed up into another question: What does it mean for fictive time to have permitted actual readers to get outside their own mortal time?

#### V. Zeitroman versus Hegelian historiography

According to Dowling (88), applying Ricoeur's general observations to *The Magic Mountain* would imply that its moment of *recognition* allows readers to grasp their own immersion (in the story) as interlude to or as insertion within their mortal time. Ricoeur sees Mann's approach partly as a "time-novel" in which the 'time of feeling' eliminates clock time; confusing the seasons also adds to the blurring of appropriate reference within a perpetual duration. On the background of this erosion of the sense of time Hans Castorp takes a step from perplexity toward lucidity by disassociating time-as-it-appears from time measured (Mann 1969, 66; Ricoeur 1985, 119). Still, for Ricoeur, the novel unfolds through *false epiphanies* (in a dreamlike sequence the hero imagines a mystical union with Madame Chauchat; the whiteness of a snow-covered landscape looks like a vision of eternity). Supposedly leading the protagonist towards an ironic detachment, episodes like *Soup Everlasting* and *Sudden Enlightenment* (Mann 1969, 183-219) contain "the underground" of a strange, selfsame eternity, confirmed by the narrative voice: "[...] what is being revealed to you as the true content of time is merely a dimensionless present." (183-4). Sometimes the storyteller is interested in his own thinking about ordinary time as inseparable from

routine activity, while underneath is the barren ground of existence (Dowling 90). From a main point in Ricoeur's analysis, the novel is ultimately about its own narrator. This is revealed by the reversal of the normal relation between *telos* and the perspective of the voice telling the story. At the end, after the fictive experience of time, the reader is alone with a possible clarity of perception (Dowling 91).

This interpretation of the ways to epitomize the experience of time skips the historical influences on the novel's conception (Ricoeur 1985, 133). Harry Jansen begins his analysis with such an investigation. For example, narrator states in the forward to *Der Zauberberg (The Magic Mountain)* (21) that the events in the book "...take place before a certain turning point and border that has deeply fissured life and consciousness [...] it took place in former times, beforehand, in the old days, the world before the Great War."<sup>27</sup> (Jansen 4). Following Stephen Kern in identifying temporal perspectives in the chaotic world dating around WWI, Jansen points out that Henri Bergson and Walter Benjamin provided alternatives to Hegelian-romantic historiography (5). Ricoeur uses the notions of "*synthesis of the heterogeneous*" and "continuing entities" which may be counted as arguments for a homogeneous temporality. The second one is in debt to Maurice Mandelbaum and signifies the main, singular subjects in History (countries, nations, churches, religions, cultures, and subcultures) (Ricoeur 1984, 194-208). These are renamed as 'first-order entities' and seen as collective *quasi-personages*. The rise and fall in their identities<sup>28</sup> show diachronic character which is the object of historiographical narration (217-18). Following Steven Smith,<sup>29</sup> Jansen notes that this thematization differs from the temporal development of the historicist "*Idee*." It is a more pluralistic perception of first-order entities in whose endeavours are seen manifold ideas.

According to Hayden White, in histories with first-order protagonists the tropology is determined mainly by the trope of synecdoche which displays a *totum pro parte* connection (Jansen 6-7).<sup>30</sup> In Jansen's tropology<sup>31</sup> "*Zeitromane*" are paradigmatic for

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<sup>27</sup>Translation by Joshua Kovaloski. *High Modernism: Aestheticism and Performativity in Literature of the 1920s*. Rochester NY, Camden House, and Boydell and Brewer Limited. 2014. pg, 158.

<sup>28</sup>Defined by their members' "participatory belonging" (197-98).

<sup>29</sup>"Historical Meaningfulness in Shared Action." *History and Theory*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2009, p.2, note 2.

<sup>30</sup>White 1973, pp. 35-36, 39-40, 122, 127, 129, 166-167, 189.

different temporalities whose forms are sought for in historiography as well. In his view (1-2), while Mann attempts to remove homogeneous temporality, Ricoeur's idea of configured temporality passes by both Benjamin's and Bergson's views on the topic (1985, 28, 168; 1988, 270). To the extent that White's theory indicates a level of consciousness "...on which a world of experience is *constituted* prior to being analyzed" (1973, 33), Jansen works out a relation between figurative and fictive reality. Although tropology primarily detects meaning *in* a historical text, for Jansen, it also reveals time-experience before its narration. He uses tropes to discern a temporal reality *behind* (the text) which makes the flux of experience comprehensible (3). In this way irony undermines or amplifies one of the other three temporalities in novels (White 1973, 37; Jansen 4). Mann's time novel displays this "metatropological" and "dialectical" aspect. For example, the words that the sanatorium (a quasi-personage) robs Castorp of his life enable an ironization of synecdoche or expose the hypertrophy of a "normal" first-order entity. Ascending to the Berghof means illness and often death; descending—a return to the real world (Jansen 11). Along this line of thought, for Ricoeur, *The Magic Mountain* confronts the time of working citizens with the "magic" time in a sanatorium; spatial division articulates the difference between calendar and "beyond-time" (Ricoeur 1985, 103-104, 112; Jansen 2). The stretching out of the chapters (*erzählte Zeit*), combined with abbreviation of the narrative (*the Erzählzeit*), creates a perspective link which is essential to the hero's musings on the sense of time (1985, 113). The composition of chapter 6 illustrates the difference between the narrated time and the time experience projected by fiction. According to Jansen, synecdoche reveals a time of rise and fall but irony upsets it (4). Ricoeur also refers to a remaining discordance: "[...] a discontinuous structure suits a time of dangers and adventures [...]" (1985, 81), but to some extent sees Mann's novel as involving learning about oneself and the world. Jansen suggests viewing Ricoeur's interpretation in the light of his analyses of temporality (8). Like the protagonist's departure from Hamburg and arrival in the Swiss Alps, the movements of several other characters are within the frame of rise

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<sup>31</sup>In *Triptiek van de tijd*, Jansen shows how novels of time let us explain different temporalities in historiography. Proust's metaphor exposes a heterogeneous time. Mann's synecdoche problematizes the temporality of rise and fall. Virginia Woolf uses a metonymy founded on human atomism that takes the form of "simultaneity of the dissimultaneous." This approach is close to Reinhart Koselleck's mediation of human experiences of time—the temporal modes in *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*. Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000, pp. 132-133—"long-term system changes" and "simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous" which display similarities respectively to Jansen's treatment of *The Magic Mountain* and *Mrs. Dalloway*.

and fall, that is, between an “almost immobile time” (1988, 134) “up there” (1985, 118) and the opposite time of everyday, clock-time measurement (Jansen 8-9). While Castorp’s fever dream may be another example of timelessness (Jansen 10), “Snow” (1969, 469-98) stands out of all previous episodes and deserves to be included within the “moments” that remain like a discontinuous chain, where the narrated time and the experience of time together find their culmination. For Ricoeur, the composition produces the peak of this conjunction. Yet, before this pinnacle experience, the evasion of chronology almost breaks up into irreconcilable perspectives. In losing measurable time, Castorp reaches an aporetic level—the impossibility of reconciling internal time with the cosmic aspects of time (Ricoeur 1985, 124). The encounter between two intellectual figures in the novel may be interpreted as a contradiction between the Enlightenment tradition of “civilization” (Settembrini) and the romantic tradition of *Kultur* (Naphta). This contrast of sensibilities is relevant, but according to Lucian Hölscher, the central European world after the WWI was neither of these (Jansen 10-1).<sup>32</sup> Jansen concludes that the temporality of *The Magic Mountain* is affected by the deeply ironic manner of its author. In the space of exploration, the paradoxes brought to light are those that afflict the internal experience of time when it is freed from its relation to chronological time. The hero’s preoccupation with the equivocality of time (the contrast between immobility and changes) (Mann 1969, 344) has been freed by the effacement of measurable time (Ricoeur 1985, 125). The novel contributes to the refiguration of time by bringing aporias of time to the “next level.” For Ricoeur, ironic detachment is the most “elevated,” perhaps precarious victory. In this sense the consciousness of dissonances is lifted a step higher (130).

## VI. The elaboration of ‘*leitmotiv*’ in *The Magic Mountain*

It is not easy to accommodate Mann’s perception of time within the approach of Jansen. The “structure” of *The Magic Mountain* may also be construed as a doubt about the mimetic aspect of emplotment which hardly fits within the theory of *Time and Narrative*. Is this a literature capable to deliver findings which differ from associationist metaphors? Natanson suggests that the employment of “*leitmotiv*” provides an insight into the phenomenological structures and an elucidation of the boundary between literature and philosophy.

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<sup>32</sup>“Mysteries of Historical Order: Ruptures, Simultaneity and the Relationship of the Past, the Present and the Future.” *Breaking Up Time: Negotiating the Borders between Present, Past and Future*. Edited by Berber Bevernage and Chris Lorenz. Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013, pp. 134-151, 148.

As a connection to the “uncanny” temporality (Natanson 99) in our daily lives, the novel shares terrain with existential phenomenology (10, 90). The concept of ‘*horizon*’ and the notion of ‘*leitmotiv*’ are interchangeable without being identical (91). Mann’s novel inquires about the sedimentation of meaning and proposes a tropological uncovering of transcendental time. He states that the purpose of “symbolic and allusive formulas” is to present an entire world of ideas at any given moment (Mann 1972, 725). These networks assemble Castorp’s journey in such a way that in the present emerges a kind of correlate in which “...past and future show themselves to be quite other than a chain of isolated moments” (Crowell 283). The *leitmotiv* is the formal structure which makes the content (intended object) of the hero’s current experience possible. It gives neither a kind of similarity nor remembering or anticipating, but *Evidenz* itself which “all at once is, remembers, and portends” (Natanson 90); “...[a]ll at once” is not a matter of association, but of something that comes to be bodily “there” (90) in something else.

The series of *leitmotivs* have a meaning that persists from the level of the affective (Mann 1978, 82) to that of nameless “unconscious conviction” (Natanson 128). The impossibility of locating the beginnings of these feelings (128) counteracts a psychological explanation in linear time. From the perspective of *leitmotiv*-development, Castorp’s proleptic/metaleptic thoughts bring about a structural continuity (Natanson 92, 131) that is equivalent to the mode in which the phenomenological notion of horizon enforces depth (Crowell 284).<sup>33</sup> To note this temporal characteristic is to say that the constitution of meaning is metaphorical. It also shows how style helps understand the art of phenomenological reduction. Natanson’s analysis implies that the idea of the *leitmotiv* aids Husserl’s model on the question of how the operation of sedimentation could yield a form with the integrity of a meaning. Object-constitution becomes intelligible if the “now” moment is understood in terms of metaphorical identification. Intentional correlates arise because temporality is nothing but the transformation of experience into structure through the alchemy of identification-in-difference (Crowell 285-86) which must be an ubiquitous universal condition of experience. Anything meaningful comes as to identify with what it portends and what is sedimented in it, and finally as something that eludes all identification (Natanson 90). Grasped in its character as

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<sup>33</sup>For example, the quasi-identification (between Clavdia and Pribislav Hippe) (Mann 1978, 361, 630) is an element whose meaning is grounded in something which is also only articulated in the convergence of these characters.

fictive reality, my experience has the character of “cords with knots” (Mann 1978, 233) where each encountered thing is a “knot” in a story (Crowell 286). If this is the only way to understand *identity*, then ontology will be a logic of the constituted figures of fictive reality (286). Accordingly, the world as given in experience, compels us toward an ontology of metaphor. But the consequences from Natanson’s re-interpretation of the transcendental field of constitution are not enough to arrive at a “...conception of the boundaries and possibilities of both philosophy and literature” (64). For Crowell, transcendental reflection on experience may link philosophy to “reality,” but cannot make the case for metaphor (as constitution). Mann’s method uses only eidetic possibilities. An ontology of fictive reality would require further critical interpretation of identification: whether there might not be modalities other than the tropologic character of horizons, which also contribute to the constitution of *what is* (Crowell 287). Still, it is the elaboration of phenomenological evidence which literature achieves that guarantees its inclusion into the project of illuminating the transcendental constitution of meaning (288).

## VII. A project for ontology of fiction

Ricoeur (1979) agrees with Nelson Goodman (*Languages of Art*, p. 241) that our aesthetical grasping reorganizes the world in terms of works and vice versa. He points out that fictions also “remake” the sphere of *praxis*, but in his elaboration on ‘*productive reference*’ as equivalent to reality shaping, the main emphasis remains aesthetic. The task is to show how the emergence of new meanings in the sphere of language generates an emergence of new images (1979, 125-127). According to Ricoeur, *image* is able to play an appropriately semantic role only if it leaves the unstableness of the sensible impression in order to pass into that of language (129). To say that poetic images are spoken before being seen is to claim that a work of discourse displays something in circumstances under the procedure of “reverberation”.<sup>34</sup> The latter proceeds from things said. Ricoeur’s approach of the accent on impertinence shifts one’s attention towards the restructuring of semantic fields at the level of predicative usage (Ricoeur 1979, 130).

According to Ricoeur, the experience of reading suggests that the images which exercise the iconic function (with regard to nascent

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<sup>34</sup>English for “*retentissement*,” a term which Gaston Bachelard (1969, xxi) borrows from Eugene Minkowski.



significations) are “bound”, that is, engendered by poetic diction itself (133). *Reverberation* - the intermediate level of depiction - is between the schematization of the metaphorical attribution and the “free” image. On the one hand, the free image seems to disperse meaning into floating reverie; on the other hand, the bound image introduces into the whole process a negative effect which places the phenomenon of reading in the neutralized atmosphere of fiction (a dimension of *unreality*). The ultimate role of image is to condition an *epoche* of the real, to place us in a sort of disengagement with regard to perception or action, to suspend meaning in the dimension of fiction. In this state we try new ways of being-in-the-world (1979, 133-34). At this stage is also the paradox of productive reference: only the image which does not already have its referent in reality is able to display a world. If this is how fiction intimates reality, Ricoeur comments that Kant’s relegation of fiction to the reflecting judgement<sup>35</sup> has made the way to an ontology of fiction difficult (1979, 135).

Noel Fitzpatrick (2016) argues that Ricoeur’s idea about fiction should be understood as a backdrop to the development of philosophical anthropology. In other words, the ability of language to refer to possible worlds is central within his hermeneutic project (Fitzpatrick 140). The status of fictional objects is dependent on the blurring of boundaries (between fiction and history) which takes place once the question of fiction is raised to the level of construction of identity (138). In presupposing the mediation of the world through language, the question could be: How do readers distinguish between language which refers to the real world and language that refers to an imaginary one shared by the author, narrator and the reader? (Fitzpatrick 143). In Ricoeur’s scheme the distinction between fictional works, as semantic-syntactic entities, and fictional objects reflects the distinction between world of fiction and fictional configuration. A characteristic of “*fiction*” is the “narrower extension” than that of “narrative configuration”. The term designates creations that do not have ambition to constitute a truthful historical narrative (Ricoeur 1985, 3; Fitzpatrick 146). Ricoeur’s focusing on the tendencies in modernist novels starts with understanding that emplotment takes as reference the overall unit of time (Fitzpatrick 147-48). From the conception of an act which attempts to include the whole, the analysis moves to the problematic of the possible world of the work/text which enables the development of a terminology of referentiality (Fitzpatrick 149), that is, “... [t]o open up the notion of

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<sup>35</sup>Both insisting on the subjectivity of the judgment of taste and placing fiction within the aesthetics of genius.

*emplotment* – and the notion of time that corresponds to it - to the outside [...]” (1985, 5; Fitzpatrick 150). The emphasis is on the fictional experience in self-understanding that is mediated by narrative. The questions of subjectivity are framed within a narrative self-constructed through fiction and non-fiction. The continuous transitions of fiction are “*between the experience that precedes the text and the experience that follows it*” (1985, 73). Fitzpatrick points out that, for Ricoeur, it is only by losing one’s self as reader that one finds oneself through wider experience of inhabiting the possible world of the word (152). This conception is parallel to that of the ability for the literary to abolish all reference to reality (Ricoeur 2013, 69). To understand oneself before the text is to expose oneself to the propositions of possible fictional worlds; the referential aspect of the nonexistent takes place within the discourse of the world of fiction itself (Fitzpatrick 151-52; Ricoeur 2013, 73-4). In Fitzpatrick’s assessment, in order to contend that the world of the reader has an ontological status, Ricoeur marks two moments. On the one hand, readers give such status to the fiction through interpreting themselves in the light of fictional experiences; on the other hand, in the world of their imagination the character of the novel is attributed ontological status (Fitzpatrick 152).

Ricoeur connects the *iconographic function* of the image (the analyses of poetic image and pictorial fiction are included under this category) to the analysis of writing in Francois Dagognet’s *Ecriture et Iconographie* (1973). The reason for this is to show why fiction must be embodied in a *work*, so that reality in its turn can be worked by it (Ricoeur 1979, 128, 135). The perspective of this theory envisages the core of a reality which is no longer the world of manipulable objects but the world into which we have been *thrown* by birth and within which we project our innermost possibilities (139). In Heideggerian context poetry denies the ordinary vision of reality. On the other hand, in Ricoeur’s retrieval of Aristotelian concepts, *mimesis* is creative reconstruction by mediation of fiction. The imagination working in a *work* is said to produce a world out of itself. Metaphor is the key to the ‘transfer’ of meaning and the displacement of concepts (1979, 140-41).

### VIII. The complication of configuration - ‘about time’

Before turning to the issue of the type of configuration and main characteristic ‘*about time*’ (Ricoeur), Currie elaborates on the problem of the analytical value of prolepsis. First, he notes that the

three prolepses bear little resemblance to the temporality of reading. From the latter perspective, the reader's present will have embedded in it the present of the preterite, thus, 'temporal succession' is undermined by the idea of time as co-existence in a perpetual present. While the foundation of prolepses (narrated, narration, reader's time) is organized chronologically, the phenomenology of reading draws the notions of past and future into the present in such a way that the anteriority of the past and the posteriority of the future are questioned (Currie 70). As Wood remarks (247–49), it is difficult to understand any purely phenomenological account of time whether of the threefold present<sup>36</sup> (St. Augustin) or of the unity of the *ecstasies* (Heidegger) without reference to an external, cosmological, or ordinary conception of time. Ricoeur asks: How can we make sense of the *distension* of the present in the mind, without objectively referring to past, present, and future, on which depend the meanings of 'memory,' 'direct experience,' and 'expectation'? It would seem that fictional narrative most adequately explores the interaction of Husserlian protentions with actual plurality of the future or the relation between the subject and the cosmic (Currie 70-1). This kind of discourse would bring into contact the intersubjective network of consciousnesses with outside forms of time. For Ricoeur, the philosophy of time will always confront the tensions which make novel the most appropriate field for observing the dynamic dialectics of time (Currie 74).

Regarding the capacity of narrative to reveal a 'secret relationship' of eternity to death (1985, 101), *Time and Narrative* vol. 3 presents a conversation between phenomenology, history, and fiction. The form common to historical and fictional stories is a function of their shared content—'*structures of time*' which hold something fateful (White 1991, 151). In the reflection on this event histories are complemented by fictions. According to Hayden White, it is on this basis that we attribute the fascination of a classic to an allegory of temporality. This fact tells more about the poetics of narrative utterance, that is, its 'literary' quality (152-53). On the subject of this juncture, Currie's concern is with defining what a novel does in relation to time (94). He notes that it is not easy to uphold the typological difference between the logic of the *whodunit* and a life which is open to an unpredictable future (86). In the former the time of narrative functions as the site of self-conscious reflection both on past events and on the nature of writing about them. This is one of the

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<sup>36</sup>If the threefold present is inescapable for the human mind, we are merely saying that the temporal distance that separates the past from the present is immanent in the present (Currie 70).

recurring features of the *Zeitroman*. Narration might be thought of as progressive improvement in understanding the past from the point of view of the present (Currie 88). In comparison, the *novel* presents more associative and less straightforward constatives. One of its propositions is that the linear time is placed in question by circularities like recollection, explanation, or anachronicity. Thus, the novel produces a tension between the chronology of events it describes and an alternative version of their representation. According to Ricoeur it "...may break away from real time" but it cannot break away from configuration. The time of novels:

[...] cannot help but be configured in terms of new norms of temporal organization that are still perceived as temporal by the reader, by means of new expectations regarding the time of fiction... [And] to believe that we are done with the time of fiction because we have overturned, disarticulated, reversed, telescoped, or reduplicated the temporal modalities the conventional paradigms the novel have made familiar to us, is to believe that the only time conceivable is precisely chronological time. It is to doubt that fiction has its own resources for inventing temporal measurements proper to it. (1985, 25)

In Currie's opinion (93), this point means that experimental novels, at best, establish new novelistic conventions for configuring time and at worst, reaffirm the notion of real time as linear succession. The complication lies in the notion of '*configuration*' which implies that fictive temporality both reflects and affects the temporality of '*life*.' Configuration plays a mediating role in Ricoeur's narrative theory. On the side of living, it makes (or abstracts) explicit syntactic formulations over (or at a distance) from the implicit proto- or pre-narrative characteristic of life. This is done by the operation of emplotment which draws obliquely from the temporal segments of *praxis* (semantics of action) but primarily turns heterogeneity into narrative composition. Assuming that the fictional representation of time and the lived experience of time constantly modify each other (in a shared movement), Currie re-states once again the quote from above: the emplotment of a novel may depart from 'real time' chronology but it cannot break away from temporal organisation in itself. He comments further that Ricoeur's conceptualization needs clarification on whether '*real time*' belongs within *configuration* or lies outside it. *Time and Narrative* deploys this relation in the following way: strictly speaking, *configuration* takes place in the second phase of Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle (*threefold mimesis*) while in the third phase the

appropriation of narrative emplotment, the understanding that a reader has of real time may be modified and as such is supposed to return effectively to the world of action. Thus, as Currie remarks, the view on time experience as the essential horizon (or function-Ch.D.) of this operation is mixed with the notion of ‘real time’ as the referent which lies beyond that horizon. He objects to reintroducing the idea of chronological succession as in the motion for the *novel’s aboutness*. In regard to temporality, the latter formulation remains bound up with the question of reference. Respectively, Currie points out that the claim that language (in its discursive units from the sentence upwards)<sup>37</sup> says something about something becomes confusing when that something is ‘time.’

In order to be operative, the idea of a ‘narrative about time’ requires a real time to which language refers (Currie 95). Another example of this background motif is Ricoeur’s saying, “...[c]hronology - or chronography – does not have just one contrary, the a-chronology of laws or models. Its true contrary is temporality itself” (1984, 30). On the one side, Currie explains that if we view ‘*chronology*’ as the outside of temporality, this term appears to indicate something that exists outside of language, discourse, and mind, thus, the term bears contradictory meanings in the context of emplotment. Chronology seems to be a figure both inside and outside the temporality of configuration (96). On the other side, in *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur hints that dechronologization in narratology may also be seen as a deepening of narrative temporality (1984, 30; Currie 95). Preceding the examination of the “...hierarchical levels that form the depth of temporal experience” (vol. 2), with the supposed content of this theme—the enigma of death, and eternity—Ricoeur refers to the Heideggerian concept of *Zeitlichkeit* (‘deep temporality’) as the level of definite limit (vol. 1, 61). Accordingly, the form in which such experiences reach expression in language is glimpsed in “tales about time” (1985, 101). Currie concludes (96) that the notion of ‘fiction about time’ requires both a specific hermeneutic phenomenology and a realism which views chronology as a fact (of the cosmos). Aside from a simple juxtaposition between fictional time and time of the world, what we may tentatively call ‘games with time,’ appears to be a borderline experience in consequence of which the question about another temporality comes to the front. The latter emerges in the line

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<sup>37</sup>Ricoeur adopts Benveniste’s view that the critique of reference (Saussure) does not apply to the larger units of discourse; “With the sentence, language is oriented beyond itself. It says something about something.” (1984, 78).

between different problematics but also as an option for a novel to evolve.



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## Mapping the Specter: Seeing *Asking for It* as Spectral Realism

Marybeth Ragsdale-Richards

What role do women writers play in a postmodern society? From its conception, postmodernism attempted to account for temporal changes in society in such a way that casts doubt on the universal truth that progress is inevitable. The relationship between feminist literary theory and postmodernism is fraught with familiar tension that is indicative of a postmodern world, for while postmodernism questions the Age of Enlightenment, feminist theory provides scholars a way to resist the Age of Reason in favor of (re)connecting women to their bodies and lived experience. Taken together, one way to perceive the question regarding the role of the woman writer in a postmodern world lies in the provocative authorship of Louise O’Neill, an Irish author, whose work in young adult fiction grapples with the contradictions inherent in a rape supportive culture; specifically, O’Neill’s *Asking for It* underscores the absurdity of a society that logically claims rape to be a crime while failing to delegitimize aspects of rape culture like rape jokes, pervasiveness of sexual violence, and microaggressions that justify and normalize sexual harassment.

In an interview with Aoife Berry, O’Neill states, “I was inspired [to write *Asking for It*] by a few incidents, [including] the Steubenville case in Ohio [and] the Slane Girl in Ireland.” Viewing *Asking for It* as a cultural index reflects the complex relationship that young women—like the novel’s protagonist, Emma O’Donovan—have with themselves and the society they inhabit. However, unlike the typical good-girl protagonist that features prominently in YA rape narratives, Emma is not a virgin or the girl-next-door character type; she is narcissistic and hyper-judgmental of everyone she encounters. Moreover, the relationship Emma has with her body reveals how the terms of the culture in a postmodern world dictate paradoxical messages about beauty and desire that inform the way she interacts with and interprets the world around her.

At first read, it is easy to overlook the feminist undertones in *Asking for It*. O’Neill’s approach to rape and sexual assault is brutally honest in its characterization of patriarchal power and the way women police each other through slut discourse by rigorously exploring the pervasiveness of victim blaming and analyzing the implications of rape culture that genders rape as a woman’s problem. While *Asking for It* appears to be a stereotypical dark problem novel reminiscent of the

Golden Age of YA literature, O'Neill calls on readers to reject this label precisely because it risks situating rape as a private matter, a hidden problem, a secret, or a rare occurrence, which is exactly the type of rhetoric feminists seek to demystify. Alternatively, I propose categorizing *Asking for It* as an example of *spectral realism*. O'Neill employs techniques affiliated with feminist film criticism—such as haptic visuality, distanciation, and spectatorship—in a way that haunts the text and violently disrupts the notion that reading is pleasurable by breaking down the objective barrier between reader-as-subject and text-as-object as she pulls them right up against the act of rape itself.

As an instance of spectral realism, *Asking for It* blurs the line between readers-as-spectators and casts them as eyewitnesses to the sexual violence that plays out on Emma's body. Not only does O'Neill deny Emma any possibility to (re)cuperate her body, but she also uses the superficially opposing techniques of distanciation and hapticity to disturb the way rape culture anesthetizes readers-spectators to rape so that what appears to be a familiar YA novel about the consequences of hook up culture becomes a critical text that directly engages feminist theory by making explicit the dangers of turning sexual assault into a spectacle.

Accordingly, O'Neill splits Emma's life into two sections, before the rape and after the rape. *Asking for It* begins *before* the assault takes place which is different from other YA rape narratives that are typically set *after* the rape and operate in hindsight. As such, the first half of O'Neill's novel foregrounds the readership's understanding of slut discourse and situates Emma at the top of the social hierarchy among her inner circle of friends; it also conveys to readers that she is idolized by the students who attend St. Brigid's Secondary School, an all-girls' high school in Ireland. In part, O'Neill representation of Emma's negative character defects is purposeful; she plays on the readers' aversion to her so that when Paul and the other young men rape her. The readers-spectators experience a cathartic response to the events as it occurs regardless of whether Emma is an angel or a whore, a good girl or a bad girl, a virgin or a slut. However, the degree of catharsis that readers-spectators experience is largely dependent upon the degree to which they adhere to or reject rape myths. Ironically, *all* of Emma's friends, except her childhood friend, Conor, believe that Emma *is* asking for it and see rape as a logical consequence for her salacious behavior.

Subsequently, the idea that Emma should suffer any consequence for asserting sexual agency connotes feminist film

theorist Laura Mulvey's conception of sadistic voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia. According to Mulvey, filmmakers have developed and perfected the political economy of the gaze to fetishize the female body in such a way that the gaze of the camera aligns with the gaze of the male hero, which in turn aligns with the gaze of the spectator, who identifies with the male hero's ego-ideal. Mulvey argues that the male unconscious has "...two avenues of escape from ...castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma [and] punishment [or] complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish object" (62). If Emma's narrative is read through this phallogentric lens, the only ego ideal that O'Neill leaves open for readers to identify with is that of the rapists, as the novel's secondary characters are as obsessed with looking at and objectifying Emma's body as she is.

At the same time, O'Neill also problematizes the male gaze as she antagonizes it. Hence, the diegesis of *Asking for It* also challenges sadistic voyeurism as it embraces haptic visuality, a multisensory mode of visuality proposed by Laura Marks which "...is mimetic: it presses up to the object and takes its shape. [The haptic maintains] a robust flow between sensuous closeness and symbolic distance" (142). On the one hand, *Asking for It* is an exercise in mimesis as O'Neill richly captures realistic elements of youth culture that intersect with rape culture, while on the other hand, O'Neill's personal distance from the subject matter facilitates her authorship in a manner that sets her apart from other YA authors who self-identify as survivors of rape. In many ways, the events of the postmodern experience define the parameters of what constitutes trauma and since traumatic experience resists narrativization, O'Neill's outsider position affords her a different analytical framework *to speak* a textual representation of sexual violence. Furthermore, where haptic criticism offers spectators "...a way to 'warm up' our cultural tendency to take a distance" (Marks 142), Emma's narrative presses up against the lived experiences of survivors. This unique way of looking facilitates "...[o]piticalvisuality [in the sense that it] requires distance *and* a center with the viewer acting like a pinhole camera" (Marks 144). Even though Marks' criticism encourages closeness, it is also closely tied to erotic experience, and given that rape offers no chance for reciprocity between sexual partners in terms of sexual pleasure, O'Neill manipulates the experience of the assault for the readers-spectators by filtering the sensations through Emma's body during the rape. Through spectral realism, the novel's exposition warms up the readers to then take a step back as O'Neill encloses them in the space

where the rape takes place—a center—where they become embodied spectators and narrative eyewitnesses to the assault.

When O’Neill introduces readers to Emma, her identity is not synonymous with victimhood. In fact, Emma enjoys the privileges that her beauty affords her but her perceptions about her beauty—and her body—are not inborn; they gradually emerge as she interacts with people around her. In the novel’s opening scene, Emma sits in front of the mirror as she gets ready for school. She observes, “My mother’s face appears in the mirror beside my own. You’re a lot like your mother, people always say. You’re the image of her” (3). The construction of the mirror functions as a notional space that positions Nora’s face in the background, behind and beside Emma’s, which occupies the center. The image of the mother-daughter dyad in the mirror reflects and reproduces the tenuous matrilineal process of feminine socialization within patriarchal culture, a process that “...turns [the woman’s] child into a signifier of her own desire to possess a penis” (Mulvey 57). Hence, the double-image in the mirror suggests a congruency between them, a chiasmus wherein one is exactly like the other.

O’Neill continues to make Emma’s beauty the subject of the scene. As Nora speaks to her daughter, her traditional femininity informs Emma’s conception of self. While Emma brushes her hair at the vanity, Nora puts a vitamin pill on her desk and lectures her about the importance of maintaining her posture and complexion. Once Emma reassures her mother that she will take the pill before school, Nora “...turns at the door to look at [Emma], her gaze working up [her] body, lingering [on] her face” (6). Tellingly, Nora’s gaze marks the first of many instances that O’Neill utilizes to signify the degree to which Emma’s body “connotes *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (Mulvey 60). Yet, at the same time, the look also serves as a point of connection between Emma and her mother as well as a point of contention. As Emma looks into the mirror, she can see her mother standing behind her watching her. She thinks, “And I know exactly what she is going to say to me. *You look beautiful this morning. As Always. Now, come downstairs and join Daddy and me for breakfast. He wants to see you before he goes to work*” (emphasis original; 6). The double-invocation of Nora’s look tells readers something that Emma cannot escape: she is beautiful, which is symbolic of the importance of the political economy of the gaze in the novel. Similarly, the conversation also connects to Emma’s father’s sight. Emma remembers:

I can still picture Mam sitting at the vanity mirror in her dressing area, a silver silk dress spilling over her body, a slash of bright lipstick, her hair twisted into a chignon. Dad would call up the stairs and she would reply, using that special voice she used with him, with all men ...I'd sit at the top of the stairs, watching her as she walked toward Dad. His eyes never left hers. (5)

Emma's memory corroborates Mulvey's conception that "...the function of woman [is to] raise her child into the symbolic" (60), and Emma takes pleasure in watching her mother dress. For her father's part, Denis only has eyes for Nora even as Emma "...started to cry as they left, arms flailing as the babysitter restrained [her]" (5). The triangulation destabilizes the plentitude of the mother-daughter dyad as Emma views her father as the responsible party for severing her from her mother and the act thus signifies her place in the symbolic order: outside.

Additionally, the opening sequence in *Asking for It* establishes the web of connections—the terms of the culture—that informs Emma's beliefs about herself and about how women and men should interact with one another. In *Asking for It*, "the terms" of the culture are double-voiced discourse. On the one hand, it encompasses the language that Emma acquires to define herself. For instance, Emma routinely surveys herself in the mirror: "I stand up straight ...I am beautiful. I mouth the words at my reflection. That is something ...money can't buy" (38). Yet, on the other hand, it refers the unspoken terms of the culture which requires her to attend to the double-bind of young adult female sexuality in patriarchal society. Emma often reflects on her sexual encounters: "I'm always wondering how I'm going to make [the other person] keep their mouth shut about what we did or didn't do" (81). Emma's internal dialogue demonstrates that she is aware of the paradox that surrounds female sexuality which calls for her to be passive but at the same time demands that she participate in her own objectification.

Since Emma's self-worth is synonymous with whether or not others find her desirable and attractive, Emma's thoughts belie the practice of slut discourse that is always present in the background of her identity pre-rape. The principles of slut discourse require Emma to actively police how her sexual partners speak about their encounter just as it requires her to also police the sexual practices of other girls which must remain subordinate to her own. It follows that when Emma leaves the home, the terms of the culture broaden, and she receives verbal and nonverbal affirmations about her self-presentation from her

peers. Since the peer hierarchy is a powerful agent for regulating youth culture, it is not surprising that O'Neill establishes Emma's high-status among girls at school when they pass her in the hallway. Emma thinks:

I always nod at girls passing by who call my name, say hello, ask me where I got my sunglasses, or what lip gloss I'm wearing. I always smile ...and dole out compliments in return.... By time the bell rings, I'm exhausted. I have to smile and be nice and look like I care about other people's problems or else I'll get called a bitch. People don't understand how tiring it is to have to put on this performance all day. (12)

Emma's thoughts draw the readers' attention to her gender performance, which correlate to a version of her mother's idealized femininity in which she must look like she cares. Equally compelling is Emma's admission that she is not self-same; it offers the readers further contradictory insight regarding her subjectivity: Emma must find a way to be nonthreatening through traditional feminine passivity but cunning enough to maintain her status by both manipulating *and* placating her *peers*.

However, Emma does not garner esteem or respect from her inner circle through the same pseudo-egalitarianism or altruism she exudes at school; rather, she polices their femininity through the principles of slut discourse by speaking to them condescendingly. According to Katharine Armstrong et al., slut discourse is "...only indirectly related to judgements about sexual activity. Instead, it is about drawing status-based moral boundaries that simultaneously organize sexual behavior and gender presentation" (101). Ironically, it is important to remember that high-status young women may very well engage in the same sexual practices of those they label trashy, with the only difference being that low-status women do not enjoy the same esteem and respect as their high-status counterparts (Armstrong et al. 101). Here, the principles of slut discourse provide context to interpret the way in which Emma acts tyrannical towards her best friends.

For instance, Emma's friendship with Jamie is fraught with tension that involves rape. Incidentally, one of the boys, Dylan, who rapes Emma also raped Jamie at a party that takes place a year before the novel begins. Although female friendships are present in *Asking for It*, they are not mutually reinforcing. In fact, Emma's relationship with Jamie is a point of intersection between slut discourse and rape culture. Given that Dylan rapes Jamie, this knowledge is the early

axiom that supplies readers with insight as to how the characters adhere to rape myths including Emma. While Emma, Jamie, and two of their friends, Maggie and Ali, are sunbathing in the park, Dylan comes up to them with a group of acquaintances and taunts Jamie after she refuses to say hello to him and look him in the eye. He says, “Girls are all the same... Get wasted and get a bit slutty, then in the morning try to pretend it never happened because you regret it” (27). He directs this comment at Jamie, and Emma laughs, “a little too loudly” (27). The effect of Emma’s response shames Jamie and compels the readers to want to distance themselves from her as she appears to revel in her friend’s humiliation. For, despite knowing and believing that Dylan raped her, Emma’s response emphasizes the paradox of a society that refutes rape culture while reinforcing it via microaggressions.

To complicate matters more, Conor is also present for the exchange in the park, and he confronts Emma for her behavior in the park when he drives her home later that night. As he castigates Emma for laughing at Jamie, she snaps, “Oh, for fuck’s sake, Conor. It was just a joke. Lighten up, will you?” (36). Here, Conor conveniently points out Emma’s complicity in the conversation but bypasses his own. In doing so, O’Neill showcases the damaging effects of male complicity in rape culture and conveys to young adult readers that rape remains a gender-specific problem wherein girls and women must either deal with or confront on their own. Nevertheless, Emma cannot help the memory of “Jamie’s face in the park, stricken. Jamie crying and crying. *What’ll I do, Emma? What am I supposed to do now?* And I wish I could go back to that moment. I would tell Dylan to fuck off and leave Jamie alone. I would stand up for her” (36). The exchange between Conor and Emma is the first glimpse of Emma’s vulnerability but the moment is fleeting.

Interestingly, Conor does not appear again until Emma invites him and the girls to her house to “pregame it” (37) before Sean’s party. Yet, it is not Conor’s arrival that grabs Emma’s attention rather it is the moment when Jamie walks through the door as she is already drunk. As Emma watches her, she thinks, “She should take it easy. She should know what happens when *you* drink too much” (emphasis mine; 65). It is interesting that O’Neill frames this statement through the use of the verb “should,” as it is undoubtedly a criticism of Jamie’s behavior; however, her use of the second-person pronoun “you” breaks the narrative form and inserts the readers into the text. Here, by virtue of what Emma does not say, O’Neill makes an important cultural inference about what she suspects her readers *know*—whether consciously or not—about rape culture: when *you* drink too much, *you*



put yourself at risk, because it is *your* responsibility to make sure that someone does not rape *you*. The rupture in the traditional diegesis brings readers into close proximity to Emma's own feelings about Jamie and survivors of rape.

Before Emma has the chance to approach Jamie, Conor joins her on the porch and compliments her dress, which is black and "...cut down to the navel, and very, very short" (58). This time, Conor's presence connotes the theme of men-as-women's-saviors. For example, when Emma decides she needs another beer, Conor says, "Just give it some time before your next one. Unless you want a repeat of what happened at Dylan's" (68). It is not a coincidence that Conor's speech echoes the sentiments Emma has regarding Jamie's excessive drinking, only Conor speaks directly to Emma, so readers are not confused by his use of the second-person pronoun. Likewise, it also accounts for Emma's actions on the night Dylan raped Jamie. Emma remembers:

Kevin is throwing me against a wall at the party, his teeth sharp ...he is dragging me into a dimly lit bedroom that smells of Play-Doh. *Let's go back to the party*, I kept saying. Kevin's hands are on my shoulders, pushing me down, saying, *Go on, come on, Emma*. It seemed easier to go along with it. Everyone is always saying how cute he is anyway. Afterward I made him *swear* he wouldn't tell anyone. (68)

Although Conor does not know that Kevin sexually coerced Emma into performing oral sex on him, O'Neill mirrors the image of Emma's sexual compliance with her memory of waking up at Conor's house the next morning. Emma thinks, "I woke up in Conor's single bed. He was asleep on the floor next to me. I saw a photograph of the two of us from when we were kids. I tiptoed out of his room without saying goodbye" (68). Strategically, in the same way that O'Neill uses Conor to buffer Emma's memory of Kevin, readers-spectators can glean an important aspect about gender relations through closely reading Conor's character: for as predictable as Conor's romantic interest in Emma is, it ultimately communicates that not all men who drink and attend parties are rapists.

Given the realization that Emma acts out sexually in ways that are contradictory to how she actually feels, O'Neill contrasts Conor's behaviors against those of the young men who rape Emma, Conor's presence reminds readers that women are not *always already* ready and willing to have sex with them, despite either party's outward

appearance and behavior. However, when Emma and her posse arrive at Sean's party, O'Neill reflects the same web of causality in the novel's opening sequence between Nora's "look" and her father's "sight," as the male gaze permeates all aspects of the party scene. For instance, Emma notices Dylan staring at Jamie, only this time so does his girlfriend, who verbally accosts Jamie: "Is it not enough you fucked my boyfriend once—now you want to do it again?" (71). Just like the afternoon in the park, multiple people laugh at Jamie; Emma thinks, "*I need to get away from this. From Jamie*" (72) and flees the room. As she meanders down the hallway, Emma overhears Sean and another boy having a conversation about "a fucking ride" (74), a fourteen-year-old girl named Mia. When Sean realizes that Emma is listening, she "...doesn't want to seem boring so [she] smiles because it shows [she's] cool" (74), but he reads her utterance as sexual interest in him, as he "pulls [her] toward him" (74) until she has to physically push him away. As Emma is about to walk outside, she overhears Mia whisper loudly, "*Oh my God ...no way ...is that actually Paul O'Brien?*" (77) and sees that Jack is with Paul.

Immediately, Paul notices Emma and he approaches her. As he speaks to her, his eyes sweep over her body: "I have to say, you're looking particularly ravishing this evening, Emmie" (78). Although Emma ignores him, she notices that his eyes follow her, an act that connotes voyeurism. To escape Paul's gaze, Emma sits next to Jack while he plays *Grand Theft Auto* with a group of other boys. She listens as one says, "I need some health" (80) to which the other responds, "Just fuck a hooker, that'll help" (80). Thus, the avatar of the hooker becomes the fetish object with which the gamers use for their own pleasure. In this way, Sean's party is a signifier for rape culture. In order for this type of rape ethos to emerge, the partygoers must disregard the feelings of young women entirely which is achieved through objectification.

Yet the paradox pertaining to feminine sexuality in rape culture comes to the forefront once Emma sees Mia in Jack's lap and notes that Mia is "irritatingly tiny and doll-like" (87). Sardonicly, Emma confronts Jack: "I didn't realize you were into children" (87), but he merely shrugs his shoulders. In effect, Mia threatens Emma's position as the object of male desire, which, in turn, threatens her status among both sexes. Therefore, not to be outdone by a child, Emma endeavors to make Mia jealous by flirting with Paul since she knows that Mia idolizes him. Paul quickly notices Emma's interest in him, but it comes when his teammates want to leave the party. As one of the players leaves, Paul hands him a sandwich bag full of pills. When

Emma inquires about the bag's contents, he says, "Nothing for an innocent girl like you to be concerned with" (90). At the prospect of being innocent, Emma thinks, "I am sick of people thinking they know me. No one knows what I'm capable of" (90). Ironically, Emma's ire stems from an experience she has as a fourteen-year-old girl when she overhears two boys at a disco club say, "*Emma O'Donovan is hot ...but she's boring as fuck*" (26). In part, the incident becomes the locus of control that informs Emma's doctrine about her gender performance as the boys reaffirm an aspect of her identity that she already knows while they offer her a critique of her self-presentation. Hence, when she "...leans over to whisper in [Paul's] ear 'I want it' [and notices] his breathing is getting heavier" (91), she perceives that his reaction is evidence of her power over him. In actuality, power belongs to Paul.

After Emma swallows the pill, she encourages Paul to take one, but he shakes his head no, pulls her into his lap, and holds out his hand expecting to be paid. Here, O'Neill mirrors the image of Mia in Jack's lap with Emma in Paul's, as she says, "Oh, I don't pay for things" (91). Of course, metaphorically speaking, Emma's statement is ironic considering the ways "pays" for her actions throughout the course of the night. Nonetheless, Emma's performance has an effect on Mia as she inquires from her friends why Paul is sitting with Emma if he already has a girlfriend. Emma "...sits up straighter when [she] sees jealousy flash across her face. Somehow, it makes Paul more handsome, as if their envy is a flattering Instagram filter" (91). Mia's reaction satisfies Emma's desire to make her jealous which, in turn, makes her feel powerful.

After a few minutes, Emma begins to feel the effects of the drug and leans into Paul's touch as his hand stokes her thigh. He tells her, "Well, well. That didn't take long" (94), and he leads her towards the stairs. However, two things happen at once that interrupt their ascent upstairs. First, Emma verbally resists to Paul's suggestion. She hesitates, "I don't want to go" (94), and slows their pace. Second, Ali sees her and asks, "Have you taken something?" (95), to which someone else remarks, "It's not like her though, you know what a control freak she is" (95). As she and Paul turn the corner, Emma runs into Conor, who hands her a drink of water. She thinks, "Conor is so much nicer than me ...I wrap my arms around him, and press our hearts together too. I kiss him, but then Paul is there" (96). Here, Paul shoves Conor out of the way: "Finally" (96), he says. Although Emma wants to protest, she sees Jack leading Mia out of the room and desperately "needs him to *see* [her]" (emphasis original; 96). Thus, she

follows him to the bedroom, “locking the door behind [them]” (97). The moment the door closes, O’Neill sequesters the readers—as spectators and witnesses—to Paul’s assault of Emma, as the moment also cuts them off from observing the events that are happening in the peripheral.

Here, O’Neill segregates the spectators’ gaze so that they only have two areas to focus on: the spatial arrangement of Sean’s parents’ bedroom and Emma’s body. Yet, on its own, fetishistic scopophilia and sadistic voyeurism are not enough to explain the way O’Neill oscillates from one sense modality to another. O’Neill’s representation of the bedroom is an example of phenomenological space which is “...not orchestrated for sight alone but by means of visual cues [that] refer to other sensations and relations of bodies and objects in a lived world” (Pollock 91). Although Emma and Paul do not exist in a lived world, spectral realism posits that the spectators do exist in a lived world, therefore their gaze is a knowable reality. O’Neill describes Sean’s parents’ bedroom in minimal but important detail: “[T]he bedding is white with red oversize roses *splattered* across them, and the carpet and curtains match. On the table nearest to the door, a photo frame of a baby and a tube of women’s hand cream” (emphasis mine; 97). The room, however sparse, is eerily foreboding and gendered female, as the description of the roses on the duvet and curtains being splattered across them foreshadows the violence that is about to take place.

The rape scene begins as Paul pushes Emma onto the bed and undressing himself as he does so. As he strips Emma of her clothes, she notes, “He turns me around and kisses my neck from behind as he grips my throat. He runs his hands all over my body, whispering to me what he is going to do to me, and what he wants me to do to him” (98). It is here that O’Neill posits the encounter as a zero-sum game and speaks to the pornutopic rape fantasy, which she exemplifies through competing ideologies in Emma’s stream-of-consciousness. Kelly Oliver, a feminist philosopher, defines pornutopia in relation to rape culture as the idea that “...all women enjoy violent sex and ask for more. In rape culture, the pornutopic fantasy enables the male to act on his own sexual desires, which always satisfies the recipient, no matter what she says or how she feels about the sexual activity” (54). The zero-sum metaphor manifests as Paul’s speech and actions become increasingly forceful and violent as the assault escalates at the same moment Emma realizes she has underestimated her ability to control the situation. While Paul assaults her, she begins to hear her mother’s voice in her head. Emma narrates:

Paul says, “Stick ...” (*Emmie, why would a boy buy the cow when he can have the milk for free?*)“...in your mouth ...now.” (*It’s different for boys and girls.*) “You like that ...”(Be more ladylike.) “You like that don’t you? ...” (*Cover yourself up, Emmie, for goodness sake.*) “...Dirty little ...” (I don’t like that word, wait! No ...) (ellipses original; 98)

Although both voices attest to the angel-whore dichotomy, Nora’s voice shames her daughter. However, since Paul has not vaginally penetrated her yet, Emma believes that she can still stop the attack, so she tries to push him away and bargains with him. She says, “[M]aybe we should go back to the party” (98), but he “...pushes [her] face into the center of the rose-print duvet [and] tells her, ‘Don’t be silly. Don’t be a fucking cock tease’” (98). Paul disregards Emma’s plea for him to stop and he operates from the understanding that she was asking for it; therefore, for him to stop is absurd, even as she begs: “‘No. Wait! I don’t—’ but he pushes me back down, yanks my underwear aside, and he’s inside me, and I’m not ready and it hurts, and I don’t feel well, and I don’t think he’s using a condom” (98-99). The act of rape itself, as Paul forcefully enters Emma, affirms Paul’s position in the symbolic order as a subject-Self, but it also shows his complete disregard of her verbal refusal, which is evidence of her subordinated position as object-Other. In the issue of consent, specifically affirmative consent that so often accompanies conversations regarding rape prevention, Paul violates the metamessages Emma gives him in the posturing of her body and her hesitation just at the moment he violates her literal refusal of his sexual advances. In a rape supportive culture, such as the one in the microcosm of Sean’s party, Emma *is* nothing more than an object for Paul to win, an aspect of the zero-sum game that foreshadows the public shaming Emma experiences her blacklisted status at school and among the community.

Moreover, if the readers-spectators “read” the rape is read through Mulvey’s theory of narrative and visual pleasure, the absolute focus of the rape scene is Paul’s fascination with Emma’s body. However, O’Neill is not content to fully align the readers-spectators’ gaze with the rapist’s. Rather, Emma’s narration refocuses the readers-spectators’ attention to the domestic space around her in such a way that it disrupts the onerous male gaze as the sense of claustrophobia and restraint are “...read into the pressurized placement of [Paul and Emma] in shallow depth” (Pollock 92), and this forces the readers-spectators “...into a confrontation or conversation with the painted figure[s]” (92). Although Emma and Paul are not painted figures, they

are nonetheless metaphorical “painted” representations of embodied figures in narrative fiction.

Furthermore, as he rapes her, Emma no longer hears her mother’s voice. Instead, she hears her own: “I did this. There isn’t any point in stopping him. It doesn’t matter” (99). Emma’s attempt to downplay the assault through *misnaming* herself as the guilty party is an insidious misnomer of a phallogocentric belief system that perpetuates rape myths and clearly positions her as the disadvantaged party in the zero-sum game: while denial is a defense mechanism against the guilt and shame Emma feels during and after the assault, it is one that ultimately fails her. Notably, Emma does not disassociate during the rape as many protagonists in YA rape narratives do but instead becomes hyperaware of what Paul is doing to her body. Emma narrates:

He’s wraps some of my hair around his fist, wrenching my head back he bites my shoulder, hard ...and he leans over me again biting my ear, telling me I’m a slut, *you know you want it, Emma, you know you want it, Emma*, thrusting harder and harder, slamming his body into mine. And finally, his fingertips gouging into my hip bones, he pulls out, gives a long, desperate groan while a wet heat splatters across my lower back. He collapses on top of me. All I can see is the splatter of red across white. (99-100)

Despite its textual form, one of the risks that Emma’s graphic depiction of the rape indelibly comes up against is the question of pornography. Such a question is relevant, and it speaks to embodied spectatorship that O’Neill creates by bringing the spectators into the closed space of the bedroom. However, while closely reading the rape scene the readers-spectators must ask: for whose eyes is this scene for? Since a feminist interpretation of Brechtian dis-identifactory practices allows for the “...disruption of narrative, [and the] refusal [to] identif[y] with heroes[,] a different form of realist knowledge [emerges that] actively involve[es] the spectator in its production” (Pollock 96). Thus, Emma’s narration resists Paul’s attempt to claim her as her attention to the roses on the duvet interrupts the gaze of the readers-spectators and prevents them from completely aligning with Paul’s sadism.

During the rape, Emma fetishizes the flowers on Sean’s parents’ duvet where her mind abstracts the red roses and transforms them into splatters of red across white, an element of the narrative that actually resists the theory of sadistic voyeurism by reconfiguring what

kind of spectacle is being made of Emma's body during the attack. While distanciation works to undermine "...the specularity of reflection and its system of exchange [by] creating a new contact between stage and the auditorium and thus giving a new basis to artistic pleasure" (Brecht qtd. in "Screening the Seventies"; 95), O'Neill's depiction of Paul raping Emma creates a new contact in the sense that the system of exchange between author, spectator, and spectacle gives rise to a deeply disturbing artistic *dis*-pleasure. Through reading the rape scene as spectral realism, the readers-spectators cannot escape the spatial reality of Sean's parents' bedroom any more than Emma can, which is a testament to the capacity of O'Neill's authorship to enjoin the readership-spectatorship's psychological closeness to the act of rape itself. Even though Paul rapes Emma, readers-spectators experience the violence of the rape through Emma's textual corpus.

However, O'Neill's choice to narrate the rape from the position of firstness as opposed to thirdness is no less risky than other YA writers' choice to portray it in fragmented memories. Here, haptic images "...do not invite identification with a figure so much as they encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image" (Marks 144). O'Neill's authorship of the rape facilitates a multisensory experience that allows her to launch her own assault on the readers-spectators' senses only to violate a tenet of haptic visuality that insists "...[w]hat is erotic is being able to become and object with and for the world, and return to being a subject in the world" (Marks 144). Haptic criticism sees a sensuous continuum between the representation of the subject and the object as opposed to a gap between them, which O'Neill embraces at the level of text and reader as well as the specularity of reflection and its system of exchange but she prohibits readers-spectators from passively observing or reckoning with what would otherwise be read as an erotic encounter.

Nevertheless, after Paul rapes her, Emma wraps herself in a sheet while he appears to be asleep and tiptoes into the bathroom connected to the bedroom. Her first reaction to seeing herself in the mirror is to note that "...the bones in my face have shifted" (101). Clearly, the shift in Emma's face marks a moment of transition wherein readers-spectators begin to look at her differently: to be up close against Emma is to simultaneously feel embodied and wish for disembodiment. To that effect, the zero-sum metaphor also speaks to the cost of embodied spectatorship, as readers-spectators bear witness to the active gaze of a rape culture that insists Emma is asking for it. It is at this point that O'Neill leaves them no choice but to reflect on the

violence they have just encountered and the dis-ease/disease it brings forth in the rest of the novel.

Yet, Paul's assault on Emma is only the first of the night. When Emma returns to the bedroom, she expects that Paul will be gone, but instead she is met by Paul, Sean, Dylan, Eli, and another boy named Fitzy. Without warning, Paul rips the sheet away from Emma, exposing her breasts and the rest of her body to the other boys. For his part, Paul makes an "...oops face and says, 'Ah, you're too hot not to show off. Boys, look at her'" (103). As they look, Emma staves off the urge to run back into the bathroom: "This is the price of my beauty, and I have to pay it. I am willing to pay it" (103). Not surprisingly, Emma's willingness to pay the cost of her beauty further emphasizes the zero-sum game metaphor, as Paul puts Emma's body on display for other young men fetishize as he has. Emma's response to the other young men looking is as equally as disturbing, for her behavior does not suggest she has just been brutally raped. Rather than cry out for help or call the police, she simply refuses to meet their gaze but voluntarily takes another pill that Paul offers her and loses consciousness.

Hence, O'Neill abruptly distances spectators from witnessing or experiencing the gang rape that takes place in between the time when Emma loses consciousness in Sean's parents' bedroom and when she regains consciousness the following afternoon. Although O'Neill dissolves the notional space of Sean's parents' bedroom and refocuses the narrative in Emma's home, she also places the burden of knowing what happened between Paul and Emma on readers. The burden of knowing and being witness to the rape further attests to the way O'Neill's authorship and Emma's narration blurs the gaze of the readers-spectators superfluously between text and reality as Emma briefly suffers from amnesia for twenty-four hours after she wakes up on the lawn of her family's home.

Ironically, Emma's first post-rape memory is her mother's frantic voice. Since her parents were out of town celebrating their anniversary on the night of the assault, they find Emma sprawled across the front lawn just before dinner, naked and burning in the sun (107). Emma hears her mother tell her father, "Her skin is ruined. Pick her up Denis. Bring her inside" (107), but when she opens her eyes, she sees her father hesitate, as if he has an aversion to her. While it may be tempting to interpret Emma's second and third-degree burns as a symbol of rebirth, her burns speak to how O'Neill specularizes rape culture in Western society, which is to say, the burns allegorize



society's penchant for hiding the epidemic in plain sight and masking it as something other than the complete violation that it is. Despite having burns all over her body, Nora makes her daughter go to school the following day, insisting that it is just "sunstroke" (111). On the car ride to school, Emma wonders, "*Why am I so sunburnt? Why can't I remember anything? What happened?*" (112). The didactic function of her questions is to remind readers that they were spectators to the rape.

As Emma walks down the halls of St. Brigid's, her peers are silent and avoid making eye contact with her. It is a stark change in comparison to the way other students idolize her at the beginning of the novel. When Emma walks into class, she confronts her friends, but Ali shuts her down: "Well, maybe you should try being less of a whore. Don't you remember fucking four guys in one night? Don't you remember how you let all of them take pictures, and Fitzzy film it!" (120). The vehemence in Ali's tone renders Emma speechless as she remembers the memory of Paul raping her at the same moment she. Emma grapples with how to verbalize Paul's attack but words fail her. She and Jamie speak:

"I didn't ...I don't know what you're talking about, but Paul ...He—"

"What are you trying to say, Emma?" Jamie narrows her eyes at me.

I don't know. I don't know what I'm trying to say.

"That's right," Jamie says. "Best not to say anything. No one likes a girl who makes a fuss, do they?" (125)

Jamie's words are cruel but it is the first time in the novel that Emma is without power relative to her position in her peer group. Instead, Jamie possesses it and wields slut discourse to shame her. In effect, the exchange marks the end of Emma's friendship with Jamie, Ali, and Maggie.

Moreover, Emma continues to be shamed as she walks home from school; however, this time it is by Dylan's girlfriend Julie, who throws an aluminum can of soda at her. The Coke hits her in the back before it hits the ground and explodes, *splattering* across her back in the process: "You're fucking finished, do you hear me? I saw the snapchat" (129). Julie's actions solidify Emma's newly acquired low-status position in the peer hierarchy that leaves her in a position to victimize Emma. In fact, Julie's assault on Emma's body compels readers to re-experience the body's affective response to the moment Paul ejaculates on Emma's back during the rape. Thus, O'Neill

subjects the readers to the verbal *and* physical violence that Emma suffers at the hands of her supposed best friends as well as those who are not in her immediate circle. It is an aspect of the text that puts the pervasiveness of rape culture on full display; Julie's metaphorical ejaculation via the coke-as-phallus is no less violent as Paul's assault.

Subsequently, after Emma arrives home, she gets in the shower to rinse off the evidence of Julie's attack. As soon as she feels the water in her mouth, it induces a flashback: "Hands pushing my bones into the center of my body, as if they're trying to make me smaller. *Lads, I don't know if this is a good idea.* Laughter, something wet splaying across my skin and running down my throat" (133). The fear of the memory paralyzes Emma. It is not until the phone rings that she finally comes out of the shower. The voice on the other end of the line tells her to check her social media accounts and quickly hangs up. Once she logs in, the computer informs her that she has several hundred notifications, one of which is an invitation to join a new private group, "Easy Emma" (134).

Here, Emma sees naked photo after naked photo of her body—which Dylan has posted. One of the captions reads, "Can we all just take a moment to appreciate The Body That Is Emma O'Donovan?" (135). Where Paul had made a spectacle of Emma's physical corpus, Dylan treats it as an absent referent. She is no longer a trophy; she is no longer beautiful; she is no longer Emma O'Donovan, but The Body in its most basic form—flesh. Emma observes:

The photos start at the head, work down the body, linger on the naked flesh spread across the rose-covered sheets. Dylan on top of that girl. His hands cover her face. She is just a body. An it. A thing. Now Dylan's fingers are inside the body. He spreads her legs, gesturing for the camera to come closer, the next few photos of pink flesh. Dylan puts his head between her legs. Next, a photo of Sean, his face twisting into a grimace as he pushes inside her, puke gushing out of his mouth onto her face and hair. They laugh. Next, my front yard. Dylan stands there, his dick in his hand, a thin yellow stream of piss flowing onto her head. I feel shame ripping through me as I scroll, breaking me apart. (135-36)

It would seem, then, that the photos of Emma's body taken by the young men as they gang rape her provide irrefutable evidence that they raped her but this is not the case. Whilst Oliver refers to these types of photos taken during a party rape as creepshots (5), the comments from

Emma's peers and even strangers communicate that hunting Emma is a spectator's sport. For instance, one commenter states, "Some people are asking for it. She deserves to get pissed on" (143), while another notes, "She's deader than a doorknob. She's deader than Oscar Pistorious's girlfriend. Her ass looks good though" (300). Again, the idea of woman-as-trophy is at issue: her body is both prey and trophy. Yet the photos do more than transgress the dichotomies of hunter/hunted, trophy/object, or self/other, they facilitate an element of spectral realism that transmutes Emma's figure into the body-*cum*-corpse.

In contrast to the rape scene, readers experience the gang rape from the perspective of the present moment reflecting on the past. Although readers encounter the images with Emma, the angle of the camera used to take the photos completely aligns with the male gaze, thus, it does exclusively align with the gaze of the rapists. Once again, O'Neill compromises the readers-spectators' positionality in relation to the text by creating an uneasy tension between haptic visuality and distanciation. On the one hand, the spectacularity of the images requires readers to touch the photos of Emma's body with their eyes which is evident in her description of the way the camera starts at her head and descends down the rest of her body, as well as when she notes that Dylan waves his hand and invites the camera closer (135). Moreover, readers-spectators also become witnesses that cannot un-see Dylan and Sean rape Emma at the same time they desecrate her body. Yet, the enabling factor that allows such vulgar and violent objectification to occur is the culmination their collective fetishization of Emma's body.

On the other hand, by experiencing the creepshots alongside Emma, haptic visuality produces catharsis in spectators—a push to sympathize or to identify and understand her pain. This technique calls into question the distanciation that O'Neill relies on so heavily in novel's exposition of the characters which occurs via slut discourse by villainizing Emma and actively discouraging readers from identifying with her.

The photos draw the attention of the school guidance counselor at St. Brigid's, who alerts the police and contacts Emma's parents. Here, Emma is doubly acted against, as it is not her choice to press charges, the state does it for her. Initially, Emma agrees to press charges against the young men but after the case garners national attention, the community shuns her as well as her family. Her father is relocated to manage a bank in the next town, her mother's bakery stand in the market goes out of business, and even a year after the

assault, Emma continues to receive threatening emails and is tagged in photos on social media (292). Here, the earlier terms of the culture that posit Emma as a someone to envy become the grounds for public humiliation that intensify her shame.

As a result of the public backlash, Nora decides to homeschool Emma but the post-traumatic effects of the assault prevent her from being able to complete any work. Despite seeing a therapist and taking a daily regimen of anti-psychotic and anti-depressant medication Emma attempts suicide twice (159; 206). However, when Emma finds out that the photos the rapists took will not be admissible in the court proceedings, she cedes, “All I am is a thing. They are all innocent until proven guilty. But not me. I am a liar until I am proven honest” (270). After her lawyer informs the family that the local priest has agreed to serve as a character witness for two of the boys and that Emma’s sexual history will be a part of their defense, Emma capitulates. For their part, Emma’s parents applaud her for “doing the right thing” (314) by not “...dragging the family through anymore public humiliation” (314). Emma is disgusted by her parents’ reaction to her decision and feels betrayed by them.

Alone, once more in her bedroom, Emma checks her email and finds a letter from Conor, who laments that he “...should have been there to protect [her]” (315), a juxtaposition that mediates her parents’ failure to do so. Of all the characters that O’Neill interjects into the first half of the novel, only Conor still attempts to speak to Emma, but since she will not agree to physically see him, he emails her daily. As she reads his last email, she fantasizes about what she would have been like if she had left the party with Conor. She notes, “I belong to those other boys, as surely as if they have stamped me with a brand. They have seared their names into my skin” (315). As she says this, Emma takes stock of her/self in the mirror. It is not a coincidence that it is the same mirror that appears in the novel’s first chapter.

Notably, O’Neill ends *Asking for It* in the same physical space where she begins it: Emma’s bedroom. However, Emma’s evaluation of her reflection is no longer narcissistic or self-flattering but distant and detached. She notes, “How is it that two eyes, a nose, and a mouth can be positioned in such varying ways that it makes one person beautiful and another person not? What if my eyes had been a fraction closer together? I might be different” (315). In an act of hyperbole, she is only able to tear her eyes away from the looking glass when Nora yells up the stairs and tells her to “...hurry and come down for breakfast. Your father wants to see you” (317) that Emma gives

readers the novel's closing lines: "I must look like a good girl. It's important that I look normal. It's important that I look like a good girl. I walk down the stairs" (317). Yet, it is within these lines that attests to O'Neill's most significant achievement regarding spectral realism: as Emma describes the attributes of her face on the last page, readers realize that they do not actually know what Emma looks like. Embedded throughout *Asking for It* are generic similes that allow readers to make inferences about what Emma "looks like" without ever divulging any specific details about her appearance. Although this is a facet of O'Neill's authorship that points towards women as icons, it also speaks to the embodied gaze of the spectators pertaining to the novel's secondary characters and readers alike, who "...project [their] fantasy onto [Emma's] body" (Mulvey 60) and inscribe it thereafter.

In essence, Emma's body is a palimpsest text. She is a translucent specter whose corporeal form only exists through the nonspecific inferences that O'Neill threads throughout the novel. Emma's physical features, which often provide identity markers for the reader, are irrelevant. In a grotesque inversion of narrative expectations, O'Neill operates from the perspective that readers always already know what Emma looks like. Therefore, at the center of O'Neill's representation of Emma is the tension between haptic visuality and distanciation, for readers only know that she "looks like" her mother, a model, a porn star, a slut, a liar, a whore, a dead girl, a good girl, and like she was asking for it. Since the act of reading requires an individual's participation to make the text meaningful, O'Neill repurposes the rape narrative as a political statement by seizing the opportunity to bring readers behind locked doors and witness the rape—its effects and its affects—without the promise or guarantee of narrative closure. Thus, O'Neill plays on the readers' assumptions about what they think they know regarding the terms of rape culture. It is up to readers—as spectators and witnesses—to imagine what happens to Emma after she descends the stairs to join her parents for breakfast. Through spectral realism, O'Neill jars readers from their assumptions about who is and who is not rapeable and at the same time, unapologetically scrutinizes rape culture.



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## Atlantis as Heterotopia: On the Theoretical Simultaneity of Plato's Atlantis

*Kwasu D. Tembo*

The concept of a mythical island appears in the texts of numerous occidental cultures as both a literary construct and as part of mytho-religious systems. Ranging from sources found in Slavic, Nordic, Greco-Roman, British, and Spanish legendary traditions, the enchanted and/or hidden island is ubiquitous. The mythical islands of occidental folklore and literature are not only conferred with the qualities of, but are also predicated on the tension between conceptions of, utopia and heterotopia, the staticity of paradise, and the cosmopolitanism of ideological and cultural intertextuality or *bricolage*. Current scholarship concerning Plato's Atlantis heretofore tends to it read as circuitous, closed, and circumscribed by recursive analytical areas of interest in a way that leaves a scarce scope for advancements of theoretical interpretations of Plato's account of the island unless they necessarily rely on historicity, archaeology, or philology. In order to redress the *theoretical* paucity of Atlantian scholarship and to contribute to lines of inquiry therein which seek a more theoretical hermeneutic with regard to the mythical island, this essay opens with a close reading of Atlantis based on excerpts from Plato's account of the island-continent and its city-state detailed in the dialogues, *Timaeus and Critias* (360 BCE). It further explores the manner in which Plato portrays Atlantis as a heterotopian chronotope so as to develop a speculative theoretical profile and analysis for the mytho-historical island-state, testing the Isle as a theoretical space in relation to issues and debates concerning other spaces, that is, heterotopia and utopia. To this end, it will compare and contrast the Platonic Atlantian narrative against two possible models of interpretation, namely, Michel Foucault's comparison of the relationship between utopia and various types of heterotopias in "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" (1984), and Frederic Jameson's analysis of the tensions between space, time, and utopia in *Archaeology of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005).

A cursory glance at contemporary Atlantian studies reveals that the preponderance of scholarship pertaining to the Isle can be divided into what I call three broad analytical archipelagos: Philological Atlantis, Archaeological Atlantis, and Philosophical Atlantis. Diverse parsing analytical approaches have been brought to bear on Plato's account of the Isle. In "Plato's Atlantis Story: A Prose Hymn to

Athena” (2008), Tom Garvey argues that (re)viewing the Atlantis narrative promulgated by Plato as an encomium of the Greek Goddess Athena reveals that the true character of the narrative is an attempt to demonstrate the justice and beneficence of the gods. More particularly, in stressing the ritual elements of the narrative and focusing on alterations to Athenian myth therein, “...the Atlantis story *qua* hymn to Athena is thus a means of reclaiming for Athens its patron goddess, a re-enactment of the original chariot race for the city in a manner more amenable to Plato’s idiosyncratic conception of the gods” (Garvey 391-2).

Other classical works of Atlantian scholarship like Christopher Gill’s *Plato: The Atlantis Story* (1980), perform a broadly philological study of *Timaeus* and *Critias*, offering vocabulary, sketches of Atlantian geography, and a methodological introduction to the myth that outlines the numerous interpretations of the text (Gill). Here, Gill makes recourse to a circuitous Atlantian hermeneutics centred on the controversial character of the Isle as presented by Plato, namely, interpreting the Isle as purely factual (which Gill argues against), or as a strictly political allegory of Plato’s experimentation with fictional prose<sup>38</sup>. In its approach, Gill’s scholarship is a continuation of the scholarly tradition established by Proclus’ commentary on the dialogues, offering various insights and discourse on over eight centuries of Platonic interpretation<sup>39</sup>.

In “Remembering Atlantis: Plato’s *Timaeus-Critias*, the Ancestral Constitution, and the Democracy of the Gods” (2017), Casey Stegman offers a detailed analysis of the political role of the Atlantis narrative in relation to Plato’s own politics. Referring to numerous insights made about Plato’s involvement with Athenian politics, Stegman’s analysis subsequently reorients not only the contemporary understanding of the Atlantis myth *in principium*, but more importantly, the narrative in relation to the scholarly disagreement concerning Plato’s participation in the mid-fourth century debates concerning Athenian ancestral constitution or *patrio politeia as well*. (Stegman).

In “A Scientific Approach to Plato’s Atlantis” (2015), Massimo Rapisarda takes an empirical approach to Atlantian hermeneutics, attempting to use the various archaeological sciences to

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<sup>38</sup>see also Gill’s 1979 essay “Plato’s Atlantis Story and the Birth of Fiction”.

<sup>39</sup>see *Proclus: Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, Volume 6, Book 5: Proclus on the Gods of Generation and the creation of Humans, 2017.



investigate the archeo-historical verisimilitude of the Isle of Plato's recounting. Rapisarda's investigation is thorough with aspects of the myths and replete with geological diagrams as well as concise analytical interventions concerning its central figures. His investigation opens with an account of the origin of the myth itself and then moves on to discuss a range of aspects concerning the Isle: the credibility of its author contra alternative accounts of Atlantis such as those found in Diodorus Siculus' forty volume *History of the World*<sup>40</sup> (1st Century BC) compendium and Herodotus' *Histories* as well as detailed analysis of archaeological findings of Atlantis' time (Rapisarda).

Works like Omid Tofighian's *Myth and Philosophy in Platonic Dialogues* (2016) and Sarah Broadie's *Nature and Divinity in Plato's Timaeus* (2011) explore the myth of Atlantis as ancillary support for a more primary thesis analysing the paradigms, epistemic possibilities, and metaphysics of divinity contra mortality in the dialogues (Broadie 2011). There are also other works that offer illuminating comparative analysis of Atlantis against other mytho-religious utopias such as Diskin Clay and Andrea Purvis' *Four Island Utopias: Being Plato's Atlantis, Euhemerus of Messene's Panchaia; Iamboulos' Island of the Sun; Sir Francis Bacon's New Atlantis, with a Supplement on Utopian Prototypes, Developments, and Variations* (1999). In the text, the authors not only provide a close reading of the source texts for each island utopia named in the title, but also provide an *intertextual* analysis of how these chronotopes function as utopias in themselves and in relation to one another. In situating utopian studies in a pre-Morean milieu by making recourse to more ancient examples, particularly Greco-Roman utopianism, Clay and Purvis provide a detailed analysis of utopianism in relation to mythical isles that make comprehensive references to numerous Classical works ranging from the works of Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Simonides, to Herodotus. In their analysis of what they refer to as 'proto-utopias,' such as the Islands of the Blessed and the exotic isles of the *Odyssey* as forerunners of Platonic utopianism, the authors offer an interesting *genealogy* of mythical isles in relation to utopianism. In a section titled "Utopian Prototypes, Developments, and Variations," Clay and Purvis collect various excerpts concerning the Elysian Fields, the Isles of the Blessed, Hyperborea, Ethiopia, and Amazonia and in doing so highlight an underlying commonality that ultimately undifferentiates them all—each, in their way presents the mythical isle as a chronotope

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<sup>40</sup>Editor's note: The original Latin text is referred to as *Bibliotheca Historica*. Rapisarda uses the translated title as *Library of History*.

playing host to alternative societies and/or radical alterity in terms of onto-existential states of being. Despite Abraham Akkerman's excellent account of spacio-temporal imperatives inherent in Plato's Atlantian myth in relation to urban space and the concept of the Ideal City in "Platonic Myth and Urban Space: City-Form as an Allegory" (2014), there exist few accounts of Plato's Atlantis that offer categorically theoretical readings of the island as a chronotope or space-time of radical alterity that does not rely on political allegory and/or utopian discourse.

The ur-example of an Atlantian narrative is found in the dialogues of Plato. It is generally accepted that Plato uses Atlantis as a literary device in his dialogues to explore various issues and debates concerning Classical Greek political thought and Western political thought. He provides two accounts of Atlantis, detailing its history and its relation to other historico-archaeologically verifiable ancient city-states (Jowett). The first account comes from *Timaeus*. In this dialogue, a Greek lawmaker named Solon recounts the history of Atlantis. He describes the Atlantian kings as having fought and lost a great military campaign some nine thousand years ago against the Athenians. At that time, the ancient Atlantian kings had begun a predominantly naval offensive to conquer the Atlantic Ocean with machinations to establish colonies in Europe and Asia beyond (Donnelly 1882). To mount their defence, the Athenians made a league with other Greek city-states to answer the Atlantian threat. After repelling the Atlantian advance, the Athenians freed Egypt as well as all other countries or city-states under Atlantian rule. Shortly after their defeat, Atlantis suffered massive geological cataclysms like earthquakes and floods, among others, resulting in the total destruction of the island-continent (E.E.O). The second is offered through *Critias* with a more detailed account of the history of Atlantis. According to Plato, when the Olympian gods divided the dominion of the earth amongst themselves, Poseidon was given Atlantis as part of his allotment. He married a mortal named Cleito and with her sired the Atlantian royal line. The royal house of Atlantis was taken forward by the ten demigod sons of Poseidon and Cleito (E.E.O). Atlas, Poseidon's first born, was crowned the high-king while his younger brothers were made princes. Atlas had numerous sons whose order of succession was based on primogeniture. Plato describes Atlantis as peaceful, progressive, and fecund. Furthermore, to supplement the natural abundance of Atlantis, intercontinental import and trade were widely practised in the capital (Jowett). In terms of Atlantian statecraft, Poseidon decreed a set of strict laws, inscribed on a pillar of the precious metal orichalcum, that the Isle's leaders were bidden to

follow. These laws included rules of government, protocols and rituals of judgement, assuaging of feuds, vendettas, or quarrels amidst the legislators, and procedures of joint council meetings (Donnelly). Plato's narrative states that the prosperity of all Atlantians, high and low, was dependent on their collective adherence to Poseidon's laws. However, when these laws began to be forgotten, predominantly due to dilution of the so-called divine nature of the Atlantians by wide-spread propagation with mortals, the Isle and its people failed. As a result, Zeus and the twelve principle Olympian gods and goddesses convened a council to pass judgement against the wayward Atlantians. Plato's narrative of the subsequent fate of Atlantis ends abruptly following his description of this Olympic council (E.E.O).

In *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005), Jameson states that one of the objective preconditions for a utopia is that a utopia must presume that "...the miseries and injustices thus visible must seem to shape and organize themselves around one specific ill or wrong," and further that "...the Utopian remedy [toward such ills] must at first be a fundamentally *negative* one, and stand as a clarion call to remove and to extirpate this specific root of all evil from which all others spring" (Jameson 12; emphasis mine). For this reason, Jameson cautions that approaching utopias with *positive* expectations is a mistake, which I extrapolate in my analysis of Atlantis to suggest that while a preponderance of occidental mythical isles are typically seen as spaces that consistently represent the idyllic, particularly pastoral utopia, they also simultaneously *misrepresent* such formulations in doing so.

While the bounty of Atlantis as described by Plato offers "...visions of [a] happy world, spaces of fulfillment and cooperation, representations which correspond generically to the idyll or the pastoral rather than the utopia," the concept of the mythical isle is not what it seems (Jameson 12). From Jameson's theoretical perspective, outside of Classical Greek political thought and allegory, there are two distinct ways that Plato's Atlantis, in either utopian or dystopian terms, can be thought: either as an "...alleviation and elimination of the sources of exploitation and suffering" or as a "...composition of blueprints for bourgeois comfort," that is, the mythical island as resort, land of extreme luxury, and/or unattainable or radical exclusivity (Jameson 12). According to Jameson,

Utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space, in other words, that the very possibility of Utopian space is itself a result of spatial and social differentiation. But it is an aberrant by-product, and its possibility is dependent on the

momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater within the general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum. (Jameson 15)

When thought of in utopian/dystopian terms the notion of atemporality, that is a chronotope's ability to remain unravaged by time's dismantling of spatial inertia, a mythical isle like Atlantis appears to be akin to a "pocket of stasis," an "enclave within which Utopian fantasy can operate" (Jameson 15). This atemporality decouples the utopian enclave from the momentum and forces of social change. Such socio-political atemporality is, in praxis, "...the distance of the Utopias from practical politics, on the basis of a zone of the social totality which seems eternal and unchangeable, even within this social ferment [Plato has] attributed to the age itself" (Jameson 15). If one considers Atlantis as an example of such a space, even though the Atlantian Acropolis which Plato describes as being topographically permeable along specific channels (the transversal causeway diametrically cutting through all five concentric circular landmasses comprising the city, in particular), it is, in its residual praxes, still a closed space triple canopied by zonal walls. As such, within the remit of the Platonic legend, Atlantis is a space beyond the social turbulence of other continental societies (Greece and Egypt, in particular) due to both its natural oceanic barricades and the edifices of Atlantian engineering that doubly surround and sequester it.

However, while Jameson describes a utopia as a space predicated on stasis and insularity, a passive preservation achieved through inaction, the protective insularity that Plato's Atlantis projects does not stop it from projecting itself outwardly. The aggressive and partially successful naval campaign waged by the Atlantian navy, its international/intercontinental imperialism, and the continued socio-economic and martial supremacy which, in turn, warranted the formation of a united Greek coalition to answer the Atlantian war-machine, illustrates that Plato's Atlantis was not a model of socio-political abstentionism. It is described as a distant, albeit active, emanation of socio-political, economic, and martial power. Therefore, unlike Jameson's interpretation of a utopia, Plato's Atlantis is thoroughly engaged in the socio-political, cultural, and economic gestalt of the ancient world. It is, in the last instance, a prime mover involved and influencing the direction of its momentum through warfare and commerce. While isolated and unassailable due to the natural defence offered by the Atlantic ocean, Atlantis, as an interstice-space, would appear to be an immovable force. According to Jameson, utopias of this seemingly impassive kind can only be troubled "...in

those rare moments in which revolutionary politics shakes the whole edifice.” In the case of Plato’s Atlantis, this purpose was served by the Greek coalition, on the one hand, and the decidedly apolitical cataclysm that destroyed the island itself, on the other (Jameson 16).

Within the space of the theoretical profile being developed here, it is becoming increasingly clear that a preliminary axiom one can deduce is that Plato’s Atlantis is deeply dualistic. While the house of Atlas would appear to be a court of ancient power, an “...ahistorical enclave within a bustling movement of secularization and national and commercial development” which “...offers a kind of mental space in which the whole system [of social being and its governance] can be imagined as radically different” from the rest of the ancient world, Plato’s Atlantis *does* participate in national and commercial movements of other city-states (Jameson 16). As such, Plato’s Atlantis is not atemporal, but rather a space in which the momentum of socio-political and commercial change is not absolutely governed by external forces. In this way, Plato’s Atlantis is a chronotope of *alternative time*, one influenced by the momentum of differentiation in ancient time, but not determined by it. We can thus say that Plato’s Atlantis is

something like a foreign body within the social [zeitgeist of antiquity as described by Plato whereby in it,] the differentiation process [has] momentarily been arrested, so that [it] remain[s] as it were momentarily beyond the reach of [ancient socio-political forces] and testify to [their] political powerlessness, at the same time that [it] offer[s] a space in which new wish images of the social can be elaborated and experienced. (Jameson 16)

In the last instance, however, the force that exerted the ultimate influence on the island and its ruling city-state was not the differentiating socio-political and economic momentum of the Athenians, the liberated Egyptians, or the former Atlantian colonies, but *nature* itself.

In “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopia” (1984), Foucault discusses the concept of heterotopia by providing and analysing various styles and principles thereof. Though the author gives no clear definition of a heterotopia to encapsulate, a latent principle subtending all six forms or instantiation of heterotopia he discusses. I offer the following working definition of heterotopia that will serve the analysis to follow: *heterotopias are spaces wherein the*

*typified onto-existential, socio-political and cultural praxes as well as all flows of bio power of a given culture break down at most, or are renegotiated at least.* Here, the term heterotopia describes the human geographical phenomena of spaces and places that function in non-hegemonic ways or conditions. Heterotopic spaces are, therefore, spaces of otherness, liminality, fusion, confusion, play, and dynamism. They can, furthermore, hybridize various modalities and states of matter, they can be physical and ephemeral simultaneously like the space of a telephone call or one's reflection in the mirror.

Within the narrative framework of Plato's Atlantis, the city-state can be thought of as heterotopic in the following ways. Firstly, Atlantis, both topographically and culturally, represents a "...counter site, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (Foucault 3). According to Plato's account, this is *at least* topographically accurate. As an island-continent, the city-state of Atlantis is described as a topographical counter-site and reflection of the socio-political and socio-cultural infrastructures and ideologies of other, and in certain respects rival cultures, most notably Greece (Athens) and Egypt (Sias). When considered from a cultural perspective, however, Atlantis bears many of the hallmarks of a heterotopia or indeed heterotopias within it. Having said that, the account of Atlantian life and culture, though surprisingly robust despite its pithiness, does not elaborate in depth certain praxes of its inhabitants that would help elucidate a comprehensive theoretical profile of the city-state's heterotopianism or the heterotopias it contains.

However, the first serviceable example of heterotopia that Plato's narrative provides in terms of developing a theoretical profile of/for Atlantis is that of the heterotopia of juxtaposition. Foucault describes a heterotopia of juxtaposition as one which "...is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 6). While Plato's account does not make mention of Atlantian theatrical praxes, an element which Foucault takes as an ur-example of a heterotopia of juxtaposition symbolized succinctly by the theatrical stage itself, he does make mention of the elaborate and fecund gardens of Atlantis. Heterotopias of juxtaposition are spaces wherein a single space juxtaposes numerous spaces. Such heterotopias can also be described as heterotopias of bricolage/coalescence. Examples include the garden, wherein plants and flowers can be arranged or altered so as to act as coextensive microcosms of numerous heterogeneous environments and habitats.

According to Foucault, “...the oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites is the garden”, a chronotope in which “...all the vegetation of the garden was supposed to come together in this space” (Foucault 6). As such, the garden is supposed to attest to symbolic perfection, and act as “...the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world” (Foucault 6). Consider this against Plato’s pithy, albeit comprehensive, account of Atlantian horticulture:

Also whatever fragrant things there now are in the earth, whether roots, or herbage, or woods, or essences which distil from fruit and flower, grew and thrived in that land; also the fruit which admits of cultivation, both the dry sort, which is given us for nourishment and any other which we use for food—we call them all by the common name pulse, and the fruits having a hard rind, affording drinks and meats and ointments, and good store of chestnuts and the like, which furnish pleasure and amusement, and are fruits which spoil with keeping, and the pleasant kinds of dessert, with which we console ourselves after dinner, when we are tired of eating—all these that sacred island which then beheld the light of the sun, brought forth fair and wondrous and in infinite abundance. With such blessings the earth freely furnished them. (Plato 206)

It is the heterotopia of Atlantian gardens and overall horticulture which embody the concepts of fecundity, specifically appetitive abundance, bio-difference/diversity, and aesthetic perfection—as stated in the *Critias*—that intimates a latent link between Atlantis and other mythical utopian spaces, not all of which are isles, such as Eden, Shangri-La, and Shambalah.

Similar to Jameson’s discussion of spatio-atemporality, Foucault offers a framework for understanding heterotopias of time. He states that there are “heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, for example, museums and libraries”, in whose spaces objects from various points of time are brought together and, though existing in time, are shielded from temporal decay by virtue of being housed therein. Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time does not stop, but they represent a “...will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place” (Foucault 7). In this way, heterotopias of time are spaces wherein objects from varying points of

time (not unlike the spatial flux inaugurated, curated, and sustained by the garden) can be physically dislodged from their original chronotopes. A second type of heterotopia of time concerns the opposite of infinity, namely, the brevity of time. Foucault refers to this as “the mode of the festival” (Foucault 7). Foucault chooses the fairground as an example of such a space, one that accumulates heteroclitic objects and praxes, which stands idle for the duration of the year, save on specified days/weeks when they teem with activity.

Besides horse-racing (remaining mum on the frequency of its practice), Plato makes no mention of Atlantian entertainment in his narrative, thus, making the discernment of whether or not Atlantis possessed heterotopias of time in the mode of the festival speculative at best. In comparison to the privileged details of Atlantian horticultural praxes and provisions, such descriptive paucity seems odd. Furthermore, while he makes clear mention of the intellectual feats of Atlantis, its impressive edifices attesting to its inhabitants’ engineering prowess, their development of the Atlantian Acropolis, its fortifications, the success and might of the city-state’s navy, and so on, Plato makes no mention of where or how this wealth of knowledge was ordered, stored, or referred to. There is no mention of an Atlanian library, museum, record house, legislature, clerical registrar, or archive. Similarly, we do not find details regarding Atlantian medicine and aesculapian practices. The lack of details concerning Atlantian infrastructures of learning, knowledge, history, and art leads one to assume that all Atlantian wisdom and *techne* were, in some way, an affordance made possible by the hereditary aspects of their semi-divine natures.

In terms of the heterotopia of purification, Foucault specifies that these spaces always “...presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” meaning that “...the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public space,” but “...either the entry is compulsory, as in the case of entering a barracks or a prison, or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. To get in one must have certain permission and make certain gestures” (Foucault 7). The examples Foucault refers to, in terms of activities of purification—both religious and hygienic, are Moslem hammams and Scandinavian saunas. While Plato makes mention of Atlantis’s cold and hot springs and the bathing areas established for private citizens of the Acropolis, the royal house, horses, men, and women in his narrative, the nature of the use of and access to said bathing areas remains unclear. However, the rituals of judgement suggest that the temple of Poseidon at the centre of the



island-continent represented a heterotopia of ritual/purification in two primary ways. First, the temple of Poseidon is described as being a space where the Atlantian rulers convened to pass judgement against themselves and their people. Before any judgement was passed, Plato describes in detail the protocols and rituals each member of the council would have to undergo and properly execute in order to purify themselves, both before their gods and before one another, of any charges or impiety. This ritual involved specific clothing, times, sacrificial victims, and pronouncements. Second, the ritual of judgement could not occur without the preceding ritual sequence of purification. Having been described as a private, nocturnal/auroric rite, this entire process is both symbolically and praxeologically liminal in terms of both space and time as it takes place out of view of the public. In this way, the twofold predication of Atlantian rituals of judgement and the spaces in which they take place are heterotopic since they are exclusive, i.e., only accessible to a conditional few and this accessibility too is based on the knowledge of the requisite processes and protocols of ritual purification.

It is in terms of the sixth possibility of heterotopia that Foucault theorizes that Plato's Atlantis, both as city-state and island-continent, is *most* heterotopic. Foucault describes the sixth principle of heterotopia as being twofold. On the one hand, heterotopia's function is to create spaces of illusion. The function of the space of illusion is to expose all real spaces and sites wherein human life is partitioned as more illusory. On the other hand, Foucault states that these heterotopias also "...create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This latter type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation" (Foucault 8). If we regard Atlantis as an idyllic and mystical stronghold of a super-race, as Plato's literary narrative intimates, then the island-continent and city-state represent a perfect organization of not only terrestrial space, evidenced in the concentric symmetry of its topography, but also the perfect arrangement of its society and populace. Beyond this, Atlantis—and other mythical islands—as an island, theoretically shares some of the qualities of the heterotopia *par excellence*, namely, the boat/ship. Foucault states,

the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they

conceal in their gardens [...therefore] in civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates. (Foucault 9)

It would then seem that Atlantis's naval imperialism, biodiversity, and socio-economic fecundity that Plato describes, all closed in on themselves and yet given over to the sea and replete with the treasures won or traded from the ports, brothels and gardens of ancient Egypt and Athens, conform to Foucault's rather poetic conceptualization of heterotopia *par excellence*. Regardless of how heterotopic a boat/ship may be, Plato's narrative of Atlantis illustrates that a mythical island, like a boat/ship can sink, no matter how laden it may be.

Plato's Atlantis is a primary example of the ur-occidental mythical island, as it reflects heterotopic qualities. Any theoretical profile of Plato's Atlantis must take into account the city-state's numerous instances of socio-political, economic, and cultural simultaneity and paradox. The above analysis has explored Plato's Atlantis to illustrate that while other mythical or lost lands/isles in Western mytho-religious systems often serve or reflect a specific purpose or quality, Plato's Atlantis is, theoretically, a comparative composite of all of them. Plato's account portrays the island-state as theoretically predicated on paradoxes, simultaneously mystical and banal, attractive and dangerous, seemingly timeless and radically brief. It is a space of onto-existential liminality and topographical symmetry. From its origins, its description as a city/island-state built and ruled by demigods, to its population being a result of inter-ontic procreation, Plato's Atlantis and its foundations are consistently concerned with flouting of boundaries and liminality of existence.

In each instance, the paradoxes resulting from this liminality and flouting of boundaries also manifests itself in the city-state's sense of being simultaneously both open *and* closed. Plato's narrative illustrates that while the topography of the island and the architecture of the city echo the panopticism of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, Atlantis was by no means completely carceral, closed, insular, or self-contained. On the one hand, as the *Critian* dialogue states, Atlantian trade, conquest, and other forms of inter-cultural exchange were fundamental aspects that contributed to the city's socio-economic strength and prosperity, while on the other hand, the land itself was rich with exportable goods from precious ore (orichalcum), quarry stone, timber, to wild as well as husbanded livestock including animals from marshlands, river-lands, as well as mountain-lands, all of which have been described as being bounteous and sufficiently maintained by

the natural resources of the island itself, allowing the finances for aqueducts, gardens, temples, guardhouses, horse-racing tracks, and so on. As a result, the heterotopic concentration of diasporic flora and fauna found in Plato's Atlantis gives the island an Edenic, albeit closed quality. At the same time, being expert in trade and warfare, Atlantis would also appear to have been a secular cosmopolitan city-state; one whose historical verisimilitude, archaeological evidence, possible theoretical interpretations, and everything else ultimately redound to the same sense of utopian interstice, historical liminality, incomplete destruction, murky preservation, or, in short, heterotopianism.



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# Derrida's Open and Its Closure: The Aporia of Différance and the Only Logic of Thinking

*Mengxue Wu*

“...for an opening is relative to a ‘surrounding plenitude.’”<sup>41</sup>  
“The gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits: we have never come upon it as upon a particular *case* of experience—that which Husserl believes he is describing.”<sup>42</sup>

Metaphysics—the entire history of metaphysics has been considered as the metaphysics of presence—is closed; it is closed like a dead end. In its “surrounding plenitude” no exit can be found and it is meeting its own death. Though a system of philosophy with incompleteness is not a perfect theory, but the rebuke of how comprehensive and close a philosophy is and the demand of that philosophy to open its house to the alien and the ungraspable would be a preposterous importunity. However, upon the stage where the entire history of Western philosophy has been played, “...nothing is staged or displayed theatrically. Rather, the battle of the new gods against the old is being fought” (Heidegger 22). This battle, between the new gods and the old, between the new thoughts and the old, is a battle of breaking into new ruptures and finding new openings in the old thoughts. At the moment when traditional philosophy has become a closure of the metaphysics of presence, even those streams of thought that already broke new phenomenological grounds in the beginning of twentieth century and Levinas’s ethical breaking are closed “as the self-presence in absolute knowledge” (Derrida 102, SP). Derrida states that we need an “un-heard-of” thought, far away from the system of presence and meaning, called “trace,” “différance” by Derrida. It is the movement before the formation of meaning that is continuously differing and deferring before the formation of presence. It is a perception that cannot be sensed (seen, heard, and touched) by oneself in consciousness—it is un-seen, un-heard, and un-touched. Therefore, it “indicates *a way out* of the closure” (141, *italics mine*)—the closed circle of auto-affection of sensing (hearing) oneself and presentation. However can this “un-heard-of” thought indicate a way out? Can this

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<sup>41</sup>Jacques Derrida, “Violence and Metaphysics,” in *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 106; hereafter WD.

<sup>42</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena, and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*. Trans. David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 104; hereafter SP.

thought open the closure of metaphysics? Is this thought of openness a different mode of thinking, pointing towards "...possibilities for a new kind of meditation?"<sup>43</sup>

To discuss these issues in Derrida's writings, a close reading of the following texts is proposed—*Speech and Phenomena* (1973), "Violence and Metaphysics" (1964) in *Writing and Difference* (1978), *Of Grammatology* (1976), and "Différance" (1968) in *Speech and Phenomena*. The "difference," the movement of traces, and the play of differences, for their structural commonality in endless references, will be provisionally called "open structure."<sup>44</sup>

The way in which an open structure operates is through trace, writing, différance, and supplement. They are open to the difference with another trace, to another supplement, to the substitution, to the effacement of every trace and supplement, and to the postponement of deferral. The tracing/erasing of traces and the seeking of the next supplement for the current one are the structures of open. We could say a trace traces and erases/effaces itself: trace traces and writes with erasing and effacing and at the same time, it erases and effaces with tracing and writing. Open lies in the very erasing, writing, and

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<sup>43</sup>David B. Allison in his "Translator's Introduction" of *Speech and Phenomena* writes that deconstruction is not as negative as "destruction" in the context of Nietzsche or Heidegger. Deconstruction has no intention to overthrow or overcome metaphysics, instead, it sets its task to "...set forth the possibilities for a new kind of meditation, one no longer founded on the metaphysics of presence" (See page xxxiii footnote).

However, it is always necessary to remember to switch one's perspectives. From one perspective, deconstruction indeed presents us a possibility to think differently other than the metaphysics of presence. From the other perspective, however, this different thinking, this is to say, trace, différance, writing, and supplement, with its powerless "power" of spreading everywhere and encompassing everything, including the possibility of thinking differently other than deconstruction, itself has no possibility for "a new kind of meditation," one is no longer on the structure of deconstruction.

<sup>44</sup>Open is questioned in several ways. First, the question "How does différance open words, concepts, and categories?" concerns the opening of the horizon of metaphysics, the reduced pure expression, and ideal meaning, as Derrida discussed in *Speech and Phenomena*, essays on Husserl and phenomenology. Secondly, we might ask, "Do 'open,' 'outside,' and 'the way out' remain on the metaphysical level and upon that level, are they the 'absolute, ideal, and perfect open?'" This question without doubt takes the same position with Derrida's critique of Levinas in the essay "Violence and Metaphysics," in which Derrida emphasizes that the other must not be an absolute and conceptual "other," rather, it is before every concept, and thereby it is before the level of metaphysics. Without a doubt, for Derrida, open is not a "solid" open—it is not solid as Husserl's perfect ideality and Levinas's absolute open; on the contrary, Derrida will never speak of this "open" "the perfect open," "the pure open," "the absolute open," or "the totally-open."

deferring. In other words, open lies in the very moment—let us still use “moment” as an expedient—that is *about* to remove, to write, and to defer. This “moment” of “about,” is always deferring, about to defer, or about to defer the deferring. Open happens at the very moment when the trace is going to disorder the common time and the deferral is going to defer between traces and during the movement of supplements. In this sense, open means “allowing,” “permitting,” and “promise.” It allows and promises *différance*, the play of traces, and vice versa. From one supplement to another, open promises the freedom of substituting, erasing, and moving thus, endowing the openness of what is erasable and replaceable. Only in this condition, a supplement could be replaced by another supplement, and therefore, a chain of supplements becomes possible. On the one hand, in the circumstance of open traces, *différance*, and supplements happen, and vice versa. On the other hand, in the chain of supplements and the play between traces, open happens. It is this process of open that makes trace and supplement not stop at their own and become determinate and certain concept. Open maintains that trace is an interruption and a disorder of metaphysical order. By being always able to differing and deferring itself, open prevents the risk of being petrified and beingfixed into one certain trace or supplement.

When open occurs between traces and supplements, it naturally means it is in certain limit. When open has the meaning of “unfolding,” it first means “folding” and “close.” A metaphor of an onion would help us. Imagine peeling an onion. To open and unfold an onion means to peel the onion. When we peel an onion’s layers, we see that inside a layer, there is another layer. We differentiate layers by other nearby layers. The process of erasing and detaching layers is the process of opening and unfolding an onion. By the same token, supplying is always substituting one for another, playing is always one playing with others. This inter-trace, inter-supplement implies a finite opening and a certain close. Open is from one supplement to another assupplement can never occur without the other supplement. Thus, open cannot only mean pure, absolute, and infinite open, rather it is finite—it is in certain closure. Open is at work where and when traces trace and efface, supplements substitute, and both meaning in language and Being in beings arise and arrive at their limitation.

Though trace, *différance*, and supplement condition words, concepts, and categories, they themselves are neither words nor concepts. They do not even cause words. They have no power to control, govern, or manage words. However, to say that trace is a “common root” for words, concepts, and categories does not mean that



trace is a “root,” a substantial root, or an origin. Open and the openness of trace, too, are not a substantial root or origin. In the metaphor of peeling an onion, there is a notable and interesting fact: when one finishes peeling, the center of an onion is nothing. On facing the nothingness of the center, the metaphysical assertions on “concept,” “essence,” and its related question (“What is open?”) will turn out to be untenable to hold, for how can one give a “concept” before the formation of a concept, that is, before the play of traces? Prior to predicates, trace and *différance* escape the fate of being presence and metaphysics.

However, words and concepts are possible only by inscribing them into the movement of traces and differences. There are no words outside this structure of trace. As Derrida himself always states, “...there is nothing outside of the text,” and “...the gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits” (Derrida 104). This open structure of *différance* is endless like the fabric of text and the labyrinth of the gallery. This structure of open spreads over everything, in other words, it includes all.

No-thing can be outside of this structure—in this sense the open structure is closed. But at the same time, it is not closed because the structure of *différance* always expands everywhere. There is no “bound” of this structure and there is no frontier for *différance*. It never closes. But—again—it is never open. It is both open and closure; but at the same time, it is neither open nor closure. Moreover, it includes its own “exit,” includes the “outside,” therefore, “the outside is the inside,” and as a whole where there is no “outside” or “inside,” thus, “the outside is (with cross) the inside.” Is not this all-including structure another kind of closure? Speaking from the perspective of the history of philosophy, does this structure not share the same essence of metaphysics with other (metaphysical) categories like Being and idea which attempt to grasp everything?

Moreover, if the risk of misunderstanding arises, ask a question in Saussurean way: what makes trace a trace, temporization a temporization, and supplement a supplement? What are we talking about when we talk about trace, temporization, and Derrida’s other terms? When we are talking about trace and temporization, are we really speaking of trace and temporization? Though from Derrida’s perspective, these questions would be nonsense, because there is no need to recognize them, no need to “be” trace, *différance*, and supplement. As Derrida writes, “The Being of the existent is not the absolute existent, nor the infinite existent, nor even the foundation of

the existent in general” (WD 143). When trace disorders and deferral defers, trace and temporization enter into an unstable, uncertain, and disordered status. This status of instability, uncertainty, and disorder—just as trace, *différance*, and supplement are endless—is endless. The web of *différance* maintains itself and prevails endlessly; accordingly, the status of this instability, uncertainty, and disorder maintains itself and prevails endlessly. Therefore, is this “disorder” another order of metaphysics, an order of disorder, an order as disorder, a disordered order—in one word, an order?, Though everything is tracing and erasing and is in an unstable condition in Derrida’s structure of *différance*, this structure as a whole, by maintaining and prevailing itself, achieves a stable and even a static status. From this holistic view, due to the unstable stability, deconstruction is never destruction.<sup>45</sup>

The first point for Derrida’s open—that it implies the dissolution of the center, of the central ideal, and positive meaning—is inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure. Derrida draws upon the key Saussurean insight, “...in language there are only differences.” Each word must refer to other words. The only connection in language system is the differential connection between words and it is “*Arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified*” (Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 68-69; italics mine). Saussure writes,

Everything that has been said up to this point boils down to this: in language there are only differences. Even more important: a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*. Whether we take the signified or the signifier, language has neither ideas nor sounds that existed before the linguistic system, but only conceptual and phonic differences that have issued from the system. The idea of phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it. (120)

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<sup>45</sup>Many scholars have come up with the same conclusion: “Deconstruction is never destruction.” David B. Allison in his “Translator’s Introduction” of *Speech and Phenomena* states the similar idea. Cf. *Speech and Phenomena* xxxii and see my footnote 3. However, one must also notice that this same conclusion comes from different reasons. Behind the surface of same conclusion, my argument is distinctly different from other scholars’ arguments. In this paper, from a macroscopic point of view, deconstruction is found to have provided “supports” and “grounds” to metaphysics by removing its ground, and this move is another kind of protection for metaphysics, far from destroying it. Therefore, this is the reason behind my concluding that “deconstruction is never destruction.”

There is no such thing called “the positive meaning” of each word. A word does not have a meaning of its own, rather, only through the differences between this word and other surrounding words is a word’s meaning determined. Referring to others, depending on others, and differing with others, make the word open to the “outside” of itself. The “outside” of a word is relative to this word itself; the “outside” here means other words.

Derrida in his “Différance” after citing Saussure points out,

The first consequence to be drawn from this is that the signified concept is never present in itself...Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts, by the systematic play of differences. (SP 140)

It is the *difference* that operates in language and makes language possible, rather than positive meaning, the determined sound, or the absolute idea. However, difference itself is neither a word, nor concept, nor meaning; or to put it in the language of metaphysics, it is neither a substance, nor a subject, nor a predicate, nor being. Difference is not a concept, it is the condition for conceptuality; it is not even a “principle” as Saussure names his “differentiation principle.” It is just a “play” which Derrida names—the play of differences—différance.

Are difference and différance, by putting “positive meaning” in question and “indicating *a way out* (141, italics mine),” opening a certain closure? At this point, the answer is certainly yes. For the differences between words as well as différance—the play of differences—indicate an open place where one word can have meaning only via opening it and relating it with other words. The frontiers between allword disperse. A word cannot self-sufficiently own its plentitude of meaning. Counter to classical linguists’ assumption, there is neither presence of any signified “true” thing nor any natural connection between a word and its “ideal meaning.” There are only differences and references between words as well as rupture between word and its meaning. Among references and differences of words, open is shown as differences and ruptures. Beneath these demonstrations of differences and ruptures, open implies an incomplete and deficient “self-sufficiency.” In other words, open implies a disillusion of “self-sufficiency,” a disillusion of an ideal

status not only for the signified present of classical linguistics, but also for Husserl's "ideal meaning."

Instead of speaking of complete and perfect "self-sufficiency," Derrida comes up with "insufficient" to designate a fundamental lack that he also identifies as the original supplement. This fundamental lack of positive center accordingly means that the supplement to what was a lack is as fundamental as lack. With the lack of origin, or with the supplement of origin, Derrida can firstly, avoid asserting any full presence of a signified "positive meaning"—for once, if one only speaks the certain and determinate "positive meaning," one actually says nothing but nonsense—"Différance is the non-full, non-simple 'origin'" (SP 141). Secondly, guided by this "non-full," "non-simple origin," the lack and consequently the supplement to the lack, he can avoid speaking of a plentitude, the plentitude as the ideal meaning in the Husserlian sense, or the plentitude in the sense of the "anti-metaphysical" Other and exteriority in Levinas's philosophy.

The breaking of the centric and positive meaning is the first step to open. This is the departure point from closure: not only the departure point for linguistic meaning, but for meaning in general, especially, ideal meaning and pure expression as they are understood in Husserl's theory of ideal meaning. Husserl clearly indicates that the ideal meaning intention is indifferent to the fulfillment of the meaning intuition because whether or not there is any possible intuition is not the criteria for judging an assertion and the meaning intuition qua empirical experience is already reduced. He arrived at the conclusion that "truth is lacking." Husserl notices two levels in expression which he distinguishes as "presentation of words" and "sense-giving act" (*Logical Investigations* 193). The former i.e. the presentation of expression, which is also called "appearance" of empirical expression, must be reduced; no one really cares about the presentation of the expression, what sound it likes, when and where it is expressed, and who expresses it—all these acts of expressing are vanishing. All of these belong to the domain of indication that must be bracketed and put aside. As Husserl writes, "My act of judging is a transient experience: it arises and passes away" (195). The opposite side of this transient experience, that is to say, what people really care about, is the meaning of the assertion: "But what my assertion asserts, the content *that the three perpendiculars of a triangle intersect in a point*, neither arises nor passes away. It is an identity in the strict sense, one and the same geometrical truth" (195). It is easy to understand by using a self-evident geometrical truth as an example. Moreover, the sentence will be understandable when this geometrical assertion is false, say, "...that

the three perpendiculars of a triangle do not intersect in a point.” This apparently false and absurd assertion still makes sense, and its meaning, too, is still repeatable.

In this situation, that is, in a false or absurd assertion its “truth” is lost. Putting this to the system of object-subject and *a priori* knowledge and logic, the wrong meaning can never be fulfilled and the false assertion can never be fulfilled with its correlative object. Meaning-intention here works empty. Truth is lacking:

If “possibility” or “truth” is lacking, an assertion’s intention can only be carried out symbolically: it cannot derive any “fullness” from intuition or from the categorical functions performed on the latter, in which “fullness” value for knowledge consists. It then lacks, as one says, a “true,” a “genuine” meaning.<sup>46</sup> (196)

“Truth is lacking” because the content as truth is not necessary for expression, and the objectivity that is based on any real object is replaced by any ideal objectivity. Yet this “ideal” does not mean correctness and truth of expression; it does not correspond to true or false knowledge.

There emerges an essential problem of phenomenology from “...the false assertion can express objectively.” Husserl can naturally and easily get the conclusion that “truth is lacking” in order to show and prove that phenomenology is indifferent to the real object, however, he unwittingly admits another presupposition: even though the content is false, there is no possible object to fulfill the intention of assertions, the objectivity of false expressions is always valid by judging according to our *a priori* knowledge and logic—sense. It is not only the lack of truth, but also the lack of sense; in fact, the place of truth—a place of a self-evident foundation—is merely replaced by sense: here, sense supplies truth. Whether or not having sense is the presupposition for phenomenological judgments—judgments such as “it is evident true,” or “it is false and absurd,” or “it is nonsense at all.” Beyond truth, Husserl finds sense as his foundation. In other words, in this lack of truth, there arises another foundation and presupposition: sense that is always there and is already in expressions, without any doubt. Because sense can traverse “sense-only” and “sense-related-

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<sup>46</sup>Edmund Husserl, “First Investigation,” in *Logical Investigations*, trans. J. N. Findlay (New York: Routledge, 2001), 196; Derrida also cited this passage in *Speech and Phenomena*, 97, however, to use for his own idea.

objects” it may or may not be fulfilled by real and possible objects but in fact, it does not care about this fulfillment. At the same time when Husserl abandons truth, which “is lacking,” Derrida, standing on the opposite and using the same words, would argue the same conclusion to prove his idea by using the very same words from Husserl: the lack of the ultimate and the lack of the absolute presence. In addition, after the abandonment of truth, Husserl finds another presupposition regarding sense, and Derrida, again, would hold his position that sense qua truth, likewise truth, is lost. As Derrida says, “There is already sense in the first proposition...it only precedes truth as its anticipation” (SP 98). Truth is promised but it has not come yet.

Now, this radical lack of sense, from which results the lack of foundation and origin, tears, ruptures, and holes open in the solid ground of phenomenology. To say it more radically, an assertion is judged by the relationship between sense and the object. By judging whether it is true or false one judges sense’s relationship with the object. For Derrida, no matter how radically Husserl denies assertion’s relation with the object, he is still using the criterion of the object, which, according to Derrida, is the norm of knowledge. The whole explanation of Husserl, though it touched on “truth is lacking,” seemingly steps backward to the object-subject relationship, and thereby, the whole analysis is still stuck in the domain of metaphysics.

Thus, according to Derrida, sense relates to words in exactly the same way in which object relates to words. The difference between the real object and sense is not as sharp as Husserl’s thought. If the intuition/corresponding object is lacking so is sense and vice versa, while if one fulfills intuition, one can also fulfill sense. By assessing whether an assertion has truth or not, one already relies on the criteria of the object and knowledge. As Derrida confirms, “Apparently independent from fulfilling intuitions, the ‘pure’ forms of signification, as ‘empty’ or cancelled sense, are always governed by the epistemological criterion of the relation with objects” (98). Therefore, without such a radical distinction between truth and sense, if truth is not necessary for phenomenological assertions, then sense, according to Derrida, is also not necessary either. Depending heavily upon knowledge or logic, sense can be lacking. Therefore, sense is lacking in the very beginning. And because sense is lacking, what is shown in speech is lacking; only the sign is left with its relation/reference/difference with other signs. When the foundation qua sense is lacking fundamentally, the so called “secondary and derivative” sign, originally belonging to sense, comes to the place. If we understand by “outside” that a sign is not something that is added

to the “insufficient,” then we can say more precisely that the sign taking the place of sense does not come from outside. The sufficient sense due to some reasons becomes insufficient. Sense is always something other than sense.

In this understanding, sense and the sign are no longer distinguishable. This is why when sense is lacking, the sign can supply it immediately. To understand this as correctly as possible, one must try to accept that the integrity of sense is lacking and thus, sense is no longer sense, rather, it is sense in a supplementary way. What does this mean? Let us relate this to Derrida’s analysis of Rousseau’s *Confession* in *Of Grammatology*. When speaking of the issue of masturbation—Rousseau thinks it is a “model of vice habit”—Derrida and Rousseau have totally different ideas regarding the same. Compared to the “normal” sexual activity, Rousseau thinks masturbation is just a special case, just an assistant, and that the imagined presence of beauties is only an addition to the real presence. He will never think that this “harmless” “assistant” is rather “original,” more original so that it is in itself the subject, “corrupting” the integrity of the subject fundamentally. Derrida writes,

Affecting oneself by another presence, one corrupts oneself [makes oneself other] by oneself [*on s’altèresoi-même*]. Rousseau neither wishes to think nor can think that this alteration does not simply happen to the self, that it is the self’s very origin. He must consider it a contingent evil coming from without to affect the integrity of the subject. (*Of Grammatology* 153, hereafter OG)

For Derrida, the integrity of the subject and the ideality of sense are now put into question. Masturbation comes immediately because it is in the beginning of the so-called “Nature” and “origin.” This “evil habit” merges into, and then breaks the integrity of the subject and becomes a part of the subject in the very beginning, just as the sign mingles with and adulterates the ideality of sense. Sense itself makes it other, that is, the sign. Under this circumstance, auto-affection—both in the case of Rousseau and the case of speaking to oneself in solitary mental life—is not pure and perfect as Husserl and Rousseau would wish; it functions rather by the substitutive symbol of the presence. The presence presents itself as an illusion, a symbol for substituting the presence itself. In the process of auto-affection, pleasure is satisfied immediately by imagining the absent present, because it is nothing but symbolic present, a substitution for the real presence.

On one hand the auto-affection could be possible and pleasure, could be immediate because of the substitution, but on the other hand, the coming of the immediate satisfaction implies the deferral of the true pleasure. For Derrida deferral means that pleasure is never coming. The never-coming pleasure is but the lack of pleasure. Therefore, pleasure, or sense, or presence, or “truth,” “is lacking.”

The enjoyment of the thing itself is thus undermined, in its act and in its essence, by frustration. One cannot therefore say that it has an essence or an act (*eidōs*, *ousia*, *energeia*, etc.). Something promises itself as it escapes, gives itself as it moves away, and strictly speaking it cannot even be called presence. (*Of Grammatology* 154)

The essence is the center, and the center (if there is such a thing) is non-center. To play with the thing itself is to play with its symbol, illusion, and the supplement. In other words, one plays with symbol, illusion, and substitution from the outset. The so-called “that dangerous supplement” is not dangerous at all; on the contrary, what is really “dangerous” is the presence, the thing itself, the pleasure in the full plenitude, the purest ideality, and the most perfect meaning, in which the true menace—death—is dwelling. Supplements protect people from the danger of exposure to the too-strong light of purity and plenitude and from the menace of death. According to Derrida, there must be no center, no pure meaning/sense; otherwise it would be death. By the same reason, Derrida writes, “Pleasure *itself*, without symbol or suppletory, that which would accord us (to) pure presence itself, if such a thing were possible, would be only another name for death” (155). Then he cites from Rousseau himself: “Enjoyment! Is such a thing made for man? Ah! If I had ever in my life tasted the delights of love even once in their plenitude, I do not imagine that my frail existence would have been sufficient for them, I would have been dead in the act” (155).

Once there is a thing that is in its plenitude, it would be death. And once there is a thing that is in its purity and absoluteness, it would be a dead thing. In order to endow the ideal and full meaning of “the I,” “I” have to be dead and in order to speak well the expression “I am alive,” I have to be dead because the pure-self-presence is the announcement for death. Therefore, I present, I die. This is why the beginning question “what is the sign” must be lacking, for the sense/meaning is lacking and for the sign already substituted for sense. This metaphysical mode of questioning “what is x” has no answer but



one, which is deludedly answered in Husserl's pursuit of absolute and ideal knowledge. Under this circumstance, a closest closure occurs:

In this sense, *within* the metaphysics of presence, within philosophy as knowledge of the presence of the object, as the being-before-oneself of knowledge in consciousness, we believe, quite simply and literally, in absolute knowledge as the *closure* if not the end of history. And we believe *that such a closure has taken place*. (SP 102)

A bit further, Derrida writes, "This history is closed when this infinite absolute appears to itself as its own death" (102).

In this way, sense—rather than the object—is asserted as a starting point of phenomenology. This foundation of phenomenology is taken away in Derrida's interpretation of "sense is lacking." To say that "truth is lacking" shows Husserl's confidence in how phenomenology keeps away from empirical "blood and flesh" and only keeps its ideal unity of meaning. However, at the same time, Husserl also shows how heavily he depends on sense. Once Derrida takes away sense from phenomenology, he takes away the foundation of phenomenology. Sense, and other synonyms of it: meaning, purity, ideality, universality, the absolute, the ultimate, and the full-presence, are closed. They are as closed as death.

Derrida in the end of *Speech and Phenomena* comes up with an "un-heard-of" thought. The openness of this "un-heard-of" thought concerns something beyond knowledge and beyond presence—knowledge and presence are lack in the very beginning. When full-presence dies—it dies "in the act"—supplements come.<sup>47</sup> Supplement replacing sense/meaning/center/truth and thus breaking the foundation of metaphysics—the pure and full presence, ideal, and ultimate absoluteness—is Derrida's open.

Lacking happens originally and the supplement is in the origin. If one denies the perfection of the purity, one can naturally avoid saying such as "the absolute open," or "the absoluteness of the open." These latter expressions are quite Levinasian. Therefore, the open, in this sense, by taking a lesson from Levinas, must be non-open.

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<sup>47</sup>In Derrida's corpus, Supplement has several names: "sign," "trace," "writing," and "différance."

In “Violence and Metaphysics,” Levinas’s presupposition is, as Derrida claims, that “there would be no interior difference, fundamental and autochthonous alterity within the ego” (WD 109). When Levinas does not want to accept the “inner-difference,” he naturally imagines a “pure ethics” that avoids violence. Derrida analyzes, “It is true that Ethics, in Levinas’s sense, is an Ethics without law and without concept, which maintains its non-violent purity only before being determined as concepts and laws” (111). The “purity” of something—this “something” could be “Ethics,” “exteriority,” “alterity,” as well as the “other”—and the rejection of the inner-difference, inner-other, share the same logic as in Rousseau’s “problem” of masturbation: both neither wish “to think nor can think that this alternation does not simply happen to the self, that is the self’s very origin” (OG 153).

Derrida concludes that phenomenology is the metaphysics of presence in which a closure takes place. Levinas’s way, by announcing an opening from totality (the synonym of closure for Levinas) via the absolute other and infinity, however, cannot be taken either.

The open that Derrida seeks must occur at a more “original” level where there is no “transcendence” or “beyond of,” where this open must be open within itself and so must confront its own closure. Open does not transcend closure, but rather, being closed itself is a way of being open. Therefore, Derrida seeks an open in a more “fundamental” way—“older”: older than categories and predicates, thus and accordingly, older than the concepts such as “pure open,” “closure,” “same,” “other,” etc. Derrida writes,

Either there is only the same, which can no longer even appear and be said, nor even exercise violence (pure infinity or finitude); or indeed there is the same *and* the other, and then the other cannot be the other—of the same—except by being the same (as itself: ego), and the same cannot be the same (as itself: ego) except by being the other’s other: alter ego. (WD 128)

The same and the other, in fact, transcend and are beyond their own categories. To be precise about it, the same and the other diffuse in each other, thus there is no “pure same” against the other or “pure other” against the same, and thus you can no longer point out distinctly the boundary between “pure same” and “pure other.” The play of this dissemination of the same and the other is performed secretly behind

the stage, before they walk into stage lights and transform into clear shapes of concepts and categories. “Behind the stage” is not a stage, nor a ground at all, to use Derrida’s own words. It is in such a stage that the open has to be rooted and inscribed, so deeply, originally, and “fundamentally,” thus, open and the play between open and closure, cannot be open except by open qua closure, otherwise open cannot be open if there is nothing but openness, without the limit of the closure. Open, by taking this logic, has already undermined every concept and category. It is open qua closure, as well as closure qua open. This open takes place so deeply and so fundamentally that nothing can escape its open range, which is also as known as “closed” range.

Because open is not simply the opposite of Husserl’s closure, it is one that does not simply follow Levinas’s “absolute totality-absolute other” logic. As Derrida argues, the other must happen before being a concept, it must happen on the stage of pre-concepts, the stage of the verb “to be,” of the phrase “let it be,” and the stage of Being with its dissimulation, which in this context, the other and its dissimulation, the same. Open acts as closure and vice versa. For this dissimulation of open, it is but that of closure. Being, before concepts and categories, is itself just a play of differences from which concepts and categories arise. Derrida writes,

Now, Being is not simply a predicate of the existent, no more than it is the existent’s subject. If it is taken as essence or as existence (as Being-such or Being-there), if it is taken as copula or as position of existence, or, more profoundly and more originally, if it is taken as the unitary focal point of all these possibilities, then the Being of the existent does not belong to the realm of predication, because it is already implied in all predication in general, and makes predication possible. And it makes every synthetic or analytic judgment possible. It is beyond genre and categories... (136)

Being itself just “lets be.” One may wish to think that judgment is power and concepts and categories are powers to grasp things. Even though Being lets the concept remain a concept and the category be a category, and the judgment be a judgment, it itself has no power. Because it is before concept, the effort of trying to understand Being by concepts would be a vain attempt, and for the same reason, saying and asking the question “What is Being/différance?” would amount to “nonsense.” On this understanding, we can say that the same, open, and closure are neither concepts, nor categories, or judgments. The play of Being is the play of the other and the same, the play of open

and closure. How do they play? The other hides itself with the mask of the same; the open covers itself with the appearance of closure. They dissemble themselves.

Being lets it be, lets it be such and such things; because it is nothing. This is to say, it is never such and such a thing according to their preset categories and concepts in plenitude. Being is not the absoluteness of something. From the very “beginning”, non-plenitude, not perfect, and not absolute entail difference—different from itself and being the other of itself. :

If to understand Being is to be able to let be (that is, to respect Being in essence and existence, and to be responsible for one’s respect), then the understanding of Being always concerns alterity, and par excellence the alterity of the Other in all its originality: one can have to let be only that which one is not.(141)

To be different from itself or to be the other of itself is the structure of open. Difference is open, open to difference, to the alterity and the other within something itself, to the uncertainty and in determination. Open and closure have to be mingled and this mixing in certain sense is Heideggerian, having Heideggerian names like dissimulation, concealment, and the “very veiling of Being.” Being is open to itself that is different from itself; in other words, Being is open to itself that it is not itself: Being is against itself. As Derrida writes,

Therefore, the thought of Being, in its unveiling, is never foreign to a certain violence. That this thought always appears in difference, and that the same—thought (and) (of) Being—is never the identical, means first that Being is history, that Being dissimulates itself in its occurrence, and originally does violence to itself in order to be stated and in order to appear.(147)

The absolute Being or the thought of Being as concept in its own plenitude is nothing but death. “A Being without violence would be a Being which would occur outside the existent: nothing, nonhistory, nonoccurrence, nonphenomenality” (147). This “outside the existent,” is the stage of pre-concept and pre-category, a stage where the open, the closure, the same, and the other occur. On this stage, open is originally open to differences.

Up till now, in order to dislodge Derrida's open, we have examined Derrida's thoughts step by step from different perspectives. We started from Saussure then stopped by Husserl and Levinas. What can we know from the above discussion? When the infinite and repeatable ideality must be dissolved in differences, in both perspectives of logic and time, Husserl's "ideal-meaning-truth" freedom for true or false assertions finds itself in the closures of knowledge. And by the same token, Levinas, though took the totally opposite track from Husserl, emphasizes on the absolute other that takes the same form of fatal "perfectionism." In the perfect and pure Other there is no other but the same; in the motto "open to the other," there is no open but only closure.

On the way to open, this dead and petrified perfectionism must be cleared up. Or we can choose another logic by asking: Is there any perfection, absoluteness, or plenitude? If there is any "open" in Derrida's thought—first let us assume there is—then what does this open mean? Perhaps the thought of plenitude can tell us.

Derrida uses trace—neither substance nor concept—to counter the perfect "open." This is to say, he uses more "fundamental" difference—différance—against absoluteness. In this "strange" structure of différance what should be present is always *on its way* "about to present." By "on this way" I mean that it is always and never arrive sat completion, determination, and perfection. Perfect presence is always deferring its own arrival; once it arrives, it would be something other than itself like the imagined beauty in Rousseau's *Confession* where the presence is the imagination of the presence of beauties. This open of différance, as both the temporal deferral and the logical difference, compose the general structure of the Human Being. This "defectiveness of oneself" gives us time and the possibility to live. One must not be totally identical with oneself (to avoid being dead) rather one must be the other of oneself, open to the difference of oneself. Moreover, one is always living in the deferral of death, and by this postponement, one can have time. Not only death, pleasure shares the same logic. The incomplete and defective pleasure keeps one alive; otherwise pleasure in plenitude belongs to the domain of death— "I would have been dead in the act."

One is same, but not identical with oneself; completely identical is plenitude. Derrida clearly writes in "Violence and Metaphysics" that "...an opening is relative to a 'surrounding plenitude'" (WD 106). This "never in plenitude," "undecided," which is différance that is always already in the structure of other-than-itself

and in the structure of alterity, is open. Alterity is always already included: “If to understand Being is to be able to let be... then the understanding of Being always concerns alterity, and par excellence the alterity of the Other in all its originality: one can have to let be only that which one is not” (141).

For Derrida, the open is trace tracing, writing, and erasing, that is to say, trace opening to all other “things” other than itself. Open is also *différance* differing and deferring to the “thing” that is not itself. Thus, one can easily get to the “conclusion” that, for Derrida, open is just and exactly trace, *différance*, writing, and supplement. Is this true? Trace, *différance*, and writing, are never beings, concepts, and categories. Therefore, they do not exist; they are not. Because they are not beings, concepts, or categories, they have no power to control or govern beings, therefore they are not any totality or supreme form of beings. Because the pure and absolute other would be nothing but the same, the same logic works here: The mirroring or imaginary “pure” open would be nothing but closure. Therefore, our discussion about “Derrida’s open” is never an absolute open.

Upon consideration of the above, the question arises that how did trace, *différance*, and writing work in order to be open? Trace, *différance*, and writing are the condition for words; and furthermore, the condition for consciousness, concepts as well as beings. And only upon this huge web of *différance* (and trace, writing), which indeed opens to differences and in determinations, beings are possible. There is no being outside of the web of differentiation. This web becomes all-including for it is the only possibility and condition for words, concepts, beings, as well as consciousness. An extraordinary metaphor in Derrida’s *Speech and Phenomena*, “The gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exits” (SP 104). Does not this mean that there is no way out of this “gallery”? Is that to say that there is no way out of this web? This is perhaps true, for Derrida clearly says this in *Of Grammatology*, “*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *il n’y a pas de hors-texte*]” (OG 158). Text is a web of *différance* or play of differences, a web so secure that nothing can be possible without it. But at bottom it can provide nothing “secure” for it is groundless. Therefore, in this all-including web there is no way out. Moreover, we already know the reason; the exit is in itself. In this boundless web there is no outside—in this sense, it is not only “there is not outside of the text” but rather “there is no outside,” or in more precise words, in this boundless web, there is no possibility for the “outside.” To put it in Heideggerian expression is to say that it itself *conceals* the outside but here the implied meaning is rather the ordinary

meaning of the word. In this sense, this web—the structure of *différance*—is neither open or closed, for it is both open and closed.

And this all-including web extends even beyond the field of signified presence of linguistic (differential) to the presence in general. This web becomes so protective because every presence in general in our every consciousness is involved and thus appears as substitution. How does Derrida make this transition? A passage in “*Différance*” cannot be ignored. At the beginning of his argument, Derrida indeed prudently limits his discussion to linguistics, where he talks about the signified presence. After engaging with Saussure’s principle of differentiation, Derrida draws his first consequence, “...that the signified concept is never present in itself, in an adequate presence that would refer only to itself” (SP 140). A little further, we can see that Derrida expands this to all signs in general: “As there is no presence before the semiological difference or outside it, we can extend what Saussure writes about language in sign in general” (141). “Signs in general” is involved into the web of *différance*: “...we shall designate by the term *différance* the movement by which language, or only code, any system, of reference in general, becomes ‘historically’ constituted as a fabric of differences” (141). In this web of linguistic differences, questions that have the syntax “what?” “what is,” “who is,” are not valid independently because the speaking subject is already inscribed in the differences of language.

However, this web is not just the web of language it is also a web for the presence in general. The passage that follows the analysis of language is very important for this expansion. What we discussed above—the signified presence and the presence in general—remain in the domain of language and the sign. Then what about the presence that is not in this domain? Does it still belong to presence and in turn, the structure of *différance*? Or the question would be precise if one asks it in a different way: Is this system of *différance* still suitable for other fields beyond language, for example, consciousness prior to language? Derrida has anticipated this sort of question. He writes,

We might be tempted by an objection: to be sure, the subject becomes a *speaking* subject only by dealing with the system of linguistic differences, or again, he becomes a *signified* subject (generally by speech or other signs) only by entering into the system of differences. In this sense, certainly, the speaking or signifying subject would not be self-present, insofar as he speaks or signifies, except for the play of linguistic or semiological difference. But can we not conceive of a presence

and self-presence of the subject before speech or its signs, a subject's self-presence in a silent and intuitive consciousness? (146)

An answer to this question allows Derrida to expand the presence from the signified and concept to the presence in general. Thus, he expands the web of linguistic differences into *différance*, an all-including system and a condition for all presence, a gallery that has no bound and no outside, for it "...includes in itself its own exits." This question shows itself as a question concerning consciousness: consciousness that is "before" language. As Derrida writes, "...such a question therefore supposes that prior to signs and outside them, and excluding every trace and *différance*, something such as consciousness is possible" (146-7). The question now is focused on whether or not consciousness can be presented by itself without referring to others. For Derrida, consciousness is always the consciousness of a "subjective existence in general,"(147)and since the subjective existence is involved in the question of the presence in general, and particularly, in the self-presence, so does consciousness. "Just as the category of subject is not and never has been conceivable without reference to presence as *hypokeimenonorousia*, etc., so the subject as consciousness has never been able to be evinced otherwise than as self-presence" (147). Consciousness, shown as self-presence, returns to Derrida's discussion of presence and therefore, belongs to the web of *différance*, trace, that is, "the text."

The process of Derrida's analysis, from linguistic signs, presence in general, and consciousness as self-presence, to "the text" of trace/*différance*, is the process of the expansion of the domain of "the text." "*There is nothing outside of the text*" (OG 158). This strong statement concludes that all kinds of presence, signified, concepts, the self-presence of consciousness, in one word, presence in general, have to be involved in "the text," the strange structure of *différance* and supplement. In that the web of *différance* and the knots on the web—the supplements—are all-including and boundless, this web is spreading endlessly so that everything is engaged in *différance* as the substitution of *différance*. Therefore, according to this logic, what we get is because *différance* does not exist, and it just sends its relegates/representatives/proxies; there is nothing but supplements; there is nothing but text. The text itself is closed even though inside the text there are possibilities and necessities of opening onto



différance; and this closedness is not simply because of Derrida's logic of open—logically defined by closedness.<sup>48</sup>

It is closed because "...there is nothing outside of the text." In this specific example of Rousseau, Derrida defends this nothing-but-text and the absence of the Nature and "real mother," which is the natural consequence of nothing-but-text. He says:

*There is nothing outside of the text* [there is no outside-text; *iln'y a pas de hors-texte*]. And that is neither because Jean-Jacques' life, or the existence of Mamma or Thérèse *themselves*, is not of prime interest to us, nor because we have access to their so-called "real" existence only in the text and we have neither any means of altering this, nor any right to neglect this limitation. All reasons of this type would already be sufficient, to be sure, but there are more radical reasons. What we have tried to show by following the guiding line of the "dangerous supplement," is that in what one calls the real life of these existences "of flesh and bone," beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the 'real' supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, *in the text*, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence.(OG 158-9)

In this passage, what we can see is that there is nothing outside of the text because the real mother of Nature does not exist and also because, what we have is just supplement. Nature and "real mother" are purely absent, also, différance—the movement of traces—does not exist; what we have is just the supplement—the addition of what is absent. Because the absence is abyss and différance is groundlessness, supplements thus are a chain with infinite supplements.

This "adding" movement is the structure of différance, which it is always differing and deferring, and which it is always tracing,

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<sup>48</sup>Cf. Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," the analysis concerning the other and the same.

writing, and erasing. Everything is in the difference and deferral. From *différance* not only rises the unstable surface—supplement, word, the text, the “delegate, representative, and proxy,” (SP 152) but also rises the meaning of language by the adroit and clever balance game of *différance*. Therefore, what should be “abnormal” becomes “normal”; what is differed and deferred becomes substitution; disorder becomes an order as disorder, a disordered order, or to put it in one word, order. Supplement, trace, and the text, as difference and deferral between words, though unstable and disordered, fill the dictionary in complete and platitude. Derrida’s open and its closure are like a dictionary, being opened, and after it has been read, closed.

As Derrida emphasizes several times, “There is nothing outside of the text”; “The gallery is the labyrinth which includes in itself its own exit”; and in “Violence and Metaphysics,” he comments on Husserl, “Nothing can appear outside, the appurtenance to ‘my world’ for an ‘I am’” (WD 131). There is no outside. And thus, there is no “overcoming” of metaphysics” (*Heidegger, the Question of Being and History* 63). Derrida cannot agree with Heidegger who tries to use “dissemblance” and “disguise” as the concealment of the truth of Being and thus let the truth of Being be. Derrida calls this belief “Heideggerean *hope*” (SP 159). For Derrida, however, there is no such hope. He writes in *Heidegger, the Question of Being and History*,

...that there is no chance, that there will never be any chance for those who might think of metaphor as a disguise of thought or of the truth of being. There will never be any chance of undressing or stripping down this naked thinking of being which was never naked and never will be. (62)

If one really “undresses” the thinking of Being, according to Derrida, one will find nothing. Because this Being, as well as “real mother” and Nature for Rousseau, as well as the “truth of Being” for Heidegger, are from the outset absent, like the center of an onion.

This is quite a sad news for there is no hope, no outside, and no possibility of going out of this web. One might object this “impossibility of going to the outside” by taking up Derrida’s position of “aporia”—the relationship between possibility and impossibility. In this position, as Derrida addresses, the only possibility is nothing but impossibility. You can only forgive someone when this person is unforgivable; otherwise, when the misdeed is minor and this person is easily forgiven, you are forgiving nothing. “Forgiving, if it is possible,

can only come to be as impossible” (“A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event” 449).

The impossibility of forgiving is the possibility of it. Thereby the impossibility of going to the outside is exactly the possibility to go to the outside. This objection by using the logic of *aporia* flips over the possibility and impossibility of going to the outside: if one can get to the outside so easily, it is even not “getting out”, on the contrary, if it is an impossibility to get to the exit, then this is the possibility of going to the outside. Is not this logic the only logic: the logic of *différance*, the only logic of thinking? Via this logic, even the thinking of “the impossibility of going to the outside” involves in the web of *différance*. In the web of *différance*, any raised question or objection will just be a “part” of *différance*, a possibility of the impossibility. Therefore, in this structure of *différance*, there is no open.

Indeed, deconstruction is not destruction. It is just an inner “explosion” on the “root,” under the surface. Though the root and its stability are undermined by differing, deferring, tracing, and supplying, the surface is well-maintained. This is the strategy of deconstruction: digging deeply. Speaking metaphorically, this strategy jeopardizes the root of the tree of Western philosophy. However, the tree is still blooming, rather, this tree is even more flowery just because the root is removed by deconstruction so that no one can hurt its root fundamentally. By the name of deconstruction, metaphysics can never and will never be overcome or overthrown. In the huge and bottomless chess game, everything seems open and chaotic, in fact, it obeys the “rule” of trace. This web is boundless and groundless, needless to say, it does not exist and has no power and governs nothing. However, all things are all in it and cannot escape it. It is powerless but also powerful. No one can deny it and no one can resist it. There is no resistance for it because it will engulf resistance in its web and its game by revealing that there is no “enemy” to begin with. This web takes metaphysics apart not to destroy it but to protect it, therefore, no one can destroy it from its foundation. This is because of nothing but the fact that there is no foundation at all.

We must *affirm* it [*différance*]—in the sense that Nietzsche brings affirmation into play—with a certain laughter and with a certain dance (SP 159). This is true. For this *aporia*’s play of *différance*, boundless, and groundless, no outside and no overcoming, when it comes to denial, resistance, and objection, the play will laugh secretly and mock at any rejections, at their energy and impetuosity.



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## **Improvising Theatrical Jazz in a Queer Time and Space: Aishah Rahman's Unfinished Women Cry in No Man's Land While a Bird Dies in a Gilded Cage**

*Ege Altan*

Jones: Queer desire is less about who someone has sex with and more about a person's approach to the present moment - open, absorbed, exploratory, a life of possibility rather than prescription.

Bridgforth: And that's how jazz is queer. It is about infinite possibility and exploration (Jones and Bridgforth 142).

How can we trace the queerness in the corpus of a text aside from the characters' genders and sexualities? How can we experience a queer sense of storytelling in a work even if the work does not include any LGBTQ+ character? Can a storyline be queer or is queerness only related to an individual's sexuality and gender? Or can we open up queerness more and stretch it? David Halperin suggests that queerness does not refer to anything in particular but everything that is in conflict with what is considered as dominant and normative (Halperin 19). In fact, we can read Halperin's statement together with the dialogue of Omi Osun Joni L. Jones and Sharon Bridgforth, which is the epigraph of this essay. It also indicates that queerness cannot be limited to someone's gender and sexuality, queerness is about the exploration of the non-normative. In other words, one may say that queerness can be stretched to read non-normativity that is embedded in a text. Not only a text but even a genre of music can also be considered as queer if it compels us to think outside the box. Bridgforth, in his dialogue, eloquently expresses that jazz makes us explore the infinite possibilities as it requires improvisation that necessitates a lucid disengagement from constructed conventions.

Performance scholar Omi Osun Joni L. Jones's book *Theatrical Jazz: Performance, Aşç, and the Power of the Present Moment* seeks to enhance queer theories as she finds the relation between jazz and queer theories in the concept of theatrical jazz. She argues that queerness does not impose socially constructed performances. In fact, queerness creates a space for identity to struggle with itself (Jones 13). Liminality is a key concept in relation to queerness according to Jones. She borrows the anthropological term liminality and expands it to mean a space of possibility in which people are completely free from all social structures by creating, inventing, and imagining new spaces that are not restricted to social constructions (11). Liminality can be

perceived as a way of improvisation as Jones states that it becomes a space for improvisation that allows us to invent something new that did not exist before (11). She draws the parallel between queerness and jazz by asserting that they both “...sample so that the recognizable is seen anew” (12). By undoing the conventional way of thinking about queerness, Jones unites queerness and jazz in the concept of theatrical jazz. The jazz aesthetic in theatre embodies the aural, temporal, and spatial linguistic expression of queerness as it is “insurgently liminal [and] unfixed” (10). Aishah Rahman’s *Unfinished Women Cry in No Man’s Land While a Bird Dies in a Gilded Cage* is an ideal play to apply this experimental queer theory and to trace the trajectory of theatrical jazz. This play functions to queer, release, and undo the conventional western realist mode of narrative that creates the play’s non-realist language. Following Jones’s inquiry into theatrical jazz, this article will show how Rahman situates her play in the context of theatrical jazz, which creates a queer time and space, whereby she explores freedom in the form.

*Unfinished Women* is an experimental play, which incorporates the jazz aesthetic by engendering a new dramatic language that rejects the conventional realistic language used by the popular North American playwrights (Barrios 613). It offers improvisation through jazz, collaboration of the spectator, and metamorphosis but does not offer any sense of exploration of queerness of gender and sexuality. However, it offers a linguistic utterance of queerness and liminality in a non-linear plotline in dream-like fragments of *Hide-A-Wee-Home* and Pasha’s *boudoir*. The entire cast expresses a dream-like liminality of the play by exclaiming, “So part of what I offer you is Fantasy/ And part of what I offer you is true/ Which is which [...] / Is up to you!” (Rahman 206). Their dialogue informs the form of the play from the very beginning itself. Rahman offers fragments in a tantalising manner rather than by transmitting the play in an uninterrupted narrative. It allows the spectator to be active and makes them arrive at their own provisional conclusion at the end of the play. *Unfinished Women* does not and cannot propose a final verdict; it is about the spectators’ exploration of the present moment in an open and fragmented space as the play emphasizes that everything is up to the spectator.

The play, centered around the last day of Charlie Parker, focuses on five unwed pregnant women—Wilma, Paulette, Mattie, Midge, and Consuelo—three of whom are of African descent, one white and one Hispanic. The play’s unconventional narrative is spread over twelve scenes and takes place in two different settings. The five young

pregnant women are imprisoned in a space called no man's land or Hide-A-Wee-Home for Unwed Mothers, wherein they can look for self-fulfilment without having a connection with a man and can independently decide whether to keep the child or put it up for adoption. Meanwhile, Charlie Parker, or Bird, is confined in his gilded cage with an old French woman called Pasha who is his fictional boss. The play stages the suffocating relationship between the self-destructive Parker and his patron Pasha in a room while simultaneously showing the young women's life-changing decisions about their unplanned pregnancies in a prison-like setting. Parker's music is entangled with the women's lives as all the pregnant women mention it at some point while they are narrating their stories. Even though these two settings seem to be unrelated, Charlie Chan, who appears in blackface and is the alter-ego of Parker, links the two narratives; he moves from one narrative to the other by remaining outside the drama since he is represented as an invisible character. In the final scene, the relationship between the two settings is disclosed—the sound of Parker's saxophone disintegrates into pure sound as he dies and becomes an echo of the cry of Wilma's newborn baby.

Unfinished Women employs a unique form to narrate the story. As form and content are inseparable from one another for Rahman, the conventional forms of Aristotelian drama proved to be insufficient to narrate the content she had created. James T. Stewart also emphasizes the need for black artists to create revolutionary forms that correspond to their realities (Stewart 6). He expresses that art should move dynamically as it is not a fixed set of human activities (6). He also asserts that the construction of new models is only attainable through non-matrixed and fluid revolutions in the form (6). Revolutionary and fluid amendments in form can be seen clearly in Rahman's play; therefore, she calls her play a polydrama;

The two setting [...] should be interplayed and intraplayed with the dramatic image of Bird and Bird's music being the fundamental notes with which both parts bounce off on creating tensions between them while at the same time weaving the seemingly disconnected parts into one polydrama. (Rahman 202)

In her play, Rahman finds her voice by creating her own fluid, liminal, and queer form by integrating a jazz-like structure with the dramatic action to hold the fragmented settings and different narratives of the women and Charlie Parker together.

What Rahman has created through polydrama is a fluid space without using the realist language of drama. Considering the clash between realist and non-realist language in drama, Tori Haring-Smith's observation in the article "Dramaturging Non-Realism: Creating a New Vocabulary" is relevant here as she employs realist language to understand non-realist language. According to her, a realist notion of drama needs character development, cause and effect relationship, referential language, linearity, or a psychological, physical, and thematic coherence (Tori Haring-Smith 53). Contrary to this, the pregnant women in Rahman's play are only figures and there is no evident development in their characters since they only narrate their past lives without there being any development in their stories. By breaking the linearity as the play moves to and fro in the two settings, characters and settings become associative images. For instance, Chan is omnipresent, Parker is the cosmic melody, and Pasha, an old woman, who wants to have a baby or create a Hide-a-Wee-Home—a prison for women with a guardian of morality. Rahman asserts that she likes the surrealistic mode as it offers unpredicted juxtapositions, "...the symbolic objects and actions that emphasize the subconscious or non-rational imagery that is rooted in African American"(23). Shifting the focus from one dimension to the other, an abstract and a dissolving language derive from text and context. Therefore, the mood, the rhythm, and the image of the play resonate and create an unexpected juxtaposition. Jones writes that jazz and queerness employ similar transgressive tactics with regard to fluidity and queerness in their form, "...moving from mimesis (imitation that can lead to stasis and maintenance of status quo) to poesis (the literary imagination with emphasis on language) to kinesis (the forging, the sweating, the calloused hands that offer up the not known)" (Jones 5). This shows that both queer and jazz require a sense of transformation and Rahman's play reveals a fluid space through which she manages to transform the conventional rules of drama with the help of theatrical jazz to create her own voice and form. Rahman creates a non-realist language by means of theatrical jazz. She arrives at kinesis energetically with an unpredictable form, in which spectators need to focus on the moment to create their own meanings out of the broken form, which does not offer any conclusion.

Jones asserts that theatrical jazz is non-linear and transtemporal (Jones 4). The notion of time remains elusive and unknown. Jones draws a parallel between queer and jazz in theatrical jazz by focusing on the notion of queer time. She argues that queer time holds up both the aesthetic and the political aspect of jazz through its non-normative and transgressive rhythms as the narrative strategies are simultaneous



and non-mimetic (11). The expectation of linearity cannot be found in jazz music too as it highly depends on improvisation. Unfixed and continuous narrative draws a parallel between improvisations in the two forms of art. Improvisation transcends time by focusing on the possibilities of the present moment rather than seeking to find a fixed structure. In that sense, queer time offers a complex present-time. The idea of queer time should be considered in the structure of *Unfinished Women* in relation to Charlie Chan. Apart from the fact that the play offers a complex and non-linear plot line, Charlie Chan is the key figure who embodies the queerness of time. He is the omnipresent character in both settings and he is the only one who adjusts the hands of the broken clock in the first and the last two scenes. The real time has never been revealed; thus, the sense of time in the play is surreal and distorted. Chan articulates, “think of time as a circle going round” (206), he reveals the distortion of the linear time from the very beginning. In fact, we can hear the stories of all the women, their decisions about their babies’ lives, and Parker and Pasha’s relationship in this cyclical sense of time which has neither a beginning nor an end. In the last scene, Nurse Jacobs says, “It’s time” after Chan’s adjustment of the clock, but Paulette cries, “No... It is not time” (235). Hence, the notion of time becomes relational. In this multi-layered now-time, the spectator explores multiple voices of each character.

Understanding how queer time is created is very important in order to understand the play’s dramaturgical language. *Unfinished Women* uses the character of Chan as well as the music to disrupt the linear understanding of time. As a matter of fact, music is always audible throughout the play. Jazz music is observed as the organizing principle of *Unfinished Women* (Koger 105). Jazz music is conceived as a metaphor for “the joy and anguish of black women’s lives” (Wilkerson 74). Even though jazz plays an extremely significant part to hold the broken pieces of narration together and we may see the metaphorical dimension of music in the play occasionally, such as hearing the sound of Parker’s saxophone as the cry of Consuelo’s baby’s (Rahman 207). We can say that music is more than just a metaphor for the two opposite extreme emotions of black women’s lives. Music functions to problematize the linearity of time in the play since queer time is an integral part of theatrical jazz. The most important element of the script is rhythm—the different rhythms of scenes, characters, and of their languages. The multiple rhythms of the play resemble the way bebop innovated the sense of rhythm in the forties to have rhythmic subdivisions (Williams 138). Parker’s idea of rhythm is especially crucial, since his accentuation “...comes

alternatively on the beat and between beats” (Hodeir 109). Therefore, music—or more accurately, the specific style of jazz that is bebop—is not a metaphor but a device that actively reconstructs the non-realist and non-imitative language of the play. Miles Davis asserts the non-imitative nature of bebop by asserting that “...[bebop does not] have harmonic lines that [one] could easily hum out” (Davis and Troupe 119). Therefore, bebop allows Rahman to break the conventions of imitation in drama as she situates her play in a polydramatic framework in which unrecognizable polyrhythms offer multiplicity through unconventional improvisations by dragging the characters, the settings, and the plot line in queer time.

In Rahman’s play, bebop plays a significant role in relation to play’s polyrhythmic idea. Amiri Baraka observes that bebop was very close to the African way of establishing music because of the “reestablishment of the hegemony of polyrhythms” (Baraka 194). Boppers abandons the conventional traditions of improvising and creating variations on the chords for a melodic theme (194). Bebop has an emphasis of polyrhythms in which “...melodies there seemed to be an endless changing of direction, stops and starts, variations of impetus, a jagged that reached out of rhythmic bases of the music” (194). Even though *Unfinished Women* offers juxtaposition of major rhythmical lines as the stage is divided into two rhythms: *Hide-A-Wee-Home* and *Pasha’s boudoir*, the creation of the polyrhythm is more complex than just juxtaposing the two streams of rhythm. *Hide-A-Wee-Home* divides time into six by the narration of the stories of Wilma, Paulette, Mattie, Midge, Consuelo, and Nurse Jacobs in different scenes, thereby effectively creating a set of rhythms. The other rhythm divides the time into two, between *Pasha* and *Parker*.

In fact, Rahman’s usage of polyrhythms is more than breaking the time into two different rhythms. The figure of Chan (who is *Parker’s* alter-ego) is almost an embodiment of *Parker’s* function of his polyrhythmic music who bridges all the complex layers of now-time by means of improvisation. When the piano starts to play a lush romantic tune and Chan says, “Lovely tune, isn’t it? [...]Where is the past? Up? Down? I wish to relate to you the circumstances of Birth, Death, Musicians, and Women on the day that Charlie Parker died. Memory is not spontaneous. It is the mind, rooting the soul for self-forgiveness” (206). He takes the tune of the piano as a starting point and then draws a parallel between memory and time while subdividing these concepts into mind and soul. However, at the same time, he unites mind and soul at the end by uniting the spatial engagement with birth, death, music, and pregnant women in a cyclical time.

Additionally, he questions the location of the past by breaking it spatially as up or down. He asserts that it is not spontaneous. It is neither hidden in up nor in down because one may find it in the present moment.

Polyrhythms are not accidentally produced in bebop's improvisation as they come with rhythms and between rhythms. Therefore, time and memory are not accidental, they are not spontaneous but simultaneous and seek new possibilities inside the same moment as the play explores the stories of each of the figures in present time. The temporal unity that Chan creates is not an accidental one; it gestures towards Parker's statement to Pasha about music:

I want to separate myself from you and all that ties me to this earth. There is one perfect note. [...] Yet, I keep on hearing it all the time. And when I do every cell of my body wants to break up into tiny parts of that one perfect musical note and float on the ear of every living soul. [...] WHAT A PERFECT COSMIC MELODY I WOULD BE AT THAT MOMENT!  
(209)

Parker wants to become a disembodied cosmic melody by separating himself from his earthly body. He wants to transcend his body and become the audible music eternally. The italicization of 'I' emphasizes the oneness, fullness, and integrity of his music, mind, and body. Death brings about the wholeness of his music since he is emancipated from his body and becomes the cosmic melody. The cosmic melody is omnipresent, appearing in every scene with his music. Every woman in the play hears this cosmic melody in their minds and the audience participates in the experience through the saxophone mimicking the crying baby. Each scene, character, and rhythm is created in relation to this cosmic sound and to Parker's disembodiment—Charlie Chan. Although he is referred to as the invisible man in the stage directions, he is the most visible character to the audience as he exists in each scene either fixing the clock or setting up the scene. In Scene 2 he sets up flowers (211), in Scene 5 he emerges to play the servant (217), in Scene 10, when the song Cherokee plays softly underneath, he steps out of the corner and repeats three times, insistently as if no one hears him, "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the world famous Birdland...Here's Charlie Parker and 'Cherokee'" (323). Thus, it explains why Rahman calls Chan as the Master of Ceremony (200), since he conducts every part of the polyrhythms by distorting, twisting, and juxtaposing the different rhythms. His appearance in every scene puts an emphasis on now-time as he is the alter-ego of Parker.

Unfinished Women focuses on multiple stories rather than having only one main story. However, the centre of gravity of each story varies in relation to each character's articulation of her story. Even though we hear the echo of Parker's existence or annihilation or his Cosmic Song in relation to each woman, Wilma is a particularly interesting figure in regard to the audibility of Parker's Cosmic Song. In Scene 6, she narrates the incident of watching Parker live in concert, and then her focus shifts to her baby:

I never saw anything like that and I never heard anything like his music [...] I don't want to give up my baby, but... S'funny what Bird meant to me [...] I always wanted to be a man 'cause they can do things and go places. Bird is the man I wanted to be. Maybe my son will like him... Maybe I'm thinking about giving up a Charlie Parker (221).


Parker's music connects Wilma to her baby even though she is hesitant whether to put up her baby for adoption or not. She believes in Parker and his music. Music is the dominating element in the scene and towards the end she literally hears the music, "Hear that? He's not dead. Bird lives... Inside here" (222).

With regard to Parker's attitude towards improvisation, Martin Williams states, "Parker uses the bridge of the piece not as an interruption or interlude that breaks up or contrasts with its flow, but as part of its continuously developing melody" (Williams 143). Hence, one may interpret Wilma as a continuously developing melody who improvises on Parker's cosmic song by the means of her baby. Jones states, "Theatrical jazz transformation is built on truth telling, present-tense-ness, and a dedication to joy, hope and life" (Jones 211). This transformation occurs inside Wilma with the help of Parker's song and Wilma's hope for life.

The last scene is extremely pivotal in relation to the improvisation of polyrhythms, since we can see each character on the stage as the influx of rhythmic ideas as they burst into music and voices. The characters keep repeating the dialogues over and over again, "...weaving in and out of, on top and below each other, accelerating in pace, volume and intensity" (Rahman 235). An eclectic audience is needed for this scene as it opens with Chan fixing the clock and dragging time into the present moment. The audience participates in the moment and has the freedom to compose the scene on their own as they are exposed to simultaneous dialogues. They can

transform the piece in relation to their experience of the moment. The transformation occurs not only within the cyclical structure of the play, but also inside Wilma through her baby and Parker's cosmic song. While Wilma gives birth to her baby, Parker slowly dies and says, "Can you hear the song I'm breaking into" (236). The last scene offers a "triple-consciousness" (Rahman 283), which offers a sense of metamorphosis of life and death, as the unborn, the living, and the dead share the same dimension.

Theatrical jazz focuses on the open mesh of possibilities in the present moment through improvisation and *Unfinished Women* uses it as a strategy of resistance. Expanding the meaning of queerness and jazz to disrupt convention, theatrical jazz remains liminal in nature by constructing a sense of queer time. The multiplicity of possibilities needs polyrhythmic ideas to tie all the possibilities together. Like queer, jazz's resistive nature can only be maintained in a liminal space. Rahman eclectically creates her own form to be able to convey her story and calls it polydrama, not by totally rejecting the Western forms but by focusing more on African-American ways of dramatic and musical expressions. She does not imitate traditional perspectives but rather engenders this fluid space by means of polyrhythmic bebop improvisations where multiple possibilities can co-exist. Music is the most significant element in the play because of its capability to form its non-realist and non-matrixed language: queer, transformative, resistive, simultaneous, and multifaceted. Although *Unfinished Women* does not gesture towards any kind of queer sexualities or gender representation, one can trace how the narration embodies queerness. Creating queer expressions and forms for telling the stories necessitates the listeners, the readers, or the spectators to find innovative ways to receive the work, or maybe queer-read the work.



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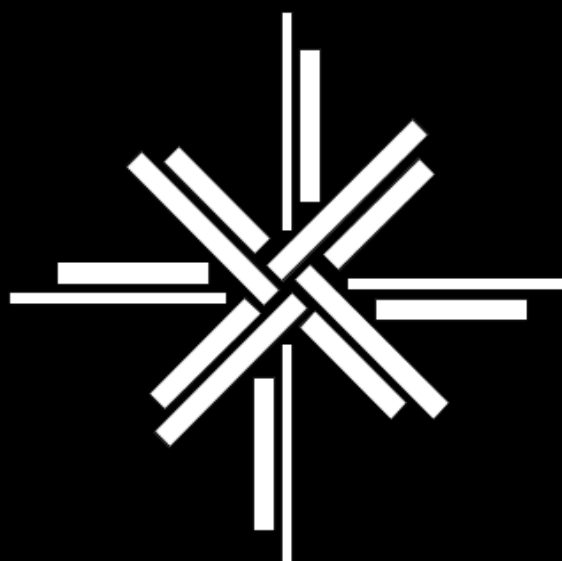
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